



Canoe Trip #19

Saskatoon - Nipawin (Saskatchewan River)

Length of Trip: 335 kilometres (208 miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 5 days (approximately)

Number of Portages: 1 (optional - if carrying on past Francois Finlay Dam)

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 the presence of hazards not described herein. It is the canoeist's responsibility to proceed with caution and alertness, using discretion and good judgment 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.

NOTE: At the time of the survey, early October 1992, the level of the river was relatively low. At times of low rainfall, the level could be considerably lower.

Maps:

- 1:250,000 scale: 73-B Saskatoon
- 1:250,000 scale: 73-A Melfort
- 1:250,000 scale: 73-H Prince Albert (Grid locations in the body of the text refer to these maps)
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-A/13 Domremy
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-B/2 Saskatoon
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-B/7 Dalmeny
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-B/8 Aberdeen
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-B/9 Rosthern
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-B/16 Duck Lake
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-H/1 Ridgedale
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-H/2 Fairy Glenn
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-H/3 Peonan Lake
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-H/4 Prince Albert
- 1:50,000 scale (optional): 73-H/8 Nipawin (Grid locations for these maps, listed in the same order as those for the 1:250,000 maps, follow at the end of the text - see numbers in brackets (#)).

Access to Starting Point:

In the City of Saskatoon the South Saskatchewan River may be entered safely and conveniently from the road and parking lot located on the west bank just below the Canadian Pacific Railway bridge near 33rd Street. (Grid location CH-8778-Map 73-B)(1).

Warning: Do not start this trip farther upstream as there is a dangerous weir built across the river a few hundred metres of water over the weir until one is practically at the 2 metre (6.5 foot) drop.

About the Trip:

Although this canoe route passes in part through rural areas, few signs of settlement are noted other than bridges, ferries, power lines and the occasional farmstead.

Normally, two flood periods occur each year. The first one is in April during the spring run-off, the second is in late June or early July when the snow melts in the mountains. Retention or release of water from Lake Diefenbaker (Gardiner Dam) could counter any effect from these flood crests. Because of their shallow draft, canoe travel is possible during a normal year whenever the river is free of ice.

At times of very low water levels, travel on the Saskatchewan River may not be advisable as the river bed becomes very rocky and shallow. At such times, extended periods of difficult wading and dragging of canoes past long rocky sections may be called for, thereby detracting from enjoyment of the trip.

NOTE: If in doubt about water levels, please contact the Saskatchewan Water Corporation's Forecast Branch at (306) 694-3983 for information.

The moderately fast current carries canoeists through an area rich in history. Many forts and trading posts were located along the river in the late 1700s. In this vicinity, the Riel Rebellion of 1885 took place near Batoche.

Both the South and North branches of the Saskatchewan River are polluted. Thoroughly boil and/or filter all river water for human consumption. Preferably, carry your own drinking water supply. This can be replenished from ferrymen along the river, or from small unpolluted tributary streams. Fishing is good, especially where tributary streams enter the Saskatchewan River. Species include walleye, sauger, northern pike and goldeye.

Sauger and walleye contain elevated levels of mercury in their tissues and anglers are advised to follow the guidelines for consuming fish containing mercury summarized in the Department's brochure entitled - (Mercury in Fish: Guidelines for Consumption). (See Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management)

Despite its length, this canoe trip is a generally safe one without any serious rapids or exposed lakes to cross. Except for the portion through the Fort a la Corne Provincial Forest, it could not be considered a wilderness canoe trip. However, the chances of seeing wildlife, including big game animals, are good. The scenery of this trip is somewhat monotonous and consists mostly of high river banks. Many attractive, natural campsites can be found along the route.

The Canoe Trip:

Some of the best landmarks for checking one's progress down the Saskatchewan River are bridges, power lines, ferries, major islands, distinctive changes in the direction of the river's course, and towns or villages.

The Circle Drive bridge in Saskatoon is passed shortly after leaving the starting point.

Wanuskewin Heritage Park can be seen in, and above a coulee on the left, or north bank, 9.5 kilometres (six miles) from the start of the trip (Grid location CH-9187 - Map 73-B)(2). This Native History Interpretive Park is more appropriately visited by land prior to the start of the canoe trip. Arrangements can be made for park visits by phoning (306) 931-6767. Park entry fees are in effect.

14.25 kilometres (nine miles) past Wanuskewin Heritage Park, the canoeist passes the C.N.R. bridge east of Warman (Grid location DH-0096 - Map 73-B)(3) and Clarkboro Ferry two kilometres (1.25 mile) further downstream. At the time of the survey, a partial rock dam was evident immediately below the ferry. This causes a Class 1 rapid, the central chute of which is the best choice for running. It is recommended that the rapid be surveyed from the ferry prior to running.

At Hague Ferry (Grid location DJ-1316 - Map 73-B)(4) the canoeist encounters the next obstruction - another partial rock dam immediately below the ferry. At the time of the survey, chutes at the right and left of centre appeared to be the best choices for running this Class 2 rapid. It is recommended that the rapid be surveyed from the ferry prior to running.

27 kilometres (17 miles) below Hague Ferry, the canoeist passes the three span, Highway 312, bridge east of Rosthern (Grid location DJ-2436 - Map 73-B)(5).

A further 24 kilometres (15 miles) of paddling brings the canoeist to St. Laurent Ferry east of Duck Lake (Grid location DJ-2754 - Map 73-B)(6). A Class 1 rapid is encountered in the shallows immediately below the ferry. At the time of the survey, a chute left of centre appeared to be the best option for running. It is recommended that the rapid be surveyed from the ferry prior to running.

A sharp right turn to the east at kilometre 114 (mile 71) from the start (Grid location DJ-3163 - Map 73-B)(7) signals the approach to the lowland farmsteads of St. Louis.

At St. Louis, on the south shore (Grid location DJ-4664 - Map 73-A)(8), an easy landing at the base of the bridge leads to a steep path on the east side of the Highway 2 bridge. St. Louis is a convenient place to obtain food supplies, water, motel accommodation and gasoline, or to make phone calls. All of this is within easy walking distance of the bridge.

The railway bridge at kilometre 153 (mile 95) signals the imminent approach to the privately operated (fee for use) Fenton Ferry (Grid location DJ-6075 - Map 73-H)(9). Watch for the shallow rock dam below the ferry. This causes a Class 1 rapid, the central chute of which appears to be the best choice for running.

11 kilometres (7 miles) more of paddling brings the canoeist to the Highway 3 bridge within the Muskoday Indian Reserve (Grid location DJ-6781 - Map 73-H)(10). Follow the right, or east channel around Crossing Island.

A power line crosses the river shortly after the Highway 3 bridge and within the Muskoday Reserve (Grid location DJ-6685 - Map 73-H)(11).

The ferry shown at kilometre 185 (mile 115) on some older editions of Map 73-H (Grid location DJ-7490)(12) is no longer in use. Watch for a possible old rock dam below this site. At the time of the survey none was noted.

Kilometre 206 (mile 128) marks the location of Weldon Ferry (Grid location DJ-8992 - Map 73-H)(13).

Watch for a possible rock dam below this site. At the time of the survey none was noted.

The confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers makes an interesting place at which to land.

A good view of this important landmark may be had by climbing the surrounding hills.

Unfortunately, the North Saskatchewan River is polluted, not only by sewage, but by effluent from the pulp mill at Prince Albert. This effluent is evident for many kilometres (miles) below the confluence of these two rivers.

In the 16 km (10 mile) stretch of river below the confluence there are a number of Class 1 rapids. These include the rapids indicated on Map 73-H (Grid locations EJ-0097, EJ-0298 & EJ-0395)(14). None of these

should present any problem to the alert canoeist.

Excellent wilderness campsites are to be found within the Fort a la Corne Provincial Forest. Coyotes are frequently heard at night and signs of deer, moose, elk, and bear, are common along the river bank. As the canoeist approaches the Highway 6 bridge north of Gronlid (Grid location EK-3599 - Map 73-H)(15), the upper reaches of Codette Lake are entered. This long narrow lake, which rarely exceeds 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) in width, is the result of water backing up behind the Francois Findlay Dam near Nipawin.

Wapiti Valley Regional Park is located just east of the Highway 6 bridge, on the south shore of Codette Lake. This park is a winter facility, but it does have a good boat launch area. Across the lake from Wapiti Valley, and east of Highway 6 is a Government of Saskatchewan campground located along the road up from the old Gronlid Ferry (Grid location - EK-3501 - Map 73-H)(16). A steep climb from the water's edge leads to a water pump part way up the hill. Tables, wood, grills, toilets and a kitchen shelter are available here.

Near the east end of Codette Lake, the canoeist approaches Smits Beach on the south shore (Grid location EK-5505 - Map 73-H)(17). Check with the beach operator at (306) 862-5630 regarding parking, etc. Minor supplies are available here. The canoe trip could potentially be ended at this point 315 kilometres (196 miles) from the start.

Smits Beach is accessible from Highway 35 at Codette. It is located 9.8 kilometres (6 miles) west on Municipal Road 789 and 2.7 kilometres (1.75 miles) north on a dirt road.

The normal end point for this trip is Bushfield Flats boat launch on the east shore of Codette Lake just prior to reaching the line of bouy markers above the Francois Findlay Dam. Access to the boat launch area is by a 2 kilometre (1.25 mile) dirt road heading west from Highway 35 at a point 3 kilometres (1.75 miles) north of Codette. The landing is in a small cove (Grid location EK-6308 - Map 73-H)(18). NOTE: Do not leave vehicles at this point as the area is unattended.

If the canoeist is planning on finishing at Nipawin, or continuing downstream to Cumberland House or The Pas, a portage past the dam is possible at the left, or west end. If a portage is not made, arrangements for transportation to Nipawin Regional Park can be made through either The Town of Nipawin's Economic Development Office at (306) 862-9866 or Saskatchewan Power Corporation at (306) 862-3148.

Portage (Optional):

Past Francois Findlay Dam. 1600 to 4000 metres (1 to 2.5 miles) long, depending on start and finish points selected, and in good condition.

This portage starts at an old road near the left, or west end of the dam area (Grid location EK-6308 - Map 73-H)(19).

Vehicle pick-up could be arranged in advance from the old gravel road which runs into the waters of the lake (Grid location EK-6207 - Map 73-H)(20).

The portage ends at a boat launch area in fast water below the dam (Grid location EK-6408 - Map 73-H)(21).

It is possible, though difficult to launch canoes at a steep bank about 800 metres (880 yards) downstream from the boat launch site (Grid location EK-6409 - Map 73-H)(22).

Camping, telephone, firewood, groceries, etc. are available at Nipawin Regional Park located on the right, or east, shore (Grid location EK-6616 - Map 73-H)(23) about 5 kilometres (3 miles) past the railway bridge in Nipawin, and a short distance prior to the Highway 55 bridge.

To avoid Tobin Lake it is recommended that canoeists wishing to carry on down the Saskatchewan River below the E. B. Campbell dam and hydroelectric station arrange to be transported from Nipawin to the D. Gerbrandt campground located just below the hydroelectric station. A distance of 75 kilometres (47 miles).

It is possible for canoeists to extend their trip down the shores of Tobin Lake, but this course is not recommended. Tobin Lake is large, exposed and may become very rough. There are many drifting logs and deadheads still attached at one end. These not only present a hazard to navigation, but may make it impossible for a canoeist to reach the safety of shore during rough weather.

If canoeists elect to traverse Tobin Lake despite the hazards, they would have to arrange to be picked up at the boat launch site on the east shore prior to the log boom above the power canal at the dam, and be trucked 8 kilometres (5 miles) to the D. Gerbrandt campground just below the hydroelectric station.

Contact Saskatchewan Power Corporation at (306) 862-3148 for information and to make necessary arrangements.

Grid Location Cross-Reference (for 1:50,000 maps):

No. Location Grid Location Map

1. Starting Point 877780 73-B/2
2. Wanuskewin Heritage Park 912863 73-B/2
3. Warman/Clarkboro Ferry 002956 73-B/8
4. Hague Ferry 129162 73-B/8
5. Highway 312 Bridge 240357 73-B/9
6. St. Laurent Ferry 264544 73-B/16
7. St. Louis Lowland Farms 310632 73-B/16
8. St. Louis 459638 73-A/13

9. Fenton Ferry 608745 73-H/4
10. Muskoday Bridge 665816 73-H/4
11. Power Line 660849 73-H/4
12. Old Ferry 744906 73-H/3
13. Weldon Ferry 891923 73-H/3
14. Rapids below Confluence 004965 73-H/2
021980 73-H/2
035947 73-H/2
15. Gronlid Bridge 360000 73-H/1
16. Highway 6 Campground 358010 73-H/8
17. Smits Beach 551066 73-H/8
18. Bushfield Flats 630071 73-H/8
19. Start of Portage 632082 73-H/8
20. Gravel Road into Water 616068 73-H/8
21. End of Portage 640083 73-H/8
22. Steep Bank 637093 73-H/8
23. Nipawin Regional Park 660164 73-H/8

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

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