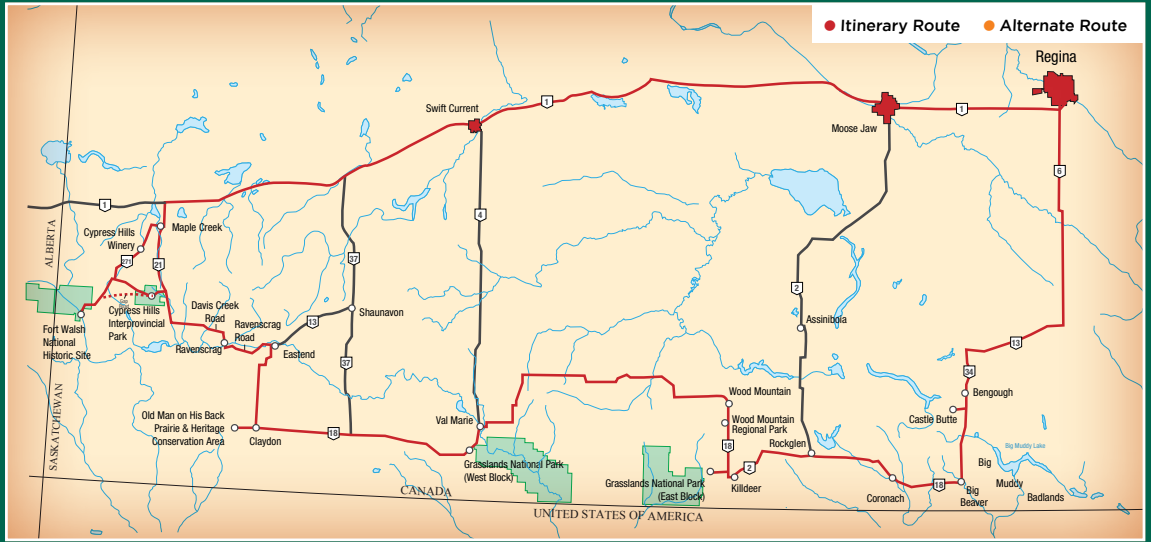




To access online maps of Saskatchewan or to request a **Saskatchewan Discovery Guide** and **Official Highway Map**, visit: www.sasktourism.com/travel-information/travel-guides-and-maps

TRIP LENGTH
5 days
838-881 km

DRIVING THROUGH SOUTHWEST SPLENDOUR



Castle Butte, Big Muddy Badlands. *Tourism Saskatchewan/Paul Austring*

Saskatchewan’s southwest is a land of larger than life landscapes – bison roaming sweeping grasslands, wild badlands, picture-perfect valleys and some of Canada’s highest land between the Rockies and Labrador.

If you’re the kind of explorer who likes to get off the major highways and into the scenic heartland, this five-day drive from Regina to Maple Creek is for you.

DAY ONE Bengough, Coronach

From Regina, travel approximately 85 km south on Hwy 6, then 40 km west on Hwy 13 and 17 km south on Hwy 34 to Bengough, “Gateway to the Big Muddy.” These badlands were formed by glacial meltwater some 15,000 years ago, with continuing erosion deepening incised channels, revealing multi-coloured sediments millions of years old. This is a land of sprawling ranches, where notorious outlaws once had secret hideaways in remote coulees. Most infamous was Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch who used the Big Muddy as Station No. 1 on the Outlaw Trail that stretched south to Mexico.



Grasslands National Park of Canada. Tourism Saskatchewan/Greg Huszar Photography

Driving south of Bengough you suddenly drop into the wide scenic valley. Follow the road running west along the valley floor to Big Muddy's iconic landmark – Castle Butte. The weathered slopes of this 60-metre high monolith are impressive anytime, but become magical at sunrise or sunset when bathed in the sun's brilliant reddish-orange glow. Castle Butte is located 22 km south of Bengough on Hwy 34 and 5 km west on a grid road. Watch for the sign at the grid turn-off.

Return to Hwy 34 and continue 13 km south, then turn west on Hwy 18 for a couple of kilometres to Big Beaver, a tiny community that's home to famous Aust's General Store; its motto says it all – "If we don't have it, you don't need it."

Travel nearly 29 km west on Hwy 18 to Coronach. The nearby Poplar River Power Plant and Mine Site generates a third of Saskatchewan's electricity. Join a tour of the power plant and coal mines where gigantic drag-lines expose the rich deposits. Tours originate from 220 Centre Street in Coronach. Coronach's highlight is a trip with Big Muddy Tours where you really get up close and personal with the badlands, from wild landscapes to outlaw caves and ancient aboriginal stone effigies. Please call ahead to pre-book your trip with Big Muddy Tours.

Overnight in Coronach or continue on to Rockglen, the first stop on your itinerary tomorrow.

DAY TWO Rockglen, Grasslands National Park, Val Marie

Continue 36 km west on Hwy 18 to Rockglen. The community is nestled in the scenic Wood Mountain Uplands, which are one of only four areas in North America untouched by the last glaciations. Opportunities abound to explore the area's ecological, geological and cultural history. Visit the Effie Mattson Nature Walk and Archaeological Centre or stretch your legs on the Yost Wildlife Hike, located just outside town along Hwy 2, a preserved natural area with spectacular views over the town and surrounding hills.

Travel for 35 km west on Hwy 2 to Killdeer. From Killdeer head north on Hwy 18 for a short distance and follow signage to the East Block of Grasslands National Park, protecting one of the largest and least disturbed tracts of native prairie in North America. Off Hwy 18 you will travel on gravel roads 6.4 km west, then 6.4 km south and another 2.4 km west to the main road access for the East Block and the former "McGowan Place" next to Rock Creek, now a picnic site and campground. Several suggested hikes begin here and lead you to rugged hills, badlands and picturesque valleys.

Follow the road signs a few kilometres south to Poverty Ridge Warden Station. A minor road behind the house and yard runs 3 km west to the park boundary where an easy walk along the valley rim reveals spectacular views over the Killdeer Badlands. Here the plateau dips sharply into multi-coloured gullied slopes with free-standing buttes and whimsically sculpted formations. Killdeer Badlands was the site of western Canada's first discovery of dinosaur bones in 1874 by the Boundary Commission.

Follow the signage to Grassland National Park's West Block by returning to Hwy 18 and travelling 30 km north to Wood Mountain, then 126 km west along Hwy 18 to Val Marie. A worthwhile sidetrip along Hwy 18 is the Wood Mountain Regional Park, where the Wood Mountain Rodeo Ranch Museum acts as a summer information centre for the national park. Located in Val Marie, the Grasslands National Park Visitor Centre houses displays on this special environment and provides helpful information on drives, hikes and park programs.

The 80 km Ecotour drive through the West Block highlights is not-to-be-missed. The well-signed route leads east on Hwy 18, then south into the Frenchman River Valley where the landscape suddenly opens up into sweeping views of the picturesque valley floor along the narrow river, framed by weathered buttes and scenic hills. Rich in wildlife, you may see pronghorn, mule deer or perhaps the free-ranging bison that roam the park. Watch for prairie rattlesnakes along the road and look up for a glimpse of the threatened ferruginous hawk. This valley is the only place in Canada to see black-tailed prairie dogs, noisily chirping

away in sprawling colonies right beside the road. The loop tour returns to Val Marie from the south, passing by the park's highest point of land and most imposing site – 70 Mile Butte.

After a full day of exploration, retire in one of Val Marie's excellent accommodations including the Convent Country Inn, The Crossing Resort, Rosefield Church Guesthouse and Ride with Lamotte.

DAY THREE Eastend

Travel approximately 95 km west along Hwy 18 to Claydon. At the corner where Hwy 18 curves south, continue west to Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area. The former ranch of Peter and Sharon Butala, now run by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, protects this vast and rare stretch of native prairie with its abundant wildflowers, grassland birds and broad vistas. Among the wildlife are plains bison that roam freely as they did for thousands of years. The visitor centre operates on weekends from May to September. For weekday access, please call ahead (see Contacts and Resources).

Return to Claydon and take the grid road that runs north, meeting Hwy 13 just southwest of Eastend, a beautifully situated valley town boasting more than its fair share of scenic spots. The drive from Claydon to Eastend is approximately 60 km. Hiking and driving tours can be downloaded from the Eastend website from a link provided at the end of this itinerary, and include picturesque sights like Jones Peak, Chimney Coulee, Brady Coulee and Pine Cree Regional Park. A highlight is Eastend's T. rex Centre, a combination visitor centre and research facility conducting work on the area's numerous paleontological finds including Scotty, Canada's most complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton. Fixed-roof accommodations and camping are available in Eastend, so take the evening to soak in the beauty of the Frenchman River Valley.

DAY FOUR Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

Head west of Eastend on Grid 614 for 2 km, then turn left onto Ravenscrag Road. The next 22 km follows the meandering Frenchman River framed by spectacular multi-coloured badland-like slopes, many with a striking band of brilliant white sandstone.

At Ravenscrag, head north for 7 km, then west along Davis Creek Road to Hwy 21. From this corner it's only 12 km north to the Centre Block of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park where the terrain changes yet again. These hills have a flavour all their own with highlands of white spruce and lodgepole pine more reminiscent of the north or mountain foothills, combining with open grasslands and wetlands. The mix of landscapes makes it especially rich in wildlife with plenty of moose, elk, pronghorn, over 200 species of birds and stunning wildflower displays. Head to the visitor centre for information on drives, hikes and other activities, then explore the Centre Block along the auto tour that takes you to Lookout Point on the edge of the escarpment to gaze over the plains far below, and Bald Butte, where you can walk the short path up this treeless hill marking the highest point in the block.

The park has plenty of amenities to keep you as busy as you would like including zipline canopy tours by Cypress Hills Eco-Adventures, an outdoor swimming pool, boat rentals on Loch Leven, Cypress Hills Golf Course, mini-golf, tennis courts, Cypress Hills Riding Academy and nature trails galore.

The Centre Block will be your home for the evening. Choose from cabins, condos and hotel rooms at the Cypress Park Resort Inn or camp in one of the park's campgrounds.

DAY FIVE Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, Maple Creek

Take the Gap Road, a 32 km shortcut across pastureland to the park's West Block Wilderness Area. The road could be rough, even impassable after a rain, but the "see forever" views make it worthwhile. Please check with park officials for current road conditions. If road conditions are poor, you can reach the West Block by travelling 27 km north to Maple Creek on Hwy 21, then 50 km southwest on Hwy 271.

Approaching the West Block Wilderness Area, you climb a series of switchbacks to the plateau. Along this road is the approach to Fort Walsh, a national historic site reliving the early days of the North West Mounted Police. Just west is the turnoff to the conglomerate cliffs, a must-visit where the edge of the escarpment consists of cliffs of water-worn cobblestones that have been naturally cemented together, with outstanding views over Adams Lake and the plains and hills below. Further into the West Block, the road descends into Battle Creek Valley and follows this picture-perfect creek as it meanders through the park.

To finish your route, return to Hwy 271 for the scenic 50 km drive to Maple Creek, which is just south of Trans Canada Hwy 1 and a much quicker route back to Regina. The Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery is located just off Hwy 271 en-route to Maple Creek (watch for signs). If time allows, cap off your visit to Saskatchewan's southwest with a tasting of their wines made from Saskatchewan-grown fruits, a slice of saskatoon pie and a gourmet sandwich or artisan cheese platter.



Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park. Tourism Saskatchewan/Greg Huszar Photography

CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

Coronach

Information on accommodations, attractions and services

P: 306-267-3312

W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000184

Big Muddy/Outlaw Cave Tours

Depart from Coronach Golf Course, watch for signs

Open: June-Sep, call ahead for availability

P: 306-267-3312

W: www.2sk.ca/9504

Poplar River Power Plant and Mine Site

Tours depart from 220 Centre St, Coronach

Open: Mar-Dec, call ahead to pre-book

P: 306-267-2078 / 306-267-2157

W: www.2sk.ca/14566

Rockglen

Information on accommodations, attractions and services

P: 306-476-2144

W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000768

Rockglen and District Visitor Centre

Junction of Hwys 2 and 18, Rockglen

Open: late May-Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-476-2002 / 306-476-2144

W: www.2sk.ca/9324

Wood Mountain Rodeo Ranch Museum

Wood Mountain Regional Park, 8 km S of Wood Mountain

Information on the East Block of Grasslands National Park

Open: May – Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-266-4953

W: www.2sk.ca/10279

Val Marie

Information on accommodations, attractions and services

P: 306-298-2022

W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000926

Grasslands National Park of Canada

SW Saskatchewan between Val Marie and Killdeer, S of Hwy 18

Park Visitor Centre located in Val Marie, call ahead for seasonal hours

Open: year-round

P: 306-298-2257

W: www.2sk.ca/14659

Eastend

Town Office, 108 Maple Street

Information on accommodations, attractions and services

P: 306-295-3322 / 306-295-3553

W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000247

Eastend Driving and Hiking Tours

W: www.dinocountry.com

T. rex Discovery Centre

1 km N of Eastend

Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-295-4009 / 306-295-4734

W: www.2sk.ca/13806

Eastend Museum – Cultural Centre

306 Red Coat Dr, Eastend

Open: late-May-Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-295-3375 / 306-295-3564

W: www.2sk.ca/12880

Old Man on His Back Visitor Centre

60 km SW of Eastend via Hwy 13 and Claydon Grid

Open: weekends, May long-weekend to mid-Sep, call ahead for weekday access

P: 306-296-2077 / 306-347-0447

TF: 1-866-622-7275

W: www.2sk.ca/20152

Cypress Hills Tourism Destination Area

W: www.cypresshills.ca

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

Centre Block (full services), 27 km S of Maple Creek on Hwy 21

West Block Wilderness Area (limited services), 57 km SW of Maple Creek on Hwy 271

Open: year-round

P: 306-662-5411 **TF:** 1-800-205-7070

W: www.2sk.ca/11231

Cypress Park Resort Inn and Ivan's Restaurant

30 km S of Maple Creek in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

Hotel rooms, cabins and condominiums, licensed dining

Open: year-round

P: 306-662-12853

W: www.2sk.ca/12853

Cypress Hills Eco-Adventures Ltd.

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park – Centre Block

Open: May-Oct

P: 306-716-6541

W: www.2sk.ca/23198

Fort Walsh National Historic Site

55 km SW of Maple Creek on Hwy 271

Open: May – Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-662-2645 / 306-662-3590

W: www.2sk.ca/14548

Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery

20 km SW of Maple Creek on Hwy 271

Open: May – Oct, call ahead for hours and food service availability

P: 306-662-4100

W: www.2sk.ca/21407

Maple Creek Information Centre

114 Jasper St

Information on accommodations, attractions, shopping and dining

Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-662-4005 / 306-662-2244

W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000555

Jasper Cultural and Historical Centre

311 Jasper St, Maple Creek

Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours

P: 306-662-2434 / 306-662-2876

W: www.2sk.ca/16719

Southwest Saskatchewan

Old-Timer's Museum

218 Jasper St, Maple Creek

Open: May-Sep, other times by appointment

P: 306-662-2474

W: www.2sk.ca/14499

SPECIAL EVENTS

Bengough:

The Gateway Festival, July –

www.2sk.ca/21163

Grasslands National Park:

East Block Party, Aug –

www.2sk.ca/14659

Astronomy Program, Friday evenings,

May-Sep –

www.2sk.ca/14659

Cypress Hills Tourism Destination Area:

Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, Aug –

www.2sk.ca/17082

South West Quest for Saskatchewan Art and History, July –

www.2sk.ca/18661

Maple Creek:

Maple Creek Cowtown Rodeo, July –

www.2sk.ca/10167

Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Western

Art & Cowboy Gear Show, Sep –

www.2sk.ca/10172