

FARMLIVING

TEAM RESOURCES

Fall's best comfort foods: oven spaghetti, pumpkins, cranberries and apples make up a harvest of flavours at home. | **Page 18**



FARM LIVING EDITOR: BRUCE DYCK | Ph: 306-665-3507 F: 306-934-2401 | E-MAIL: BRUCE.DYCK@PRODUCER.COM

Take a scenic drive through the Thickwood Hills

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

If you like country drives big on scenery but light on traffic, it's hard to beat the Thickwood Hills in northwestern Saskatchewan. A bonus at this time of year is that you can include a visit to one of the spookiest places around to get in the mood for Halloween.

The hills are roughly northeast of the Battlefords and south of Highway 3 running through Spiritwood and Shell Lake. The gently rolling terrain holds a mix of farming and grazing land, dotted with small lakes, wildlife-rich wetlands and extensive patches of mostly aspen forest. The area is especially stunning during fall colour season. Spring is alive with waterfowl because of the many wetlands, and summer brings dazzling wildflower displays, especially large patches of brilliant red paintbrush.

This area is also special to us because our farm is here. We've spent many years wandering the backroads and we still keep finding new routes. It's an area where you can almost pick a road at random and not be disappointed. However, be prepared for lots of zigzagging and backtracking when exploring off the beaten path.

Among our favourites is Highway 378, which runs from just north of the Battlefords to Spiritwood. One of the most scenic stretches is around Whitkow, a tiny community in a valley setting where an old Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevator still stands. A bit farther north, on the way to Rabbit Lake, the highway climbs an escarpment offering sweeping views.

A nice loop trip from the Battlefords is to take Highway 378 to the curve about three kilometres north of Whitkow, then turn west onto Grid Road 750, which winds through the hills and meets Highway 4 straight north of the Battlefords.

A more adventurous variation to this route is to travel about halfway along Grid Road 750, then turn north toward Scent Grass Lake, an important migratory bird sanctuary. Just look for a huge hill that dominates the landscape. The road runs between the hill and bird-rich wetlands lining the lake.

Farther west, the road crosses a narrow sliver of land between Scent Grass Lake and adjoining Moore Lake, then continues to Highway 4. However, this route should only be attempted in dry conditions. Alternatively, grid roads to the north go around any wet areas.

Yet another variation is to head



Highway 378 is one of the main roads that can be taken to explore the Thickwood Hills in northwestern Saskatchewan. It runs from just north of the Battlefords to Spiritwood. | ROBIN AND ARLENE KARPAN PHOTOS



Grid Road 750 through the Thickwood Hills.

straight east of North Battleford on Highway 40, then after about 27 kilometres turn northeast on Burma Road as it descends into a valley. We can then travel by way of Alticane and Mayfair back to Highway 378 to make a loop trip. This route takes us close to the region's best-known landmark, the mysterious Crooked Bush just southwest of Alticane.

Crooked is an understatement. In this small grove of aspen trees, every branch and every trunk of every tree is wildly twisted and contorted, like the set for a horror movie. It's as if the trees couldn't make up their minds which way to grow. The most perplexing part is that the trees in neighbouring bushes seem perfectly normal.

The phenomenon had led to some colourful speculation over the years. A local joke is that they must have buried a lawyer here.

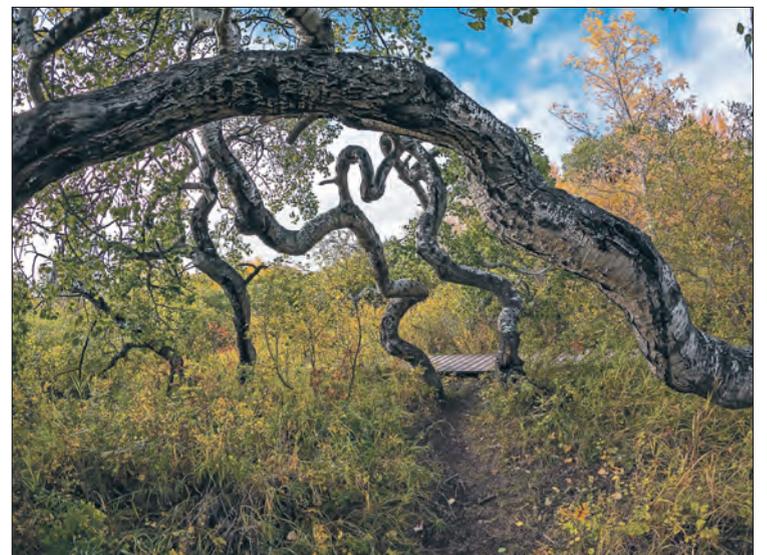
The "official" explanation posted at the site is that years ago a fellow claimed that he saw a UFO land here. The passengers got out of the

craft, peed on the ground, got back in and flew off. The trees were never the same after that. This area used to be famous for its homebrew, but perhaps that's just a coincidence.

Late in the fall near Halloween is a great time to visit. With the leaves gone, the bizarre trees look even more spooky than usual. It's a place to gaze over an otherworldly scene, let your imagination run wild, and come up with your own conclusions. Scientists have rather mundane explanations involving mutations or genetic defects. But we might wonder what caused the mutation in the first place. Was it space alien pee?

For more detailed descriptions of these drives, as well as other routes throughout the province, see the guidebook *Saskatchewan's Best Scenic Drives*, by Robin and Arlene Karpan, available in bookstores or from www.parklandpublishing.com.

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



The Crooked Bush is the region's best-known landmark, just southwest of Alticane.



Scent Grass Lake is an important migratory bird sanctuary.