

WELCOME to “A Layering of Footprints”



Through his introduction, Bob Caldwell helped me realise that the story we are telling in this *Vantage Points* is one of thousands upon millions of footprints.

I would like to take Bob’s idea a step farther and include not only southwest Manitoba’s relatively recent peoples, but the Assiniboine, people such as the Mound Builders, and earlier First Nations who called themselves by names that we do not know. Then think about the footprints left by the bison—galloping across the landscape and raising a noise like thunder no longer heard on the prairies. These animals led early peoples to water, taught them where the best places to ford rivers were, and ultimately provided them with food, tools and shelter.

More recently the prairie sod felt the hoof prints of horses pulling red river carts as Métis bison hunters traversed the land; these trails were followed again by the pack trains of the Boundary Commission Survey, and later by covered wagons pulled by oxen that heralded the beginning of European settlement; then the footprints of workhorses were imbedded into the soil as they crossed fields hundreds of times pulling the plow. Later the footprints of the era became those of the “Iron Horse” as railway beds were raised and tracks laid down. A few decades afterwards, the first automobile tires were felt on town streets and gravelled roads.

And through it all, humans were driving these methods of transportation, with their needs, dreams and desires. The articles in this *Vantage Points* aim to bring to light the layers of peoples, industries and activities that have moved over this landscape: the tusk of a woolly mammoth that dates back 34,000 years; archaeologists interpreting artifacts that suggest horticulture was seen hundreds of years in advance of European settlers; fur trading companies struggling to gain an upper hand in the industry; enterprising Métis finding a particular niche for themselves; the first of the Numbered Treaties being signed in Canada; and early settlers establishing communities along with the necessary social centres: general stores, schools and churches.

A single footprint is nearly invisible; quickly erased by wind and weather. It is when dozens, hundreds and thousands of footprints become layered on top of one another that we see evidence of animals or people passing; trails are cut into the landscape and followed by others. The footprint itself is not what we are seeing—it is the evidence that people were here, and remain here, by relying on the steps taken by those who have come this way before.

I hope you enjoy!

Teyana Neufeld - Researcher/writer

★ Check out the TM-SPHA website: www.vantagepoints.ca ★

Turtle Mountain – Souris Plains Heritage Association:

Our Southwest Manitoba association of Councils, Locals, Municipalities and Citizens aims to:

- ★ celebrate oral histories
- ★ protect heritage sites
- ★ attract visitors
- ★ promote creative and partnered economic development
- ★ have this culturally and environmentally diverse region recognized internationally for its beauty and spirited co-operation