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Travel Itinerary | TRAILS OF 1885

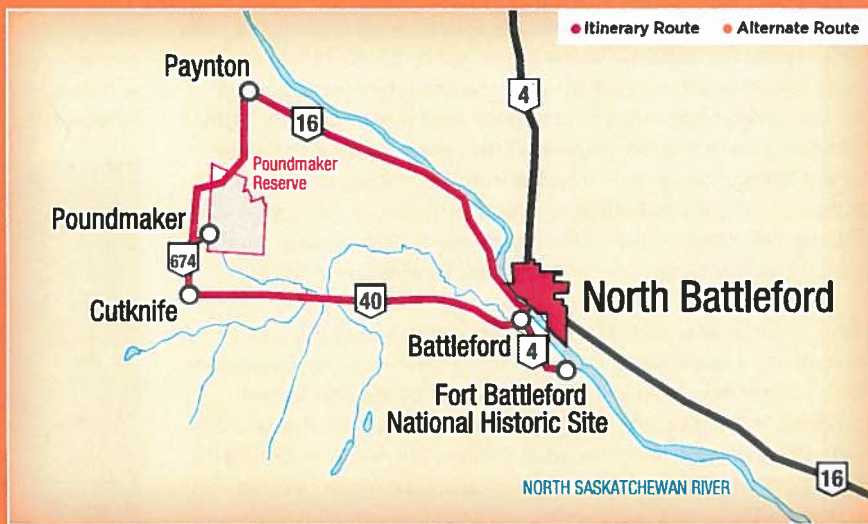
TRAILS OF 1885

A Drive through Battle River Country

TRIP LENGTH

1 day

124 km



Embark on a day trip through the picturesque country around the Battle River, where in 1885, hostilities broke out between the Cree and Canadian government forces. Visit historic sites of the Battlefords, Cut Knife and Poundmaker Cree Nation which preserve and commemorate the stories of those tumultuous days.



Fort Battleford National Historic Site of Canada. Tourism Saskatchewan/Eric Lindberg

The Battlefords

Your starting point is the twin communities of Battleford and North Battleford, beautifully situated near the confluence of the North Saskatchewan and Battle Rivers. History abounds here, from the earliest days of the North-West Territories before Saskatchewan became a province, to the story of prairie settlement told at the Western Development Museum Heritage Farm & Village. Not to be missed is the Allen Sapp Gallery, where evocative paintings by this world-famous artist celebrate the life of the Northern Plains Cree.

For a historic backdrop to the community, drive to the south end of

Battleford on Hwy 4. After crossing the Battle River Bridge, take the first road to the right where historic markers commemorate Telegraph Flat, site of the original community and the founding of the Saskatchewan Herald, the first newspaper in the North-West Territories. Continue west as the road climbs the hill and take the first road to the left to see the remains of Government House. While the tall chimney is all that remains of the original building, a series of panels outline its long history. In 1876, Battleford became the first permanent capital of the North-West Territories and was responsible for about two-thirds of the land mass of Canada. Nearby is the Land Titles Office, dating to 1877, the only original building on Government Ridge still standing.

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Fort Battleford National Historic Site

Follow the signs to Fort Battleford National Historic Site. Established in 1876, the fort was responsible for keeping the peace. See the displays in the visitor centre and the five original buildings that pay tribute to the Mounties' role in the development of the west, and highlight events at the fort during the 1885 conflict. Interpreters in period dress help bring history alive.

The spring of 1885 was a difficult time with tensions coming to a head when local Cree and Assiniboine bands, led by Chief Poundmaker, went to Battleford to negotiate better rations. Many were starving and government promises of assistance were slow in coming. Settlers around Battleford heard the news of the recent battle at Duck Lake where Métis under Louis Riel had defeated a contingent of Mounted Police, while closer to Battleford a farm instructor and a rancher were killed by Assiniboine who were on their way to Poundmaker's camp. Fearing more violence, some 500 settlers took refuge in the fort.

When Poundmaker and his followers arrived at Battleford, the community was deserted. Negotiations to meet with the government Indian Agent failed and some of those with Poundmaker looted buildings in the town. In response, the government sent militia under Colonel Otter to come to the aid of Battleford. The troops arrived on April 24. Then a week later, acting without orders, Otter decided to attack Poundmaker's reserve near Cut Knife Creek, 60 km to the west.

A short video at the fort provides background to the conflict, while maps, interpretive panels, exhibits and programming fill in the details of the story. You can see Chief Poundmaker's ceremonial war club and Winchester rifle, as well as militia and North West Mounted Police (NWMP) uniforms. The Gatling gun is identical to the one used by Otter's troops in the Battle of Poundmaker Hill. A highlight for many visitors is the fort's daily canon firing demonstration, another weapon used by troops at the Battle of Poundmaker Hill.



Fort Battleford National Historic Site of Canada. Tourism Saskatchewan/Eric Lindberg

If time permits after visiting the fort, continue north along Central Avenue to the Fred Light Museum for a comprehensive view of Battleford's history. A number of exhibits relate to 1885 such as the Snider-Enfield rifles issued to the Home Guard, military uniforms, medals awarded to the NWMP and household items used by Battleford residents.

Cut Knife

To follow the next episode in this conflict, travel 50 km west on Hwy 40 to Cut Knife, where some streets are named for personalities from 1885 such as Colonel Otter, General Strange of the Alberta Field Force and Sam Steele of the NWMP. A must stop is the Clayton McLain Memorial Museum at the west end of town, located next to the World's Largest Tomahawk. Spread over 13 buildings, the museum focuses on the diverse cultures around Cut Knife. Museum founder Clayton McLain had a special interest in 1885 events and collected the stories of participants as well as artifacts. Among the many displays are historic photographs and documents, a militia rifle and personal items belonging to Chief Fineday, Poundmaker's war chief during the Battle of Poundmaker Hill.



Poundmaker Hill Battle Re-enactment, Poundmaker Cree Nation. Tourism Saskatchewan/Ian McGilp

Poundmaker Cree Nation

To see the battle site, take Grid 674 for 7 km north to Poundmaker Cree Nation and follow the signs to the Chief Poundmaker Historical Centre and Battle of Poundmaker Hill National Historic Site. Here you'll learn more about Colonel Otter's march from Battleford with 300 troops. Otter attacked Poundmaker's camp on the morning of May 2, but things didn't go as planned. The defenders used the familiar terrain to their advantage, and after about six hours of fighting, they had the troops surrounded. Otter retreated and Poundmaker stopped his men from pursuing the soldiers.

At the Poundmaker Historical Centre, learn details about the battle and conditions which fueled the conflict and delve deeper into the larger story of Chief Poundmaker and the Cree, presented through artifacts, photographs and archival material. Follow the circular path around the hilltop battle site where interpretive panels relate more details about the famous chief and battle events. Poundmaker's gravesite lies within a large tipi-pole marker.

To take an alternate route back to the Battledowns, turn left at the entrance to the historic site and continue down the winding road for about 8 km to Grid 674; turn right and follow the road 14 km across the Battle River to Paynton on Hwy 16. Travel east for 57.5 km on Hwy 16 to North Battleford. To explore the events of 1885 further, head west at Paynton and follow the "North West Frontier" itinerary which explores the events leading up to the final military conflict on Canadian soil, when government forces clashed with followers of Cree Chief Big Bear.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Battlefords:

North West Territorial Days, Aug – www.2sk.ca/10571

Fort Battleford:

Canada Day Celebration, July 1 – www.2sk.ca/10569

Ghost Walks, selected dates – www.2sk.ca/10569

Trails of 1885:

Commemorative events, various locations – www.2sk.ca/22489

TRAILS OF 1885

Trails of 1885 commemorates the significant events of the North West Resistance in 1885 – a turbulent and formative time in Canadian history. For more information on 1885 attractions, special events and self-guided itineraries, visit the Trails of 1885 at www.2sk.ca/22489 or call 1-866-467-2057.

Trails of 1885 Geo Quest

Visit www.trailsof1885geocaching.com to learn more about caches at Trails of 1885 sites. Unscramble clues and search out souvenirs on this high-tech treasure hunt.

River Trails of 1885

Take to the waterways to experience 1885 sites from a different vantage. CanoeSki Discovery Company of Saskatoon offers guided canoe treks to 1885 sites along the South Saskatchewan River. For more information, visit www.2sk.ca/14819 or call 306-653-5693.

History and Heroes with Clearwater Canoeing

Join Clearwater Canoeing on a two-night guided canoe trip on the North Saskatchewan River filled with local folklore and history of the fur trade and North West Resistance. For more information, visit www.2sk.ca/21554 or call 306-895-2001.

CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

Battlefords Tourism & Convention Association

Information on accommodations, attractions, shopping and dining
Suite 502-1101-101 Main St, North Battleford
Open: year-round, Mon – Fri
P: 306-445-2000 **TF:** 1-800-243-0394
W: www.2sk.ca/com/1002271

Battlefords Tourism Visitor Information Centre

Junction of Hwys 16 & 40 E, North Battleford
Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-445-6226

Fort Battleford National Historic Site

4.8 km SE of North Battleford, through Battleford and SE on Central Ave
Open: May – Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-937-2621
W: www.2sk.ca/10569

Western Development Museum Heritage Farm & Village

Junction Hwys 16 & 40, North Battleford
Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-445-8033
W: www.2sk.ca/12489

Allen Sapp Gallery – The Gonor Collection

1 Railway Ave E, North Battleford
Open: year-round, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-445-1760 / 306-445-1762
W: www.2sk.ca/12018

Fred Light Museum

11-20th St E, Battleford
Open: May-Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-937-7111
W: www.2sk.ca/13315

Cut Knife

Information on attractions and services
P: 306-398-2363 / 306-398-2353
W: www.2sk.ca/com/1000207

Clayton McLain Memorial Museum

W side of Cut Knife in Tomahawk Park
Open: late June through August, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-398-2345 / 306-398-2920
W: www.2sk.ca/14404

Poundmaker Historical Centre

Poundmaker Cree Nation, 14 km S of Hwy 16 at Paynton
Open: summer, call ahead for seasonal hours
P: 306-398-2316 / 306-398-1036
W: www.2sk.ca/13070