

East to Arden Ridge: cultural icons and landscapes of the “Beautiful Plains” region of Manitoba¹

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Introduction

Within a few hours driving distance of the Town of Neepawa there are a variety of physical and cultural landscapes, many of which are unique to the stereotypical ‘prairie landscape’. A select few sites were chosen for the field trip offered to participants attending the 2002 annual meeting of the Prairie Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers (PCAG) (see Figure 1). Proximity to Neepawa, the host site for the meeting, the Arden Ridge, and cultural landscapes and icons, were the key factors in designing the tour. The field trip, although ‘human’ in design, attempts to focus on the human use of the environment, and thus, as all good geography should, tie together the physical characteristics and the human response to these features.

The human history of the area began almost 12,000 years ago, and it was occupied by bands of Assiniboine and Cree when the first Europeans arrived (*Neepawa* n.d.). Most of the early ‘white’ settlement in this area was by people of British background. The Graham family was the first to settle in what is now the Town of Neepawa – on a high well-drained plateau that is now part of Riverside Cemetery. Early ethnic settlement was unusual enough to be clearly noted in many of the local histories, but the presence of the St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church is evidence of the arrival, in the early twentieth century, of Eastern European immigrant populations.

(Km 0) — Neepawa:

The tour begins at the Vivian Hotel in downtown Neepawa, that according to a welcoming billboard on the Yellowhead Highway leading into town from the east, is a town “996,600 short of one million people”

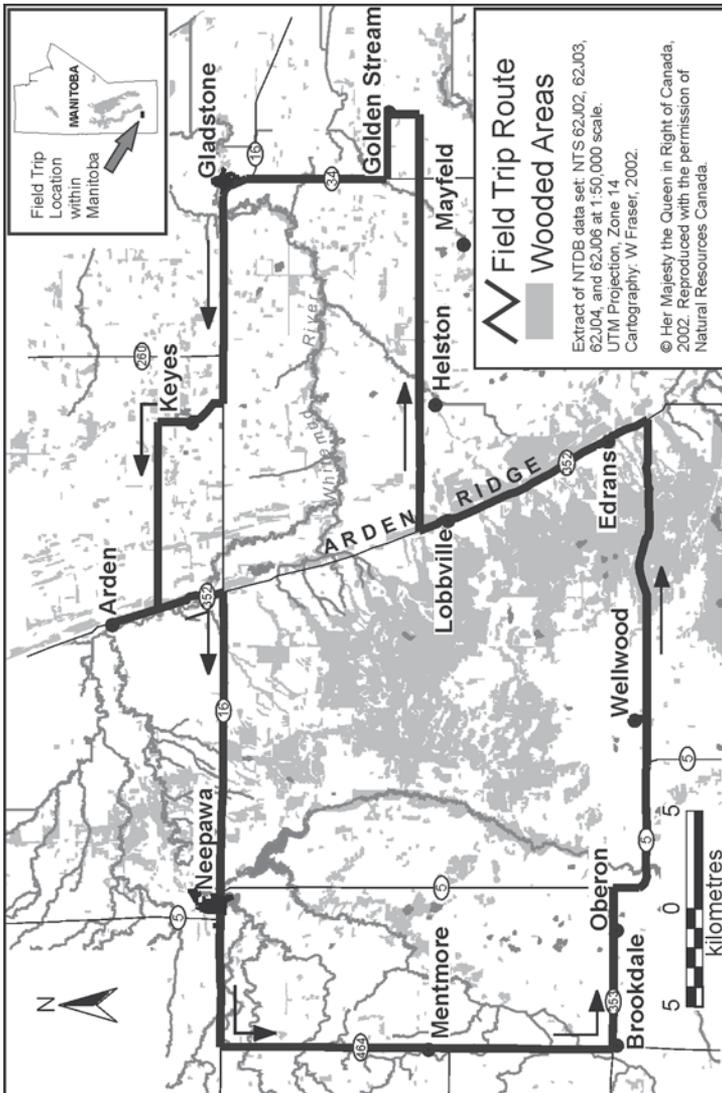


Figure 1: Field trip route.

Its population in the 2001 census was actually 3,325, an increase of 24 (0.7%) since 1996. Founded in 1880 by immigrants from Ontario (via Palestine²), in 1891 Neepawa had 774 people, rising to a peak of 3,508 in 1976. The billboard was obviously always optimistic. The toponym is a Chippewa Indian word which means 'plenty' or 'abundance' - hence the widespread presence of the cornucopia ('the horn of plenty') which was adopted as the town's emblem in 1884 (or 1912, depending upon which source you believe) (*Neepawa* n.d.).

As Neepawa existed before the railroad, it has a different town plan from most other prairie 't-town' settlements. The Manitoba and North Western Railway (MNWR) was built from Portage to Minnedosa in 1883, after the Town of Neepawa gave the railway free lots and \$16,000 as an incentive (see Figure 2). It was leased to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) for 999 years in 1900. For some time this north end of town out-competed the south end around the original nucleus, but by 1900 the present-day commercial area had established its dominance. The Canadian Northern (CNor) branch from Hallboro to the south was built to Neepawa in 1902 under a Morden and North Western Railway charter, as were continuations to Birnie and Clanwilliam (1903). The Clanwilliam line was later continued by the CNor north-west along the 'turkey trail' to Erickson, Rossburn and Russell (1908), and north along the edge of the Manitoba Escarpment to McCreary (1903) where it met the CNor line (once the Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company route) from Grandview to Sifton and Winnipegosis (opened 1897). The MNWR/CPR is at the northern boundary of town, the CNor/Canadian National (CN) to the west. Downtown Neepawa remains free of railway influences.

In 1900, there were seven licensed elevators owned by six different companies on the CPR. By 1902, there were nine (eight companies) on the CPR (none on the CN), and by 1912 this number had dropped to three (Dominion, Lake of the Woods, and Ogilvie) — again all on the CPR. Elevators were built in later years on the CN line by the United Grain Growers (UGG) (in the mid 1950s) and by the Manitoba Pool (1970s). Currently there are no line elevators operating within the town limits, although at the time of writing, the Pool and the UGG 'houses' were still standing.³ In addition to its many central place services, a salt factory helped to make Neepawa famous. The salt deposits were discovered by pioneers seeking oil (History Book Committee 1983). The last incarnation of this operation was closed in 1970 but some of the buildings remain as part of the Yellowhead Arena complex.

Neepawa appears to have a vibrant economy tapping into both the agricultural and tourism sectors. In terms of agriculture, Neepawa is home to the Springhill hog processing plant (Springhill Hutterite Colony is a

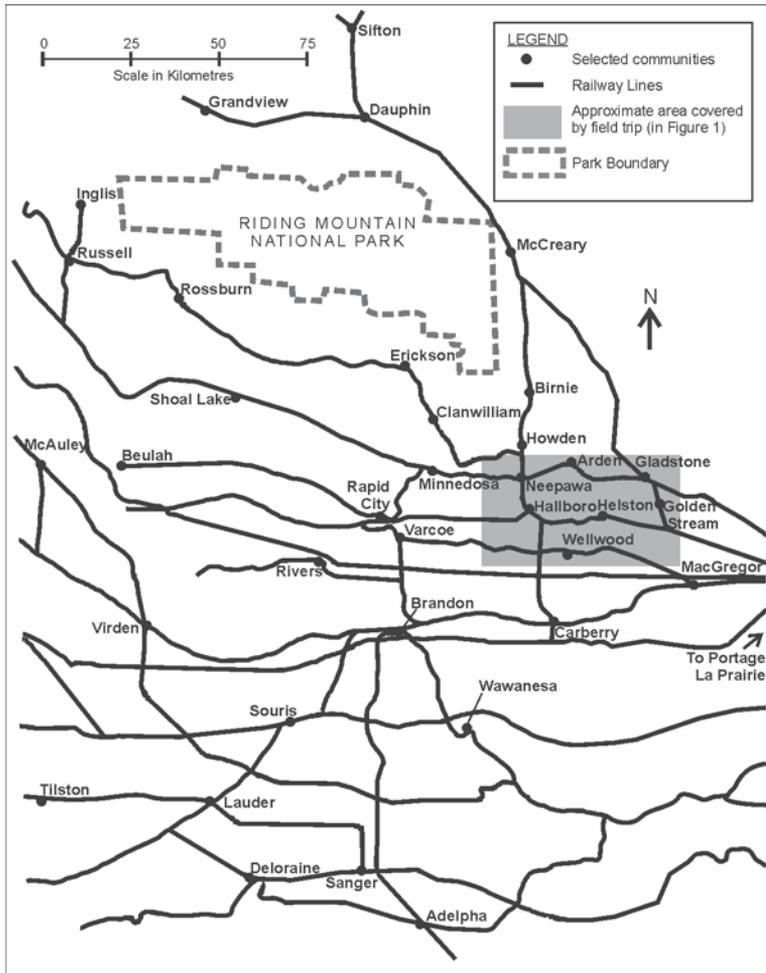


Figure 2: Railway lines in South-West Manitoba, 1922 (Source: Tyman 1972, 53).

few miles to the north-west) and Neepawa Food Processors, a division of Champ Food Systems Limited’s Hatchery and Farm Division that specializes in “Quality Day Old Chicks” (15-20 day olds). The hog plant is located on the eastern edge of town; the hatchery is located one block south of the Chicken Delight and Chicken Corral restaurants that are located on the Yellowhead Highway. Neepawa is also home to the main office of the Whitemud Conservation District. Its location on the Yellowhead

Highway has provided Neepawa with tourism and travel benefits. Most prominent is the recent opening of a McDonald's Restaurant – an outsized function for a community of this size.

Neepawa is famous for its Margaret Laurence connections, with her house (she lived in it for some time) open as a museum, and with 'The Stone Angel' a landmark in the very well kept cemetery. The latter is located on the grave of John Andrew Davidson, one of the founding fathers of Neepawa (the other was Jonathon J. Hamilton). Also take a look at the "Beautiful Plains County Court Building" on Hamilton Street, constructed in 1883 and nicely preserved and conserved. It was designated as a provincial historic site in 1982. South-east of town is Lake Irwin, a 1950s PFRA water-provision project, now a recreational/cottage area. The Beautiful Plains Museum is a converted train station located along the main rail line just north of McDonald's.

From Neepawa, the tour heads west along PTH 16, the Yellowhead Highway, past a lumber yard (Prairie Forest Products Ltd.) that all but obscures its original use as a World War Two training field (which is 1282 feet above sea level). As the Neepawa town boundary is crossed, the tour enters the R.M. of Langford. About five kilometers west of the town centre is the first cairn on the trip: "Stoney Creek School Division #133" to mark the location of a school site that existed from 1881 to 1950. Its opening predated the railway, which came in 1883. The site of an old Drive-In movie theatre is to the south.

(Km 6.5) — Great Plains Interpretive Centre (GPIC):

In the late 1990s there were attempts to build a tourist destination point for Neepawa. The GPIC has not yet got off the ground. The land has been purchased but its location was not the original choice. It had been hoped to have it closer to Neepawa. A business plan has been produced, and the provincial government and other sources are being asked for funding. The attempt to develop this centre is an illustration of the local desires to diversify from the traditional agricultural economy.

The Road to Brookdale

At kilometer eight, we turn south along provincial highway 464 and enter the little known area between the Trans Canada and Yellowhead Highways – the focus of this field trip. At this point the land slopes gently from west to east. Later in the trip, as we head towards Arden Ridge, it drops more rapidly before reaching the floor of glacial Lake Agassiz where the ground becomes more level once again.

(Km 19) — Mentmore (26-13-16-W):

Located on the Western Extension Railway (WER) that was opened from Hallboro (on Highway 5 between Neepawa and Carberry) to Beulah (south-west of Shoal Lake) in 1911. Eastwards it connected through Carberry Junction and Muir (Canadian Northern) to Portage. We will cross the abandoned line again at Helston. The WER company was amalgamated with Canadian Northern in 1903. The station (Mentmore) was apparently named by the owner of the site, who thought his home “meant more”!! However, the first elevator was not built until the late 1920s (by the Manitoba Pool). This was the only elevator company represented at this point. An elevator still stands and is used by a local farmer (“Drayson Bros. Ltd. Feed Service”). This stretch of the line (Hallboro to Beulah) was closed in 1978. The elevator annex was moved by road to Franklin in 1980 and attached to the Pool elevator in that settlement. The hamlet of Mentmore (at 1337 feet ASL) had a population of eight in 1941 and nine in 1956. It had however, a post office, a short-lived grist mill and several other central place services (Channon and Morrison 1972).⁴ No more recent population data has been found for Mentmore but you can draw your own conclusions!

We continue south on 464 crossing from Langford R.M. into North Cypress R.M. about one mile north of Brookdale (this boundary is part of the Fourth Base Line). Note that further down the road, just north of Brookdale, is “Sunnyview U-Pick” an example of on-farm diversification of activities. While strawberry production declined by 24.3% in Manitoba between 1996 and 2001, Saskatoon berry production increased by 43.8% over the same period, further illustrating the degrees of change in diversification initiatives.

(Km 28) — Brookdale (26-12-16-W):

Brookdale (1279 feet ASL) is located at the junction of highways 464 and 353 on the now abandoned railway line that was the Varcoe Branch of the CPR. It was one of two branch lines (the other was the WER/CNR Neepawa/Rapid City Subdivision) that ran east-west between the CPR’s Minnedosa Subdivision (through Neepawa) and the main CN line (once the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) ‘alphabet line’). The Varcoe line branched off from MacGregor on the CPR mainline in 1901. It reached Wellwood that year, Brookdale in 1903, and Varcoe in 1905. Varcoe was on what had been the Great North West Central Railway from Chater to Hamiota (opened 1890). Varcoe was situated just to the west of the current Brandon-R.M.N.P. highway (PTH 10). It was named after an early settler. A local brook was the origin of the toponym ‘Brookdale’. As will be seen, these naming practices were fairly typical of the region. The Wellwood to Varcoe

section of this line (and thus the Brookdale siding) was closed in 1978. The MacGregor to Wellwood stretch had gone in 1975.

Brookdale has never been a large settlement, but as a result of its community spirit and its all-weather road connections it has survived as a village (Channon and Morrison 1972). Its peak (known) population was in 1956 (156 people) but it was likely larger in earlier days. It declined after 1956, reaching a low of 76 in 1981, but has since grown to just under a 100. Its community centre/curling rink, school, relatively good roads, and centrality, probably explain this success. Brookdale has a mixture of long-term residents and Brandon commuters. The town used to have many services, including a brickyard, but now has only a few. Still in operation are a small convenience store that also acts as a postal outlet and an elementary school. The community centre was built in 1979 on the site of the former school (1927-1971). In addition to the “Good Neighbours” centre, there is a complex which houses a community hall, two pad curling rink, and a small arena that is used officially for minor hockey only.

Brookdale has had a variety of elevators over the years. In 1912, Brookdale had two elevators, one owned by the Lake of the Woods Milling Company and one by the Grain Growers Grain Company (GGG Co.). Lake of the Woods had one of the major lines of elevators in the southern prairies, gathering good quality grain for its milling operation in Keewatin. Sir George Stephen and William Van Horne were among its original shareholders. It was torn down in 1947-48. The GGG Co. was a farmer owned company set up to help combat the major line elevator and milling companies. Its elevator had been purchased from the Manitoba Elevator Commission (MEC) (the second government owned utility after the Telephones) in 1910. It had been built in 1902 and sold to the MEC by the Carberry Elevator Co. in 1910 for \$5,369, and was bought by the GGG Co. for \$6,142. The GGG Co. later formed the basis of the UGG. The Pool elevator was built in 1929. As of 2002, the old Pool elevator was owned by a local farmer (“J.R. Jones Farms”), and the United Grain Growers (UGG) structure appears to be abandoned. But there still remains, on its original site, one of the few extant ‘flat warehouses’ that predated most elevators in Manitoba. Unfortunately this structure is in poor repair and may not survive much longer. Rings for hitching the horses that drew the grain wagons can still be seen. The foundation of the octagonal CPR water tower can be seen at the east end of the village.

As is common in prairie settlements, the local cemetery is located out-of-town, about a quarter of a mile south on 464. Nearby is an old railway station moved in about five miles from Ingelow (the ‘T’ on the Grand Trunk Pacific/CNR alphabet line). It was meant to be the marital home of a young couple but they divorced before refurbishment could

take place. The mother of one of them now owns it but lives elsewhere. Although there have been a number of requests, it is not for sale!

The Road to Arden Ridge

We now go east on provincial highway 353 (which now bypasses Brookdale, once having cut through town) past a succession of changing agricultural landscapes, which in part reflect a variable physical environment. Millet is one of the first alternative crops seen. We also pass a horse stable operation. While Ayerst Organics in Brandon has been instrumental to the burgeoning PMU industry, the total number of horses and ponies in Manitoba declined by 8.7% between 1996 and 2001, whereas the Canadian total increased by 3.8% (Statistics Canada 2002a). East of Brookdale, near Oberon, is a unique abandoned farm. A local resident indicated that the two-story barn with windows (less the panes) was a chicken operation. At 30-12-15, a small farm with oddly designed out-buildings represents failed diversification into the ostrich industry. A further attempt into the hog sector (400 hogs) also failed. The farmhouse is an old railway building that was imported from Oberon. One mile north (32-12-15) is an expanding hog farm, currently housing 2,600 hogs with turnover three times per year. In contrast to horses, hog production increased by 42.9% between 1996 and 2001 in Manitoba. Sows and gilts for breeding increased by 62.4 % over the same period, double the national rate of increase (Statistics Canada 2002b). The barley is grown for feed on the farm, whereas all other feed comes from other sources. While barley is an important component to hog feed, actual production of barley actually fell by 25.2% between 1996 and 2001.

(Km 36) — Oberon (29-15-12-W):

The settlement was originally named Boggy Creek and later McKenzieville after a prosperous early landowner (Adam McKenzie), known as 'Manitoba's Wheat King'. Also a wealthy landowner in the Arden area, he once took 32 carts of flour to Edmonton, taking two months to cover the 1,500 kilometres but making enough profit in the process to buy 12,000 acres around Oberon. The hamlet (at 1,278 feet ASL) was renamed Oberon in 1905 after the local post office, itself named after a town in North Dakota – which was named after the fairy king in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Also located on the Varcoe branch, Oberon lost rail service in 1978, but the elevator remains and is used by a local farmer. Once having a G.B. Murphy elevator⁵, this site was an Ogilvie Flour Mills elevator point until this company's elevators were taken over

by the Manitoba Pool in 1959. There were 23 people in Oberon in 1951, and 5 in 1966. No more recent population data exists for the settlement. There are presently three occupied dwellings, the abandoned elevator and a deserted store, and a welding shop (Arctic Welding) that is in operation.

We continue east on '353' (which also now bypasses Oberon) and skirt the northern edge of North Cypress R.M. Three and a half miles east we cross (but can no longer distinguish) the route of the old CN rail-line that ran north-south connecting the Carberry area lines with those around Neepawa. This particular stretch ran from Carberry Junction to Brandon Junction (on the CN line south of Carberry) and was opened by the Canadian Northern in 1905. The section from the CN line to the south, to the CN mainline ('alphabet line') still operates. The townsite of Munroe (named after the local landowner John Munroe) once lay one mile to the north, but little is known about this place. It does not appear to have ever had a siding or an elevator.

(Km 49) — Wellwood (28-12-14-W):

The pre-railway community was named after a Presbyterian Minister/School Inspector in the early 1880s when postal service came to this area. The name was transferred to the railway point after the CPR line arrived in 1901. The line was closed to the east in 1975 and to the west in 1978. Two elevators were built in 1901, a 'Western' and a 'Winnipeg'. These were both sold to the MEC in 1910, were dismantled and rebuilt into one elevator in 1919. This new structure (which also included materials from a Binscarth 'Canadian' elevator) was leased to the UGG that bought it in 1924 for over \$28,000. The UGG elevator remained in the community for some time after abandonment and was used by local farmers/businesses, but was eventually dismantled. Wellwood's population was 97 in 1957 and 69 in 1966, but has steadily dropped since that time. It may now be between 50 and 60, but it still functions as a social central place for the local region.

At present there is a community hall and large auto salvage operation roughly located on the old elevator site. Beyond these features, Wellwood stands ubiquitous to many prairie communities - an abandoned hotel and garage, and monuments to where a school (1919-1976) and church (1881-1985) once stood. While the ball diamonds are no longer in use, the curling rink on the same site appears to be.

Leaving the hamlet of Wellwood and continuing east toward the Arden Ridge, we descend about 200 feet and pass through deltaic deposits (the Assiniboine Delta into Lake Agassiz) that are part of the flight path of pelicans and other migratory species and include conservation district projects. An area with many dissected sand dunes, this marks noticeable

land use variations including community pastures, shelterbelts, grazing land, crop land, livestock operations and even the local dump servicing Brookdale, Wellwood and Fairview. Coming to a T-intersection we begin traveling on one of the relatively few prairie-surveyed roads that does not conform to the section-township-range survey system.

Provincial Highway 352 is known locally as the 'Ridge Road'. Just south of this intersection is a unique operation, "The Penfolds-Oakwood Grange - Breeders of Traditional British Livestock". Originally from England, with stints farming in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, this family operation is home to rare roosters and chickens, sheep, a 'guard' donkey, and beef cattle. Traveling north from the T-junction along '352' there are numerous flooded creeks and wet areas - mostly resulting from beaver activity.

The Road to Gladstone

(Km 68) — Edrans (35-12-13-W):

Edrans and Highway 352 are located on the Arden Ridge of glacial Lake Agassiz - one of "Manitoba's Scenic Secrets", according to Neepawa author Bill Stillwell (1997). This beach ridge was formed about 12,000 years ago and is also referred to as the Campbell Beach. It can be traced north to the Swan River area. Edrans (1,073 feet ASL) was the next elevator point east of Wellwood. It was named after an estate in Ireland from where the original landholder originated. Never a large settlement, it had 25 people in 1986 — the last date when data is available — but this seems unlikely today. The Varcoe Subdivision was built through here in 1901, and the line was closed in 1975. A Western Canada Flour Mills (WCFM) elevator was located here during the early years, but it was unlicensed by 1916 and gone by 1919, and has never been replaced. The look of the surrounding countryside (and its current land use) reinforces a supposition that this is not important grain growing country, and its proximity to Firdale (the 'F' on the GTP line) and Helston (on the CNor) did not help its profitability as an elevator point.

More than most settlements to this point in the fieldtrip, Edrans has elements of both abandonment and lack of prosperity (past and present). In addition to abandoned homes and an abandoned outdoor hockey rink, Edrans does have a community centre that is still in operation. Unique though is the "Edrans Church" that now operates a K-12 school with a total of 28 children. In operation for four years, members of the

congregation practice the Charismatic Faith. The community cemetery is located just north-west of the townsite, with another old church building associated with it. The cemetery is on the beach ridge, which provides easy digging and good drainage to a number of such cultural landscape features as it wends its way north-west. The R.M. boundary of Lansdowne (which is also part of the Fourth Base Line) is crossed just after we pass the cemetery and Edrans Community Chapel. North-west of Edrans (in Lansdowne) is a large community pasture.

North of Edrans, we pass the “Midnight Rodeo Company”, a travelling rodeo company that taps into the small country fair market. They ‘grow their own’ bucking horses and transport the complete show to their customers. The owner began life as a rodeo participant and went into management in the twilight of his active career. In the off-season, activities convert to trucking general goods. Note the bison on the east side of the roads. Family pets!

(Km 80) — Lobbville (28-13-13-W):

This place was also on the WER/CNor line from Portage to Beulah. There is little recorded evidence of this settlement - other than on a map in *The Lansdowne Story* (the history of the R.M.), and the discontinued 1:125,000 ‘Neepawa’ topographic sheet, and its name has slipped from local usage (McKenzie 1967). It doesn’t appear to have been much more than a stopping point (probably a ‘flag stop’ and maybe a siding) on the railway as it crossed the beach ridge/road. It appears to have been named for the Lobb family, local farmers. No Lobbs appear on the current tax rolls of Lansdowne R.M., but there were once many in the Lobbville-Helston area. West of Lobbville, is Hummerston (22-13-14-W), which was once a grain shipment point named for its first shipper. It no longer exists, and is not on this tour, but this sandhill area is now the site of a community pasture, and is said to be another of Manitoba’s “scenic secrets” (Stillwell 1997).

(Km 81) — Sinclairville (32-13-13-W):

Sinclairville was another early community based upon a school district (No. 2063) that was organised in the home of local farmer John Sinclair. The school was built on the Ridge Road. It was closed in 1966. No obvious trace remains of this community (and the name is no longer used locally) other than a cairn commemorating the school. We turn east one mile south of the Sinclairville school-site and go down the ridge side (about a sixty-foot drop from the near eleven-hundred foot height of the ridge) towards the Agassiz lake plain along a section road.

(Km 88) — Helston (25-13-13-W):

Originally known as Berton, and founded in 1902 as a CN siding, the name of the community (at 992 feet ASL) was changed in 1924 and now commemorates Helston, in Cornwall, England. The School District (No. 1912) was named Berton until amalgamation. Helston is bisected by the Lansdowne-Westbourne R.M. boundary. Students went to a school in Westbourne before Berton School was opened in 1918. In order to interpret Helston, one needs to examine the monument/cairn just south of where the railway once ran, as it includes a map of the community as it once was. The old “CPR Red” Manitoba Pool elevator (c. 103,000 bushels capacity), while abandoned, has been maintained and appears in good structural shape, although this first impression apparently masks all sorts of problems. It is now owned locally, but is for sale. You could pick it up for about \$1,000, with the land around it costing you \$2,500 on top. Gordon Lariviere, an (Alberta-based) elevator expert rates this structure in the “top ten” for contemporary Manitoba (Lariviere various dates). Helston had a population of 41 people in 1956, and 31 in 1966. It seems likely to have dropped considerably more since that date. The railway line was closed from Muir to Helston (eastwards) in 1978 and from Helston to Carberry Junction (westwards) in 1975.

The cairn in Helston, located at the site of Public School #1912, includes a map of the former hamlet that indicates that at one time a railway station, manse, skating and curling rink, school, community hall, post office, store and 10 houses once stood. The cairn does not include a church, however, one possible explanation is a cairn for Knox United Church that is located 6 km east of Helston. This church apparently existed before Berton was founded, and may have served a large local region.

(Km 100) — Silver Stream Cairn (35-13-12-W) (N.B. Mayfeld 23-13-12-W):

As we proceed deeper into Westbourne R.M. we reach Silver Stream/Mayfeld, about five miles east of Helston (and just above the 925 foot contour). The site also has a cairn with a map illustrating where a train station, ice rink (1950-1969), school (closed in 1969), Orange Lodge, elevator, and post office once stood. The cairn appears to be located just over a mile north of the actual site of the settlement of Mayfeld (given the location of the former CNor railway), although no clear indication is given of such on the monument. A small flat warehouse (6,000 bushel) in the townsite was owned by W.H. Squair, and then operated (possibly after conversion to an elevator) by Wiley-Low until 1925, one of the companies that managed to profit from the mismanagement of the Manitoba Elevator Commission - although this structure was not an MEC house. The latest

1:250,000 map calls the settlement Mayfield, the 1:50,000 Mayfeld. Most other sources term it Mayfeld, after an early settler (John Mayfeld). About four miles south-west of Mayfeld there used to be a water tank for the steam engines. Many early settlements were located by geometry rather than environment principles, while water tanks were built where water could be found.

(Km 109) — Golden Stream (35-13-11 and 33-13-11-W):

There are two monuments denoting Golden Stream. A school cairn located at 35-13-11 W indicates the structures that once stood at that location: a log school (1873), one room school (1895), modern frame school (1949), and the school's closure in 1968. The actual site of the community of Golden Stream (33-13-11-W) includes an abandoned rail line and siding, a church, an occupied home, and a cairn containing a mixed historical inventory as it indicates that the community was once home to a CN station, elevator, Sears store, church, blacksmith shop, store, post office, and a school that appears to be located south-east of the community roughly where the school cairn is located. Can we presume that the Sears outlet and blacksmith shop were not in operation at the same time? Golden Stream (at 888 feet ASL) had a small (10,000 bushel capacity) non-line elevator (owned by P. Broadfoot) in the early nineteen-teens. It was on the CNor line from Portage via Beaver to Gladstone that was built in 1902. The house was sold to Wiley-Low in 1916 and then to Federal Grain (along with the rest of the company) in 1932. It was located just north of the contemporary main road. It was rebuilt/replaced by a larger structure at some point after the Federal takeover. The CN line is still open but the elevator has now disappeared (probably after being bought by Manitoba Pool along with the other Federal houses in the province in 1972). By 1972 Golden Stream had become "too small to classify" as a community (Channon and Morrison 1972, 13).

(Km 121) — Gladstone (14-11-W):

Turning north, we travel to Gladstone (at 892 feet ASL it is a hundred feet lower than Helston). A pre-railway town (the first settlement west of the old parishes), and one of the oldest in Manitoba (dating to 1871), this settlement was first known as Third Crossing (for Red River carts on the Whitemud River) and later as Palestine (for the bounty of the 'promised land') (Morton Fahrni and Morton 1946).⁶ Its location on the Whitemud has caused it some problems over the years. After the village was incorporated in 1882 the town fathers got ambitious and named it for the British Prime Minister, W.E. Gladstone. The CN line from Golden Stream

to Dauphin passes through town, as does the CPR line from Portage to Neepawa. The latter was originally the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway. It had been hoped that the CPR mainline would pass through the town, but it went south and so did many of the hopes of the early inhabitants of Gladstone who had incorporated nine square miles into the settlement in 1882. Before the railroad arrived, the S.S. St. Boniface plied the Whitemud to Third Crossing but this didn't survive for long. The Westbourne and North Western Railway, later becoming the Portage, Westbourne and North Western, then the Manitoba and Northwestern, reached Gladstone in 1882 - after the owners of the railway received a 'bonus' to stop them by-passing the settlement. This bonus, in addition to the boom and bust cycles of the time, led to severe financial problems for the town in its early years.

The town has had a variety of elevators over time, but currently no major company operates in town. Our Alberta expert has termed the old UGG structure (part of the defunct flour mill) the "ugliest elevator in Manitoba" and it is hard to argue this point. Gladstone had 883 inhabitants in 1881, but the number dropped soon after and did not regain this level until 1956 (882). Its size then fluctuated, peaking in 1976 at 976. Since then it has dropped to 848 (in 2001). This represented a decline of 8.5% from 1996. It is the largest settlement in Westbourne R.M. North of Gladstone is the Big Grass Marsh, a stopping place for over 200,000 waterfowl in spring and fall – and thus a favourite place for hunters. It is another of Bill Stillwell's "scenic secrets" (Stillwell 1997).

The Road to Arden (with a few diversions)

We now turn westward along the Yellowhead Highway (#16) and start heading uphill again. A few miles west we turn north to see some other changing landscapes. This gravel road marks the 1870 boundary between the Northwest Territories and Manitoba (the 'postage stamp province').

(Km 133) — Keyes (36-14-13-W):

This settlement (at 975 feet ASL) was originally known as Mosquito Lake (be warned) and later Midway as it is located midpoint between Portage la Prairie and Minnedosa. The Keyes family (from Ontario) was dominant in this area with farmland, stores, and the post office, and in 1900 the settlement was renamed in honour of William Keyes. The settlement had a number of services, including an Ogilvie elevator, a station - with the 'best kept grounds' on the CPR for several years running

(McKenzie 1967) - a school, two blacksmiths, and at least two churches. Lord Strathcona apparently helped to fund the local Church of England building (giving land and money). It is uncertain how much land he owned in this area or why but it is known that he also had four sections south of Lobbville (McKenzie 1967). A stake near the post office used to mark the fact that Keyes was at the north-west corner of the original 'postage stamp province' of Manitoba. Today it is just inside Lansdowne R.M. There are currently two occupied dwellings and an abandoned home. The abandoned siding also remains. We continue north and west along section roads, passing the now invisible site of Twyford School (3-15-13-W) that closed in 1951 (and amalgamated with Arden S.D.). Riverside Hutterite Colony, located near Arden, owns land throughout this area.

(Km 150) — Arden (13-15-14-W):

The Carleton Trail, its best-known local name, was one of the Indian trails that connected the prairies together for trading purposes. In the late nineteenth century it ran from Fort Garry to Prince Albert, SK, passing a few miles north of Neepawa. It was also used by General Middleton in 1885 to reach Batoche to attack the Metis. It became the main route for supplies for this part of Manitoba before the railways arrived. It made use of the Arden Ridge, as did the Manitoba and North Western Railway (now CPR), in its search for a crossing point of the Whitemud River on its way to Neepawa. The Whitemud River, located just west of town, is diverted considerably from what might have been its path along the Arden Ridge. It eventually cuts through the beach ridge near the Yellowhead Highway. The ridge is also the site of a number of Indian burial mounds, although little evidence of these remains. Other beach ridges that run parallel to (but lower than) the Arden Ridge include the Robbins Ridge, the Rose Ridge and the Purple Ridge. Sloughs and meadows lie between the ridges, forming excellent pastureland.

The origin of Arden's name is in dispute, but probably commemorates Arden in Yorkshire (UK). In its early days Arden was quite the central place. Arden (between 1,050 and 1,100 feet ASL) once had a bank, a flour mill (burned in 1908), a lumber mill (destroyed by a flood on the Whitemud River); there was also a local cheese factory (15 miles out of town and out of business by 1905) amongst its services. Reflecting the spirit of the time, Arden banned nude bathing within the village limits in 1908. The land for the local cemetery was given to the town by a (Scots-origin) farmer, who with great foresight retained a block for his own use. There were stockyards and stables in the settlement, Methodist, Anglican, and Mennonite Churches, schools, various fraternal societies, and several recreational groups. There was also a mink ranch — not uncommon in

this area. Gravel has always been a major source for mining in this part of Lansdowne R.M. In 1900, there were five elevators in Arden (including the flour mill's structure), two owned by Manitoba Milling, and one each by Lake of the Woods and the Northern Elevator Co. As Arden's centrality declined, the number of elevators was reduced to two in 1912 (Lake of the Woods (LofW) and Western Canada Flour Mills (WCFM)). When the Pool entered in 1926 there were again three, but eventually the Pool took over WCFM (1940) and LofW (1959) and integrated these structures into its Arden operation. The current house was purchased from the Pool by a local group, the Canadian Organic Commodity Marketing Co-op. You may notice that Arden has adopted the Crocus as its town symbol — after an extensive search to find something unused elsewhere. Around the base of the giant crocus are some cast cement blocks that were retrieved from a demolished building. Several structures in this region are made of this very durable material. In 1894, the town had 150 inhabitants. It had reached 237 in 1941, but has mostly fluctuated downwards since that date. In 1991, there were 157 people in Arden. Today it once again has about 150.

The Road to Neepawa

From Arden we return to Neepawa via the Yellowhead Highway (#16). We pass Riverside Hutterite Colony south of town (founded in the early 1930s on land once owned by Adam McKenzie) just before reaching the Yellowhead Highway at the Arden Ridge Service Station, where we pass back into Langford R.M. Just to the south of the Colony are the remains of a concrete bridge (possibly built in 1919) that was once part of the east-west highway. We will also see other houses built of cast concrete blocks that flank the giant crocus. One was almost certainly one of the McKenzie family's farmhouses.

Seven kilometres east of Neepawa is the Fulford-Trail walkway (another "scenic secret", and the last of this field trip (Stillwell 1997)) on 130 hectares of Crown Land. Note the extensive fringe functions east of Neepawa — far greater in number than might be expected to exist near such a small settlement, a sign of the volume of traffic that uses the Yellowhead Highway. The McDonald's in Neepawa is a function of the Yellowhead traffic, rather than the population of Neepawa and District. The restaurant sits on the abandoned right of way of one of the few north-south railways in this region that connected Neepawa to Hallboro.

Closing Comments

This tour offered only a selection of the sites and landscapes located within the Neepawa area. Much diversity exists north and west of Neepawa, however, time did not permit the inclusion of all of it. We chose to focus on key elements within a smaller area. In doing so, we chose routes that were products of technical survey lines as well as topography. The resulting settlement geography is an anomaly within the standard section-survey system of the Canadian prairies. While much of the local history has become limited to cairns depicting ‘what once was but is no longer’, this tour also illustrated a continued attachment to the land and desire to preserve the culture on that land.

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Endnotes

¹ Much of this field trip is based upon the authors' field work. References to places names mostly come from Penny Ham (1980) *Place Names of Manitoba*. Another major aid was A.F. McKenzie (1967) *The Lansdowne Story: Grain, Gravel, Growth*.

² Palestine is now called Gladstone.

³ Apparently all equipment was removed from the UGG elevator during the summer of 2002.

⁴ Channon and Morrison (1972) has a classification of communities in the field trip region. The terminology used (hamlet, village, etc.) is used in this paper.

⁵ Apparently this elevator was dismantled (around 1918) and taken to Alberta. The economics of such situations are now very different!! Brookdale Historical Society (1987).

⁶ Palestine was actually a short distance south from present-day Gladstone, but it was located in the same Township and Range (14-11-W) and to all intents and purposes it was a forbear of the town.