



Canoe Trip #9

La Ronge - Iskwatikan Lake - Churchill River - Pelican Narrows - Mirond Lake - Sturgeon-Weir River - Maligne Lake (Kilometre 275 Hanson Lake Road)

Length of Trip: 245 to 270 kilometres (152 to 168 miles) depending upon route taken across Lac La Ronge.

Time Required to Complete Trip: 7 to 10 days

Number of Portages: 15 to 18 depending upon route taken across Lac La Ronge.

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 campground in La Ronge. Alternate launching sites which avoid the more open waters of Lac La Ronge are English Bay, approximately 19 kilometres (12 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 102, or Wadin Bay, approximately 27 kilometres (17 miles) north of La Ronge on Highway 102. Arrangements for the safe parking of vehicles could, in all probability, be made with any of the fishing camp operators in La Ronge, English Bay or Wadin Bay.

La Ronge airport receives regular scheduled flights from Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

Charter float plane service, telephone, hotel, food and a wide range of services are also available at La Ronge.

Maps:

- 63-L/15 Birch Portage
- 63-M/2 Pelican Narrows
- 63-M/3 Sandy Narrows
- 63-M/5 Trade Lake
- 63-M/6 Manawan Lake
- 73-P/2 Hunter Bay
- 73-P/3 La Ronge
- 73-P/6 Nemeiben Lake
- 73-P/7 Stanley Mission
- 73-P/8 Nistowiak Lake
- Optional: Hydrographic Chart #6281 Lac La Ronge

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.

The Lac La Ronge portion of this trip is across a large, island studded northern lake. The Churchill River to Maligne Lake portion is over a route very rich in history. Most of the great explorers of the Canadian Northwest passed over it.

Other points of interest include picturesque Nistowiak Falls and the rapids below the dam at the outlet of Lac La Ronge.

This canoe trip offers an opportunity to see typical pre-cambrian lake country with its interesting variety of rock exposures, trees, plants, animals and birds. Fishing is excellent throughout the trip with northern pike and walleye in all waters and lake trout in the larger lakes. Good natural sloping rock campsites are abundant, and occasional small sandy beaches will be found.

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.
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:

There are a variety of ways to cross Lac La Ronge to its outlet in the northeast end of the lake. 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 they 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 lost time spent waiting on the weather by hiring a big boat to transport canoes and equipment across Lac La Ronge. If, for reasons of safety or for variety of route, the canoeist decides to stay close to the northwest shore of Lac La Ronge, there are one, two or three additional, optional portages which make this longer but more sheltered course possible. Any, or all, of these optional portages may be made.

Optional Portage Number 1 - Nut Portage:

(Approximately 11 kilometres (7 miles) northeast of La Ronge) Connecting Campbell Channel with Nut Bay. Approximately 100 metres (109 yards) long and in good condition.
From Campbell Channel, this portage starts at the narrowest, and lowest, portion of the peninsula (Grid location 896117 - Map 73-P/3).
From Nut Bay, this portage starts along the southeastern shore, and is easily seen (Grid location 896118 - Map 73-P/3).

Optional Portage Number 2 - English Bay Portage:

Connecting most westerly (Ewen Bay) part of Nut Bay with English Bay. Approximately 460 metres (503 yards) long and in fair to good condition.
From Ewen Bay, the trail starts as a clear break in the birch, alder and willow shoreline along the most westerly portion of the bay (Grid location 838164 - Map 73-P/3).
From the southeast shore of English Bay, this portage starts as a small break in the willows, birch and spruce between two projecting rocky points (Grid location 835167 - Map 73-P/3).

Optional Portage Number 3 - Anglo-Rouyn Portage:

Connecting northern and eastern portions of Wadin Bay with Ore Bay. Approximately 700 metres (765 yards) long and in good condition.
From the northeastern part of Wadin Bay, near the old Anglo-Rouyn Mine site, this portage starts as a break in the shoreline willows and grasses at the narrowest part of Williams Peninsula (Grid location 983272 - Map 73-P/6).
From the northern part of Ore Bay, near the old Anglo-Rouyn Mine site, this portage starts as a wide cut through willows and poplars at the narrowest part of Williams Peninsula (Grid location 987267 - Map 73-P/6).

Portage Number 1 - Rapid River Portage:

Connecting the outlet of Lac La Ronge (Northeastern tip of Diefenbaker Bay) with Hale Lake. Approximately 500 metres (550 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a Class 5 rapid. Canoes and equipment may be loaded onto a small car, or buggy travelling on rails and hauled across this portage, this convenience is questionable in view of the heavy weight of the car, unless there is lots of manpower available.
From the outlet of Lac La Ronge, this portage starts on the north, or left shore approximately 200 metres (219 yards) beyond the dam at the outlet of the lake. WARNING: Stay well clear of the current flowing through the gates of the dam.
From Hale Lake, this portage starts at a wooden dock on the southeast, or left bank just below the bottom of the rapid.
A small Class 1 rapid separates Hale Lake from Stewart Bay on Iskwatikan Lake. From Hale Lake, canoeists should proceed cautiously. After descending the first part of the rapid, 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 rapid.
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, or right side to avoid the swiftest current.

Portage Number 2 - Nistowiak Falls Portage:

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 south shore of Nistowiak Lake, this portage starts on the bare rock to the west of the inflowing waters of the Rapid River (Grid location 401393 - Map 73-P/8). An outfitter's camp is located at this site. 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: Experience 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) through 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.

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. Portage 3B 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 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 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 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 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 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. 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 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. 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 6:

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 7:

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 8 - 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 9:

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 10:

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 11:

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 12 - 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 and 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.

From Pelican Narrows travel in a southeasterly direction about three kilometres (1 3/4 mile) to the outlet of the lake at Opawikusehikan Narrows. Canoeists may easily pass under the highway bridge and on to the northwest portion of Mirond Lake.

Travel in a generally southeast direction past the southwest shore of Gillies Peninsula to the outlet of the lake at Corneille Rapids.

Portage Number 13 - Corneille Portage:

Connecting the southeast part of Mirond Lake with the northwestern part of Corneille Lake. Approximately 165 metres (180 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 3+ rapid.

From Mirond Lake, this portage starts on the north, or left, shore in a cove about 90 metres (98 yards) above the start of the rapids.

From the northwestern end of Corneille Lake, this portage starts on the north, or right, shore in a cove about 140 metres (153 yards) from the base of the rapids.

About 200 metres (219 yards) below this portage there is some fast water which should cause no problem for the careful canoeist. Watch for dangerous rocks on the extreme right, or south, side. There is an old portage trail past this fast water on the left, or north, shore which may be used by those in doubt about running this rapid, or by those travelling upstream.

Paddle generally along the north shore to the outlet of Corneille Lake at its extreme northeast end (Grid location 512990 - Map 63-M/2).

Portage Number 14 - Dog Portage:

Connecting Corneille Lake with the Sturgeon-Weir River. Approximately 45 metres (49 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a 1 1/2 metre (5 foot) fall. From the northeast end of Corneille Lake, this portage starts approximately 45 metres (49 yards) to the right, or east, of the top of the fall at a break in the shoreline willows. There is a small islet about 50 metres (55 yards) directly off-shore from the start of the portage. The falls, known as Dog Rapids, are not easily visible until the canoeist is very close to them, though their sound may be audible if the wind is quiet.

From the Sturgeon-Weir side, this portage starts in a cove about 20 metres (22 yards) to the left, or east, of the base of the falls.

There are a number of stretches of minor fast water in the upper parts of the Sturgeon-Weir River, but these should present no problem to canoeists.

On entering the small lake at the Birch Portage Indian Reserve, DO NOT go to the head of the outlet rapids as THE PORTAGE DOES NOT START THERE. Rather, the portage starts in a cove on the east side of the rocky peninsula lying east of the rapids (Grid location 522827 - Map 63-L/15).

Portage Number 15 - Birch Portage:

Connecting the small lake above the rapids with the lower part of the Sturgeon-Weir River. Approximately 330 metres (361 yards) long and in good condition. This portage by-passes a class 4 rapid.

From the upstream end, this portage starts in a cove on the east side of the rocky peninsula lying east of the rapids. The trail angles up over the bare rock of the peninsula.

From the downstream end, this portage starts about 200 metres (219 yards) below the rapid on the right, or east shore at an opening in the shoreline vegetation.

On entering the small northern part of Maligne Lake, the highway bridge across the narrows in the lake comes into view. This is highway #104 (The Hanson Lake Road). At this point there are several tourist camps and, nearby, a campground.

Maligne Lake, the endpoint of this trip, is located 50 kilometres (31 miles) from Flin Flon, Manitoba.

Canoe trip number 14 gives further information for those wishing to travel down the Sturgeon-Weir River to Denare Beach on the northeast side of Amisk Lake.

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

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

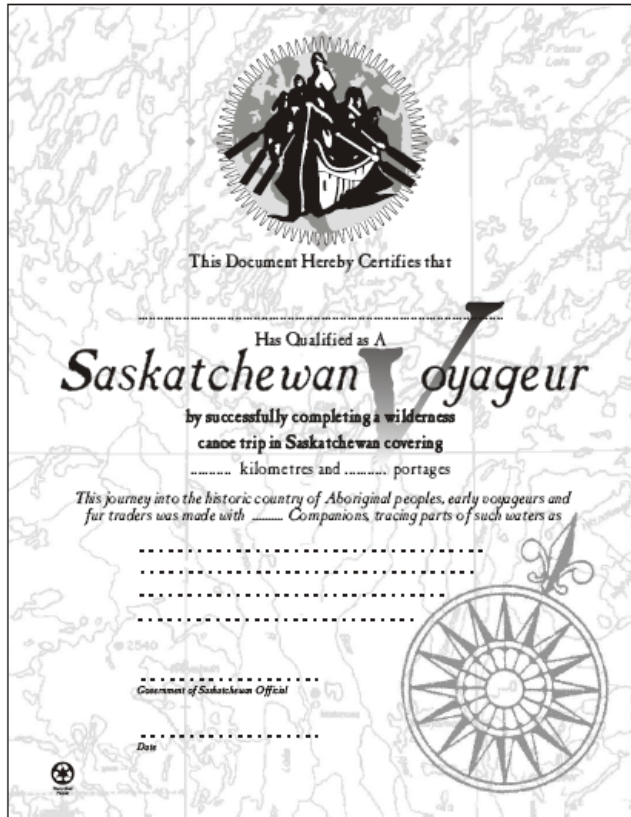
To minimize your impact on the environment while canoeing along Saskatchewan waterways, please keep

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:

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