



by **BRUCE MASTERMAN**

10 GREAT ESCAPES



Photo by: Mike Sturk



the BEATEN TRACK in Alberta

NO. 1

ANN AND SANDY CROSS CONSERVA- TION AREA

Rancher Sandy Cross was the son of A.E. Cross, founder of the Calgary Brewing Company and one of the *Big Four* ranchers who bankrolled the first Calgary Stampede in 1912. In 1945, Sandy Cross started buying land just southwest of Calgary to raise prize purebred cattle. He developed a deep love of the rolling, forested landscape and the many species of wildlife that lived there. Cross could have sold it for millions, but instead he donated 4,800 acres to the province, to be preserved forever as a conservation area, to be used for light recreation and as an outdoor classroom for students and others to learn about the environment. Thousands of people visit every year. crossconservation.org

THE ROCKIES with Banff and Jasper National Parks, the Calgary Stampede, Kananaskis Country, Dinosaur Provincial Park, West Edmonton Mall, Crowsnest Pass ... by all means, visit them all.

Beyond Alberta's world famous tourist attractions lies a province of stunning contrasts: from haunting badlands to lush forests to bald prairie, and just about everything in between, including what many people believe to be the best fresh water fishing in the world. The people are friendly, the towns are charming, the prices are reasonable, the spaces are wide open and you'll always be welcome.

Here, in no particular order, are 10 terrific off the-beaten-track places to visit in Alberta this summer, or any summer.

NO. 2



NO. 3



Photo Courtesy of Rosebud Theatre

Photo Courtesy of Bomber Command Museum of Canada

2. ROSEBUD THEATRE

It's the little theatre that could. Located in the hamlet of Rosebud, about an hour northeast of Calgary, Rosebud Theatre grew out of a School of the Arts launched in 1973. The theatre was designed to raise money for the school, but it soon took on a life of its own. Employing acting students from around the world and putting on top-notch performances, the theatre has developed a faithful and growing fan base. Performances are in the historic Opera House, with tiered seating for 220. This season's shows include W.O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid: Prairie Seasons* which runs May 27 to August 28. The brand new Rosebud Mercantile building, featuring a meeting area and in-house caterer, will officially open in May. www.rosebudtheatre.com

3. BOMBER COMMAND MUSEUM OF CANADA

Drivers heading south from Calgary on Highway 2 can't miss this wonderful museum in the little town of Nanton, known as the Antique Capital of Alberta. Parked outside, most days, is a full-size Avro Lancaster Bomber. It's flanked by two smaller jet aircraft mounted on iron pedestals. The Lancaster is a four-engine heavy bomber used in the Second World War by the Royal Canadian Air Force, and other countries. Only a few are left in the world. The volunteer-built museum honours those who were part of Bomber Command and the Commonwealth Air Training Plan. In addition to the Lancaster – you can actually get in it during a guided tour – the 23,000-square-foot museum features other aircraft, military

vehicles, displays (including flight simulators) and other memorabilia. www.bombercommandmuseum.ca

4. BERTHA LAKE

There's a lot to be said about this little high-country gem in Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta's southwest corner. For starters, it is in Waterton, the province's least-known national park – and in my books also the best. It's small, at 525 square miles, isn't as commercialized as Banff and Jasper, and there's a good chance of having a popular hiking trail to yourself. In winter, it's even less crowded; the townscape in winter has more bighorn sheep and deer than people. The hike to Bertha is just over five kilometres, mainly uphill and you'd be wise to carry bear spray, but the effort is worth it. The

lake sits in a spectacular amphitheatre-shaped alpine valley, with stunning views of Mt. Richards, Mt. Alderson and Bertha Peak. The lake has a good population of rainbow trout that can be fooled with small spinners and flies. You need a national parks fishing permit. A walking trail surrounds the lake, named for early Waterton resident Bertha Ekelund, who went to jail for counterfeiting. A smitten park warden gave the lake her name. www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/waterton

5. SMALL TOWN RODEOS

"It's boots and chaps. It's cowboy hats. It's spurs and latigo. It's the ropes and reins and the joy and the pain. And they call the thing rodeo." Garth Brooks's song Rodeo touches a chord in rural Alberta, which hosts hundreds of rodeos, at all skill levels. There's something special about hitting a small-town rodeo and seeing the same pro cowboys and cowgirls who, at season's end, will compete at the Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton, or even the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas. At small town rodeos, fans sit so close to the action they can taste the dust, and dodge dirt clumps thrown by bucking horses and bulls. There's a chance to share a beer with a champion cowboy or two-step with pro barrel racers at the rodeo dance. With the season running from March to late September, choose from more than 30 small-town pro rodeos, from Teepee Creek to Taber. To find one near you, check out www.rodeocanada.com

6. CYPRESS HILLS INTERPROVINCIAL PARK

Like a desert oasis, this park tucked in the province's southeastern corner just seems to appear out of nowhere. Half an hour after leaving Medicine Hat east-bound on the Trans-Canada Highway, from which you see nothing but prairie and antelope, suddenly Highway 41 south takes you to this amazing place of lush forests, wetlands, grasslands, lakes and viewpoints from which you can see for more than 100 kilometres (and enjoy spectacular sunsets). Hiking, boating, fishing, camping, watching wildlife – over 220 bird species and 47 mammals, including elk and moose – golfing and even hitting the beach are some of the



NO. 5



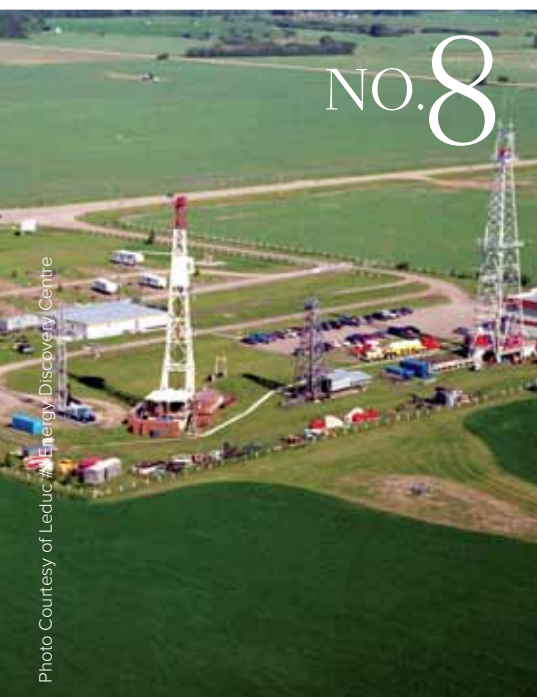
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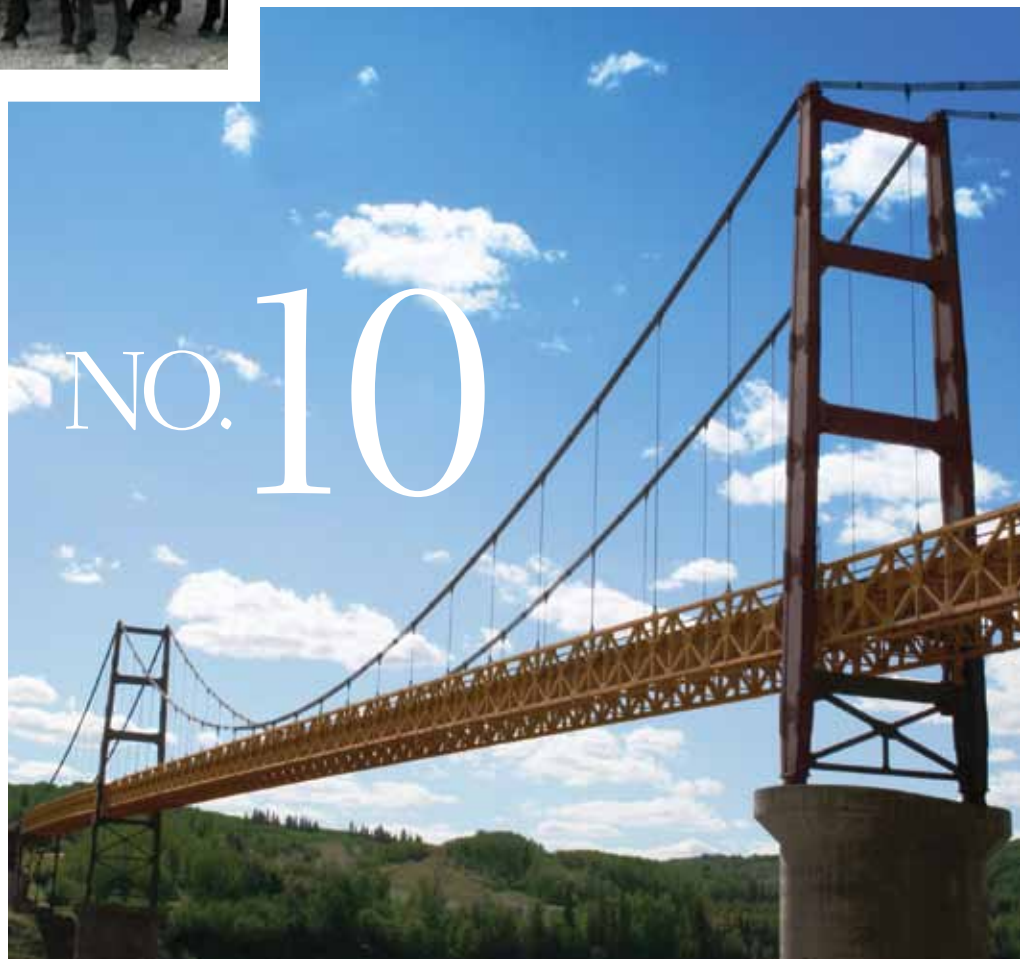
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NO. 10



summertime activities. Elkwater Lake provides lots of family activities. To take in the photo-friendly views, check out the Horseshoe Canyon and Reesor Lake viewpoints. www.cypresshills.com

7. FORT MACLEOD

This town two hours south of Calgary lives and breathes history. Walking down the main street – called Colonel Macleod Boulevard after the commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police who led troops here in 1874 – it's easy to picture early settlers and NWMP members strolling along more than a century ago. The town has been described as having more historical amenities per capita than any other place in Alberta. Must-sees include the 99-year-old Empress Theatre,

Alberta's longest running theatre, and the Fort Museum, which tells the story of the NWMP. Don't miss the NWMP Musical Ride – a historic horseback display first performed at the Fort in 1876. It's held every day but Tuesday from July 1 to Labour Day. www.fortmacleod.com

8. LEDUC #1 ENERGY DISCOVERY CENTRE

Like it or not, we all need oil and gas to keep us going. This centre near Devon, south of Edmonton, tells the story of the industry that made Alberta Canada's

richest province, and has helped shape the landscape, both physically and politically. The volunteer-run centre is owned by the Leduc/Devon Oilfield Historical Society. The centre's name comes from the historic Feb. 13, 1947 oil strike at a well called Leduc #1. Brought into production by a colourful oilman named Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter, it was considered the discovery that jump-started Alberta's oil boom. Visitors can visit indoor and outdoor exhibits and even stand on the floor of a 1940s-era drilling rig. www.leducnumber1.com

9. HISTORIC CLAY DISTRICT

The Medalta Potteries National Historic Site, on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in Medicine Hat, once produced more than 75 percent of the pottery in Canada. That's because the area offered the two main ingredients needed for pottery: plenty of high quality clay from the riverbanks, and natural gas to keep the kilns burning. The 150-acre Historic Clay District was home to key

Canadian clay factories, including Medalta Potteries, Hycroft China, National Porcelain and Alberta Clay Products. The Medalta Potteries site has been developed into an interactive museum. Guests can walk into a rare circular kiln, explore the original factory and learn about the local history of clay products. There's even a place where kids can get their hands dirty playing with clay. www.medalta.org

10. DUNVEGAN BRIDGE

People seeing the Peace River for the first time often describe it as *mighty*. Its might is clearly evident for drivers taking Highway 2 across the river on the 51-year-old steel Dunvegan Bridge, in the heart of the Peace Country 90 kilometres north of Grande Prairie in north-western Alberta. It is the province's only vehicle suspension bridge, and, at 274 metres long and just over eight metres wide, one of the largest suspension bridges in Canada. From 1909 to 1960, travelers crossed the river on a ferry. The bridge is the cornerstone of Dunvegan Provincial Park where, way back in 1805, Alberta's earliest

fur trading posts and missionary centres were established.

www.discoverthepeacecountry.com **West**

Bruce Masterman is a writer and author in High River, Alberta, where he and his wife, Karen, raised two daughters, sharing with them many of the places on this list.

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