



Canoe Trip #17

Nemeiben Lake - Besnard Lake - Black Bear Island Lake - Churchill River - Otter Lake

Length of Trip: 170 kilometres (106 miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 6 to 8 days

Number of Portages: 19 to 22

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:

Canoes may be launched at the Saskatchewan Government campground at Nemeiben Lake. This campground is located at the end of a well marked, eight kilometre (5 mile) long, access road which branches off to the northwest from Highway 102 at a point 19 kilometres (12 miles) north of the community of La Ronge. Total road distance from La Ronge is 27 kilometres (17 miles).

Arrangements for safe parking of vehicles during the canoe trip can be made with either the supervisor of the Government campground, or the operator of a private fishing camp located near the campground at the south end of Bell Bay on Nemeiben Lake.

Maps:

- 73-P/5 Morning Lake
- 73-P/6 Nemeiben Lake
- 73-P/10 Otter Lake
- 73-P/11 Kavanaugh Lake
- 73-P/12 Black Bear Island Lake

About the Trip:

This medium length trip gives the modern voyageur big lake experience, exposure to the Churchill River, and familiarity with narrow, marshy waterways and small lakes. It is not recommended for beginners, but is very popular and well used by canoeists of intermediate skills. It is not an especially difficult trip, and all dangerous rapids can be readily portaged.

Because parts of this trip involve possible exposure to strong winds and waves on large lakes, ample extra time should be allowed to wait out bad weather which may make big lakes unsafe to travel.

Numerous attractive natural campsites occur all along the route. Fishing for northern pike and walleye is good in all waters. Lake trout occur in Nemeiben, Black Bear Island and Trout Lakes.

Normally this trip would be made in the direction described here. It is possible, however, to reverse the direction if so desired. A certain amount of upstream paddling would be encountered in some spots, but not enough to bother the determined canoeist. For those who wish to reverse the direction of the entire trip, and for those who may choose to simply travel part way and then return via the same route, portage descriptions are given from both directions.

A 95 kilometre (59 mile) access road extends from Highway 2 to a Saskatchewan Government campground on Besnard Lake, located near the narrows between the southwestern part of Besnard Lake and the larger eastern portion. (The campground is located near Grid location 330408 on map 73-O/8 Bar Lake). This access road into Besnard Lake makes a shortened version of this trip possible - i.e. Nemeiben Lake to Besnard Lake. It also means that in the event of an emergency, help could be obtained at Besnard Lake campground or from the private fishing camp operators on Besnard Lake.

The Canoe Trip:

From the Government campground on Nemeiben Lake, the route crosses to Miller Channel on the west side of the lake and then to Head Lake. Frequent reference to map and compass is advised to avoid getting lost on this large lake.

The canoeist has a choice of two routes to reach Head Lake.

One choice is to stay to the north of Stewart Peninsula on the west shore of Nemeiben Lake. This route

does not require a portage to reach Head Lake.

The other choice is to travel to the southwest along the east side of Stewart Peninsula to its narrowest point and to make optional portage number 1. This choice offers more protection from north and west winds, and is also 3 kilometres (2 miles) shorter.

Portage Number 1 (Optional):

Connecting Nemeiben Lake to waters leading to Head Lake (Miller Channel). 103 metres (113 yards) long and in good condition. From the southeast shore of Nemeiben Lake, this portage starts at a break in the shoreline vegetation in a small cove about 150 metres (164 yards) to the south, or left, of a dock and cabin (Grid location 662255 - Map 73-P/5).

From Miller Channel, this portage starts from a small cove on the southeast shore (Grid location 661256 - Map 73-P/5).

Paddle to the west end of Head Lake. There are three choices of portages to reach Pine Brook from Head Lake: Portage Number 2 is short and in good condition; Portage Number 2A is slightly longer, in good condition and it shortens the canoe route by a few 100 metres (yards); Portage Number 2B is considerably longer, but it shortens the canoe route by nearly 3 kilometres (1 3/4 miles). It is also a pleasant walk for members of a canoe party without heavy packs who could easily be picked up by canoe from its west end.

Portage Number 2:

Connecting Head Lake with Pine Brook. 252 metres (275 yards) long and in good condition.

From the west shore of Head Lake, this portage starts at an old dock about 300 metres (328 yards) north of the mouth of Pine Brook (Grid location 617237 - Map 73-P/5). This trail is wide, straight and used in connection with wild rice harvesting on Pine Brook.

From the Pine Brook side, this portage starts on the east bank at an old dock just before a grove of tall spruce about 200 metres (219 yards) before further canoe travel is blocked by shallow rocky rapids (Grid location 615238 - Map 73-P/5).

Portage Number 2A:

Connecting Head Lake with Pine Brook. 291 metres (318 yards) long and in good condition. From the west shore of Head Lake, this portage starts at an old dock about 800 metres (875 yards) north of the mouth of Pine Brook and north of the point and small island on the west central shore of the lake (Grid location 619243 - Map 73-P/5).

From the Pine Brook side, this portage starts on the east bank at a definite opening in the shoreline vegetation by a grove of tall poplars 800 metres (875 yards) before further canoe travel is blocked by shallow rocky rapids (Grid location 616244 - Map 73-P/5).

Portage Number 2B:

Connecting Head Lake with Pine Brook. 1008 metres (1102 yards) long and in fair to good condition with some wet spots. This trail is used more as a trapper's winter trail and short cut rather than as a portage. From the west side of Head Lake, this portage starts from a rocky landing on the south side of the mouth of Pine Brook (Grid location 616236 - Map 73-P/5). During the summer, this trail would by-pass 4 kilometres (2 1/2 miles) of moderate upstream paddling through wild rice.

From the Pine Brook side, this portage starts at a definite grassy opening back of a whitish rock outcrop immediately north of a small cabin on the east shore of the brook (Grid location 609236 - Map 73-P/5).

The route up Pine Brook touches the southern shore of Howard Lake and then continues on to the southeast end of Clam Lake. As the outlet of Clam Lake is approached, the current against the paddler becomes progressively more noticeable.

Portage Number 3:

Connecting Pine Brook with Clam Lake. 105 metres (115 yards) long and in excellent condition.

From the Pine Brook side, this portage starts in a small grassy cove on the right, or east, shore 25 metres (27 yards) from the base of shallow rocky rapids.

From the Clam Lake side, this portage starts at a grassy landing on the left, or east shore 35 metres (38 yards) from the head of shallow rocky rapids.

In travelling across Clam Lake, watch for shallow rocks in the narrows at the mouth of Laird Bay (Grid location 521305 - Map 73-P/5).

There are two possible routes between Clam and Triveet Lakes. The shorter route involves one portage, whereas the other involves no portages.

Portage Number 4:

Connecting Clam Lake with Triveet Lake. 206 metres (225 yards) long and in excellent condition.

From Clam Lake, this portage starts at a green patch on the southwest shore of Laird Bay (Grid location 517308 - Map 73-P/5).

From Triveet Lake, this portage starts at a sandy landing on the east shore of a small cove on the southeast arm of the lake (Grid location 515308 - Map 73-P/5).

The other alternate does not involve making a portage, but it is about 12 kilometres (7 1/2 miles) longer and quite shallow in spots. This route follows Laird Bay to the inlet stream at its northern end (Grid location 544358 - Map 73-P/5) and paddling up against a slight current to Triveet Lake. Canoeists may have to haul over a beaver dam or two on this route which is used by outfitters to take large boats between the two lakes.

Portage Number 5:

Connecting Triveet Lake with the outlet stream of Morning Lake. 167 metres (183 yards) long and in excellent condition.

There is a good campsite located on a ridge near the west end of this portage.

From Triveet Lake, this portage starts at a grassy patch on the west shore 80 metres (87 yards) southwest of the shallow, rocky inflowing stream (Grid location 499339 - Map 73-P/5). This portage ends in a narrow channel which becomes quite shallow in spots.

From the Morning Lake side, this portage starts at a grassy landing on the right, or south, side of a narrow winding stream 15 metres (16 yards) above the start of a small shallow, rapid. This stream is followed for one and one half kilometre (1 mile) after leaving Morning Lake from a shallow, reedy bay on the east shore (Grid location 492350 - Map 73-P/5).

During periods of extremely low water, the part of this stream nearest to Morning Lake may become very shallow and necessitate the hauling of canoes over sand bars.

Paddle around the southern end of the main peninsula in Morning Lake and up the long north central arm which extends six kilometres (3 3/4 miles) to the northeast. During the summer, the first kilometre (2/3 mile) up this arm involves paddling through a dense growth of wild rice.

In travelling between Morning and Gull Lakes, there is a choice between portage number 6 which is quite long and level, or portage number 6A which is shorter but steeper.

Portage Number 6:

Connecting Morning Lake with Gull Lake. 574 metres (627 yards) long and in good condition.

From the northwest shore of the north central bay of Morning Lake, this portage starts at a break in the shoreline vegetation of a shallow bay (Grid location 479387 - Map 73-P/5).

From the Gull Lake side, this portage starts from the bottom end of the most southerly bay midway between two prominent shore rocks which are 50 metres (55 yards) apart. During the summer, this bay is densely overgrown with wild rice.

Portage Number 6A:

Connecting Morning Lake with Gull Lake. 380 metres (415 yards) long and in generally good condition, but steep in spots.

From the northwest shore of the north central bay of Morning Lake, this portage starts at a break in the shoreline vegetation 90 metres (98 yards) southwest of a prominent point (Grid location 483390 - Map 73-P/5).

From the Gull Lake side, this portage starts from the bottom end of the most southerly bay immediately north of a prominent shore rock 30 metres (33 yards) north of the end of portage number 6. During the summer, this bay is densely overgrown with wild rice.

There are two possible routes between Gull Lake and Besnard Lake. One route is via Spoon Lake and involves three fairly difficult and little used portages totalling over 800 metres (875 yards). This is not the preferred route to follow, therefore details have been omitted.

The preferred route is easier and involves two portages totalling 766 metres (837 yards).

Portage Number 7:

Connecting Gull Lake with a small nameless lake to the northeast. 318 metres (348 yards) long and in good condition.

From Gull Lake, this portage starts at the extreme southeast corner of the most northerly bay opposite a prominent rock face (Grid location 496424 - Map 73-P/5).

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts at the extreme south end of the lake.

Portage Number 8:

Connecting the small nameless lake northeast of Gull Lake with Besnard Lake. 448 metres (490 yards) long and in good condition, but swampy at the start.

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts at a swampy break in the shoreline vegetation on the northeast shore near the north end of the lake (Grid location 499429 - Map 73-P/5).

From the Besnard Lake end, this portage starts from the south end of a small bay on the eastern side of the lake (Grid location 502433 - Map 73-P/5).

On Besnard Lake, canoeists should travel to the lake's outlet at the northeast end of MacDougall Bay (Grid location 570573 - Map 73-P/12).

Portage Number 9:

Connecting Besnard Lake to quiet waters below the first rapid in the outlet stream. 290 metres (317 yards) long and in only fair condition due to a forest fire in the summer of 1989.

From the Besnard Lake side, this portage starts on the right, or southeast shore of the outlet stream 6 metres (6 1/2 yards) above the start of a shallow rocky rapid.

From the quiet waters below the first rapid, this portage starts on the left, or southeast, shore at the base of the fast water.

Portage Number 10:

Connecting successive sections of quiet water between rapids in the outlet stream from Besnard Lake. 161 metres (176 yards) long and in only fair condition due to a forest fire in the summer of 1989.

From the upstream, or southwest end, this portage starts on the right shore immediately above the fast water at the head of a shallow rocky rapid and about 150 metres (164 yards) below portage number 9.

From the quiet waters below the second rapid, this portage starts on the left, or southeast, shore at the base of the rapid.

Portage Number 11:

Connecting successive sections of quiet water between rapids in the outlet stream from Besnard Lake. 168 metres (184 yards) long and in only fair condition due to a forest fire in the summer of 1989. The trail is wet in spots and the lower landing is difficult. From the upstream, or southwest end, this portage starts on the left shore immediately above the fast water at the head of a shallow rocky rapid.

From the quiet waters below the third rapid, this portage starts on the right, or northwest, shore at a rocky landing at the base of the rapid.

Portage Number 12:

Connecting successive sections of quiet water between rapids in the outlet stream from Besnard Lake. 113 metres (124 yards) long and in fair condition. The trail skirts the edge of a forest fire in the summer of 1989.

From the upstream, or southwest end, this portage starts on the left shore immediately above the fast water at the head of a shallow rocky rapid.

From the quiet waters below the fourth rapid, this portage starts on the right, or northwest, shore at the base of the rapid.

In the waters below portage number 12, there are two short shallow sections which can generally be run under normal water conditions. Under low water conditions, canoeists may have to wade or line their canoes past these spots.

The outlet stream from Besnard Lake empties into a narrow bay on the south shore of Black Bear Island Lake (Grid location 583586 - Map 73-P/12).

Canoeists should follow a generally easterly course to the outlet of Black Bear Island Lake at Birch Rapids. These rapids are divided by a fairly large island. Birch Portage is on the south shore of the southerly part of this divided set of dangerous rapids (Grid location 752602 - Map 73-P/11).

Portage Number 13 - Birch Portage:

Connecting the east end of Black Bear Island Lake with quiet waters below the main rapids. 226 metres (247 yards) long and in excellent condition. This portage by-passes a class 5 rapid.

From Black Bear Island Lake, this portage starts as a break in the shoreline vegetation on the south shore about 45 metres (49 yards) above the more southerly set of rapids. Watch for rocks in the shallow approach.

From the quiet waters below the main part of Birch Rapids, this portage starts at a definite break in the vegetation on the west shore about 45 metres (49 yards) to the left of the southern set of rapids.

Approximately one and two third kilometre (one mile) below Birch Portage there are more rapids of a less severe nature divided by an island. There are three options open to the canoeist: 1) Run the main chute to the right, or south, of the dividing island after carefully surveying it; 2) Follow down the left-hand shoreline where some wading may be necessary at times of low water. This is the easiest and safest alternate; 3) Make optional portage number 14.

Portage Number 14 (Optional) - Around rapids below Birch Rapids:

Connecting quiet waters below Birch Rapids with the southwest end of Trout Lake. 200 metres (219 yards) long and in poor condition. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid.

There is a longer version of this portage which is 306 metres (335 yards) long and goes completely around the entire rapid. This longer version could be used by upstream paddlers not wishing to line or wade.

From the upstream end, this portage starts about 40 metres (44 yards) above the rapid on the right shore at an inconspicuous break in the alders and willows near the right edge of a grove of tall trees. The shorter version ends in fast water at the base of the rapid. The longer version ends in quiet water.

From Trout Lake, this portage starts on the left, or south, shore below two conspicuous rocks in quiet water opposite a rocky island at the foot of the rapid.

The canoeist should now proceed northeast to the outlet of Trout Lake. There are three sets of rapids between Trout Lake and Stack Lake.

Portage Number 15 - Trout Portage:

Connecting Trout Lake with quiet waters below the first rapid. 145 metres (158 yards) long and in good condition, but rocky and steep in spots. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

From Trout Lake, this portage starts on the east, or right, side of the outlet about 60 metres (66 yards) above dangerous rapids.

From the quiet waters below the rapid, this portage starts on the left bank about 30 metres (33 yards) from the base of the rapids.

Within about 300 metres (328 yards) the next set of rapids is encountered. Most canoeists will run these rapids which should however first be surveyed from shore. If in doubt, the canoeist should take optional portage number 16.

Portage Number 16 (Optional):

Connecting consecutive sections of quiet water between rapids separating Trout and Stack Lakes. 110 metres (120 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid. From the upstream end, this portage starts at a poor landing on a big flattish rock on the right shore immediately above the rapid. The trail improves back of the landing.

From the downstream end, this portage starts on the left shore at the base of the rapid at a high rock exposure. This trail is mostly used by upstream canoeists, and there are some excellent campsites along it.

The next set of rapids occurs in about 600 metres (656 yards).

Portage Number 17:

Connecting quiet waters below the second rapids with Stack Lake. 90 metres (98 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 3 rapid.

This set of rapids is divided into two channels by a small island.

From the quiet waters below the second set of rapids, this portage starts about 60 metres (66 yards) above the rapids on the right shore of the right, and larger, rapids.

From Stack Lake, this portage starts on sloping, bare rock about 30 metres (33 yards) below the base of the rapids on the left shore.

The left channel has a Class 2 and a Class 1 rapid in it. For downstream travel only, these two rapids can usually be run after careful survey from shore.

The outlet of Stack Lake is divided by a number of small islands. The right-hand choice involves descending through moderate fast water which should present no problems to alert canoeists. If in doubt, canoeists can wade or line down the shallower channels on the left. The upstream canoeist should wade or line up the shallow channels on the right hand side.

500 metres (547 yards) below this rapid, the canoeist approaches Rock Trout Portage.

Portage Number 18 - Rock Trout Portage:

Connecting consecutive sections of quiet water between Stack and Mounthey Lakes. 260 metres (284 yards) and in excellent condition. This portage by-passes a class 3 rapid.

Going downstream, this portage starts on the right, or east, shore at a sandy landing 15 metres (16 yards) above the start of the rapid.

Going upstream, this portage starts on a sloping rock shelf 30 metres (33 yards) below the end of the rapid.

There are numerous campsites along this portage.

500 metres (547 yards) below this portage, the canoeist encounters another set of rapids split by an island 140 metres (153 yards) wide. The right, or southern, course is the deepest and most easily run. Most canoeists will elect to run this rapid. An alternate is to make a short carry of a few metres (yards) over bare rock on the left channel.

Going upstream, the canoeist should make a short carry of a few metres (yards) over bare rock on the right channel.

At the outlet of Mounthey Lake there are several minor rapids which most likely would require wading for upstream travel.

Portage Number 19:

Connecting waters below the outlet of Mounthey Lake with waters leading to Nipew (or Dead) Lake. 190 metres (207 yards) long and in good condition, but steep at the lower end. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid.

This portage starts on the northeast, or left, shore in a cove 125 metres (136 yards) above the main rapid. A shorter 100 metre (109 yard) alternate starts immediately at the head of the rapid and, after climbing a steep embankment, joins up with the longer alternate.

Going upstream, this portage starts on the right bank at a steep embankment at the foot of the rapid.

There are intermittent minor rapids below the end of this portage which are not dangerous, and which can

be run by the alert canoeist. Some wading or lining may be necessary at times of very low water, and for upstream travel.

After entering the west end of Nipew Lake, travel in a generally northeasterly direction to the narrows leading to Hayman Lake. There is considerable current in these narrows, leading to a class 1+ rapid (Grid location 058720 - map 73 P/10). Wading or lining would most likely be required for upstream travel. Be sure to select the most easterly outlet from Burgess Bay of Hayman Lake.

Portage Number 20 - Great Devil Portage:

Connecting Hayman Lake with quiet waters below Great Devil Rapids. 1090 metres (1192 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 4 rapid.

N.B: The first obvious trail on the east side of Burgess Bay IS NOT the portage trail, rather it is a five kilometre (three mile) winter road which by-passes both Great and Little Devil Rapids.

From Burgess Bay of Hayman Lake, this portage starts in a cove on the north or left side 60 metres (66 yards) above the rapid.

From the quiet waters below Great Devil Rapids, this portage starts in a cove 135 metres (148 yards) below the rapids on the right, or northwest, shore.

Portage Number 21 - Little Devil Portage:

Connecting quiet waters below Great Devil Rapids with Devil Lake. 840 metres (918 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 2+ rapid.

From the quiet waters below Great Devil Rapids, this portage starts in a small cove on the north or left side 70 metres (77 yards) above the rapid.

From Devil Lake, this portage starts in a cove on the north, or right, shore immediately below the base of the rapids.

A shorter version of Little Devil Portage exists on the right, or south, shore. This involves two shorter portages as shown on map 73-P/10, but these have not been surveyed.

There is a Saskatchewan Government campground on the east shore of Devil Lake (Grid location 170680 - map 73 P/10), and road access to Otter Rapids and Missinipe.

Portage Number 22 - Otter Rapids Portage:

Connecting Devil Lake with Otter Lake. 565 metres (618 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 3 rapid. From the south end of Devil Lake, this portage starts on the east, or left, shore just after passing a prominent rock and immediately to the west of the Water Surveys building located at the head of the rapid.

From Otter Lake, this portage starts on the east, or right, side in a quiet cove at the base of the rapids.

Below the cove there is considerable fast water.

Canoeists planning to end their trip at the bridge across Otter Rapids need only portage 350 metres (382 yards). There is an excellent Government campground located at the point where the portage crosses Highway 102. Others will complete the portage and paddle on to Missinipe Townsite on Walker Bay at the west end of Otter Lake.

At Missinipe, the end point of this trip, there is a Saskatchewan Government campground. There are also several fishing camps, an air charter service and a small general store. Radio, airplane, telephone and highway communications are possible with La Ronge which is situated 80 kilometres (50 miles) to the south.

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

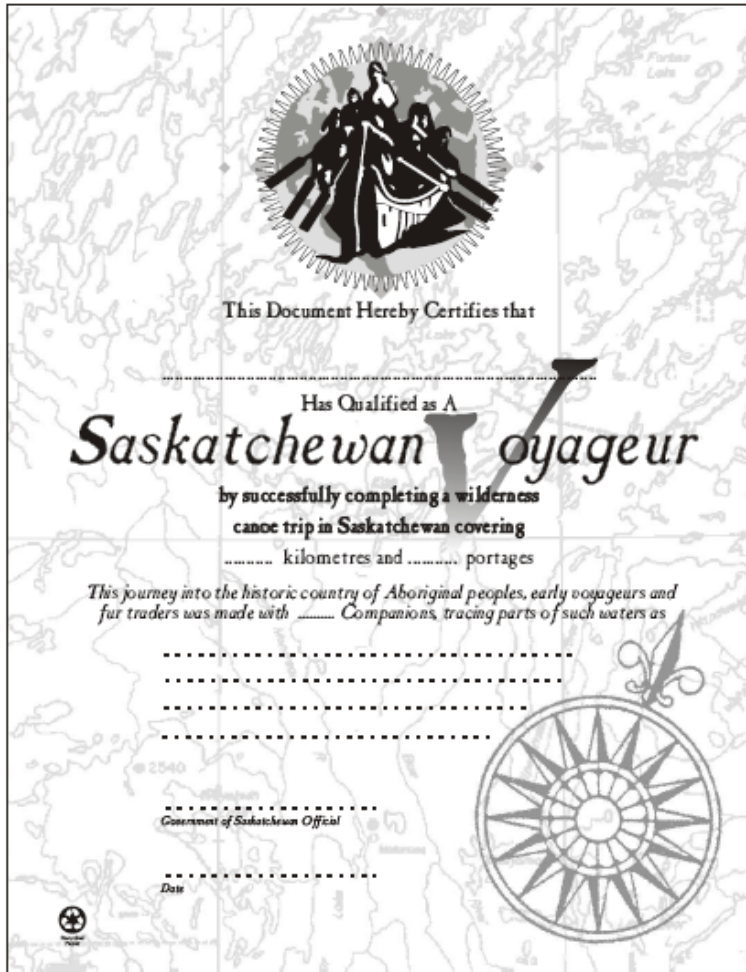
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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
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