



Canoe Trip #5

Otter Lake - Churchill River - Stanley - Frog Portage - Pelican Narrows

Length of Trip: approximately 160 kilometres (99 miles)

Time Required to Complete Trip: 6 to 7 days

Number of Portages: 13

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 campground at Missinipe (Walker Bay) on Otter Lake 80 kilometres (50 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. An alternate starting point for this trip is from below the rapids at the campground at Otter Rapids 88 kilometres (55 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 102. Otter Lake forms part of the Churchill River system.

Accommodation, air-charter, food, gasoline and telephone services are available at Missinipe.

Maps:

- 63 M/2 Pelican Narrows
- 63 M/3 Sandy Narrows
- 63 M/5 Trade Lake
- 63 M/6 Manawan 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 along lakes of part of the Churchill River system. 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 and 102.

A point of interest along this trip is picturesque Nistowiak Falls. The canoeist leaves the Churchill River at Frog Portage, that important link connecting the Churchill and Saskatchewan River systems, and over which most of the famous explorers of the Canadian northwest have passed.

This trip is not strictly a wilderness trip in its entirety in that 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.

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.

Pelican Narrows has road connections with the outside via Highways #135 and #106. Accommodation, air-charter, camping, food, gasoline and telephone services are also available.

Numerous rapids and falls are encountered along this route.

At the foot of any rapid, it is far better to be sorry one did not run the rapid than to be sorry one did!!

The Canoe Trip:

After travelling generally southeast on Otter Lake, 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. Approximately 73 metres (80 yards) long and in excellent condition. This portage by-passes a 3 metre (10 foot) fall.

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

From the small lake between Robertson and Twin Falls, the start of this portage is at an obvious landing about 10 metres (11 yards) to the east of the most easterly part of Robertson Falls.

Portage Number 2, Mountain Portage:

Connecting the small lake between Robertson and Twin Falls to the northwest end of Mountain Lake. Approximately 275 metres (301 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 small cove along the southeast shore about 45 metres (49 yards) west of a group of buildings belonging to an outfitter's camp. The portage shows as a break in the trees immediately east of two small islands (Grid location 280558, Map 73, P/10).

From the northwest end of Mountain Lake, the start of this portage shows as a break in the shoreline vegetation about 400 metres (437 yards) southwest of the falls. 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. Approximately 90 metres (98 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 2 rapid.

NOTE TO CANOEISTS TRAVELLING DOWNSTREAM: 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 about 90 metres (98 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. From Drope Lake, this portage starts on the north, or right side of the rapids, on the west side of the lake immediately north of the island dividing the rapids (Grid location 334427, Map 73, P/8), and after paddling up through some fast water. Heavy boats may be hauled over the pole ramp on the north shore of the island dividing the rapids.

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).

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, an outfitter's camp is encountered and 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 90 metres (98 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.

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 4B:

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 easterly portion of Brown Bay, this portage starts in wet willows about 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.

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

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 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. Approximately 90 metres (98 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 2+ rapid.

From the upstream approach, 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. 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 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. 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.

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 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. About 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.

Approximately 600 metres (656 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

Travelling downstream, this portage starts about 600 metres (656 yards) below portage number 7 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). There is a short stretch of fast water on either side of the island at the opening into Trade Lake. Travelling upstream, this portage starts on the right, or north, shore at the base of the main rapid after ascending the fast water at the island at the west end of Trade Lake. 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 and travel continues on waters leading to the Saskatchewan River. Frog Portage was originally called 'Portage de Traite' (Trade Portage) because, at this point in 1774-75, Joseph Frobisher met a band of Indians bound for Churchill to trade their winter's catch of furs. He traded with them for as many furs as his canoes could carry. It was also known as 'Frog Skin 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 9, Frog Portage:

Connecting the Churchill River at the east end of Trade Lake with Lindstrom 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 Lindstrom Lake, this portage starts at a steep but protected bank at the extreme northwest end of the lake.

The canoe route follows through Lindstrom and Pixley Lakes and into the north end of Wood Lake. Care should be taken not to enter the narrows leading to Manawan Lake by mistake.

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 10:

Connecting waters east of Grassy Narrows with quiet waters between small falls. 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 fall.

About 165 metres (180 yards) below portage number 10, the canoeist approaches portage number 11.

Portage Number 11:

Connecting successive areas of quiet water between small falls. Approximately 30 metres (33 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 similar to portage number 10 in being over a small island dividing the fall.

About 400 metres (437 yards) below portage number 11, the canoeist approaches portage number 12.

Portage Number 12:

Connecting quiet waters between small falls with Muskike Lake. Approximately 55 metres (60 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a small unrunable fall.

From the upstream side, this portage starts on the east shore about 45 metres (49 yards) before the start of the fall. From Muskike Lake, this portage starts on the northwest shore about 45 metres (49 yards) from the foot of the fall. About 2 1/2 kilometres (1 1/2 mile) below portage number 12, at the outlet of Muskike Lake, the canoeist approaches Medicine Rapids and portage.

Portage Number 13, Medicine Portage:

Connecting Muskike Lake with Chachukew Lake. Approximately 85 metres (93 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 2 rapid.

From Muskike Lake, Medicine Portage starts on the northeast, or left, shore about 20 metres (22 yards) above the rapid.

From Chachukew Lake, Medicine Portage starts on the northeast, or right, side immediately at the base of the rapid.

After passing Medicine Rapids the canoeists should head in a generally easterly direction to the channel leading to Pelican Lake.

The end point of this trip is the community of Pelican Narrows. Pelican Narrows has road connections with the outside via Highways #135 and #106. Accommodation, air-charter, camping, food, gasoline and telephone services are also available. This canoe trip can be extended to several points along the Sturgeon-Weir River. Consult the index of available canoe trips for further information.

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

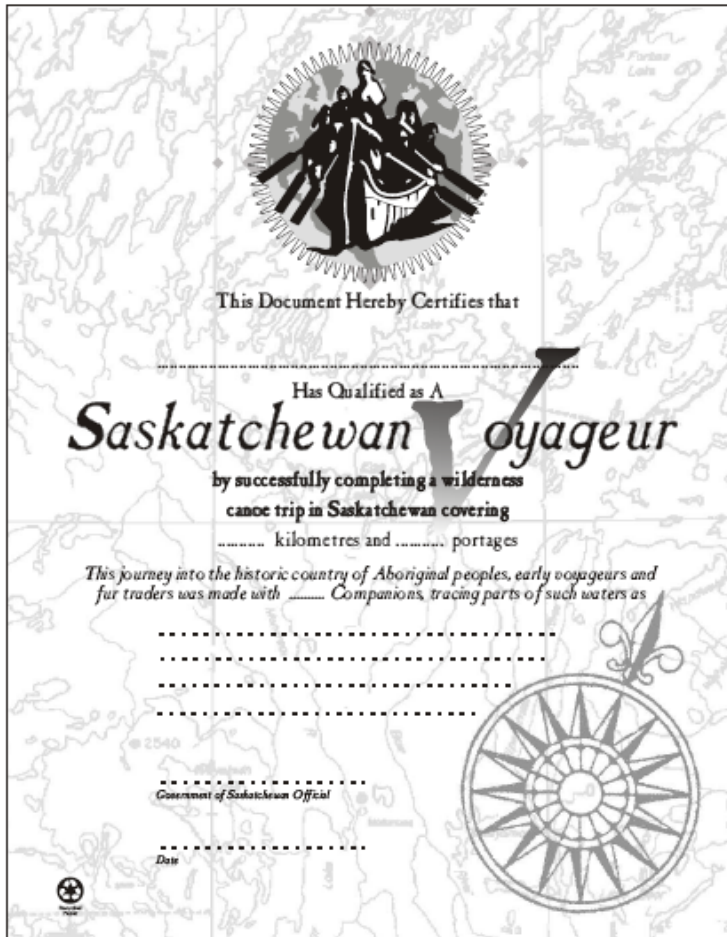
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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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Culture and Sport**

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