

## The Cypress Hills

This jewel of the prairies consists of three separate blocks of hills, one in Alberta and two in Saskatchewan. Rising over 600 metres above the surrounding prairie, they reach an elevation of 1460 metres, the highest point between Thunder Bay, Ontario and the Rocky Mountains. It contains lakes, creeks, marshlands, forests, rare fescue meadows, and ranch lands.

The Cypress Hills have a rich history. They contain two provincial parks and the Fort Walsh National Historic site. There are important archaeological sites, including a 7000 year old Stampede site and a Metis wintering village.

There is always something to do in the Cypress Hills. Take a tour with a local touring company, take a hike with one of the Park's interpreters, or explore on your own!

## Elkwater

Elkwater is nestled on the outskirts of Cypress Hills. The townsite is situated at 1234 metres above sea level. Here you will enjoy many of the luxuries found in a resort-style area, including hotels, restaurants, shopping and more!



Elkwater Townsite

Elkwater can be enjoyed year round. During the winter, a major attraction is the Elkwater Winter Festival, as well as skiing at the Hidden Valley ski slopes just south of Elkwater townsite along Highway 41. In the summer, the Elkwater Rodeo coincides with the Canada Day festivities. Elkwater Lake is great for fishing, boating, waterskiing, a leisurely swim or just enjoying a sunny day on the sandy beach.

## A Natural Habitat

### Birds

Flocks of horned larks and longspurs are the first to arrive in the spring, soon joined by lark buntings, meadow larks, numerous sparrows, kingbirds, yellow-breasted chats, and many more. Broad winged hawks are very numerous over the prairies as are marsh harriers, burrowing owls, and the daylight flying short-eared owls. Prairie falcons and golden eagles can also be found along the rivers and coulees.

Horned larks, sparrow hawks, king birds, night hawks, cliff swallows, robins, black-birds, magpies, snipes, killdeer, and meadowlarks are all seen and heard in the summer and English sparrows and magpies remain throughout the winter. These are only some of the over 200 species of birds found in Cypress County.

### Mammals & Species

Mammals of these prairies include badgers, porcupines, skunks, Richardson's ground squirrels, coyotes, bobcats, lynx, raccoons, prairie hares, white-footed mice, and meadow voles. Other large mammals include elk, antelope, white-tailed deer, moose, and mule deer.

Although sightings are few, Cypress County is home to other creatures such as snakes and scorpions. The most famous snake of the Alberta plains is the rattlesnake, a pit viper with a rattle on the end of its tail. One may also find garter snakes, bull snakes, and hog snakes.



Rattlesnake

### Local Plants

This semi-arid, short grass prairie region hosts a number of native grasses including: Blue grama grass, blue joint, June grass, needle grass, and a few shorter stemmed wheat grasses. Sagebrush, wild rose, wolf willow, and snowberry are the major shrubs scattered over the County grasslands.

Hillsides in the County are covered with prickly pear cactus, pin-cushion cactus and Russian thistles. At higher elevations, along stream valleys and on the northerly exposed slopes of the Cypress Hills, there are forests of lodge-pole pine, white spruce, aspen poplar, and balsam poplar.



Cactus in bloom

Wild black currant, common wild rose, wolf willow, Canadian buffalo-berry, lowbush cranberry, wild gooseberry, Saskatoon berry, wild strawberry, pincherry and chokecherry can also be found in Cypress County.



Cypress County

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Cypress County

Explore  
our History

Southeast Alberta hosts a vast array of plants, animals, scenery, colours, sounds, and textures. It is constantly evolving and changing as the seasons and weather move us on into the future.

## Explore Cypress County with an Historical Tour

### Cypress County is rich in history

There are many historical sites to visit throughout the County.

Begin the tour in Irvine, visit the **Prairie Memories Museum** where displays and exhibits portray life in Irvine as it was long ago.

Also see the recently restored one-room schoolhouse.

From Irvine, travel down **Eagle Butte Road** and experience the scenery and beauty of Cypress County on the way to the Cypress Hills. There are several routes available to the Cypress Hills, take the **Black & White Trail (Hwy 887)** or **Highway 41** to enjoy the transition from prairie to hills.

Check out the **Visitor Centre**, and view audio and visual displays or inquire about interpretive programs for both adults and children.



Next, travel into the **Cypress Hills**. Take a tour alone, with a local touring company or with a Park Interpreter to experience the colourful history of the area.

From **Elkwater**, travel east to the **Constable Graburn Memorial Cairn**. Learn about the violent death of a Mountie. The first death of it's kind in Canada.

Finally, travel south to **Highway 501** to follow the route of the Mounties on their trek out West along the **Red Coat Trail**.

## Take a tour of Cypress County's Fishing Holes & Campgrounds!

Captain John Palliser headed the first official exploratory and scientific group to enter the Cypress Hills. On July 28, 1859 he wrote, in his journal:

"They (Cypress Hills) are covered with timber, much of which is very valuable for building purposes. The soil is rich, and the supply of water abundant. These hills are a perfect oasis in the desert we have traveled."

Start with **Cavan Lake**, just south of the **TransCanada Highway on Range Road 40** and visit this very busy campground. There is fishing in the lake there as well.



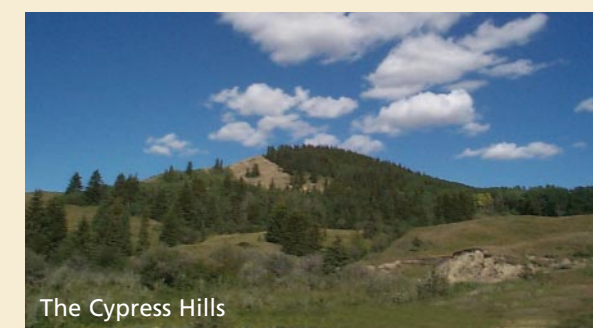
Cavan Lake

Next, move on to **Elkwater Lake** where one can take a boat out on the lake and fish or just fish from the shore. In Elkwater, there are 12 campgrounds with over 500 campsites, ranging from walk-in tent sites to full power and water hookups. Winter services are available too.

**Reesor Lake** is just a short drive or hike from Elkwater. Enjoy trout fishing with either a boat or from the shore.



Reesor Lake



The Cypress Hills

To the west of **Elkwater** along the **Eagle Butte Road** is the **Bullshead Reservoir**. South of the Bullshead Reservoir is **Michelle Reservoir**. Both are nice spots to fish and camp as well.

Also visit **Golden Sheaf Park** (also known as Rattlesnake Park) west on **Highway 523** for great fishing and a relaxing visit.

Round out the tour by visiting **Sandy Point** in the north of the County, on **Highway 41**. The County has a great little campsite by the bridge and there is fishing and boating on the South Saskatchewan River.



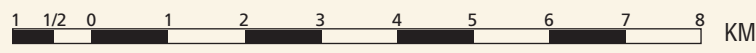
Sandy Point

Elkwater Lake

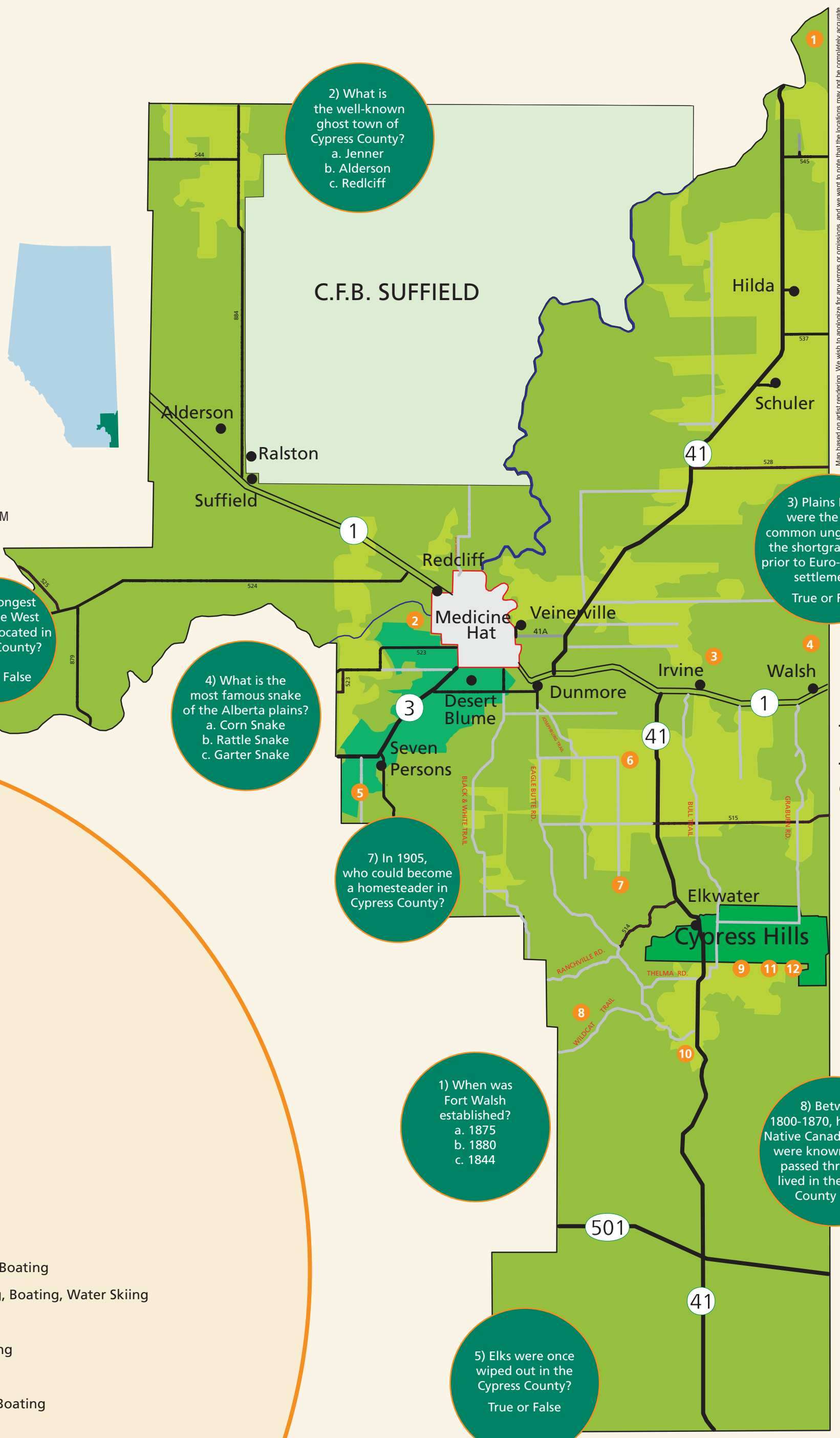


# Cypress County

- Trans-Canada Highway
- Primary Highway
- Secondary Highway
- County Road



- Dryland Farming
- Grazing
- Irrigated Land



2) What is the well-known ghost town of Cypress County?  
 a. Jenner  
 b. Alderson  
 c. Redcliff

3) Plains Bison were the most common ungulate on the shortgrass plains prior to Euro-American settlement?  
 True or False

6) The longest bar in the West was once located in Cypress County?  
 True or False

4) What is the most famous snake of the Alberta plains?  
 a. Corn Snake  
 b. Rattle Snake  
 c. Garter Snake

7) In 1905, who could become a homesteader in Cypress County?

1) When was Fort Walsh established?  
 a. 1875  
 b. 1880  
 c. 1844

8) Between 1800-1870, how many Native Canadian groups were known to have passed through or lived in the Cypress County area?

| SERVICES      | Gas | Dining | Accommodations | Grocery | Camping | Fishing | Swimming | Boating | Ski Resort | Golf |
|---------------|-----|--------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|------------|------|
| Dunmore       | ●   | ●      |                | ●       |         |         |          |         |            | ●    |
| Elkwater      | ●   | ●      | ●              | ●       | ●       | ●       | ●        | ●       | ●          | ●    |
| Hilda         |     | ●      | ●              |         |         |         |          |         |            |      |
| Irvine        | ●   | ●      | ●              | ●       | ●       |         |          |         |            |      |
| Medicine Hat  | ●   | ●      | ●              | ●       | ●       | ●       | ●        |         |            | ●    |
| Ralston       | ●   |        |                | ●       |         |         |          |         |            |      |
| Redcliff      | ●   | ●      | ●              | ●       | ●       | ●       | ●        |         |            | ●    |
| Schuler       | ●   |        |                | ●       |         |         |          |         |            |      |
| Seven Persons | ●   | ●      |                | ●       |         |         |          |         |            |      |
| Suffield      | ●   | ●      |                |         |         |         |          |         |            |      |
| Walsh         | ●   | ●      |                | ●       | ●       |         |          |         |            |      |

- 1) Sandy Point Municipal Recreation Area: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 2) Golden Sheaf Municipal Recreation Area: Camping, Fishing, Boating, Water Skiing
- 3) Irvine Prairie Memories Museum
- 4) Walsh Tourist Information Centre: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 5) Murray Lake Reservoir: Fishing, Boating
- 6) Cavan Lake Municipal Recreation Area: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 7) Bullshead Reservoir: Fishing, Boating
- 8) Michelle Reservoir: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 9) Spruce Coulee Reservoir: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 10) Hidden Valley Ski Resort
- 11) Reesor Lake: Camping, Fishing, Boating
- 12) Graburn Gap: Constable Graburn Memorial, Guest Ranch, Camping, Horseback Riding

TRIVIA ANSWERS 1) In 1875, Major James Morrow Walsh, Jerry Potts, and about 30 men were sent to the Cypress Hills. The 160 mile trek was completed on June 7, 1875 and the construction of a fort, stables, and other buildings was completed in 6 weeks; 2) Alderson. Take a trip back in time touring this incredible ghost town. : 3) TRUE; 4) The rattlesnake – a pit viper with a rattle on the end of its tail; 5) TRUE; Elk had to be reintroduced to the hills after having been wiped out originally by 1909; 6) True. The Alamo Hotel in Suffield was once known as the longest bar in the west. ; 7) Under Homestead regulations of 1905, those who could make entry for a homestead had to be 18 years of age; a British subject; and had to pay a fee of \$10; 8) At least nine including: Cree, Assiniboine, the Gros Ventre, Blood, and Piegans. Others known to the area were the Crow, Blackfoot, Arapaho, and the Kailispel, and others from west of the Rocky Mountains.

Map based on artist rendering. We wish to apologize for any errors or omissions, and we want to note that the locations may not be completely accurate.