

Episode # 22 - From "The Hat" to Big Sky Country

After our stirring visit to Writing On Stone Provincial Park, we headed northeast and had a nice stop in Medicine Hat – aka "The Hat". It was a nice town with a positive vibe and some interesting sites.



There was an impressive looking Arts and Heritage Centre, a lovely court building and some fun shops – including a nice little café where I had a beautiful latte.



And then we crossed the border into Saskatchewan. We had a short but very pleasant stay in Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park, which as the name suggests spans the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. It was quite a climb up to the campground and we were surprised to learn that it was the highest spot east of the Rockies in all of Canada. Chef Jim grilled up a delicious meal.



Once we descended for Cypress Hills the next day, we were truly in Big Sky Country.
And it certainly lived up to its name.







Eventually we got to our destination: Grasslands National Park.





Along with the spectacular Prairie skies, one of the main reasons to go, we were told, was for the chance to see the free-roaming herds of Plains Bison which were re-introduced to the land in 2005 after being culled to near extinction. Of course, since they were free, one could never tell where they might be, or if you were actually going to see them.

I went for a walk up over the ridge and I did indeed spot a herd.



I was pretty sure they were Bison, although they could've been cows. So I made use of the magnifying "tower viewer" they had there, and put my camera lens right up to it. And if you try to zoom in, you can kinda see that they're shaped like Bison. Kinda.



Never mind. The views were pretty fantastic, even without the Bison. And, forgive me, but I couldn't stop taking pictures. One of the really cool things was that they had Muskoka chairs there for us to sit and enjoy the magnificent view.







That evening, I expected that we might have a memorable sunset. What I didn't expect is that we'd also get a rainbow!



Then we got the sunset.





For us, the show was over, but for our neighbouring campers, the show was yet to come. Grasslands National Park has become a mecca for stargazers, because it's one of the darkest sky zones in North America.

I spoke to one of them, and he said they'd be out at about 3:00 a.m. taking shots with this.

I went out at about 11:30 and was amazed by the star-filled sky. I never got to see what our neighbours captured with their camera. We broke camp at about noon and they still weren't up yet.



As we were heading out of the campground, we got a slightly closer look at a Bison.



Jim seized an opportunity to tame another wild animal in the park.

And on the way out, we managed to see some of the famed prairie dogs in their "Dogtown". They were as cute as advertised.



My brother Ted insisted we stop on the edge of Grasslands and meet his friends Neil and Susan Ward. They have a combination retreat and, as Susan called it, a “Bed No Breakfast” just on the edge of the park. We enjoyed our visit – and got a jar of honey from their own garden as a parting gift! Thanks Neil & Susan (and Ted for insisting.)



Ted also highly recommended a restaurant in Shaunavon Saskatchewan, called the Harvest Eatery. We didn't dare disregard him. And we were glad we didn't.



After finding a
campground spot in a
park right in the
middle of town...



... we walked literally around the corner and found this little gem.



We had the best service, and a wonderful meal, with a delicious starter, scrumptious main courses and a delectable dessert. My only regret is that we didn't get a photo of Jordan our server, who was delightfully entertaining and welcoming. Everything was superb! (Thanks Ted, again.)



In fact, we were very impressed with the town of Shaunavon. Everyone we met was friendly, interesting and loved living in this little town.