

Trail 3: Pakowki Lake and Etzikom

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Pakowki Lake is renowned for its large congregations of waterfowl, particularly during spring and fall migrations. Depending on water levels a variety of shore birds may be present. Specialty birds, which may be found here include White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Bittern and occasionally egrets. Pakowki Lake is a large landlocked lake south of the hamlet of Etzikom. The levels of this lake can vary greatly from year to year, depending on precipitation totals. Birding hot spots along this lake vary with the water level.

One can access Pakowki Lake from Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Foremost or Taber. Etzikom's excellent Windmill Museum has a small café and ice cream shop. It's a great refreshing stop and the museum makes a great diversion from birding. The museum is only open from May to September.

A suggested itinerary is to start at Etzikom **(A)**, proceed west along Hwy 61 to RGE RD 93 (Sunrise Road). Turn south and follow along through farmland and some undisturbed prairie, watching for Chestnut-collared Longspur and other prairie passerines. The small sloughs often have good numbers of Cinnamon Teal as well as other waterfowl and depending on the water levels may be good for shorebirds. Proceed south along this road until you arrive at the marshy west arm of Pakowki Lake **(B)**. The Sunrise Hutterite Colony is just to the south of this arm. This wonderful wetland abounds with bird life. Good numbers of White-faced Ibis (first site in Alberta to host this species), Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Bittern, Sora, Common Tern, and Western Grebe may be found here. Rarities that have been found here include: Virginia Rail, Clark's Grebe and recently, both Great and Snowy Egret. Many Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets frequent this wetland.

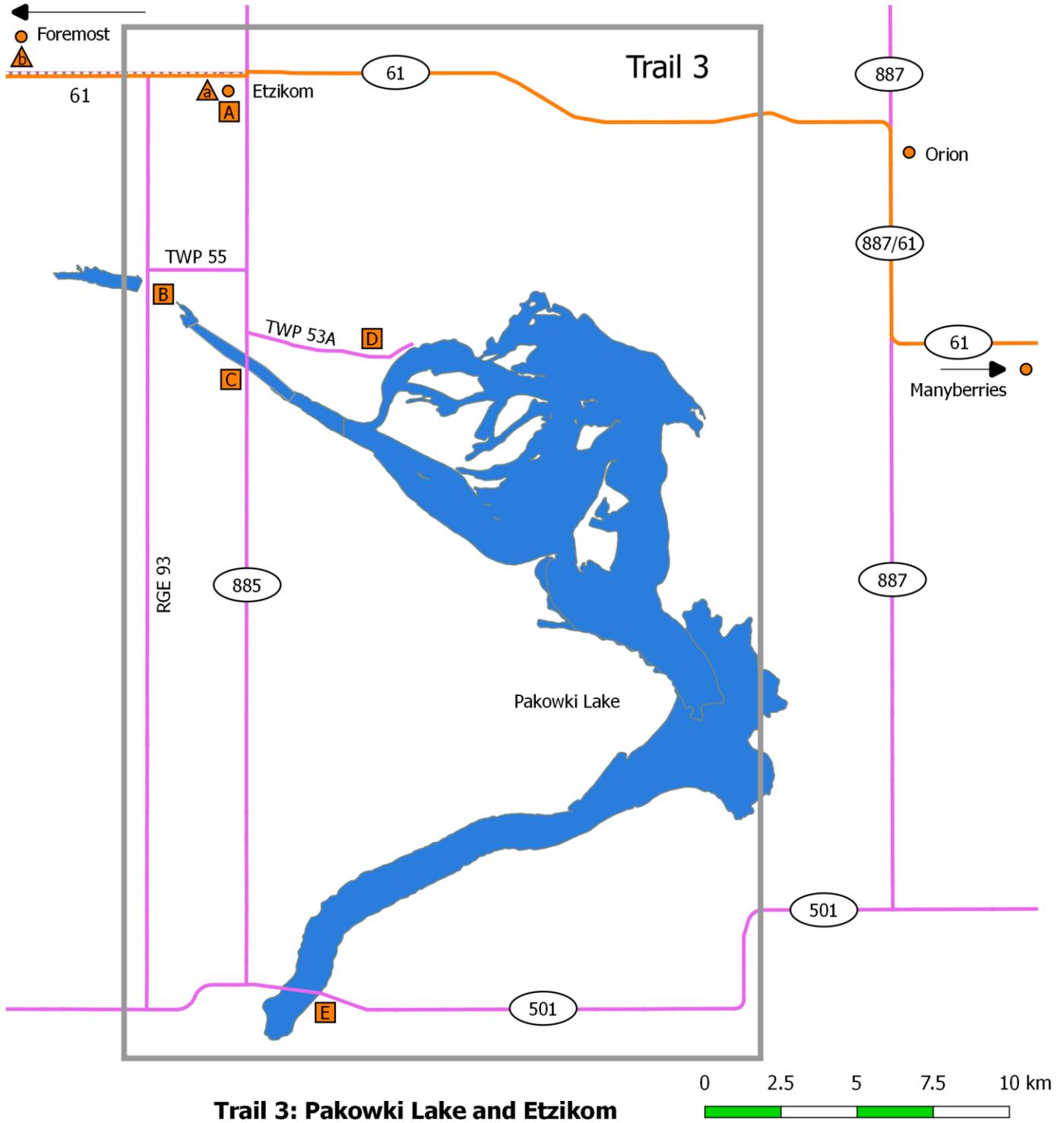
From these wetlands, back track to TWP RD 55 following it east to Hwy 885. Turn south on 885 and stop where the highway bisects the west arm of the lake **(C)**. If the lake is relatively shallow a profusion of cattails and rushes will provide excellent cover for a variety of nesting species including Common Yellowthroat, Marsh Wren, terns, grebes, perhaps a bittern or two and even Whimbrel on the rocky shoals. During the summer of 2012, a Black-headed Gull was found among the more common gull species. Hwy 885 is a very narrow road and although lightly travelled one must be very aware of potential traffic hazards while birding.

Back track to a gravel road (TWP RD. 53A) that winds eastward to another portion of the lake. Follow this trail to its eastern extremity ending at an abandoned but privately owned farm site **(D)** (Permission should be sought to drive onto the farmyard). Often a Great Horned Owl or two will be found near the farm. A large colony of Cliff Swallows has built their mud nests under the eaves of the house. On the lake you may find species that you have missed at the other two sites on the west end of the lake. As you proceed along the gravel road watch for Horned Lark, Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspur. Burrowing Owl has also been seen along this route.

Continue south along Hwy 885 to the junction with Hwy 501. This portion of the route is primarily surrounded by cultivated land which provides little cover for birds. However Ferruginous Hawk may be found in the few trees along the road. Anywhere along Hwy 885, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, and other raptors may be seen.

At Hwy 501 proceed east to the south arm of Pakowki Lake **(E)**. At times the lake may be dry here but when water is present this can be an excellent spot for shorebirds such as, American Avocet, both species of Yellowlegs, Pectoral and peep Sandpipers. Even a small flock of Sanderlings has spent their summer here. A small population of resident Bonaparte's Gull has also been observed here throughout the summer.

Depending on one's schedule, the Manyberries area (Trail 4) could also be birded on the same day although one might want to bird either trail in conjunction with the Onefour/Pinhorn Ranch areas. The nearest overnight accommodations are located in Foremost, Elkwater or Medicine Hat. The Manyberries Hotel is sometimes open on a very limited basis and perhaps a snack and drink could be purchased here.



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- Observation Points
- A Windmill Museum
- B Sunrise Wetlands
- C Causeway
- D Pakowki Lake North Trail
- E Pakowki Lake Southwest Arm

- ▲ Amenities
- ▲ Etzikom: meals, restrooms and museum*
- ▲ Foremost: fuel, meals, lodgings and camping

* Only open from May long weekend to September long weekend.