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# TRAILS OF 1885

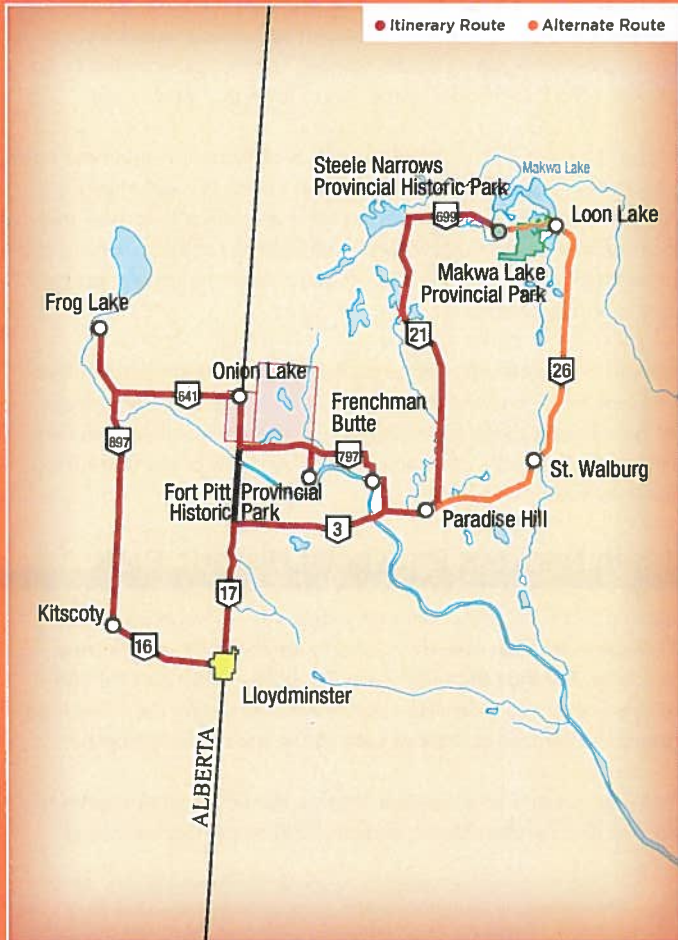
## A Drive through the North West Frontier

**TRIP LENGTH**  
1 day  
Approx 397 km



*Historic sites on this driving itinerary do not have visitor centres, and onsite facilities are primitive. By planning comfort stops along your journey in advance, you will enjoy a more comfortable road trip. Access to restaurants and other services will be limited, so we encourage you to pack a lunch and refreshments to enjoy at one of the onsite picnic areas.*

Explore the tumultuous days of the 1885 North West Resistance on a historic and scenic drive through Saskatchewan's northwest. Follow the stories of Chief Big Bear's Cree who clashed with Canadian government forces, culminating in the last military engagement on Canadian soil.



### Frog Lake National Historic Site of Canada

This day-long tour begins in Lloydminster on the Saskatchewan/ Alberta border. Drive 24 km west on the Yellowhead Hwy 16, then turn north on Hwy 897 near Kitscoty, Alberta and travel nearly 59 km to Frog Lake, Alberta. After you reach the Frog Lake Store, head 3 km east to Frog Lake National Historic Site. The Frog Lake Massacre took place here on April 2, 1885, and it set off a turbulent chain of events that shook the North West.

Plains Cree led by Chief Big Bear were camped near Frog Lake. Times were difficult with widespread starvation and little government aid. The Cree approached Indian Agent Thomas Quinn for extra rations, but were repeatedly refused. Violence erupted when more militant Cree, led by Big Bear's war chief Wandering Spirit, confronted Quinn. Wandering Spirit shot Quinn in the head and his followers turned their guns on other residents. Big Bear tried unsuccessfully to stop the killings, and in the end, nine men lay dead: Quinn, a carpenter, farming instructor, grain mill owner, clerk, trader, mechanic and two priests. Another trader and the wives of two slain men were taken prisoner.

A cairn commemorates the Frog Lake Massacre. There are also eight grave markers: seven for those killed here (the two priests were buried elsewhere) and a larger headstone for North West Mounted Police (NWMP) Constable Cowan, killed during a skirmish at Fort Pitt, the next stop on your tour.

## Fort Pitt Provincial Historic Park

Travel south on Hwy 897 for 14 km, then head 24 km east on Hwy 641 back into Saskatchewan to Onion Lake. Drive south on Hwy 17 then east on Grid 797 for about 15 km where a sign directs you south to Fort Pitt Provincial Historic Park. Several interpretive panels throughout the site provide insight into the fort's history, the fur trade, Treaty 6 and the events of 1885.

Established in 1829 by the Hudson's Bay Company, Fort Pitt became the most important post between Fort Carlton and Fort Edmonton. In 1885 it was home to a small NWMP detachment commanded by Inspector Francis Dickens, son of novelist Charles Dickens. When word of Frog Lake reached Fort Pitt, Dickens sent three scouts to look for the Cree. While the scouts were gone, the Cree arrived at Fort Pitt, set up camp and asked for a meeting. When the returning scouts inadvertently rode into their camp, the Cree opened fire thinking this was an attack from the fort. One scout, Constable Cowan, was killed. Another was wounded but made it back to the fort under covering fire, while the third was captured. After negotiations, the outnumbered Mounties left the fort and the civilians surrendered. Dickens and his men made a difficult week-long journey in a badly leaking scow downstream to Battleford. The Cree took provisions from the fort and burned it to the ground.



Fort Pitt Provincial Park. Robin Karpan Photo

## Frenchman Butte

Return to Grid 797 and continue 22 km east to the hamlet of Frenchman Butte, beautifully situated on the bank of the North Saskatchewan River. Be sure to visit the impressive Frenchman Butte Museum, a complex of nine buildings plus a teahouse and RV park. A few 1885 artifacts include firearms used by the militia and Steele's scouts, an original Hudson's Bay Company trade musket, photographs of Fort Pitt from 1884, a buckskin jacket worn by Métis leader Louis Riel and a diary of the events written by the Indian Agent in nearby Onion Lake. With advance notice, the museum can also arrange for guided tours of area historic sites.



Cree rifle pits, Frenchman Butte National Historic Site. Robin Karpan Photo

Travel east of the village along Grid 797 for just over 2 km to the curve in the road, then head north 4 km and east 1 km to Frenchman Butte National Historic Site. Canadian authorities responded to the Frog Lake killings by dispatching General Strange and the Alberta Field Force who marched from Calgary to Fort Edmonton, then boated down the North Saskatchewan River to Fort Pitt. Pursued by the militia, the Cree took cover here on a ridge above a coulee and dug rifle pits among the thick trees. Strange's troops attacked from the south on May 28; however, they soon discovered that getting across the marshy bottom and up the bare slope would be suicidal. The troops retreated to Fort Pitt, while the Cree moved farther north towards Makwa Lake.

Visiting the site today, it's easy to see how difficult it would have been to successfully attack this strategic spot. Follow the well-marked walking trails to the numerous rifle pits, most with a clear view over the open slope and valley below. While the fighters took positions in pits on the ridge, other pits on lower ground behind the ridge protected civilians and prisoners.

Retrace your route 1 km west and travel south to the first road, then head east for 1 km to the 1885 Artillery Site where General Strange had his camp. Looking north across the valley, you will see the cairn marking the Cree rifle pits - an excellent overview of the battle site from the militia's viewpoint.

## Steele Narrows Provincial Historic Park

Return to Grid 797 and continue south to Hwy 3. Head 9 km east to Paradise Hill, then take Hwy 21 north for about 57 km, entering the scenic lakelands of the Bronson Forest. Turn east on Grid 699 and travel 16 km to Steele Narrows Provincial Historic Park. The road crosses the narrows on Makwa Lake at the site of the last battle.

After Frenchman Butte, General Strange waited for reinforcements and sent Colonel Sam Steele of the NWMP to stay on the trail of

the Cree. It was here on June 3 that Steele's scouts surprised a Cree camp. After three hours of fighting at least four Cree lay dead, while Steele withdrew to wait for reinforcements. The troops continued their pursuit in following days, but there was to be no more fighting. The Cree split into two groups and released their prisoners. Chief Big Bear and Wandering Spirit successfully evaded their pursuers, but eventually surrendered.

Interpretive panels tell the story of the narrows named for Sam Steele. A cross near the road is a grave marker for the Cree killed during the skirmish. For the best view of the site, take the stairs to the top of the hill. It's the perfect place to reflect on this difficult period in our history,

and how such a tranquil setting in these scenic lakelands became the site of the last military battle in Canada.

To take an alternate route back, continue east on Grid 699 through Makwa Lake Provincial Park to Loon Lake, then head southwest on Hwys 26, 3 and 17 to return to Lloydminster via St. Walburg and Paradise Hill for a total of 148 km.

## CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

### Lloydminster Tourism

Information on accommodations, attractions, shopping and dining  
5420-50 Ave, Lloydminster  
**P:** 780-871-8333 **TF:** 1-800-825-6180  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/com/1000521](http://www.2sk.ca/com/1000521)

### Tourism Saskatchewan Visitor Reception Centre

Hwy 16 near Alberta border, Lloydminster  
**Open:** May-Sep, call ahead for seasonal hours  
**P:** 306-825-8690  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca](http://www.2sk.ca)

### Frog Lake National Historic Site of Canada

Approximately 90 km N of Lloydminster  
**Open:** year-round  
**Services:** No visitor facilities  
**P:** 306-937-2621 / 780-943-3737  
**W:** [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/froglake/index.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/froglake/index.aspx)

### Fort Pitt Provincial Historic Site

22 km W and S of Frenchman Butte, off Grid 797  
**Open:** mid-May through Sep  
**Services:** picnic area, outhouse  
**P:** 306-837-2410 / 1-800-205-7070  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/15343](http://www.2sk.ca/15343)

### Frenchman Butte

Information on attractions and services  
Information at Valley View Inn, 10am-12:30pm  
**P:** 306-344-2034  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/com/1000312](http://www.2sk.ca/com/1000312)

### Frenchman Butte Museum Society

Hamlet of Frenchman Butte  
**Open:** seasonally and by appointment, call ahead for hours  
**P:** 306-344-4478  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/11207](http://www.2sk.ca/11207)

### Frenchman Butte National Historic Site

5 km NE of Frenchman Butte  
**Open:** year-round  
**Services:** picnic area, outhouse  
**P:** 306-344-4478  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/11207](http://www.2sk.ca/11207)

### Steele Narrows Provincial Historic Park

15km W of Loon Lake on Grid 699  
**Open:** mid-May through Sep  
**Services:** picnic area, outhouse  
**P:** 306-837-2410 / 1-800-205-7070  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/15343](http://www.2sk.ca/15343)

### Makwa Lake Provincial Park

W of Loon Lake  
**Open:** May-Sep, call ahead for seasonal dates  
**P:** 306-837-2410 **TF:** 1-800-205-7070  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/15343](http://www.2sk.ca/15343)

### Loon Lake

Information on attractions and services  
**P:** 306-837-2090  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/com/1000527](http://www.2sk.ca/com/1000527)

### St. Walburg

Information on attractions and services  
**P:** 306-248-3232  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/com/1000856](http://www.2sk.ca/com/1000856)

### Paradise Hill

Information on attractions and services  
**P:** 306-344-2206  
**W:** [www.2sk.ca/com/1000681](http://www.2sk.ca/com/1000681)

## 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](http://www.2sk.ca/22489) or call 1-866-467-2057.

### Trails of 1885 Geo Quest

Visit [www.trailsof1885geocaching.com](http://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](http://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](http://www.2sk.ca/21554) or call 306-895-2001.