

Introduction

What's so special about Saskatchewan for outdoor photography? The possibilities are as boundless as the Saskatchewan sky, with everything from herds of primeval bison roaming open grasslands of the deep south, to jaw-dropping remote waterfalls of the far north. In between are some of Canada's baddest badlands, drifting dunes, enchanting river valleys, whimsically sculpted sandstone formations, and massive hard rock cliffs of Precambrian Shield. Then there are those extraordinary landscapes that don't fit neatly into categories—the Cypress Hills with its delightful mix of highlands, grasslands, and forest, and one-of-a-kind hidden gems such as Lake Diefenbaker's fairytale sandcastle, or the other-worldly crooked bush that seems straight from the pages of a fantasy novel.

This is “the” place to photograph wild prairie. Saskatchewan has some of the largest expanses of increasingly rare native grasslands left in North America,



including the stunning and easily accessible landscapes of Grasslands National Park.

Saskatchewan is, hands down, the sand dune capital of Canada, home to both the largest and second largest dune fields in the country, plus a few others thrown in for variety. But it's not just size that matters. The Athabasca Sand Dunes are unique in the world. Most great sand dunes are in deserts or at least arid settings. But here a desert-like terrain is seemingly misplaced in the midst of boreal forest and lakelands, bordered by one of Canada's largest lakes, and sliced by three rivers. Remarkably, the best way to explore deep into these dunes is by canoe! How cool is that?



Above: Coyote pup.

Opposite: Madge Lake, Duck Mountain Provincial Park.

Saskatchewan's north remains largely pristine, a vast forested land of 100,000 lakes and a mind-boggling array of interconnected rivers made legendary during the fur trade, and chronicled by a who's who of northern exploration from Mackenzie to Franklin and countless voyageurs. Today, it ranks among the world's great canoeing destinations, serving up adrenaline-pumping whitewater and soul-soothing tranquility lost to most of the world.

Let's not forget the critters. Located smack on the Central North American Flyway, migrating waterfowl stage here in the hundreds of thousands, giving us easy access to some of nature's most breathtaking spectacles when massive lift-offs practically block the sky. Long famous as “North America's Duck Factory”, Saskatchewan raises a quarter of the continent's ducks, plays host to half of the world's migrating sanderlings, has half of Canada's pelicans, half of Canada's designated sites in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, the world's largest inland concentration of bald eagles, the world's largest concentration of breeding white-winged scoters, white-tailed deer with the largest antlers in North America, the only black-tailed prairie dogs in Canada, and a quarter of the world's endangered piping plovers.



For photographers, the nature of the light is as important as the scenery. This is where Saskatchewan really shines. The *Land of Living Skies* slogan lives up to its hype, with clear air, skies of the bluest blue, more hours of sunshine than practically anywhere in the country, and the thrilling drama of sudden summer storms. Sunrises and sunsets are simply the most dazzling on the planet. Dark Sky Preserves are among the largest and darkest in the country, helping you to capture the full magnificence of the night sky. We have photographed in many incredible places throughout the world, but when it comes to the quality of the light, we've found few places to match what we enjoy close to home.

The biggest bonus of all? We seldom have to contend with crowds. Many avid photographers have ventured to famous photogenic sites only to find throngs of people with cameras jostling for space to take exactly the same shot that has already been taken a gazillion times. While an increasing number of savvy photographers are exploring Saskatchewan, this still remains relatively undiscovered territory for shutterbugs. It's not at all unusual to visit amazing spots and find that you're the only photographer around, increasing the odds of bagging that killer one-of-a-kind shot.

Whether you're a professional photographer expanding your horizons, a serious enthusiast looking for new ideas, or you simply want better mementos of your vacation, the *Photographer's Guide to Saskatchewan* helps you discover and capture the best that Saskatchewan has to offer.

Above: Bulyea Falls on the north shore of Lake Athabasca.

Getting the Shot

RED-NECKED GREBE AT WATER LEVEL

Photographs of wildlife often work best when we can get close to their level—eye to eye so to speak. That's easier to do with large land animals or sometimes with birds in trees, but birds on the water present more of a challenge. Being in a boat or canoe helps, but better yet is being in the water near the birds, with the camera just above the water line. For this shot I used a floating blind, a contraption of our own design with two wooden pontoons and a crosspiece at the front with a bolt to attach a tripod head. The covering, rising a little less than a metre high over the pontoons, is made of plywood and burlap, and covered with reeds and dry grass to blend in with the marsh as much as possible. Wearing chest waders, I walk along the bottom of the marsh and guide the blind with the camera attached to the tripod head. If I move slowly, the birds accept the blind and may even be curious. That's what happened with this red-necked grebe which came close to investigate. This image was taken using a Nikon D300 camera with a Nikon 200–400mm f4 lens. Settings were f8, 1/500 sec., ISO 400.

