

EASTERN SASKATCHEWAN | HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

It's all about the scenery in Narrow Hills Provincial Park

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

The landscape changes dramatically soon after we leave Smeaton, Sask., at the start of the Hanson Lake Road (Highway 106).

The northern edge of the grain belt in eastern Saskatchewan gives way to the boreal forest of Narrow Hills Provincial Park.

It is an exceptional place to experience the powerful effects of 10,000-year-old glaciers, when great ice sheets scoured the land and formed long ridges such as eskers and push moraines. The best way to get in touch with this landscape is to follow an impressive scenic drive and take one of the most delightful short hiking trails anywhere.

The Narrow Hills Scenic Drive begins near the park's core area at Lower Fishing Lake. Interpretive panels along the way relate stories about the geology and history of the hills.

The road starts out smoothly as it steadily climbs the push moraine ridge but soon becomes a narrow, one-lane track that is deeply rutted in places. It could be challenging in spots if your vehicle has low clearance or you're visiting after a heavy rain.

We wind through thick forest much of the way, but higher onto the ridge, vistas open up over seemingly endless tracts of forested lake lands. A highlight is the view over the Grace Lakes, with its gracefully curving shorelines.

The officially designated scenic drive ends here, although the road continues down the hills to the south.

However, the park doesn't recommend going any farther because the trail becomes extremely rough and is often not passable in wet conditions. Before modern roads, this track along the ridges was the main access to the hills and lakes.

The best hiking is in the northwest part of the park. To get there, continue north on Highway 106, west on Highway 913 and then follow the signs to the Gem Lakes.

Lakes are scattered throughout northern Saskatchewan, but these jewels of the forest stand in a class by



TOP: Sunset is breathtaking at Saskatchewan's Narrow Hills Provincial Park. | KARPAN PHOTOS

ABOVE: Pearl Lake reflects deep blue and green.

RIGHT: The small campground at Baldy Lake allows peaceful canoeing.

themselves. Rare formations called tunnel valleys formed here as glaciers retreated. Melt water carved valleys as it flowed beneath the ice. Huge blocks of ice settled in the sandy base, eventually becoming lakes when they melted.

The five lakes are small but deep. While practically next to each other, they aren't connected.

The lakes seem to shimmer like gemstones because of their sandy bottoms and amazingly clear deep water. Colours are accentuated by

reflections of the blue sky and surrounding vegetation.

It's easy to see why the lakes were named Jade, Opal, Pearl, Diamond and Sapphire.

Follow the 5.5 kilometre network of hiking trails to visit all the lakes.

One of the best viewpoints is only a few minutes from the trailhead where a high ridge looks over Jade Lake. The shallow edge of Opal Lake has an iridescent tinge that really is reminiscent of opals.

Another of our favourite spots is

Pearl Lake where, if you happen to hit conditions just right, the water appears an almost unreal deep greenish-blue.

Walk-in backcountry campsites are located at Diamond Lake and Opal Lake in case you want to linger longer in this special spot. The lakes are stocked with trout, so freshly caught fish might be another bonus.

We especially like visiting the Narrow Hills in autumn, when colours are at their prime and campgrounds are almost empty.

The main campground is at Lower Fishing Lake, with smaller camps at Zeden, Ispuchaw, and Baldy lakes. Our top choice is Baldy, where only six spacious sites line the water's edge. During our most recent trip in late September, we had the entire campground to ourselves.

For more information, visit www.saskparks.net.

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PSA TEST | HEALTH COVERAGE

Early detection for prostate cancer increases survival rate

HEALTH CLINIC



CLARE ROWSON, MD

Q: My husband has just turned 40. I have heard that it is not too early to start testing for prostate cancer in this age group. There have been men in his family, two uncles, who have had it. Is the cost of the test covered in Saskatchewan?

A: The PSA test is a simple blood test that is an indication of the health of a man's prostate.

In 2013, Prostate Cancer Canada

developed an educational campaign called Know your number, which encourages Canadian men to have a baseline PSA test in their 40s.

The patient and doctor can then determine if future tests reveal the number is increasing, suggesting a higher possibility of prostate cancer.

People at high risk—those with a family history like your husband or people of African or Caribbean

origin—were especially encouraged to do this.

This type of cancer, when detected early, has high survival rates. An earlier Swedish study suggested testing the PSA levels in the mid to late 40s.

A high number does not necessarily mean that people have cancer. They might have an inflammation of the prostate known as prostatitis, or it may be a false positive result.

Further tests would be needed to

establish the correct diagnosis.

Some provincial health-care plans do not cover the cost of this test unless the person has already been diagnosed with prostate cancer or has symptoms that indicate that this is a possibility. The Saskatchewan government covers the PSA test as a screening device.

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