

Town of Foam Lake Celebrates 100 Years of History

By Bob Johnson

Celebration Committee Note:

Just how do you write a story about a community that is celebrating 100 years as a town and try to keep the spoken version of the story within 10 to 15 minutes? The simple answer is - this is next to impossible; however, Former Mayor and retired Newspaper Editor Bob Johnson agreed to try and outline highlights of our community for this 100th celebration. Celebration organizers recognize the terrific job that Bob has done and applaud him for his great story; however, it is with a warning to those who read and listen to the story that not ALL people nor events of importance could be properly mentioned and/or recognized while trying to stay within the time constraints. We apologize in advance for items and people of note that may not be mentioned and it in no way diminishes the efforts or importance of the contributions of people from our community.

The community that came to be known as Foam Lake first came into being in 1909 when, with a population of a whopping 57 people, it was incorporated as the "Village of Foam Lake" with Olafur Petursson, the first Overseer at the helm.

The name originated from early Icelandic pioneers who saw foam on the shores of the current Foam Lake Heritage Marsh on a windy day, giving it the name Foam Lake in the late 1800s. The marsh, or lake as it was then known, is located 3 ½ miles northwest of the current Town of Foam Lake.

The area around Foam Lake was first settled in 1882 by the Joshua and Frances Milligan family, who built their homestead near the present-day Fishing Lake First Nation. Other families, namely the Edward Field, George Scott, Eiricksson, Bildfell, Jasonson, Johnson, Halldorson, Paulson, and Olafson families, followed in the ensuing years.

They settled on Treaty Four Territory, which encompasses the current location of Foam Lake and a large surrounding area, with the closest Indigenous community being the traditional land of the Saulteaux First Nation.

A series of natural disasters necessitated the first settlers to move from the Fishing Lake area to locations near the Foam Lake marsh. As settlement increased where the railroad was expected to arrive, the townsite of Foam Lake sprang up at its current location.

Immigrants from the United States, the British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, and many other countries began to arrive following the progress of the railroad.

Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, and the railroad arrived in Foam Lake in June 1907, helping to increase the number of people calling Foam Lake home.

Before the arrival of the railroad, the settlement of Foam Lake boasted several businesses, including a blacksmith shop, a lumber merchant, a general merchandise store, and a machinery dealership as well as the first Western Hotel built in 1908. All did brisk business with locals and settlers passing through.

Following the arrival of the railway, Foam Lake saw significant development in 1908 and 1909.

The first store on South Railway Avenue was built and operated by Robert Cain.



The first Post Office was operated by Franklin and Mattie Bray from their two-storey railroad construction gang house, and Franklin Bray also built a large two-storey building that housed a general store on the ground level, with the upper level used as the Village's first temporary school classroom.

There were three grain elevators, two livery barns, a feed mercantile, and other small businesses established on Main Street and Railway Avenue before Foam Lake was incorporated as a Village in 1909.

Foam Lake grew rapidly as immigration increased, with more and more people coming from across the globe to settle in Canada.

The Village of Foam Lake and surrounding communities such as Sheho, Tuffnell, Leslie, and West Bend, as well as many rural districts, grew rapidly.

In 1917, the first street lighting was installed in Foam Lake. The community continued to grow and was incorporated from Village to Town status on March 1, 1924.

Foam Lake experienced decades of rapid growth as more people settled in the community and area. There were farm families on nearly every section of land, pushing up the population and increasing the need for services such as education, healthcare, recreation, and many others.

Foam Lake's first 10-bed hospital was opened in a private residence in 1938. The second hospital, built in 1949 on the south side of Highway 16, was a 30-bed facility with an attached nurse's residence. It served the community until 1970 when the Foam Lake Union Hospital was constructed on Saskatchewan Avenue.

The hospital served the community until 1991 when it was closed, a devastating blow to the community. The building is now home to the Foam Lake Health Centre, which offers medical services provided by doctors from Wynyard and Wadena, and nurse practitioners. It also houses a state-of-the-art X-ray and lab facility as well as the public health inspector office, public health nurse, home care office, physiotherapy, and other outpatient services. Maintaining a level of service for our citizens is of major importance to the town, and the urban and rural councils spend much time advocating for health services.

Education in Foam Lake has seen many changes. The Foam Lake Elementary School was relocated to its present location in 1977, having originally been located at the west end of Bray Avenue. The original Foam Lake Composite School was built at its current location in 1949, and in 2024, graduated its 75th class from Grade 12. Both schools have undergone extensive renovations and additions over the decades to accommodate changes to the education system.

The original Foam Lake Town Hall was built on Main Street in 1917 and served until 1980 when it was closed. The new Foam Lake Community Hall was opened in 1994, becoming a facility that is the envy of many communities.

The 1960s saw much progress, including the installation of sewer and water lines in 1959-1960, the introduction of the dial telephone in 1963, and the first senior citizens' homes on Moore Street in 1964.

The current Jubilee Nursing Home was built in 1967, and the Tiger Lily Lodge Seniors Housing Unit was built adjacent to the Jubilee Home in 1988.



The first skating rink in Foam Lake was built in 1916, followed by a second one in 1950. The Foam Lake Recreation Centre, as it exists today, opened in 1967. It was built to replace the skating rink that burned down in 1962, with the curling rink structure relocated and joined to the new skating rink. Both arenas have artificial ice.

The current Post Office on Main Street was built in 1938, housing the Post Office on the main floor, the RCMP Barracks on the second floor, and a jail cell in the basement. The current RCMP Barracks on Macintosh Street was completed in 1968.

The Central Park Swimming Pool, built in 1974, served the community well until the upgraded Foam Lake Water Park aquatic facility was completed in 2014.

Foam Lake underwent a significant infrastructure upgrade in the late 1980s, with the installation of curb, gutter, and pavement on all the streets, along with updates to some water and sewer lines. The project was a vast improvement, serving the community very well despite initial opposition and misgivings by some ratepayers. You might say large projects like these were *“short term financial pain for long term community gain.”*

Another notable upgrade to the town’s water system, including a new well, pipeline, and reverse osmosis filtration system, was completed in 2004. The system continues to provide residents with the highest quality water available.

One of the original Town Office buildings, built in 1926 on Bray Avenue West, is now home to the Foam Lake Museum. The museum association, formed in the mid-70s, moved into the building during that time. The museum is a treasure trove of displays and exhibits depicting early life in the area. The ‘Douglas House,’ located near the Visitors Centre, is a major part of the Foam Lake Museum’s contribution to the town’s history. It was relocated from its original location where it was built in 1915. It features many of the home’s original characteristics and has been filled with appliances and artifacts from that era. The museum also built an authentic ‘piche’ outdoor oven at the site, used during ‘Bread Baking Days’ in the spring and summer to bake and sell bread as a fundraiser.

The current Town Office is in the former Foam Lake Credit Union building. Milligan Bio-Tech purchased the building from the Foam Lake Credit Union and used it for office space before selling it to the town. Prior to that, the Town Office, built in the mid-70s, was located on Cameron Street until the move to the former Credit Union building on Main Street in 2018. The former Cameron Street building now houses the Foam Lake Library, Foam Lake Food Bank, and meeting rooms, and is called the Community Cultural Centre.

Foam Lake is also noted for its Recreation Combine Lotto Fundraiser. The Lotto was the brainchild of the Recreation Centre Volunteer Management Committee, who were looking for a way to raise money to help defray operating costs and make capital improvements at the Foam Lake Recreation Centre. The group came up with the idea of raffling off a combine as a major prize. It turned out to be a good idea because, after much hard work by the volunteers, it was a sell-out and raised over \$110,000 for the facility. That was in 1995.

The committee decided to continue the lotto, and the Foam Lake Community Hall and Foam Lake Golf and Country Club, who were also looking for a fundraiser, got on board as partners to help with the lottery. What a success story it is. Twenty-nine years later, thanks to the Combine Lotto Committee members and the hundreds of volunteers in this community who help each year, the lotto is still going strong and, to date, has raised more than \$4 million for these organizations. This money has gone a long way to help maintain and improve all the groups’ facilities. It has also been a huge benefit not only to the people of the Town of Foam Lake but also to people from the region who enjoy these great facilities. It is a Foam Lake success story that can be directly attributed to community volunteerism.



The councils of the Town of Foam Lake have always been promoters and supporters of the importance of leisure, sport, culture, and recreation for all our citizens, and the community was one of the first small towns in the province to hire a full time Recreation Director in the early 1970s, a position that continues to be key to the health and wellness of our organizations and people. Wellness and quality of life are also achieved through a longstanding tradition of competent and dedicated town administrative staff and public works crews who all work hard to administer and deliver the high levels of service that is expected by citizens of the community.

In 1965, Saskatchewan's Jubilee Year, Foam Lake boasted several grocery stores, cafes, and a bakery. The town also had a drugstore, two resident doctors, a dentist, a hospital, clothing stores, a blacksmith shop, liquor board store, a bank, a credit union, dry cleaners, a repair shop, garages, implement dealerships, a printing shop, lumber yards, a barber shop, and beauty salons, and an RCMP detachment.

Today, our Main Street remains vibrant, with businesses including a grocery store, three hardware stores, two lumber yards, a laundromat, a dollar store, a window manufacturing business, a plumbing business, a massage therapist, a tavern, the Town of Foam Lake Office, a flower, gift and home decor store, a linen rental and gift shop, a financial advisor, an insurance agency, a liquor store, a car wash, a dental centre, a bowling alley, a furniture store, a beauty salon, gift shops, a newspaper office, a post office, two financial institutions, a pharmacy, a law office, several restaurants, and the Foam Lake Community Theatre, originally built in 1950.

Foam Lake also hosts various businesses on adjacent streets, including a private personal care home, plumbing and heating business, a hair salon, a funeral chapel, and several home-based businesses.

Highway 16 features a welding and fabricating shop, an outdoor marine and boat dealership, two tire shops, a motel, a storage business, a grain dryer business, a cannabis shop, a bulk fuel/fertilizer dealer, an agriculture products dealer, an auto/agro parts repair shop, a veterinary clinic, a gas/confectionary and restaurants, a truck and trailer repair shop, and Milligan Biofuels.

Viterra operated a concrete elevator on Railway Avenue and an inland terminal just west of the town boundary.

Despite economic fluctuations, Foam Lake's business community remains resilient, offering a wide array of retail and service businesses. However, the town has lost some key businesses over the years, such as Ford and GMC dealerships and two machinery dealerships, though the buildings they occupied continue to house other businesses.

In the early 90s, a group of enterprising farmers and entrepreneurs began producing value-added products from off-grade canola. They began small and developed techniques and equipment as they went. They began producing and marketing biodiesel. In 2009 they purchased the former Southside Service Building on Highway 16 and opened Milligan Biofuels.

This facility produced biodiesel and additives from off-grade canola seed and at its peak employed over forty people. Milligan operated until 2018 when it closed due to the loss of government subsidies for biofuel production. The facility was purchased in the same year by Eaglepoint Ventures and reopened. It is still in operation producing a variety of products including diesel fuel conditioner, bio meal feed, rust inhibitor, penetrating oil, and dust suppressant. Milligan provides employment for seventeen people from the area.

Northome Windows, another major manufacturer, operates in a former grocery store building on Main Street. Founded by Nelson and Cheryl (Code) Coupland in 1988 in Regina, the business moved to the Edfield District north of Foam Lake in 1990. Their first workshop was a tarp attached to the side of their house. They soon built

a shop and began manufacturing windows. After significant growth, they relocated to the former Shop Easy building in 2010, with their son Jonny taking over in 2019. The company has an office in Regina but continues to manufacture windows in Foam Lake, serving east central Saskatchewan.

Foam Lake is proud to be the home to the Breast Friends, a group of ten women who got together in 2003 to raise money for a breast cancer research fundraising snowmobile ride. The ladies hosted a supper that they catered and after an overwhelming show of support, they decided that they would publish a cookbook to raise money for breast cancer research. They formed the group 'Breast Friends' who have now published six bestselling cookbooks and raised nearly \$2 million dollars toward breast cancer research.

Foam Lake takes pride in the professional athletes who began their careers in our community. In 2002, Foam Lake celebrated some of these athletes during the Foam Lake Hockey Heroes weekend. Honoured were Pat Elyniuk, Ted Hargreaves, Bernie Federko, and Dennis Polonich, all of whom reached the NHL and WHL. Their achievements are commemorated with murals at the Foam Lake Visitor Centre on Highway 16. Our community also celebrates the accomplishments of native sons and daughters through the Sport, Culture, and Recreation Wall of Honour, which includes world-renowned orchestra conductor Tania Miller, among many other distinguished citizens.

The Foam Lake Visitor Centre is the base for the Foam Lake Campground and offers information about the area. The Visitor Centre displays dioramas of the flora and fauna that can be viewed at the marsh and provides information on the Foam Lake Heritage Marsh International Bird Area. Designated international status in 1995, the marsh provides world-class bird viewing and tells the story of early settlement through its towers and trails that wind through the 6500-acre marsh.

Foam Lake has many amenities and services envied by other communities its size. Community leaders and residents continuously work to maintain and enhance these services, ensuring growth.

Foam Lake has experienced a population decline since the 1980s, when the town boasted over 1,400 residents. Factors such as the hospital closure, loss of farm families, and business relocation or closure contributed to this decrease.

However, the 2021 census indicated a population nearing 1,200, with growth fueled by newcomers from various parts of Canada and the world. Starting in the mid-2000s, a significant number of people from Ontario relocated to Foam Lake, a trend that continues today. In the last decade, the community has welcomed individuals from the Philippines, Ukraine, Germany, and other countries, as well as British Columbia and Alberta.

Many of these new residents are returning to their hometown, while others are young people seeking a more economical and safer place to live, work, and raise families. Over 40% of Foam Lake's population now consists of new residents.

Foam Lake's cultural diversity has always been a strength. Early settlers from many countries maintained their strong cultural traditions and customs. Over the decades, these cultural differences have remained important and have been preserved, even as integration among the different cultures has occurred.

Arts and culture remain a very important part of Foam Lake's history. Groups such as the Foam Lake School of Dance, Ukrainian Dance Club, Quill Plains Music Festival, Vatnabyggd Icelandic Club, Veselka Committee, and others have all helped to keep cultural traditions alive and well. Additionally, several churches in Foam Lake continue to serve their parishioners from a wide area.



Foam Lake is known for embracing diversity and inclusiveness, exemplified by its "Good Neighbour Policy." This policy guides the council with a series of statements that outline the kind of community we aspire to be. It also initiated and continues to guide our journey in Truth and Reconciliation with our First Nations friends and neighbors. This document could serve as a model for other communities seeking to foster similar values.

Foam Lake is an incredibly resilient community, having faced many disasters since becoming a town.

In 1944, a fire that started in the Foam Lake Livery Barn and stables spread to the Security Lumber Yards, destroying both. High winds caused several smaller fires, threatening much of the north side of town.

In 1959, the Foam Lake Flour Mill, in operation since 1912, was destroyed by fire, threatening most of the town and damaging several nearby homes, the Pioneer and Federal Grain elevators, and the CPR station house.

In 1962, the ten-year-old Foam Lake Skating Arena was destroyed by fire. The Curling Arena gave up half its ice surfaces (four of its eight sheets of ice) so kids could skate and play hockey until a new skating rink was built in 1965. That same year, the Foam Lake Co-op Creamery, processing milk, eggs, cream, and butter burned to the ground. It was rebuilt and operated until the mid-1970s. The building is now occupied by Dream Works vehicles.

Harry's Central Lunch and an adjacent hardware store burned to the ground in 1967. In 1973, Sandberg's Chicken Barns near the cemetery were lost to fire, and in 1976, Foam Lake's first school, a two-storey brick structure located at the west end of Bray Avenue, burned. The adjoining school building was saved and later turned into the Community Cultural Centre, serving Foam Lake for many years before being demolished.

In 1983, Foam Lake Motors was destroyed by fire but was rebuilt at the same location, at the corner of Cameron Street and Highway 16. The Shell Oil Bulk Fuel Facility on the north side of McIntosh Street was also destroyed by fire in 1983 and rebuilt along the south side of Highway 16.

In 1984 a fire destroyed Sydor's Hardware Store and Russel's Parkland Foods on Main Street. The Pioneer Annex on North Railway Avenue was also destroyed but was rebuilt. After a group of local investors stepped forward, the IGA Grocery Store, operated by Russel and Audrey Rokochoy, was rebuilt on the property of Russel's and Sydor's hardware. The hardware store was not rebuilt.

Disaster struck again in 2006. Late at night on June 29, a fire destroyed three buildings on Main Street. TJ's Confectionary, the Water Fountain, the Backyard Studio, and a Sears Catalogue outlet were housed in the first building where the fire originated. It spread to Dennis's Cafe next door destroying the business and living quarters upstairs. It then spread to the next building that housed the Foam Lake Medical Clinic, where Dr. Bia had his office. The medical records from the clinic were saved by volunteers who came to help. Dennis's Cafe relocated to a vacant building on Main Street where it is still operating. Dr. Bia relocated his office to the Foam Lake Health Centre where he continued to serve Foam Lake and the area. He retired in 2016 after 42 years of dedicated service to Foam Lake and moved to Saskatoon to be nearer his family.

The Foam Lake Credit Union purchased the property that was left vacant after the fire and later built their new office on the corner of Bray Avenue West and Main Street.

Just over a month later in 2006, another major fire started in a privately owned grain elevator on North Railway Avenue and McIntosh Street. The elevator was destroyed, and the fire, fanned by extremely strong winds, quickly spread to the adjacent Pioneer grain elevator's wooden annex. The annex was destroyed, and the adjoining concrete terminal was damaged but later reopened. It was an amazing effort of the Foam Lake, Wynyard, Wadena, Invermay, and Yorkton Fire departments that kept the fire from spreading across town. Local volunteers also manned garden hoses, shovels, rakes and whatever they had to control small fires that started across town.

The Foam Lake area has also been devastated by flooding. In 2007, unprecedented snowfall, run-off and spring rains brought around 37 inches of rain, flooding Fishing Lake and destroying many lake homes and cabins. The golf course and regional park facilities were also forced to close. Flooding occurred again in 2010 after over 53 inches of rain fell in the spring. Although the town itself escaped damage, infrastructure was tested to its limits, and the economic impact from the years-long elimination of lake traffic was devastating for local businesses.

In 2014, torrential rainfall caused Milligan Creek to overflow, threatening several properties directly west of Highway 310. Local volunteers joined the volunteer Fire Department to sandbag the highway and prevent damage to nearby residences. Flooding occurred again in 2017, with heavy rains causing Milligan Creek to overflow Highway 310. Although the damage was less significant, many volunteers were on high alert to help prevent significant damage.

In 2022, a tornado struck the Foam Lake area, sparing the town itself but causing significant damage to nearby farms. The tornado touched down about two miles west of Foam Lake, destroying many buildings in the farmyard and bin yard of Rob and Janina Currah and Chris and Ruth Gislason. It then travelled east, touching down in the Ross Lamb farmyard just north of town, causing significant damage before stopping about 500 yards short of the community. The power and devastation of the tornado were shocking, and residents were left thanking their lucky stars that it did not cause more damage than it did.

In true Foam Lake fashion, volunteers and friends came out in numbers to help the affected families clean up and start the rebuilding process. YouTuber Quick Dick McDick (Dickson Delorme), who assisted with cleanup said that when something like this happens in your community, it gives you a whole new perspective. Foam Lake's current Mayor, Shelley Thoen-Chaykoski, echoed these sentiments, highlighting how the community always comes together to help when disasters happen. "We look out for each other. That's important. We know that someone will be checking in on us because that's just what we do," she said.

Foam Lake's resilience in the face of adversity is a source of pride. That could be part of the reason that in 1996, after Canada and Saskatchewan were declared the best country and province in the world to live, Foam Lake was named the "Best Place in the World to Live" following a CBC Radio poll. This brought about the slogan on the Town of Foam Lake sign on Main Street, and the community continues to strive to live up to that slogan.

An article by Joan Eyolfson-Cadham in the Foam Lake Review in 1999, following the 75th Anniversary celebration, featured the following piece, "My Town and I", author unknown:

"My town is where my home is founded, where my business is situated, where my vote is cast, where my children are educated, where my neighbours dwell, and where my life is chiefly lived. It is the home spot for me.

My town has a right to my civic loyalty. It supports me, and I support it.

My town wants my citizenship - not partisanship, friendship - not oafishness, cooperation - not dissension, sympathy - not criticism, my intelligent support – not indifference.

My town supplies me with law and order, trade, friends, education, and the rights of a free-born Canadian. I should believe in my town and work for it.

And I will."

If we take it to heart and follow this bit of philosophy, we will do well as a community going into the next century.

Thanks for helping us celebrate.



Mayors' Historical Highlights 1924-2024

Mayor DR. RUSSEL H. CHANT, 1924-1929 and 1931-1946

- Dr. Chant's office was where the Town Office now stands on Main Street.
- During his term, Foam Lake's first hospital opened in 1938.
- Foam Lake gained Town status.

Mayor JOHN REID, 1929-1930

- During his term, he was active in many businesses, starting as a drayman and later running an implement dealership.

Mayor ALBERT PYSDEN, 1946-1956

- During his term, the new hospital and nurses' residence were built at the end of Main Street.
- Construction of what is now the Composite School took place.

Mayor HELGI LOPTSON, 1957-1959

- During his term, sewer works were installed.
- The keeping of livestock and fowl in town was prohibited.

Mayor PETER PANKRATZ, 1960-1964

- During his term, exploration for a water source took place.
- Sewer services were extended north of the tracks.
- The Campbell well was developed.

Mayor NICK FEDERKO, 1965-1970

- During his term, the present Recreation Centre was opened.
- Streets were paved.
- The Nursing Home was opened.
- A new water treatment plant was built.
- Curbs and sidewalks were constructed.

Mayor RENT DUNLOP, 1971-1976

- During his term, the sportsground and the Northside Playground were established.
- Land for a lagoon was purchased.
- Development of a new housing subdivision began.
- Development of the new Town Office, Fire Hall, and Library took place.

Mayor JOHN D. SEREDA, 1976-1978

- During his term, the swimming pool was opened.
- Artificial ice was installed in the Recreation Centre.
- Expansion of water and sewer services took place.

Mayor MORRIS FEDAK, 1978-1982

- During his term, the Town acquired the old Bray School for a community cultural centre.
- Purchased a street sweeper, garbage truck and the first Handivan.
- Sold the old town hall property to the Sask. Liquor Board.
- Held the first public meeting for a new community hall.
- Installed sprinklers in Central Park (now called Ralls Park).

Mayor VELMA JOHNSON, 1982-1985

- During her term, she was a member and promoter of the original Hall Committee.
- Developed a storm sewer system,
- Developed a water treatment plant and expanded water storage facility.

Mayor MILT NORGAARD, 1985-1991

- During his term, there was a Nursing Home expansion.
- Rescue Van and EMO equipment were purchased for the Fire Department.
- Complete paving and curbing took place.
- The tourist area and present Town Campground were developed.

Mayor DANIEL BODNAR, 1991-1994

- During his term, a partnership with the Rural Municipality of Foam Lake for a new Fire Protection truck was developed.
- The recycling program was started.
- The new landfill site was developed.

Mayor RAY KING, 1994-2003

- During his term, the water treatment plant was upgraded.
- There was formation and cooperation with surrounding communities for a Regional Economic Development Authority.
- The birdwatching area at the Heritage Marsh was developed.
- Ball Park improvements were completed.

Mayor BOB JOHNSON, 2003-2016

- Advanced the town into the utilization of online services and website development as an expanded communication tool.
- Continued recruitment of permanent dental services to Foam Lake and advocacy for base levels of health services at the local health centre.
- Major renovation of the 1976 Central Park Swimming Pool into the newly revitalized Foam Lake Waterpark in 2014.
- Extensive water valve maintenance work on the town's water distribution system.
- Expansion of the Public Works shop on Railway Avenue.

Mayor LORNE HREHOR, 2016-2020

- Developed a mini golf recreation facility.
- Extensive upgrading of sewage treatment, with a new Main lift station planned and constructed.
- Planning and development of a new town office facility moved to the present Main Street location from Cameron Street.
- Adoption of regular street maintenance programs.
- Major healthcare advocacy efforts continued.

Mayor SHELLEY THOEN-CHAYKOSKI, 2020-present

- Led council and community through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Implemented Strategic Planning processes and extensive bylaw and policy updates, including the Good Neighbour Policy that highlights diversity, inclusion, and truth and reconciliation for the town.
- Development and renovation of the former town office into a multi-purpose Community Cultural Centre on Cameron Street.
- Construction of an outdoor Sport Court in Ralls Park.
- Renovations to the Recreation Centre Curling Club facility.
- Major Main Street water line replacement and pavement upgrades.
- Revitalization of the Town Cemetery.
- Continued housing and healthcare advocacy efforts.