

Riverlands Heritage Preservation Region Inc.

1. TOWN OF BLAINE LAKE

Settled in the late 1800s, Blaine Lake flourished with the 1899 arrival of Doukhobor settlers. Today, it remains a vital agricultural hub. Historic highlights include the museum housed in a former train station and the Doukhobor Prayer Home on Main Street, a Municipal Heritage Property. Visitors can also view the Petrofka Flour Mill grinding stone corn and several vibrant murals. This community serves as the gateway to the Riverlands, celebrating a century of rich, diverse pioneer history.

2. PAZERAEVKA

Located near the original village site of Pazeraevka, this area was a significant gathering place for Doukhobor families. Every June 29th, descendants met to celebrate Petrov Day, or Peter's Day. These communal gatherings were central to Doukhobor life, emphasizing their core values of "Toil and Peaceful Life." The events were marked by traditional singing, inspiring speeches, and deep fellowship, reinforcing a cultural heritage that remains a cornerstone of the region's identity and peaceful agricultural roots.

3. BALMORAL CEMETERY

Established at the turn of the century by the Congregational Church of Canada, Balmoral Cemetery is a site of great national significance. It is the final resting place of William Diehl, a scout during the 1885 Northwest Resistance. Diehl was one of the three men to whom Louis Riel surrendered. This peaceful cemetery honors the individuals who shaped the early political and social landscape of Saskatchewan, offering a quiet place to reflect on the region's complex history.

4. AGRICULTURAL ZONE

This fertile region east of Blaine Lake, Marcelin, and Leask features a diverse landscape of black soils and sandy loams. As a premier mixed farming area, it has supported generations of families through the cultivation of cereals, legumes, and oilseeds. The changing colors of the fields throughout the seasons reflect the hard work of local producers. This zone highlights the essential relationship between the land's natural geography and the agricultural industry that sustains the Riverlands community.

5. OSPENIA SCHOOL (NO. 2386)

Formed in 1909, the Ospenia School District served the children of the nearby Doukhobor village. Though the original building was struck by lightning, the community rebuilt the school to continue providing education and a social gathering space. It remained a vital focal point for local families until its eventual closure in 1957. Today, the site stands as a reminder of the dedicated efforts early settlers made to ensure their children received an education in the rural parklands.

7. OSPENIA CEMETERY

This historic cemetery served the residents of Ospenia village, one of twelve original settlements within the Prince Albert land reserve. These reserves were specifically set aside by the government for Doukhobor settlers arriving from Russia. As you pass this site, you are traveling through a landscape once dotted with communal villages. The cemetery remains a silent, sacred link to the families who first broke the land and established their unique communal way of life in Saskatchewan.

8. SLAVANKA CEMETERY

Located on the northeast quarter of 17-44-5 W3, this cemetery serves the Slavanka district. A notable feature is the cemetery house, which displays decorative styles influenced by the Doukhobor settlers who emigrated from southern Russia. Visitors are invited to pay their respects to the pioneers buried here and sign the guest book. The site offers a moment of quiet contemplation regarding the passing of time and the enduring cultural aesthetic of the early Doukhobor immigrants.

9. RIVERLOT FARMS

Unlike the standard square grid system found elsewhere in Saskatchewan, the Riverhill area features unique river lot surveys. Each lot is approximately 1/8 mile wide by 2 miles long, ensuring every farm had essential access to the river. This area also contains the original site of Fort La Montée, a North West Company post that merged with Fort Carlton in 1821. This distinct surveying method highlights the importance of the river for early transportation and survival.

10. RIVERHILL SCHOOL (NO. 2586)

Established in 1910, Riverhill School began its first classes in 1912 with fourteen students. After the original structure was lost to a fire in 1931, the community quickly rebuilt the facility. Beyond its role as a schoolhouse, the building served as a bustling community centre for the Riverhill district. It represents the resilience of rural neighborhoods, where the local school was often the heart of social life, holiday concerts, and various community-led gatherings for many decades.

11. RIVERHILL (SPASOVKA) ARMILLARY

This unique memorial honors the hardy pioneers who developed the Riverhill region. The armillary is a sophisticated sundial based on a Renaissance design, specifically calibrated for the area's latitude of 53° North. Its gnomon points toward the North Star, casting a shadow that indicates real time on the horizon ring. Located within the Riverhill Cemetery, this monument serves as a functional and artistic tribute to the passage of time and the enduring legacy of local settlers.

12. SLOUGH & MARSH LAND

The Riverlands landscape is defined by its aspen-parkland sloughs, which feature wet meadow perimeters and deep open water. These vibrant wetlands provide a crucial habitat for over fifteen species of waterfowl and numerous songbirds. Throughout the year, visitors may observe geese, shorebirds, and various ducks utilizing these natural reservoirs. This site illustrates the ecological diversity of the region, where the intersection of water and land supports a complex and thriving web of native Saskatchewan wildlife.

13. FORT CARLTON - GREEN LAKE TRAIL

Originally an ancestral Indigenous route following the migrations of the bison, the Fort Carlton Trail became a primary overland path for fur traders and explorers. Linking Fort Garry to Fort Edmonton, this "Snake Plain Trail" reached its peak in the mid-1800s. Although its use declined with the arrival of the railway, it remains a vital historic corridor. Today, the trail offers a scenic drive through the parklands, connecting Carlton Crossing to Leask and preserving the path of early prairie travel and Indigenous heritage.

14. CRAIGMORE CHURCH & CEMETERY

Founded in 1904 by Dr. Benjamin Ralph, Craigmore Church is named after a college in Ireland. Dr. Ralph was a distinguished community leader until his death in 1930, and he is buried in the adjacent cemetery. Often described as one of the most peaceful and serene locations in the province, this idyllic country church remains a favorite destination for visitors. Its simple architecture and quiet surroundings embody the spiritual and community spirit of the early homesteading era.

15. CARLTON CROSSING

From this high vantage point overlooking the North Saskatchewan River, you are standing on ground used by prehistoric hunters, fur traders, and homesteaders. In the 1800s, this area was alive with canoe brigades, York boats, and later, steamships. Looking across the river, you can see the site of Fort Carlton, once a vital trade and transportation hub. This crossing represents a major intersection of Indigenous history, the fur trade, and the eventual European settlement.

16. CHELLWOOD SCHOOL (NO. 2480)

Named after a district in southwest England, Chellwood School was established in 1909 following a local community meeting. The school and its accompanying teacherage were built shortly after, opening their doors to twenty local students. For over fifty years, the school served as a centre for learning and community activity until it finally closed in 1961. This site commemorates the early educational history of the region and the teachers who lived and worked in these rural districts.

17. LOCAL FAUNA (ANIMALS & BIRDS)

The Riverlands region is home to a staggering array of wildlife, with over 50 species of mammals and 200 species of birds. Travelers may spot large animals such as moose, elk, bear, and cougar, or smaller residents like lynx, fox, and various squirrels. The diverse habitat of the river valley and parklands provides essential nesting and hunting grounds. This stop highlights the rich biodiversity that has sustained both indigenous peoples and early settlers for centuries.

WINGARD FERRY

Since its establishment in 1895, the Wingard Ferry has provided a vital link across the North Saskatchewan River. Located on the historic route between Duck Lake and the Battlefords, it serves as a modern connection to the region's pioneer past. The ferry remains a unique way to experience the river's natural beauty and scale. As one of the few remaining cable ferries in the province, it continues to offer travelers a peaceful, scenic river crossing.

24. POTHOLE SLOUGH

The aspen parklands are famous for these "potholes"—small marshes and sloughs that serve as vital breeding grounds for waterfowl. This particular marsh extends for kilometers, supporting roughly 200 species of birds throughout the year. Whether they are migrating, wintering, or breeding, birds find essential shelter and food in these wetlands. This stop offers a glimpse into the vast, watery landscape that defines much of the prairie ecosystem and sustains its incredible avian diversity throughout the seasons.

25. ST. JOSEPH HOME CEMETERY

Established in 1944, this cemetery was part of the St. Joseph Home for the aged, run by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross. The facility included a farm to support its residents, and the large, original barn remains visible nearby. Although the Sisters moved their operations to Prince Albert in 1956, the cemetery remains a quiet memorial to the home's residents. It reflects the community's early commitment to providing care and dignity for its elderly citizens.

26. ORIGINAL MARCELIN SITE

Founded by Antoine Marcelin in 1902, this site was the original location of the village that bears his name. However, when the railroad was built half a mile to the west, the entire community decided to move to be closer to the tracks. Today, only the open fields remain at this original location. It serves as a reminder of how the arrival of the railway dictated the survival and placement of almost every town in early Saskatchewan.

27. TOWN OF MARCELIN

Located at the junction of Highway 40 and Grid 783, Marcelin moved to its current site in 1913 to meet the new CN rail line. It is a central business hub for the surrounding area and the Muskogee Lake First Nation. The town features the stunning St. Joseph's Church and a culturally diverse cemetery. This vibrant community continues to honor its French-Canadian roots while serving as a modern service centre for the families of the Riverlands heritage region.

28. ST. JOSEPH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Completed in 1923, St. Joseph's is a Municipal Heritage Property and the largest church in the region. Designed by architect Theodore de Byl, it was constructed using local brick and fieldstone. The church originally served a large French-Canadian congregation and included a convent where nuns taught music and school lessons. Its grand architecture and historic significance make it a landmark of the Riverlands, representing the deep spiritual roots and community pride of the early Marcelin settlers.

CROWN HILL

Visible for miles southwest of Marcelin, Crown Hill is a prominent landmark and a remarkable glacial landform known as a drumlin. The hill's gentle slope serves as a prehistoric compass, indicating the southward direction of the ancient glacier's flow. Please note that Crown Hill is situated on private land and must be viewed from the public roadway. It remains a majestic geological feature, offering passers-by a unique glimpse into the ice-age forces that shaped the Riverlands.

18. ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH (SILVERGROVE)

Built in 1917, St. Paul's served Lutheran settlers in the Silvergrove district near the Wingard Ferry. A Municipal Heritage Site since 1984, the church is noted for its classic prairie architecture and well-served cemetery. While the congregation began moving its regular worship to the nearby town of Leask in the 1960s, the "Old Church" remains a cherished landmark. It continues to host an annual summer service and community picnic every August, keeping the spirit of the original pioneer families alive for modern generations.

19. ASPEN PARKLANDS

This vantage point offers a perfect look at the transition between the aspen-parklands and the southern boreal forest. The unique ecological "edge" creates a habitat exceptionally rich in flora and fauna. With over 230 bird species and a wide variety of trees and shrubs, the area is a haven for nature enthusiasts. The mixture of trembling aspen and coniferous trees provides a diverse canopy that supports a wide range of native Saskatchewan wildlife and plants.

20. LOCAL FLORA (PLANTS)

The light sandy loam soils of this transition zone support a variety of hardy vegetation. Along with the predominant white spruce and trembling aspen, visitors can find numerous berry-producing shrubs. These include saskatoon, chokecherry, and pincherry, alongside red-osier dogwood and wolf willow. These plants provided essential food and medicinal resources for early residents. Today, they continue to define the natural beauty and seasonal colors of the Fort Carlton Trail as it winds through the countryside.

21. FORT CARLTON - GREEN LAKE TRAIL

This specific section of the Carlton Trail was a major northern branch used to haul trade goods to distant outposts. Fort Carlton served as the primary provisioning centre for travelers moving between Manitoba and the northern forests. After the fur trade era, the trail became an essential route for incoming settlers looking to establish farms in the fertile Riverlands. This path is a physical reminder of the transition from a trade-based economy to one centred on permanent settlement.

22. OTTAWA SCHOOL (NO. 2519)

Originally established in 1910, the Ottawa School was rebuilt in 1930 after a devastating fire. For decades, it was the social heart of the district, hosting dances, Christmas concerts, and sports days in addition to daily classes. Although it closed in 1958, the building remains privately owned and has undergone some restoration. The nearby orchard and the school itself stand as monuments to the social and educational life that once thrived in this rural farming community.

23. GREENLEAF HUTTERITE COLONY

The Hutterite people, originating as Anabaptists during the 1500s, moved frequently across Europe to escape persecution before settling in North America. The Greenleaf Colony lives within a structured communal society, where property and labour are shared among all members. Known for their self-sufficiency and modern agricultural practices, the Hutterites maintain a lifestyle focused on faith and hard work. Their presence in the Riverlands adds a unique chapter to the region's diverse history of religious and communal settlement.

29. BLAINE LAKE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CEMETERY

This beautifully maintained cemetery serves the local Ukrainian Catholic community and was originally associated with Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Blaine Lake. While the former church building is now a private residence, the cemetery remains a sacred space containing approximately 80 graves. The site reflects the rich Eastern European heritage that shaped the region. Its traditional markers stand as a tribute to the Ukrainian pioneers who brought their faith and culture to the Riverlands.

30. PETROFKA AREA

Petrofka was a primary settlement for Doukhobor immigrants who arrived in 1899. Early families spent their first winters in dugout homes built directly into the riverbanks. The site was chosen for its proximity to a natural spring and a reliable river crossing. At its peak, the village featured a school, a flour mill on Radouga Creek, and a bustling communal life. Today, the area is a historic landmark commemorating the strength and ingenuity of these early pioneers.

31. PETROFKA CEMETERY

Established in 1899 near the original Petrofka Village, this cemetery contains roughly 100 graves, many of which are unmarked. A defining feature is the stand of tall pines in the centre, planted so the site would be visible from a distance in any weather. Although the village disbanded in 1929, the cemetery still serves the community today. It is a sacred space that preserves the names and stories of the region's first Doukhobor settlers and their families.



RHPRI acknowledges that its tour route is in Treaty 6 Territory, traditional homelands of the Cree, Nakoda, Saulteaux and Metis people. Treaty 6 was signed at Fort Carlton, 1876.

OVERVIEW

This self-guided tour route offers a glimpse into the rich cultural and natural history along the west side of the North Saskatchewan River between Petrofka Bridge and Wingard Ferry in Saskatchewan, Canada.

The river valley is rich in biodiversity. Fauna includes fifty species of mammals, over two hundred species of birds, and many examples of fish, amphibians, reptiles and insects. Plant life includes twenty types of trees and shrubs, countless varieties of flowering plants, grasses, and more primitive species. First inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, the region was settled by Europeans in the late 1800s, including the Doukhobors and other religious and cultural groups. The tour has over two dozen sites, including: old school, church and village sites; many cemeteries, including five Doukhobor sites; several river lookouts; parts of the Carlton Trail; and bird-watching spots.

The starting point of the tour route on the map is the Town of Blaine Lake, at the junction of Highways 12 and 40, but the tour can be started at any point. It is possible to complete the route by car in a day but visitors may wish to take more time to enjoy the scenic and historic area. There are signs along the way to mark the route and explain key points in more depth.

PLEASE NOTE

Some of the roadways may not be accessible in winter or during wet weather. Use caution, watch for other travellers at crossroads, and pay attention to all traffic signs.

Riverlands Heritage Preservation Region
~ Petrofka to Wingard ~
www.riverlandsheritagepreservationregion.ca
riverlandsheritage@gmail.com



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