



# Canoe Trip #18

## ***Nemeiban Lake - Besnard Lake - Black Bear Island Lake - Churchill River - 6 Portages - Nemeiban Lake***

**Length of Trip:** 156 kilometres (97 miles)  
**Time Required to Complete Trip:** 6 to 8 days  
**Number of Portages:** 18 to 20

### **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 these booklets 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/11 Kavanaugh Lake
- 73-P/12 Black Bear Island Lake

### **About the Trip:**

This medium length trip is a loop which conveniently returns the canoeist to the starting point via a different return route. This 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 310378 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 (109 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 by-passes 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 becomes 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 recent forest fire (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 recent forest fire (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 recent forest fire (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 the recent forest fire (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.

Trout Lake to Rachkewich Lake On entering Trout Lake, canoeists should paddle to the first of the six

portages to Nemeiben Lake at the southwest end of a two and one quarter kilometre (1 1/2 mile) long bay on the southwest shore of Trout Lake.

Paddle and pole into the marshy, reed filled area at the south end of the bay until the hard to find inflowing channel becomes more clearly defined. Follow this meandering, narrowing channel as it eventually becomes only canoe width. At a point along this channel (Approximate Grid location 763574 - Map 73-P/11), the canoeist must make a choice to either: 1) Portage across the marshy meadow of the valley floor to a winter trail (Portage Number 15A) that angles up through the trees along the west side of the low valley and connects with Portage Number 15 near its midpoint; or 2) Continue upstream along the narrow channel, hauling over old beaver dams and shallow rocky spots for a further distance of about one kilometre (2/3 mile) until finally a short, straight, man-made channel is found leading to the west. The actual portage (Number 15) starts at the western end of this small, 23 metre (25 yard) channel. The choice between 1) and 2) should be governed by the water levels encountered in the narrow stream. Extremely low water conditions would make Portage 15A, although considerably longer, the better choice.

**Portage Number 15:**

Connecting Trout Lake with Rachkewich Lake. 600 metres (656 yards) long and in good condition, but steep in spots.

From Trout Lake, paddle and pole into the marshy, reed filled area at the south end of the bay until the hard to find inflowing channel becomes more clearly defined. Follow this meandering, narrowing channel as it eventually becomes only canoe width. Continue upstream along the narrow channel, hauling over old beaver dams and shallow rocky spots for a further distance of about one kilometre (2/3 mile) until finally a short, straight, man-made channel is found leading to the west. The actual portage (Number 15) starts at the western end of this small, 23 metre (25 yard) channel.

From Rachkewich Lake, this portage starts at a distinct opening in the shoreline vegetation about 150 metres (164 yards) to the west of the shallow outflowing stream. After descending the steep slope at the lower end of the trail, a narrow man-made channel is reached which leads to a small stream. If water levels do not permit launching the canoes at this point, an alternate newer trail which starts at a large pine tree on the left a few metres (yards) before reaching the man-made channel should be used. Turn left at the pine tree and follow this new trail for 45 metres (49 yards) along the valley edge, then turn right through willow thickets for 55 metres (60 yards) until the shallow stream channel is reached.

**Portage Number 15A:**

Connecting Trout Lake with Rachkewich Lake. 1200 metres (1312 yards) long and in generally good condition but steep in spots. The last 270 metres (295 yards) at the Trout Lake end are only fair.

From the Trout Lake end, at a point along the narrow channel (Approximate Grid location 763574 - Map 73-P/11), the canoeist must portage across the marshy meadow of the valley floor to a winter trail that angles up through the trees along the west side of the low valley and connects with Portage Number 15 near its midpoint.

From Rachkewich Lake, this portage is the same as Portage 15 for the first 355 metres (388 yards). On reaching a distinct fork in the trail, follow the left trail until it reaches the marshy meadow of the valley floor. Proceed directly across this meadow until the shallow stream channel is reached.

**Portage Number 16:**

Connecting Rachkewich Lake with Little Crooked Lake. 491 metres (537 yards) long and in good condition.

From Rachkewich Lake, this portage starts from the extreme south end of the lake at a small sandy beach.

From Little Crooked Lake, this portage starts from the extreme north end of the lake at a distinct grassy opening in the shoreline vegetation.

**Portage Number 17:**

Connecting Little Crooked Lake with a small nameless lake. 455 metres (497 yards) long and in generally good condition, but steep in spots and wet at the ends.

From Little Crooked Lake, this portage starts at a rocky cove on the southeast shore (Grid location 778499 - May 73-P/6). The start of the trail shows as a green patch south of a sheer rock face.

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts at the end of a narrow man made channel at the extreme north end of the lake.

**Portage Number 18:**

Connecting the small nameless lake with a beaver pond along the shallow outlet stream. 460 metres (503 yards) long and in generally good condition, but steep in spots and wet at the ends.

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts from a distinct opening in the shoreline vegetation at the extreme south end of the lake just east, or left, of a beaver dam.

From the beaver pond, this portage starts from the north end of an old man made channel at the north end of the pond.

**Portage Number 19:**

Connecting the beaver pond with a small nameless lake. 330 metres (361 yards) long and in poor condition.

From the beaver pond, this portage starts from the west, or right, side of a beaver dam at the south end of the pond. Two forks to the left, near the bottom end of this portage, should be avoided as they lead to impassable marshy areas.

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts on the west, or left, shore about 100 metres (109 yards) from the marshy inflowing stream (Grid location 779473 - Map 73-P/6).

**Portage Number 20:**

Connecting the small nameless lake with Bague Bay of Nemeiben Lake. 305m.(333 yds) long and in good condition, but wet at the west end.

From the small nameless lake, this portage starts about 30 metres (33 yards) to the right, or south, of the outlet stream at a distinct opening in the shoreline vegetation (Grid location 785454 - Map 73-P/6).

From the Nemeiben Lake end, this portage starts from the west side of the northern part of Bague Bay immediately south of the inflowing stream (Grid location 788456 - Map 73-P/6). Travel south and southeast across Nemeiben Lake to Bell Bay which is the start and end point of this loop trip. A Saskatchewan Government campground and an outfitter's camp are located at the south end of Bell Bay.

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.



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