



Canoe Trip #29

Otter Lake - Churchill River - Sandy Bay

Length of Trip: 222 Kilometres (138 miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 9 to 12 days

Number of Portages: 14 to 19

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 from the Saskatchewan Government campground at Missinipe (Walker Bay) on Otter Lake 80 kilometres (50 Miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 102. Otter Lake forms part of the Churchill River system.

An alternate starting point for this trip is from below the rapids at the Saskatchewan Government campground at Otter Rapids 88 kilometres (55 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 102.

Arrangements for the safe parking of vehicles may be made with one of the fishing camp outfitters at Missinipe. Accommodation, air-charter, food, gasoline and telephone services are also available at Missinipe.

Maps:

- 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
- 73-P/7 Stanley
- 73-P/8 Nistowiak Lake
- 73-P/10 Otter Lake
- Optional 73-P/9 Guncoat Bay

About the Trip:

The first part of this trip takes the canoeist through lakes of the Churchill River system, following part of Saskatchewan's historic fur trade route as far as Frog Portage.

Early in the trip the historic community of Stanley Mission, site of the oldest church in Saskatchewan, is passed. A wide variety of supplies is available at general stores in Stanley, as well as telephone communication and road access via highways 915 (gravel) and 102 (gravel and paved).

A point of interest along this trip is picturesque Nistowiak Falls. This trip is not strictly a wilderness trip in its entirety as a number of fishing camps will be seen along portions of the route. However, the opportunities for wilderness camping and fishing are extensive. Northern pike and walleye occur in all waters; lake trout are found in the larger lakes.

The early part of this trip is well travelled and trails are in good shape. The lakes are fairly large and sometimes quite rough. The use of larger canoes is recommended, and the use of a small outboard motor for auxiliary power might be considered by those so inclined.

The Canoe Trip:

After travelling generally southeast on Otter Lake approximately 16 kilometres (10 miles), the canoeist comes to the first portage.

Portage Number 1 - Stony Mountain Portage:

Connecting the southeast end of Otter Lake with a small lake below Robertson Falls. 73 metres (80 yards) long and in excellent condition. This portage by-passes a 3 metre (10 foot) fall.

From the southeast shore of Otter Lake, this portage starts on the west shore of Eyinew Island 45 metres (49 yards) above the head of the fall (Grid location 277563 - Map 73-P/10) and ends at a rock shelf at the foot of the fall. The portage can be seen from the water and appears as a break in the spruce and birch of the shoreline.

Portage Number 2 - Mountain Portage:

Connecting the small lake between Robertson and Twin Falls to the northwest end of Mountain Lake. 278 metres (304 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a 6 metre (20 foot) fall.

From the small lake between Robertson and Twin Falls, this portage starts at a break in the trees immediately east of two small islands (Grid location 280558 - Map 73-P/10) in a small cove along the southeast shore 45 metres (49 yards) west of a group of buildings belonging to an outfitter's camp. It ends at a break in the shoreline vegetation 400 metres (437 yards) southwest of the fall. An outfitter's dock is located about midway between the falls and the portage.

The trip continues in a generally southeasterly direction past Amuchewaspimewin Cliff (Also known as 'Shooting-Up Place') (Grid location 283420 - Map 73-P7) to the historic community of Stanley Mission, site of the oldest church in Saskatchewan. A wide variety of supplies is available at general stores in Stanley, as well as telephone communication and road access via Highways 915 and 102.

From Stanley, this trip continues in an east-northeast direction down the Churchill River for approximately five kilometres (three miles) to Stanley Rapids.

Portage Number 3 - Stanley Portage:

Connecting Mountain Lake to Drope Lake. 100 metres (109 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 2 rapid.

NOTE TO CANOEISTS: On approaching Stanley Rapids, stay close to the north, or left shore and to the north side of the island dividing these rapids so as to avoid the Class 3 rapid on the south, or right side of the island.

From Mountain Lake, this portage starts inconspicuously in the grasses on the north side of the northernmost channel 75 metres (82 yards) above the rapid (Grid location 333427 - Map 73-P/8).

On the south side of this channel (north shore of the island), there is a shorter alternate portage trail with many crossed poles to facilitate the dragging of big boats around the rapid. Both trails are currently used. In Frog Narrows (Grid location 376415 - Map 73-P/8), connecting Drope and Nistowiak Lake, the current can vary from moderate to fast, depending on water levels. Special care should be taken when paddling this section because of the eddies and current boils in the river. If in doubt, the canoes could be lined along the shore.

At this point, a side trip to view picturesque Nistowiak Falls is well worth the time. The trail to the falls starts at a fishing camp located near the inflowing Rapid River (Grid location 401393 - Map 73-P/8).

Follow the south shore of Nistowiak Lake to the area of Potter Rapids.

Portage Number 4:

Connecting Nistowiak Lake with Drinking Lake.

There are two options in travelling between Nistowiak Lake and Drinking Lake: Portage 4A is shorter, goes right through an outfitter's camp and is only suitable for downstream travel (west to east) because of the swift current below Potter Rapids. Portage 4B is longer, no outfitter's camp is encountered, and it can be used for travel both downstream and upstream. These portages by-pass a Class 4 rapid.

Portage Number 4A:

Connecting the southeast portion of Brown Bay on Nistowiak Lake with the western end of Drinking Lake. Approximately 95 metres (104 yards) long and in excellent condition.

From Nistowiak Lake, the start of this portage is unmistakable as it starts at an outfitter's camp. Land at the dock and portage past the main lodge building to the dock below the rapids.

Portage Number 4B:

Connecting the most easterly portion of Brown Bay on Nistowiak Lake with the western end of Drinking Lake. Approximately 340 metres (372 yards) long and in good condition.

From the most easterly portion of Brown Bay, this portage starts in wet willows 80 metres (87 yards) south of exposed rocks which mark the start of small rapids (Grid location 467408 - Map 73-P8). This portage by-passes a small pond, and ends at the base of the fast water at the lower set of rapids near the head of a narrow, northward extending, bay on the west end of Drinking Lake. Near the east end of Drinking Lake there is a sizeable island (Healy Island) with moderate rapids on both north and south sides. Either side is passable but the north alternative is easier. If the left, or north, alternative is selected, descend generally in the right half of the wide stretch of fast water. If the smaller right, or south channel is chosen, land and study the short Class 2 rapid before making the run.

About one and three quarter kilometre (one mile) below these rapids, the canoeist comes to the main falls at the extreme east end of Drinking Lake. The canoe route follows the five kilometre (3 mile) Inman Channel which detours to the north and northeast around Carr Island. A few hundred metres (yards) after entering the Inman Channel there is a narrow spot with mild rapids. Under normal conditions these can be easily run. Near the eastern end of the channel there is a small falls and a short portage.

Portage Number 5:

Connecting the east end of Drinking Lake, via the Inman Channel, with the northern portion of Keg Lake. 91 metres (100 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 2+ rapid.

This portage starts on the north, or left, shore to the northwest of a large rock outcrop about 70 metres (76 yards) above a small chute and ends at a large flat rock near the foot of the rapid.

An alternate portage for hauling heavy boats has been blasted through the rocks on the south, or right, side of the rapid. This alternate is shorter, but landings are tricky at both ends.

On reaching the eastern part of Keg Lake, the canoeist should make sure to take the channel along the southwest shore of Greig Island. There is some fast water in this area.

After passing a small island, the main stream swings sharply to the right or southwest and a smaller stream from the east side of Greig Island joins the main channel. Immediately upon swinging right, the

canoeist should move to the left, or southwest, side and enter a cove to the left of the start of the rapids.

Portage Number 6:

Connecting the east end of Keg Lake with the waters above Grand Rapids. 85 metres (93 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a 2 metre (6 1/2 foot) fall.

From the east end of Keg Lake, this portage starts as a clear break in the shoreline vegetation about 20 metres (22 yards) on the left, or east, side above the top of the fall and ends a few metres (yards) east of the foot of the fall.

A few hundred metres (yards) below this portage, there are some Class 1 rapids which are divided by an island. The safer course appears to be to hug the left side of the left channel.

Portage Number 7:

Connecting successive areas of quiet water above the main part of Grand Rapids. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid.

Four kilometres (2 1/2 miles) below portage number 6, the river swings to the east and a small rapid extends completely across the river. The safest course is to go to the extreme right, or south, side and carry canoes across the few metres (yards) of exposed rock to the quiet water below. More experienced canoeists may examine this small rapid and decide to descend the chute located about one-third of the way across from the south shore.

Portage Number 8:

Connecting quiet waters above the main part of Grand Rapids with the west end of Trade Lake. 604 metres (660 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

This portage starts 600 metres (656 yards) below portage number 7 and on the left, or north, side of a large rock outcrop in a quiet cove 140 metres (153 yards) above the start of the rapids (Grid location 728353 - Map 63-M/5). It ends on the right, or north, shore at the base of the main rapid. There is a short stretch of fast water on either side of the island at the opening into Trade Lake.

After passing into the narrows at the east end of Trade Lake, the canoeists come to Frog Portage at which point the fur trade route leaves the Churchill River system. 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 leaving the area of 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 9 - 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 9, 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 10:

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 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.

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 11:

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 11A:

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 11B:

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 12, 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 13:

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 14, 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.

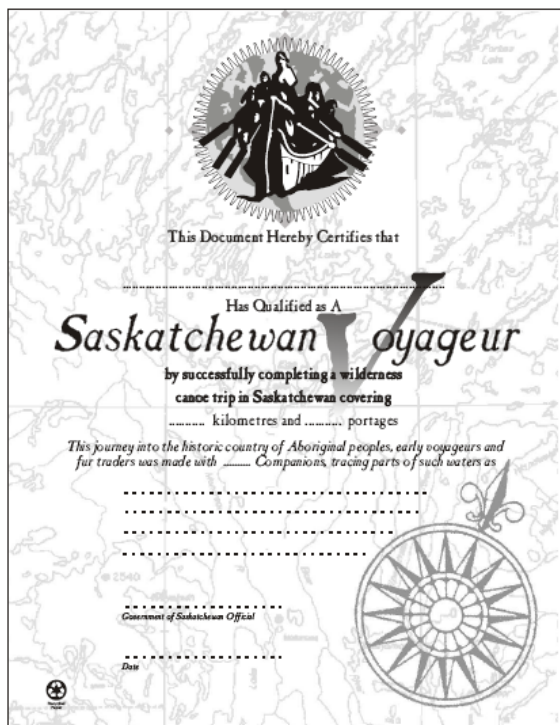
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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.



Ministry of
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For further information contact:

Toll Free: 1-800-205-7070

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