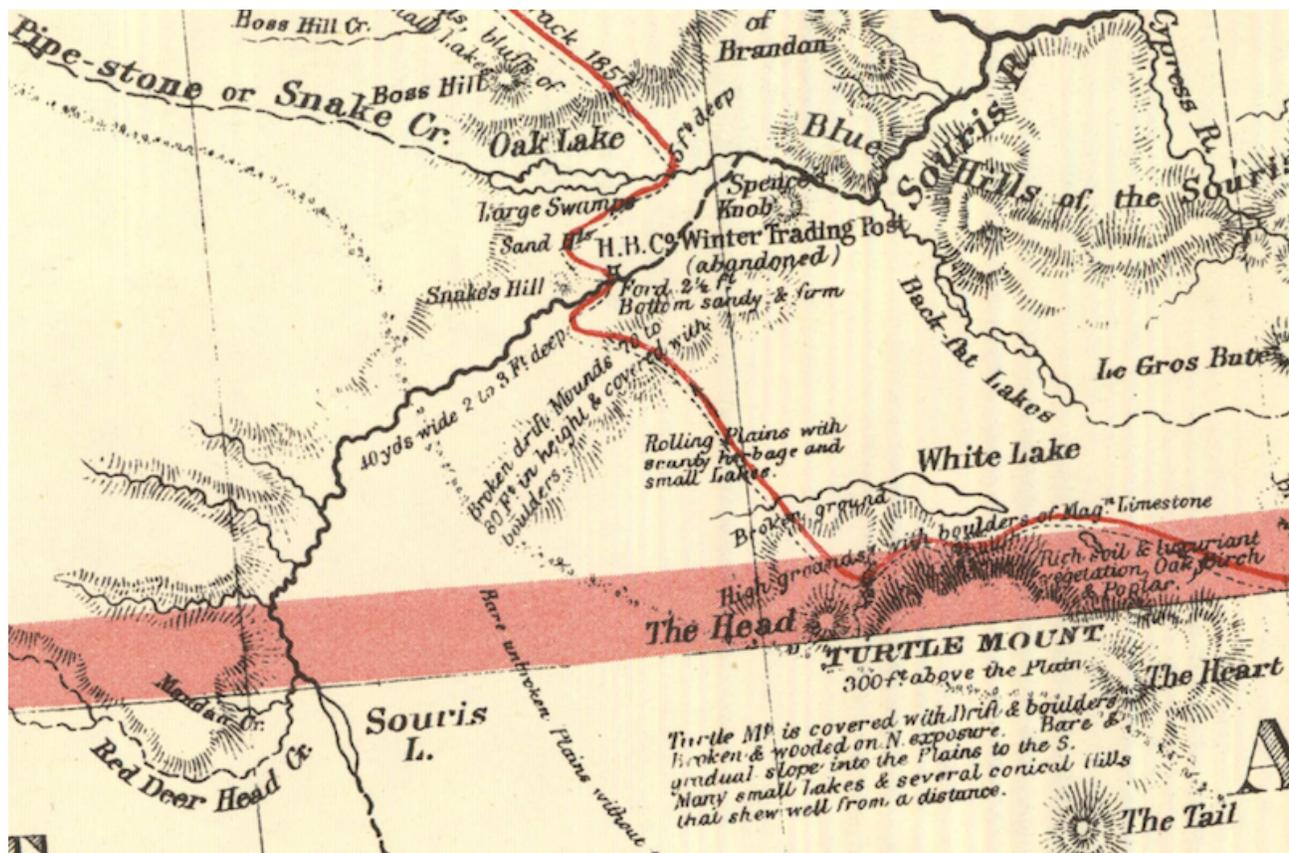


## The Land in 1860



The dominant features of southwestern Manitoba were well known before the era of European settlement.

The first European fur traders and explorers created maps based on their observations and information they received from the Aboriginal people who lived here.

The Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies employed cartographers to map the region.

In the 1850 and 60's the governments of Canada and Great Britain sent expeditions to the west, hoping to prove that this land was suitable for agriculture. This map from about 1860 was produced by one of those expeditions.

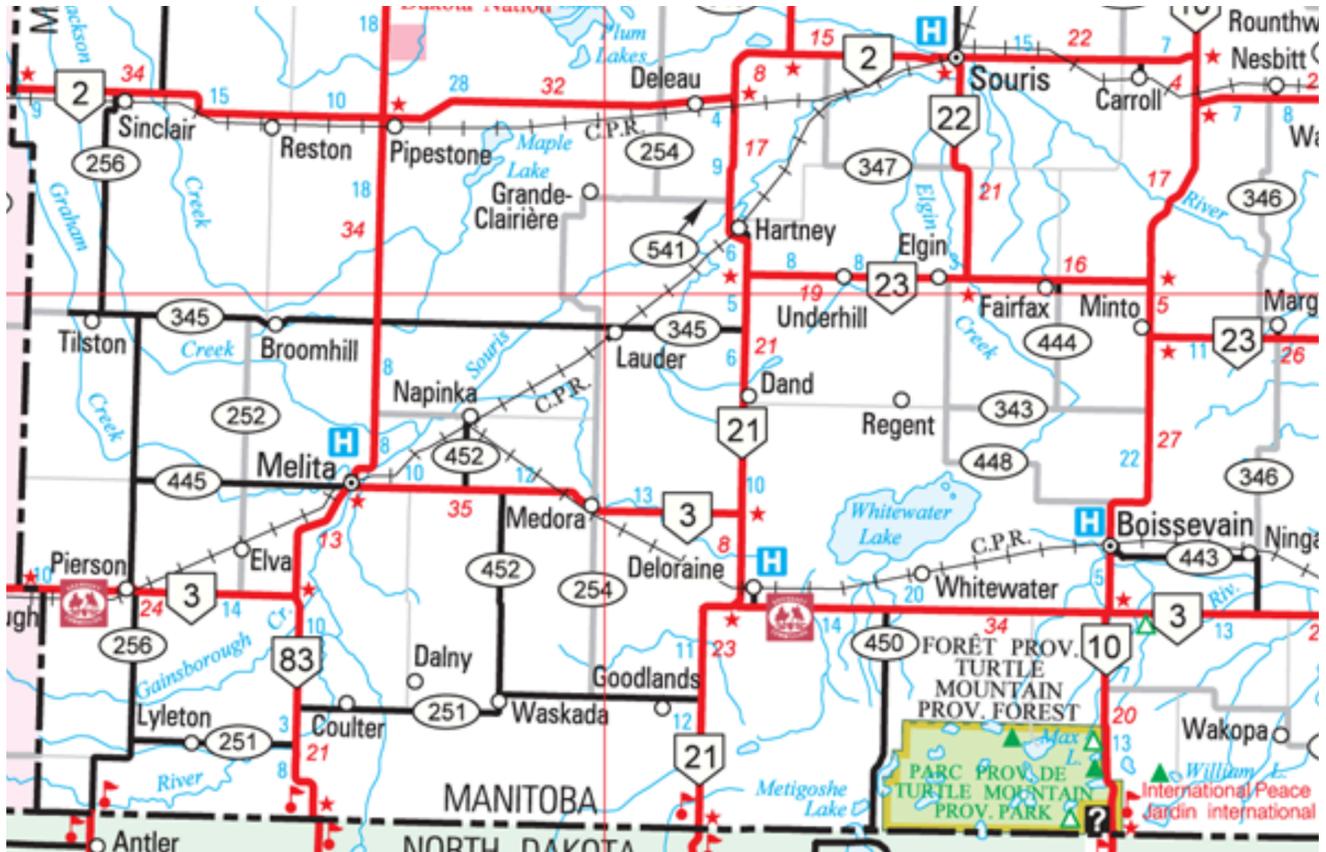
Details of the features of Turtle Mountain, the Souris River and Whitewater Lake were shown.

Find Oak Lake – just under it is the notation "Large Swimming Sand" – indicating the range of sand hills that stretch from there south to the Souris River.

The only European "settlement" marked on this map is the "H.B.C. Winter Trading Post" near where Hartney is located today.

The only "road" is the "Track" that runs from the top to Turtle Mountain.

## The Land Today



After 150 years some of the names have changed – some remain.

Some of the creeks flowing into the Souris River have been re-named.

But the main features remain.

In between the time of the “old” map on the previous page, and this modern map, many towns and villages have been created – some of those have disappeared. Many railway lines have been built – most of those have also been removed.

And of course thousands of kilometres of roads have been built – only the main ones appear on most highway maps.

# Turtle Mountain

About a hundred million years ago Southwestern Manitoba was part of the Western Interior Seaway. The climate was a lot warmer than today, and huge reptiles called mosasaurs were the toughest beasts around. Then, about 66 million years ago an asteroid crashed into southern Mexico. The blast was so strong that the dust and debris blocked the sun and slowly cooled the climate. In a short period 75 percent of all species became extinct, including most of the dinosaurs.

About two million years ago we entered a series of Ice Ages. Giant glaciers covered the land, and then melted off. It was a long process and it created the landscape we know today

There were long periods between the visits of the glaciers. We're in one of them now.



*The view from a Lookout Tower on Turtle's Head.*

As the ice melted, material that was carried by the glaciers was deposited over Turtle Mountain. By about 12,800 years ago Turtle Mountain was free of ice. As the last glacier retreated it carved many shallow lakes and wetlands and shaped the hills. Many steep ravines were shaped by streams of run-off

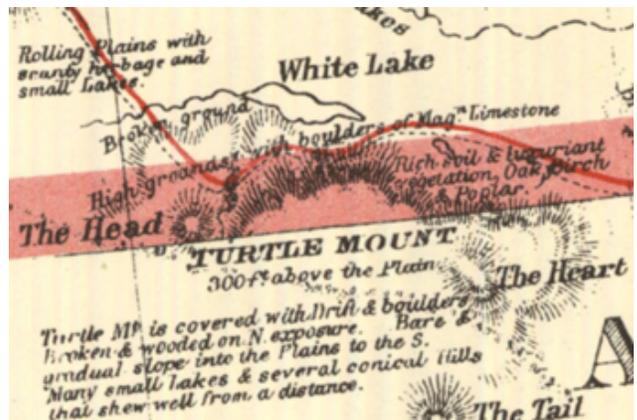
waters flowing from the high ground to the low plains.

Turtle Mountain, surrounded by the flat prairie of the Souris Plains, was one of the first things travellers to this region noticed. What is known as the Turtle's Head at the western end of Turtle Mountain is the second highest point in all of Manitoba.



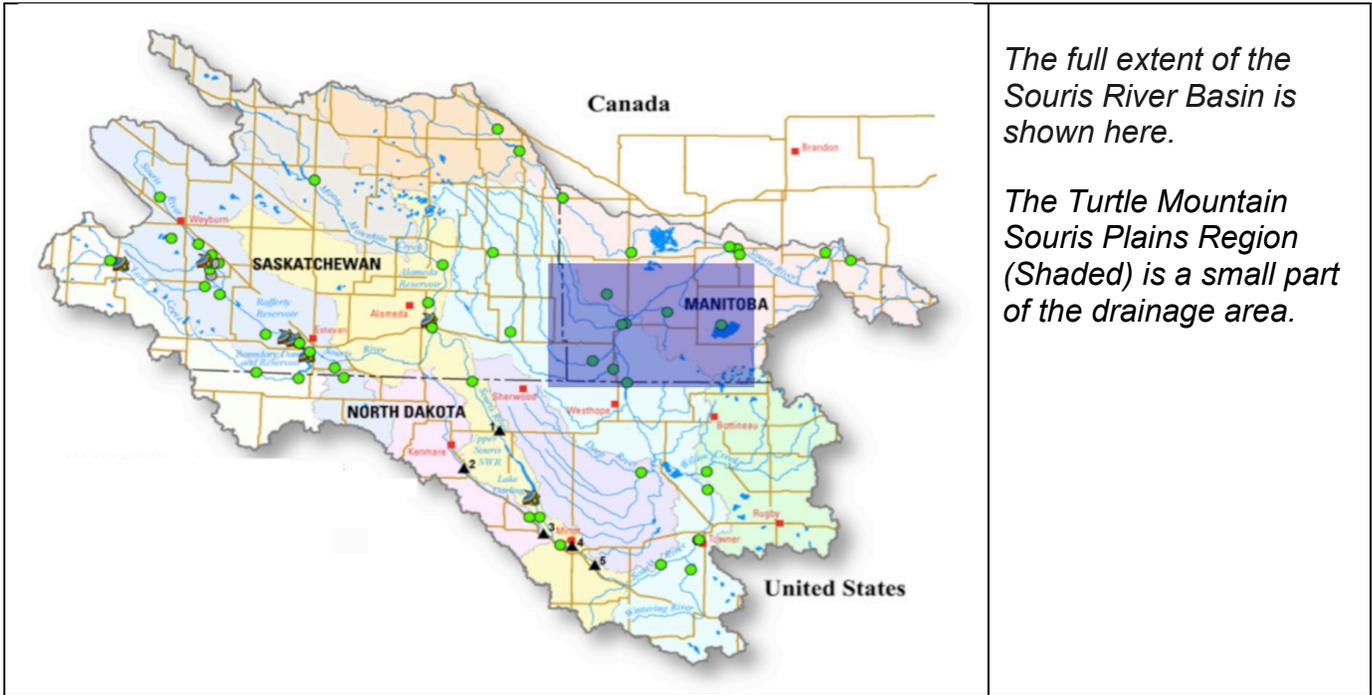
*William Lake, with The Turtle's Head in the distance.*

The wood, shelter, water and game that it provided were important, to the aboriginal hunters, to explorers, fur traders, and the first European farmers who settled here.



*This map from 1860 shows the features of Turtle Mountain.*

# The Souris River



A traveller to the Southwest Corner can see Turtle Mountain from quite a distance. Another important feature of the region, the Souris River is often hidden in a deep valley and might not be noticed until you were overlooking it.

Here in Manitoba we see only about a quarter of the Souris River drainage basin. It begins north of Weyburn, Saskatchewan. It then travels through southeastern Saskatchewan and northern North Dakota where it makes a giant U-turn (known as the Souris Loop) before entering Manitoba south of Melita. From the border to Souris the stream is gentle as it twists and turns its way through rolling hills. It then drops 480 meters in elevation by the time it empties into the Assiniboine River, picking up speed as it passes through a deep valley.

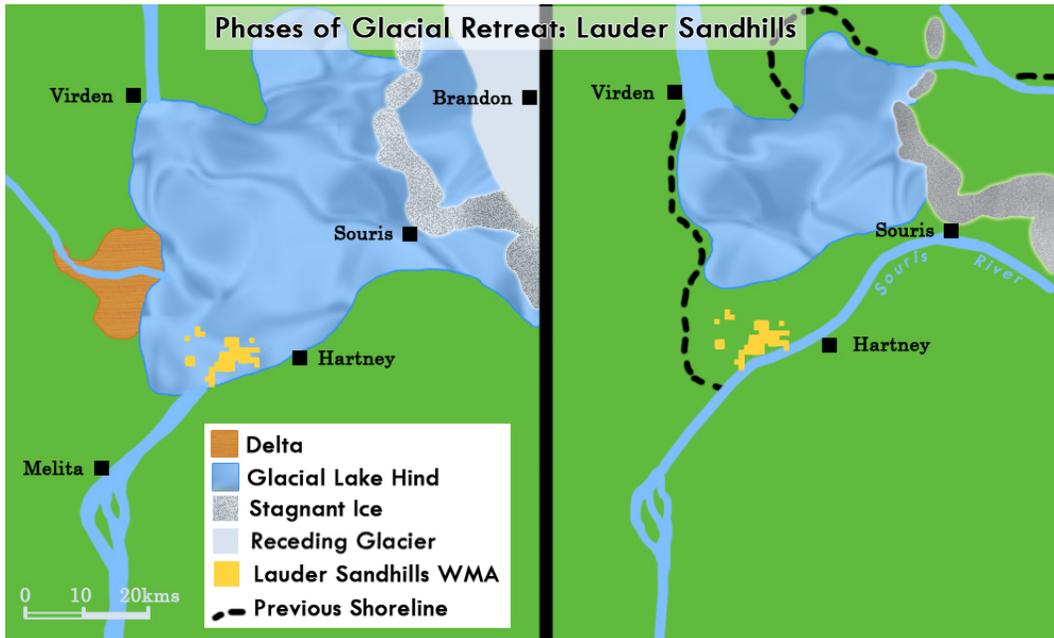
On these wide-open dry plains, the river valley offered wood, water and shelter. Plains hunters camped on the banks. They trapped and hunted the animals that also took shelter there.



In recent years, several dams have been built in an attempt to control the flooding tendencies of the Souris River but it has proven tough to control. In recent years floods have caused a great deal of damage and expense. The Souris River is a commanding feature of southwestern Manitoba. Whether flowing mildly between its banks, or rising to threaten land and livelihood, it continues to be a central feature in the lives of those who live alongside it

## The Lauder Sandhills

About 10,000 years ago, when the glaciers from the last ice age were melting, huge lakes were formed. Glacial Lake Hind covered the area around present-day Hartney. Huge deposits of sand formed a delta where a river ran into the still body of Lake Hind. Today they are the Lauder Sandhills.



As the climate kept changing, the land was at times marshes, lakes and sloughs, and at times, sand dunes.

The nearby Souris River and surrounding grasslands made the hills a good place for the buffalo and for hunters.



Over time trees and vegetation made this an attractive place to live.



*The Lauder Sandhills Wildlife Management Area was established in 1971, originally to protect the winter habitat of the white-tailed deer.*

## Whitewater Lake

When the glaciers that once covered all of Canada began to disappear about 12,000 years ago they left huge lakes and rivers. Most of those lakes have disappeared but Whitewater Lake is the last evidence of Lake Souris, which once covered the region between Turtle Mountain and the Souris River.



It is large, about 20 kilometres long, but shallow. It is fed by creeks from Turtle Mountain during heavy rains and the spring run-off.

Because it is shallow, a dry spell, or a few dry years, can really affect its size. It has gone dry on several occasions. In 1913 the lake dried up, and government engineers surveyed the land, reporting that it should be sold as farmland. But by the next spring it was a lake again!

During the “Dirty Thirties” and the 1980’s the lake also disappeared and trails led across it as people made short-cuts.

The plains around Whitewater Lake were well-known to the Nakota, and later, the Métis as a good place to find buffalo. The last buffalo anyone saw in the Turtle Mountain area was spotted just to the east of Whitewater Lake in 1883.

Fur-bearing animals, such as mink and muskrat, attracted trappers and traders to the region. The muskrat furs that came from

Whitewater Lake were of especially good quality and fetched a good price.

With the arrival of homesteaders the frozen lake served as a road. Teams of horses transported loads of grain from farms on the north side of the lake to Whitewater village on the southern shore. Firewood from Turtle Mountain was hauled in caravans of sleighs to homes north of the lake, and the road across the ice often became a very busy highway.

### Bird Sanctuary

Whitewater Lake was the traditional nesting grounds for the whooping cranes until their near extinction around 1880. Though the number of birds on the lake in modern times does not come close to the numbers found during settler days, it remains an important stopping place during migrations. A sanctuary on the southern shore is a popular spot among birders.

## Grassland

Grassland is the name of a municipality formed in 2015 when the Town of Hartney joined the Municipalities of Cameron and Whitewater. The name refers to the large prairie, between the Souris River and Turtle Mountain, that is another important geographic feature of Southwestern Manitoba.

These plains were a vital resource to Aboriginal Peoples, to Metis hunters and traders, to pioneer homesteaders, and now to modern and large-scale farmers.



A grassland is a region where the average annual precipitation is enough to support grasses, but has few trees. Grasses can survive fires because they grow from the bottom instead of the top. Their stems can grow again after being burned off.

Fires help certain plants by clearing ground cover, which helps the germination of seeds, and by nourishing the soil with freshly burnt vegetation.

### Manitoba's Mixed-Grass Prairie

This landscape developed from years of low precipitation and regular prairie fires. These fires kept trees from growing except along rivers and streams and allowed for the wide areas of prairie grasses that fed the huge buffalo herds. These herds provided the plains people with nearly everything they needed for a good life.

With the arrival of the European traders, the buffalo served an additional purpose as a trade good – the fuel of the fur-trade.

### Breadbasket to the World

The land that was perfect for the buffalo was also good for growing grain and feeding livestock. The soil is deep and dark. The upper layers are the most fertile because of the buildup of many layers of dead branching stems and roots.



*Harvesting in the good old days.*

Farmers were able to adapt the land for agriculture.

### A Home for the Birds



*A Manitoba Grassland Birding Trail near Lyleton.*

The grasslands of Southwestern Manitoba are known for their variety of birds. Trails and Wildlife Management Areas have been developed and visitors come from all over the world.