

Preface

We are truly indebted to the local pioneers who took the time to share with us their experiences and their knowledge of people and places along the South Saskatchewan River. Without their co-operation much of this history would have been lost. So sit back and relax as we take you down thirty-two miles of river and back more than 9000 years in time. Our departure point is from Batoche National Historic Site and our destination is Sugar Island, six miles downstream of St. Louis. There are thirty-four points of interest along the river with a numbered sign at each one that is cross-referenced to this map.

1. THE CARLTON TRAIL and BATOCHÉ CROSSING.

The Carlton Trail

As early as 1825 this 900-mile overland route was used connecting Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and Fort Edmonton. Explorers, fur traders, freighters, hunters and pioneers used this vital trail throughout the development of the Northwest and more specifically during the settling of the Saskatchewan Valley. In one year during the 1870s, 1,871 Red River carts, 227 wagons and 35 buckboards appeared in long caravans bringing travelers to our area. Six Metis families who came to Batoche in 1882 from the Red River district indicate the trip lasted 52 days. Several sets of cart and wagon ruts are clearly visible, on both sides of the river, to this day. The Carlton Trail passes through the East Village, the original site of the village of Batoche, and continues to the river at Batoche Crossing.

Batoche Crossing.

The Hudson's Bay Company left a scow or barge here for public use in about 1840. Buffalo hunters also used "bullboats", which were elk or buffalo hides on a willow framework, to cross the South Saskatchewan River. The first formal cable ferry service in the Northwest Territories was started in 1873 by Xavier Letendre dit "Batoche". The ferry was relocated downstream in 1921. In 1885, during the "Battle of Batoche", Metis rebels under the direction of military commander Gabriel Dumont lowered the ferry cable, which spanned the river, in an attempt to corral or capsize the steamer "Northcote". The cable damaged the smokestacks and pilothouse of the Northcote rendering her ineffective for the remainder of the battle.

2. BATOCHÉ FERRY CROSSING #2.

The Provincial Government established this ferry crossing in 1921. The importance of ferries increased as yet another wave of settlers came to the Saskatchewan Valley. Ferry traffic now became buggies and wagons, tractors and ploughs, steam engines and threshing machines as farmers cleared the land, seeded and harvested their crops. This ferry was closed in 1968 with the opening of "Gabriel Bridge" on Highway #312.

3. LIME PITS and RIFLE PITS.

Lime Pits

Large flat white rocks can still be seen strewn around the perimeter of the lime pits on top of the riverbank. Metis people dug out the lime rocks and crushed them. This lime powder was then mixed with water and used to whitewash their log houses. When “La Petite Ville” was moved to St. Laurent Mission, Father Andre’s new log buildings were plastered with clay and white washed.

Rifle Pits

This area also contains the northern edge of the rifle pits that were dug prior to the “Battle of Batoche”. A typical rifle pit was about five feet long, two and one half feet wide and three to four feet deep. Food, water, blankets and warm clothing were stored within the pits.

4. THE NORTHCOTE.

After having lost smokestacks, spars, masts and whistle the 150-foot long sternwheeler “Northcote” careened downstream out of control until her anchor caught at the mouth of the rapids. Another paddlewheeler, the “Marquis”, was ordered to bring repairs for the crippled gunboat. The two steamboats arrived back at Batoche in time to hear the last shots of the battle being fired. The “Northcote” was used several days later to transport wounded soldiers and the illustrious prisoner, Louis Riel, to Clarke’s Crossing.

5. FAYANT FLATS.

During the early 1870s, buffalo hunting was the primary occupation of the Metis people. Gabriel Dumont, who led these hunting expeditions, claimed the last good hunt was in 1877. The Hudson Bay Company still purchased pemmican for its voyageurs as late as 1880 for 25 cents/lb but the demand could not be met. New occupations had to be chosen! This prime river flat was farmed by some of the first Metis settlers during the 1870s. Farming was exhausting work when done by hand or with oxen in those early days. Mother Nature rewarded their toil with morning dew from the river, which kept adequate moisture on the crops even during drought conditions. “Crop failure” was unheard of on Fayant Flats!

6. ORIGINAL ST. LAURENT FERRY CROSSING and FUR TRADING POSTS.

Original St. Laurent Ferry Crossing

This ferry crossing was used prior to 1905. In early years passengers would pull themselves across the river by hand using ropes but later on the ferry was pulled back and forth by men on horseback. This crossing was used heavily during the winter months as well. Area farmers hauled grain to the town of Duck Lake, which is located five miles directly west of here.

Fur Trading Posts---approximate location.

In about 1804 the North West Company (French) and the Hudson Bay Company (English) once again set up rival fur trading posts on the South Saskatchewan River. The NWC post was called the South Branch House while the HBC post was called Carlton House. Notes from a ledger indicate that in 1806 the HBC traders left for York Factory (the main supply depot for inland HBC posts, situated at the mouth of the Hayes River on Hudson Bay) with their fur brigade on May 7 and returned Aug. 28. Both these companies moved their posts to the present site of Fort Carlton on the North Saskatchewan River in 1810.

7. PRESENT ST. LAURENT FERRY CROSSING.

The Provincial Government built a wooden ferry here in 1905. A Frenchman came up with the original idea of using the current to push the ferry across the river as opposed to pulling it with horses. A steel ferry was constructed in 1970. The St. Laurent Ferry is still active and used heavily during the summer to bring Pilgrims to the Shrine. A record was set in 1985 when 1500 vehicles were ferried across the river in one day on their way to or from the centennial celebrations at "Back to Batoche" and at the Batoche National Historic Site. Also of interest has been the discovery, over the years, of many hand-made clay bricks along the east bank. Little is known who made these bricks or for what they would have been used.

8. THE SHRINE and ST. LAURENT MISSION.

The Shrine

The Shrine has been the scene of religious activity and prayer since 1879. The first interparochial pilgrimage was organized in 1905 and has become a summer tradition for thousands of people ever since. Every July 15 and Aug. 15 pilgrims arrive in all kinds of vehicles while others come on foot fulfilling vows or doing penance. In 1922 a multitude of 8000 assembled here in the presence of the new Bishop of Prince Albert.

St. Laurent Mission

St. Laurent Mission grew by about 300 people in 1873 when "La Petite Ville" was transported to the mission site on the west side of the river. In 1877, Metis that were opposed to Father Andre's direct influence demolished the unfinished school building and rebuilt it on the opposite shore of the river. For some years the Mission prospered and had as many as fifty students but in 1894 the site for St. Michael's School was established at Duck Lake. This seemed to be the final blow for St. Laurent Mission.

9. THE BUFFALO PIT

Long before the introduction of horses "Buffalo Pits" were an effective method of killing these powerful animals on foot. Indian inhabitants would stampede the herd over this extremely deep and steep ravine on the west side of the river and then butcher the remains at the bottom. With the arrival of horses and guns in about 1735, "Buffalo Pits" were used less frequently.

10. MAURICE HOLLIGIER WINTER CROSSING.

Maurice came to this area from France in the 1920s. He worked as a deck hand on a French Boat until reaching Halifax where he abandoned ship. He made his living out West doing odd jobs, working for local farmers and just living off the land. His ability to “sing like a bird” may not have been only by chance for Maurice and his mother had entertained together on stage back in Paris. Maurice could also make wine and beer, all kinds and lots of it. He lived on the edge as the bullet holes in the door of his log shack can verify. He remained on his riverlot until his untimely death in March of 1962. Maurice is buried in the South Hill Cemetery in Prince Albert

11. THE TREE NURSERY.

Valves and aluminum pipes can still be seen up from the river’s edge. This equipment was used by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food to irrigate acres of small trees during the 1970s and 80s. Also further up the path, gates, fences and concrete foundations are still visible. This area has become very popular in recent years for campers and recreation vehicles.

12. SOUTH BRANCH HOUSE---HUDSON BAY COMPANY.

This site was the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company’s fur trading operations on the South Saskatchewan River from 1786 to 1794. In June of 1794, a war party of at least 100 Gros Ventre Indians attacked and savagely massacred all but one of the occupants. The Gros Ventre then removed 60 to 70 bales of fur before setting fires and demolishing the remainder of the post. A Provincial monument has been placed where the South Branch House once stood.

13. GARIEPY’S FERRY CROSSING.

Long before explorers came to this area, a well-used Indian trail forded the river here. In 1773 Mathew Cocking and his Cree companions built canoes on the riverbank near here. By 1876 a raft with oars was located here on “Lepine Flat” and operated by James Short. At the time of the Northwest Resistance in 1885 a ferry was operating. Pierre and Philippe Gariepy owned the land in the immediate area. The Northcote and the Marquis transported Middleton’s troops from Batoche to the west bank of Gariepy’s crossing and from there the soldiers marched to Prince Albert. After the “Battle of Batoche” Louis Riel went into hiding in the woods around Gariepy’s ferry. On the east side of the river at a short distance from here the Metis leader met with two of Middleton’s scouts and gave himself up. As late as the 1940s local farmers used this trail for winter travel to haul wood to “The Flat”. The crossing was then referred to as “Gemess” or the “Old Ferry” crossing.

14. SOUTH BRANCH HOUSE---NORTHWEST COMPANY.

The North West Company had built a fur trading post here in 1786 to be in direct competition with the Hudson Bay Company across the river. Fur trading was a lucrative business as Natives brought in pelts from the beaver, otter, muskrat, marten, bear, fox, lynx, fisher, mink, wolf and buffalo. These pelts were taken by canoe down the South Saskatchewan River, into Lake Winnipeg and then to the home base of Grand Portage on Lake Superior. After the Gros Ventre Indians had burned the HBC fort, they forded the river and attacked the Nor'Westers. The battle raged on until the Gros Ventre war Chief, L'Homme de Callumet took a musket ball in the chest that stretched him lifeless on the ground. The NWC had won the battle but they no longer felt safe. They loaded trading goods, supplies and equipment into their canoes and left for the La Corne region.

15. BUCKET STOP WINTER CROSSING.

Settlers on "The Flat" used this winter crossing when they needed to catch the bus on old #11 highway between Prince Albert and Saskatoon. The distance from the river to the highway was less than a mile. Passengers would flag down the bus in the morning, travel to P.A. for the day and return that evening. To ensure the bus driver did miss the drop off point, an old pail had been hung on a tree at the correct approach along the highway. It came to be known as "the bucket stop".

16. SNOWMOBILE SHACK.

This house was moved from Prince Albert in 1998 by a snowmobile club called the "South Saskatchewan River Riders". The warm-up shack is still used by snowmobile enthusiasts from St. Louis and surrounding districts several times each winter. This point is located 10 miles by river from St. Louis. Stop in and make yourself comfortable.

17. LIME PITS.

High up on the north bank you will find a deep scorched hole where lime rocks were burned during the 1930s. The Seeley Brothers and surrounding neighbors dug these rocks out of crevasses or pits along the riverbank. The finished lime product was used for holding chimney stones together as well as a primitive type of cement used in building foundations. The lime pits are situated on the old Game Preserve or what is now called the Nisbet Forest.

18. THE THIRD MERIDIAN.

The third meridian is one of the main control lines used for land surveys in this province. This true north line is established at the Canada-United States border and runs to Saskatchewan's northern boundary. The first meridian is just west of Winnipeg, the second meridian is near Yorkton, the third meridian is approximately the center of the Saskatchewan, and the fourth meridian is the Alberta-Sask. border. From these lines surveys were made creating a land system of sections, townships and ranges. (In our area also riverlots-10 chains wide or 660 feet). Most of the survey was completed between 1880 and 1910.

19. SEELEY BROTHERS WINTER CROSSING.

Ernest and Zimri Seeley came to the Saskatchewan Valley from the United States in the early 1920s. They survived the first winter living in a cave they had dug in the side of the riverbank. They upgraded to a log shack shortly thereafter and life got easier. Branded by some as “men on the run” the Seeley Brothers made an honest living raising cattle and horses. In later years they were thought to have 100 head of cattle and at least 50 head of horses all running free range. Ernest died in Aug. of 1946 at the age of 59 while Zimri passed away in May of 1951. The Seeley Brothers are both buried in the South Hill Cemetery in Prince Albert.

20. PROPOSED DAM SITE.

In 1970 drilling rigs rolled in and began boring test holes for a proposed hydro dam. These test holes went down over 500 feet in an attempt to find a suitable working base. The high riverbanks and surrounding hills were ideal to accommodate such a project. The top of the dam would have been at least one mile across, backing water up past Gabriel Bridge and flooding “the flat” to a depth of 80 feet. A tragic accident took a young man’s life when blasting caps ignited pre-maturely while he was attempting to dynamite some rocks. The hydro project was moved downstream in the early 80s to Nipawin so both branches of the Saskatchewan River could be utilized.

21. SEQUIN CREEK.

Mr. Sequin was known to have worked at a sawmill north of MacDowall during the 1930s while Mrs. Sequin taught music to local residents at her home located on the edge of this small creek. Their two daughters were musically inclined as well and played numerous musical instruments. Mrs. Sequin home-schooled her children, put on concerts at Lecoq and Donnybrook schools and made most of the costumes herself. She also worked as a mid-wife helping to deliver several babies in the area.

New discovery! About 250 yards downstream of Sequin Creek on the same side of the river there appears to be a huge white rock high up on the bank. It is actually the wall of a pit built with layers of smaller rocks. No other information is known at this time.

22. BRANGER WINTER CROSSING.

Local pioneers used this winter crossing to haul birch out of the island, cut ice on the river and to travel six miles north to the Fraser farm to buy wool. Mr. and Mrs. Fraser were from Scotland and during the late 1930s they raised many sheep. They sheared the sheep, spun the wool and both being experienced knitters could make you a pair of socks or mitts while you waited. When snow got too deep, area residents on the north side of the river would cross to the south shore and travel to St. Louis, as the south road was higher and better for travel. This is the present site of River Ridge Berry Farm.

23. LA ROCHE A BOUGON.

Antoine Richard and his family were the first owners of this riverlot. Apparently Antoine didn't always talk clearly and often mumbled his words. The nickname "Bougon" was born and the giant rock in the river became known as "La Roche a Bougon". Old timers recall stopping along the river road to check rising and falling water levels as they gauged them by the height on Bougon's rock. The Richards must have built very close to the river for during the rebellion, from their log house on the riverbank, they watched the steamboats carrying police and soldiers going to Batoche. This boulder is also known to some area residents as "Paul Bunyan's Rock". Local legend suggests that Paul, while standing on the south bank wielding a giant slingshot, propelled this gigantic granite marble into the river. The slingshot no longer exists but the legend lives on.

24. OLD ST. LOUIS.

Riverlot 15 is the upstream edge of original St. Louis as No. 14 School was built here in 1886 and continued to operate until 1950. A Sectional Map of Prince Albert South dated 1897 shows the settlement of St. Louis existing in this area at that time. The next three river lots downstream from here housed Saint Louis de Langevin's earliest convent, church, rectory, cemetery and post office. "South Saskatchewan Riverboat Tours" operate from this location.

25. FORT DES ISLES.

These were the first two fur trading posts established on the South Saskatchewan River about 70 miles upstream from The Forks. In 1785 the North West Company built a fort here and a Detroit operation called Gregory and McLeod in competition followed suit. These posts operated for only one year, then were abandoned and rebuilt nine miles further upstream in 1786 to compete with the Hudson Bay Company at South Branch House.

Note: some history books indicate the "Fort des Isles" site was three miles upstream from Fenton Ferry. This location is approximate as no remains exist.

26. BOUCHER COLONY.

Jean-Baptiste Boucher and his family arrived, at their homestead on Riverlot 12, by cart and oxen from the Red River District in 1882. He became involved in the writings of petitions requesting the government do land surveys and also took an active part in the Riel Rebellion. From July until November of 1884 Louis Riel and his family stayed with Charles Nolin at the Boucher Colony. From this home base, Riel along with Gabriel Dumont and other executive committee members addressed gatherings at Lindsay School near Red Deer Hill, Halcro Settlement and Prince Albert. After the resistance of 1885 Jean-Baptiste returned to his farm and to avoid capture and prosecution dug himself a hole on the top of the riverbank where he had a good view of his house to the south and of the river to the north. He later escaped to the United States but returned when he was granted amnesty in May of 1886. A Metis flag, paying tribute to Jean-Baptiste and his family, flies above his hideout that can be seen to this day. Louise Boucher Tournier now owns this land.

27. BARGE CROSSING.

In the early 1880s the brave pioneers of old St. Louis (Boucher Colony) would cross the river on a little barge or skiff and travel 15 miles to their nearest church at the Mission in St. Laurent. These open rafts were made from several squared tree trunks lashed together and moved forward by means of ropes or could be pulled back and forth with horses. Oxen and horses were not transported on these barges; therefore they were forced to swim the river on their own. This barge operated until about 1886 at which time a ferry service at McKenzie's Crossing was established.

28. ST. LOUIS FERRY CROSSING.

This ferry service was established in 1899 and would continue until 1928 at which time the traffic wings were put on the Railroad Bridge. The ferry was used heavily especially during special events in St. Louis such as the July rodeos of 1919-1921. Cars and buggies would be backed up for a mile on either side of the river waiting to cross. Anyone crossing between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. would be charged 25 cents/vehicle and 15 cents/person. On a busy day in July of 1927, 670 passengers were ferried across the river. Due to local population increases and developments in Northern Saskatchewan it was becoming apparent that another method of crossing the river had to be implemented.

29. ST. LOUIS, MCKAY CREEK and MCKENZIE'S CROSSING.

St. Louis

Present day St. Louis was established in 1914 with the completion of the Railroad Bridge. The train came in 1916 and the hamlet began to prosper. The traffic wings were added to the bridge in 1928 and in 1959 St. Louis became incorporated as a village by the Province of Saskatchewan. Like many small towns in rural Saskatchewan, St. Louis at times has struggled, but has survived and continues to be a very strong and active community. Stop in soon to view the life-sized replica of an Antiquus Bison, as it would have appeared 9000 years ago and also to enjoy some St. Louis hospitality. Access to the river is available adjacent to the Bison.

McKay Creek

This tributary brook joins the South Saskatchewan River at present day St. Louis. Information taken from the journals of Henry Youle Hind in 1858, whose mandate from the Canadian Government was to determine the suitability of the West for farming, explains how his party accompanied by several Cree guides followed the upstream course of McKay Creek. They followed this creek to a landmark, known to many early explorers as "Lumpy Hill of the Woods" or the Minichinas Hills, that has an altitude more than 300 feet higher than the surrounding land. These hills were later used by Minitinas Ski Resort and are now the site used by Mission Hill Productions.

McKenzie's Crossing

The village of St. Louis is located on the land once owned by Captain Norman McKenzie who arrived in 1886 from Scotland. He constructed the first ferry and put it into operation in 1887 at a site near the present bridge. In 1897 the Prince Albert Police used this crossing when they traveled to the Minichinas Hills in their attempt to capture Almightyvoice and his companions. This site is also close to the intersection of two important early trails. One came from Fort a la Corne and ran to Batoche and the Elbow. The other trail left the main Carlton Trail near Humboldt and ran north to Prince Albert. The ferry service operated here until 1898 and then was moved one mile upstream.

30. ST. LOUIS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE.

In 2002 a significant archaeological discovery was made at the future location of the new St. Louis Bridge. While conducting a heritage impact assessment for the Department of Highways, Senior Archaeologist Butch Amundson and his excavators, uncovered some rare findings. Skulls from extinct species of bison, also remains of wolves, coyotes, bears and other various animals were discovered in the oxygen-deprived soil or silt along the river terrace. Other artifacts recovered include campfire stones, scraping tools, stone knives, spear points and engraving tools indicating this site had been used by generations of Indigenous people as a bison butchery site. In all over 4000 artifacts were collected and radiocarbon-testing reports indicate some are more than 9000 years old.

31. GALLOWAY CROSSING.

Anyone passing here in the 1920s would have seen how innovative the early pioneers could be. The Galloways had devised a system to collect water from the continuously flowing springs out of the riverbank. A series of six open wooden troughs, each about sixteen feet long and two feet square joined together by an overflow pipe, had been built at different elevations along the road coming down to the river. Several V shaped gutters made of rough lumber were then driven into the springs bringing water down to the top trough. Although simple in theory the system worked well enough to water Galloway's flock of approximately 5000 sheep. By 1937 it was time to modernize so the 4000 to 5000 gallon tankhouse was built and still stands today. The 120-foot vertical distance up to the tankhouse from the river was overcome by using a two-inch metal pipeline and a Beatty piston pump driven with a 1530 International tractor. During these same years the river played another important role. When the water froze smooth enough the river served as a winter highway to Saskatoon. Live sheep and bags of wool were transported to sell in Saskatoon using a 1927 Reo truck. The Galloways also own land on the north side of the river and for several years fed cattle on the "low flat". At other locations further west cattle were fed silage and loose hay. Two horse teams were used in the daily crossing of the ice. To pull heavy loads four horse teams were used to climb the long river hill. In earlier years, the cattle were trailed home across the ice in late winter. However, with the development of the Outlook dam, the changing river levels made the ice unsafe for crossing. To date five generations have witnessed the different methods of crossing the river, which have included walking, swimming, on horseback, by boat and by Caterpillar tractor.

32. GALLOWAY CREEK.

As more farmers settled in this area and new land was cleared, water erosion along the creek became a serious problem. Entire summer fallow fields were being washed into the creek. By the late 1940s, the Galloway Creek Watershed Program was implemented encouraging farmers to seed grass on side hills and in the creek bottoms. During the 1950s a near tragedy occurred where the creek crosses #25 highway. Fred Rogoza, a worker with the Department of Highways, was attempting to remove some debris from the upstream end of the culvert so the highway would not flood when he suddenly slipped and fell into the water. Fred was immediately sucked into the whirlpool but seconds later shot out the opposite end of the culvert unharmed with his shovel still in hand. Any canoers or hikers passing near the mouth of this creek may wish to stop and do some exploring as many interesting fossils and bones have been found here in recent years.

33. SINCLAIR WINTER CROSSING.

Farmers on the east side of the river used this crossing during the 1930s to haul grain to Gerrond Siding. On a trial basis boxcars were spotted there along the railroad tracks to be filled with grain. Although it was shorter to haul to Gerrond Siding than to St. Louis the danger of going down the steep east bank with a sleigh load of grain pulled by horses was extreme. Chains (roughlocks) were wrapped around the back sleigh runners on the way down the bank to provide a brake for the horses. After several years, the practice of filling boxcars by hand at Gerrond Siding was abandoned but this crossing continued to be used by local residents and travelers as a short cut to Prince Albert as late as the 1950s.

34. SUGAR ISLAND.

It is believed this island received its name from the Indians who came here to make sugar by tapping the stands of maple and birch trees. This island which covers an area of 1062 acres was part of the Chacastapasin Indian Reserve and for decades was a haven for white tail deer and other wildlife. In 1947 a woodcutter spent an unscheduled night on the island. The river had gone out but the ice jammed downstream causing the island to flood. To avoid drowning he climbed a tree and spent the night there. Over the years thousands of loads of logs have been hauled out of the island to be used for firewood or lumber. Many barns and houses that still stand today were built from trees harvested on Sugar Island. By the early 1960s, after numerous attempts by several different contractors, Sugar Island or the Big Island as it is also called, was converted to farmland. Hunting practices and habits of the white tail deer would be forever changed.