

Eastend Auto Tour #1

The Frenchman River Valley



Beautiful Scenery

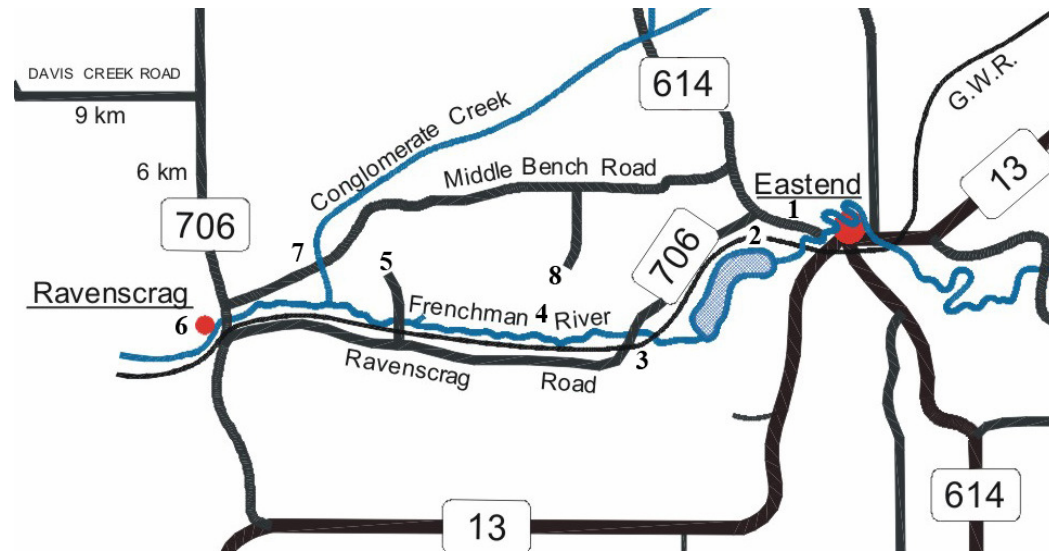


Interesting History

Eastend Community Tourism Authority

Caution: ECTA is in no way responsible for the condition of the tours. Use at your own risk and discretion.

Frenchman Valley Map



The Frenchman River Valley

The Frenchman River Valley is a beautiful yet rugged area that was carved by glaciers many years ago. The valley begins on the outside edge of the Cypress Hills. Interestingly, the Cypress Hills were missed by glaciers, and stand as the highest point between the Rocky Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. It's climate and vegetation is more closely related to the foothills regions than the surrounding prairies. From the Cypress Hills it loops its way down to Eastend, passing through a more traditional prairie environment. After passing through Grasslands National Park, it eventually joins the Milk River in northeastern Montana.

Let's Get Started...

To begin this 40 kilometer trek, take Grid 614 (the Brady Coulee Road) out from the western edge of town. After only a km or so, you'll notice a sign announcing our first attraction.

Some Pre-Trip Information

Warning:

- The Frenchman River Valley Auto Tour takes place on gravel and dirt roads. Road conditions vary with the weather, and the tour is not recommended in wet conditions.
- Only leave the main road when the brochure mentions it is safe to do so. The prairie environment is very fragile and must be protected.
- The Frenchman River Valley and surrounding country is filled with wildlife such as whitetail and mule deer, antelope, coyotes, rabbits, and perhaps even moose. While best viewed at dusk and dawn, be sure to lower your speed to avoid a potential collision.

1. Chocolate Peak Chocolate Peak is a large reddish-brown hill located on the north side of the road. There was originally a large deposit of whitemud (clay) at its base. For this reason, it was once named Wedding Cake Hill. Back in the 1930's and 40's, whitemud (clay) was quite valuable. One miner thought his work would be easier if he could burn the coal layer that rested on top of the whitemud. Well the coal layer did burn, but for years rather than days, wrecking the clay in the process and turning the hill into its present color.

2. Eastend Dam From Chocolate Peak, continue driving a short distance until you come to a fork in the road. Turn left (south) onto the Ravenscrag Road. From here you should be granted a fine view of the Eastend Dam. The dam was originally built in 1904 by a ranching outfit named Enright and Strong to provide irrigation for the surrounding pasture land. During 1918 the dam was pushed out by heavy ice. No one rebuilt it until the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration completed the project in 1936. The new dam was much improved and now serves as a popular recreation area. Perhaps after the tour you could wet a line and try for the abundant pike that lurk in its waters.

3. Crazy Horse Camp
GPS map datum: WGS84
49°29.348 / 108°54.662 Roughly three km's down the road from the dam you'll encounter a bridge. Just past and to the right (marked by a sign and interpretation) is a flatland that may have been the site of Crazy Horse's Camp. Crazy Horse was a great Sioux chief that helped Sitting Bull defeat Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. While Sitting Bull fled north into Canada, Crazy Horse continued to fight before eventually surrendering and being stabbed at the hands of an American soldier. After his death about 200 of his lodges fled across the Medicine Line (the border between the USA and Canada). Many famous Sioux warrior chiefs such as Spotted Eagle, Stone Dog, Black

Bull, and Black Catfish and Crowfoot of the Blackfoot Nation were also found throughout the Cypress Hills area at various times.

4. The Hills **49°29.099 / 108°57.631**
As you continue to travel through the valley take the time to glance at the beautiful valley hills. Small streams have created these badlands by cutting steep ravines into soft shale and sandstone. You will also notice the many layers that have formed these hills over the years. In fact, the first layers were deposited by an inland sea, and thus consist of sand, silt and clay. After the sea receded, you can find the whitemud layer (right above this layer is where dinosaur bones are found.) Deposits made by rivers and streams coming from the mountains formed additional layers. The final layer consists of gravel, pebbles, and sand and is known as the Cypress Hills Conglomerate.

5. The White Mud Pits
49°29.370 / 109°01.223 After about 17.5 km's you'll come across a green sign announcing the White Mud Pits. This is the site of amine that had been used for years. In the earlier part of the century, white mud mining was big business. The work was mostly done by hand with the use of shovels and dynamite. You are welcome to take a small detour and follow the road north up to the actual site of the mine (after obtaining landowner permission). While exploring, you may even be lucky enough to spy an ancient fossil, just remember the Heritage Property Act that states all fossils belong to the government.

6. Ravenscrag **49°29.754/109°05.240**
As you continue down the valley you'll eventually come to a junction, at which you turn right (north). To your left is the small community of Ravenscrag. **49°29.729 / 109°05.228** Though it may not look like much now, Ravenscrag was once a bustling western town. It had three general stores, two livery barns, a large stockyard and many other businesses. The town was an important point for shipping out cattle and horses. Just across from the entrance

to Ravenscrag (and immediately before the ranch yard to the right side of the main grid) is the Middle Bench Road. This will be the second half of your adventure. As you drive by the ranch yard mentioned earlier you can catch a glimpse of old log buildings that date back to the start of the century. As you continue along you'll cross Conglomerate Creek.

7. Conglomerate Creek
49°30.380 / 109°02.946 Conglomerate Creek, named after the conglomerate rock layer found throughout the hills, has an interesting beginning. The creek's source is a spring found in the hills to the northeast. This spring is located right on the Continental Divide. This divide is basically an imaginary line that decides which way the local waters flow. Those found to the south of the lines such as Conglomerate Creek, flow south and eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico. Those north of the line, such as Swift Current Creek, flow northeast and empty into the Hudson Bay. Conglomerate Creek is stocked with brown trout and is another place to try a little fishing, just be sure to ask the landowners first. As you continue your tour heading east, you'll climb out of the valley. After passing a farmyard, keep an eye out for the sign (located on the right side of the road) **49°31.424 / 108°56.573** announcing the detour to Jones Peak. From there you'll be granted a truly breathtaking view of the valley and countryside.

8. Jones Peak
49°30.107 / 108°57.219 Jones Peak is named after Harold Saunders 'Corky' Jones. He was a local rancher, amateur palaeontologist and historian. He was very knowledgeable about local history and also found a number of fossils including a Triceratops skull. From the peak, you can see most of the earlier attractions. What an amazing valley! As you continue along the main road, you'll come across another junction. **49°31.971 / 108°52.408** To return to town, turn right.