



# Canoe Trip #26

## ***Black Lake (Saskatchewan) - Chipman Lake - Bompas Lake - Selwyn Lake - Flett Lake (Northwest Territories)***

**Length of Trip:** Approximately 169 kilometres (105 miles)

**Time Required to Complete Trip:** Seven to 11 days

**Number of Portages:** 12

### **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 the presence of hazards not described herein. It is the canoeist's responsibility to proceed with caution and alertness, using discretion and good judgment 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:**

Black Lake is located on the Fond du Lac River 1,120 kilometres (696 miles) north of the Canada-United States border, and 175 kilometres west of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border.

The lake also receives the drainage from the Chipman, Porcupine and Cree Rivers.

Black Lake is connected at two points by a road from the settlement of Stony Rapids. The road forks at its southern end, reaching Black Lake settlement with the western fork, and two outfitter's camps are located at the outlet of the lake with the other fork. Stony Rapids is a small settlement of approximately 300 persons, located on the Fond du Lac River between Lake Athabasca and Black Lake.

The settlement is regularly serviced by Highline Airways Inc. from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and by AFrame

Contracting barge from Ft. McMurray, Alberta. Stony Rapids provides float plane facilities, a landing strip, R.C.M.P. post, Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources office, Nursing Station, Hotel, a trucking service and Hudson's Bay Company Store.

Upon arrival at Stony Rapids, the canoeing party, supplies and canoes can be trucked to Black Lake.

### **Maps:**

- 74-P Stony Rapids
- 75-A Wholdaia Lake

### **About the Trip:**

The trip is part of a route originally explored by Dr. G. B. Tyrrell during the summer of 1893. Details of the trip can be found in the books, "Across the Sub-Arctic of Canada", by Tyrrell and the Annual Report, Geological Survey of Canada IX, Part F.

In 1955 a party of six Americans left Black Lake to re-trace part of the route followed by Dr. Tyrrell, 1,280 kilometres (796 miles) across the barren lands to Baker Lake, North West Territories.

The canoeing party arrived at Baker Lake 12 weeks later, out of food, overdue and the object of an air search. A tragedy had occurred enroute: two of the three canoes had overturned in the freezing water and one member of the party died of exposure.

### **The Trip Offers:**

Excellent fishing, beautiful wilderness canoeing, solitude and an excellent chance of wildlife observation.

### **Alternate Finishing Points:**

Arrange for float plane pick-up at Flett Lake, return over the same route or use the trip for access to other regions.

**Safety and Comfort:**

This is an extremely rugged trip that should only be attempted by experienced persons in top physical condition. The length and nature of the portages and the total absence of other persons through this wilderness region increases the danger of even the smallest accident.

### **Fishing:**

Excellent fishing is available for walleye, northern pike, lake trout and grayling.

**Please Note:**

With one exception, the small lakes between Black Lake and Chipman Lake are unnamed. To enable you

to follow this description, they are referred to as lakes A, B, C, D, E and F, travelling south to north.

#### **The Canoe Trip:**

Leaving the mouth of the Fond du Lac River, the route follows the 90 metres (98 yards) high, west shore of Black Lake into the narrows west of Fir Island. Excellent campsites can be found on the prominent point of land on the main shore of the lake just before leaving the narrows. Black Lake elevation is 278 metres (304 yards).

Chipman River enters the northwest corner of Black lake by flowing around a small island located at its mouth. The start of Chipman Portage is from a gravel bar located at the east side of the island.

Paddle up the river keeping a wary eye for rocks and unload directly onto the gravel bar on the east shore.

The portage passes through a line of trees, past a large well-blazed spruce visible from the lake, then runs parallel with the lake shore for approximately 400 metres (437 yards). Although this section of the portage is only a scant 15 metres (16 yards) from the lake, unloading anywhere along this shore is impossible due to the extreme shallowness of the lake at this point.

The trail heads northeast away from the lake and crosses a rocky ridge before an alternating series of short muskegs and sandy ridges. The latter, providing excellent campsites, are well treed with spruce up to 25 centimetres in diameter. The campsites (water available) are found for approximately the first two and a half kilometres (1.5 miles) of the portage, but the terrain then changes to muskeg for a further kilometre.

The portage climbs 4.5 metres (5 yards) up a stream bed in one place, then the muskeg continues until the trail makes a sharp turn up a rise then heads north.

The trail from this point is the old original Chipman Portage, the south end of which was abandoned when the new route was cut from the Chipman River.

Although the new route is approximately a kilometre longer than the original portage of four kilometres (2 miles), it is much the easier route.

From the merging of the two portages no further muskeg is encountered. In one place the trail forks then meets again, the west rail crossing a stream then climbing a steep bank, the top of which provides a good campsite.

The portage terminates about 720 metres (787 yards) further with a drop of about 5 metres to small lake "A".

Lake "A" is approximately 800 metres (875 yards) long and 90 metres (98 yards) wide. Loading is difficult here as the lake is very shallow.

#### **Portage Connecting Lake "A" and Lake "B": (Not shown on map 74-P)**

A small creek connects the two lakes. The portage is found a few metres to the east of where the creek enters the lake. The trail over large rocks is very rough at first but changes to fair condition later. A distance of about 900 metres (984 yards) long, the portage rises 14 metres and terminates at a well-used campsite on the south end of Lake "B".

A shallow ledge divides Lake "B" just south of the long bay to the west. Unless very low water conditions prevail, canoes can be paddled carefully over this obstruction.

#### **Portage Connecting Lake "B" and Lake "C" (Square Lake): (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Paddle to the extreme north end of the lake and into the brook entering from Lake "C". The extreme east side of this is navigable until an unloading site on the west side of the brook is reached.

For low water conditions, unload on the east shore of the lake just below where the brook enters. A trail from here leads to Lake "C". The loading spot on Lake "C" is a few metres down the east shore of the lake. The portage is three chains in length.

#### **Portage Connecting Lake "C" and Lake "D": (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Approximately 17 chains in length and a rise of about 5 metres (5 « yards) this portage appears as an opening in the bush in a small bay west of two small islands off the west shore of the lake.

The south end of the portage is rough but a number of campsites are available at the north end. Shallow water makes loading difficult.

#### **Portage Connecting Lake "D" and Lake "E": (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Lake "D" is L-shaped. The portage to Lake "E" is found at the north end of the west leg of the 'L'.

The short portage of about 45 metres (49 yards) drops over a rocky ridge to a very small lake ("E") about 5 metres (5 « yards) below.

The lake, approximately 180 metres (197 yards) across is skirted along the east shore by a portage trail, thus offering the choice of paddling or portaging.

#### **Portage Connecting Lake "E" and Lake "F": (Not shown on map 74-P)**

The start of this portage is obvious and connects to the portage skirting Lake "E".

Approximately 17 chains long and a drop of about six metres (6 « yards), the portage passes through a wood and is soft underfoot.

A campsite is available at the north end on a rise to the east. A very shallow lake edge makes loading very difficult. Lake "E" is also skirted by a portage around the east shore of the lake.

**Portage Connecting Lake "F" and Chipman Lake: (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Twenty-three chains long with a drop of 5 metres (5 « yards), the portage is rough and passes through a wood. It terminates at a group of large boulders at the end of the south bay of Chipman Lake.

Chipman Lake elevation is 363 metres (397 yards).

The route heads north for a distance of two and a half kilometres (1 « miles) then turns northeast through Chipman Lake.

Watch for rocks in the narrows between the islands! Approximately half way along the length of Chipman Lake, good campsites are available on the narrows dividing the two main sections of the lake.

Leaving the narrows, the east side of the lake is sheltered by a high ridge running parallel for a few kilometres. River current is very slight until a moderate current is encountered when crossing through a muskeg for 400 metres (437 yards) to a ridge on the west side of the lake.

The river above here is actually a narrow lake until the first of the three portages to Bompas Lake is reached.

**Portage No. 1: (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Seventy-five metres (82 yards) long and on the west side of the rapids, the portage has good landing and loading sites. A number of excellent campsites are available. After a short paddle of 800 metres (875 yards), the second portage is encountered.

**Portage No. 2: (Not shown on map 74-P)**

The landing site is obvious from the lake being at the foot of a steep nine metre climb on the east bank, over which the portage leads. A campsite is available here.

The 990 metre portage is dry but very rough at the north end. It terminates on a short shallow section of river with a moderately fast current. In low water conditions the shallowness of the river may make it necessary to only half-load the canoes and make two trips by water to the next portage.

The canoes may have to be poled up the first 45 metres (49 yards) of river, but the remaining 360 metres is over deep water. Watch for a submerged rock approximately nine metres (10 yards) from the landing!

**Portage No. 3: (Not shown on map 74-P)**

At the foot of the rapids and on the east bank of the river, the 235 metre portage is rough at the beginning but fair for the remainder.

Bompas Lake elevation is 387 metres (423 yards).

Approximately three kilometres (2 miles) up the lake at a narrows, a small rapid obstructs the paddler.

This is a very shallow rapid, but a moderately deep channel on the extreme eastern edge enables canoes to be lined upstream.

A further three kilometres (2 miles) of paddling reveals another narrows through which a moderate current flows. The deeper water is again on the eastern side.

About one and a half kilometres (1 mile) from the portage is Selwyn Lake; a large island offers a more sheltered route up the west shore of the lake. This island is actually connected by a narrow strip of land crossing from the west shore of the lake to the northwest corner of the island thus making a very short portage necessary.

Campsites are very frequent in this area.

**Portage Connecting Bompas Lake to Selwyn Lake: (Not shown on map 74-P)**

Paddle into the small bay approximately 270 metres (295 yards) east of the narrow opening in the lake shore through which the Chipman River enters.

The portage appears as an opening in the bush and the west trail of about 180 metres (197 yards) ends on a small pond over which supplies must be paddled to the far shore.

The portage climbs a steep bank from the side of the pond then levels off and is rough but dry for the remaining 720 metres (787 yards) to Selwyn Lake.

Campsites are available a few metres to the west of the north end of the portage. Selwyn Lake elevation is 388 metres (96 yards).

Ninety metres (98 yards) from the portage a shallows obstructs canoe passage, but a deeper channel on the east side gives passage into Selwyn Lake. Twenty-two kilometres (13 « miles) up the lake an esker provides an excellent campsite and viewpoint.

The 60th parallel divided the Province of Saskatchewan from the North West Territories.

The 'Double Vee' boundary marker cut through the trees can be sighted on the horizon over the west shore of the lake. From this point, the lake spreads immensely. The canoe route follows the west shore of the lake through a maze of islands, across a 'Big Open' and into a narrows, the opening of which is obstructed by a cluster of islands.

Two groups of winter cabins are located on the west side of these narrows.

**Portage Connecting Selwyn Lake and Flett Lake: (Not shown on map 75-A)**

This portage is located below the low spot on the horizon in the northwest corner of the large bay northeast of the narrows. About 2,160 metres (2362 yards) in length, the portage crosses the height of land and drops over 30 (33 yards) metres to Flett Lake.

The drainage north of this portage flows by way of the Dubawnt and Thelon Rivers into Hudson's Bay and

the Atlantic Ocean. The drainage south of the portage flows through the Chipman, Fond du Lac, Athabasca, Slave and McKenzie Rivers to the Arctic Ocean.

Rough at both ends, the portage provides fair campsites about 115 metres (126 yards) in from Selwyn Lake and at the north end of Flett Lake.

The south and west side of Flett Lake is broken with numerous small islands and reefs, making navigation very treacherous in all but calm water. Avoid these shores if making arrangements for float plane landings.

Flett Lake elevation is 358.5 metres (392 yards). It is connected from the east shore to Wholdaia Lake through a maze of small islands and narrows.

An alternate and shorter canoe route crosses the narrow neck of land from the northwest corner of Flett Lake. This is the route used by Dr. Tyrrell on his original exploration.

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

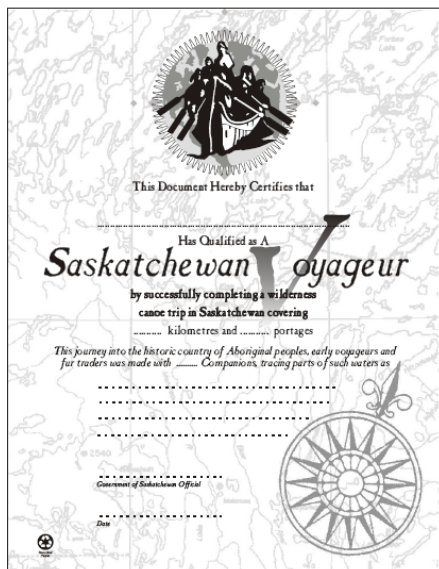
**ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:**

To minimize your impact on the environment while canoeing along Saskatchewan waterways, please keep in mind these safe and sensible practices:

Make every canoe trip a clean trip! Follow the pack in - pack out rule. When breaking camp, erase all evidence that you were there. Leave your campsite cleaner than you found it.

Consider the wildlife and their habitat: While portaging or camping, stay on the trails to prevent any disturbance to the wildlife and natural vegetation.

Fire Prevention: Forest fires along canoe routes are an ever present danger. It is vital that all campfires are kept small and are thoroughly extinguished with water after use. Never leave a fire until you are sure it is 'dead'.



Be sure to obtain an official Saskatchewan Voyageur Certificate upon completion of your canoe trip. Before you start out, check in at one of the registration points and then again immediately after your journey is over. You will then become an official Saskatchewan Voyageur receiving a certificate as a memento of your canoe experience in Saskatchewan.

**Registration Points:**

Ministry offices in La Ronge, Prince Albert, Green Lake, Beauval, Ile-a-la Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, La Loche, Weyakwin, Stony Rapids, Pinehouse, Southend, Wollaston Lake, Sandy Bay, Pelican Narrows, Creighton, Cumberland House, Saskatoon, Pierceland, Loon Lake; Meadow Lake Provincial Park, Narrow Hills Provincial Park and the Visitor Information Centre at La Ronge.



Ministry of  
Tourism, Parks,  
Culture and Sport

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

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