

Discover the Historic Milk River by Canoe



The Milk River is formed from small streams and springs arising in Southwestern Alberta and Northern Montana. It joins the Missouri River and eventually drains into the Gulf of Mexico.

This guide covers the two hundred miles of its journey through the most remote, beautiful, and historic prairielands in Southern Alberta.

This river flows through what was part of the Louisiana Territory and also of Ruperts Land. The Milk River country has been claimed by several governments and The Hudson Bay Co., thus the term "Under Eight Flags".

In the late 1800's several N.W. Mounted Police posts were established "at strategic points along the river" to control the whisky trade.

Jerry Potts, the police scout, located one such post six miles west of the town of Milk River where the historic Whoop-Up-Trail crossed the river.

One of the most interesting aspects of the river is its rich archeological history. Many of the sandstone cliffs are covered with petroglyphs and paintings. The earliest known rock art forms were carved by Shoshoni, Sioux, Assisiboine, and the Gros Venture people who held dominion over this area until the middle 1700's. The Blackfoot Confederation, including the Peigan and Blood Tribes, about this time acquired guns and forced the earlier inhabitants from the area. It is very important that no artifact or site be disturbed in any way.

The Milk River was so named by the famous Lewis & Clark Expedition of 1805-1806.



Water

The canoeing season starts shortly after break-up time in April and generally continues into September. Due to an international water agreement with the U.S.A., irrigation water from St. Mary's Lake flows through the Milk River and an acceptable level of canoeing water is maintained throughout the summer. However there are some fluctuations and it may be advisable to contact:

THE TRAVEL ALBERTA CENTRE
Milk River, Alberta, Ph. 647-3990

OR

WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK
Milk River, Alberta, Ph. 647-2364

The river water is relatively unpolluted; however it should not be used for drinking unless boiled or chemically treated. Drinking water may be obtained at campgrounds at Del Bonita, Milk River, Gold Springs, and Writing-On-Stone Park.

River Safety and Comfort

The Milk River is considered an easy river to float. However, a few hazards do exist. Some sections of the river are very remote and extra planning and precautions should be taken due to the difficulty of access. Extra rations should be carried to allow for unanticipated delays due to weather or head winds. Rattlesnakes may be encountered throughout the length of the river and hikers and campers should be careful where they place their hands and feet.

A few fencewires across the river may be encountered and should be approached with caution.

The Milk River is a fairly shallow narrow stream 200 miles of river in Alberta may be run by practised beginners as there are no rapids that exceed Class 1. However the section of river between Gold Springs Park and the Wier Bridge may cause some difficulty due to many "rock gardens", hidden boulders and overhanging cliffs.

The river is a fairly shallow and narrow stream that rarely exceeds 60 feet in width. The overall gradient is 6 to 7 feet per mile and never exceeds 20 feet per mile at any time.



Sections and Scenic Quality

The section from Whisky Gap to the town of Milk River consists of unbroken prairie grasslands, and the low shoreline permits an almost unobstructed view of the surrounding ridges and coulees.

The river becomes entrenched from the town of Milk River to Writing-On-Stone Park and has cut a passage through sandstone cliffs and hoodoos. Below the park the river enters a vast grassland coulee and then into a badland section where the carved banks and hillsides create a moonlike landscape of stark beauty.

The lower canyon of the Milk River surpasses the scenic beauty of any other similar area and is the deepest valley in the plains area of Canada.

This part of the canyon has a very interesting semi-desert environment that harbors several plants and animals found nowhere else in Canada. The area is very rich in archaeological and Paleontological material which can be observed but must not be removed.

Egress from the lower canyons is very difficult over private land and permission must be obtained.

The River Miles

from one access point to the next

The river miles from one access point to the next are as follows. -

Whisky Gap to River crossing north of Del Bonita - Approximately 20 miles.

Del Bonita to Milk River - 64 miles

Milk River to Gold Springs - 12 miles

Gold Springs to Coffin Bridge - 11 miles

Coffin Bridge to Poverty Rock - 7 miles

Poverty Rock to Wier Bridge - 8 miles

Wier Bridge to Writing-On-Stone Park - 4 miles

Writing-On-Stone Park to Deer Creek Bridge - 8 miles

Deer Creek Bridge to Aden Bridge - 17 miles

Aden Bridge to Pinhorn Ranch - 28 miles

Pinhorn Ranch to Lower Canyon & Montana Border - 31 miles (difficult egress)



Fuel

Fire wood is scarce for the upper 60 miles of the river.

Make sure your fire is dead out before retiring or leaving your camp site.

EXTREME CAUTION MUST BE USED WITH FIRES

Weather

Extremes in summer temperature and weather are common. Temperatures may exceed 28 degrees celsius but thundershowers may occur along with gusty winds. All gear should be placed in watertight containers. However, the summer weather is "for the most part" quite comfortable and canoeing on the Milk River may be enjoyed from April until September.

Garbage and Waste

Please pack out all garbage and leave a clean campsite for others to enjoy.

Clothing

Tennis shoes are desirable when canoeing but hiking boots will make exploring shoreline areas easier. Basic necessities should include rain gear, long sleeve shirts, jacket, suntan lotion, and a shade hat and sunglasses.

Boating Regulations

Approved life jackets are required for each boater.

Land Owner Considerations

A great deal of private land is located adjacent to the river. You are the landowners guest if you step on their land. - Remember - USE RESPECT.

Flora

Trees are scarce for the first 70 miles of the River, but after moving eastward from Poverty Rock, stands of cottonwood can be seen. Wolfwillow, Saskatoon and Chokecherry line the shores. Also clumps of Buffalo Berry are present, with Sagebrush and Cactus covering the hills.

Fauna

The Milk River valley abounds with wildlife, Antelope, both Whitetail and Mule Deer are present, along with Coyotes, Badger, Beaver, and Cottontail Rabbits. The birdlife is abundant. It is very important that the wildlife remain undisturbed. Remember Use Respect..

River Ethics Means: -

1. Pack out what you pack in.
2. Keep your vehicle on established roads.
3. Respect the quiet solitude along the river.
4. Observe safe boating standards.
5. Maintain the beauty of your campsite by using existing fire rings and deadfall.
6. Make sure your fire is dead out when leaving camp.
7. Have all pets under control.
8. Be careful with firearms.
9. Enjoy the wildlife but do not disturb their young.
10. Help preserve historical features by leaving them unspoiled and intact.
11. Taking nothing from this area but pictures and pleasant memories.

Canoeing Responsibility

The Milk River Canoe Club assumes no responsibility for the misuse of this information.

The decision to paddle this particular river rests solely with the paddler.

214 RIVER MILES

Mileage Between Points on the River

4	Whiskey Gap
24	20 Del Bonita
88	84 64 Milk River
99	95 75 11 Gold Springs
111	107 87 23 12 Coffin Bridge
120	116 96 32 21 9 Poverty Rock
126	122 102 38 27 15 6 Weir Bridge
133	129 109 45 34 22 13 7 Writing-On-Stone
138	134 114 50 39 27 18 12 5 Deer Creek Bridge
151	145 131 67 56 44 35 29 22 17 Aden Bridge
179	173 159 95 84 72 63 57 50 45 28 Pinhorn Ranch
214	210 190 126 115 103 94 88 81 76 59 31 US Border

