

Try taking the road less travelled between Sask. cities

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

With most long-distance travel on hold, many of us are staying closer to home this summer and doing driving trips. Leaving the major highways where we can slow down to enjoy the scenery provides the most rewarding type of road trip.

In Saskatchewan, we're fortunate to have some great off-the-beaten-path routes linking our major cities.

Saskatoon to Regina

While Highway 11 is a quick and easy way, a route just to the west takes us through parks, wildlife refuges, and along Lake Diefenbaker.

Head south of Saskatoon on Highway 219 — the Chief Whitecap Trail. It passes through the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, site of the Dakota Dunes Golf Links, one of the province's top golf courses. Just south of here is the historic Round Prairie Cemetery, all that remains from a large Metis community dating to the 1850s.

The highway ends just outside Gardiner Dam. To continue south, turn onto Highway 44 along Lake Diefenbaker's east shore. Almost immediately, we pass the entrance to Danielson Provincial Park with campgrounds, lake access, and trails through prairie grasslands, wooded coulees, and lakeshore.

At the junction with Highway 19, turn south toward Elbow, home to the Elbow Harbour Recreation Site with its popular golf course and scenic views over the marina.

Douglas Provincial Park is next with campgrounds, hiking trails and a full range of lakeside activities. We consider the highlight of the park, and indeed this entire route, to be the hike to the sand dunes. After walking about 45 minutes, we enter an exotic desert-like landscape of active dunes with rippled ridges, bowl-shaped blow-outs, and trees with exposed roots. This shouldn't be missed.

Shortly after Highway 19 crosses the Qu'Appelle River near its outlet from Lake Diefenbaker, turn southeast on Highway 367 towards Eyebrow, then keep going this direction past Brownlee, Keeler, Marquis, and to Tuxford at the junction with Highway 2.

Head east of Tuxford to Buffalo Pound Provincial Park, a picturesque part of the Qu'Appelle Valley along Buffalo Pound Lake. Our favourite part of the park is Nicolle Flats Nature Area where wildlife abounds in the marshlands. An excellent system of hiking trails leads to bird-rich wetlands, the river, and high into the adjoining hills. Highway 301 heads straight south of the park, joining Highway 1 between Moose Jaw and Regina.

Saskatoon to Prince Albert

Our favourite backroads route is Fish Creek Road, which follows the South Saskatchewan



Fish Creek Road is one of the backroad routes that can be used to get off the beaten path in Saskatchewan. This road is part of an alternative way to travel between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. | ARLENE AND ROBIN KARPAN PHOTOS



The St. Laurent Ferry is a worthwhile detour to visit the historic site of St. Laurent.

River much of the way. Begin by heading northeast of Saskatoon on Highway 41. About 10 kilometres past Aberdeen, turn north onto Fish Creek Road. The route takes us past onion-domed heritage Ukrainian churches, then beside the Fish Creek Battle Site where the first battle was fought in 1885 between the Canadian militia and Metis led by Louis Riel.

Fish Creek Road ends at Highway 312, but the route continues north along the river on Highway 225 to Batoche National Historic Site. After closing because of COVID-19, almost everything has re-opened at the famous site that depicts Metis culture and the historic 1885 Battle of Batoche.

Just north of Batoche, Highway 225 turns east toward Bellevue, but we can continue following the river northeast along Grid Road 782 to St. Louis on Highway 2, then turn north to Prince Albert.

A worthwhile detour along this stretch is to cross the St. Laurent Ferry to visit the historic site of St. Laurent just across the river. The early Metis settlement dates to the 1870s and boasts a beautiful log church.

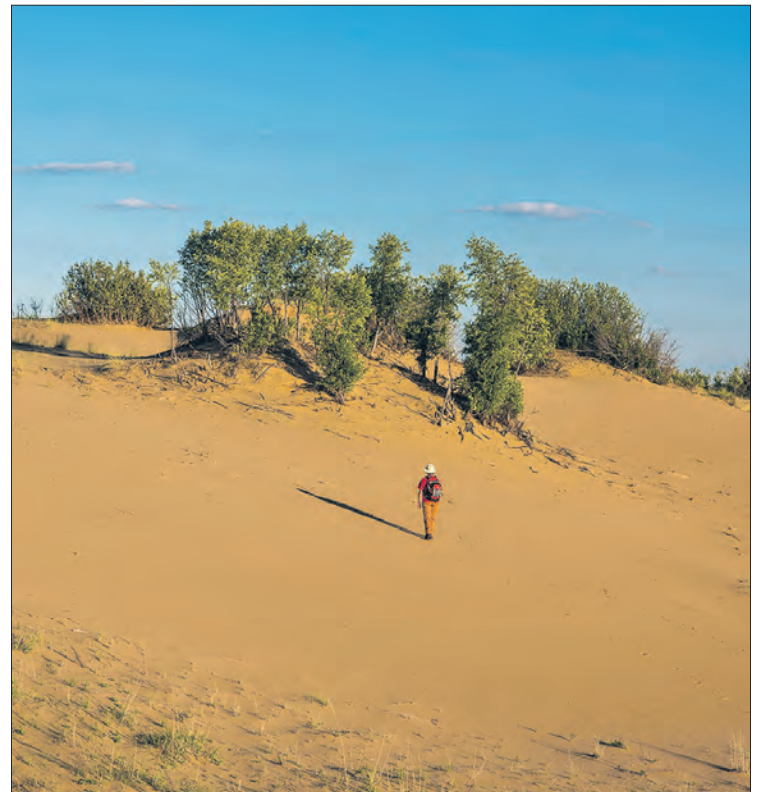
Saskatoon to The Battlefords

Instead of heavily travelled Highway 16, an alternative scenic route stays on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River the entire way. It has a definite off-the-beaten-path feel with little traffic.

Head west of Saskatoon on Highway 14. Just past Asquith turn north onto Highway 376, which zigzags northwest, crossing the beautiful Eagle Creek Valley where a regional park is a recreational centre of the area. The road passes the tiny communities of Arelee, Struan, and Sonningdale before crossing the North Saskatchewan River on the Maymont Bridge.

Just before getting to the river, turn west onto Baljennie Road, which continues to Highway 4 south of Battleford. This is an especially scenic section as the road winds through the Eagle Hills with creek valleys, forested hills, and a plateau with views toward the river valley. Partway along an historic marker commemorates the old Saskatoon to Battleford Trail, the main route used by early settlers.

Arlene and Robin Karpan are well-travelled writers based in Saskatoon. Contact: travel@producer.com.



The sand dunes are one of the highlights of Douglas Provincial Park on Lake Diefenbaker.



The Elbow Marina can be found on Lake Diefenbaker, just off Highway 44.