

# North Saskatchewan River

## Edmonton to the Saskatchewan Boundary

### Why Go

When the high flows of summer are past these are pleasant reaches for day to multi-day trips. These reaches offer scenic pastoral vistas, and both good wildlife and birding opportunities; and then there is the history!

### Duration of Tour(s)

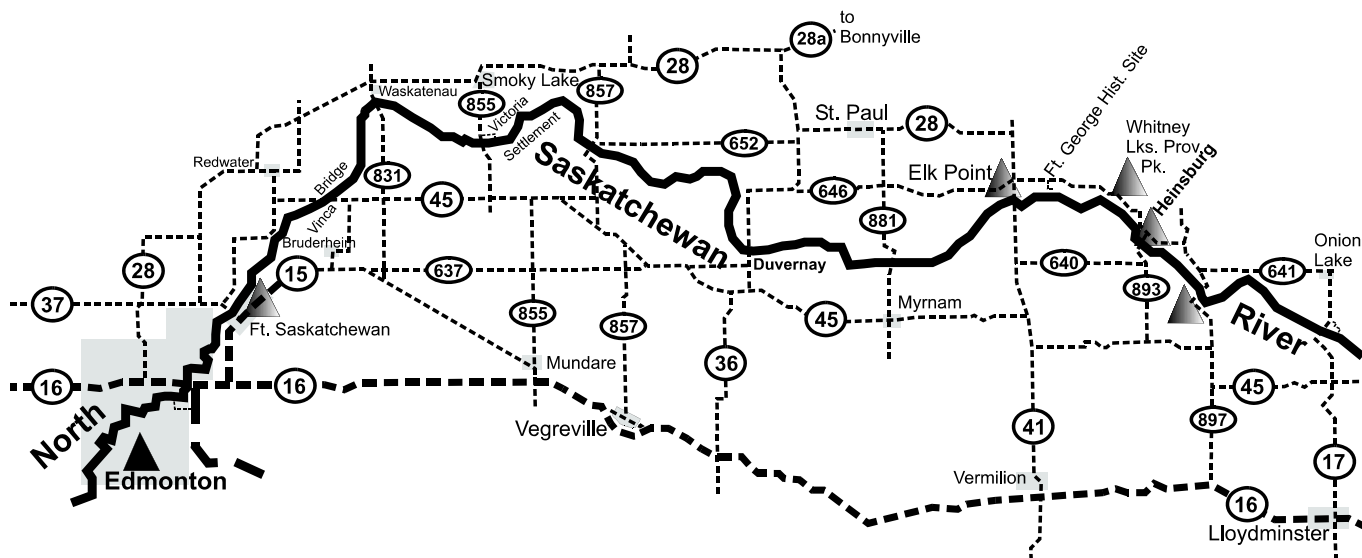
- \* 330 km
- \* 6-10 days with many day and weekend trip possibilities



Looking back at the Beverly Bridges in east Edmonton, August 1996

### Classification

1. Rapids: Class I to easy II
2. Skill of Paddlers: Novice River



### Start

The proposed start for this run is the Capilano Park / 50<sup>th</sup> Street boat launch in east central Edmonton. Once south of the river any main east-west road will take you to 50<sup>th</sup> Street, and then it is north to the river.

### Finish

Finish for this run is at the former Highway #17 ferry north of Lloydminster, and south of Onion Lake. From the present highway bridge, go north approximately 800 m and take the first road on the east side, this is a sharp turn, and it quickly drops back into the river valley and down to the former ferry site.

## Intermediate Access and Distances

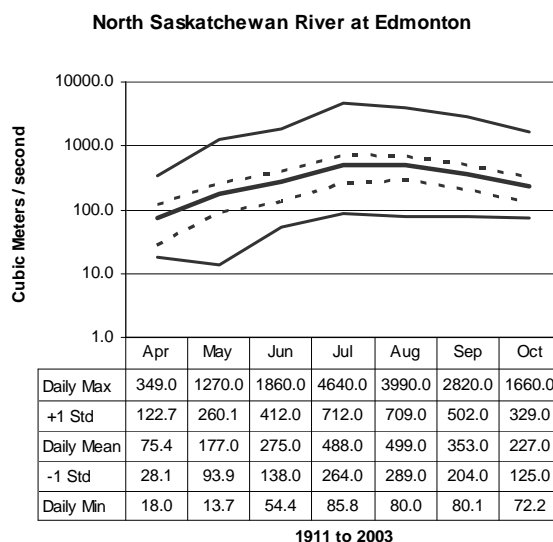
Location	Elevation meters	Km down	Km up	Km between	Access / Bank or Rapid / Class	MGRS datum NAD 1983 zone 12U	Gradient m/km
Capilano Park / 50 St. in Edmonton		330	0		right bank	UE 398 375	
	610	315	15				
township road 540		313	17	17	right bank	UE 463 448	
Ft. Saskatchewan, Red Coat Landing, off Westpark Drive		303	27	10	right bank	UE 499 510	
	600	300	30				0.7
Highway #15 bridge		300	30		no access		
Turner Park / River Rd. & 104 St.		297	33	6	right bank, rather steep	UE 538 542	
Sturgeon River		290	40				
	594	284	46				0.4
Highway #38 / Vinca Bridge		271	59	26	left bank, under bridge	UE 702 728	
	587	259	71				0.3
	579	247	83				0.7
Highway # 831		245	85	26		UE 834 915	
	572	235	95				0.6
Highway # 855		223	107		poor access		
Victoria Settlement / Pakan		216	114	29	left bank	VE 083 848	
	564	214	116				0.4
Highway # 857		190	140	33	left bank, 500 m below bridge	VE 247 815	
	556	179	151				0.2
	549	168	162				0.6
	541	152	178				0.5
Highway #36 / Duvernay		141	189	49	right bank, above bridge	VE 546 603	
	533	122	208				0.3
former Beauvallon Ferry		119	211			VE 733 564	
Highway #881		107	223	34	either bank, old ferry crossing 500 m below bridge	VE 854 562	
Fort Island		104	226				
Highway #41 / Elkpoint		81	249	26	left bank	WE 067 680	
	526	78	252				0.2
Ft. George Historic Site		71	259		left bank	WE 155 679	
	518	68	262				0.8
Moosehills Creek		61	269			WE 239 677	
Highway #893 / Heinsburg		48	282	33	left bank, 500 m below bridge	WE 313 576	
Highway #897 / Vermillion River		29	301	19	right bank, under the bridge	WE 438 458	
Highway #17		1	329		dry weather access to either bank		
former ferry site		0	330	29	left bank, better all weather road access	WE 667 392	

## Gradient

No average gradient on these reaches exceeds 1 m/km, though some stretches are a bit faster than others as the above table would suggest.

## River Volume and Flow Rate

Again this is a good sized river and generally best paddled earlier or later in the season. Avoid the high water periods. Flows of 150 to 350 cms will provide more than adequate water and there will still be a decent beach at most locations for access and camping. These suggested flows may seem low relative to the flows reported in the graph and table to the right, but remember that this table reflects flows of nearly 100 years and flows have generally been diminishing over this whole period. At Edmonton flows vary from 2 km/hr at 125 cms to 8 km/hr at 2000 cms



## Maps & Guides

- 1 - *Alberta Road Map* - this may be all you need
  - 2 - *North Saskatchewan River Guide* - this is not so much a guidebook, as an interpretative manual to all you may see along the river; it is very informative.
  - 3 - NTS 1:250,00 - these are all getting rather old and the provincial series is not much better!
    - 83 H - Edmonton
    - 83 I - Tawatinaw
    - 73 E - Vermillion
- NTS 1:50,000 - not necessary

## Camping

On stream (or at least close) public campgrounds along this run are available: in Ft. Saskatchewan at Turner Park (780.998.4074), Highway #41 bridge (south of Elk Point), in the Hamlet of Heinsburg, and near the Highway #897 bridge at the Lea Park - Jubilee Regional Park (780.847.2273).

After the high waters of summer there are many idyllic stream side and island wilderness campsites for smaller groups. As always, one should ask permission of the local property owner or lease holder before camping above the highwater line, or near any occupied private property.

During the August '06 scouting trip, and when checking out the access on the south-side of the river at the former Beauvallon Ferry, I learned that the Alberta Snowmobile Association maintains a series of cabins along the Duvernay (Highway #36) to Highway #881 reach. Two cabins are available to the canoeing public at the former Beauvallon Ferry site, one on each side of the river. Individual paddlers are welcome to use these cabins, the south side cabin was open when we hiked down to it, a 25 minute walk each way from the first gate. The cabin is snowmobile and quad accessible, but it would be tough getting in a vehicle to drag out canoes. Road access is restricted (gates and locks) and groups should book in with the Alberta Snowmobile Association (780.427.2695) for the cabins and the Rannach Provincial Grazing Reserve Manager (780.645.6336) for access permission.

## Wildlife

During consecutive trips in 1996, Lois and I saw more wildlife on the first few hours run out of Edmonton than we saw during a three day trip on Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park! Yes, these reaches are all through farm lands, but the wildlife is concentrated along the river and the viewing is grand. The pelicans alone make this run worthwhile. Over the years we have seen peregrine falcons, many other raptors, blue herons, cormorants, common and black terns, and a multitude of other bird life along these reaches. Mammals are well represented too: beaver and muskrat in the water, both deer species, moose and elk, coyotes, bears and maybe even a cougar may be spotted along these reaches.

## Trip Notes

After or before the high water of summer these reaches offer great day, weekend or longer trips for the novice river paddler. The log jams and sweepers are few and far apart, the biggest problems may be the occasional gravel bar, or bridge pier that is off set to the current and creating some strong eddies. One paddler of these reaches has reported that some islands and bars may present more difficult riffles or rapids in one channel and not the other – it is always best to keep a sharp eye looking downstream -- and scout anything that is doubtful.

Lois and I have made a number of trips on these reaches, but have yet to paddle it all. In '96 we made the run down to Victoria Settlement from Edmonton. In '09 we had a pleasant overnight run from Shandro (Hwy #857) to Duvernay (Hwy # 36). In '06 we paddled the Heinsburg to Highway #897. On this last run I completed the shuttle by riding a bike back for the truck, 19 km of paddling and 23 km of riding! All of these runs were done with less than 200 cms for water flow. On both the Shandro and Heinsburg runs we were surprised by a number of gravel & boulder bar riffles. More than one of these riffles was loud enough I felt compelled to stand up in the canoe to scout the drop. On the Shandro run the riffles are on the higher gradient stretch, on the Heinsburg run the first drop was about 10 km below the start. Some of these riffles required maneuvering to stay in the deep water and to avoid the biggest of the boulders that broke the surface. An occasional wave even slopped into our canoe. Any one of these riffles, waves or boulders could catch an unwary paddler by surprise and provide a soaking, if not a swim or maybe even damage a canoe. It is always best to paddle with friends!

## Other Reaches

Devon to Edmonton is in this guide. The North Saskatchewan river of course continues on and through Saskatchewan joining with the South Saskatchewan east of Prince Alberta. From the Saskatchewan border to The Battlefords there is approximately another 180 kms of similar paddling. There are numerous access points along the way.

## Other Local Activities or Destinations

Whether you are on the river or not, all “old” voyageurs need to visit the historic sites of Victoria Settlement, and Ft. George & Buckingham House. Whitney Lakes Provincial Park has very nice individual and group campsites at Ross Lake that could be the base for a variety of activities and explorations in the eastern part of these reaches.

## Rentals & Shuttles

Rentals:

Mountain Equipment Co-op 780.488.6614

Totem Outdoor Outfitters 780.432.1223

Shuttles: A number of taxi companies are available for reaches close to Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan.



the “Shuttle Equipped” canoe on Bird Island, below Heinsburg, August, 2006