

## Last Mountain Lake

Last Mountain Lake, also called Long Lake, is located 48 km northwest of Regina, Saskatchewan. It was a well-known wintering site for Metis bison hunters. Its name commemorates a Cree legend describing how the Great Spirit made the last hills (east of Duval) from soil scooped from the valley now occupied by the lake. Scientists say it formed c. 11,000 years ago from meltwaters of the continental ice sheet draining south into the Qu'Appelle glacial spillway.

In 1869, the Hudson's Bay Company built Last Mountain House at the southern end of the lake; Isaac Cowie, clerk for the HBC, described one of the last great herds of buffalo in the region. In his book "The Company of Adventurers.." (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913).



The Steamboat "Qu'Appelle" on Last Mountain Lake.

Cowie, writing in 1867-1874, describes the winter activities of the Metis at this site:

### METIS FESTIVITIES.

The winter quarters of the two Metis Counsellors of Assiniboine had been taken up on the west side of Last Mountain Lake, about fifteen miles north-west from ours. I drove with my dog-sled twice to visit them. On one occasion to relieve Madame Amlin of a tormenting tooth, and on some business as well as for pleasure the other time. As befitted persons of their importance, as well as to accommodate their large retinue of relatives and followers and for trading purposes,

## RED RIVER JIG AND SCOTCH REEL

their winter camp was large, their single-roomed dwellings being especially spacious.

My former travelling companion, Henri Hibert dit Fabian, accompanied me once when we spent the night under Mr. Breland's hospitable roof. Besides his accomplishments as a voyageur, Henri was a vocalist who knew all the chansons of the canoe men, but the song into which he put most fire and fervour was that of Pierre Falcon, "Le bon garçon," made and composed to celebrate the massacre of the wounded at Seven Oaks in 1816, and "La glorie de tous ces Bois-brules," obtained thereby.

After a feast of the best of buffalo meat, as well as cakes, rice and raisins beautifully cooked by Madame Breland, followed by a flowing bowl of rum punch, Mr. Amlin and his following came to join in further festivities. Fiddles were tuned up, and Red River jig and Scotch reel were joyously joined in by the young men and maidens, who were soon followed by their elders. The mirthful dance was later on, as the ladies retired, followed by joyous song and thrilling story of celebrated adventures on the voyage, in the chase, and in the encounters of the Metis with the Sioux. Each admirer extolled the excellencies of his favourite racing and hunting horse, and the speed and endurance of sled-dogs and their drivers. On the relative merits of all these there at once arose loud and lively argument, to allay which a song was opportunely called for. To wet the whistle, every now and again Mr. Breland, whose twinkling eye and amused smile showed the fun he was having quietly out of the excitement of his guests, would judiciously dispense a little liquid refreshment. As the assembly warmed up, the end of each dance, song or story was immediately followed at first by one or other of the more enthusiastic Metis Nationalists calling out, "Vive mon nation." Gradually more and more joined in the cry, till before the festivities ceased, everyone joined in the shout of triumph, with the exception of Mr. Breland himself, whose genial countenance became grave as he thought of the events

Last Mountain house lasted only a few years before it was destroyed by fire. However this led to the establishment of a pair of hunting camps on the lake's south shore. One was Metis and the other First Nations. More settlers arrived by 1885 and in 1886 the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway and Steamboat Co. built a branch line as far as Craven, intending to run a steam ship service along the lake, but the rail link to Saskatoon was completed in 1890, bypassing the lake. Canada's first federal bird sanctuary was designated on the lake in 1887.



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