



# Canoe Trip #15

## ***Cumberland House - Saskatchewan River - The Pas (Manitoba)***

**Length of Trip:** 133 kilometres (83 miles)

**Time Required to Complete Trip:** 2 to 3 days

**Number of Portages:** 0 to 1 portage (Depending on selected starting point)

### **Warning:**

Water levels and canoeing conditions on many Saskatchewan rivers and lakes vary from time to time, causing changes in the appearance of the various landmarks described in this booklet, as well as causing hazards not described herein. It is the canoeist's responsibility to proceed with caution and alertness, using discretion and good judgement at all times. The information in this booklet is intended to be of general assistance only, and the Government of Saskatchewan assumes no responsibility for its use. Canoeists are reminded that they travel at their own risk at all times.

### **Access to Starting Point:**

Cumberland House is located 165 kilometres (103 mile) northeast of Nipawin via highways 55 (paved) and 123 (paved and gravel). A ferry on highway 123 crosses the Saskatchewan River to the island on which Cumberland House is situated. Access to this trip may also be gained via the Saskatchewan River from E.B. Campbell Hydroelectric Station (Squaw Rapids Dam) (see canoe trip #25) or via the Sturgeon-Weir River (see canoe Trips #14 and/or #44).

NOTE: It is not advisable to leave vehicles unsupervised for long periods of time at northern campgrounds. Safe parking of vehicles should be arranged with private tourist camp, marina or motel operators.

### **Maps:**

- 63-E/16 Cumberland House
- 63-F/13 Barrier Lake
- 63-K/4 Namew Lake
- 63-F/14 The Pas, Manitoba
- 63-K/3 Root Lake, Manitoba

NOTE: Maps 63-K/3 and 63-K/4 are only needed for navigating the 13 kilometre (8 mile) central section of the Saskatchewan River's 'Big Bend' swing to the north.

### **About the Trip:**

This trip takes the canoeist through an area rich in history. It also traverses some excellent moose, goose and duck habitat which would be of interest to the nature enthusiast as well as the hunter. If one does not intend to hunt, it is strongly suggested this trip be made during closed season before the end of August. Generally, the scenery along this route is not spectacular; and, at low water levels, the presence of much exposed mud along the banks can be an inconvenience to canoeists and campers.

Fishing is good, although it is advised that consumption be limited as the fish in the Saskatchewan River system have exhibited traces of mercury contamination. Species found include pike, walleye and goldeye.

NOTE: The use of river water for drinking purposes is not recommended. However, should this become necessary, the water should be thoroughly boiled.

This is an extremely safe and easy trip. There are no rapids to run, no exposed bodies of water to cross, as well as a steady and moderate current to assist the paddler all the way.

The trip ends at the bridge at The Pas, Manitoba, from which point canoeists can easily be picked up by car or truck, or from which they can telephone for assistance.

Canoeists may also purchase supplies at The Pas for an extended trip down river in Manitoba.

### **The Canoe Trip:**

At the starting point of Cumberland House the canoeist may purchase food, gasoline and most other supplies. This northern community also contains Saskatchewan Government offices, an R.C.M.P. detachment, hotel, airstrip, float-plane base, post office, hunting guides and outside communication via radio, telephone and highway.

There are several starting points in Cumberland House. Which one is used depends on personal preference and on how the community was reached.

### **Choices of Starting Point:**

Canoeists may launch their canoes into the Saskatchewan River at the ferry crossing (either shore). The ferry is 5 kilometres (3 miles) by road south of Cumberland House proper. Canoeists without vehicles could arrange to be trucked from Cumberland House to the ferry, or they could consider one of the other route variations to avoid the rapids in the Bigstone Cutoff above the ferry.

Canoeists, especially those reaching Cumberland House by canoe, who do not wish to hire a truck to take them to the ferry below the rapids, may select one of the following options:

Canoeists may travel by water from Cumberland House in a southwest direction down the Bigstone River. At the confluence of the Bigstone River and the Bigstone Cutoff the canoeist should travel up the Bigstone Cutoff in a northwesterly direction for about one kilometre (2/3 mile) to the start of Elm Portage. This portage permits the canoeist to bypass severe rapids in the Bigstone Cutoff. These rapids are located 2 kilometres (1 1/3 mile) southeast of the confluence of Bigstone Cutoff and Bigstone River.

Elm Portage (Optional):

Connecting the southwest shore of Bigstone Cutoff with a northerly loop of the Saskatchewan River's "Old Channel". 225 metres (246 yards) long and in fairly good condition. This portage bypasses a class 3 rapid. From Bigstone Cutoff, this portage starts from an inconspicuous break in the shoreline vegetation on the southwest bank (Grid location 731794 - Map 63-E/16). The portage can also be located by looking for a break in the willows growing back from the shore.

From the "Old Channel" of the Saskatchewan River, this portage starts from a steep bank on the north shore of a sharp northerly swing of the channel (Grid location 728793 - Map 63-E/16). The steep bank may present a problem for the canoeist loading or unloading a canoe at this point.

There are no rapids in the "Old Channel" between the foot of Elm Portage and the junction with the Bigstone Cutoff.

It is possible, although not recommended, to portage along the exposed northeast shore of Bigstone Cutoff to avoid the rapids (Grid location 757782 - Map 63-E/16).

It is possible to travel eastward from Cumberland House along the south shore of Cumberland Lake to the start of the Tearing River (Grid location 846817 - Map 63-E/16). However, this route variation is not recommended during periods of low water. A number of years ago the residents of Cumberland House constructed a dam at the head of the Tearing River. The remains of this dam could cause problems at low water levels.

The canoe trip down the lower Saskatchewan River is without great variation of scenery. Campsites are easy to find, unless low water levels cause the banks to be very muddy.

Because of changing requirements of the E.B. Campbell Hydroelectric Station (Squaw Rapids), the volume of water released below the dam can vary considerably. River travellers should haul their canoes well out of the water at night, as well as tie them to trees, to ensure that they will not be carried away in the event of a sharp rise in water level.

After crossing into Manitoba, the canoeist should watch the northwesterly bank for evidence of the old 'Barrier Settlement', the site of an attempt in the early 1900's to farm this area of the Saskatchewan River delta. In the area between grid locations 212772 and 230775 of Map 63-F/13, clearings and the remains of old farm buildings can still be sighted.

The river's big swing to the north provides a slight variation, and the occasional hunting camp is passed. There are a few old buildings at the sharp bend of the 'Big Eddy' settlement, and shortly thereafter the buildings of The Pas are sighted.

The trip ends at the bridge at The Pas, Manitoba, from which point canoeists can easily be picked up by car or truck, or from which they can telephone for assistance.

Canoeists may also purchase supplies at The Pas for an extended trip down river in Manitoba.

WRITTEN BY: Original script by Peter Gregg, reviewed in 1989 by Historic Trails Canoe Club.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:**

To minimize your impact on the environment while canoeing along Saskatchewan waterways, please keep in mind these safe and sensible practices:

Make every canoe trip a clean trip! Follow the pack in - pack out rule. When breaking camp, erase all evidence that you were there. Leave your campsite cleaner than you found it.

Consider the wildlife and their habitat: While portaging or camping, stay on the trails to prevent any disturbance to the wildlife and natural vegetation.

Fire Prevention: Forest fires along canoe routes are an ever present danger. It is vital that all campfires are kept small and are thoroughly extinguished with water after use. Never leave a fire until you are sure it is 'dead'.



Be sure to obtain an official Saskatchewan Voyageur Certificate upon completion of your canoe trip. Before you start out, check in at one of the registration points and then again immediately after your journey is over. You will then become an official Saskatchewan Voyageur receiving a certificate as a memento of your canoe experience in Saskatchewan.

**Registration Points:**

Ministry offices in La Ronge, Prince Albert, Green Lake, Beauval, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, La Loche, Weyakwin, Stony Rapids, Pinehouse, Southend, Wollaston Lake, Sandy Bay, Pelican Narrows, Creighton, Cumberland House, Saskatoon, Pierceland, Loon Lake; Meadow Lake Provincial Park, Narrow Hills Provincial Park and the Visitor Information Centre at La Ronge.



**Ministry of  
Tourism, Parks,  
Culture and Sport**

**For further information contact:**

Toll Free: 1-800-205-7070

Fax: (306) 787-7000

Email: [info.TPCS@gov.sk.ca](mailto:info.TPCS@gov.sk.ca)

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