

It's a good day up here when I can see far in every direction. I can relax - into the hum of life. I'm Turtle Mountain. I've been overlooking this area for 13,000 years – north and south of the Medicine Line. Across the oak savannah. Like it or lump it. I've become an unrepentant know-it-all!

My mama, the ice age glacier, dropped me and left me to mature as best I could. I've done well, if I have to say so myself. I'm a Blue Jewel they say.

But, I'm not alone. I have siblings! Porcupine Hills, Moose, Duck and Riding Mountains are part of my "mountain range". We're around the western edge of what was a massive lake.

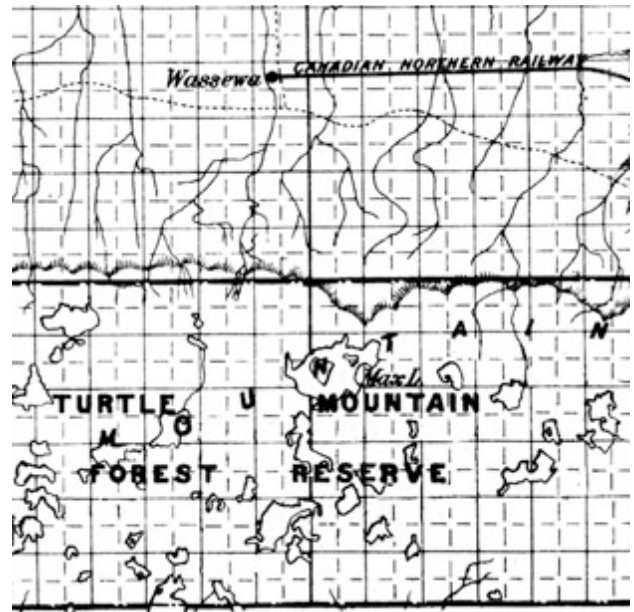
You see, Mama glacier was so heavy she compressed the earth – leaving a depression that filled with her melt water - Lake Agassiz. So what happened to the lake? Well, it's still happening! With the weight of the glacier gone, the earth is springing back – causing water to flow north into Hudson's Bay. Really! Whitewater is one of the few puddles left behind.

But, it's not always like watching the prairies drain. Fires get me excited. Yes, I know. Fire's a natural thing. It cleans up the dead stuff and germinates a ton of new growth. But, so much pain for that gain. I'm thinking there's a calmer way.

The big fire in 1898 showed me a couple things. I noticed big fires happen when big animal numbers go down. The biggest fires were in the later 1800s when bison numbers dropped and humans hadn't yet ploughed the land or built roads; when bison came through in millions, eating everything – especially in dry years. There was little grass for a fire to grab hold of. Those earlier days humans set fires to attract bison. Fresh green grass follows a fire. Their fires rarely got away, though, because the grass was well grazed. I think you call it 'control burning' these days.

The morning of the '98 fire, I smelled smoke

early and felt the wind come up all crazy. Our only hope was a soaking rain. Nothing came. After the smoldering was done, only island trees remained. In the dismal days that followed, I had my second realization. The fewer trees I have, the less rain I get. With no trees, it was pretty tough attracting a rain cloud.



I full on love science! Paying attention – and getting smarter. If my Mama was still around, she'd likely recommend modesty as well. Hmm. Sorry Whitewater, you're more than a puddle ...you're almost a lake. See, I can be repentant!

David Neufeld adapted 'Overlooking Fire' from a story written for Vantage Points 1 and 4.