

THE GLORY OF THE ATHABASCA SAND DUNES

A Photo Essay



*An aerial view of the dunes east of the William River.
The Athabasca Sand Dunes are the largest in Canada.*

Frank Roy



Slow-moving sand begins to overtake muskeg and forest, Little Gull Lake.

Frank Roy



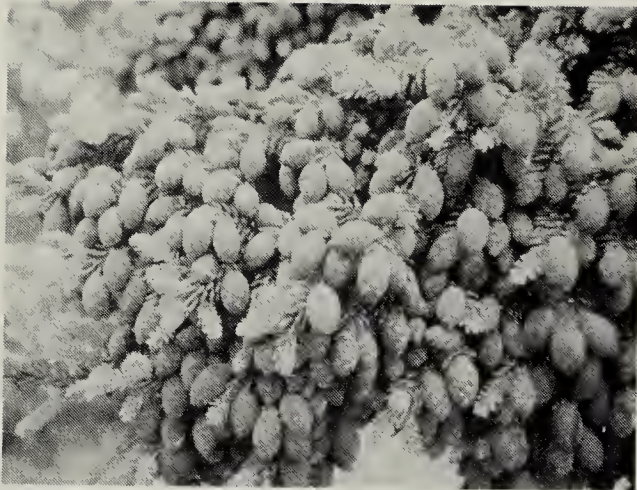
Desert sands and water, side by side.

Frank Roy



Most of its roots exposed, a pine clings desperately to life above the William River.

Frank Roy



The abundance of cones on a black spruce, its last stand against the oncoming sand. Cones that outlast the shifting dunes may produce a new forest.

Frank Roy



The sands move on, now uncovering trees once covered.

Frank Roy



Dennis Tyson and George Tosh look west to the William River Dunes, the largest dune field on the south shore of Lake Athabasca.

Frank Roy



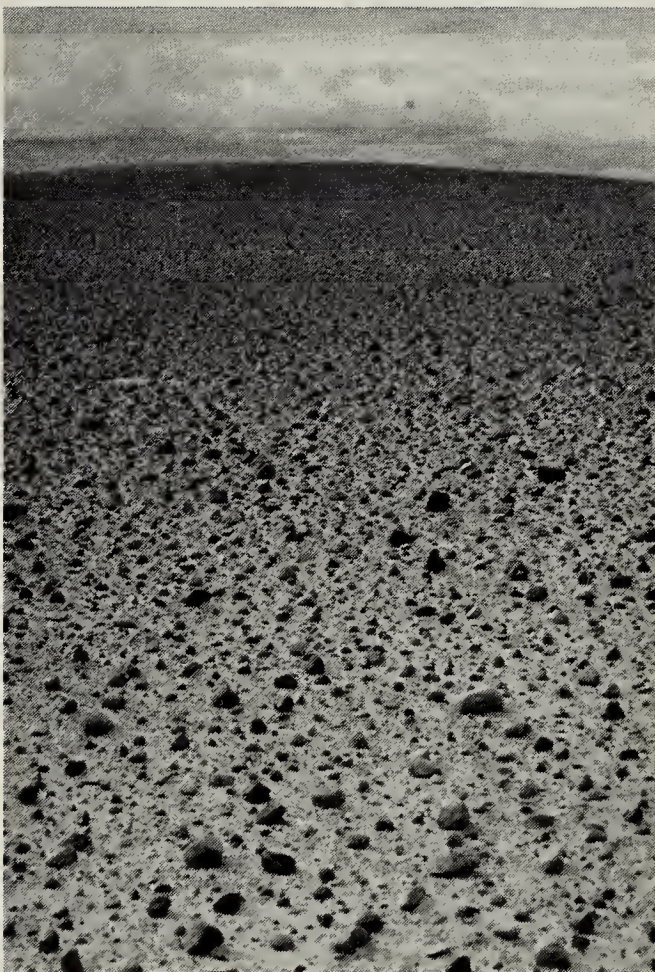
Dunes here rise 50 m above the William River.

Frank Roy



As it nears its mouth, the William broadens to become a braided river: a criss-crossing of shallow streams and sand, deep orange, pink, cinnamon and yellow, "like dunes below the surface."

George Tosh



A "Gobi," a stretch of desert pavement formed by wind erosion; the layer of pebbles prevents further erosion.

Frank Roy



Pebbles rarely touch in the "Gobi" pavement.

Frank Roy



An endemic variety, the Lake Huron Tansy, is a common, sturdy plant with gray-green leaves that help stabilize the dunes wherever it grows.

Ken Coutu



Turnor's Willow: first noted in 1936 by Raup, the botanist who discovered the endemics of the dunes. The bark on mature specimens is as white as that of a birch.

George Tosh



The Felt-leaved Willow, the most impressive of the willow endemics has thick gray-green leaves, typical of plants that adapt to desert-like conditions.

Frank Roy



Like a cluster of African village huts, these tiny mushrooms, less than 1 cm across, grow in moist depressions in the sand.

Ken Coutu



Horsehead landmark, Little Gull Lake.

Frank Roy