

# Athabasca River

## Whitecourt to Fort Assiniboine

### Why Go

In the early or late season this is a most pleasant river for canoe camping, with some fine wilderness vistas and plenty of wildlife.

### Duration of Tour(s)

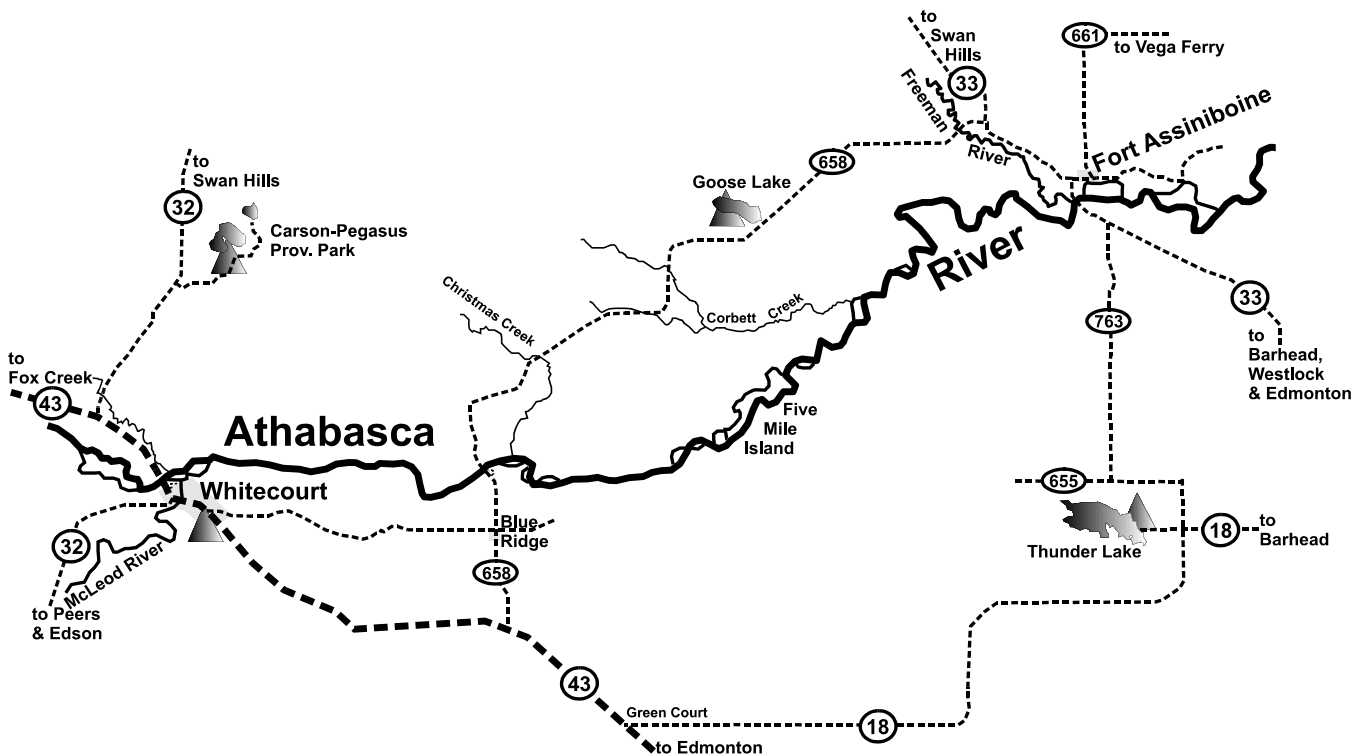
- \* 90 km
- \* 1 to 3 days



Morning on the Athab', from under the fly, May '06

### Classification

1. Rapids: Class 1
2. Skill of Paddlers: Intermediate River Paddlers, or at lower flows Novice River Paddler with good leadership.



### Start

This run starts at the River Boat Park boat launch in Whitecourt, which is at the confluence of the McLeod and Athabasca Rivers. From Highway #43, on the south side of the Athabasca River bridge, take the east service road off Highway #43, and follow the park/boat launch signs, a bit north and then east and down stream to the confluence.

### Finish

This run ends at the picnic site at the confluence of the Freeman and Athabasca Rivers. This is just over the bridge on the town (north) side of the Athabasca River. Take the west service road south to the picnic site by the bridge. If coming from the north, turn right before the town of Fort Assiniboine, and continue south on Highway #33. Just past the gas station turn onto the service road and follow it along the west side of the highway to the picnic site.

## Intermediate Access and Distances

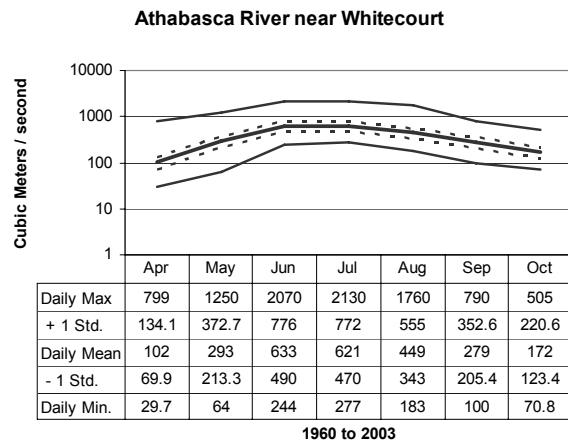
Location	Elevation meters	Km down	Km up	Km between	Access / Bank or Rapid / Class	MGRS datum	Gradient m/km
Riverboat Park in Whitecourt		90	0		right bank of Athab', left bank of McLeod	NA 848 010	
	686	84	6				
	671	71	19				1.1
Highway #658 north of Blue Ridge		66	24	24	right bank	PA 051 023	
	655	58	32				1.2
	640	52	38				2.5
start 5 Mile Island		46	44			PA 213 047	
Corbett Creek		29	61		left bank		
	625	29	61				0.6
	610	2	88				0.6
Freeman River, just above the Highway #33 bridge		0	90	66	left bank	PA 439 214	

### Gradient

The average gradient over this whole run is 0.9 m/km, and I suspect that all of the above gradients are closer to this than the mean gradients between each contour line, especially that 2.5 mean gradient noted above.

### River Volume and Flow Rate

This station is closer to Windfall than Whitecourt and does not reflect the McLeod River contribution to flow. In spring or early summer also check the McLeod River flows to ensure that neither river is in flood. Good paddling happens on these reaches with 125 to 500 cms of water being reported at this Windfall station. Velocities for this station vary from less than 2 km/hr at 200 cms to 10 km/hr at 4000 cms.



### Maps

1 - I think that most folks will be adequately served by the NTS 1:250,000 sheet noted below and the *Alberta Highway Map*. If you need a reference for additional access try the Alberta Lands and Forest *Whitecourt Forest* sheet at 1:250,000. It can be nice to have the 1:50,000 sheets, but on this run you need five of them!

2 - NTS 1:250,000: 83 J Whitecourt

NTS 1:50,000: 83 J/ 4 Whitecourt, 83 J/ 3 Green Court, 83 J/ 2 Thunder Lake, 83 J/ 6 Christmas Creek, and 83 J/ 7 Fort Assinboine

## Camping

There are really no established public campgrounds right on the river to support this trip. In Whitecourt the campground is on the south edge of town, a long ways from the river. The picnic site at the Ft. Assiniboine bridge is not really a campground, and the Blue Ridge bridge is just a nice launch site. On the other hand, at medium to low water levels this is a fine run for wilderness camping. I suspect that most users are like myself: they come from within a few hours drive, drop a car off at the finish and drive the second vehicle to the start and paddle back, camping at least one night along the way. At medium to high flows you will have to read your map carefully and plan to check out all likely spots; the islands tend to be fairly overgrown and “thick!” Camping at higher water levels is limited.

## Wildlife

On a May '06 run we spotted some deer but the biggest highlight were the eagles. We had at least two eagles, maybe more, one mature, and one immature that seemed to follow us down the river over our two day run from Blue Ridge to Fort Assiniboine. On the Sunday morning the mature eagle gave us an extended fishing demonstration right off of our breakfast beach. A prior canoe guide for this reach suggested that the walleye, and rocky mountain whitefish fishery were in good shape on this run. I would think that the eagles were a demonstration that this is still the case.

## Trip Notes

Whitecourt to Blue Ridge is a little swifter, and very braided, relative to the run below Blue Ridge. Logjams and sweepers are a constant hazard on both reaches, unless you paddle as we did in May '06, at very low water levels and then most of the logjams and sweepers are “stranded” and well above the water line. There are a number of big islands on this run, with *5 Mile Island* being the largest. It is probably a good idea to keep your group together, and not split up to explore side channels. Not only are side channels more likely to harbor logjams and sweepers, but your separation can at times be rather extended.

## Other Reaches

The reach above Whitecourt is available in this guide. From Ft. Assiniboine to well below the town of Athabasca, the “Athabee” is a pretty tame paddle. Vega Ferry is 41km, Smith 165 km, and Athabasca town 279 km below Fort Assiniboine.

## Other Local Activities or Destinations

The senior's centre in Fort Assiniboine is a reconstruction of the original fur trade post, and is well worth the time of a tour.



Drifting and watching the eagles, May 2006