

Western Parks

Turtle Mountain Provincial Park



Introduction

With an area 184 km², the park is characterised by undulating hills, marshland, deciduous forest cover and shallow lakes.

Classified as a Natural Park, its purpose is to preserve areas that are representative of the Turtle Mountain Natural Region; and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

The park will:

- Provide nature-oriented recreational opportunities such as hiking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing in a largely undisturbed environment;
- Provide opportunities for high quality intensive recreational developments such as campgrounds all-season day-use areas;
- Promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features; and
- Accommodate commercial resource uses such as oil and gas activities where such activities do not compromise other park purposes.



Wetland

Origin

Knowledge of Turtle Mountain's physical origin, was first obtained during the exploratory expeditions of Palliser, and of Dawson and Hind in the mid-19th century. They were sent to assess travel routes and natural resources, in particular near the 49th parallel. Several scientists were included in these groups to collect information on plants and geology, and to appraise the lands for cultivation and future settlement. Their discoveries and recent core samples from experimental drill holes, show that Turtle Mountain was shaped over several hundred million years.

One of the deepest layers of rock consists of black shales and limestone that were deposited during the Mississippian Age, 240-265 million years ago, in a vast saltwater sea. Plant and animal material settled to the bottom, decayed and changed into oil. These sedimentary layers are found in the southwestern corner of the province and are our only known oil-producing formation. The next significant layer above the oil-bearing rock are Cretaceous shales, deposited 60-130 million years ago. These shales form the basis of the second prairie level that includes highlands like Porcupine, Duck, Riding mountains, and the Pembina Hills.

Sandstones and shales above the Cretaceous layers are unique in Manitoba. Formed within the last 60 million years, they are our most recent bedrock formation.

One of these sandstones, known as the Boissevain Formation, is visible in a few locations north of the mountain. At the turn of the century, one outcrop south of Boissevain was quarried and used as ornamental stone. The blocks were extensively used for building in communities along PTH 3. Some of the stone houses and churches are still standing and are still being used. They are excellent examples of early Manitoba architecture.

During one phase of the Tertiary sea, this area was characterized by a vast swamp. Its lush vegetation consisted of huge ferns, trees like ginkgo and fig, and the forerunners of our

evergreens. Large quantities of this vegetation accumulated and were transformed into lignite in what is called the Turtle Mountain Formation of sandstone.

When this sea finally withdrew, Turtle Mountain's core emerged as part of a landform called the Missouri Coteau. Many millions of years of erosion by wind, water and the effects of several glacial advances separated the mountain from the remainder of North America's third prairie level which is situated about 80 km to the southwest.

What may be regarded as the last layer responsible for Turtle Mountain is a mantle of glacial till deposited on the bedrock at the end of the Ice Age about 15,000 years ago. The mantle of clay, sand, gravel and boulders, is up to 122 m in depth. Glacial Lake Souris formed north and west of the mountain from meltwaters, and persisted for several thousand years.

The melting and disappearance of ice was not a sudden event. Large quantities were buried and melted at a slower rate than exposed ice. As the buried chunks melted, they caused considerable shifting and collapse of the land above them. Such irregular melting is credited with the mountain's present topography-many hills and frequent water-filled depressions.

Prehistory and History

The Turtle Mountain region is the oldest inhabited part of the province, since it was the first dry land that appeared after the glacial period. Coniferous forests quickly became established and waterfowl, mammoth and, perhaps, giant bison attracted small groups of nomadic hunters. Little is known about these people as no campsites have yet been discovered in Manitoba for archaeological study. Only a handful of scattered stone tools tell of their presence.

About 10,000 years ago the last of the glacial ice had melted and local topography generally took on its present contours. A major climatic change caused the replacement of the forests with grasslands. Hunting and gathering began on the prairie, and persisted well into the 19th century.

Today it is difficult to imagine how one type of animal could be the life-source for a diversity of people for many thousands of years. Yet this was the case for many of North America's First Nations on the Great Plains. The buffalo (bison) was a source of food, shelter, clothing, tools, utensils and weapons. It was also prominent in religious ceremonies, songs and legends. When fuelwood was scarce on the open prairie the animal's droppings, known to explorers as "buffalo chips" were used for campfires. For countless generations winters ended when the warm, buffalo-scented winds from the south and west announced the returning herds and the start of spring.

In the early 19th century a new people of mixed Native and European origin appeared on the prairie. The Métis, who lived in the Red River settlement, were primarily buffalo hunters. Between 1810 and 1870 they made annual hunting trips into western Manitoba. As many as 2,500 men, women and children made the journey in Red River carts for the big hunt.

In the later years, as the herds diminished, they made hunting trips into Saskatchewan and Montana. Some of the hunters wintered in Turtle Mountain rather than make a long journey in the summer from Fort Garry. As the hunting way of life disappeared, many Métis set up homesteads in this area.

Although the 49th parallel was agreed upon as the boundary between Canada and the USA much earlier, it wasn't until 1872-74 that the actual border was surveyed.

The work of locating the border, cutting the line and building earthen mounds began in winter at Lake of the Woods. In spring, the Canadian survey team moved westward in a train of ox-drawn covered wagons. Along the way they established astronomical stations to determine the latitude, and a series of supply depots such as that on the east side of Turtle Mountain. Depots were regularly supplied with food and equipment from Fort Dufferin situated near the present town of Emerson.

Several members of the Boundary Commission Survey team were photographers whose painstaking work resulted in a visual record of this historic event. In addition, they captured the dying days of the wild prairie. All that remained of the life-giving buffalo herds in Manitoba were their scattered, sunbleached bones. In 1874 the newly formed North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) made their historic trek to the West, in the footsteps of the surveyors, past Turtle Mountain.

The Forest

Turtle Mountain's rolling hills are covered in a forest of deciduous trees. The predominant tree, trembling aspen, is interspersed with balsam poplar, green ash, birch, Manitoba maple, elm and bur oak. Shrubs like hazel, chokecherry, saskatoon, nannyberry, dogwood, highbush cranberry and pincherry are found in the forest understory. Many of these, and wild plum trees, provide fragrant blossoms in spring and the delicious fruit throughout the summer months for berry pickers and animals alike. Species of willow, including diamond willow, are common in moist areas.

Fire played an important role in the development of present-day vegetation. Prior to settlement, the mountain was periodically swept by fire caused by lightning and people.

The worst recorded fires occurred in 1897 and 1903, probably due to the increased human activity that accompanied settlement. All of Ranges 20 and 21 in Township 1 were burned except for the Oskar Lake area and the Max Lake islands. Eagle and Arbor islands are the two living examples of mature deciduous forest. Their dominant trees are ash, elm, oak and Manitoba maple.

In 1911 a ranger headquarters was established on Turtle Mountain and two major steps were taken to protect the forest. Fireguard roads were ploughed to contain possible forest fires, and livestock grazing was encouraged to eliminate the fire hazard due to dry grass and thick shrub

growth. Max Lake was the scene of an annual fall round up. (The old corral site was planted with white spruce in 1916.) Despite these precautions a fire blown in from North Dakota in 1921 consumed a large portion of the forest. Today, fireguards form a network of dry-weather roads which are used as snowmobile trails in the winter. Turtle Mountain Provincial Park was designated in 1961.

Sloughs and Lakes

When Turtle Mountain Provincial Park is seen from the air, it appears to be about one-third water and two-thirds forest. The wetlands are generally shallow and their depths vary from season to season. Their main source of fresh water is precipitation, rain and snow, which is considerably more than on the surrounding prairie. Natural drainage is very poor due to the clay-like nature of the soil. It is not unusual to find nearly adjacent ponds at different elevations.

Because the waters are shallow and contain little oxygen, they are for the most part, unsuitable for fish populations. Adam, Bower, Max and William lakes have been stocked periodically, and they are the best known fishing spots on the mountain. Adam and Bower lakes require aeration systems to enable the fish to overwinter.

Both directly and indirectly, the ponds support a great variety of wildlife. Shorelines of rushes and cattails provide nesting sites for most species of ducks. In spring, amid a chorus of frogs, nights reverberate with the calls of grebes and loons. Birds like the great blue heron, black-crowned night heron and the double-crested cormorant return to their colonies of nests. The ponds provide food, shelter and breeding grounds for painted turtles, salamanders, muskrat, beaver, raccoon, mink and moose.

Nearly every open body of water has at least one beaver lodge, and their dams are found wherever there is a semblance of natural drainage. In this manner beaver play a vital role in maintaining ponds and the wildlife that is dependent on them. Beaver, however, were not always plentiful. In the early part of this century there were no beaver on Turtle Mountain, due largely to indiscriminate trapping. The absence of these water engineers was felt in the 1930s when many of the lakes dried up. Adam Lake was reduced to the size of a small pond. Beaver were successfully reintroduced in the 1940s. Their main food sources, willow and aspen, remain plentiful.

Things to Do, Places to See

Camping

Adam Lake campground, adjacent to PTH 10, has electrical and unserviced sites. Showers are available for campers and firewood is provided. Seasonal camping and group camping are offered on the south side of the lake.

Max Lake campground offers unserviced sites on a daily or seasonal basis. It is a quiet, out-of-the-way campground on the park's largest lake.

Oskar Lake campsite, for hikers, cyclists or canoeists, is a short distance off the Oskar Lake road. James Lake cabin, one step up from camping, is available for overnight stays. Book in advance through the Boissevain office. Only registered hikers/skiers/canoeists may overnight. However, other trail users may use it as shelter during the day.

William Lake Provincial Park to the east, offers unserviced and group campsites on the wooded shores of William Lake. Showers are available and firewood is provided.



Camping at Adam Lake

Travel Manitoba

Swimming

For a cool dip on a hot summer's day or a sandy beach for lying in the sun, take the family to Adam, Max or William lakes. Please be cautious near the water as all beaches are unsupervised. Never swim alone and be constantly watchful of children.

Fishing

Turtle Mountain has some great fishing holes which have produced master angler sized fish for many years. Stocked waters at Bower Lake and William Lake are popular for brown trout, rainbow trout and smallmouth bass. Adam Lake is good for pike.

Bicycling

The park is a paradise for mountain bikers looking for long rides, and for families looking for a shorter outing. Trails starting at Adam Lake offer nicely rolling terrain for an afternoon ride. The

Oskar Lake, south boundary, Sharpe Lake and west main roads form a loop of about 40 km for those who want to take a longer ride in the backcountry.

Please note that cyclists must obey all traffic signs within the park and should be aware of hikers, horseback riders and motor vehicles on some trails. Backcountry roads are not recommended when they are wet.

Hiking Trails

Adam Lake

The Adam Lake trails start in the campground and give hikers a choice of four, nine, ten, and 15-km trails through the quiet forests and past a myriad of lakes and potholes.

Turtle's Back

This trail starts at William Lake and is considered a bit strenuous. It leads to one of the mountain's highest points where a tower gives you the vantage for a breathtaking view. Interpretive signs describe the migration of peoples across the prairies that stretch out before you. Allow 2 h.

Adam Lake Fitness

This trail is good for a pleasant walk or for a real workout. Starting at the Adam Lake beach, it takes you past exercise stations as it winds along the lakeshore and past the campground.



Hiker on one of many trails

Self-guiding Trails

Disappearing Lakes

Interpretive signs along this short trail, off the Oskar Lake road, describe the life of a Turtle Mountain lake and how it eventually disappears. People often see moose, waterfowl, beaver and other wildlife. Allow 1 h.

Wildlife Viewing

Starting in Adam Lake campground, this trail leads to a viewing tower. A brochure available at the trailhead describes how Turtle Mountain is a special place for wildlife. Bring your camera and binoculars. Allow 45 min.

Horseback Riding

South of Adam Lake and off PTH 10, trails can give hours of pleasant riding through gently rolling woodlands. There are two short loops near Adam Lake, and a longer loop to John Lake and the international border. These trails overlap with the Adam Lake hiking trails in some areas, so hikers and mountain bikers can be expected there.

Canoeing

Many lakes offer good opportunities for canoeing, especially a quiet, afternoon paddle. Oskar, Max and James lakes, linked by portages are the park's canoe route through the backcountry. In times of high water it offers pleasant canoeing, however, canoeists must watch for extensive mudflats when water levels are low. Allow one overnight for a leisurely trip.



Exploring Eagle Island

In Winter

Turtle Mountain park is an excellent place to visit in winter. Safe, well groomed cross-country ski trails at Adam Lake make for a pleasant outing. The James Lake cabin can be booked for an overnight trip in the great outdoors. Snowmobile trails, starting at the north side of the park near PTH 10 will lead you to explore the winter scenery in the west end of the park. More family recreation is available at Adam Lake with its toboggan slide and skating rinks.

Local Attractions

Immediately south of the park is the International Peace Garden with exquisite flower displays, picnic sites, hiking trails, monuments and the famous music and athletic camps. Information on programs and services is available by writing to: The Superintendent, Box 419, Boissevain, Manitoba, R0K 0E0.

Boissevain is the nearest service centre to the park offering a full range of services and a spectacular display of outdoor murals. In addition, the Beckoning Hills Museum and the Moncur Gallery of Prehistory in the Civic Centre, offer interesting displays.

