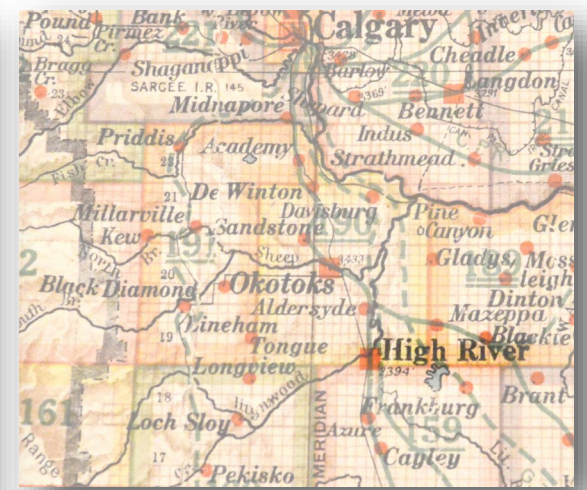


PLACE NAMES OF THE FOOTHILLS



A View in High River, April, 1907.

High River, 1907



High River

‘The Crossing’ was the name used by early settlers to describe what is now known as High River. It was the location to safely ford the river by horse or by wagon.

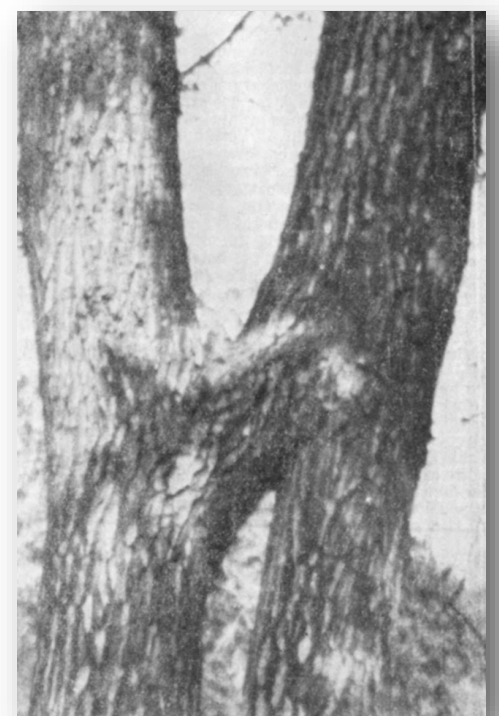
The Blackfoot called the river ‘Ispitsi’, meaning ‘high.’ They also applied the term Ispitsi to the large, tall cottonwood trees which border the river’s banks; hence ‘highwood.’ The history book ‘Life and Legends’ offers another translation of Ispitsi: ‘the place of high trees along running water.’ Early pioneers and traders phonetically spelled the word ‘Spitzee.’ Some early maps label the river as ‘Spitzee’ and others, such as Palliser’s map of 1858 and Laurie’s map of 1870, label it as the ‘Highwood.’

The first post office established at The Crossing in 1884 at the home of W. J. Bunce located NW6-19-28-W4. The High River School District No. 144 formed in 1889 and the first school was in a sod-roofed log house that had been the home of Buck Smith. It served as a school until a proper school was built in 1891 on the south side of the Highwood. Later that year, another school was built on the north side of the river.

High River started as a hamlet and in 1901 residents applied for village status. Five years later, in 1906, it was incorporated as a town.

A significant landmark in the High River area was the Medicine Tree. It was actually two cottonwood trees growing side by side joined by one branch growing about 10 feet off the ground. It was revered by the Blackfoot who provided offerings of food, tobacco and arrowheads at the base of its trunk. The tree eventually rotted and blew down.

High River has a population of 13,580 as of the 2016 census.



The Medicine Tree.