

THE FLORA OF OUR CYPRESS HILLS, A ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTPOST

by

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The flora of the Cypress Hills area is unique in contrast to the surrounding dry plains and very closely resembles that of the Rocky Mountain foothills. From the point of view of the botanist it is very interesting as about fifty species are found here which are not known to occur in other parts of Saskatchewan, and many more which usually occur only in the northern areas of woodland.

It is the only location east of the Rockies where the lodgepole pine grows and in a large part of the more elevated forest this is the principal tree species. White Spruce, poplars and willows, together with the lodgepole pine make up the bulk of the forested area but an occasional mountain ash (Sorbus scopulina) is found. Among the lower growing trees and shrubs are many Saskatoon bushes, chokecherries, hawthorn (both the round-leaved and the long-spined species), low-bush cranberry, besides shrubs such as raspberries, black, red and golden currants, gooseberries, etc.

At almost any season of the year, from spring to freeze-up, a wealth of flowers are seen. In early spring there are masses of the dark blue low larkspur (Delphinium bicolor), Shooting Stars (Dodocatheon sps.) camas, spring beauty (Claytonia and Montiastrum sps.) violets, corydalis, anemones, golden bean, wild fruit blossoms and much other vernal flora. Later the silvery lupines, hedysarum, shrubby cinquefoil, roses, arnicas, agoseris, stonecrop, bluebells, etc., make the bench lands beautiful, while the woodlands show a profusion of white geranium, painted-cups, willow-herb, cow parsnip, squaw-root, peavines and vetches. Climbing the shrubbery is the pale blue purple clematis and on the forest floor the lovely twin-flower (Linnaea borealis var. americana), three varieties of coral-root, wintergreens, bunchberry, bearberry and many others.

In the moist low places, of which there are many, can be found several members of the orchid family, of which at least nine species have been recorded. The streams are also a source of great interest to the botanically and artistically minded visitor as large masses of yellow monkey-flower (Mimulus guttatus) are in evidence, with american speedwell (Veronica americana), water crowfoot and many aquatic grasses, rushes and sedges.

On the higher and more wind swept knolls really xerophytic or drought tolerant plants are found such as yellow umbrella plant (Eriogonum flavum), little clubmoss (Selaginella), moss phlox, low whitlow-wort (Paronychia) and so on.

In the fall the bench lands are brightened by masses of gaillardia, hawksbeard, ragworts, goldenrods, asters of many species, and many fleabanes which all blend artistically with the autumn tints of the deciduous trees and shrubs and the darker background of the evergreens. These bench lands belong to the bench grassland association of rough fescue, wild oatgrass and shrubby cinquefoil, a Rocky Mountain foothill type of grassland, rare on the prairies.

A few of the species which are apparently found in no other location in the Province may be mentioned; - lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta var. latifolia), pine grass (Calamagrostis rubescens), alpine timothy (Phleum alpinum), spike trisetum (Trisetum spicatum), twisted stalk (Streptopus amplexifolius), lance-leaved spring beauty (Claytonia lanceolata), linear-leaved spring beauty (Montiastrum lineare), purple clematis (Clematis columbiana), slender white water crowfoot (Batrachium flaccidum), narrow petalled stonecrop (Sedum stenopetalum), golden currant (Chryso-botrya aurea), white geranium (Geranium richardsonii), squaw-root (Perideridia Gairdneri), pine drops (Pterospora Andromedea), thyme-leaved speedwell (Veronica serpyllifolia) and many others.

Well over 300 species of plants have already been recorded as having been found in a small study area in the Cypress Hills park and the list is by no means complete. This area is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and unique districts in Saskatchewan as well as being one of our finest beauty spots.