

Western Parks

Spruce Woods Provincial Park

Spirit Sands Self-guiding Trail



Introduction

The area you are about to explore had its beginning more than 15,000 years ago. The Assiniboine River, much larger than it is today, created an enormous delta as it brought glacial meltwaters into ancient Lake Agassiz. Of the original 6,500 square kilometres of delta sand, only four square kilometres remain open; the rest is now covered with a rich variety of plants and wildlife.

Wind-patterned sand, cacti and high temperatures make it tempting to call Spirit Sands a desert. Yet the moisture received here is 300-500 millimetres per year-nearly twice the amount received in a true desert region. This abundant rainfall enables plants to colonize or cover the dunes, decreasing the open sand area.

At the Devils Punch Bowl, sand slips and slides down a bowl-shaped depression 45 metres deep and disappears into an ever-moving, eerie pool of blue-green water. Although this may sound bizarre, it is part of the landscape of the Spirit Sands. Underground streams have eroded and collapsed the hills beside the Assiniboine River to create an unusual site.

For centuries people have come here to see something special. World-renowned nature writer Ernest Thompson Seton walked the sandhills wanting to learn more about nature. Now, visitors come to see this rare and unusual part of Manitoba's natural legacy.

Poison Ivy



Trail Tips

The trails are moderately demanding with level stretches and a few steep slopes. The "steepest" have stairs and platforms to help you climb and to protect the fragile layer of vegetation. To make your exploration of the Spirit Sands an enjoyable experience, consider the following suggestions.

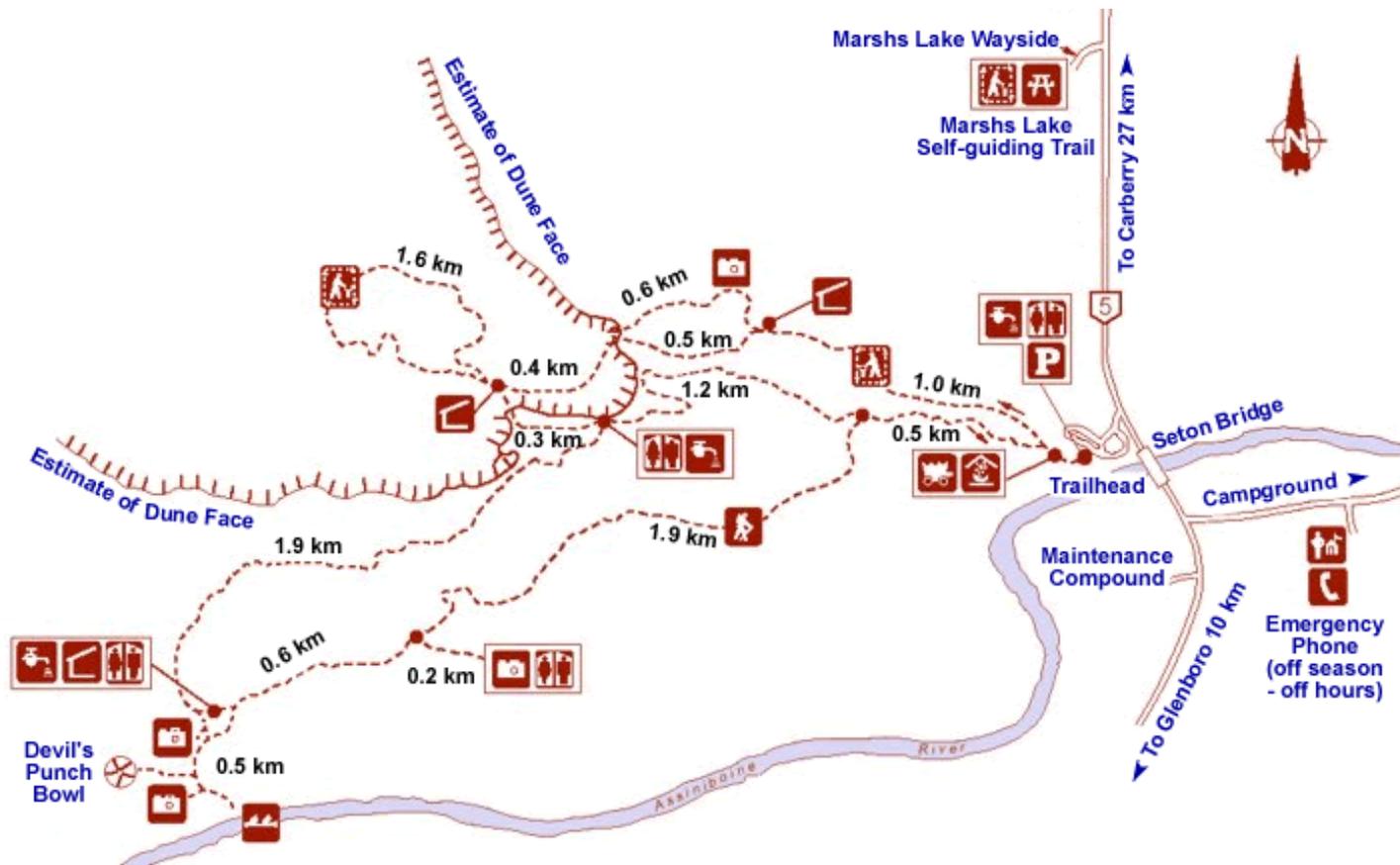
- Select a trail length that is appropriate for all members of your group; allow time for observation and rest breaks.
- Come prepared with proper walking shoes, a hat, sunscreen and drinking water. On the reverse side, the map indicates where water is available.
- On hot summer days, avoid the trails at midday; plan a morning or evening hike.
- Beware of poison ivy.
- Bring a camera with suitable protection from flying dust and sand.

Trail Rules

You are visiting one of Manitoba's special places, which is an extremely fragile ecosystem. Please observe the following rules in order to protect plants and animals and to ensure that your actions do not spoil the experience of others that follow.

- Stay on the trails. Access to the Spirit Sands is restricted to designated hiking trails and covered wagon routes.
- Do not pick or remove any object including plants, minerals and animals here or elsewhere in the park.
- Pets must be kept on a leash at all times.
- Bicycle, horse and ATV riding are not permitted.
- Do not litter; pack out what you packed in.

Map



Trail Distances

The Spirit Sands Self-guiding Trail features on-site interpretive signs that present the area's cultural and natural history. Interpretive signs at the Punch Bowl describe this unique feature.

Distances indicated on the map are measured from trail junction to trail junction. Visitors may choose the combination of trails and distances that suit their outing. Allow at least 20 min for each kilometre.

