



Lake Agassiz

The Red River Valley is part of the area that was once occupied by Lake Agassiz.

Origin of Lake Agassiz

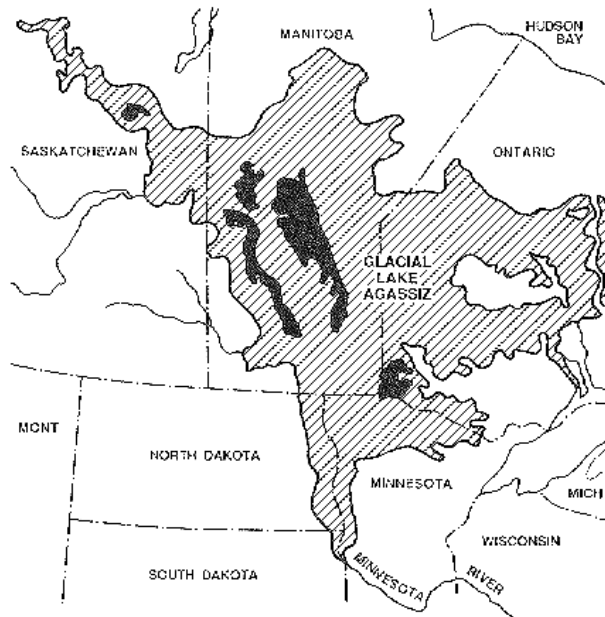
Lake Agassiz was formed by the melting of glaciers about 11,500 years ago. At the end of the Wisconsin ice age, an ice sheet covered most of Canada with lobes of ice extending all the way down the Red River Valley. As the ice melted, water accumulated to form Lake Agassiz. Lake Agassiz existed for about 2,000 years, increasing and decreasing in size depending on whether the ice sheet was advancing or retreating.

Extent of Lake Agassiz

Lake Agassiz covered areas totaling 367,000 square miles at various times, probably reaching its maximum size of nearly 135,000 square miles about 10,000 years ago. The map on this page shows the approximate boundaries of Lake Agassiz, which drained at various times, eastward into Lake Superior, northwestward to the McKensie River, and southward into Big Stone Lake, cutting a channel that formed the present valley of the Minnesota River.

Formation of Red River Valley

As glacial Lake Agassiz catastrophically drained about 9,500 years ago, it left behind the flat surface we know as the Red River Valley. The ice sheet, which formed the barrier at the northern end of Lake Agassiz, continued to retreat, until the barrier finally collapsed 9,500 years ago. With the retreat of the ice sheet, a channel to the north drained Lake Agassiz into Hudson Bay. The Lake of the Woods, Upper and Lower Red



Lakes, and Canada's Lakes Winnipeg, Winnipegosis, Manitoba, and Nipigon are remnants of glacial Lake Agassiz.

Named Lake Agassiz

In 1879, Lake Agassiz was named by Warren Upham in honor of Louis Agassiz, the Swiss-born U.S. scientist who is credited with developing the glacial theory.

For more information:

Krenz, Gene and Jay Leitch. [A River Runs North, Managing an International River](#), Second Edition. Red River Water Resources Council: 2013.

Kelsey, Vera. [Red River Runs North!](#) Harper: New York. 1951.

River Keepers
1120 28th Ave. N., Ste. B
Fargo, ND 58102
701-235-2895
info@riverkeepers.org
www.riverkeepers.org
www.facebook.com/RiverKeepersFM

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