

ENCOUNTERS WITH WOLVES AT PRINCE ALBERT NATIONAL PARK

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On the morning of 12 September 1989 Lori Skulski and I drove north on Highway 263 in Prince Albert National Park. The sky was mainly clear and, though cool, it was a nice autumn day. Near the turnoff to Namekus Lake we saw a large dog-like animal crossing the road ahead and as we drove closer we got a better view of it as it disappeared to the trees on the west side of the road. It was definitely a dog of some sort, a large one, uneven grey in colour, with a pointed face. The Namekus Campground was about 3 km away and we saw no vehicles parked nearby. Maybe it was not someone's German Shepherd, maybe it was a ... "Naw, it couldn't be." We had listened to wolves in Prince Albert National Park, but did not expect to be so lucky as to see one so easily.

We drove to the head of the Mud Creek Trail, which is west on the Narrows Road. As we hiked the trail and saw an assortment of birds, we were ever on the lookout for otters (*Lutra canadensis*) as we had seen them in the park before, both in Waskesiu Lake and in Mud Creek itself. We came to roughly midway on the looped trail and we stepped out onto the beach about 50 m from where Mud Creek meets the lake.

Suddenly, across the creek from us, an elk cow and calf charged out of the forest. They continued frantically into the bay of the lake and swam urgently towards the centre of

it. Within seconds four large canines appeared from the same spot and splashed into the water and halted. They stared round-eyed towards the elk. One in up to his chest lapped at the water. They all panted hard.

One of the canines was fairly dark grey, another much lighter, two were black. The lighter one seemed a bit smaller but otherwise they looked very much the same. The one farthest into the bay began staring at us. We stared back through our binoculars. We couldn't believe our luck — wolves. They retreated into the bush after a few minutes. Meanwhile the elk were barely visible to the naked eye, swimming towards the east shore of the bay.

I crossed the creek to where the wolves had been on the beach. As I reached the spot a black one and one other bolted further into the forest from the shrubs at the edge of the beach. I'll bet they weren't half as startled as I was. The tracks were there for us to see (see photo).

Later the same day we saw another grey wolf as it crossed the Narrows Road close to Trippes Beach. We have not seen a wolf since, not in three years or so. However, each time I come across a set of large dog tracks in a place such as Prince Albert National Park, I look very carefully to see if they might be those of a wolf.