



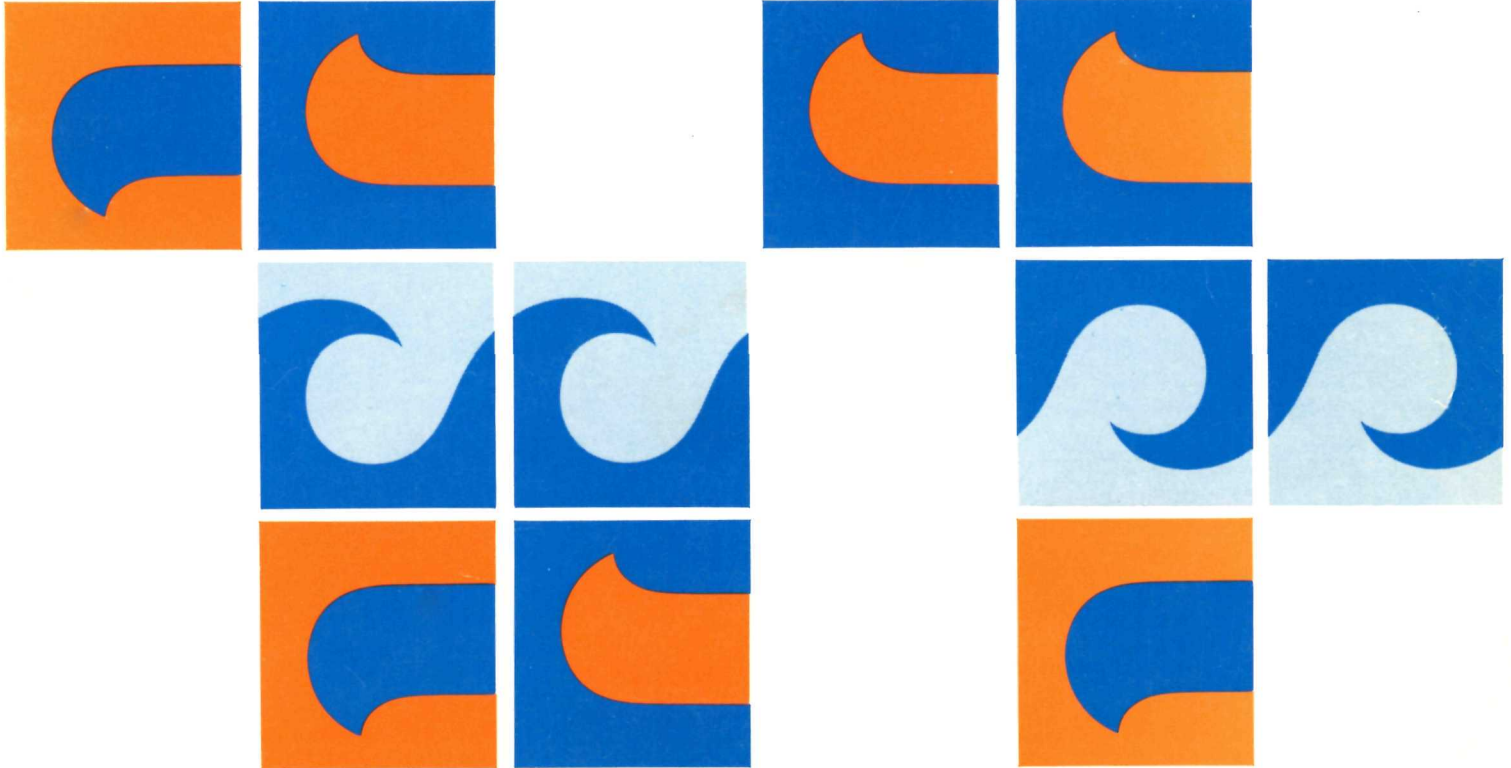
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Wild Rivers: Saskatchewan

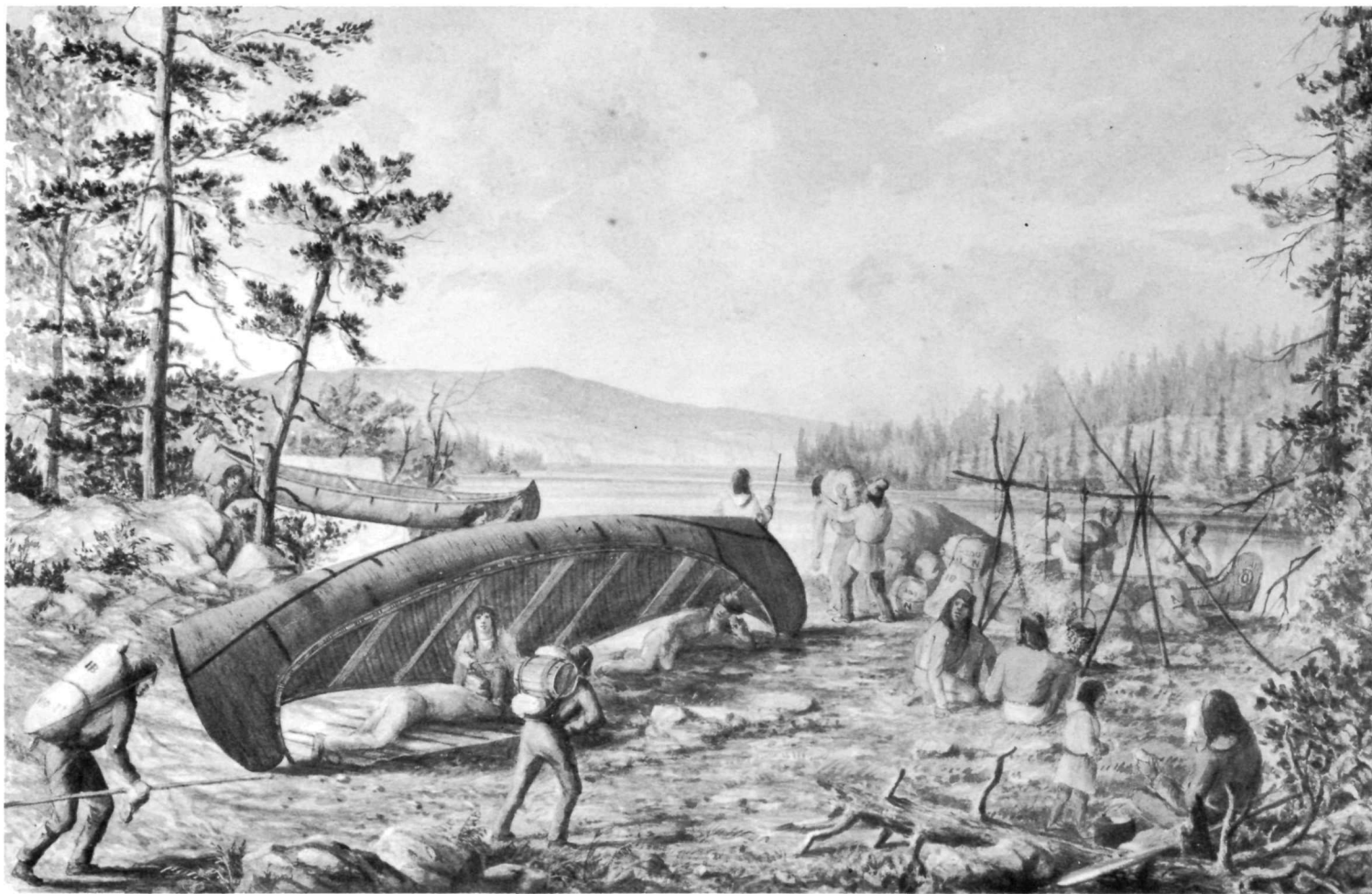


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Wild Rivers:
Saskatchewan

Wild Rivers Survey,
Planning Division,
Parks Canada,
Ottawa, 1974



*Indians loading their canoes at a portage, 1873
(Public Archives of Canada)*

It is difficult to find in life any event which so effectually condenses intense nervous sensation into the shortest possible space of time as does the work of shooting, or running an immense rapid. There is no toil, no heart breaking labour about it, but as much coolness, dexterity, and skill as man can throw into the work of hand, eye, and head; knowledge of when to strike and how to do it; knowledge of water and rock, and of the one hundred combinations which rock and water can assume—for these two things, rock and water, taken in the abstract, fail as completely to convey any idea of their fierce embracings in the throes of a rapid as the fire burning quietly in a drawing-room fireplace fails to convey the idea of a house wrapped and sheeted in flames.

Sir William Francis Butler (1872)

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Foreword

Wild rivers are a priceless part of our natural heritage. These waterways, untouched by the march of man's technological progress, are the arteries of our land, and one of the main elements in its growth to nationhood.

From the copper-coloured waterfalls of the Labrador plateau, to the Canadian Shield's labyrinth of lakes and streams, to the glacial torrents cutting through the western mountains—wild rivers are all that remain unharnessed of those waterways which first made it possible for this huge and varied country to be explored and developed.

Long before Europeans laid eyes on them, these rivers served the native peoples as vital sources of both food and transportation. Later, the rivers were to carry the newly-arrived Europeans on other voyages of exploration and exploitation throughout the vast interior of the continent. And the settlers who followed travelled the same routes.

The waterways were the mainstay of the fur trade; they were the highways to the gold rushes. They did much to provide the economic nourishment through which Canada grew to its present stature.

With the advent of modern technology, some of our rivers were harnessed to serve our newfound needs. But thousands of miles of waterways, and the land they pass through, remain essentially untouched.

Today, Canadians are gradually re-discovering these fascinating wild rivers. They are seeing nature on its own terms—enjoying its works from the vantage of its own highways. They are recreating the adventures of the explorers; struggling over the same portages as the heavily-burdened “coureurs de bois”; running rapids which once hurtled “voyageurs” and their precious cargoes toward the markets of Montréal; gently floating down majestic rivers which once carried thousands of anxious prospectors toward the promise of gold.

Parks Canada is promoting these challenging voyages of discovery, which embrace both the past and the present. Wild rivers are important to Canadians as integral components of our founding heritages.

However, a good deal of down-to-earth information about the rivers and their habits is needed before anyone attempts to navigate them. It is for this reason that Parks Canada decided to carry out surveys of wild rivers all across the country. We are publishing the results of these surveys in the present series of booklets, in order to provide a practical guide for the modern “voyageur”.

But there is one other very important point you must bear in mind. “Wild” really is the correct adjective to describe many of the rivers, and only experienced and well-equipped canoeists should enter these waters. You will find them a tremendous challenge. So it's up to you. Our land and our rivers are waiting for you to explore and rediscover them.

The Wild Rivers of Saskatchewan

Climate

The chief attractions of trips on the wild rivers of Saskatchewan are the superb fishing and the magnificent scenery of the northern wilderness. To these are added the challenge of testing one's skill and endurance on a long and arduous canoe trip and the romance of exploring an historic canoe route of the fur trade era.

These are long, strenuous and isolated trips, recommended only for experienced river canoeists. There are long sets of rapids with no portage trail around them; many rapids require lining or wading through cold water. Many of the lakes to be crossed are large; unfavourable winds or weather can make such crossings difficult and dangerous—even temporarily impossible. The condition of being wind-bound for a day or days is always a possibility during a trip of this length.

In the summer months Saskatchewan enjoys an excellent recreational climate. Temperatures in the mid-20s Celsius (mid-70s Fahrenheit) can be expected daily from June until the beginning of September. The days are long and sunny, with only 5½ centimetres (2½ inches) average precipitation each month. The nights are cool, but frost is unusual. Prevailing winds come from the northwest. It should be noted that ice does not usually leave the lakes in the Churchill area until the middle of May.

Planning the trip

In planning a canoe trip allow 25 to 30 kilometres (15 to 20 miles) per day paddling. Always allow extra time and food for such unforeseen events as being wind-bound or delayed by rain.

If egress is to be by plane make sure arrangements have been made before you begin the trip.

Be sure to check in with some responsible agency (the RCMP or the Department of Northern Saskatchewan*), giving them a route and expected time of arrival. And don't forget to check out with them at the end of the trip.

Permits for fires and fishing may be required. Extreme caution should be exercised in the use of fire. Campfires should be built on rock or sand only; afterwards they should be extinguished completely

with water, smothered with sand or soil, and stamped down firmly. All garbage should be packed out with you.

A sturdy canoe capable of handling well in rapids, and equipment for its repair, are essential. Aluminum canoes were used throughout the wild rivers surveys, and proved most practical.

Since lining and hauling are often necessary, lengths of strong rope are essential. Several pairs of high-cut running shoes or other sturdy footwear which can take the abuse of rocks and constant wetness are also needed.

In the more isolated regions an emergency survival kit is advisable. The kit should contain high-energy food rations, waterproofed matches, fishhooks and line, and emergency rescue flares for signalling aircraft. These items should be well waterproofed; if the kit is small it could be worn on your belt.

Firearms are never necessary.

The National Topographic Series of maps are available from:
Canada Map Office,
Room 147, 615 Booth Street,
Ottawa, Ontario
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*Legislative Buildings, Regina, Saskatchewan.

1 Clearwater River

Clearwater River

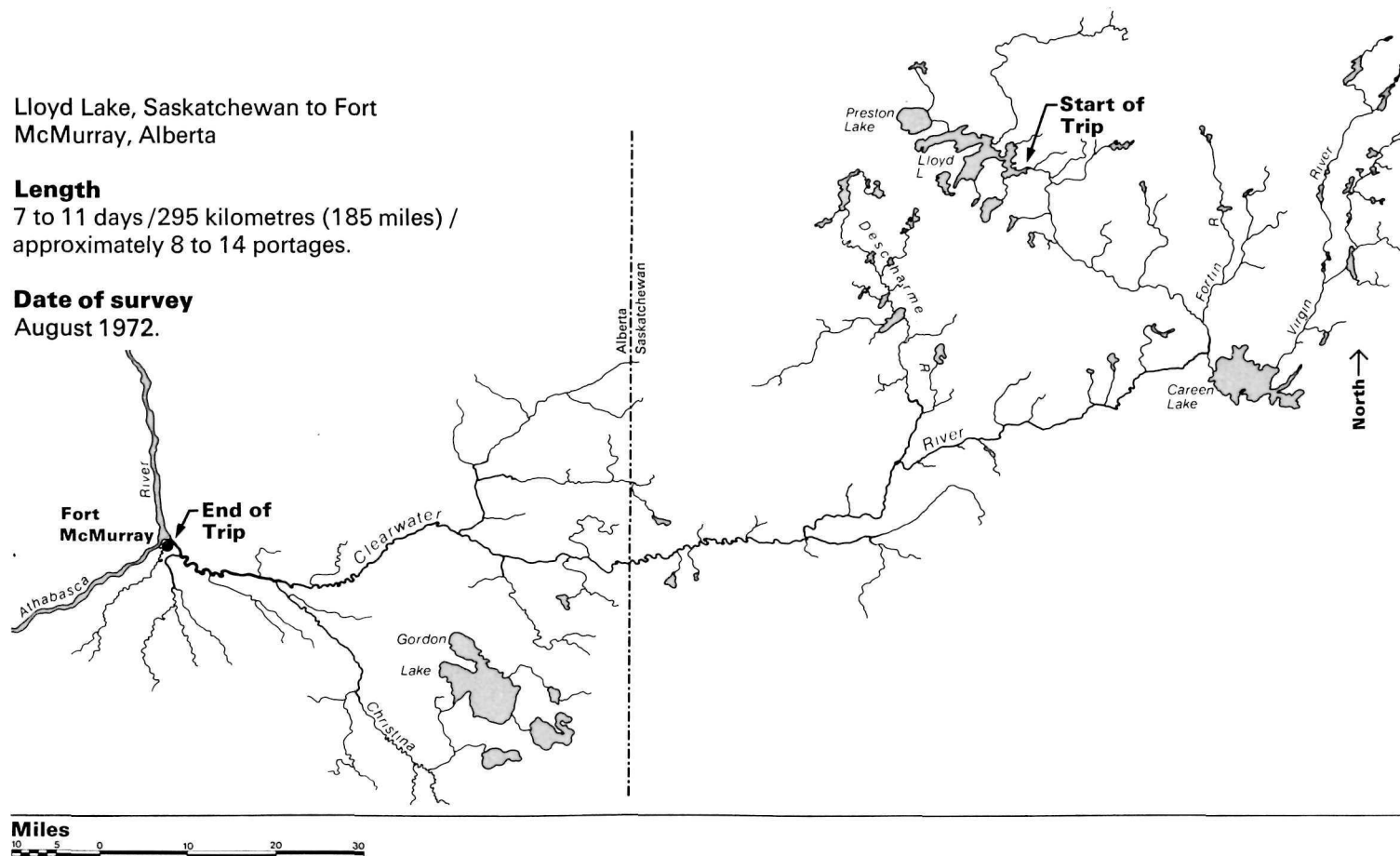
Lloyd Lake, Saskatchewan to Fort
McMurray, Alberta

Length

7 to 11 days / 295 kilometres (185 miles) /
approximately 8 to 14 portages.

Date of survey

August 1972.



Access and egress

Lloyd Lake can be reached by charter float plane from La Loche, Saskatchewan or Fort McMurray, Alberta. Alternate access points are: Careen Lake, to which you must also fly; and the Mèthy Portage or La Loche Portage from Lac la Loche, the headwaters of the Churchill River system. Fort McMurray, the point of egress, is serviced by an all-weather road.

Maps required

(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)

74F Lloyd Lake

74C La Loche

74D Waterways

About the river

Geography

The Clearwater River runs through 3 major types of surface rock: the granite and gneiss of the Canadian Shield; the valleys cut into the limestone of the Mèthy Formation; and its overlay of sandstone on the prairies. Over thousands of years the river has cut a number of spectacular gorges and waterfalls into these sandstone and limestone strata. The resultant spectacular and diversified scenery, combined with the many rapids and ever-present current, makes the Clearwater one of the most exciting of Saskatchewan's wild rivers.

Flora

The valley of the Clearwater River is richly forested. Along the upper reaches jack pines predominate, thriving in the dry Athabasca sand which covers the Precambrian rock. Further down the river, jack pines give way to spruce up to 15 metres (50 feet) tall and, still further downriver, the valley around Fort McMurray is covered with equally large poplar.

Fauna

These great forests and the isolation of the area provide an excellent environment for many forms of wildlife. Moose and beaver are often seen, and evidence of other mammals, such as bear, fox, wolf, lynx and deer, can also be found. Many species of ducks, and even Canada geese, can be seen nesting in the quieter parts of the river. The rivers and lakes abound with pike, walleye and arctic grayling.

History

The Clearwater River was once a very important link between the north-flowing Mackenzie River watershed and the east-flowing Churchill River system.

During his travels on behalf of the North West Company in 1788, Peter Pond became the first white man to cross the 20-kilometre (12½-mile) Mèthy Portage. Having reached the Clearwater River, he followed it down to its junction with the Athabasca River and built the first trading post in the area.

This route became crucial for supplying the voyageurs of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company during the great fur-trading years of the nineteenth century. The present portage system around the rapids is virtually the same as it was then.

The canoe trip

Lloyd Lake to Virgin River

The Clearwater drains Lloyd Lake from Gibson Bay. The first rapids begin 5 kilometres (3 miles) downstream from the end of Gibson Bay. A portage trail, 255 metres (285 yards) long and in excellent condition, begins in a bay to the left of the first chute. Below this there are several sections of fast water and a small chute before the next major rapids.

These next rapids begin 4 kilometres (2½ miles) downstream from the first portage. They should be carefully surveyed before any attempt is made to run them. No real portage trail exists, but if a portage is necessary the left shore offers the easiest passage.

For 37 kilometres (23 miles) below these rapids the river meanders through a wide sandy valley, with no major obstructions to navigation.

High granite cliffs and a sudden change in the direction of the channel mark the advent of 3 short rapids, all of which should be examined before running.



*Entering a rapid on the Upper Clearwater River
near Lloyd Lake*

Just downstream are some long rapids through a narrow gorge which must be portaged. The portage trail, 1,010 metres (1,120 yards) long and in good condition, begins on the right shore of a narrow bay just upstream and to the right of the rapids. Below this portage the river runs without interruption to the entrance of the Virgin River.

At this junction, the canoeist might paddle up the Virgin River for about 1½ kilometres (1 mile) to the bottom of a magnificent set of rapids. These rapids drain Careen Lake, run through a beautiful gorge, and are the home of many record-size arctic grayling. There are several trails along the west side of the gorge. This side trip is well worth the extra time.



The Virgin River, which drains Careen Lake and joins the Clearwater River

Virgin River to the Descharme River

Just below the junction of the Clearwater and Virgin rivers there are small rapids. A 75-metre (80-yard) portage on the left shore bypasses them.

This is followed by a 1½-metre (5-foot) waterfall, separated by 2 islands, which must be portaged. The portage trail begins on the right shore of the right channel in a very small bay, just a few metres upstream from the falls. It is 115 metres (125 yards) long and in good condition.

There is a long and difficult rapid 2½ kilometres (1½ miles) downstream. It is advisable to carefully examine the entire length of the rapid before deciding whether to run it. A portage trail, 135 metres (150 yards) long and in good shape, begins in a small bay just to the right of the rapid. It may be advisable to take this portage, especially at high water.

Below this are 2 sections of fast water before the Clearwater River runs through a granite gorge. The portage past the

gorge begins on the right shore, about 15 metres (20 yards) upstream from the beginning of the gorge. It is 110 metres (125 yards) long and in excellent condition.

There is another rapid 3 kilometres (2 miles) below the gorge. It is a single strong chute which can be run down the right after careful examination. For the more cautious, an excellent portage, 95 metres (105 yards) long, begins on the left shore.

The next set of rapids begins 13 kilometres (8 miles) above Olson Rapids. The first part goes through a large boulder field, but it is short and can be run down the centre. The second part is separated into 2 channels by an island; the left

channel is the best to run. The canoeist should then take the centre, taking care in the shallows at the bottom. The third part is a straight channel .4-kilometre (¼-mile) long; it is very shallow and may have to be waded at the bottom.

These are followed by Olson Rapids, a series of 6 sets of shallow, fast water separated by short intervals of slack water. All can be run without difficulty.

The Mackie Rapids mark the approach to the junction of the Descharme River. The first part of Mackie Rapids is a section of shallow fast water. The second is a very strong rapid, separated into 2 channels by an island; the left channel is the best to run. At periods of low water it may be necessary to line the bottom section. Below this rapid are 2 sections of shallow fast water before the entrance of the Descharme River.

Descharme River to Contact Rapids*Gould Rapids to Simonson Rapids*

Of all the rapids on the Clearwater River which must be run, Gould Rapids are the most difficult. They are also very long.

Lining is impossible, and there is no portage trail. The best route is to take the right channel around the first large island, and then the 2 small chutes back into the main channel. From here it is possible to examine the last chute and decide on a course of action.

The first "R" marked on map 74C below Gould Rapids is actually a waterfall. Although a portage trail is thought to exist on the right, the survey team did not find it. There is a very poor passage around the falls on the left, but it does not bypass the rapids below. The canoeist

is advised to explore this area and define his or her plans carefully before beginning this portage. A 360-metre (400-yard) carry through the woods on the left still leaves a tricky rapid with whirlpools at the base of the falls to be negotiated.

There is another rapid one kilometre (½-mile) downstream. It is separated into 2 channels by an island. The right side of the right channel appears to be the best course, but careful examination from the island is still a necessity. No portage trail exists.

The Clearwater drops over another spectacular waterfall 5 kilometres (3 miles) below these rapids. The portage begins on the right side of the right channel, about 70 metres (80 yards) upstream from the falls. The trail is 210 metres (235 yards) long and in good condition. The falls are spectacular, surrounded by 20-metre (70-foot) limestone cliffs. A small ledge, ½-kilometre (¼-mile) below, can be run on the right.

Simonson Rapids

These extend for more than a kilometre and are a complex series of ledges and boulder fields, separated by occasional sections of quiet water. There is no portage trail, and running the rapids safely requires a great deal of manoeuvring. There is one severe ledge that requires lining or carrying.

Contact Rapids

The rapids below the entrance of the McLean River are known as the Contact or Granite rapids. They are the last exposure of Precambrian rock along the Clearwater River. There is an excellent portage, 1,150 metres (1,280 yards) long, beginning on the right shore in a bay, just before the westward bend in the channel.



Contact Rapids to Fort McMurray
Mèthy Portage

Below Contact Rapids, the top of the valley rises to 180 metres (600 feet) in places, as the Clearwater cuts deeper into the sedimentary rock. The historic Mèthy Portage can be seen on the left shore, directly opposite a fire tower which stands on the right shore. It is well worth hiking to the top of the valley along this old trail.

Whitemud Falls

This is the first major exposure of limestone bedrock along the Clearwater River. Just beyond a flowerpot island on the right, a channel opens on the extreme right. This channel splits. To the left, a short channel returns to the main channel and the falls. The portage begins on the right shore of this small channel; it is 430 metres (480 yards) long and in good condition. Time should be taken to view

Canoeists shoot rapids in the Clearwater River



this beautiful waterfall, which drops through a limestone gorge.

One kilometre below Whitemud Falls there is a small chute which can be easily run. A portage, 105 metres (115 yards) long, begins on the left about 70 metres (80 yards) upstream from the rapid, but it is primarily used for upstream travel.

Pine Rapids

These rapids run through a limestone canyon. A beautiful portage trail through limestone bluffs, 980 metres (1,090 yards) long and in good condition, begins on the left 65 metres (70 yards) upstream from the rapids. The rapids can be run by expert canoeists, but care must be taken to avoid the many small ledges.

Bigrock Rapids

These consist of 2 sections of shallow, fast water. A 180-metre (200-yard) portage on the right bypasses the second section.

Long Rapids

There is a 2-kilometre (1¼-mile) portage in good condition on the right of these rapids. The first part of the rapids consists of a series of small ledges which may be run. The rest of Long Rapids is shallow fast water. Some wading may be required during periods of low water, to avoid damaging canoe bottoms.

Cascade Rapids

Cascade Rapids are the last rapids before Fort McMurray. There is a 790-metre (880-yard) portage on the right, which is in good condition. There is one severe ledge. A very experienced canoeist might run this ledge through a point to the

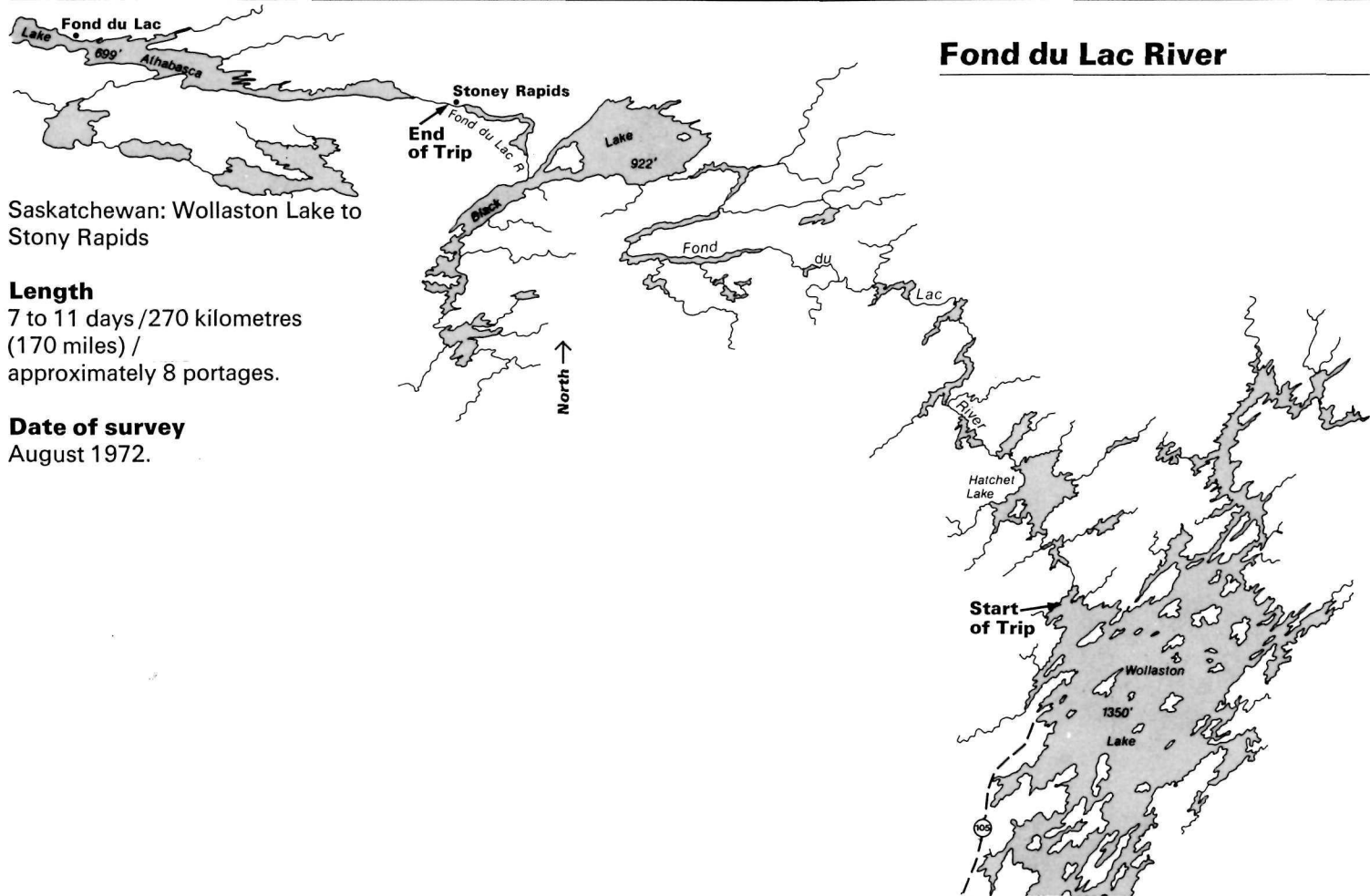
right of centre, while the more cautious could carry over the ledge or take the portage.

Fort McMurray

The Clearwater River meanders 110 kilometres (67 miles) from the last rapids to the Athabasca River, obstructed only by a section of rough, fast water where the Christina River enters the Clearwater. At Fort McMurray, the best place to end the trip is at the marina and float plane base. This area is located just past the docks and warehouses, through a narrow channel on the left. From here it is only a short walk to downtown Fort McMurray.

2 Fond du Lac River

Fond du Lac River



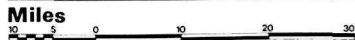
Saskatchewan: Wollaston Lake to
Stony Rapids

Length

7 to 11 days / 270 kilometres
(170 miles) /
approximately 8 portages.

Date of survey

August 1972.



Access and egress

At the present time, Wollaston Lake is accessible either by float plane, or via the new all-weather road into the Gulf Mineral Mine on Wollaston Lake. There are air charter firms in Stony Rapids, and regular scheduled flights out to Lac la Ronge and Prince Albert, both of which are serviced by roads.

Maps required

(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)
64L Wollaston Lake
74I Pasfield Lake
74P Stony Rapids

About the river

Geography

From Wollaston Lake to the community of Stony Rapids, the Fond du Lac River drops 182 metres (606 feet), with a 67-metre (222-foot) drop in the last 30 kilometres (20 miles) between Black Lake and Stony Rapids. The Fond du Lac flows north and west, first through the Precambrian Shield and then through the Athabasca sandstone geologic formation. The canoeist will see a variety of magnificent sandstone cliffs, sandy beaches, granite walls and spectacular waterfalls.

Flora

The banks of the Fond du Lac River are covered predominantly by black spruce. In areas where the soil is sandy and dry, jack pine thrive. Some white spruce and tamarack are also found along the route.

Fauna

Wildlife is undisturbed along the Fond du Lac River. Moose and black bear may be observed at close range. A large variety of ducks and other birds, including eagles, inhabit the area. Arctic grayling, walleye, northern pike and lake trout provide excellent fishing.

History

The Fond du Lac River was first documented in 1796 by David Thompson of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was searching for a route into the Mackenzie River watershed, to provide an alternative to the one along the Churchill and Clearwater rivers. During his return trip, Thompson and his guides lost their canoe, rifles and supplies while lining up what are now known as Thompson Rapids.

The canoe trip

Wollaston Lake to Redbank Falls

Wollaston Lake

The Fond du Lac River begins in the northwest corner of Wollaston Lake in Cunning Bay. There is a short section of shallow, fast water 3 kilometres (2 miles) below the outlet. A further 3 kilometres (2 miles) below that, there is another small rapid in 3 parts: the first 2 parts are shallow but can be negotiated with little difficulty; the third section is extremely shallow and it is advisable to line or wade this part down the right side. Approximately one kilometre before Tromburg Bay, there is another section of fast water which is best run on the left side.

Hatchet Lake

The Fond du Lac River enters Hatchet Lake at the southeast end, and leaves through narrows at the northwest end of the lake. The outlet from the lake is found by keeping to the right after entering the narrows.

The rapids at the outlet may usually be run by an experienced canoeist who has examined them carefully. The first part is a fast chute through a boulder bed, best run down the centre at first and to the left of centre near the bottom. The second part begins approximately 45 metres (50 yards) downstream, after a small expansion; it also runs through a boulder bed, and ends in a series of large standing waves.

For the more cautious canoeist, and for everyone in times of low water, there is a 610-metre (680-yard) portage trail around these rapids. It is in excellent condition, and begins at a dock on the left shore of Hatchet Lake about 45 metres (50 yards) upstream from the outlet.

Corson Lake

There are several attractive natural campsites on Corson Lake. At the outlet from the lake there is a rapid, broken into 2 sections. The first section is best lined down the left shore, but the second

section can be run. No real portage trail exists, although a combination of wildlife trails on the left shore may be used to bypass the rapids.

Approximately one kilometre downstream from these rapids there is a section of shallow fast water extending for one kilometre (½-mile). Some wading may be required when water levels are low.

Cascade Rapids to Crooked Lake

Cascade Rapids begin at the end of the section of fast water. They consist of heavy waves and a number of ledges, and cannot be run. The portage begins on the left bank, in a small weedy bay just above the rapids; the trail is 395 metres (440 yards) long, and in excellent condition.

The Fond du Lac River then runs into Crooked Lake. The surrounding landscape exhibits relatively flat relief, offering few campsites until the end of the lake, where some sandy beaches can be found.



Poplar Rapids

These rapids at the end of Crooked Lake are ½-kilometre (¼-mile) long, and should be studied carefully before any attempt is made to run them. The best route to run is to the left of centre going around the bend. Toward the bottom, the water is extremely shallow and the canoeist must pick a path through scattered boulders. There is no portage trail.

The first large sandstone formations on the Fond du Lac River can be seen on the right shore at the bottom of the rapids. An abandoned trapper's cabin can also be seen on the right shore. Approximately one kilometre downstream there is another short but strong rapid which might be run.

Demicharge Rapids

The Demicharge Rapids, at the north end of Westfound Bay, are approximately ½-kilometre (½-mile) long. A 365-metre (400-yard) portage trail begins on the left shore about 45 metres (50 yards) upstream from the rapids. It is in poor shape and actually consists of a number of animal trails. These rapids should be run only after a careful survey of the entire section.

Flett Rapids

These rapids are marked on map 64L. They can be run, and the boulders can be easily avoided. Below Flett Rapids, another section of fast water drains into Kosdaw Lake. The outlet of the Fond du Lac is from the northwest corner of Kosdaw Lake.

Redbank Falls

Redbank Falls is not a waterfall. It is a ledge, which can be run down the right-hand side of the channel. The lower part requires some manoeuvring to avoid the boulders.

Approximately 5 kilometres (3 miles) downstream from Redbank Falls, the Fond du Lac River is separated into north and south channels by an island. The north channel is quite shallow even in high water, and contains a number of shallow rapids and narrow chutes which can all be run without difficulty. The southern channel is wider, and is marked at the beginning by a strong rapid.

Otter Lake to Brink Rapids

Otter Lake

This is a long lake with a deep straight rapid in the narrows half-way through the lake. The rapid can be easily run down the right side. The western side of the lake has several large sandy beaches which make good campsites.

Thompson Rapids

Where the Fond du Lac River descends out of Otter Lake, there is a small chute. Thompson Rapids are 180 metres (200 yards) beyond the chute. The first of 2 sections runs through a shallow gorge incised in sandstone. There is no portage trail around it; the canoeist who wishes to avoid running the rapids will find the right shore easiest to follow.



To run the first section, the right channel is the safest route, but care should still be taken to survey the entire length of the rapid before starting. The second section is easily run by following the deep water channel in the centre of the river.

Manitou Falls

Approximately 2½ kilometres (1½ miles) downstream from Thompson Rapids, fast water, small riffles and larger sandstone banks warn of the approach of Manitou Falls. In particular, there are 2 ledges in this section of the Fond du Lac. The first ledge begins after the river turns to the right through a small rapid; it can be run along the extreme left. The second ledge is a small waterfall which must be portaged. The trail begins on the left bank, approximately 55 metres (60 yards) upstream from the ledge in a small bay. The 370-metre (410-yard) trail begins

Thompson Rapids, Fond du Lac River

with a steep 4½-metre (15-foot) embankment, but otherwise it is in good condition.

The Manitou Falls portage is one kilometre (½-mile) below the second ledge, on the left bank of the left channel immediately above the falls. The trail is in good shape, 120 metres (130 yards) long, ending in a small sandy cove.

Manitou Falls is followed by approximately 8 kilometres (5 miles) of fast water, shallow rapids and small shelves. The latter are often difficult to see from upstream.



Manitou Falls, Fond du Lac River

Brink Rapids to Black Lake*Brink Rapids*

Brink Rapids consist of 2 ledges and a boulder field. It is advisable to line or carry past the 2 ledges on the left shore, but the boulder field can be run by "picking" through the rocks and shallows.

Brassy Rapids

There are 2 routes through Brassy Rapids—one north and one south of the island which separates them. The north channel, one kilometre long, is by far the better of the two. Winding and deep, it is one of the more exciting rapids on the Fond du Lac River. The north channel is

reached by making a quick right turn perpendicular to the main channel, immediately after running a small chute. Toward the end, where the channel becomes wider and shallower, it may be necessary to wade.

Below Brassy Rapids there are 2 minor sections of fast water before the Fond du Lac turns north.

North Rapids

These rapids are located on the northward bend of the river. It is advisable to examine the shelves from the left bank before attempting to run them.

Perch Rapids

The next rapids are found just downstream from the entrance of the Perch River, which drains Perching Lake. They consist of 2 sections. There is an excellent portage trail bypassing the first section; 170 metres (190 yards) long,

it begins on the left bank, 35 metres (40 yards) upstream from the rapids. The second section of Perch Rapids can be run down either the extreme right or the extreme left side.

Approximately one kilometre downstream there is another rapid, which can be run along the left shore without difficulty. The next rapids are marked on map 74P, beginning just after the river makes a slight jog to the left; ledges block the centre of the channel, but the rapids can be run down either side.

Burr Falls

There are 2 channels around Burr Island. Neither channel is navigable and both must be portaged.

The north channel portage is 920 metres (1,020 yards) long, in excellent shape, and begins on the right shore approximately 35 metres (40 yards) upstream from the head of Burr Island.

The portage around the falls on the south channel is in 2 sections. The first is 250 metres (280 yards) long and begins on the left bank, about 90 metres (100 yards) downstream from the head of Burr Island. This trail ends in a small inland lake which must be crossed by canoe. There is then a 550-metre (600-yard) portage to the lower end of the south channel. Both sections of the portage trail around the south channel are in fair condition.

Time should be taken to view the spectacular falls, rapids and gorges which make up the Burr Falls section of the Fond du Lac River.

Black Lake to Stony Rapids

Black Lake

This large, beautiful lake is subject to high winds and heavy waves. There are many excellent campsites by the sand beaches on the south shore. The outlet of the Fond du Lac River is southwest of Fir Island.

It is possible to end the canoe trip at this point. Transportation to Stony Rapids airport may be hired at one of the fishing camps near the river outlet, or 3 kilometres (2 miles) southwest in the community of Black Lake.

Elizabeth Falls and Woodcock Rapids, downstream from Black Lake, are among the more spectacular features on the Fond du Lac River. But they cannot be seen from the lengthy main portage trails, and to run, line and carry around the many individual falls and rapids is difficult and hazardous work.

Elizabeth Falls

For those who decide to continue by water to Stony Rapids, Elizabeth Falls is the first significant obstacle after Black Lake. The portage trail is 5 kilometres (2½ miles) long and in excellent condition; it begins on the left bank at the fishing camp. Alternatively, a truck may be hired at one of the fishing camps to transport equipment to Middle Lake. Time should be taken to walk along the west shore and view the splendid falls and gorges.

Woodcock Rapids

Middle Lake drains into Stony Lake through Woodcock Rapids. The portage trail around the rapids begins on the northwest shore of Middle Lake, above the first section of fast water, and bypasses the entire complex of rapids and

falls. It is in poor condition, and quite hard to find since it begins some distance back from the shore. The trail is $3\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres ($2\frac{1}{4}$ miles) long.

It is possible to follow the river and portage around the 2 spectacular waterfalls, but it is a very arduous route. The first 2 chutes of Woodcock Rapids can be run easily; the left channel is the best choice in both cases. The third chute is split by an island; here the right channel is the best one to run, but it should be examined carefully before a start is made. To the left, an easy narrow chute leads into a pool above the first waterfall of this stretch.

The portage around the falls begins in a weedy bay on the left, 90 metres (100 yards) upstream from the falls. The trail is confused and difficult, and should be



Overlooking Elizabeth Falls on the Fond du Lac River

surveyed and traced before beginning the portage. About 14 metres (15 yards) in from the shore, a mining exploration line must be followed to the right almost to the top of the hill. Then there is a rough trail cut along the cliff near the falls, leading down to the turbulent water at their base.

Below this spectacular waterfall, a small chute may have to be lined before arriving at Woodcock Falls.

Woodcock Falls

A rough portage trail, consisting of a combination of a mining exploration line and a path, bypasses Woodcock Falls. The trail begins on the left, approximately 25 metres (30 yards) upstream from the falls. It is 390 metres (430 yards) long, and there are several private cabins at the end of it.

Stony Rapids

The last rapids are just upstream from the settlement of Stony Rapids. They are in 2 sections, both of which can be run down the left side after careful examination. Excellent portage trails also exist along both sides.

The settlement contains a store, a post office, a Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources radio station, an R.C.M.P. post, and air charter firms. There is also scheduled air service to La Ronge and Prince Albert.

3 Churchill River

Churchill River

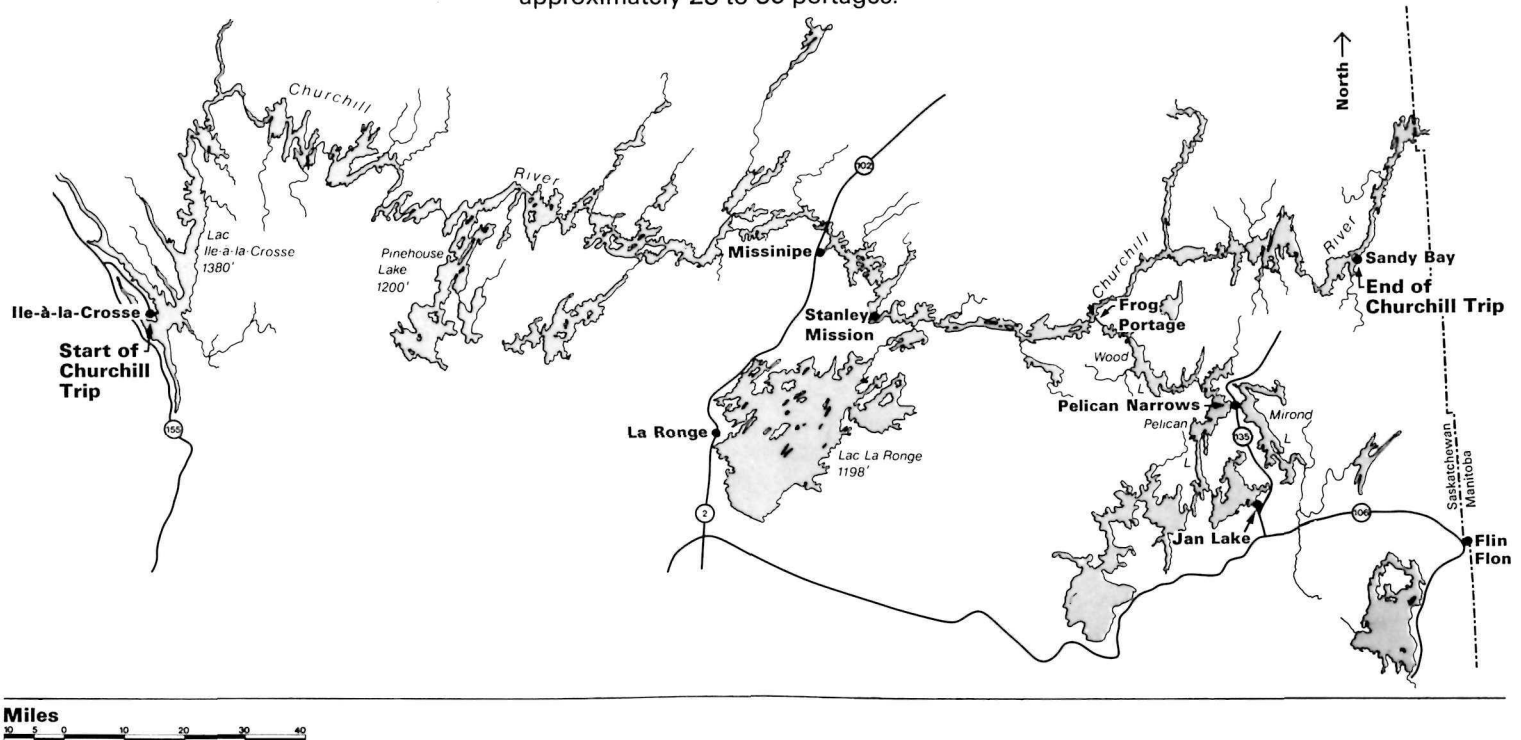
Saskatchewan: Ile-à-la-Crosse to
Sandy Bay

Length

20 to 25 days/650 kilometres (400 miles)/
approximately 28 to 35 portages.

Date of survey

June and July, 1972.



Access and egress

Canoes may be launched at either of the 2 Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources "camp kitchens". They are on the west side of South Bay at Ile-à-la-Crosse. These are accessible by a "resources development" gravel road, extending north from the community of Green Lake. Canoes may also be launched from the community of Ile-à-la Crosse, approximately 225 kilometres (140 miles) north of Green Lake by gravel road.

Egress is at the bridge across Otter Rapids, 350 kilometres (220 miles) downriver from Ile-à-la Crosse, or at the Missinipe townsite on Walker Bay of Otter Lake. Here, radio communication with La Ronge is possible, and car or air transportation to La Ronge and points south can be arranged. The townsite is 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of La Ronge, via gravel highway. Sandy Bay, the termination point of this trip, has both an airport and a seaplane base. The village is serviced by an all-weather road from Pelican Narrows.

Maps required

(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)
73O Ile-à-la-Crosse
73P Lac la Ronge
63M Pelican Narrows

(N.T.S. 1:50,000 scale)
73P/10 Otter Lake
73P/7 Stanley
73P/8 Nistowiak Lake
73P/9 Guncoat Bay

Please note that Stack Lake, Mountney Lake, Barker Lake, Hayman Lake and Missinipe Townsite were named after map 73P was printed. To enable you to follow this route description, please add these locations to your map:

Stack Lake—
the small lake between Trout Portage and Rock Trout Portage;
Mountney Lake—
west of Little Rock Portage;
Hayman Lake—
upstream of Great Devil Rapids;

Barber Lake—
located below the large island south of Great Devil Rapid;
Missinipe Townsite—
on west shore of Bay below "U" of "CHURCHILL" on map 73P.
Highway 2 crosses the Churchill River at Otter Rapids.

About the river

Geography

The Saskatchewan portion of the Churchill River rises in the sedimentary lowlands of northwest Saskatchewan, flows in a generally eastern direction skirting the southern edge of the Precambrian Shield into Manitoba, and then drains into Hudson Bay. It is a river that is typical of those in the Canadian Shield—a chain of interconnected lakes and streams. Along its course there are rapids, falls, narrow chutes, broad expanses of lakes dotted with islands, and long placid

stretches of smooth water. The surrounding landscape is uneven and hummocky, with few elevations more than 60 metres (200 feet) above river level. Precambrian rock exposures are common east of Dipper Lake, but are most evident in the islands and shores of Sandfly and Black Bear Island lakes. The largest lakes along the route are Ile-à-la-Crosse, which is 65 kilometres (40 miles) long, and Pine-house, which is 55 kilometres (35 miles) long.

The Sturgeon-Weir River drains a number of lakes south of the Churchill River, and eventually empties into the Saskatchewan River. It rises in the Precambrian Shield and flows south into the Devonian limestone region of central Saskatchewan.

Flora

Most of the countryside discussed here lies in the spruce and birch forest region. The spruce tend to predominate along most of the Churchill, but the hardwoods, such as birch and poplar, are dominant wherever glacial drift has covered most of the Precambrian outcrops, as it has around Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse and the Sturgeon-Weir River near Amisk Lake. Occasional groves of tamarack and pine are found all along the route wherever the soil is thin. Huckleberries, blueberries, raspberries, crowberries and strawberries are common.

Fauna

Although they are not easy to spot, a wide variety of mammals inhabit most of the area. Most common are moose, caribou, lynx, wolf, black bear, mink, muskrat and beaver; marten, weasel and otter are found in varying numbers. A great number of loons and various species of ducks and geese will be seen all along the route; in certain areas, large populations of pelicans, bald eagles and golden eagles are present. The Churchill River and the surrounding lakes are well known for their northern pike, walleye, whitefish and lake trout.

History

Before white settlers arrived in this part of Canada, the river was travelled by Cree and Chipewyan Indians. Then Joseph Frobisher, of the North West Company of Montréal, travelled from the Saskatchewan River, up the Sturgeon-Weir River and over Frog Portage into the Churchill River, establishing a link between the northern interior and the southern route to Montréal.

After the union of the Hudson's Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821, the lower Churchill was completely abandoned as a trading route. For a century afterwards, the route from Cumberland House to Lac la Loche was the

main access route to the northern interior and the Mackenzie Basin. The route was finally abandoned with the building of the railroad to Edmonton and the road from there to the Athabasca River.

The canoe trip

Ile-à-la-Crosse to Sandfly Lake

Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse

Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse is an unbroken expanse of water stretching 65 kilometres (40 miles) in a north-south direction. The surrounding relief is generally flat and the forest cover consists mostly of poplar, with some spruce around the northern portions of the lake. There are sandy beaches along both shores.

Shagwenaw Rapids

The Shagwenaw Rapids, in the channel linking the north end of Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse with Shagwenaw Lake, present no problem to the average canoeist. They are little more than fast water at normal water levels. There is, however, a one-kilometre (¾-mile) portage around the rapids connecting Lac-Ile-à-la-Crosse with the settlement of Patuanak.

Drum Rapids

The series of rapids known as Drum Rapids can be subdivided into 4 parts. The first stretch of fast water can be run without danger; the left side appears easier to descend. The second part of this series occurs about ½-kilometre (¼-mile) below the first; it is a sequence of mixed fast water and rapids which may be run. The end of this second series of rapids is marked by 2 boulders projecting from the water near the right shore.

The third section is the main Drum Rapids; it starts about ½-kilometre (¼-mile) below the end of the second section, after a stretch of quiet water. The portage around these rapids is 290 metres (320 yards) long and in good condition. The beginning of the trail shows as a clear break in the willow-lined shore 225 metres (250 yards) above the rapids on the south shore.

About ½-kilometre (¼-mile) below the end of the portage is the fourth section of the rapids. This series, however, is short and not difficult. The left side can be run to a large, quiet cove.

Leaf Rapids

Leaf Rapids may be run, but the safer course is the portage. The trail is 780 metres (870 yards) long and in fair condition. It starts as a break in the willows on the right shore, less than 90 metres (100 yards) from the rapids, and parallels the shore.

Deer Rapids

Deer Rapids consists of 2 distinct sets of fast water, both of which may be run or waded. In the area around and between Deer Rapids there are several good natural rock campsites.

Dipper Rapids

Dipper Rapids are difficult and must be portaged. The trail is 180 metres (200 yards) long and in excellent shape. It starts on the left side at a prominent rock outcrop immediately above the main drop of the rapids; one must pass through some fast water in order to reach it.

Crooked Rapids

Crooked Rapids consists of 5 distinct parts, of which some sections may be run. At the head of the rapids there is a 180-metre (200-yard) portage which is in poor condition. Its start is at a slight break on the right-hand shoreline, beyond the reeds, about 180 metres (200 yards) below a small willow-covered island.

Knee Rapids

Knee Rapids is in 2 sections. The first part must be portaged via a 325-metre (360-yard) trail which starts on the north shore at a big, bare rock outcrop. A bare rock at the end of 90 metres (100 yards) of fast water indicates the start of the trail. The second part of Knee Rapids can be run. There is a good sandy landing point and campsite at a cove on a point on the west bay of Knee Lake. Knee Lake has large expanses of open water which may be difficult to cross in rough weather.

From Bently Bay, the Churchill River flows uninterrupted for 29 kilometres (18 miles), entering Dreger Lake through a maze of islands. An easy set of rapids at the southeast end of Dreger Lake are run before reaching Sandy Lake. Many attractive natural campsites are found on the shores and islands of this lake.

Snake Rapids

Snake Rapids, at the outlet of Sandy Lake, is a fairly long series of rapids, parts of which can be waded. A portage trail starts as a shoreline break in a small cove, 180 metres (200 yards) northeast of the outlet from Sandy Lake. (There is another break in the willows 90 metres (100 yards) left of the outlet from Sandy Lake, but this trail leads to a trapper's cabin overlooking the first fast water of Snake Rapids.)

There are good campsites at the narrows separating McDonald Bay from the main part of Snake Lake. Cowpack Island has been burned over, but the 2 smaller islands southwest of Cowpack are good natural campsites. The little settlement of Belanger at the northeast end of Snake Lake consists of a few old houses which are occasionally occupied by Indian families.

Sandfly Lake to Dead Lake

Sandfly Lake

Sandfly Lake is one of the most beautiful lakes along the route. Relatively shallow in spots, it has rocky islands which provide an almost unlimited number of campsites to choose from.

At the outlet from Sandfly Lake is a short set of rapids. These require a 35-metre (40-yard) portage. The trail starts at the lip of a little cove on the north side of the outlet, where the rapids occur.

Needle Rapids

Needle Rapids can be run, preferably on the left side. The portage is 460 metres (500 yards) long, starting in a cove on the north side. The trail passes through muskeg in places, and is hard to follow.



Sandfly Lake in the Churchill River

At Needle Falls a sharp drop is bypassed by a 50-metre (55-yard) trail which begins upstream and to the right of the falls. Silent Rapids are easy to shoot, though the whirlpools at the bottom demand caution.

Black Bear Island Lake

Black Bear Island Lake is filled with islands. It is easy to become confused in navigation on this lake, so special attention should be paid to checking position and progress. Indian rock paintings can be found on the exposed rocks and cliffs of this lake.

There are 3 basic ways to cross Black Bear Island Lake from west to east. Each route involves descending a different set of rapids. The route recommended is the central one, which takes the canoeist to the rapids located near the letter "c" of the word "Black" on topographic sheet 73P. The central rapids on Black Bear Island Lake are easy to run.

Birch Portage

The main drop of Birch Rapids, followed by some lesser rapids, separates Black Bear Island Lake from Trout Lake. Birch Portage is approximately 215 metres (240 yards) long and in good condition. It starts on the south shore, 45 to 70 metres (50 to 75 yards) above the falls. The break in the willows is not easily seen until closely approached. The outlet from Black Bear Island Lake is divided by a sizeable island. Birch Portage is on the right side of the more southern outlet.

Trout Lake to Stack Lake

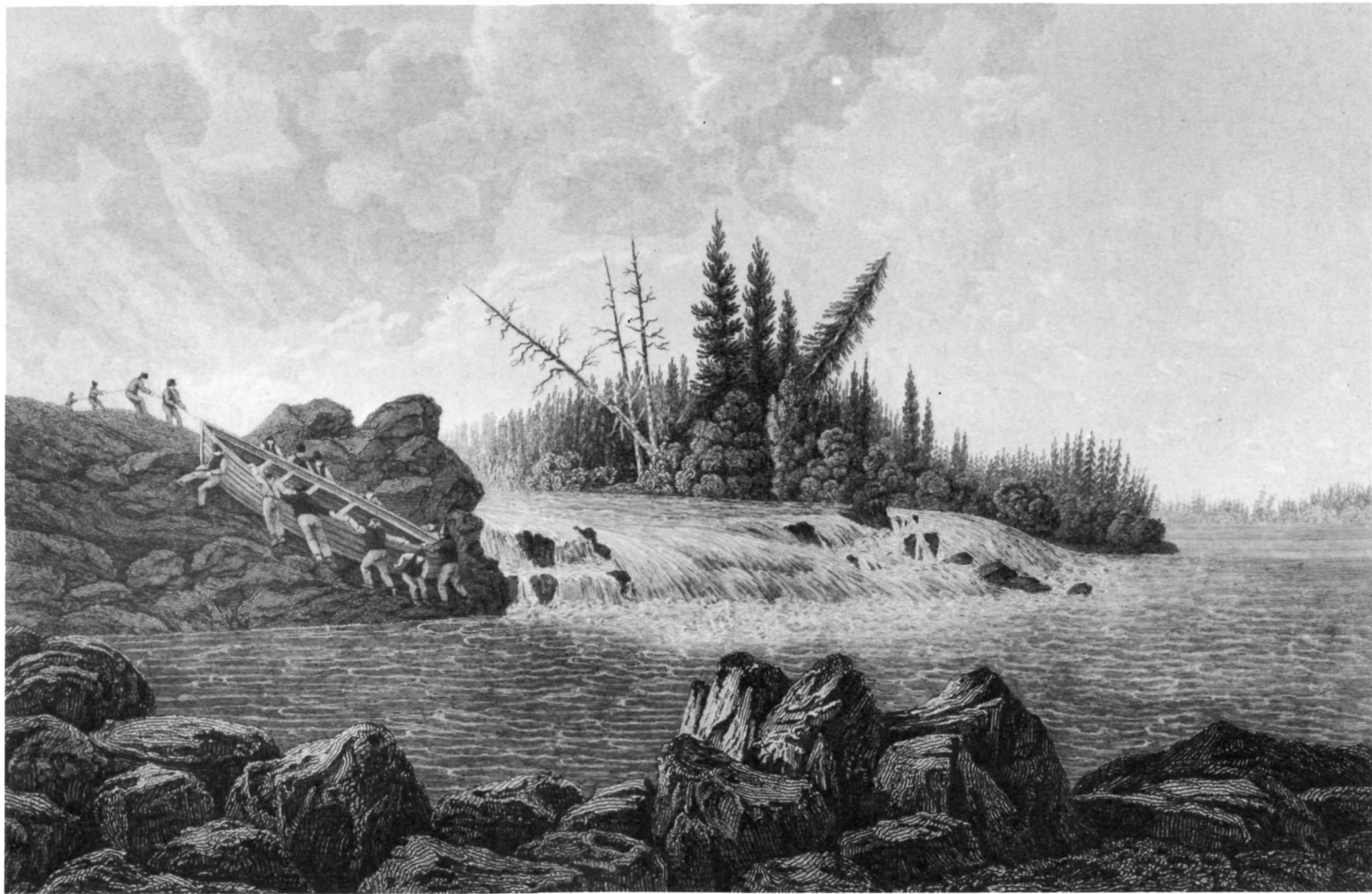
There are 3 sets of rapids between Trout Lake and Stack Lake. The first portage is 145 metres (160 yards) long, starting on the east side of the outlet of Trout Lake, 70 metres (75 yards) to the right of the rapids; the start is not well marked and the trail angles up over an embankment. There is also a boat-hauling trail which

starts nearer to the rapids and joins the longer trail.

The second portage is 125 metres (140 yards) long and starts on the right bank, 90 metres (100 yards) before the rapids. It begins on a big flat rock and goes up to a high spot with a fine view of the rapids. A decision whether or not to run these rapids is best made from this point.

The third portage is 90 metres (100 yards) long. It begins on the right side, 45 metres (50 yards) above the rapids, with a landing just past a large flat rock. The rapids at this point are divided by a sizeable island. The start of this portage is on the right side of the right outlet.

The main outlet from Stack Lake is divided into left and right channels. A third channel on the extreme left appears to be the easiest to descend. This far left course involves 2 moderate, shallow rapids separated by a short stretch of fast water. At normal water levels both are easy to run.



The Trout Fall, on the Churchill River (Public Archives of Canada)

Rock Trout Portage

The Rock Trout Portage is 250 metres (280 yards) long, beginning on the right shore within 35 metres (40 yards) of the rapids. These rapids are actually a series, the lower part of which is split by an island. The portage trail bypasses the whole series. Little Rock Portage is a carry past the left channel of rapids.

Mountney Lake to Dead Lake

There are 2 distinct sets of rapids separating Mountney Lake from Dead Lake. The first set can be further subdivided into two preliminary lesser rapids followed by a major rapid which must be portaged. The second set of rapids is actually a complex series of modest rapids and intervening fast water.

On approaching the outlet from Mountney Lake the channel apparently divides. The larger, right-hand alternative is a dead end and should be avoided.

The left route leads to a very modest rapid which can be run down the centre. This is followed by quiet water, and then by a second easy rapid. One portage trail around the major part of the first set of rapids below Mountney Lake is 200 metres (225 yards) long; it starts on the left bank 110 metres (125 yards) above the rapids in a small quiet cove. A shorter alternative trail exists, 110 metres (125 yards) long, starting a few yards above the actual rapids on the steep left bank. To reach the relatively poor landing at the start of the shorter alternative, the canoeist must pass through some fast water.

The second set of rapids between Mountney and Dead lakes is actually a whole series of small rapids broken by stretches of quiet water.

Dead Lake to Trade Lake

Dead Lake

Dead Lake is beautiful, with many attractive islands and shoreline campsites. At the east end there are channels leading to Hayman Lake. The current in Hayman Lake is considerable but there are no rapids; there are at least 3 outlets at the far east end of Hayman Lake. Be sure to select the most easterly outlet, which leads to Devil Lake via Great and Little Devil rapids. *Do not go to Parker Lake.*

Little Devil Portage

Little Devil Portage starts on the left shore about 70 metres (75 yards) above the beginning of Little Devil Rapids. The trail divides toward the end; the shorter, right-hand fork is to be avoided, as it does not take one past the last portion of the rapids. The portage is 790 metres (880 yards) long.



The Otter Rapids Portage is 550 metres (600 yards) and in good condition. If the canoe trip is to be ended at the bridge crossing the Otter Rapids, only half the distance needs to be portaged. The trail starts on the left and shows as a break in the bank vegetation, just past a prominent rock.

Stony Mountain Portage

Be sure to stay close to shore and proceed carefully in locating Stony Mountain and Mountain portages. This precaution is necessary to avoid being carried over the falls. There is another set of falls at the northeast side of Eyinew Island, so be sure not to go on the east side of the island by mistake.

Stony Mountain Portage connects the eastern end of Otter Lake with the quiet water below the falls. This portage, 80 metres (90 yards) long and in excellent condition, starts on the west side of Eyinew Island, less than 90 metres (100

Churchill River near Stony Mountain Portage

yards) from the main rapids and falls. The start of the trail appears as a well-defined break in the spruce and birch forest on the left shore. The roar of the falls is audible for a considerable distance above the start of the portage.

Mountain Portage

Mountain Portage, connecting the quiet water between the falls with the northwest end of Mountain Lake, is 275 metres (300 yards) long and in good condition. The trail commences in a small cove along the southeast shore of the quiet body of water between the falls, about 90 metres (100 yards) upstream from a group of buildings. The portage shows as a break in the trees just downstream from 2 small islands. The landing is weedy and the trail starts up a steep earth bank.

Mountain Lake

The canoeist passes many beautiful island campsites while travelling down Mountain Lake toward the community of Stanley. The oldest church in Saskatchewan, begun in 1850 under the direction of Reverend Robert Hunt, is situated near the water's edge in Stanley. Supplies can be bought at the Hudson's Bay Store on the southwest bank of the river at Stanley.

Stanley Rapids are 5 kilometres (3 miles) below the town. The left shore to the north side of the island is the way to avoid the rapids southwest of the island.

Stony Rapids Portage

The Stony Rapids Portage connects Mountain Lake with Drope Lake. It is 100 metres (110 yards) long. From Mountain Lake this portage starts inconspicuously in the grasses on the northeast side of the channel, 90 metres (100 yards) above the falls. On the

southwest side of the channel there is a log ramp to facilitate the dragging of big boats around the falls. The foot trail on this island portage is poor. It is therefore recommended that those portaging canoes on their shoulders use the better foot trail on the opposite side of the channel. Below the falls is a very short stretch of fast water.

Nistowiak Lake

Lac la Ronge and Iskwatikan Lake enter Nistowiak Lake on the southern side by Nistowiak Falls. These falls are a few hundred metres from the shoreline and are worth the hike to see them.

A 90-metre (100-yard) portage is necessary to bypass Potter Rapids and reach Drinking Lake. From the southeastern portion of Nistowiak Lake a group of buildings is visible on the south shore, just above the rapids. The landing is at a tourist camp dock.

Drinking Lake

Drinking Lake has a lower shoreline and fewer islands than Nistowiak Lake, and there are plenty of good rocky campsites along the south shore. Near the east end of Drinking Lake is an island with rapids on both the north and south sides.

Either way is passable, but the north is the easier.

About 1½ kilometres (1 mile) below these rapids are the main rapids at the east end of Drinking Lake. Island Portage, indicated on both sheet 73P and sheet 73P/8 is *not* the way to reach Keg Lake. Instead, follow the 5-kilometre (3-mile) channel, which detours to the north and northeast just above the rapids. Immediately after entering the narrow north channel, an old landing spot on the east shore of the channel indicates a steep, poor trail, 275 metres (300 yards) long, which extends to below the rapids; this could be used as a portage trail, but it is

best to continue along the narrow channel to a small waterfall. The portage trail to Keg Lake begins shortly before the falls on the left shore. It is 90 metres (100 yards) long, in good condition, and easy to find.

Keg Lake

The shores of Keg Lake are low, except for one hill on the southwestern shore. The best route along the eastern part of Keg Lake is a channel along the southwest shore of Grieg Island. After passing a little island, the main stream swings sharply to the right and is joined by a smaller one from the east side of Grieg Island. Immediately after swinging right the canoeist should work to the left and enter a little cove on the left side of the rapids.

Keg Falls

The portage around Keg Falls connects the east end of Keg Lake with the waters above Grand Rapids. It is 75 metres (85 yards) long. The start of this portage is 70 metres (80 yards) to the left of the falls. A few hundred metres below this portage there are more rapids, which are divided into left and right channels by an island. The safest course is to hug the left side of the left channel.

Grand Rapids

The portage around the first part of Grand Rapids is only a few metres long, and runs along the south shore. The second portage, 600 metres (675 yards) long, goes around the 2 major rapids comprising the lower part of Grand Rapids. This portage starts about one kilometre (½-mile) below the first one, on the north bank, at a fairly steep rock, 135 metres (150 yards) above the start of the rapids. These rapids are long and studded with small islands and rocks.



Trade Lake to Sandy Bay

Trade Lake

The southwest shore of Trade Lake has occasional sandy pockets with good camping spots. After passing the narrows at the northeast end of Trade Lake, and a spruce-covered island in the channel, the canoeist comes to Frog Portage, which lies to the southeast of a second, smaller channel.

At this point there is a choice of routes. One is the historic route over the Frog Portage and down the Sturgeon-Weir River. The other continues further down the Churchill to Sandy Bay. (The Sturgeon-Weir trip is described in the final chapter of this report.)

Kettle Falls

A portage on the north shore starts 15 metres (20 yards) upstream from Kettle Falls. A section of fast water before the

A misty day on Trade Lake

portage can be run easily, but one should be cautious of the falls and remain close to shore. This portage trail is, in fact, a skid assembly for boats. It is 100 metres (110 yards) long. Below the falls there is about ½-kilometre (¼-mile) of fast water before a rapid which is separated into 4 channels by 3 islands. The safest approach is a 25-metre (30-yard) portage or carry-over at a flat rock ledge on the extreme north shore of the river. No portage trail exists.

Iskwatam Lake

The channel connecting the mouth of the Reindeer River with Iskwatam Lake contains a rapid with 2 individual sections. Both may be run on the south side.

Iskwatam Lake has 3 large islands in the middle, thereby making northern and southern routes across this lake. The northern route has 3 long sets of rapids which may be run by expert canoeists. The southern route has 5 severe rapids, 2 of which require portaging.

The northern route will be described first. The first rapid marked on the map is separated into 3 channels by 2 islands. There is a portage trail around a narrow falls, located between the most northerly island and the north, or left, shore of the mainland. This trail is 12 metres (15 yards) long and in good condition. There is a stretch of fast water 90 metres (100 yards) below this portage, which can be run through the much larger southern channel. The second rapid consists of 2 sections of fast water. There is no portage trail and the safest course is to line or wade along the south shore. The third rapid on the northern route consists of 2 sections. There is no portage trail and again the safest course is to line or wade down the south shore. This rapid may be run, but only by expert canoeists.

The southern route through Iskwatam Lake contains 5 rapids, rather than the 3 marked on map 63M. The first rapid,

shown on the map between the second large island and the southern shore, is merely fast water. All 5 of the severe rapids are located in the channel between the third island and the south shore. The first rapid is separated into 2 channels by a small island. This rapid is a ledge and must be portaged; there is no trail, and a 15-metre (20-yard) carry across bare rock on the north is required. The second rapid marks the beginning of a long series of rapids; there is no portage trail, but it may be run down the north side. The third rapid, a one-metre (4-foot) ledge, must be portaged; there is no trail, so a 45-metre (50-yard) carry along the north shore is advised. The fourth rapid, immediately below the third, is separated into 2 channels by a small island on the left side of the main channel; the left side channel can be lined or run. After this, the fifth rapid is separated by a large island and can be run on the right side of the island and the left side of the channel. After the fifth rapid, the north and

south routes through Iskwatam Lake meet. A substantial current then flows to the next rapids, just upstream from the gorge; they are shown on the map 63M, starting at the arrowhead of B.M. 1048.

Iskwatam Lake to Wapumon Lake
Wapumon Lake is connected with Iskwatam Lake by a complex of rapids. The portage around these is found on the north shore of the channel, just after the first chute in the first rapid, in a small rocky cove. The portage trail is not apparent until one is 9 metres (10 yards) from shore. It is 1,350 metres (1,500 yards) long and in fair condition.

A more difficult but exciting route consists of 2 shorter portages. This latter route contains a number of navigable rapids, turbulent eddies and fast water. After running the first rapids mentioned above, staying to the left, the canoeist will see a bay on the left, just above the

next set of heavy rapids. At the end of this bay there is an 80-metre (90-yard) portage, in good condition, leading into the end of another bay; this bay is about 160 metres (180 yards) long. The main portage around the gorge begins in a small cove to the left, close to the mouth of the bay. It is 275 metres (300 yards) long and in good condition. Immediately below the gorge are powerful back-eddies and whirlpools. There is also a rock ledge protruding into the main stream from the left shore, about a hundred metres from the end of the portage.

Wapumon Lake

Between the gorge and Wapumon Lake there are 3 small sets of rapids. The first set is divided by a small island, not marked on map 63M, and is best run through the right channel. The second rapid, marked on 63M in the northbound

channel, is divided by a large island. The extreme right of the right channel appears to be the best course. A third section of white water is located just before Wapumon Lake at the confluence of the 2 channels. A course slightly to the left of centre is the least turbulent.

The channel from Wapumon Lake to Wintego Lake contains 3 rapids, as marked on map 63M. All 3 can be easily run.

Wintego Lake

Wintego Lake is possibly the most exposed expanse of water to be crossed on this section of the Churchill. There is a portage around Wintego Rapids at the outlet from the lake. The start of the trail is in a clump of low willows, in a bay on the south shore immediately above the rapids. It is in good condition and approximately 60 metres (65 yards) long. Just below this rapid is a short section of fast water.



In the south channel of Pita Lake

Wintego Lake to Pita Lake

The next set of rapids, marked as 2 rapids on 63M, is situated $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way down the channel between Wintego and Pita lakes. Care must be taken on approaching the rapid, for it begins at a right turn on the channel from the north. No portage trail could be found. This rapid is difficult and the first portion should be lined down the extreme right. The second and third parts should be portaged or carried over the bare rock, also on the right shore.

At the entrance to Pita Lake the channel is divided into 2 sections by a small island. The rapid can be run on the extreme left.

Pita Lake

There are 2 routes through Pita Lake. The northern route contains only one rapid. It is separated into 3 channels by 2 islands; on each island there is a portage

trail 55 or 65 metres (60 or 70 yards) long and in fair condition. At normal water levels, the northeast channel can be run.

The southern route through Pita Lake is longer but very picturesque. There are 2 rapids and each can be run down the middle of the channel. Neither rapid has a portage trail.

The next rapids are found in the channel draining Pita Lake. A large island forces the channel into 2 smaller channels, each with a rapid too difficult to run. A short carry must be taken along the left shore. There are no portage trails.

Sokatisewin Lake

The first part of Sokatisewin Lake is in the form of a north-south channel, and there is a mild current in a number of places. The shore of the main body of Sokatisewin Lake is lined in some places by stumps and deadheads caused by the artificial water level produced by the Island Falls Dam.

The last portage is around the Island Falls power dam complex. There are 2 main dams. The first one is a large control dam with 3 small white buildings on its right side; *do not enter this bay*. Go instead to the power dam, one bay north of the control dam. It can be easily recognized by the large gray powerhouse built on the dam. The portage begins in a small bay just to the left, where the decaying hulls of 2 old barges mark the beginning of the trail. The trail is 340 metres (380 yards) long and is in fair condition.

After the portage it is only a short paddle through some fast water to Sandy Bay.

4 Sturgeon-Weir River

Sturgeon-Weir River

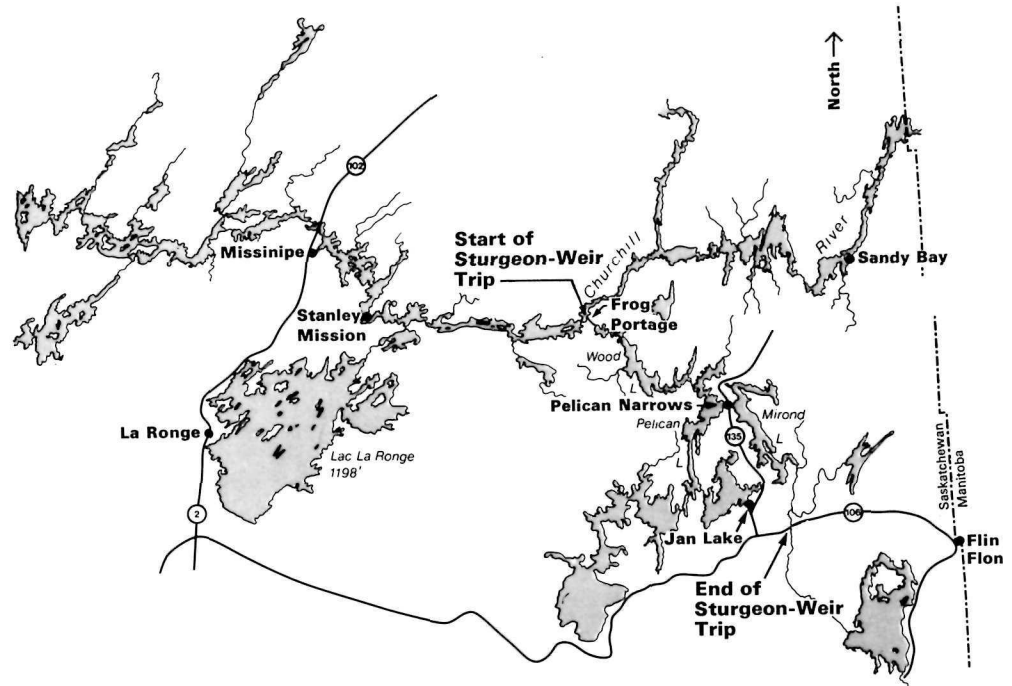
Saskatchewan: Frog Portage to Maligne Lake

Length

6 to 8 days / 215 kilometres (135 miles) / approximately 16 portages.

Date of survey

July 1972.



Access and egress

Canoes can be launched on Otter Lake at the Missinipe Townsite, which is 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of the village of Lac la Ronge, via the all-weather gravel highway. The trip ends at the Hanson Lake Road.

Maps required

(N.T.S. 1:250,000 scale)
73P Lac la Ronge
63L Amisk Lake

About the river

The major part of this river (from Otter Lake to Frog Portage) is described in the Churchill River chapter. Therefore, this chapter will deal with the final section of the Sturgeon-Weir River, from Frog Portage to the Hanson Lake Road bridge at Maligne Lake.

Geography

The upper Sturgeon-Weir River country is an area of beautiful mixed woods, open aspen glades, tiny sand beaches, occasional rock cliffs and an abundance of fish and game. The biology of this area is similar to that described in the Churchill River chapter.

History

This short stretch of the river served as the connecting link between the Saskatchewan and Churchill rivers, and thus was an important route for the rich fur trade of the 19th century. Frog Portage was originally called Portage de Traite because in 1774-75 Joseph Frobisher met a band of Indians at this point. They were bound for Churchill with their winter's catch, and he managed to trade for the furs, loading his canoes to capacity. The name Frog Portage referred to the fact that the Cree Indians left a stretched frog's skin at this location as a sign to make fun of the way the more northerly tribes of Indians dressed and stretched their beaver skins.

The Pelican Narrows area has been the site of human settlement since ancient times. Archaeological evidence has revealed that Indians have been inhabiting

the area for at least 4 or 5 thousand years. Far more recently, Pelican Narrows has been an important landmark along the much-travelled route between Cumberland House and the Churchill River. Indians, voyageurs, traders, trappers, explorers, geologists, prospectors and naturalists—all have left their marks along this route. Relics left behind are now on display at the Northern Gateway Museum at Denare Beach on Amisk Lake.

The canoe trip

Frog Portage to Pelican Narrows

Frog Portage

The trail at Frog Portage is approximately 300 metres (335 yards) long, and in good condition. It connects the Churchill River at the east end of Trade Lake with the waters lying northwest of the main body of Wood Lake. From Trade Lake this portage shows as a grassy break in the low shore vegetation on the south shore of the narrows.

Wood Lake

The northwest part of Wood Lake offers exceptionally beautiful scenery, with winding waterways threading past islands and superb rock exposures. The land is covered with birch and poplar stands, cattails and water lilies; fur-bearing animals, big game and waterfowl abound. This section is protected from the open part of the lake and offers possibilities for exploring, even during

windy weather; however, close attention to map and compass is necessary to avoid getting lost in dead-end channels. The main part of Wood Lake is a beautiful, if somewhat exposed, expanse of water. At its southeast end the canoeist enters Grassy Narrows and passes through the Wood Lake Indian Reserve.

Grassy Narrows

Grassy Narrows is as protected and scenic as the northwest end of Wood Lake. Again, the canoeist must be careful to avoid becoming confused by dead-end channels.

There are 3 small, closely spaced waterfalls between Grassy Narrows and Medicine Rapids. A 65-metre (70-yard) portage trail, in excellent condition, connects the waters east of Grassy Narrows to the quiet waters below the first waterfall. The upper end of this portage starts at a rock landing spot, found on the left side of a small island which divides a little waterfall.

About 90 metres (100 yards) below the end of this portage the canoeist comes to the second falls. The 15-metre (20-yard) portage is in good condition. It begins on a tiny rocky islet set in the middle of the falls.

There is another portage around the third falls in the series. It is approximately 50 metres (55 yards) long and in good condition. This short trail starts a few hundred metres below the end of the last portage, on the left or north bank, immediately to the left of the waterfall. A small islet divides this waterfall.

Larger boats can be hauled across all 3 of these small portage trails.

Medicine Rapids

The portage trail around Medicine Rapids is 15 to 25 metres (20 to 30 yards) long and in good condition. It connects the quiet water below the 3 small falls with the northwest portion of Pelican Lake.

The maps of this area show this trail on the wrong side of the river. The trail actually starts on the west bank at an unmistakable landing spot, immediately above the rapids.

For some distance below the lower landing point the water may be very shallow. Under these conditions, it is advisable to launch canoes at the lower end of the portage and wade beside them, carefully guiding them until deeper water is reached. Careful navigation is then required to avoid missing the narrow entrance to Pelican Lake; it is very easy to head into Chackukew Lake by mistake.

Pelican Narrows to Maligne Lake

The community of Pelican Narrows is some distance along the northeast shore of Pelican Lake. Easy landings may be made at the sand beach or at one of the

docks. A variety of supplies is available at the settlement, as well as air services, radio communications facilities and a Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources office. A road being built at the time of the survey trip will link Pelican Narrows with the Jan Lake access road to the south.

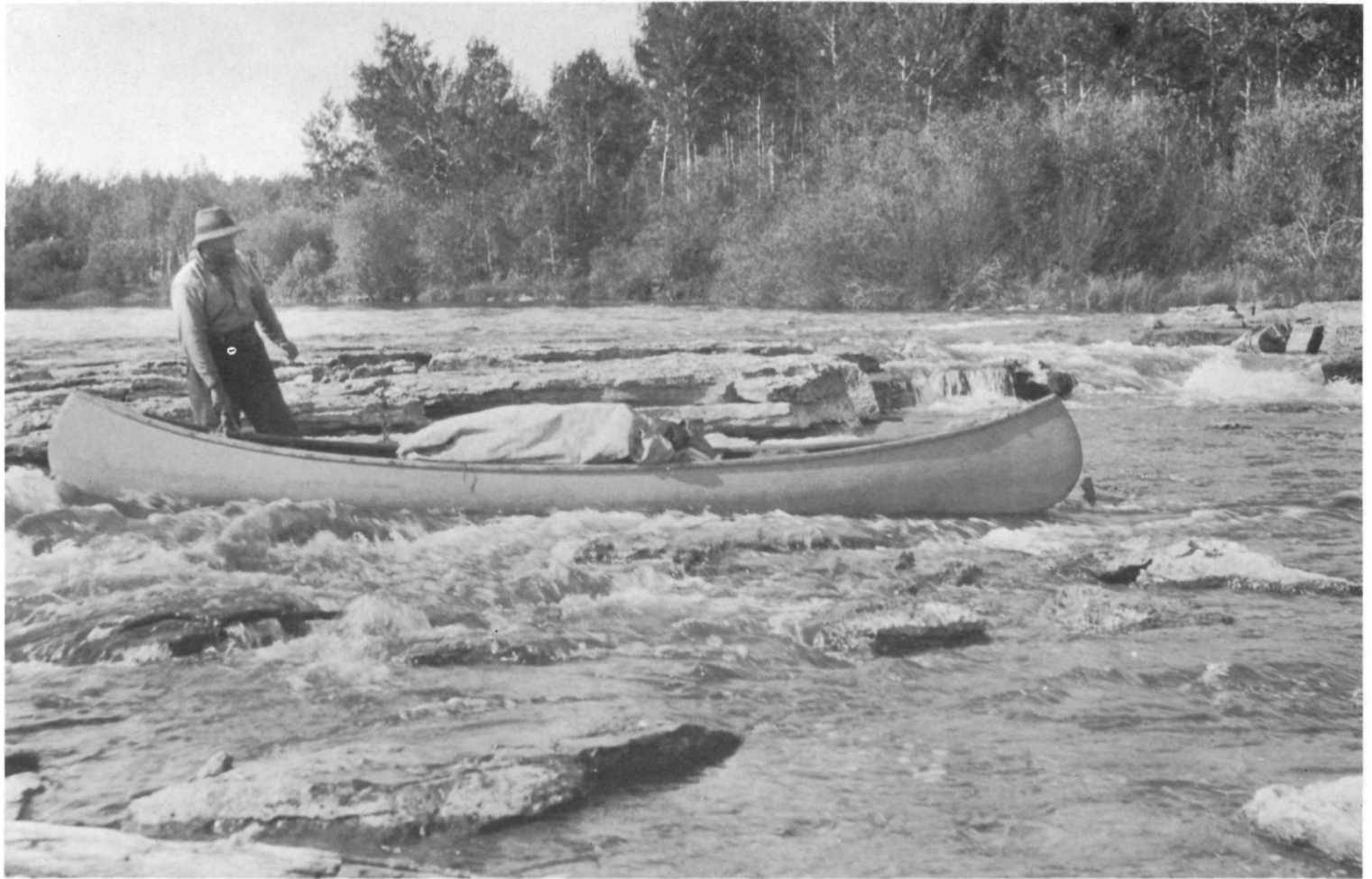
From Pelican Narrows, the canoe trip can be continued to any of several access points on the Hanson Lake Road—Jan Lake, or Ballantyne Bay on Deschambault Lake, for example. If the canoeist desires, the trip can be considerably extended down the Sturgeon-Weir River and across Amisk Lake to Denare Beach, not far from Flin Flon, Manitoba. Canoe trip information and maps, for extending the trip beyond Pelican Narrows, are available from the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources in Regina.

From Pelican Narrows the canoeist leaves Pelican Lake via the channel with the slight current, then enters Mirond Lake.

Corneille Portage

This portage connects Mirond Lake to Corneille Lake. The trail is approximately 160 metres (180 yards) long, and in good condition. Clearly visible pole-skids mark its beginning, one kilometre (½-mile) beyond the outlet of a bay at the south-east end of Mirond Lake. It is on the north bank about 70 metres (75 yards) above the rapids.

Below the portage there is a stretch of fast water which should not cause any trouble. There is an old portage trail around this fast water, and it is still useful to the very cautious, or to people travelling upstream; it may be found on the north shore of the stretch of fast water.



*Lining rapids on the Sturgeon-Weir River
(Public Archives of Canada)*

The trip from the northwest end of Corneille Lake to the northeast end takes the canoeist past many good rock campsites. There are, however, numerous rocky reefs to be avoided along the north-central portion of the lake, and among the islands.

Dog Rapids

The portage bypassing Dog Rapids between Corneille Lake and the Sturgeon-Weir River follows a good trail, approximately 40 metres (50 yards) long. The outlet from Corneille Lake is at the northeast end, and the portage trail starts on the southeast bank of the outlet. Dog Rapids is actually a waterfall which can be heard some distance away.

There are good natural campsites on the small islands below the falls. Fast water will be encountered on the upper Sturgeon-Weir River, but it can usually be run along the west side without much difficulty.

Birch Portage

The portage around Birch Rapids is approximately 320 metres (360 yards) long and is in good condition. It starts on the east side of the rapids, some distance above them, on the bare rock shore of a little cove. The trail angles up over an open grassy slope before entering the trees.

From this last portage, the canoeist travels downstream to Maligne Lake. The Hanson Lake Road bridges Maligne Lake at its central narrows. This is the finish point of the trip, and is about 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Flin Flon.

Further reading

Frank J.P. Crean, *Report of Exploration, 1908, 1909* (La Loche, La Ronge and the Churchill Area), Department of the Interior, Ottawa, 1909.

H.S.M. Kemp, *Northern Trader*, Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1956.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montréal through the continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans, 1789 and 1793*, New Amsterdam Book Company, New York, 1902.

Sigurd Olson, *The Lonely Land*, McClelland and Stewart, New York, 1961.

Canoe Information: Saskatchewan, Department of Tourism and Renewable Resources, Regina, 1974.

Notes

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Western Canada

Outlined areas are available in this series.
Shaded areas are covered by this booklet.

Soon to be available in this series:

Wild Rivers: Alberta

Wild Rivers: Central British Columbia

Wild Rivers: Northwest Mountains

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