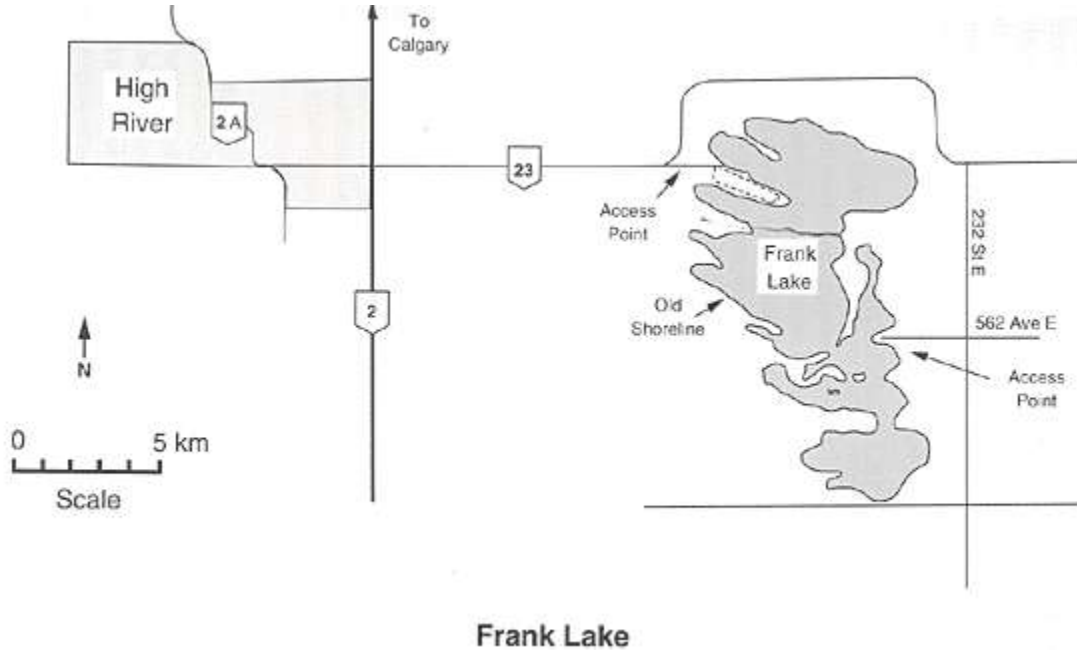


**Frank Lake** by Wayne W. Smith (1993); revised 2012



Frank Lake, situated about 50 km southeast of Calgary, is a shallow slough typical of the grasslands of southern Alberta. Species to be expected are ducks, prairie marsh birds and shorebirds. It has varied from a large lake with nesting American White Pelicans (in the 1950s) to a dry lake bed (in the 1980s). Now (in 2012) with very high water levels, it is one of the best birding venues in the Calgary area; however if water levels are too high shorebirding is not as good. White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilts and Clarke's Grebes have all nested in recent years. Currently, it is being fed water via an industrial pipeline from High River. Unfortunately, many grassland species no longer occur in the area due to its increasingly intensive cultivation.

Directions are given from the southern edge of Calgary where Hwy 2 intersects with Hwy 22X (the Marquis of Lorne Trail). At this intersection (km 0.0) proceed south on Hwy 2. The highway passes through a varied area of native grassland, aspen clumps and croplands. The bird life is not very rich but is typical of this part of Alberta. At the junction with Hwy 23 (41.3 km), take the exit east towards Vulcan. For the next 6 km the highway goes primarily through croplands.

At 47.3 km the highway makes a 90° turn to the north. As you approach this corner SLOW DOWN and watch for a gravel track that continues to the east. This wide track can be rutted and quite slick when wet. Almost as soon as you leave the paved highway there is a gate in a barbed wire fence (Gate

#1). After a short distance there is a second fence wire gate (Gate #2). When the gate is closed, park here and continue on foot. However the gravel track can be driven when the gate is open, and it reaches an observation blind in 1.5 km. This is an excellent area to watch for White-faced Ibis, Marsh Wren, and other waterbirds.

From the gate, you may also walk sketchy trails along the shorelines: one part heading east and the other south along the east side of the fence line. Take the trail heading east. To the south is a grainfield, to the north part of the old lake bottom.

The water and marsh begin at the power line. The trail then follows the old shoreline for about 2 km before eventually curving west. Most of the birds characteristic of this area may be found in this section. During migration, especially fall (August and September), one can expect many other species. In the past more than twenty shorebird species have been recorded.

When the trail begins to head west and again passes under the power line, you have the choice of either going back along the lake shore or taking the trail heading north along the fence line to Gate #2. However, as this shortcut is usually devoid of bird life, it is definitely more interesting to retrace your route.

The southeastern shore of Frank Lake can be accessed by turning right from the dirt track and continuing on Hwy 23. The highway abruptly changes direction several times, skirting around the old shoreline. After 8.3 km turn right (south) onto 232 St. E (gravel-surfaced and marked by a small white sign for High River Colony). Continue for a further 3.3 km, then turn right again onto 562 Ave. E, marked by a yellow "No Exit" sign. This small road becomes a single lane dirt track.

In dry driving conditions (only!) it can be followed for 2.3 km to the edge of the old shoreline. Here, an earthen causeway provides a good vantage point for scoping the lake.

Gas, food and washrooms are available in the town of High River, on Hwy 23 to the west of Hwy 2.

*See the map below for other viewing areas around the lake, and be aware some of the areas may be flooded in a wet spring.*

## **Frank Lake map by Greg Wagner (2011):**

The **Dark Blue Line** around the lake is a circuit that will take you around it using highway 23 and gravel roads. Good for travel outside the open water season, and it will take you around the lake to various basins and parking areas. Lots of wetlands around the lake which are always worth looking at.

**Light Green Line** – route into the west side of Basin 1, including the sewage outfall and observation blind.

**Yellow line** – trail into the northeast part of Basin 1. Should only be used in dry weather. Some prairie habitat at this spot.

**Parking Area east part of Basin 1.** Actually unsure if you can drive to this spot, but there is a large Frank Lake sign at the location.

**Teal Line** – is the trail around the south end of Basin 2. Fairly rough road which may be tough on small cars. Watch for the wet area south of Basin 4 when approaching from east. Do not drive on when wet, even if it is slightly wet. There is a stream crossing along the road at the Ducks Unlimited weir at the south end of the lake. The surface of this crossing is hardened and can be crossed even when water is present.

**Red Line** – trail into the northeast Bay of Basin 2.

**Green Line** – trail into the middle part of the trail around Basin 2. Use only during dry conditions. Not really recommended for travel.

(Note that map is rotated to fit paper)

