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**Friends of the
Saskatoon
Afforestation
Areas Inc.**



**City of
Saskatoon**

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Land Acknowledgements

References:

1. Gridley, K. (1989). *Man of the Trees: Selected Writings of Richard St. Barbe Baker*. Willits, California: Ecology Action of the Midpeninsula.
2. Hanley, P. (2018). *Man of the Trees: Richard St. Barbe Baker - the First Global Conservationist*. Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press.
3. Letters from the Universal House of Justice. Prayer "Make me a hollow reed," Baha'i Library Online. https://bahai-library.com/uhj_hollow_reed_prayers. Date Accessed Oct. 31, 2021.
4. University of Saskatchewan, University Archives & Special Collections, Richard St. Barbe Baker fonds, MG 71 Box 35 M11 Sahara1 11 London Via Sahara Kenya 001 -M12 Africa3 1 Baker 006

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Canada

SaskEnergy

Booklet 10

World Forestry Charter and the Desert Challenge



**"Make of me a hollow reed from which the pith
of self hath been blown, that I may be a clear
channel through which Thy Love may flow to
others"-this prayer, Richard's last words. [3]**

Land Acknowledgement:

The afforestation areas are situated in the West Swale Yorath Island Glacial Spillway, a sacred site in Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. Those who entered into Treaty 6 are the Cree *Nêhiyawak* (neh-HEE-oh-wuk), Saulteaux *Nakawē*, and Nakota the *Yankton* and *Yanktonai* people.

May our relationships with the land, standing peoples, forests, and waters teach us to honour and respect the past and invite us to move forward in harmony. May we all come together as friends, to find inspiration and guidance from histories, languages, and cultures which broaden our understanding and commu-

**Season: Spring/
Summer**

Introduction:

Have you ever heard of the Man of the Trees? He was born on October 9th, 1889, in England. He travelled the world, promoting tree planting, good forestry practices and the protection of special forests like the redwoods. His greatest ambition was to reverse the growth of deserts and he worked out a plan to reclaim the world's biggest desert, the Sahara, through tree planting. He understood 100 years ago that trees and forests influenced climate, protected soils and by holding water, prevented flooding.

Why is he so important to Saskatchewan? He studied at the University of Saskatchewan, lived near Beaver Creek, spent time in the forest near Prince Albert, and planted his last tree on the U of S campus before passing away at the age of 92. The afforestation area we describe here was planted in 1972 and named in his honour in 1978.



In School Activity:

From the following list of 'Earth Healers' choose one to learn about:

Wangari Mathaai (Kenya) - Green Belt Movement

Felix Finkbeiner (Bavaria) - Plant for the Planet

Masanobu Fukuoka (Japan) - Natural Farming

Rowan White (California) - Indigenous Seedkeepers Network

Dr. John Liu (America/China) - Ecosystem Restoration Camps

Chipko Movement (India) - Forest Conservation

Andy Lipkis (United States) - Urban Forests

How did they inspire positive change in their communities or around the globe? How do they inspire you?

*"The forest is a society of living things, the greatest of which is the tree."
~ Richard St. Barbe Baker^[1]*

On-site or Outdoor Activity:

Did you know that there are over 350 Indigenous bee species in Saskatchewan? Many are solitary and don't have stingers. Some don't even look like bees!

1. In groups, use the *Spring Flower Scavenger Hunt sheet* to name some of the flowers in bloom. Describe one of pollinators visiting these flowers. (Flies, mosquitoes, and wasps are pollinators too!)

2. Visit a wetland.

Wetlands often have cattails, rushes, and willows growing around them. These are filtering plants that help to clean the water. The water travels slowly down, underground, and feeds into the lakes and rivers that exist as ground water.

Draw or describe what you see at the wetland:

Story: World Forestry Charter and the Desert Challenge

Note: Anything written in italics was written by Richard himself and quoted directly from his texts.

From our hearts, with our hands, for the Earth, all the world together.

Richard always worked towards bringing people from all religions and races together for the healing of hearts and the healing of the Earth. In Africa, he called this "Twahamwe" from an understanding of a Kikuyu word meaning 'pull together' or 'work together'.

In this spirit, on July 29th, 1943, Richard hosted diplomats from 11 nations in the UK, to discuss and sign the first World Forestry Charter. It recognized that people were taking far more from the forests than they were giving back and that this would have serious consequences for the planet.

Richard organized this gathering, anticipating the formation of the United Nations, two years later, on October 24, 1945. Now, on the global stage, Richard could draw attention to the environmental concerns he was witnessing through his world travels.

At the World Forestry Charter Gathering of 1951, 32 nations approved a call for a "Green Front Against the Desert." By the fall of 1952, Richard set off on a team expedition that would try to determine the speed at which the desert was growing.

The expedition would take them 4,000 miles across one of the harshest climates of the world. They would travel from the Atlas Mountains of Algeria to Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania in 4 months.

He writes of his experiences witnessing the vast spaces between the oasis where people could still grow enough food to live, using methods of irrigation:

Near where the peach trees were planted we were shown the remains of a huge fossilized tree stump which had been brought in from the desert nearby; it was an unidentified species...unlike any we had previously seen in the Atlas Mountains. We were now hundreds of miles from these mountains and it would be interesting to know how long ago this tree was growing and the extent of this forest.

All day long we travelled towards mountains of solid rock, and in the evening we rested at the well of Ekker which is in the shade of a great tamarisk tree.

The resthouse keeper...gave us some of his precious sticks to cook our evening meal on, we asked him where they came from. "I bought them," he told us. "They still find them here and there, growing along the banks of the oueds" [dried out riverbeds or valleys].

We were interested. We told him we were foresters and were looking for old forests.

"Why, when I was a boy," he exclaimed, "the whole of that hill up there," he pointed to the mountainside, "was a great forest."

This great forest was known as the Last Forest; for his father had remembered others. But people had come and cleared the trees, even removing the stumps and roots from the ground for charcoal and fuel.

Next morning I was up at dawn and walked by myself toward the mountain. At its foot was dark sand. Something different from stone suddenly caught my eye. I picked it up. It was a bleached chip of wood. I soon found others all over the place, scattered in the sand and usually partially buried. I returned to the resthouse keeper with my finds.

"You'll find plenty of those all over the desert. They are not big enough for people to bother with," he said in a matter-of-fact way.

For us they were treasures, rewarding us for all the roughness of the journey; for us they were proof that in the heart of the Sahara, within living memory, the last forest had been cut down.^[1]

Richard saw firsthand that the removal of trees and vegetation, local changes in climate and desert expansion were linked. Richard was before his time, understanding the impact of plants on climate factors like rainfall, soil health, and temperature. He also saw the effects of land degradation on communities; causing malnutrition, famine and even war.

Scientists are still debating the causes of desertification in Africa, and the theories range from volcanic activity, to wobbles in the tilt of the Earth's orbital axis, to overgrazing by herds of goats. However, we know that this area was once a lush forest and Richard believed it could be productive land supporting communities again.

Richard promoted the Green Front as a constructive initiative for peace; deploying the standing armies of the world in a campaign of tree planting in the Sahara. There was no support for such a united effort at that time.

However, his visionary idea of a shelterbelt across the width of Africa is now being implemented as a long term Great Green Wall project. It is a global symbol of humanity coming together to overcome its biggest threat – our rapidly degrading environment.

Richard continued his mission for the rest of his life; encouraging people everywhere to plant trees and protect forests. On his extensive travels he gave lectures, networked with concerned individuals and groups and creatively used media to get out his message on the need for a universal tree sense. He died in Saskatoon, 4 days after he planted his last tree, now identified by a plaque on the Meewasin trail.

In Saskatchewan, 2021 saw possibly the worst drought on record. Climate change caused by increasing levels of CO2 in the atmosphere and the removal of vegetation everywhere are contributing factors.

What would Richard do if he was alive today? Thankfully, he inspired many people and now there are great hopeful stories of people making positive change around the world. Are you inspired to join in the action?!