



If one was travelling by horse or oxcart in the early settlement years of western Manitoba, you would likely follow one of two indigenous roads; The Boundary Commission Trail and the Yellow Quill Trail.

The Boundary Commission Trail paralleled the Canadian-US border, allowing settlers to venture west to the Turtle Mountains and the Souris basin areas, from as far east as Emerson.

The Yellow Quill Trail ran just north of the Assiniboine River (from its junction with the Red River), west to the Souris River and then southwest to Melita where it joined the Boundary Commission Trail.

The Yellow Quill Trail takes its name from Chief Yellow Quill, chief over the band of Saulteaux First Nations living near Portage la Prairie during the late 1800's. He is known for signing a land-sharing treaty with the Crown and the Canadian Government in 1875 and for being Chief of both Swan Lake and Long Plains Nations.

Chief Yellow Quill and his people were known for travelling the Yellow Quill Trail that ran parallel to the Assiniboine River for quite a long stretch. It began as a trade route used by First Nations. As European influence in

Southwestern Manitoba grew, explorers, fur traders and buffalo hunters from the Red River Settlement found the trail a convenient avenue of travel as well.

The Saulteaux people, under Chief Yellow Quill, made a living from hunting and trapping. The women made braided mats and woven baskets to sell, and in the summertime, they picked pails of fruit which they sold for 25 cents per pail.

Settlers leaving Fort Garry with hopes of settling along the Assiniboine, or in the Brandon Hills, or further to the southwest along the Souris, or around Turtle Mountain – they all travelled the Yellow Quill Trail.

We can imagine families loading up their red river carts and wagons with all their personal possessions and taking to this trail that followed a good stretch of the Assiniboine River. The wooden wheels would creak and groan along the trail, horses and oxen would trudge through thick clay and mud, and passersby would cordially greet each other along the way with the tip of a hat, or a smile and a nod.

In the early spring one would spot the prairie crocuses growing along the side of the trail, their purple blooms bursting with color,

often in the snow, as if to defy  
winter's desperate grip!

In those early settlement years, the landscape was teeming with wildlife. The bison no longer grazed in Manitoba by this time, but white-tailed deer, coyotes and moose were common sights. Immigrants, from the British Isles in particular, would stare wide-eyed back at the many animals freely roaming the prairies! What a sight!

The more adventurous, who later came in the 1800's, would continue on to the very southwest corner of the province.

Even after European settlement came to the Manitoba prairies, and land that the trail crossed became privately owned, Chief Yellow Quill's Salteaux people continued to use it for travel. It was their trail!

Today, a street and a hotel in Portage are named after the Yellow Quill. If you're looking for it, there are still several places where the trail is faintly visible, especially near Melita and along the Souris River...  
but otherwise, evidence of its existence has been wiped out by modern activity and land development.

*Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.*