



Canoe Trip #46

Tyrrell Lake - Mari Lake - Kipahigan Lake - Sisipuk Lake - Churchill River - Loon Lake - Wasawakasik Lake - Sandy Bay

Length of Trip: 228 Kilometres (142 miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 9 to 11 days

Number of Portages: 14

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:

Tyrrell Lake campground, the starting point for this trip, is located on the south end of Tyrrell Lake which is accessible from Kilometre 305 (Mile 190) of Highway 106 (Paved) via a 3.25 kilometre (2 mile) gravel road. This campground is located 21 kilometres (13 miles) west of Creighton, Saskatchewan.

Vehicles should not be left unattended at Tyrrell Lake campground for long periods of time. Arrangements for the safe parking and/or transfer of vehicles could likely be made with outfitters at Leaf Rapids, kilometre 270 (mile 168) of Highway 106 (Hanson Lake Road) and/or at Sandy Bay.

For those canoeists who might wish to make this trip in reverse, Sandy Bay would be the starting point. Those opting to do this trip in the reverse direction should be prepared for some arduous upstream paddling on the Churchill River portion.

Maps:

- 63-K/13 Flin Flon, Manitoba
- 63-L/16 Annabel Lake
- 63-M/1 Attitti Lake
- 63-M/8 Nemei Lake
- 63-M/9 Sandy Bay
- 63-M/16 Pagato River
- 63-N/4 Duval Lake
- 63-N/5 Kipahigan Lake
- 63-N/12 Sisipuk Lake
- 63-N/13 Britton Lake

About the Trip:

This is an excellent canoe trip with plenty of challenge for the wilderness canoeist with some experience in travelling northern waterways. Competence in reading a map and compass is an absolute prerequisite, as getting lost is possibly the greatest hazard on this fairly long trip. Care should also be exercised when navigating the large open expanses of lakes such as Sisipuk and Kipahigan. Most, but not all, of the rapids are so severe that they will be portaged without question thereby reducing the risk of upsetting. Most of the portage trails are relatively short and in fairly good condition. These two facts make this a comparatively safe trip despite its fairly long length.

Fishing is good throughout the trip, but especially so below falls and rapids. Please note that a Manitoba fishing licence is required for the portion of the trip encompassing most of Sisipuk Lake and the eastern end of Loon Lake.

Beautiful natural campsites abound so there should be no problem finding a place to camp.

Making this trip in the direction described could be difficult because of the considerable current of the Churchill River portion. However, with the assistance of a small outboard motor or with a willingness to paddle vigorously upstream against the currents of the Churchill River, this may be done. For this reason the description of portage locations is given from both ends.

At Sandy Bay, the ending point of this trip, there are a number of stores, a Government of Saskatchewan office, post office, motel, restaurant, gas station, air charter services and telephone communications. Sandy Bay is located at the end of Highway 135 (Gravel) 121 kilometres (75 miles) northeast of its junction with highway 106 (Paved). Highway 106 is also known as the 'Hanson Lake Road'. Arrangements for the safe parking and/or transfer of vehicles could likely be made with outfitters at Sandy Bay.

The Canoe Trip:

In addition to the Saskatchewan Government campground, Tyrrell Lake offers a number of natural campsites along its shores.

Travel in a generally northerly direction to the outlet of the lake at its northeast end. The short rocky rapid which obstructs passage can easily be passed by hauling canoes over a 6 metre (6.5 yard) log skid on the left or south side of the rapid.

There are cabins located on the south shore beside this rapid. Please respect the residents' privacy and property.

Portage Number 1:

Connecting Tyrrell Lake with a small reed filled pond. 6 metres (6.5 yards) long and in poor to fair condition. This portage bypasses a short, rocky and impassable rapid.

The portage skid starts on the left or south shore at the head of this very short rapid and ends at its foot (Grid location 868900 - Map 63-L/16).

Paddle for about 2 kilometres (1.25 miles) through reed and lily filled waters to the outlet of the small pond. At the outlet, there is a short rocky rapid and fall divided by an island. The left or west outlet is dry at all but high water levels. A rough log skid follows the course of this dry outlet.

Portage Number 2:

Connecting the small reed filled pond with the stream flowing into the south end of Little Mari Lake. 40 metres (44 yards) long and in poor condition. This portage bypasses a short, rocky and impassable rapid and fall.

From the upstream end, the portage starts at an old beaver dam on the left or west side of the most westerly outlet a few metres (yards) from the shallow and rocky outflow (Grid location 863915 - Map 63-L/16).

From the downstream end, the portage starts at a rocky landing on the right or west side of the most westerly inlet 10 metres (11 yards) from the shallow and rocky inflowing stream (Grid location 863916 - Map 63-L/16).

A few hundred metres (yards) below Portage Number 2, canoeists reach and pass by the incoming channel from Cotteral Lake. Paddle downstream in a northerly direction to the south end of Little Mari Lake.

The outlet of Little Mari Lake is located in a small cove opposite a sizeable island near the north end of the lake.

Portage Number 3:

Connecting Little Mari Lake with Mari Lake. 65 metres (71 yards) long and in good condition. This portage bypasses a 5 metre (16 foot) fall.

From Little Mari Lake the portage starts from a grassy break in the shoreline vegetation 30 metres (33 yards) north of the outflowing stream (Grid location 877967 - Map 63-L/16).

From Mari Lake the portage starts from a sharp break in the shoreline vegetation 20 metres (22 yards) north of the foot of the fall (Grid location 878967 - Map 63-L/16).

It is an interesting side trip to view this beautiful little fall, either from the portage and/or from the water below.

There is excellent walleye fishing in the waters at the base of the falls.

Travel briefly north, then south and then north again on Mari Lake for a total of about 45 kilometres (28 miles) to the rapids and portages leading to Jones Lake.

The overhead power transmission line between Island Falls generating station and Flin Flon, Manitoba crosses the water at the first narrows of Mari Lake (Grid location 094021 - Map 63-N/4).

Portage Number 4:

Connecting the north end of Mari Lake with a long narrow pond between sets of rapids. 425 metres (465 yards) long and in poor condition. This portage bypasses shallow, rocky and impassable rapids and a small fall.

From the Mari Lake end, the portage starts at an inconspicuous break in the shoreline vegetation on the right or east shore a few metres (yards) above the start of the rapids (Grid location 882269 - Map 63-M/8).

At times of high water flow, a safer alternate would be from a very indistinct break in the alders to the right or east of the remains of an old dock 50 metres (55 yards) above the start of the rapids (Grid location 882268 - Map 63-M/8). This alternate adds 80 metres (87 yards) to the length of the portage.

From the narrow pond, the portage starts from a definite break in the shoreline vegetation on the left or east shore 10 metres (11 yards) below the falls in the inflowing stream (Grid location 882274 - Map 63-M/8). Paddle north to the outlet of the pond and the start of Portage Number 5.

Portage Number 5:

Connecting the long narrow pond between sets of rapids with the south end of Jones Lake. 260 metres (284 yards) long and in fair condition. This portage bypasses shallow, rocky and impassable rapids.

From the narrow pond, the portage starts at a small break in the shoreline vegetation on the right or east shore immediately to the left of an old submerged dock (Grid location 879291 - Map 63-M/8). An alternate landing can be effected 10 metres (11 yards) below this point, off the end of an old beaver dam. From Jones Lake, the portage starts immediately to the left or east of the foot of the inflowing stream (Grid location 879294 - Map 63-M/8).

There are a number of outfitters' cabins located on Jones Lake.

Paddle 6 kilometres (3.75 miles) to the outlet of Jones Lake on the northeast shore and the start of Portage Number 6.

Portage Number 6:

Connecting Jones Lake to a small pond between rapids and falls. 210 metres (230 yards) long and in good condition. This portage bypasses a shallow, rocky and impassable rapid.

From Jones Lake, the portage starts at a distinct opening 30 metres (33 yards) to the right or east of the outlet stream which leaves the lake from the end of a narrow inlet on the northeast shore of the lake (Grid location 881348 - Map 63-M/8).

From the small pond, the portage starts from a small break in the shoreline vegetation near the mid point of the south shore of the pond (Grid location 882350 - Map 63-M/8).

There is a fork to the right near the end of this portage which bypasses the entire pond. This 600 metre (656 yard) trail ends on a sloping rock shelf 30 metres (33 yards) below the foot of the south falls. This trail is a fisherman's trail and it is not suitable for portaging canoes.

Paddle across this small pond to the outlet stream at its eastern end and make Portage Number 7 past a twin set of falls.

On leaving the pond, the stream splits into two channels each containing picturesque waterfalls.

Portage Number 7:

Connecting the small pond with Kipahigan Lake. 115 metres (126 yards) long and in poor condition. This portage bypasses a pair of 7 metre (23 foot) falls.

From the small pond, the portage starts from an indistinct opening in the shoreline alders and willows 10 metres (11 yards) to the left or north side of the outlet stream (Grid location 884351 - Map 63-M/8).

From Kipahigan Lake, the portage starts from an indistinct break in the shoreline vegetation 15 metres (16 yards) north of the base of the most northerly of the two outlet falls (Grid location 886351 - Map 63-M/8). The shoreline rises steeply back of the narrow bush fringe of the shoreline.

Kipahigan Lake offers many fine natural campsites. There are also a number of private cabins and outfitters' out-camps on this lake.

Kipahigan is a large lake which can become quite rough in high winds. Special attention should be paid to navigation so as to safely reach the narrows leading to the northwestern part of the lake and the narrow outlet bay.

There is a small picnic and camping site located on the west side of the small falls at the outlet of Kipahigan Lake.

Portage Number 8:

Connecting the northwest arm of Kipahigan Lake with the most southerly bay of Chekuhikun (Chicken) Lake. 5 metres (15 feet) long and in excellent condition. This portage bypasses a 1.25 m. (4 ft) fall. At the time of the survey there was a short log skid here.

From Kipahigan Lake, the portage starts on the left or west side immediately at the head of the fall (Grid location 837547 - Map 63-M/9).

From Chekuhikun Lake, the portage starts on the right or west side immediately at the foot of the fall (Grid location 837548 - Map 63-M/9).

NOTE: In case of emergency, it should be noted that the extreme west arm of Chekuhikun Lake is connected to the settlement of Sandy Bay by a 5 kilometre (3 mile) dirt road. There are also a number of outfitters' out-camps on this lake.

The outlet of Chekuhikun Lake is at its extreme northeastern point. There are two sets of rapids and a major waterfall in the 7 kilometre (4.5 mile) outlet stream between Chekuhikun and Sisipuk Lakes.

Portage Number 9:

Around the first rapid in the stream between Chekuhikun and Sisipuk Lakes. 300 metres (328 yards) long and in generally good condition, though very steep in spots. This portage bypasses a class 4 rapid in a narrow gorge.

From the upstream end, the portage starts at a grassy landing on the left or south side 45 metres (49 yards) above the start of the rapids (Grid location 880654 - Map 63-M/9). The trail is very steep and in part over bare rock sloping down towards the rapid below. Light loads should be taken over the portage first to enable the canoeists to familiarize themselves with the portage.

Blasting has served to create a rough rock dam at the head of the gorge through which the river flows.

From the downstream end, the portage starts from a grassy opening on the right or south shore 10 metres (11 yards) below the foot of the rapid and opposite a steep rock face (Grid location 877655 - Map 63-M/9). The trail enters an open birch stand and then angles up a very steep incline.

2 kilometres (1.25 miles) below Portage Number 9 the canoeist encounters the second rapid in this channel. Experts may elect to run this rapid after careful study from shore. Others will either make the short portage on the south shore or laboriously wade or line down the small channel along the north shore.

Portage Number 10 (Optional):

Around the second rapid in the stream between Chekuhikun and Sisipuk Lakes. 65 metres (71 yards) long and in poor condition. This portage bypasses a class 2 rapid.

From the upstream end, the portage starts at a bare rock outcrop on the left or south side immediately at the head of the rapid (Grid location 857655 - Map 63-M/9). The indistinct trail goes over bare rock past the main part of the rapid, then through a dense growth of alders before dropping over bare rock to a small rocky cove in fast water at the foot of the rapid.

From the downstream end, the portage starts from a small rocky cove on the right or south side immediately at the foot of the rapid, and after paddling up a stretch of fast water (Grid location 856655 - Map 63-M/9).

A further 2 kilometres (1.25 miles) of paddling brings you to the last obstruction before reaching Sisipuk Lake and the Churchill River. There are remains of a sizeable man-made dam and a major waterfall at this location. Paddle to the right or east side where piles of broken rock from the work on the dam are still visible.

Portage Number 11:

Connecting the stream flowing from Chekuhikun Lake to Sisipuk Lake. 45 metres (49 yards) long and in fair condition. This portage bypasses a 10 metre (33 foot) fall.

From the upstream side, the portage starts at a bare flat rock on the right or east side of the channel 40 metres (44 yards) to the right of the main drop of the fall and 20 metres (22 yards) to the left of the rock piles (Grid location 843663 - Map 63-M/9). The trail drops steeply to a rocky landing at the foot of the dam.

At this point the underwater intakes for the powerhouse planned for this spot present a hazard for anyone who might fall into the water.

From the Sisipuk Lake end, the portage starts at a rocky landing 5 metres (16 feet) to the left or west of the two man-made channels flowing out from the base of the rock piles (Grid location 843664 - Map 63-M/9).

An old, barely discernable trail starts from a slight opening in the willows 15 metres (16 yards) to the right of the rock piles and angles steeply down to the foot of the dam over a distance of 90 metres (98 yards). This trail might have to be used at times of high water as the portage described above could be under water.

Sisipuk Lake is large and confusing. Navigation must be done carefully to safely reach the inflowing waters of the Churchill River at the north end of the lake.

Canoeists can now decide to explore the extensive shores of Sisipuk Lake or travel directly to the inflow at the north end of the lake. There are numerous campsites along the varied shoreline of this large lake.

At the north end of Sisipuk Lake the Churchill River is divided into two channels by a large island. Take the more southerly route around the island as it only involves a single falls and portage, whereas the northern route involves two sets of Class 2+ rapids past which no portage trail was found.

At the junction of the two channels around the large island there is considerable current which could be a problem for upstream travellers.

Portage Number 12:

Connecting the northern part of Sisipuk Lake to the southeast end of Loon Lake. 170 metres (186 yards) long and in only fair condition due to a recent forest fire. This portage bypasses a 1.25 metre (4 foot) fall. From the downstream, or Sisipuk Lake, side this portage starts from the end of a shallow weed filled bay on the left or south side 500 metres (547 yards) from the base of the falls (Grid location 210909 - Map 63-N/13).

From the upstream, or Loon Lake, side this portage starts at a break in the vegetation back of a small sandy beach in a cove 100 metres (109 yards) to the right or south side of the outlet fall (Grid location 209908 - Map 63-N/13).

Shortly before leaving the eastern arm of Loon Lake, note the cut-line through the trees on the peninsula to the south (Grid location 876930 - Map 63-M/16) and on the island to the north. This cut-line marks the boundary between Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Paddle in a generally southwest direction on Loon Lake and through the narrows leading to Okipwatsikew Lake. Continue in a generally southwest direction to the south end of Okipwatsikew Lake.

Two options exist for travel from Okipwatsikew Lake to Wasawakasik Lake:

Stay with the main, more westerly channel and make portage number 13A; or,

At times of higher water, follow the Stewart Channel and make portage number 13B.

NOTE: At the time of this survey, water levels on the Churchill River were so low that the Stewart Channel was not navigable.

There is considerable current in the main channel between Okipwatsikew and Wasawakasik Lakes. This current could prove to be a distinct hindrance to the upstream paddler and may require the canoe to be lined.

Portage Number 13A:

Connecting the fast water at the south end of Okipwatsikew Lake to the north end of Wasawakasik Lake. 240 metres (262 yards) long and in fairly good condition. This portage bypasses a class 1+ rapid.

From the downstream or north end, this portage starts from an indistinct break in the shoreline alders on the south or left shore near the base of a large spruce tree 500 metres (547 yards) up a small stream which enters the Churchill River at the base of the rapid (Grid location 746692 - Map 63-M/9).

From the upstream or south end, this portage starts from a slight break in the shoreline vegetation near

the centre of a grassy cove on the left or west shore 500 metres (547 yards) above the head of the rapid (Grid location 747690 - Map 63-M/9).

Stewart Channel Route:

Stewart Channel is in part man-made. At times of high water, the current in this channel could prove to be a hindrance to the upstream paddler.

Portage Number 13B:

Around a short rapid in the Stewart Channel. 45 metres long and in only fair condition, it is an indefinite trail along the northwest shore of the channel. This portage bypasses a Class 1+ rapid.

From the north or downstream end, this portage starts at an indistinct break in the shoreline vegetation on the right or northwest side of the channel at the foot of the rapid (Grid location 762684 - Map 63-M/9).

From the south or upstream end, this portage starts at an indistinct break in the shoreline vegetation on the left or northwest side of Stewart Channel at the head of the rapid (Grid location 761684 - Map 63-M/9).

Paddle in a generally southwest direction to the inflowing rapids at the southwest end of Wasawakasik Lake.

There are two routes past this rapid. The northern route involves a longer portage and it bypasses stretches of considerable current and the rapid. The shorter portage on the southern route bypasses only the rapid itself. At times of lower water the faster water separated by an island (Grid location 696584 - Map 63-M/9) becomes a Class 1 rapid.

On the south end of an island near the southwest end of Wasawakasik Lake (Grid location 733606 - Map 63-M/9) there is a small cemetery used by the residents of Sandy Bay.

Northern Route:

Portage Number 14A:

Connecting the southwest end of Wasawakasik Lake with waters north and east of Sandy Bay. 235 metres (257 yards) long and in fairly good condition. This portage bypasses a Class 1 rapid.

From the downstream or northeast side, this portage starts as a break in the shoreline vegetation of a shallow grassy cove on the southwest shore of Wasawakasik Lake (Grid location 718594 - Map 63-M/9).

From the upstream or southwest side, this portage starts on the east shore of a cove in the bay north of the rapid (Grid location 716595 - Map 63-M/9).

Southern Route:

Portage Number 14B:

Connecting the southwest end of Wasawakasik Lake with waters north and east of Sandy Bay. 95 metres (104 yards) long and in fairly good condition. This portage bypasses a Class 1 rapid.

From the downstream side, this portage starts on the left or south shore from a bare rocky slope at the foot of the rapid (Grid location 718588 - Map 63-M/9).

From the upstream side, this portage starts from a bare rocky slope on the right or south shore 5 metres (5.5 yards) above the start of the rapid (Grid location 717587 - Map 63-M/9).

Considerable current is encountered in a number of spots prior to arriving at Sandy Bay, the end point of this trip (Grid location 693553 - Map 63-M/9).

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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For further information contact:
Toll Free: 1-800-205-7070
Fax: (306) 787-7000
Email: info.TPCS@gov.sk.ca