



Canoe Trip #28

Pelican Narrows - Frog Portage - Churchill River - Sandy Bay

Length of Trip: 176 Kilometres (109 Miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 7 to 10 days

Number of Portages: 11 to 16

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:

Pelican Narrows can be reached via Highway #106 (Paved) and the 'Hanson Lake Road' Highway #135 (Gravel).

The community of Pelican Narrows has a Government of Saskatchewan office, as well as an R.C.M.P. detachment. There is also telephone and radio communication with other centres.

At Pelican Narrows air charter and bus services are available. There are also several small general stores, motel accommodation and a number of filling stations.

Arrangements for the safe parking of vehicles may be made with the R.C.M.P. or other responsible person at either Pelican Narrows or Sandy Bay, the two communities are situated only 70 kilometres (43 miles) apart on highway #135 (gravel).

Maps:

- 63-M/2 Pelican Narrows
- 63-M/3 Sandy Narrows
- 63-M/5 Trade Lake
- 63-M/6 Manawan Lake
- 63-M/7 Marchel Lake
- 63-M/8 Nemei Lake
- 63-M/9 Sandy Bay
- 63-M/10 Wintego Lake
- 63-M/11 Iskwatam Lake

About the Trip:

The first part of this trip is along a well travelled route from the northern community of Pelican Narrows to the Churchill River at Frog Portage. The early part of this trip follows part of the fur traders' historical route between the Saskatchewan and Churchill River systems. The Churchill River portion of the trip becomes progressively more demanding, with many rapids, falls and portages. For this reason, this trip IS NOT recommended for the beginning canoeist; it is for the highly experienced canoeist only.

Northern pike and walleye occur in all waters, and lake trout are found in some of the larger lakes. This trip ends at the small northern community of Sandy Bay where there are two general stores, radio and telephone communications, motel accommodation and a road link with Pelican Narrows to the south via highway #135 (gravel).

At Sandy Bay air charter and bus services are also available.

The Canoe Trip:

Canoes may be launched from a variety of docks and beaches in the community of Pelican Narrows. The general route of travel is to the northwest to the base of Medicine Rapids.

Most of the portages in the early portion of this trip have pole skids installed by the local residents for transfer of large boats past obstructions. The portages described generally run parallel to, or over, these skids.

Portage Number 1 - Around Medicine Rapids:

Connecting the western part of Chachukew Lake to Muskike Lake. 88 metres (96 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid.

This portage starts at the base of the rapids on the northeast side and ends 20 metres (22 yards) above the rapid.

There are three small, closely spaced falls separating the west end of Muskike Lake and the southeast part of Wood Lake which lies to the east of Grassy Narrows.

Portage Number 2:

Connecting the west end of Muskike Lake to a small pond between falls. 58 metres (63 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

This portage starts at a grassy spot 50 metres (55 yards) north of the northern channel (Grid location 233219 - Map 63-M/3) which is dry in low water years and ends in a grassy cove the same distance to the north of the channel.

Portage Number 3:

Connecting two small ponds between falls. 10 metres (11 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

This portage starts at the foot of the fall on the left or south shore (Grid location 229222 - Map 63-M/3) and ends in a tiny cove immediately above the fall.

Portage Number 4:

Connecting the second small pond to the southeast part of Wood Lake which lies to the east of Grassy Narrows. 55 metres (60 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 6 rapid.

This portage starts at a bare rock shelf 75 metres (82 yards) left, or south, of the fall (Grid location 228221 - Map 63-M/3) and ends at a gravel beach 60 metres (66 yards) south of the fall. The portage follows a channel which is dry in lower water years.

After completing Portage Number 4, travel southwest through Grassy Narrows and then west and north the length of Wood Lake. At the north end of Wood Lake, be sure to stay left, or west, and enter the narrows (Grid location 030350 - Map 63-M/6) leading to Pixley Lake.

Paddle through Pixley Lake and to the narrows at the northwest end of Lindstrom Lake (Grid location 962376 - Map 63-M/6) which lead to Frog Portage. Shallows and old beaver dams may be encountered in these narrows, depending on water levels.

Portage Number 5 - Frog Portage:

Connecting the northwest end of Lindstrom Lake to the east end of Trade Lake. 319 metres (349 yards) long and in good condition.

Frog Portage starts from a steep but protected bank at the extreme northwest end of Lindstrom Lake (Grid location 931396 - Map 63-M/5) and ends at a rocky cove on the south shore of Trade Lake (Grid location 929399 - Map 63-M/5).

Frog Portage crosses the height of land between the Churchill and Saskatchewan River systems.

Frog Portage was originally called Portage de Traite (Trade Portage) because Joseph Frobisher, in 1774-5, met a band of Indians at this point who were bound for Churchill to trade their winter's catch of furs. He traded with them for as many furs as his canoes would carry. It was also known as Frogskin Portage because the Cree Indians left a stretched frog's skin at this location to make fun of the way the more northerly tribes dressed and stretches their beaver skins.

After completing Frog Portage, paddle to the northwest end of Uskik Lake. On approaching Kettle Falls, stay close to the north, or left, shore to avoid the strong currents going over the falls.

There are two alternates for the portage past Kettle Falls. The longer alternate described was not in use in 1990, it is described here because it could still be used by those wishing to avoid the strong currents at the head of the falls.

Portage Number 6 - Around Kettle Falls:

Connecting the east end of Uskik Lake to fast water between two falls. The long alternate is 320 metres (350 yards) long and in poor condition for the 230 metres (251 yards) before it joins the shorter alternate which is 96 metres (105 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a 5 metre (16 foot) fall.

The longer, and safer, alternate portage around Kettle Falls starts at a rock in a quiet cove on the north, or left, shore (Grid location 108571 - Map 63-M/11) about 250 metres (273 yards) above the falls. This longer trail joins the shorter trail at a grassy meadow overlooking the falls and 10 metres (11 yards) from the start of the shorter alternate.

To get to the shorter alternate portage, canoeists must descend through some fast water. The portage starts at a rocky slope 20 metres (22 yards) above the head of the falls. Both trails end at a quiet rocky cove 20 metres (22 yards) below the base of the falls.

For those wishing to lay-over at Kettle Falls to enjoy the great walleye fishing, a good campsite exists on the point below the falls (Grid location 113571 - Map 63-M/11).

After leaving Portage Number 6, canoeists must descend through over half a kilometre (550 yards) of fast water to the start of the short portage past the small lower falls.

Portage Number 7:

Connecting fast water between two falls to the west end of Ourom Lake. 30 metres (33 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a 1 metre (3.5 foot) fall.

This portage starts at a rocky landing on the north, or left, shore 10 metres (11 yards) above the fall, and ends the same distance below at a rocky shelf.

Two class 1 rapids are encountered on entering the west end of Iskwatam Lake (Grid locations 159596 and 163594 - Map 63-M/11). These rapids are a few hundred metres (yards) apart. Canoeists should stay generally to the right, or south side.

There are two routes through Iskwatam Lake. As follows:

One follows between the lake's north shore and the north side of Romuld, Loewen and Brackenridge Islands;

The other follows between Loewen and Brackenridge Islands and the south shore of the lake.

Route 1:

There are three rapids and a number of areas of fast water along the northern route. No portages were found on this route, but the rapids should present no problems to experienced canoeists. Water levels would dictate which side is the best for either running or lining.

First Rapid (North): (Grid location 223604 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid is in two sections. The first section is separated by two small islands. The south and middle channels have class 2 to 3 rapids, the north channel has a class 4 rapid.

The second section consists of a class 2 to 3 rapid which then becomes class 1 fast water as it separates on both sides of a larger island. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line either the central or southern channel without great difficulty, after careful survey from shore.

Second Rapid (North): (Grid location 242600 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid is in two sections, the first section is class 3 and the second is class 2. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line either of these without great difficulty, after careful survey from shore.

Third Rapid (North): (Grid location 249601 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid is in two sections, both of which are class 3. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line either of these without great difficulty, after careful survey from shore.

Route 2:

There are four rapids and a number of areas of fast water along the southern route. No portages were found on this route, but at two of the rapids short carries over bare rock are recommended. The other two rapids should present no problems to experienced canoeists. Water levels would dictate which side is the best for either running or lining.

The rapids indicated south of Loewen Island (Grid location 203574 - Map 63-M/11) are only fast water.

First Rapid (South): (Grid location 239576 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid is separated into two channels by a small island. There is no portage past this class 2 ledge, but a short 18 metre (20 yard) carry across bare rock on the left, or north, side is required. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line this rapid after careful survey from shore.

Second Rapid (South): (Grid location 246581 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid begins 750 metres (820 yards) below the end of the first rapid. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line this class 2 rapid after careful survey from shore.

Third Rapid (South): (Grid location 246584 - Map 63-M/11)

This rapid begins 275 metres (301 yards) below the end of the second rapid, it consists of two sections.

The first section is a class 4 ledge which must be portaged. There is no portage trail, but a 55 metre (60 yard) carry over the rocks on the left, or north, shore is required. The second section is split by a small island. Experienced canoeists should be able to run or line this class 3 rapid on the left, or north, side of the island after careful survey from shore.

Fourth Rapid (South):

This rapid begins immediately below the third rapid, it is split into two by a large island. Experienced canoeists should be able to run this class 1 rapid on the right, or south, side of the island after careful survey from shore. Those not wishing to run the rapid may line it on the left, or north, side of the island. The rapid shown at the outlet of Iskwatam Lake (Grid location 272578 - Map 63-M/10) consists only of minor fast water.

The rapids shown near BM 1046 (Grid location 282588 - Map 63-M/10) are divided into three channels by two islands. The rapid in the south channel is class 3 and the rapids in the north and centre channels are class 2. No portages were found past these rapids, but experienced canoeists should be able to run or line the rapids in either of two northern channels after careful survey from shore.

There are two routes which may be followed from the area of BM 1046 to Wapumon Lake. The northern route involves one portage over one kilometre (two thirds of a mile) long. The southern route involves two short portages and allows the canoeist to view the spectacular 'Wapumon Gorge'.

Those wishing to take the northern route should run or line the rapid in the most northerly channel. They should stay close to the left, or north, shore and make a sharp left turn into a rocky cove part way down the rapid.

Portage Number 8:

Connecting the rocky cove to Wapumon Lake. 1108 metres (1211 yards) long and in good condition, but overgrown in spots.

This portage starts in the northwest corner of the above cove (Grid location 283588 - Map 63-M/10) and ends in a large grassy area on the southwest part of Wapumon Lake at a brown rock shelf situated between two grey shelves (Grid location 290594 - Map 63-M/10). The last 365 metres (399 yards) of this portage are through tall grass.

From this portage, the canoe route tends generally southeast across Wapumon Lake to the narrows leading to Wintego Lake where some minor fast water occurs.

Those wishing to take the southern route should continue downstream along the left, or north, shore and turn into a willow-lined bay (Grid location 285585 - Map 63-M/10).

Portage Number 8A:

Connecting quiet sections of water between rapid. 112 metres (122 yards) long and in good condition.

This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

This portage starts from the northeast part of the willow-lined bay 400 metres (437 yards) to the left, or north, of the start of the rapid and ends in a shallow grassy channel which leads back to the main river channel.

Portage Number 8B:

Connecting quiet water above 'Wapumon Gorge' to fast water below. 295 metres (323 yards) long and in generally good condition with windfall trees across parts of the trail. This portage by-passes a 20 metre (22 yard) wide gorge through which the entire flow of the Churchill River is channelled.

This portage starts at a steep slope 400 metres (437 yards) to the left, or north, of the start of the gorge and ends at a rocky cove near the foot of the gorge. Those wishing to avoid the current surges at the mouth of the cove could carry along the rocky shoreline for a further 110 metres (120 yards) and put in below a large ledge which projects into the current below the gorge. Below this ledge there is more fast water which can be run with caution.

There are good opportunities for fishing in the pools below the gorge, and berry picking along its top in season.

Below the gorge there are three sets of rapids leading to the south part of Wapumon Lake. These can be run after carefully looking them over from shore.

The first rapid occurs at Grid location 305587 - Map 63-M/10 on the east side of a large island, it is a class 2 rapid and it can be run on the left side.

The second rapid occurs at Grid location 303589 - Map 63-M/10 on the north end of a large island, it is a class 1+ rapid and it can be run on the left side.

A single class 2+ rapid on the west side of the large island (Grid location 301588 - Map 63-M/10) is generally too rocky to run in low water years.

The third rapid occurs at Grid location 300593 - Map 63-M/10, it is a class 2 rapid and it can be run on the right side. Some wading may be necessary in low water years.

Canoeists should follow the south shore of Wapumon Lake to the narrows leading to Wintego Lake where some minor fast water occurs.

The canoe route now crosses Wintego Lake to its outlet rapids (Grid location 369607 - Map 63-M/10) where a portage is required.

Portage Number 9, Outlet of Wintego Lake:

Connecting the east side of Wintego Lake to quiet waters between rapids. 66 metres (72 yards) long and in poor condition due to a 1989 forest fire. This portage by-passes a class 3 rapid.

This portage starts on the right, or south, shore in a cove 40 metres (44 yards) above the rapid (Grid location 368607 - Map 63-M/10).

After passing this rapid, the river course goes south and then north for a distance of 3.2 kilometres (2 miles). The river then swings sharply to the right, or east, where three closely spaced rapids are encountered. No portage trail was found past the first two rapids.

On approaching the first rapid (Grid location 381616 - Map 63-M/10), hug the right, or south, shore and slip cautiously around the first projecting rocky point into quieter water. After surveying this class 3 rapid from shore, a decision can be made to either run or line along the south shore.

Paddle on for 150 metres (164 yards) and land on the rocky point to the right of the second rapid. After surveying this class 2+ rapid from shore, a decision can be made to either run or line along the south shore. In low water years it would be wise to carry 40-50 metres (44-55 yards) over bare rock to quiet water between rapids.

The third rapid in this series, a one metre (3.25 foot) ledge, must be portaged.

Portage Number 10:

40 metres (44 yards) long and in fair condition.

This portage starts at a rocky landing site 50 metres (55 yards) to the right, or south, of the rapid and ends in a small rocky cove.

There is an appreciable current among the islands below this third rapid.

One and one half kilometre below the third rapid, the canoeist comes to a short wide rapid separated into three channels by two islands. The class 2 rapid in the narrow left, or north, channel can be readily lined or run.

The central and south channels have class 2+ rapids. In low water years, the ledges in these two channels are too rocky to run. There are two possible routes through Pita Lake, one to the north and one to the south of Duncan Island.

The northern route has one rapid divided by an island. No portage was found past this rapid. The right side of the island has a class 3 rapid. The left, or north, channel has a class 2 rapid (Grid location 412631 - Map 63-M/10) which can be run on the extreme left at the top and to the right of centre at the bottom.

The southern route has two separate rapids. The first rapid (Grid location 398592 - Map 63-M/10) is class 2 and it can be run left of centre. Those who do not wish to run this rapid may line it on the left, or east, shore. The second rapid (Grid location 414583 - Map 63-M/10) is class 1 and it can be easily run down the centre.

The outlet of Pita Lake is divided into two channels by a large island. The main volume of water is in the north channel which has a class 1 rapid near the south end, and some fast water at the north end. The rapid (Grid location 455597 - Map 63-M/10) can readily be run along the right, or east, side.

There is a class 2 rapid in the south channel. This rapid (Grid location 458592 - Map 63-M/10), named Cameron Falls, can be run on the left, or north, side. Those who do not wish to run this rapid may carry for 23 metres (25 yards) over exposed rock on the right, or south, shore.

Paddle in a generally easterly direction across Pikoo Lake to Reeds Lake, and then south through Reeds Lake on into Sokatisewin Lake. There are no rapids in this portion of the trip, though some fast water may be encountered in narrow sections during low water years.

Paddle north and east on Sokatisewin Lake to the general area of the dam and powerhouse (Grid location 668566 - 63-M/9) at the northeast end of the lake. Avoid the diversion dam at Grid location 666552 - Map 63-M/9).

Portage Number 11, Past Island Fall Power Dam:

Connecting Sokatisewin Lake to quiet waters below the dam. 320 metres (350 yards) long and in generally good condition. The start is obstructed by driftwood and the decaying hulls of two old barges. The central portion of the trail crosses an area cut for a powerline right-of-way.

This portage starts from a small bay one half kilometre (550 yards) north of the powerhouse and ends on the rocky shoreline a few hundred metres (yards) below the dam.

One kilometre (2/3 mile) below the dam there is a class 2 rapid (Grid location 676573 - Map 63-M/9) which can be run on the left, or north, side. Those who do not wish to run this rapid can line it, or make a 50 metre (55 yard) carry over bare rock, both on the left side.

After leaving this last rapid, turn south through fast water to the south bay of Wasawakasik Lake to the community of Sandy Bay, the end point of this trip.

The community of Sandy Bay has a Government of Saskatchewan office, as well as an R.C.M.P. detachment. There is also telephone and radio communication with other centres. At Sandy Bay air charter and bus services are available. There are also several small general stores, a restaurant, motel accommodation and a number of filling stations.

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

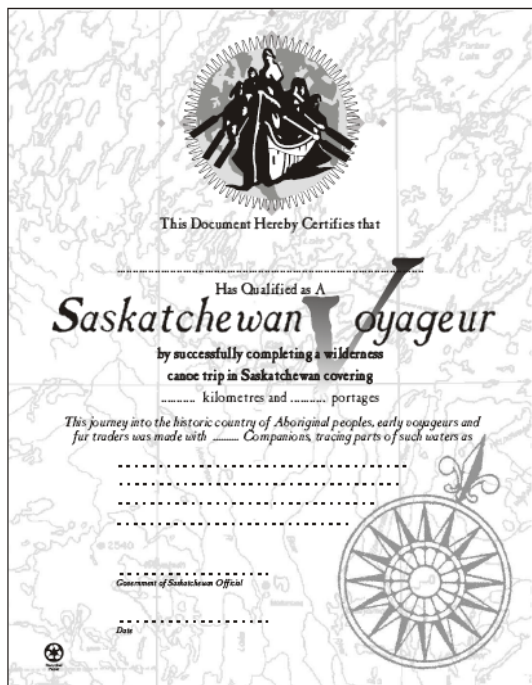
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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.



For further information contact:

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SASKATCHEWAN
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