

## The Good Walk: Creating New Paths on Traditional Prairie Trails

**Matthew R. Anderson**

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The cultural, political, and literary history of Western Canada is embodied in *The Good Walk*, Matthew R. Anderson's discerning account of three pilgrimages across traditional prairie trails.

Anderson leads expeditions that trace the routes of historic, often forgotten trade and Indigenous trails across rural Canada. The paths explored—including the Traders' Road and the Battleford and Frenchman Trails—accommodated traders, settlers, and Indigenous travelers more than a century ago. Crossing hilly prairie terrain and skirting lakes, sloughs, and marshes, these routes now span a patchwork of highways, gravel roads, and foot trails. They pass through small villages, farmland, abandoned settlements, and Indigenous land. Mapping the trails before each trip and arranging feasible rest stops requires extensive research and planning.

Anderson and the hikers who have joined him faced challenges including extreme weather, blisters, ticks, and skeptical landowners. They also met gracious people, including the children of settlers, members of the First Nations, and experts and enthusiasts at local history museums, parishes, and settlements. They attracted media coverage too, so that each walk drew a larger group of supporters and dreamers.

The book highlights Indigenous literature and history, including the injustices of colonialism, and advocates for First Nations rights and perspectives. As Anderson explains, these walks are not a "frontier adventure"; instead, the focus is on "paying attention...to the community of our walks, to integration with the Land rather than mastery of it, and to the good that writing might bring to various communities." Anderson, who grew up in Saskatchewan, portrays the walks as pilgrimages—opportunities to meditate on his family history, the power of community, and Indigenous stories.

Powerful and comprehensive, *The Good Walk* traverses and sits with the history, land, people, and iconic pathways of rural Canada.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2024)

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