

Healing Waters of Manitou

Manitou Sakahikan (Little Manitou Lake), is an important spiritual place for Indigenous people. The lake was carved out by glaciers and is fed by springs that release magnesium, potassium, silica, iron oxide, calcium and sulphate, giving it the highest mineral content of any lake on Turtle Island (North America).

A legend is told by Ochankuga'he, a young Nakoda (Assiniboine) man whose name was changed to Dan Kennedy when he was forced to attend the Lebret Residential School. Ochankuga'he and his people were moved from their territory between Swift Current and Moose Jaw to a new reserve east of Regina. He describes this new land as "littered with the remains of skulls and skeletons" from the 1840's Smallpox epidemic. The legend states that there were two large Cree nations that lived on the land that became the Carry-the-Kettle Reserve. Almost two thirds of the people who wintered there died. In the spring, the survivors began walking towards the South Saskatchewan River, hoping to escape the disease. Three young men got sick and the group camped near Manitou Sakahikan when they were no longer able to walk. Knowing the group of survivors needed to continue, leaders built the young men a shelter and left, knowing they would never see each other again. One man crawled to the edge of the lake to drink and bathe in the water to cool down.

Exhausted, he fell asleep by the lake. He woke up in the morning and his fever and illness were gone! He helped his two friends go to the lake so that they could be cured. A few days later, the three men caught up to the others. Imagine how shocked they were to see the men again!

1. Find Carry-the-Kettle Nakoda Nation on a map. How far did the group of Cree survivors walk to get to Little Manitou Lake?
2. How much further did they they need to walk to get to the closest point of the South Saskatchewan River?
3. What mineral resources are near Little Manitou Lake? How might these resources be related to this legend of the lake?
4. EXTENSION: In 2019, the village of Manitou Lake hosted “The Big Float” and had 1642 people floating at the same time because they can’t sink! Try this: put 1 can of Diet Coke and 1 can of Coke into a bucket or sink. Fill with water until both cans are covered by at least 2 cm of water. You will notice that the Diet Coke floats and the Coke does not! This is because the Coke with sugar is more dense than the Diet Coke with Aspartame. Your challenge is to try to make the Coke float! Pour table salt into the water and stir well. Keep adding until the Coke floats. What does this tell you about the amount of salt and minerals dissolved in the water of Manitou Sakahikan?