

## Why are there so many snakes in the Interlake area?

Snakes, like all other kinds of wildlife, need food, water and shelter to survive and produce young. While food and water are plentiful in Manitoba's Interlake region, and other parts of the province, it's the availability of winter dens in limestone bedrock that make this area an ideal home for red-sided garter snakes. It's only by amassing below the frost line that snakes are able to survive Manitoba winters. The dens themselves, a network of crevasses and caverns extending to the earth's surface, were formed by underground water that eroded and collapsed the limestone.

## Do snakes use the same den year after year?

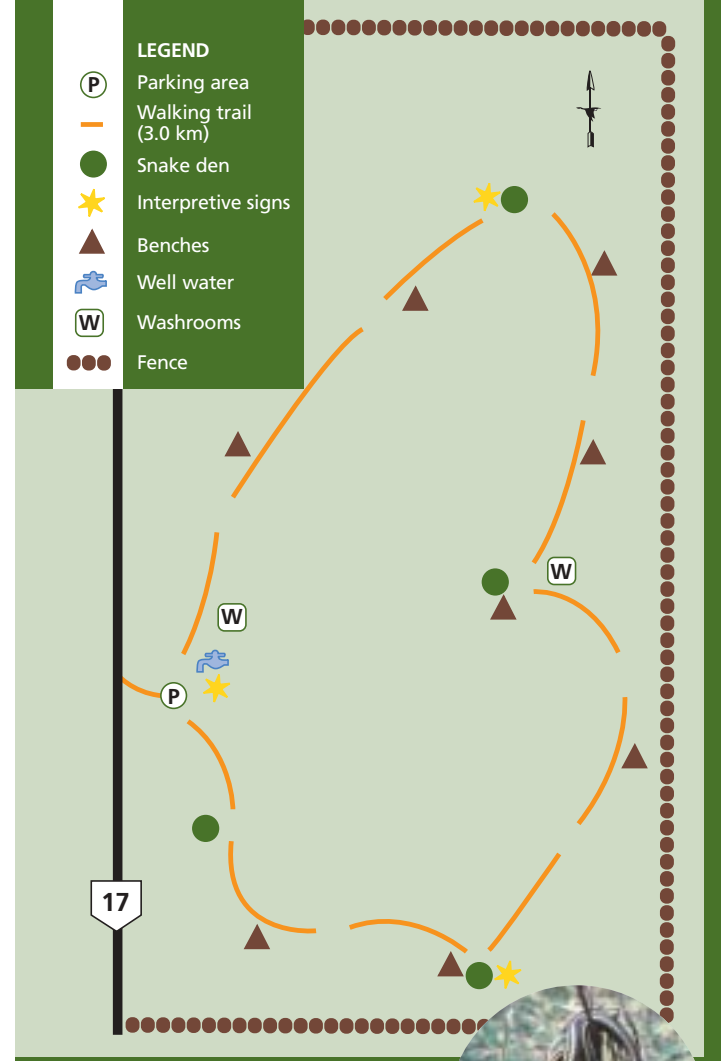
In their first winter most juvenile snakes remain where they spend the summer – seeking refuge in ant hills, animal burrows or any crevasse that will take them below frozen ground. It's only during their second year that they migrate to an established den site. Although most adult snakes seem to use the same den site, marking and recapture studies have shown that some snakes use alternate dens. It is believed that snakes home to den sites using scent trails.

## Nearby services

General stores are located in the communities of Inwood, Narcisse, and Poplarfield. Gasoline can be purchased in Teulon, Inwood, Narcisse and Poplarfield once you turn off Highway #7.

## Other places to visit

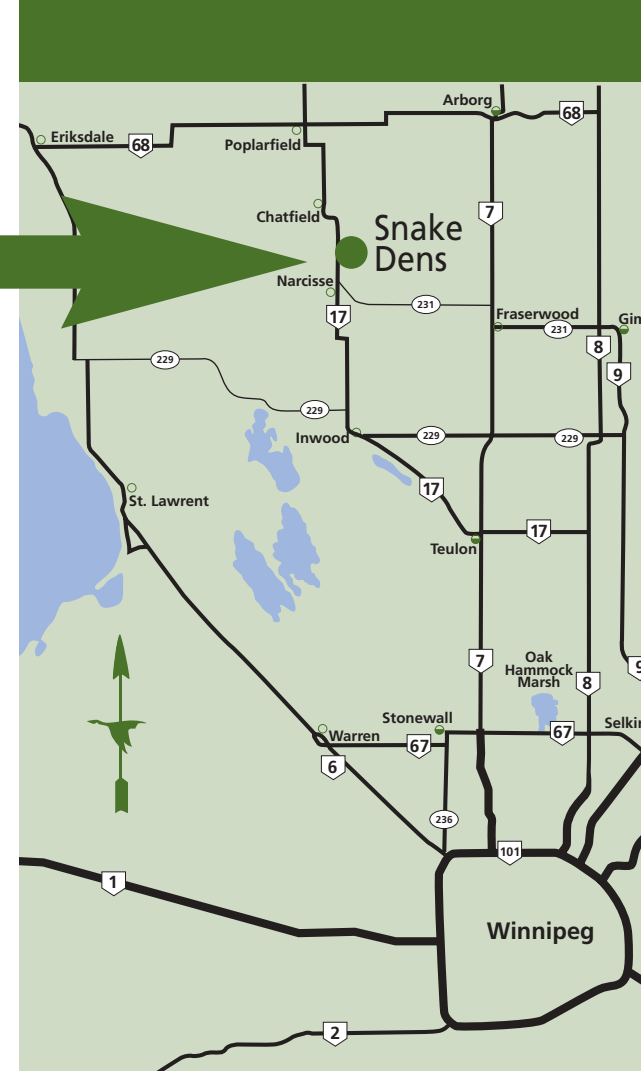
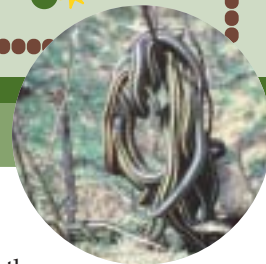
A treasure chest of historical, recreational and educational experiences await casual travellers and intrepid explorers who venture into Manitoba's Interlake region. Among the gems in the chest are the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre, Selkirk Marine Museum, Lower Fort Garry, Kennedy House and the other attractions along River Road, Hecla Provincial Park and Stonewall Quarry Interpretive Centre. Be sure to visit the snake statue in Inwood north of Highway #17.



## Special Note

### Collecting snakes

The removal of snakes from the Narcisse Wildlife Management Area is prohibited except under special permit for the scientific study of wildlife. If you encounter someone illegally removing snakes from the area, use your discretion in bringing the collection policy to his or her attention. If need be, report the incident to the Turn in Poachers (T.I.P.) Program at 945-0086 or 1-800-782-0076.



## For more information

Additional information about Manitoba's red-sided garter snakes is available on the video *The Narcisse Red-Sided Garter Snakes*. The video is available in both French and English and can be borrowed from Manitoba Conservation Public Information Services, Box 22, 200 Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3. Publications about other Manitoba Wildlife Management Areas can be obtained free-of-charge from the same address.

For information on the seasonal status of the Narcisse Snake Dens call 945-6784 or 1-800-214-6497.

# The Snakes of Narcisse

## The World's Largest Snake Dens





## Best viewing times

**SPRING:** The latter part of April and first three weeks in May is the best time to visit the Narcisse Snake Dens. During this period, snakes are preoccupied with mating and are easily approached by visitors. The greatest activity tends to coincide with the disappearance of snow and the first few hot sunny days of spring.

**FALL:** Garter snakes return to their dens in early September. Once there, they remain active and visible to visitors until cool, wet autumn weather forces them underground. Fall viewing of snakes is best during warm sunny days.

## What to bring

It's always a good idea to have a cap and windbreaker with you. Comfortable hiking boots or a sturdy pair of running shoes are all you need. Rubber boots might be needed if the conditions are excessively wet.

If you plan on pushing a stroller through the area, the south path is by far the easiest route to take.

You may wish to bring your own beverages and a light snack. As you will likely spend anywhere from one to three hours in the area, and cover a fair bit of ground, chances are you'll work up a thirst and appetite. Be sure to bring a camera and plenty of film.

## Access

Please park in the main lot. Only authorized vehicles operated by Manitoba Conservation staff are allowed beyond the parking lot.

Access into the dens and adjacent buffer zones is prohibited for both the safety of visitors and the well-being of the snakes. The viewing platform at each den site provides a convenient location for watching the action.

## Site Management

The Narcisse Snake Dens is managed by Manitoba Conservation with assistance and valuable input of the Narcisse Snake Management Advisory Group. The Narcisse Snake Management Advisory Group consists of representatives from the local community, wildlife advocacy groups, regional tourism agency and various levels of government.



## Our Main Attraction

**W**e're alive with snakes. It's here in the Interlake area that you can see more snakes at a glance than anywhere else in the world. For two brief periods each year tens of thousands of red-sided garter snakes congregate at the surface of their winter dens. Beginning with the first few warm days of spring, garter snakes emerge from these dens and gather in large numbers to perform a fascinating mating ritual. Following a two to three week frenzy of mating activity, snakes disperse to nearby marshes for the summer. By early fall they return to their dens, hibernating in crevasses and caverns in the limestone bedrock below the frozen ground.

## We're easy to find

Just look for the Narcisse Snake Dens sign on Highway #17, six kilometres north of Narcisse. Turn east at the den sign and follow the short road to the parking lot. Here you will find orientation signs, washrooms, picnic area and a 3.0 km walking trail. The trail winds through native grassland and aspen bush, and is easy to follow.

Winnipeggers should allow approximately 1 1/2 hours to cover the 130 kilometre trip to Narcisse Wildlife Management Area.



## Some commonly asked questions

### Can we pick up snakes?

Yes. Garter snakes are not poisonous. We encourage you to handle a snake only in the presence of site interpretive staff. They can show you how to properly handle a snake so these fragile creatures are less likely to be harmed. Snakes of any sex can be handled in the fall, but larger female snakes should be left alone during the spring mating season.

### How can you tell the sex of a snake?

One way to determine sex is to study their behaviour. In spring, male snakes gather in large numbers at the surface of the den waiting for a chance to mate with a female snake. As each female emerges from her winter den she is vigorously pursued by a band of males that entwine themselves around her to form a mating ball.

The one female is usually at the centre and lead of the mating ball as it slithers like a tangled mat of spaghetti along the ground or up a shrub. In addition to physical differences between the two sexes in the vent area, adult females are larger than adult males both in length and body thickness.