



Canoe Trip #7

La Ronge - Iskwatikan Lake - Churchill River - Pelican Narrows - Deschambault Lake - Mile 146 Hanson Lake Road (Highway 106)

Length of Trip: 282 Kilometres (454 miles) varying depending on route taken across Lac La Ronge

Time Required to Complete Trip: 8 to 10 days

Number of Portages: 13 to 14 depending on route selected

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 can be launched from the Saskatchewan Government campground in La Ronge. Alternate launching sites, avoiding the more open waters of Lac La Ronge are English Bay, approximately 19 kilometres (12 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 2, and Wadin Bay, approximately 27 kilometres (17 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 2.

Arrangements for the safe parking of vehicles could be made in all probability with any of the fishing camp operators at La Ronge.

Maps:

- 73-P Lac La Ronge
- Hydrographic Chart No. 6281 Lac La Ronge
- 73-P/7 Stanley
- 63-M Pelican Narrows
- 63-L Amisk Lake

About the Trip:

This is largely a big lake trip with considerable exposure to wind and waves. Because of the vagaries of weather, ample extra time should be allowed to wait out bad weather which may make lakes unsafe to travel. Bigger canoes, rather than smaller ones, should be considered for use on this trip.

Fishing is excellent throughout this trip. Northern pike and walleye are found in all waters. Lake trout occur in the larger lakes.

The Churchill River-to-Pelican Narrows portion of this trip is over a route very rich in history. Most of the great explorers of the Canadian Northwest passed over this route. Big lake scenery along this trip is unsurpassed and the number of good natural campsites is unlimited.

Because river current is negligible or non-existent in all but a few places, this trip could be made in reverse. For this reason portage locations are given from both ends.

The Canoe Trip:

There are a variety of ways to cross Lac La Ronge to its outlet in the northeast corner. The most direct route is also the most exposed and should only be attempted under the most stable of good weather conditions. Alternative routes working up the west side and across the island-filled northern portion of the lake are longer but offer more protection. Alternative starting points at either English Bay or Wadin Bay may have to be considered, but the best rule is to wait until the weather improves. Because of limited time, one might consider making up for a delayed start by hiring a big boat to transport canoes and equipment across Lac La Ronge to the outlet.

Portage Number 1:

Connecting the outlet of Lac La Ronge (northern tip of Diefenbaker Bay) with Hale Lake. Approximately one-half kilometre (→ mile) long and in good condition. Canoes and equipment may be loaded onto a small car or buggy travelling on rails and haled across this portage; however, this convenience is questionable in view of the heavy weight of this car unless there is lots of manpower available.

From the outlet of Lac La Ronge, this portage starts on the north shore beyond (northeast of) the dam at the outlet of the lake. Warning: Stay well clear of the current flowing through the gates of the dam.

From the Hale Lake end, this portage starts at a wooden dock on the southeast bank of the lake just below the falls.

A small rapid separates Hale Lake from Stewart Bay on Iskwatikan Lake.

From Hale Lake canoeists should proceed cautiously. After descending the first part, it is advisable to stop in the quiet cove below the islet and plan a course to avoid the rocks in the lower part of the rapids.

From Stewart Bay this rapid can be paddled upstream on either side of the dividing islet. Should conditions not permit this, canoes can be pulled up through the shallow water near the shore or carried over a short trail on the west side to avoid the swiftest current.

Portage Number 2 - Nistowiak Falls Portage: (Not shown on map)

Connecting Iskwatikan Lake to Nistowiak Lake . Approximately 1100 metres (1203 yards) long and in excellent condition. This portage by-passes a two metre (6 foot) fall, a 12 metre (40 foot) fall and some class 5 rapids.

From Iskwatikan Lake, the portage starts from the northern part of the lake on the southwest side of the outlet and the upper two metre (6 foot) fall (Grid location 402385 - Map 73-P/8).

From the outlet of Iskwatikan Lake this portage starts from the northern part of the Lake at the southwest side of the outlet and upper falls.

A short side trail roughly half way along this long portage leads to a viewing point above the main falls.

This is well worth seeing. NOTE: Experienced canoeists travelling from Iskwatikan Lake to Nistowiak Lake may consider a 20 metre (22 yard) portage around the upper fall, and then descending for about 365 metres (400 yards) of minor rapids to a landing point on the west shore above the main 12 metre (40 foot) fall. If this choice is made, thereby shortening the long portage by one third (for downstream travellers only), it is strongly suggested that travellers unfamiliar with this area first walk and note details of the lower landing so that there is no chance whatsoever of overshooting this crucial landing.

From the south shore of Nistowiak Lake this portage starts on the bare rock to the west of the base of the entering rapids.

Portage Number 3:

Connecting Nistowiak Lake with Drinking Lake. There are two options in travelling between Nistowiak Lake and Drinking Lake: Portage 3A 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. Note: Should the need arise, a few grocery items may be obtained at the outfitter's camp at Potter Rapids. Portage 3B is longer, an outfitter's camp is encountered and can be used for travel both downstream and upstream.

Portage Number 3A:

Connecting the southeast portion of Brown Bay on Nistowiak Lake with the western end of Drinking Lake. Approximately 90 metres (98 yards) long and in good 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. Because of the current below Potter Rapids, the use of this portage by canoeists travelling upstream is not feasible unless an outboard motor is used.

Portage Number 3B:

Connecting the most easterly portion of Brown Bay on Nistowiak Lake with the western end of Drinking Lake. Approximately 275 metres (301 yards) long and in good condition.

From the most northeastern part of Brown Bay on Nistowiak Lake this portage starts in wet willows 65 to 95 metres (70 - 104 yards) south of exposed rocks which mark the start of small rapids. This portage bypasses

a small pond and ends at the base of the fast water at the lower set of rapids.

From the head of a northward extending narrow bay on the west end of Drinking Lake, this portage starts near the base of the fast water of a small rapids on the south side.

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 course is selected on the north side of the island, descend generally in the right half of wide stretch of fast water. If the smaller right, or south channel is chosen, land and study the small rapids before making the run.

About one kilometre (½ mile) below these rapids, the canoeist comes to the main falls at the far east end of Drinking Lake, Island Portage as indicated on map 73-P, is not the best way to reach Keg Lake.

Instead, follow the 5 kilometre (3 miles) long Inman Channel which detours to the north and northeast just above this rapid. After entering the Inman Channel a few hundred metres (yards), there is a narrow spot with approximately one kilometre (½ mile) of 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 4:

Connecting the east end of Drinking Lake, via the Inman Channel, with the northern portion of Keg Lake. Approximately 90 metres (98 yards) long and in good condition.

From the western approach, this portage starts about 70 metres (76 yards) above a small falls on the north shore of the channel immediately to the northwest of a large rock outcrop. 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.

From the Keg Lake approach, this portage starts at a large flat rock near the foot of the rapid on the north, or right, shore of the Inman Channel.

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 southeast, side and enter a cove to the left of the start of the rapids.

Portage Number 5:

Connecting the east end of Keg Lake with the waters above Grand Rapids. Approximately 80 metres (87 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. This trail is unmistakable as it has been covered with skid poles to facilitate the hauling of heavy boats.

From the quiet waters above Grand Rapids, this portage starts on the east, or right, shore a few metres (yards) from the base of the rapids.

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

Portage Number 6:

About three kilometres (2 miles) below portage number 5, 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 7:

This portage is around the two major rapids comprising the lower part of Grand Rapids. Approximately 600 metres (656 yards) long and in good condition.

Travelling downstream, this portage starts about 600 metres (656 yards) below portage number 6 and on the left, or north, side of a large rock outcrop in a quiet cove about 140 metres (153 yards) above the start of the rapids (Grid location 728353 - Map 63-M/5).

Travelling upstream, this portage starts on the right, or north, shore at the base of the main rapid after ascending a short stretch of fast water.

After passing into the narrows at the east end of Trade Lake, the canoeists come to Frog Portage at which point the Churchill River system is left behind.

Frog Portage was originally called 'Portage de Traite' (Trade Portage) because Joseph Frobisher in 1774-75 met a band of Indians at this point 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 'Frog Portage' because the Cree Indians left a stretched frog skin at this location as a sign making fun of the way more northerly Indians dressed and stretched their beaver skins.

Portage Number 8 - Frog Portage:

Connecting the Churchill River at the east end of Trade Lake with waters lying northwest of the main body of Wood Lake. Approximately 310 metres (339 yards) long and in good condition. This portage crosses the height of land between the Churchill River and Sturgeon-Weir River system (Part of the Saskatchewan River watershed).

From the Churchill River approach, this portage starts at a grassy opening on the south, or right, shore of the island filled narrows east of Trade Lake (Grid location 929399 - Map 63-M/5).

From the waters lying northwest of Wood Lake, Frog Portage starts from a steep but protected bank at the northwest end of this body of water.

Travelling southeast from Frog Portage, canoeists should be careful not to pass into Manawan Lake by mistake. The entrance to Wood Lake is found more to the south and is quite narrow.

At the southeast end of Wood Lake, the canoeist will come to the Grassy Narrows area and the Woody Lake Indian Reserve. Three small and closely spaced falls occur in the area about nine kilometres (5 1/2 miles) east-northeast of Grassy Narrows (Grid locations 228222, 229221 and 233219 - Map 63-M/3).

Portage Number 9: (Rapids not shown on Canoe Route Series Maps)

Connecting waters east of Grassy Narrows with quiet waters between rapids. Approximately 65 metres (71 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a small unrunable fall. Whether travelling downstream or upstream, this portage is easily found. It is over a small island dividing the rapids and has conspicuous pole skids throughout its length.

Portage Number 10: (Not shown on map)

This portage is about 135-185 metres (148 - 202 yards) below portage no. 9. Connecting successive areas of quiet water between small falls. Approximately 30 metres (33 yards) long and in good condition. Whether travelling downstream or upstream, this portage is easily found. It is similar to portage number 9 in being over a small island dividing the rapids. It also has pole skids throughout its length.

Portage Number 11: (Not shown on map)

This portage is about one-half kilometre (440 yards) below portage no. 10. It is around the third small falls in the series of three. Approximately 55 metres (60 yards) long and in good condition.

From the upstream side, this portage starts on the north shore about 45 metres (49 yards) before the start of the rapids. Skid poles make it easy to find.

From the downstream side this portage starts at a small dock on the north shore.

Portage Number 12 - Medicine Portage:

Connecting the quiet waters below the three small falls with the northwest portion of Pelican Lake. Approximately 80 metres (87 yards) long and in good condition.

From the upstream side the portage around Medicine Rapids starts on the northeast shore about 18 metres (22 yards) from the start of the rapids.

From the downstream side Medicine Portage starts just north of the base of the rapids at the northwest end of Pelican Lake. This portage has conspicuous pole skids throughout its length.

After passing Medicine Rapids the canoeists should be careful not to miss the narrow entrance to Pelican Lake proper and mistakenly head into Chachukew Lake.

The community of Pelican Narrows has road connections with the outside. There is a Saskatchewan Government office, radio and charter air services, accommodations, general supply and food stores.

From Pelican Narrows travel in a southwesterly and then southerly direction to Sandy Narrows and on to South Arm of Pelican Lake.

From South Arm to the eastern part of Deschambault Lake there is a choice of routes. If travelling light, the long, single portage (most northerly on the map) is probably easier. If heavily loaded, the two shorter portages are more expedient.

Portage Number 13 - Single Portage Route to Deschambault Lake:

Connecting South Arm of Pelican Lake with the eastern part of Deschambault Lake. Approximately 825 metres (902 yards) long and in good condition.

From the South Arm this portage starts about 70 to 95 metres (77- 104 yards) northwest of the inflowing waters in the most westerly baylet (see map).

From Deschambault side this portage starts at the northeast end of the small baylet, showing as a small break in the cattails, and also marked by big poplar trees.

Portage Number 13A - Double Portage Route to Deschambault Lake:

Connecting South Arm with a small pond. Approximately 55 metres (60 yards) long and in good condition. From South Arm the portage starts slightly to the east of the inflowing stream at the south end of the most westerly baylet.

From the small pond approach, this portage starts at the outlet of the pond at its northwest end. There is a narrow channel through the rocks near the west shore at the start of the stream outlet. Continue down the outlet as far as possible to a conspicuous pole ramp on the east side where the portage starts.

Portage Number 14 - Double Portage Route to Deschambault Lake: Connecting a small pond with the eastern part of Deschambault Lake. Approximately 219 metres (240 yards) long and in good condition.

From the small pond approach this portage starts at the southwestern end of the small cattail-bordered pond.

From the baylet on the east side of Deschambault Lake this portage starts at the southeast end (see map).

The Deschambault settlement (not marked as such on the map) is located on the northward extending peninsula at the central narrows of the lake approximately three kilometres (2 miles) west of the south end of Tower Island (the tower provides a handy landmark). The store at Deschambault carries a variety of general supplies, food, gasoline, etc., and maintains radio communications with other northern centres.

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

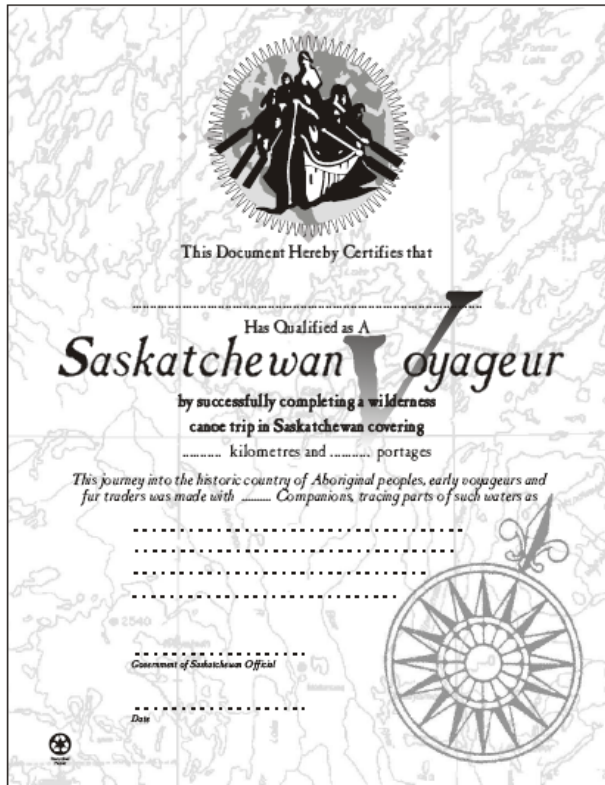
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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

**SASKATCHEWAN
PARKS**