

1971 SNHS SUMMER MEET AT INDIAN HEAD

by **Rose McLaughlin** and **Mary Skinner**, Indian Head

This year the Saskatchewan Natural History Society field meeting is slated for the weekend of June 11-13 at Indian Head. This beautiful and historic little town lies in the centre of an undulating clay-loam plain with prosperous farmlands interspersed with grasslands and aspen bluffs, broken here and there by narrow, wooded coulees leading into the Qu'Appelle Valley some ten miles to the north. The terrain to be covered by our field trips is bounded on the north by the Qu'Appelle River and Katepwa Lake, on the east by the Red Fox coulee, and on the south by the watershed which divides the Qu'Appelle River Basin from the adjoining Souris River system.

This height of land, reaching a peak of 2200 feet at the Squirrel Hills to the southwest, cradled in glacial times a lake which reached to the northern rim of the Qu'Appelle Valley. Vestigial remains form the present "interlake" chain comprising Lake Marguerite,

Cherry Lake, Deep Lake, Rasperry Lake, Strawberry Lake, and (literally) Dry Lake.

This well-watered region with its wooded coulees and abundant game had always been a favoured haunt of Assiniboine and Plains Cree Indians. Inevitably, by the early 1800's, the Qu'Appelle River became a highway for fur traders and missionaries. Next the Metis — buffalo hunters and pemican vendors — wended their way across the prairie in Red River cart angling from Fort Ellice to the little fur traders' outpost by the springs in the shadow of the Squirrel Hills.

Explorers followed their trail — in 1857, pessimistic Palliser; in 1858, Professor Yule Hind, who first grasped the possibility of linking the Qu'Appelle River with the South Saskatchewan; in 1859, the Scottish Earl of Southesk, writing in his log of the view from the Squirrel Hills looking over the cabri (pronghorn) far out on the plain, and the tangle of wildflowers



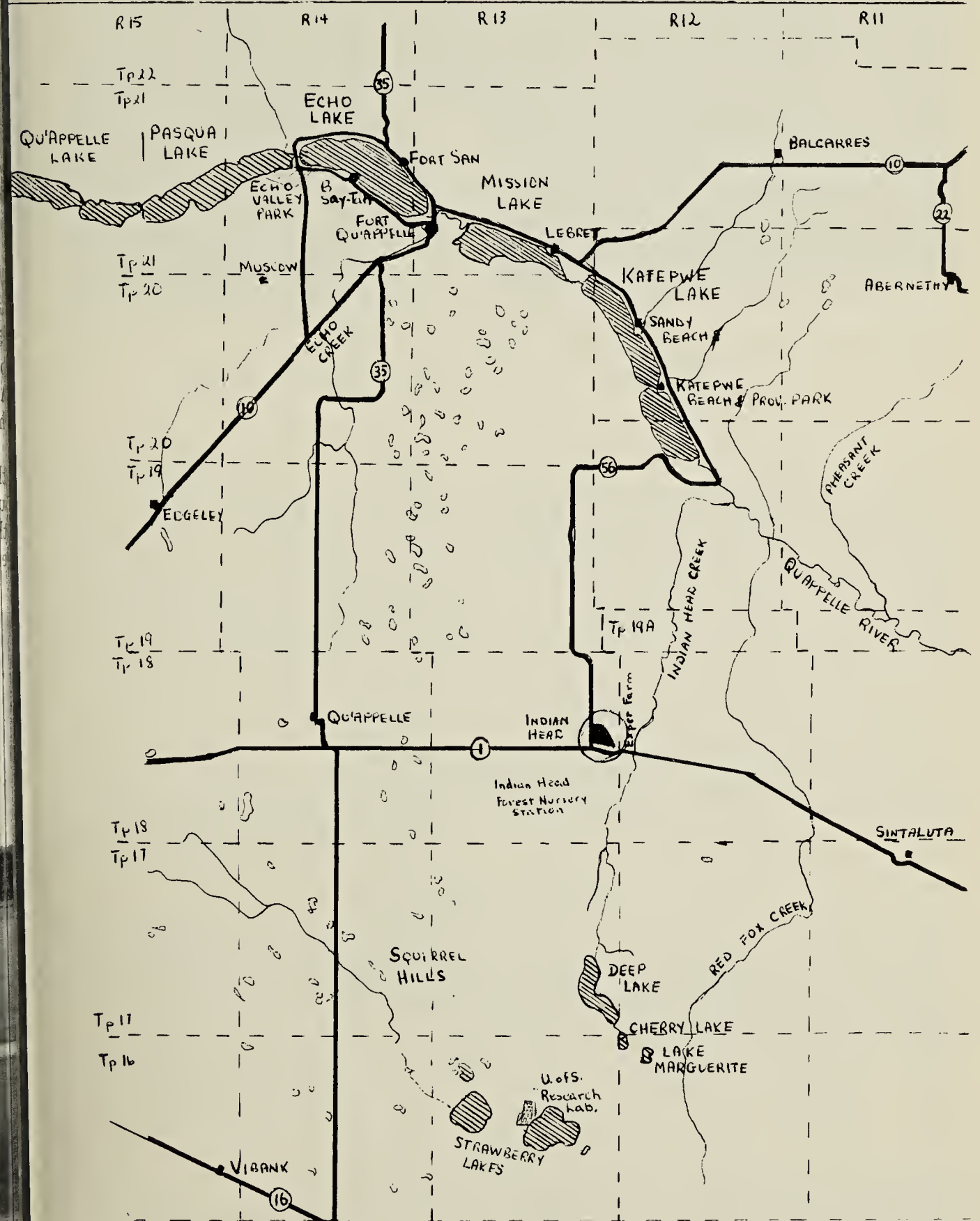
Qu'Appelle Valley at Brown's.

Photo by Mary Skinner, Indian Head

wreathing the prairie grass.

In 1882 came the first land seekers, one jump ahead of the CPR which brought a flood of settlers in its wake. At Indian Head two large-scale farming ventures flourished briefly—Major Bell's nine-mile square Qu'Appelle Valley Farming Company, 1884-1889, and Lord Brassey's "Sunbeam Farm"

Colonization Company, 1889-1895. Today on Highway 56, a mile north of town, the last of the Bell Farm buildings, a round stone barn built like a fort in the year of the Northwest Rebellion, still stands. The Big Farm idea was a failure, but farming thrived. At Indian Head, the Dominion government established an Experi-



Location of SNHS Summer Meeting, June 11-13, 1971.



Dogtown hill, Qu'Appelle Valley

Photo by Mary Skinner, Indian Head

mental Farm in 1887, and a Forestry Farm in 1903. Here in 1902 was formed the Territorial Grain Growers Association, forerunner of the Wheat Pool. At the turn of the century Indian Head shipped out more grain than any other point in the world.

Meantime, settlement in the legendary Qu'Appelle Valley had developed along distinctive lines. From its source near the Elbow to its junction with the Assiniboine River, it had become a variegated chain of provincial and regional parks; Indian reservations; religious, educational, and cultural centres; and private recreational areas, interspersed with farmlands and occasional towns.

Spotlighted today by the hearings of the Qu'Appelle River Basin Commission, the Qu'Appelle Valley stands on the threshold of a new era.

The variety of habitats — lake, stream, marsh, meadow, sand dune, coulee, cut-bank, arid hillside, and stony pasture — makes the locality a challenging terrain for the naturalist. The writers of this article have found locally almost every flower listed in Carmichael's *Prairie Wildflowers*. All

the native trees and shrubs of the parkland are supplemented by many cultivated varieties at the Experimental and Forestry Stations.

Concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds are found, particularly Deep Lake, where Canada Geese nest, and on the river flats, where the Great Blue Heron has become increasingly plentiful of recent years. And of course, Indian Head is Bluebird Country!

In bluffs and coulees white tail deer abound; the beaver is making a comeback; muskrat, porcupine, skunk, r fox, lynx, raccoon, and coyote wait from secret places. Out south there reputed to be a cougar; unfortunately, he is more elusive than the Loch Ness Monster.

For further information about arrangements for the Summer Meet, June 11 - 13, write to Mrs. Rose McLaughlin or Mrs. Mary Skinner, Indian Head.