

## **The case for keeping Rock Island Lake to ourselves:**

Best kept secret of a camping spot surrounded by lakes

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ATHABASCA, AB. - What is it about camping that we love so much? Is it getting closer to nature? Is it part of our natural instincts hearkening back to tribal times when our ancestors roasted meat on a stick? Maybe it's because for a couple of days we can get really dirty and that's OK.

Whatever the reason, finding a good spot to camp can be a bit tricky. Well, here's a little secret spot- Tanasiuk Recreation Area.

This campground, (also known as Rock Island Lake Campground) is 98 kilometers north of Athabasca on secondary highway 813 on Rock Island Lake. My husband Boyd and I along with our two Labs, Sophie and Kasey loaded up our camping gear and headed to an area of the province that was entirely new to us.



Driving the two and a half hours to our destination, the trees seemed a deeper shade of green. And when we pulled into the campground, we discovered the sites contained lots of these deep green trees making an excellent privacy screen between our neighbours and us. The washroom facilities were well maintained and the boat launch was close by, much to the delight of the dogs.

Once we'd gotten ourselves settled in our new digs, we decided to explore the area a little further. We were now in the Municipal District of Opportunity, which is not only rich in the oil and gas industry, but also in lakes. We joined up with Kristi Zufelt, tourism coordinator for the Municipal District of Opportunity who showed us three of the district's 12 main bodies of water.

Calling Lake was our first stop and we marvelled at its size and its pelican population. The Cree name for this lake is Kito-Sakahekan which represents the loud noises it makes when it freezes.

Next, we drove the short distance to Sandy Lake, which as its name suggests, has a sandy bottom. "The water level is quite high right now," explained Zufelt, "so normally you'd get some sandy spots on the shore." Nonetheless, what was there now was quite impressive.

Our final stop was Wabasca, which has been Zufelt's home for the past five years. This community is the hub of the area and boasts the new Eagle Point Golf Course. The lake is divided into two parts – north and south– each as stunning as the other.

We noticed all three of these locations were distinctly uncrowded. Zufelt explained the region's tourism efforts. "It's always a difficult balance between growing a destination area yet maintaining its natural elements. Either way, it's always better to be prepared and come up with a plan that works for both tourists and residents."

It was time for us to head back to our home away from home so we turned south to Tanasiuk and a few campfire hamburgers. It was a beautiful, warm summer night and after we zipped up our tent and our heads hit the air mattress, we were all out like a light. About five a.m. we were rudely awakened by the most intense rain and lightening storm. Our dogs figured out that when the tent lit up, a large boom would follow and they tried their best to snuggle up with us on the air mattress.

But as always, the storm passed, and the tent held, so we were all safe and dry.

So if you're looking for a beautiful, quiet, secluded camping spot, keep Tanasiuk in mind. We'll leave it up to you whether you tell your friends or not.