

Jackrabbits are active at night. During the day, they rest in scraped out areas or “forms” under bushes. If you startle one it will take off with jumps of over 5 metres and speeds of up to 60 kilometres per hour. You can explore here, or just sit and watch for a while.



10,000 Years Ago

The land before you was scoured, built up and carved out by glacial ice and streams.



We Weren't The First To Hike These Buttes...

You are walking through the ancient hunting grounds of the Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Blackfoot and Cree. One of their families built the tipi rings around you probably within the last 1000 years. There are hundreds of other sites along the river valley.

The reason for all the activity - the Frenchman River. This was the only permanent water between the South Saskatchewan and Milk rivers. Consequently it attracted bison and bison hunters. Once here, they found everything they needed to work, play and carry out their ceremonies.

The evidence of ancient peoples is found mainly on the buttes. Why? There are many explanations. On a hot day the valley floor is calm and the heat intense. Here the breeze cools you and also blows the bugs away. From the buttes it is easier to spot game and the sharp edge of the valley provided a finale for bison drive lanes.

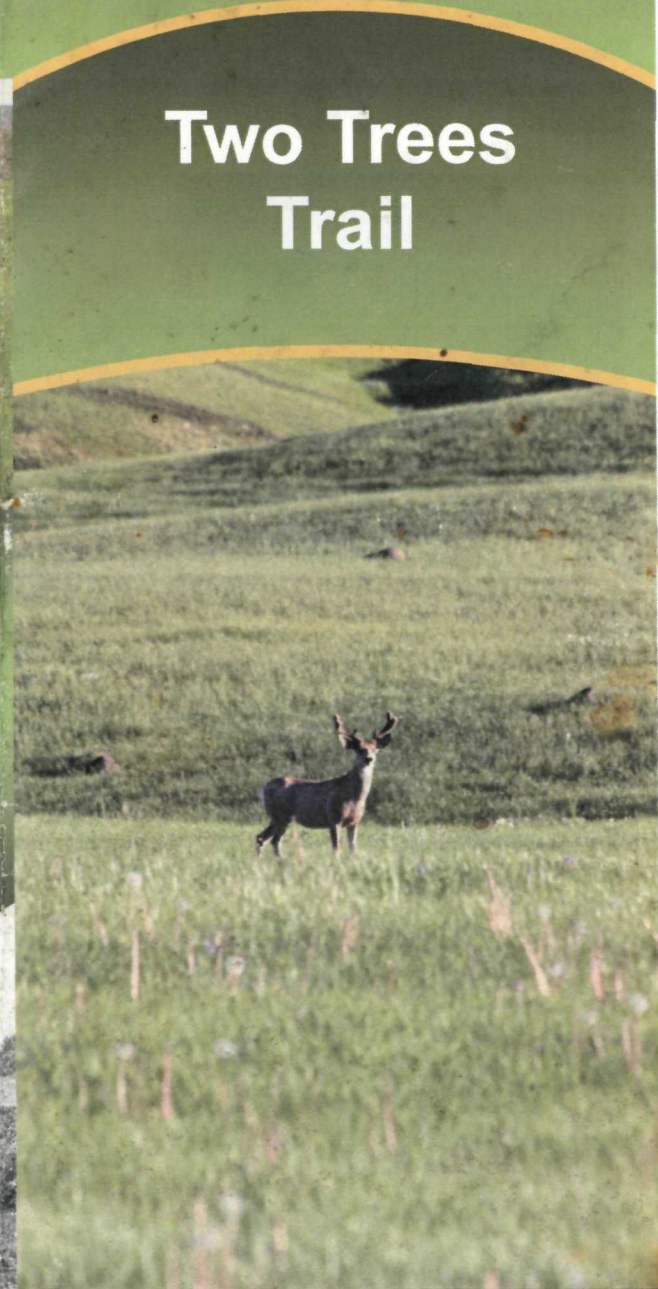
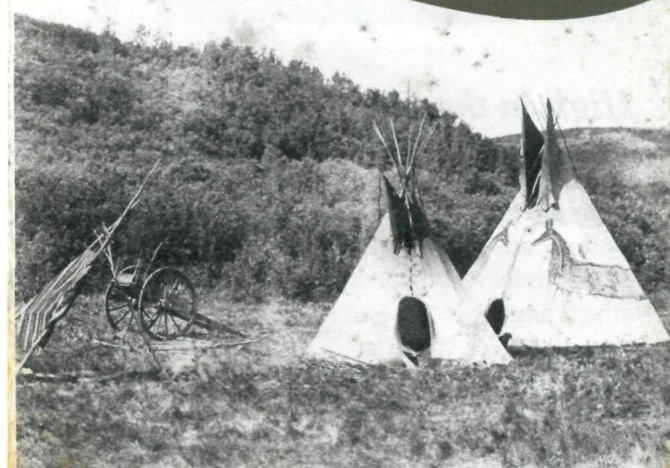


... Nor Will We Be The Last

Two Trees Trail



Grasslands National Park
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Welcome to the Two Trees Trail. The beauty of this trail lies in the 360° sky, the carved valley and the tiny world at your feet. Walk slowly, pause often, smell the air and feel the wind lifting your spirit, if not your body. This self-guided trail follows the edge of the Frenchman River Valley. It is a moderately easy loop of 4 km with a few short climbs. It will take about 1 - 1.5hrs to hike.



The View

The Frenchman River meanders before you. Today, it is only a clue indicating a once powerful glacial stream that carved the valley over 10,000 years ago. The largest bald eroded hill or butte directly to the east is 70 Mile Butte. It got the name from its location 70 miles from Wood Mountain on the North West Mounted Police patrol trail to Ft. Walsh. It rises 100 metres above the valley floor and is the highest point of land in the area.



To the north, the village of Val Marie is nestled in the irrigation land outside the park. To the south, the Three Sisters Buttes also lie outside present park boundaries. The park is remnant of a once continuous sea of grasses, squeezed into the reality of present day agriculture. Less than one-quarter of Canada's mixed-grass prairie is still in its natural state.



High in the Sky

From the melodious, to the raucous, to the shrill. The sky holds them all. Horned larks, sprague's pipits and even lark buntings send their beautiful mating calls into the sky proclaiming the productivity and diversity of this remnant of mixed prairie. If these small birds seem to fly up from your feet, take care. You might accidentally trample their eggs or young.

The shrill scream of the Golden Eagle tells of its missed strike at a prairie dog out on the flat. Eagles build massive stick nests on cliffs. Watch only from a distance! They are very susceptible to disturbance and may abandon their nest or chicks if you try to get too close.



Prairie Sod

The prairie sod survives on only 35 cm (13") of moisture each year (Pacific Rim National Park on the BC coast gets 10 times as much). On the drier buttes, short grasses such as Blue Grama predominate.



In moister areas or in wetter years, mid-grasses like the spear grass and wheat grasses are more common.

Both are often outnumbered by lichens and mosses.



Lichens and mosses as prairie sod! Lack of moisture and exposure can be as severe here as in the arctic. Only the hardest survive. Lichens and mosses live days, months,

even years with little moisture and still keep growing. They keep the prairie soil from blowing away.

Your footsteps may disturb the sod, but will not kill it. Walk softly, but be assured - it has survived thousands of bison, herds of cattle and now it will endure your passing too.



Look Around You

The coulee is a hidden protective world. Shrubs and grasses are lusher here because of the extra moisture from run-off. The thicker grass makes an ideal hideout for meadow voles to escape the never-ending search of the long-tailed weasel.

