

# Milk River

## Town of Milk River to Highway #880

### Why Go

Badlands scenery, hoodoos, pictographs, and whitewater for a number of the reaches. These reaches offer great day tripping, and there are opportunities for camping on the river.

### Duration of Tour(s)

\* 104 km

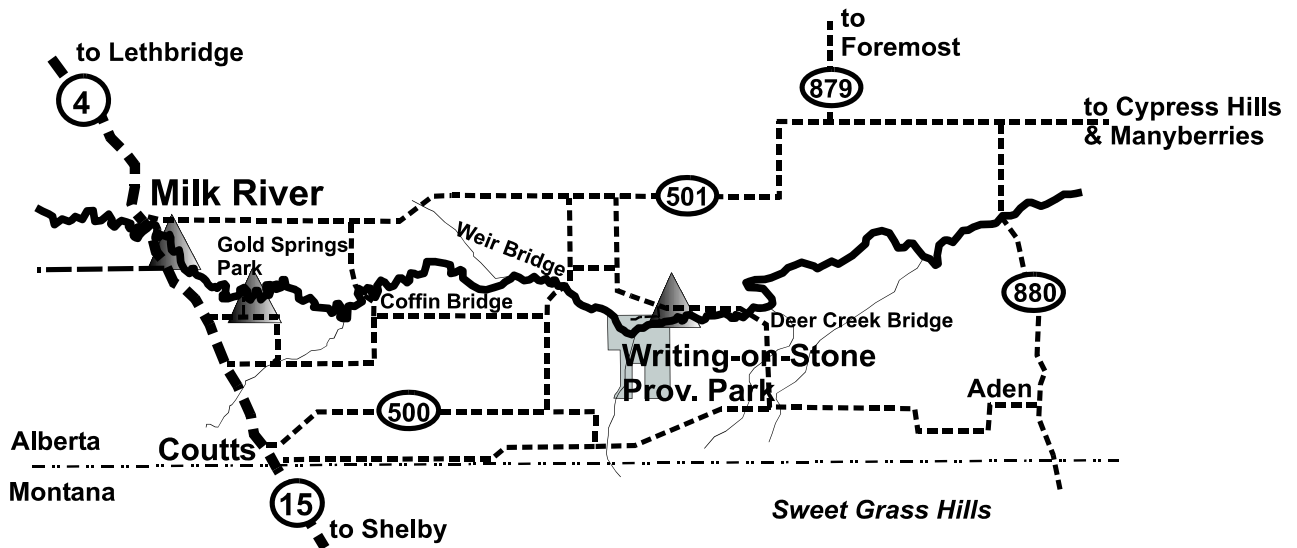
\* 3 to 5 days or a series of 1 day trips



in Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park

### Classification

1. Rapids: Class I to II+ at most water levels, easy III at higher (65 to 80<sup>th</sup> percentile) water levels
2. Skill of Paddlers: Intermediate, open canoe river skills and river reading skills required, lots of rocks to dodge! We have had reports of aluminum and plastic canoes wrapped around rocks on these reaches.



### Start

Each of these sub-reaches of the Milk has a bridge or campground at the start of each day. In the town of Milk River paddlers can put in at the campground just downstream of the Highway #4 bridge. Both Gold Springs Park and Writing-on-Stone Park have beaches along the river that require minimal hikes from parking spots, and Coffin, Weir and Deer Creek Bridges all have dedicated access.

### Finish

This reach allows one to finish at any of the intermediate access points, or the final bridge on Highway #880. In good weather shuttles are direct along the country roads. In 2004 with the Ceyana Canoe Club we stayed at Gold Springs Park. On the first day local roads were very wet and muddy and for the shuttle to Coffin Bridge we went back through town before heading east. Later in the weekend, after a hot day or two, we were able to use the local gravel roads south and east of Gold Springs Park to return from each day's paddle.

## Intermediate Access and Distances

Location	Elevation <i>meters</i>	Km down	Km up	Km between	Access / Bank or Rapid / Class	MGRS datum	Gradients m/km
	3425		-2.5			Zone 12 U	
Milk River - #4 Bridge		104.7	0.0		downstream, left bank	VK 211 438	
	3400	98.0	6.7				0.8
	3375	94.8	9.9				2.4
						NAD 1983	
	3350	89.3	15.4				1.4
Gold Spring Park		88.3	16.4	16.4	right bank	VV 277 386	
	3325	86.1	18.6				2.4
	3300	82.3	22.4				2.0
	3275	79.9	24.8				3.2
	3250	77.6	27.1				3.3
Red Creek		72.2	32.5		right bank	VV 341 370	
	3225	71.4	33.3				1.2
	3200	70.3	34.4				6.9
Coffin Bridge		68.6	36.1	19.7	downstream right bank	VV 352 392	
	3175	68.4	36.3				4.0
	3150	66.2	38.5				3.5
	3125	60.5	44.2				1.3
	3100	57.4	47.3				2.5
	3075	54.8	49.9				2.9
Poverty Rock		54.7	50.0		right bank	VV 420 399	
	3050	52.8	51.9				3.8
Verdgris coulee		50.1	54.6		left bank		
	3025	49.0	55.7				2.0
	3000	44.3	60.4				1.6
Weir Bridge (#500)		44.2	60.5	24.4	upstream on right bank	VV 488 392	
Enter Writing-on-Stone Park		39.5	65.2			VV 520 373	
Van Cleeve Coulee		37.9	66.8		right bank		
Police Creek		36.1	68.6		right bank		
	2975	36.1	68.6				0.9
Writing-on-Stone Campground beach		34.5	70.2	9.7	left bank	VV 551368	
Leaving Writing-on- Stone Park		33.7	71.0			VV 554 370	
Deer Creek Bridge		26.6	78.1	7.9	upstream on left bank	VV 607 374	
Deer Creek		24.7	80.0		right bank		
	2950	22.7	82.0				0.6
	2925	11.9	92.8				0.7
Macdonald Creek / Black Coulee		7.4	97.3		right bank		
	2900	4.5	100.2				1.0
Highway #880 Bridge		0.0	104.7	26.6	right bank, downstream of	VV 776 436	

## Gradient

Calculated gradients range from a low of less than 1 m/km to a high of nearly 7 m/km. As is often the case on small streams in canyons I am skeptical of these map based gradient estimates, but there is no doubt that the higher gradient stretches shown above do have more, and more difficult rapids. The reach below Gold Springs Park, and particularly the reach from Coffin Bridge to Verdigris Coulee offer the greatest whitewater challenges.

## River Volume and Flow Rate

The best paddling flows are between approximately 15 and 25 cms. This river has enhanced flows to support irrigation through the spring and summer and then the water is turned off by mid August most years. Peak flood flows have been over 330 cms. Velocities range from less than 2 km/hr at approximately 15 cms to over 6 km/hr at nearly 200 cms.

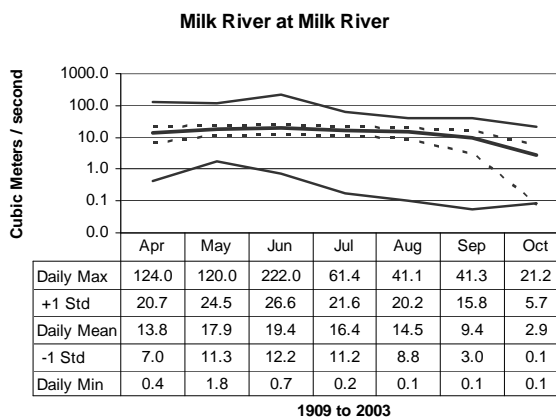
## Maps

1 - *A Paddler's Guide to the Milk River: Whiskey Gap to Deer Creek* from ARCA should be one's first choice on these reaches.

2 - NTS 1:50,000

72 E/4 - Couetts

72 E/3 - Aden (only required for the run down to Highway #880 below Deer Creek)



## Camping

Campgrounds in the area include: the town campground next to the Highway #4 bridge in Milk River, Gold Springs Park (403.647.2277), and in Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park (403.647.2364, group campsite reservations 403.893.3777) On-river camping can be had in many places, but paddlers must remember that all of the land along the river is either privately owned or park, and campers must stay below the "high water line". Wilderness camping is not allowed in Writing-on-Stone Park. Local paddlers have arranged with the land owner for a campsite at Poverty Rock, and this is a popular site for paddling groups, as it provides some shelter and rough toilets.

## Wildlife

Paddling in the open country of the Milk River allows one great views of the topography and wildlife. Unfortunately the most common sighting will be the red & white of Herford cattle, but mule deer, great blue herons, cliff swallows and various hawks can also be seen. During our 2004 Ceyana excursion we were fortunate to come across both rattle and bull snakes during one side excursion off the river to check out some pictographs. Then just after getting back into our canoes those of us at the back of the pack also came across another rattlesnake swimming in the river. Many of the reported sighting of rattlesnakes that I have from paddlers, is of the rattlers swimming in the river. Paddlers with kids and dogs must keep both under close scrutiny in this country. People of all ages must be most conscious of avoiding the placement of hands and feet in any place that cannot be clearly observed for snakes.

On our last evening at Gold Springs Park in 2004 we had a pleasant hour watching a mamma great horned owl give her two offspring flight lessons from the cliff just down stream of the campground.

## Trip Notes

I first visited Writing-on-Stone Park with my family in 1965. I did not get back to paddle these reaches until 2004 – big mistake! I don't think you've really paddled in Alberta until you've paddled on some of these southern rivers. The scenery is spectacular and the paddling is interesting. Maybe too interesting for some. During our 2004 trip with the Ceyana Canoe Club we met two different Scout groups on the water. One had taken the time to prepare properly, had their leaders properly trained through our provincial recreation canoe association (Paddle Alberta), and the group had a thoroughly enjoyable time. The second group was less well managed and prepared, had difficulties with the river and rapids, damaged their canoes, and were evacuated, with some difficulty, from Poverty Rock. Other relatively inexperienced paddlers have also told me that this was the most difficult paddling they have ever done, and reports of canoe damage are common. On the other hand, with modestly good river skills, this is a fun river! I'm going back soon.

In 2004 our group camped at Gold Springs Park, and shuttled each day to the river. Our first reach was from Gold Springs park down to Coffin Bridge, then the next day Coffin to Weir Bridge, and finally on the Monday of the long weekend, we did the run through Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park -- Weir Bridge to Deer Creek Bridge. The extra driving was a fair trade off for the fine group campsite we were given along the river in Gold Springs Park.

### **Other Reaches**

Upstream: the ARCA river guide provides good information for the runs from Whiskey Gap all the way into town, about 116 km.

Downstream: the Milk River becomes difficult to access and arrangements must be made in advance to access the grazing lands along the river in Alberta. To enter Montana, one must check-in, in advance with a border crossing.

### **Other Local Activities or Destinations**

Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park is the prime attraction in this area. To see the largest gallery of the pictographs in the park you must join one of the regular park tours. You must also join a guided hike to visit the old police post across the river on the south bank.

### **Rentals and Shuttle Services**

Local Shuttle Services include:

Milk River Raft Tours  
403.647.3586



Gold Springs Park looking SE to the Sweet Grass Hills



North West Mounted Police Buildings, Police Coulee in Writing-on-Stone Park