

Red Deer River

Content Bridge (Highway #21)
to Drumheller (Newcastle Park)

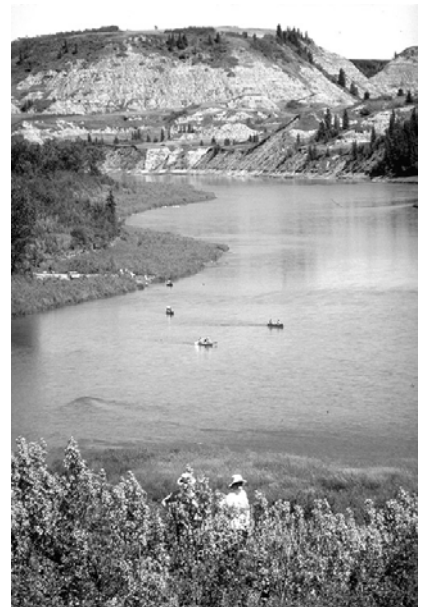
Why Go

This is a great scenic paddle that takes one through the transition from the aspen parkland, and into the prairies and badlands. The paddling at most water levels is well within the ability of anyone with a few hours of instruction.

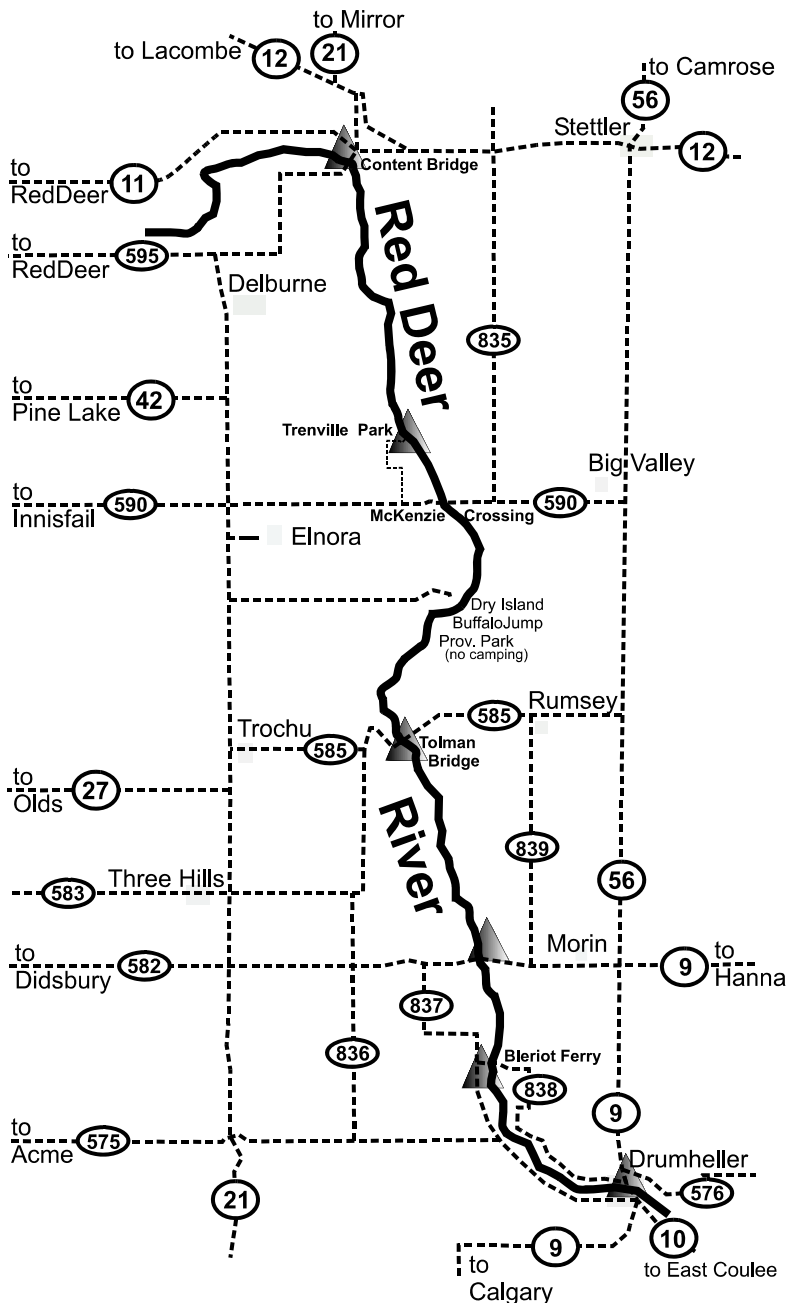
Duration of Tour(s)

* 118 km

* 3 to 4 days, with a number of one and ½ day tours possible



at Dry Island Buffalo Jump



Classification

1. Rapids: Class I - II (Backbone Riffle)
2. Skill of Paddlers: This a fine run for Novice River Paddlers (canoe or kayak) with the basic boat handling skills for ensuring direction control, with some ability at ferrying and eddy turns. Like most incised prairie streams this river can generate a strong upstream breeze, and "strong" paddling can be required on many afternoons. This is a run for touring boats that move easily through the water.

Start

The start for this run is at the Content (Highway #21 Bridge) S.W. of Stettler, near the former Metis buffalo hunting village of Tail Creek. At Content Bridge there is both a public campground upstream of the bridge and a private campground just downstream of the bridge, both on the north bank. Both campgrounds provide useful access to the river.

Finish

Access in Drumheller has improved since my last guide: Newcastle Park on the west side of Drumheller, and south side of the river, is a great spot to end, or start a trip. From downtown Drumheller go west on either 3rd or 4th Avenues, these merge into Newcastle Trail, at 10th Street turn right (north), and then right (east) again onto the Newcastle Park access road.

Intermediate Access and Distances

Location	Elevation meters	km	km	km	Access / Bank or Rapid Class	MGRS datum NAD 1983 Zone 12 U	Gradients m/km
		down	up	between			
Content Bridge Park		118	0		left - above bridge	UC 585 971	
	747	116	3				
	739	108	10				1.1
Backbone Riffle		102	16		class I - II	UC 613 838	
	724	91	27				0.6
Trenville Park		90	29	29	right	UC 631 720	
McKenzie Crossing		82	37	8	left - below bridge	UC 664 655	
	716	81	37				0.8
	709	70	48				0.8
Dry Island Buffalo Jump		68	50	14	right	UC 650 556	
	701	54	64				0.6
Tolman Bridge Campground		54	65	14	right - below campground	UC 609 448	
	693	47	71				1.1
Morin Bridge Campground		31	87	23	left - well above the bridge	UC 677 250	
Morin Bridge		30	89		right - below bridge	UC 683 239	
	686	25	93				0.3
Bleriot Ferry		20	98	11	right below ferry, beware of tow cable	UC 693 152	
Newcastle Park in Drumheller		0	118	20	right bank	UC 798 032	

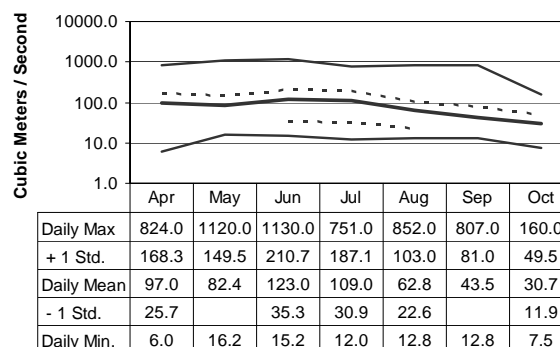
Gradient

Stream Gradients on this run range from 1.1 m/km to a low of .3 m/km on the last reach just above Drumheller.

River Volume and Flow Rate

Best paddling on these reaches are with the Drumheller station reporting flows between 40 and 200 CMS. Some paddlers suggest this river can be run with as little as 20 cms, and record floods have exceeded 1100 cms. Flow velocity for the Drumheller station varies from approximately 3 km/hr at 100 cms to nearly 8 km/hr at 800 cms.

Red Deer River at Drumheller



1915 to 2003

Maps

1 - the ARCA *Middle Red Deer Map* is a must for this reach, and actually covers the river from the Dickson Dam west of Innisfail through to Drumheller. This map with an up-to-date *Alberta Road Map* is all you really need.

2 - NTS 1:250,000	NTS 1:50,000	82P/15 - Rumsey
83 A - Red Deer	83A/6 - Alix	82P/14 - Trochu
82 P - Drumheller	83A/3 - Delbourne	82P/10 - Munson
	83A/2 - Big Valley	82P/7 - Drumheller

Camping

This is possibly the most popular canoe tripping river in the province. The great on-river and stream-side camping, the usually easy paddling conditions, and great scenery attracts a wide variety of paddlers. Unorganized or wilderness camping can be had below the high water mark along the banks or on many of the mid-stream islands.

Public and private campgrounds along this reach include:

Content Bridge Park 403.742.0777	Trenville Park 403.773.2273
MacKenzie Crossing Campground 403.740.4775 or 403.876.2524	
TL Ranch (just above the Tolman Bridge) 403.442.2207	Tolman Bridge 403.823.1749
Morrin Bridge (Starland Recreation Area) 403.772.3793	Bleriot Ferry 403.823.1749

Paddlers must be aware that there is NO camping allowed within Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park.

Wildlife

This is a pleasant run that usually offers many opportunities for wildlife viewing. On a hot summer afternoon the cries of the red tail hawk will often be heard, and one is likely to follow a great blue heron down the river. In recent years both white pelicans and cormorants have returned to fish the river. Whitetail and mule deer may be spotted from the canoe, or at camp in the early morning or evening. This is a good run for spotting wildlife.

Some years ago a provincial wildlife biologist brought to my attention that groups of paddlers were unintentionally “herding” young ducks and goslings down the river. In their attempt to stay ahead of the paddlers the young birds can become exhausted, and may drown. Lead paddlers in a group need to be alert to avoid this problem. When families of young ducks or geese are spotted the group should either pull over and wait for a few minutes to allow the birds to gain shore or a side channel; or the group should get together, and then try to sprint past the birds on the far side of the river.

Trip Notes

As noted above this is a popular run. My first canoe trip was on part of this reach and I have returned many times over the past forty years to trip and race. Often with the Ceyana Canoe Club we chose to use the former McKenzie Crossing campground as a base, and then to day trip up stream and downstream. In these later years we generally opt for the shorter runs, and this allows time for long walks through the coulees and up the ridges. And like many paddlers I have opted for June or early July to make these trips, to take advantage of the higher waters. BUT I have also in recent years advised youth leaders to NOT tackle these runs when the river was very high. Even a flat river like the Red Deer IS dangerous at high flows. I was on the river in the early ‘nineties with my scout troop and just above Trenville park we came across a Grumman canoe wrapped around a large rock in a very modest riffle – the only large rock we saw that day on the whole run from Content to Trenville. And on this run the river had been high enough to wash out Backbone Riffle, but not so high as to present any other problems.

Paddlers on the Bleriot Ferry run must also be well aware of the dangers of the ferry. It is best to pass the ferry on the far side of the river and one must never try to land on the upstream side of a ferry, as the current will pull (suck) your canoe under the ferry!

Other Reaches

I have chosen to not include the pleasant 49 km paddle from Joffre Bridge to Content bridge in this guide. The runs below Drumheller are fully reviewed in the next report.

Other Local Activities or Destinations

If you are camped at one of the bridges, planning to day trip on the river, and the rain gods are angry with you, load up and head down the highway to Drumheller and go to the Royal Tyrrell Museum. If the river is too high, or it is too windy, I would suggest driving to Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park, and go for a hike up to the Dry Island in the NE corner of the park, or out to the buffalo jump on the west side of the park.

Rentals and Shuttle Services

TL Ranch 403.442.2207

Taxi service in Drumheller seems to have deteriorated as of August 2009, and my one recent contact would only offer the possibility of shuttle service if an extra driver was available – check the yellow pages and give whoever is listed a try!



below Morrin Bridge