

# Trans Canada Trek Towards UPEI: Manitoba

by Rebecca Shorten

Part 4 of 9

Manitoba is an interesting province. Almost right away you can see the cross over from prairie into Canadian Shield, especially further north. When we crossed the border from Saskatchewan, we kept driving east towards Brandon where we turned north to Riding Mountain National Park. Riding Mountain is a beautiful park with tall coniferous trees and pretty little lakes scattered throughout. We stayed near Moon Lake that night, and there were lots of stars out playing in the night sky but the moon was too low in the sky to see.

Then next day, however, was the day I had been looking forward to pretty much the whole trip. I got to go to Gimli. I know you're asking, "Where the heck is Gimli?" Well, it is on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg and we had to drive straight across from Riding Mountain, over a little narrow bridge over Lake Manitoba, through many little towns, and south along the shore of Lake Winnipeg to get to it. We figured that would be a nicer way of getting to it than just driving north from Winnipeg. We were right.

Last fall at the college I transferred from in BC, I took a History of Western Canada course and my essay was about the Icelandic people who came and settled in Gimli, Manitoba. The Dominion of Canada gave them their own reserve which the Icelanders called Nýja Iceland whereby they had their own newspaper (in Icelandic), their own government, and their own constitution. Of course at that time, Manitoba was postage stamp sized and New Iceland was outside

Manitoba in the District of Keewatin. But even after Manitoba was expanded, New Iceland remained self governing until about 1885. While my friend lay basking in the sun on the beach, I explored their museum, which also had an exhibit from Newfoundland visiting them about Viking explorations, which was also very cool.

When I was finished in the museum, we left Gimli and looked for a campsite, and found one just north of Selkirk near a provincial park that wasn't too promising for camping. This campground is called Willow Springs, beside the Red River, and we had the whole place to ourselves. Except for all the mosquitoes and frogs. Every time we walked through the grass, 5 or 6 frogs would scatter. It was really neat and the smarter (and bigger) ones would congregate on the porch of the bathrooms to catch the bugs that were attracted to the lights there. We also saw a pelican fly by. The mosquitoes were merciless and we retired to the tent without dinner for some much needed sleep.

The next day we went to Winnipeg (mainly just to go to Mountain Equipment Co-op), and also to Lower Fort Garry near Selkirk. Lower Fort Garry is a really neat fort and is the oldest stone fur trading post still intact in North America. Lower Fort Garry not only traded furs with the local Indians, but also traded produce with the local farmers at the nearby Red River Settlement, thereby reducing their food supplies transportation costs. We had a lot of fun poking around all the buildings and meeting characters dressed up to fit the period.

By about 3:00 pm that day we reached the Manitoba/Ontario border.

