

Trip Report: Westman Wilderness Club Expedition to Grasslands National Park

August 31 – September 3, 2026

Jeannine, Andree, James, Olwen, Di & Spirit, Judy, Bert, Bill, Carol, Ed, Linda, Robert, and Audrey gathered to explore the vast, open horizons of Grasslands National Park in Southern Saskatchewan. Crossing between the rugged terrain of the East Block and the historic prairies of the West Block, we experienced the full spectrum of prairie weather, stunning geology, and warm camaraderie.

Day 1: August 31 – Journey to the East Block

The trek began with the 562 km drive from Brandon to Rock Creek Campground in the park's East Block. Though the distance was accurate on paper, winding prairie roads, hills, and stretches of gravel meant slower travel times than initially planned.

Upon arrival, participants settled into their respective set-ups, pitching tents or parking campers. Group members split up to explore the surrounding landscape on both short and longer afternoon hikes.



Rock
Creek
campsite
in the
distance,
photo by
Bert

- **Evening Highlight:** Bill and Carol stayed in an oTENTik, which became the central gathering spot for the club. The group enjoyed dinner and conversation together in the evening. As advertised, the night sky delivered virtually zero light pollution, treating us to a brilliant stargazing experience in the crisp night air.

Day 2: September 1 – East Block Exploration & Route to the West Block

After a pleasant morning, the afternoon turned hot and windy. Club members spent the early part of the day pursuing their preferred activities across the East Block:

- **Cycling:** Bert, Judy, Audrey, Robert, and Andree tackled the Badlands Parkway, a paved, low-traffic road. The group stopped frequently to take in the ancient, eroded geology at various viewpoints.



Bikers in the badlands, photo by Audrey

- **Hiking:** Olwen, James, Ed, Linda, Di, Spirit, and Jeannine set out in smaller groups to explore several hiking trails in the area.

Later in the day, the group packed up camp and transitioned to the West Block, navigating another scenic set of hilly, winding, and gravel roads before arriving at the Frenchman Valley Campground, near Val Marie.

- **Evening Highlight:** The club gathered for a shared dinner at the Coulee Centre, with trees for wind protection, barbecues, great food, and warm company.

Day 3: September 2 – Exploring the West Block



Wednesday morning sunrise - photo by Bert

Members tailored the day to their personal pace and interests:

- **Driving & Sightseeing:** Bill and Carol, who stayed overnight at the convent in Val Marie, drove the 20 km Ecotour road, stopping at short trail loops and points of interest before visiting the group back at the campground. Jeannine, Robert, and Audrey also completed the Ecotour drive to take in the landscape.
- **Cycling Note:** Club members who attempted to bike the Ecotour road found conditions challenging due to sections of loose gravel and washboard surfaces, which limited cycling activities in this section of the park.
- **Hiking:** Olwen, James, Ed, Linda, Di, Spirit, Judy, and Bert formed small groups to trek through the West Block trails according to their preferred distance and difficulty levels.





Photos by Bert from the 70 Mile Butte Trail

- **Evening Gathering & Prairie Storm:** The group met once again at the Coulee Centre for another enjoyable shared supper. The evening ended with sudden dramatic weather as a powerful storm rolled over the valley. High winds, heavy rain and hail battered the campsite. While no major property damage occurred, the tents and sleeping gear belonging to Andree, Judy, and Bert were soaked and rendered unusable for the night. Exercising good judgment, they decamped to a nearby motel in Mankota for shelter.

Day 4: September 3 – Departure

After riding out the evening's storm, the group packed up camp on the morning of September 3 and began the drive back home to Manitoba.

Natural & Environmental Highlights

- **Geology & Topography:** The breathtaking erosion features of the Badlands, deep coulees, sweeping open vistas, and the stark beauty of a treeless landscape.
- **Dark Sky Preserve:** Unmatched stargazing conditions with clear views of the night sky free from urban light pollution.
- **Weather Extremes:** A true demonstration of prairie climate—ranging from cold, clear nights to intense afternoon heat and dry winds, culminating in a dramatic late-night summer thunderstorm.
- **Flora and Fauna Sightings:** Plains Bison, pronghorn antelope, prairie dogs, a rare Greater Short-horned Lizard, and the varied prairie plant life including native cactus species.

James and Olwen logged their hikes and activities at Grasslands National Park in a captioned Google photo album.

The hikes we did included:

- Red Buttes trail (East Block)
- Rock Creek trail (EB)
- Valley of 1000 Devils trail (EB)
- Broken Hills trail (WB)
- Eagle Butte trail (WB)

[You can view our hikes and the participants in the album by clicking here.](#)