

INTRODUCTION

Taking the Road Less Travelled

Saskatchewan is tailor-made for backroad exploring. We have more kilometres of roads than any province in Canada—enough to circle the equator four times. Possibilities are mind-boggling, from drives through spectacular river valleys to sweeping natural grasslands, lake-studded boreal forest, wild badlands, some of Canada’s largest sand dunes, awesome viewpoints, little-known hideaways, and historic treasures.

This book is for those who enjoy the journey rather than travelling somewhere quickly. The key to finding the most scenic routes in Saskatchewan is getting off the beaten track. Major highways are built for utilitarian rather than aesthetic reasons, linking major cities and covering terrain where road-building is easiest. To see the best that Saskatchewan has to offer, we have to take the road less travelled—secondary highways, gravel grid roads, and lonely backroads.

Road conditions are a mixed bag. Some routes follow paved highways, most involve a lot of gravel roads, and some have sections of dirt roads that might not be passable in wet weather. A few are fairly rough and could bring out rattles and squeaks in your car that you didn’t know you had. In short, there’s something for everyone. While four-wheel drive might be useful for some routes, a regular passenger car can negotiate most roads described here, provided of course that conditions are dry, and that you take it easy. One thing for sure—these routes will take you into some of the most gorgeous countryside Saskatchewan has to offer.

How to Use This Book

These are suggested routes rather than something to follow religiously. Try variations to the routes, or different roads. Everywhere you go, ask locals for suggestions and it is quite likely that you will discover even more enjoyable drives.

Maps in this book are intended to supplement the Saskatchewan Highway Map and other maps, not to replace them. While the highway map may not include minor roads, it provides the overall framework of the Saskatchewan road system and is useful for providing the “big picture”. Maps provided by tourism destination

regions, towns, and parks (either in paper form or online) are more local in nature and often include more details on minor roads. Online map sources are especially useful. One we like is Maps.me, a free mobile app. Once you download the map for the area you are visiting, you can use it offline since it doesn’t require cell service.

We have included GPS coordinates for several places to help guide you. We strongly caution against relying too much on GPS units in vehicles to suggest routes in rural or remote areas. These units may be fine in cities or along major highways, but once off the beaten path, they don’t cope very well. We’ve seen them suggest some truly bizarre routings.

Be Prepared

When you leave major highways and wander backroads, extra precautions are necessary. Check to see that your spare tire has air, and carry a shovel, booster cables, chain or tow rope, basic tools, and extra food and water. Top up your gas tank before heading into remote areas where gas stations might be far apart. Do not automatically assume that you can rely on your cell phone if you have car trouble—many parts of Saskatchewan do not have coverage. Above all, always assess roads carefully before heading out. A dirt or lightly gravelled road that appears perfectly fine in dry weather could become a muddy quagmire after a rain. On minor roads without regular maintenance, keep an eye out for ruts, fallen trees, rocks, and other obstructions. If in doubt, leave the trip for another time, or take a different route.

Roads change. A road might be upgraded and its route changed. A gravel road might get paved, and occasionally a paved road is converted to gravel. Roads deteriorate over time, and may or may not be repaired. Minor access roads are sometimes taken out of service. Roads described here are based on conditions at the time of research. We welcome hearing from travellers who find that things have changed.

Additional Resources

Due to space constraints, we cannot include everything of interest along these drives. So we urge travellers to use other resources as well. Chief among these is Tourism Saskatchewan, which has extensive information on a wide range of attractions, activities, accommodation, and eateries. Call toll-free 1-877-237-2273 or visit their website www.tourismsaskatchewan.com. Follow links to the various attractions, communities, and all parks. Also visit the Saskatchewan Provincial Parks website at www.saskparks.com. Find out more about national parks and national historic sites at www.pc.gc.ca.