

Cypress Hills

Southern Saskatchewan is amazingly flat. But when people get desperate for trees and hills, they can come here to Cypress Hills. No kidding—real hills. They pop up out of the prairies—spring! This is the highest point in Canada between Labrador and the Rocky Mountains.

There are also forests of lodgepole pine here (although to me the pine trees look exactly like telephone poles). Actually, the French voyageurs, who travelled here from eastern Canada about 200 years ago, thought the lodgepole pines looked like the jack pines that grow in eastern Canada. "Cypres" is French for jack pine and "montagnes" is French for mountains. So they named this place "Montagnes de Cypres." Anyway, now the park is named for a jack pine tree that's not even in the park, and it's too late to change it.

Mom says there's a major bird flyway over Saskatchewan. Two million ducks and geese travel between the Arctic and Texas every spring and fall using Saskatchewan's lakes and marshes as stop-over points.

We walked to the top of Bald Butte for a windy view out onto the prairie. "If you'd stood here 20,000 years ago, you would have been surrounded by ice," said Dad. I'm glad we came today, instead.

It turns out that Cypress Hills was one of the only places around that was not totally covered by ice during the last Ice Age, so it has some plants and animals that didn't survive anywhere else.

This afternoon, we looked for leopard frogs in the cattails around the lake. We also saw some pronghorn antelope, which Dad says are the fastest land mammals in North America. They can run up to 100 km (62 miles) an hour. But, hey, never when I'm watching.

After we left Cypress Hills, we drove up to the Great Sand Hills. (No, it just seems that Saskatchewan is all hills!) Rachel and I climbed to the top of the dunes and then leaped down. Fun! That evening, we spent a lot of time trying to get sand out of our hair, our ears, and our noses.

Do you want to pull over and grab a bite to eat in Saskatchewan?

The traffic on this route is awful!

The Great Sand Hills

View from the butte



According to Dad

There aren't a lot of trees in southern Saskatchewan. Dad says British Columbia's high mountains block the wet winds coming from the Pacific. To get up and over the mountains, the winds have to dump their water on the west side. By the time the winds reach the prairies, they are dry as a bone.

Grasses can survive such dry conditions because they have lots of roots below and not much plant above. But trees can't survive very well.



Food I Was Introduced to for My Own Good

People in Saskatchewan come from many different ethnic backgrounds. We couldn't decide whether to try traditional Ukrainian breads like paska or babka, German bratwurst, or Russian, Scandinavian, or French food. I figured I could just eat pasta. It's made from durum wheat and Saskatchewan grows tonnes of it. But Mom said it wasn't very adventurous. In the end, we decided on Saskatoon berries. For hundreds of years, Native people mixed them with dried buffalo meat and melted fat to make a food called pemmican, which would keep a long time. Not us. We gobbled them up in Saskatoon berry pie.

The Great Frog Hunt

Guy's Wildlife List
Pronghorn antelope