

La Vérendrye Trail

Manitoba

Back in the mid-1700s, European fur traders had conquered the granite and forest wilderness north of Lake Superior and south of Hudson Bay, but other frontiers of what would be Canada remained unclaimed. Lured by tales of a western sea leading to the Pacific Ocean, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de La Vérendrye, assembled three sons and a nephew and began searching for that sea. Paddling the Winnipeg River, his sons reached Lake Winnipeg in 1733. Today, adventurers travelling this wild area will still find the rugged terrain that enthralled early explorers, territory now packed with wildlife sanctuaries, living history, and dozens of fine hiking trails.

Although there are plenty of B&B's and resorts along the way, don't forget to pack the camping gear, too. You'll be taking Highways 15, 44, 307 and 11 from Winnipeg to Shield Country, then follow Highways 12 and 4 to Lake Winnipeg, and Highway 59 back to Winnipeg. It can be a five-day drive, but makes an easy-going full week of sun-drenched discovery.

Prairie and Pines

Little more than an hour out of Winnipeg, fertile prairie gives way to the Whiteshell Provincial Park's Precambrian Shield forests, glacier-scoured granite, and clear, swift rivers. Just inside the park, watch wildlife at the Alfred Hole Goose Sanctuary (named after a local mink rancher who won a crock of whiskey by wagering he could keep four abandoned goslings alive), then stop at the tiny log Whiteshell Trappers Museum to discover fur-trapping history.

At West Hawk Lake, punched deep into the granite by a meteor one hundred million years ago, campers can tent or, for a little luxury, check into a log-cabin resort near Falcon Lake townsite. Either way, impudent pine grosbeaks and Canada jays will supervise your breakfast.

Allow lots of time to explore Whiteshell, named for the megis, a white shell sacred to the Anishinabe people. The Whiteshell Natural History Museum at Nutimik Lake offers tours of nearby Bannock Point's sacred petroforms, stones arranged on bedrock in mystical shapes by First Nations people centuries ago. West Hawk Museum documents the park's unique geology, and the Whiteshell Fish Hatchery and Visitor Centre offers fish-flavoured tours and exhibits. Tee off at Falcon Lake Golf Course, among Canada's top 30, cycle or hike parts of the TransCanada Trail or Mantario (Western Canada's longest Shield trail). Paddle unique spots like the Caddy Lake Tunnels, blasted through bedrock in 1877 by CP Rail.

Pinawa's Powerful Past

Just outside Whiteshell, via Provincial Road 307, the Seven Sisters Falls power dam offers views of the river and a couple of local, much-loved lunch spots. Further on, in Pinawa (Calm Waters in Cree), the Heritage Channel Walk and Ironwood Trail, 50-metre Pinawa Heritage Suspension Bridge, and local TransCanada Trail section offer woosy ways to work off lunch. Outside Pinawa, the ruined Pinawa



Camping and kayaking on Manitoba's lakes and rivers



Dam, built in the early 1900s, makes for great photos—as do majestic Great Gray Owls. This is prime habitat for Manitoba's provincial bird.

North on Highway 11, along the Winnipeg River, try tours of Pine Falls' Tembec Paper Group and Manitoba Hydro's Pine Falls Generating Station, and drop by the Saint Georges Museum, where French settlers' artifacts date back to the late 1800s. This stretch of the river offers some of Manitoba's best fishing spots, right from the riverbanks.

Sun, Sand... and an Inland Sea

Moving west, Highway 11 skirts the edge of Lake Winnipeg's beaches and campgrounds, including Traverse Bay, Victoria Beach, Patricia Beach, Beaconsia, North Beach, Belair, and Albert Beach. But the renowned three kilometres of white sand and grassy dunes at Grand Beach is king of them all. Considered one of the top 10 beaches in North America, the shallow water's perfect for toddlers, older kids love Thunder

Mountain Waterslide Park, and nature buffs head for the hiking trails around the dunes. And of course there's plenty of sailboating, windsurfing, swimming, and just plain lazing on the beach.

Waterborne History

South of the beaches, on Highway 59 and jogging across the famed Red River at Highway 4, Selkirk and the Marine Museum of Manitoba's six historic ships await curious landlubbers. Early in the 19th century, the Scottish Earl of Selkirk brought Scots and other hardy folk to colonize the area known as the Red River Settlement. Scottish heritage continues to be celebrated here in the first week of July, with the Manitoba Highland Gathering's dance, pipe and drum competitions and "heavy games" that include the tossing of telephone-pole-sized wooden cabers.

En route back to Winnipeg, Lockport's Heritage Park contains the Kenosewun Centre with its displays of four distinct local Aboriginal cultures, and the St. Andrew's Locks and Dam National Historic Site, where you'll find the French lock design that eased navigation of the Red River.

Lower Fort Garry National Historic Site boasts North America's only intact stone fur trade fort. Enjoy the scenic drive along the River Road Heritage Parkway, dotted with historic homes and markers. The simple St. Andrew's-on-the-Red Anglican Church, western Canada's oldest stone church, still sports its buffalo hide kneelers and flanks St. Andrew's Rectory National Historic Site of Canada.

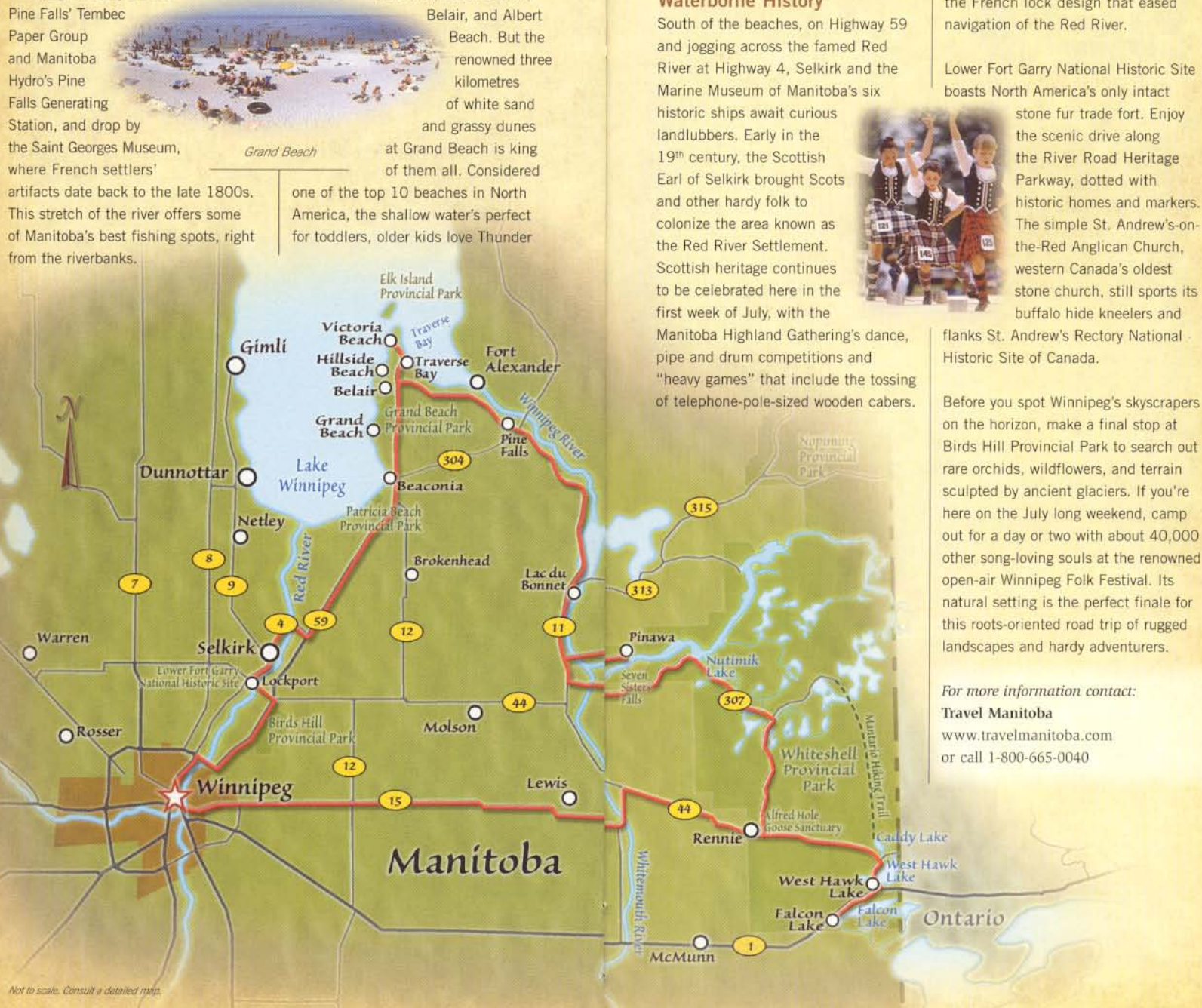
Before you spot Winnipeg's skyscrapers on the horizon, make a final stop at Birds Hill Provincial Park to search out rare orchids, wildflowers, and terrain sculpted by ancient glaciers. If you're here on the July long weekend, camp out for a day or two with about 40,000 other song-loving souls at the renowned open-air Winnipeg Folk Festival. Its natural setting is the perfect finale for this roots-oriented road trip of rugged landscapes and hardy adventurers.

For more information contact:

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Not to scale. Consult a detailed map.

