

# THE WILDCAT HILL WILDERNESS AREA

People everywhere have recently become acutely aware of the dangers of environmental deterioration. Ever-increasing human populations are taking over and poisoning so much of the earth's surface that in the next century an earth unfit for all higher forms of life is entirely possible.

Canadians necessarily share this concern. The Canadian Government, for example, is trying to prevent irreparable damage to the delicate ecosystems of the Arctic. Here in southern Saskatchewan the grassland ecosystem, though more stable, is easily plowed and destroyed. We have not yet been able to have any of it placed in the relative safety of a National Park.

The Saskatchewan Natural History Society has tried to develop an understanding of the possibility of an environmental crisis. When *Silent Spring* was published in 1962 we gave it a lengthy review because it clearly explained how persistent poisons like DDT, accumulate at the top of food chains and how man is dumping hundreds of chemicals into the environment without any knowledge of how this will affect the total ecosystem of the earth.

We passed resolutions asking that more study and public hearings be held before the draining of wetlands. Not only did there seem to be no need for the expansion of cereal production but the drainage practice was leading to loss of valuable habitats and the ever-increasing possibility of spring flooding in our valleys, villages and cities.

Our Prairie Dog Sanctuary and our Maurice Street Sanctuary are two small areas which we have managed to have designated as protected areas in which values other than farming, forestry or mining are recognized. Other groups in other parts of Canada are also trying to protect small areas. These groups are now receiving help and encouragement from the Nature Conservancy and larger areas will be protected by the efforts of private Canadian citizens. The Editor, when attending the recent annual meeting of the Conservancy, was informed that this year officers of the Conservancy would visit Saskatchewan to meet naturalists and talk of acquisition of natural areas. This effort is also helped by IBP-CT (International Biological Program - Conservation Terrestrial) which is not purchasing or providing money but which is making detailed studies (check-sheets) of natural areas. These will be available internationally and pressure can develop for the protection of every kind of habitat and living plant or animal. If you value an area and wish to have it protected beyond your own life time, you should write to your editor who is a director of Nature Conservancy.

Individuals, whether property owners or not, can do much to help change the climate of thinking regarding problems of the environment. They can write to Prime Minister Trudeau and Mr. J. Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development pressing for another National Park. If concerned people do not express their views, there will never be a national park in the beautiful South Nahanni area, N.W.T. If we do not write to our federal and provincial governments, there will never be a National Grassland Park in Canada. At this moment you should be writing to the Secretary, Public Hearings Office, National and Historic Parks Branch, 100 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa 4, Ontario to speak on behalf of Prince Albert National Park. You should support the Park Policy and speak against the vested interests which want to open the park to more permanent housing, to industry and commercial development and to more highways and motor toboggans. Attend the public hearings on the future of P.A. National Park on June 28 in Regina or June 30 in Prince Albert. Press the provincial government for public hearings before they drain new areas, industrialize provincial parks, or open new areas for mines or lumbering or agriculture.

Real evidence that the thinking on environment is changing is given this year by the Saskatchewan Government which has long adhered to the multipurpose concept. The Clean Environment Bill will help to prevent the death of our own clear, clean rivers, of Lake Winnipeg which receives much of our water and of the oceans of the world. We are a part of one finite and fragile ecosystem and if we don't protect it there is no point in trying to preserve a few square miles on the prairies. Second, the Saskatchewan Government announced the establishment of the Wildcat Hill Wilderness Area, 40,000 acres in the Pasquia Hills, in which there will be no lumbering, no mining and no roads.

We congratulate our government on their forward-looking policies and urge them to continue developing anti-pollution regulations and to continue to act as leaders in the setting aside and protection of natural areas.

# THE WILDCAT HILL WILDERNESS AREA

by Tom White, Regina

On April 13, 1971, the Honourable J. Ross Barrie, Minister of Natural Resources, strongly supported by members of both sides of the house, announced in the Saskatchewan Legislature the creation of the Wildcat Hill Wilderness Area, the first of its kind so designated in the province. It is pertinent at this time to describe the park and some of the considerations concerned with its creation.

The Pasquia Hills are part of the rise between the first and second prairie steppes. (The first steppe extends as lowland marshes eastward to Hudson Bay.) The north and eastern slopes of the Pasquia and Porcupine Hills rise steeply from the muskegs. The Pasquia Hills rise approximately 1800 feet on the north slope reaching an elevation of 2740 feet at the highest point. From other directions, the hills, lacking the dramatic falls of the northern slopes, appear as a low, forested rise. They have a high rainfall, a

moist atmosphere and therefore a more verdant flora than the drier prairies to the south. The area, in the words of the DNR news release "encompasses within its boundaries the headwaters of three streams—the Fir, Pasquia and Man Rivers all arise within a radius of one and one-half miles. . . . [The] protection of these headwaters is a vital element of the Wilderness Area. Bankside and Fir-head Lakes, the Source of the Man and Fir Rivers, are in themselves a logical focal point of the area." On every slope the rivers come tumbling down from the higher ground until they become the slow-moving trout streams so prized by trout fishermen. Some rivers have cut deep-sided ravines and canyons, and jack pine and spruce whirr as the wind sweeps through the forest. The Man River curves gracefully around Wildcat Hill which rises spectacularly above the surrounding country. The central core



The view north from Wildcat Hill



Preparing to cross a spring washout

of the area remains in its natural and undisturbed state and it is this tract of wilderness, 40,000 acres in all, that has now been set aside.

The hills formed an island during the recession of the last glacier that left a series of gravel shorelines indicating the levels of receding Lake Agassiz. Triceratops' skulls and sharks' teeth have been found in the sloughs and cut banks. On the gravel shorelines there are numerous prehistoric Indian campsites where arrows and artifacts may be found. From the air the streaking of the area by glaciers can be clearly seen although the question of how long the hills have been isolated is a matter for further research.

Within the hills there are many varied types of foliage and vegetation, for the generally inaccessible nature of the hills has protected both flora and fauna. The pollution-free rivers have banks lined with red willow. There are areas of jack pine, spruce, stands of aspen, poplar and birch, and wide expanses of muskeg. The marshes

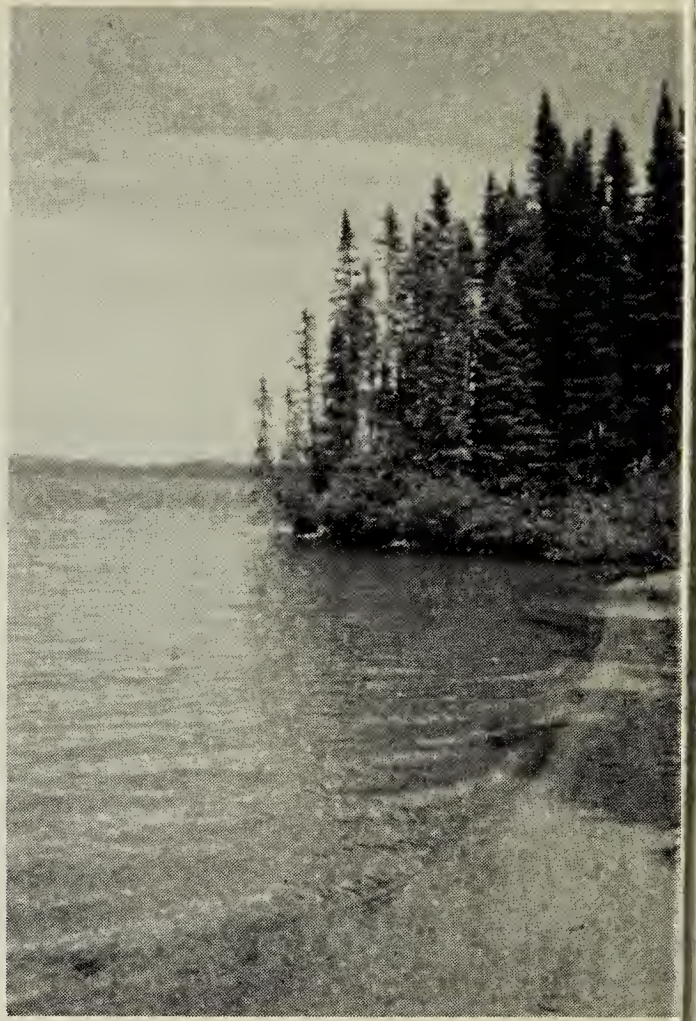
around the base of the hills and the forests and rivers contain botanical species that will take years of study to classify and enumerate.

The Pasquia Hills contain a wide variety of animal life. (The town of Hudson Bay calls itself the Moose-hunting Capital of the World!) The beaver are prolific and unattended trails are quickly submerged by water from dams. On the muddy trails the tracks of wolf, deer, moose and bear can almost always be found. In the hills there are woodland caribou, elk, deer, moose, beaver, muskrat, wolverine, weasel, lynx, bobcat, coyote, fox and flying squirrel; recently the buffalo have returned. A cougar was trapped in 1948 and there are annual reports of further sightings; there is a possibility that a few grizzly bears have survived. What is important is that nearly every animal of the Saskatchewan forests lives in the hills in relatively undisturbed habitat and that the Wilderness Area will provide an open-air laboratory for the naturalist who wishes to explore and conduct research.

In 1690 Henry Kelsey became the first white man to penetrate Saskatchewan and as he journeyed from The Pas one of his first sights would have been the long blue line of the Pasquia Hills. It was not far from here that Kelsey became the first white man in North America to describe the grizzly bear.

Louis-Joseph La Vérendrye and Anthony Henday would have seen the hills when they ascended the Saskatchewan in 1749 and 1754 respectively. Samuel Hearne established Cumberland House in 1774 in sight of the northern slopes.

When the Franklin Expedition wintered at Cumberland House in 1820, they sent Lt. Hood to draw "a moose deer" in the "Basquia Hills" from which area Cumberland House got most of its meat. A chapter in Franklin's book *Journey to the Polar Seas* contains both Lt. Hood's accounts and an illustration of the interior of an Indian teepee near the hills. Before



Sandy shore of  
Bankside Lake



Fir River, a good  
trout river

the First World War, the Finger Lumber Company (in 1918 purchased by the Wintons and renamed The Pas Lumber Company) obtained a concession and floated logs down the Carrot River to their mill at The Pas. Judging by the size of the stumps remaining there were very large trees in the hills originally, although operations ceased when the economically accessible timber was removed. In September 1916 the immense Pasquia Forest Preserve became also the Pasquia Game Preserve. In 1940 a great fire burned for months on top of the hills and, though thirty years have elapsed the dead falls still indicate the result of this prolonged blaze. In the 1940's and '50's the first highway reached Hudson Bay and in the 1960's the Otosquen Road (now Highway 109) across the Hills to The Pas was constructed. Highway 163 has been recently constructed to the north of the Hills thereby making them accessible around their perimeter for the first time.

The creation of the Wildcat Hill Wilderness area has been the result of the work of a great many organizations and individuals. The Regina Natural History Society held a series of field trips in the Hills the report of which appeared in the *Blue Jay* in 1964. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society passed in 1965 the first official motion asking for a wilderness area to be set aside and this was in turn supported by the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation in 1965 and 1970. Mr. Mazure brought the matter to the attention of the provincial Homecoming Committee and obtained the support of the town of Hudson Bay. The sympathetic co-operation of the Simpson Lumber Company in withdrawing its cutting rights also contri-

buted in making the proposal possible. Indeed, fishermen, canoeists, naturalists, biologists, as well as many interested private citizens, have all assisted in creating a favourable climate of public opinion. Most important is the foresighted attitude of the Department of Natural Resources without which no progress could have been made.

The fascination of the Pasquia Hills, then, lies in their wild and inaccessible nature and in the knowledge that so many animal and plant species live within them. With the establishing of this first wilderness area all conservationists will experience a sense of pride and a further stimulus to work for the setting aside of other similar areas in the province.

## THE PROPOSED ARCTIC INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE RANGE

by **Everett B. Peterson**, Vancouver, B.C.

Members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society will be interested in following the outcome of the conference on the Arctic International Wildlife Range because in the manner in which it was structured, its goals, and the various follow-up steps this conference could serve as a model for bringing together the interests of conservationists, industrialists and governments and for developing an approach to land management that all can endorse. While we must await the outcome of proposals from this conference, it is evident that it represented an important first step toward designation of an Arctic International Wildlife Range in an area that still possesses, comparatively unchanged, an unusually wide range of landforms and native life, including indigenous people. Of particular importance are the caribou, currently numbering in excess of 100,000, that have an international migration pattern in the area proposed for a Wildlife Range. The

habitat of these large herds is still intact but their future cannot be guaranteed without a substantial range that is permanently protected in both the Yukon Territory and Alaska.

The conference was held at Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, on October 21 and 22, 1970; it was hosted by the Yukon Conservation Society and was under the general chairmanship of Dr. A. R. Thompson, Faculty of Law, University of British Columbia. Conference delegates, 50 from Canada and 14 from the United States, included representatives of the native peoples, Federal and Territorial governments, industries, universities, and several conservation organizations. The broad objective of the conference was to explore ways by which the diverse interests in the extreme northern part of the Yukon Territory might be adjusted to allow designation of a wildlife range in Canada that would be continuous with Alaska's Arctic Wildlife Range.