

# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE

Your Guide to paddling the  
lakes and rivers of the  
Battle River Watershed.

#PaddleTheBattle



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Version 2, November 2019



# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: BIG KNIFE PROVINCIAL PARK

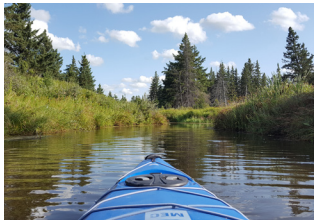
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## Why Go?

Big Knife Provincial Park and the surrounding area has some of the most beautiful scenery in the watershed. There is dense coniferous forest, large hoodoos, and beautiful coulees. Not only that, but once in the park you have access to kilometers of hiking trails, spacious wooded campsites, day use areas, fire pits and picnic spots, playgrounds, and washrooms. The boat launch area here is very accessible, but may also be busy with fishing boats.



## Know Before You Go

This section of the Battle River was dammed in 1956 to create a reservoir for the electricity generating station, and because of this it may feel more like you are paddling on a lake than a river. There are many areas to explore, just make sure you can find your way back out if you explore in the cattails! The warm water leaving the generating station keeps some of the river from freezing up in winter, attracting a variety of birds.



## Plant and Animal Life

The mix of both white spruce and aspen forest makes this a hot-spot for wildlife viewing opportunities! It is common to see moose and deer in the park, and there has also been an abundance of beaver activity along Big Knife Creek and the parks many wetlands. Bald and Golden Eagles are often soaring overhead to feed on fish, as do the peregrine falcon who nest at the Generating Station.



## Local Attractions

### Hoodoos

Walking among the hoodoos is fun for all ages, and is an unexpected treat in this region. It's like a mini Drumheller, right in our own backyard. You can take the easy walk along the River Flats trail to the Hoodoos, then climb the huge hills or admire them from below. Watch out for cacti!



### Battle River Generating Station

This facility is a major source of electricity in the area. Since it was built in 1956 it has burned coal from the Paintearth mine. The mine can be viewed traveling south on Hwy 56, and you can visit the interpretive site a few miles north from the park entrance to learn more. As of 2019 the facility is transitioning from coal to natural gas.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: DRIED MEAT LAKE

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## Why Go?

Dried Meat Lake is only about 20 minutes south-east of Camrose. Dried Meat Lake is a naturally wide section of the Battle River. The Edberg Weir was built in 1975 (then heightened in 2010) to dam the waters as a drinking source for the City of Camrose. The dam has also created stable water levels, ideal for paddling. The maximum depth of the lake is 3.7 meters so you won't have to maneuver your canoe over beaver dams or shallows even late into summer. It's an ideal spot of novice paddlers or if you don't want to shuttle a vehicle.

## Know Before You Go

This lake is a major recreational hub; be wary of waves made by passing power boats. Prepare for these waves by turning into the wave, instead of letting it splash the side of your boat which is far less stable. Strong winds can also create waves and increase your traveling time if blowing the wrong direction. The lake is naturally nutrient rich and gets additional nutrient loads so algae blooms are common in the summer. Some types, such as blue-green algae are dangerous if ingested and should be avoided. Please see the Alberta Health Services Water Advisory page for updates.



## Plant and Animal Life

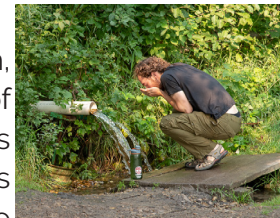
The lake is an important staging ground for migratory birds such as snow geese and swans. These birds are protected by the Restricted Wildlife Area designation on the lake until November 1st each year. In the summer months, massive pelicans swoop overhead in flocks of up to 50. Bald eagles are a common sight around the lake, feeding on northern pike and other fish that are also the target of people fishing. Aberhart bridge (1) and the Edberg weir (2) are especially popular spots for anglers to catch pike and the occasional walleye. The weir was built with an eight-bay step-pool fish ladder to allow fish into the lake from downstream.

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## Local Attractions

### Beesley's Spring

North of Tillicum Beach, a side road south of Paradise Drive leads to this freshwater spring. It flows year-round thanks to the surrounding rock formations, and it is tested regularly. Stop by to fill up your water bottles.



### Tillicum Beach Park

This small park on the north shore of the lake contains a small campground operated by Camrose County. There you can access first-come first served camp sites, fire pits, washrooms, playground and the boat launch. Maybe make your trip an overnight expedition!

### Dried Meat Hill

The name dried meat comes from First Nation's who would combine dry bison meat with berries to make pemmican. Local sources say, Saskatoon bushes still grow in abundance here. However, the hill has been impacted by a gravel mine.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: BATTLE LAKE

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## Why Go?

Battle Lake and its surrounding landscape are the headwaters of the Battle River. It offers a beautiful micro climate and is home to unique animal and plant life due to the higher elevation and increased moisture. The County of Wetaskiwin has encouraged preservation of the natural forest and shoreline, so you will see few signs of disturbance and lots of animal life.



## Know Before You Go

There is no significant movement of water in the lake and the river downstream only has a strong current during spring runoff. Powerboats are allowed on the lake but are limited to 12km/h, minimizing their disturbance, but wind can also cause substantial waves and whitecaps on the open water. In the Battle River, there are several beaver dams as well as shallow spots depending on the time of year, so only paddle downstream if you are able and willing to lift your boat over obstacles. After crossing Highway 13, the river becomes even more shallow and difficult to navigate. It is not recommended to paddle except during spring runoff. During mid-summer, watch for blue-green algae advisories from Alberta Health Services.



## Plant and Animal Life

Large flocks of Franklin's gulls enjoy the fish in Battle Lake, but you might also see pelicans and loons on the water's surface. Fish species in the lake include yellow perch, northern pike, white sucker, lake whitefish, and burbot. Plant highlights include water lilies, ferns, and a greater diversity of tree species such as yellow birch and hazelnut than you generally find in other parts of the watershed.



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## Local Attractions

### Fern Glade

The 4-H Center's 7 km of walking trails pass through Alberta's largest natural fern glade, where ostrich ferns can grow over 1m tall. Numerous springs and streams provide the perfect habitat for these ancient plants. Access is limited when kids are at camp- call ahead.

### Mount Butte

Mount Butte is on the north-west corner of the lake. Though it is hardly a mountain, it is actually one of the highest elevation areas in the entire Battle River Watershed! There is a steep trail up the south side, accessible from the shore. To approach the mountain by car, drive 5 minutes past the campground until you come across a gate leading to a meadow and oil lease. You can leave your car parked at the gate while exploring! A trail there will take you past the meadow, across a small stream, and up the mountain. The trail gets moderately steep in some places. At a leisurely pace, it should take approximately one hour to summit.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: LITTLE BEAVER LAKE

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## Why Go?

Little Beaver Lake provides paddlers of all experience levels a chance to get out and explore close to home! Camrose, Ponoka, Wetaskiwin, and Maskwacis are only just over a half hour away from this gem beside the village of Ferintosh. Little Beaver Lake is a great choice for paddlers not interested in traveling great distances or dealing with shuttle driving arrangements.



## Know Before You Go

Little Beaver Lake is a place where you can completely immerse yourself in nature. No motor boats are allowed here, and the majority of the lake has been left natural. The deepest point of the lake is found near the dock, but gets much shallower towards the north shore. Blue-green algae advisories are rare but check the Alberta Health Services before swimming.

The lake is the headwaters of Meeting Creek, which flows south through the town of the same name and past Donalda. It meets the Red Willow Creek before emptying into the Battle River. Meeting Creek may be navigatable in high water, but is untested by us.



## Plant and Animal Life

Little Beaver Lake is home to a variety of fish and minnows. The most commonly angled for is fish here is Northern Pike. A rough hiking trail follows the east side of the lake and offers a peek into the lives of the creatures here. If you're lucky you may see a beaver or muskrat. In the spring, the lake is surrounded by wild roses in full bloom, and during the summertime the trails are a mycology (mushroom) enthusiast's dream!



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## Local Attractions

### Ferintosh Campground

The Ferintosh Campground is conveniently located on the eastern shore of Little Beaver Lake, only a short walk away from Ferintosh amenities, which includes the Ferintosh Hotel-a rustic pub with a patio. A free day use area includes the playground, picnic tables and walking trail. Paid camping gives you access to sites with water and electricity, and washroom facilities. You can also pay \$25.00 for a daily rental of the picnic shelter. The campground has a central boat launch making getting in and out a breeze.



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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: WAINWRIGHT

From Fabyan Campground to Riverdale Mini Park

## Why Go?

The paddle from Fabyan Campground to Riverdale Mini Park provides beautiful scenery, wildlife sightings, and calm waters. This is one of the more natural sections of the river, with healthy riparian areas throughout. This paddle is about 25km long and should take 4-6 hours, depending on water levels given the river's meandering nature and slow moving waters. Both the put in and take out locations are at parks with ample parking and washrooms, and are only about a 20 minute drive from each other.



## Know Before You Go

This is a long stretch of river- get an early start and be sure you have enough food and water. There were a few fences crossing the river, but there was always a large opening to pass through. The fences were easy to see from a distance and we had lots of time to maneuver around. Also, businesses close early in these parts, so have a plan for where you will go for dinner, and make sure you have a full tank! If you can, plan for dinner at the Honey Pot in Wainwright- it's our favorite.

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## Local Attractions

### Mistahiya Retreat Centre

Just down river from Riverdale is a jewel of the Battle River valley- Mistahiya (named for the Cree word for Grizzly Bear). Once a ski resort, it now hosts private events and the Come by the Hills Music festival in August. Check their website for events. A 7.5km nature trail with wildlife lookout tour is publicly available.



Take-out just past this Hwy 41 bridge.



The Hwy 14 bridge at Fabyan

## Plant and Animal Life

The soil along this stretch is very sandy, making a unique habitat. You will see a lot of sandbar willow along the banks and sizable sandbars to stop for breaks. Take a closer look in the water to find crayfish jetting around the riverbed, who love the sandy habitat. As you're paddling, keep your eyes peeled for bison bones and petrified wood sticking out of the banks! Local paddlers know this route is a treasure trove for fossils, but make sure to contact Alberta Environment if you find anything bigger than bison!

As for birds, bring your binoculars! We saw; Osprey, Bald Eagle, Cooper's & Redtail Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Kingfisher, Catbird, and Goldfinch.

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### Riverdale Mini-Park

The park, operated by the MD of Wainwright is serviced with a golf course, mini putt, playground, campsites, and clubhouse (check ahead for operating hours). The take out point is a beautiful beach, a naturally sandy section of the river which is a nice place to stretch out after your paddle.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: BIG JOHN ROUTE

Hwy 53 East of Donalda to Big Knife Provincial Park

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## Why Go?

If you subscribe to the mentality that life is not the destination but the journey, this route is for you. Packed with large oxbows, you can paddle all day but not get far. Don't let that deter you, this is a beautiful route and worth the time it takes. You will paddle 30.5km, which took us 7.5 hours (including 1 hour of breaks) in Sept. You will also paddle through the confluence with Meeting Creek.

This section is named for John Pearson, a tall man with a big voice from Donalda. John was a BRWA board member who passed away in 2019. Be sure to tell a big story after you get back!

## Know Before You Go

Like most of the Battle River, there is no cell phone reception in the valley. If you need to make an emergency call, climb to the top of the hills.

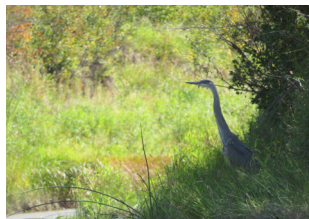
The Battle River Generating Station lies just downstream of Big Knife, and because of this the water flows extra slow in the second half of the stretch. As you near Big Knife it feels more like paddling a lake.

Towards the end be careful to follow the river- it could be easy to head into the lake-like cattail marshes and get off track. This would be very difficult in the dark- give yourself lots of time!



## Plant and Animal Life

This is the perfect route for paddlers looking to enjoy the watershed at it's most raw and unrefined, with a lush riparian area providing excellent wildlife habitat. Moose and mule deer have been spotted near shore looking for a drink. The sun set as we neared the end point, and the beavers got very active-it was fun to see them swim back and forth across the river and slap their tail as we neared. Golden and Bald eagles are also found in the park, so keep your eyes on the skies!



## Local Attractions

### Big Knife Provincial Park

See our Big Knife Paddle guide for more details about this park. There is lots to explore and enjoy at the end of your journey. The highlight being the Hoodoos on the Riverflats Trail. Also in the area is the Diplomat Mine Interpretive Site, just off the highway adjacent to the plant.



### Local Taverns

Depending on what direction you are heading after your paddle, there are (at least) three great pubs to grab a bite; east to the Donalda Tavern (don't miss seeing the world's biggest oil lamp!), North to Big Willy's Bar at the Heisler Hotel, or south to the Halkirk Hotel. The authentic charm of these places is a reason to love these small towns. Call ahead to make sure they are open.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: PETER FIDLER ROUTE

South of Bittern Lake to Ross' Flats at Duhamel (Hwy 21)

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## Why Go?

This could be a short, easy, and fulfilling route, or put in further upstream and have a full day. Close to both Camrose and Wetaskiwin, the area is easily accessible, as are the put-in and take out points.

We put in at the RR 215A Bridge, where the Peter Fidler Monument is. It took about 2 hours to go the 8km to Ross' Flats on Hwy 21. For a longer journey, start upstream at Twp Rd 462 A. The bridges are within sight of each other, but add 8km to the journey.

There are no obstacles on this route and it offers beautiful views of the valley. The south valley slope is a continuous forest, which helps you recognize which direction you are heading along the meanders.



## Know Before You Go

Wear rubber boots to get in and out of the water. The banks are muddy and you might sink in. Be respectful of the farmers field at Ross' Flats. There is a gate opening which allows you to access the river from the field.



## Plant and Animal Life

During our paddle in late April, the spring migration was in full swing and we saw thousands of snow geese flying in their great flocks heading north. We also saw multiple pelicans, great blue herons, ducks, and muskrat. The banks are high along much of this reach so you don't get a full view of the surrounding landscape until you climb up onto land. We were also lucky to find crocuses in bloom. Spring is a wonderful time to Paddle the Battle!



## Local Attractions

### Peter Fidler Monument

European surveyor and map maker Peter Fidler is said to have crossed the Battle River here in November 14, 1792. There is a nice little monument for him on the RR 215A bridge. Have a read and imagine what they valley would have looked like over 200 years ago. Can you see the Bison?



### Ross' Flats Campground and Historical Bridge

In 1910, the Grand Trunk Pacific made one of the worlds tallest and longest wooden trestle bridges across the Battle River. Details about it and the town of Duhamel are on the interpretive sign at this Campground. Although fairly basic, the campground provides washrooms, picnic shelter, fire pits and unserviced camp sites.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: CAMROSE SOUTH

Ross' Flats at Duhamel (Hwy 21) to Aberhart Bridge

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## Why Go?

This is a must do for everyone who wants to Paddle the Battle. The route is about 18km, which we did in 3 hours (including breaks) during spring runoff. There are no obstructions along the route and no rapids (small ones do occur other places) so this is also a great route for families.



Aberhart Bridge

## Know Before You Go

This is a good route to do in the spring when the water is flowing. Having some current to help push you along will help during the twists and turns. Although you are somewhat sheltered from wind, a strong wind can feel difficult to paddle into, so try to go out on a calm day.

As you near the end, you will see a few houses (named Ferlow Junction) on the north slope, and cross under a railroad bridge. Here you are at the confluence of the Stoney Creek into the Battle. Once you see the Aberhart Bridge, you still have about 1 hour to paddle. There are large meanders here!



## Plant and Animal Life

In the spring the river tends to flood over the land upstream of Aberhart Bridge, and large flocks of geese land here, especially in spring and fall during migration. In addition, pelicans are often spotted in the area, as well as the stunning and graceful trumpeter swan. As you paddle watch

for beaver lodges made into the sides of the bank, and muskrat houses in the cattails. We have also found bones along here, once bringing home a deer skull!



## Local Attractions

### Migratory Birds

Between the Aberhart Bridge and the city of Camrose are two lesser-appreciated bird watching hot spots that provide unique habitat for our feathered friends: the lagoon and the landfill. Both of these locations are known by local birders as a great place to find less common species in the watershed.



### Dried Meat Lake

Just past Aberhart Bridge is the beginning of Dried Meat Lake. Check out our Guide to that paddle for more details.

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: PONOKA

Hwy 2A to Town to Bobtail Rd

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## Why Go?

Despite crossing several highway, train, and walking bridges, and traveling through both the town of Ponoka and farmland, this stretch of the river is very peaceful and a beautiful paddle. The riverbanks, especially along the top half of the stretch, are steep, forested, and in excellent health. This reach crosses several beaver dams and shallows, but it still relatively navigable even when the river is low during midsummer.



## Know Before You Go

As with many places along the Battle River, the flow rates are only significant in early spring, tapering off around mid-June. Beaver dams and man-made obstacles exist along this stretch. Past 50 Ave, the water gets much shallower as it nears Bobtail Road, so you may be required to walk through the water and pull your canoe behind you.

Keep in mind that trash and other household objects tend to litter the riverbed of streams that run through cities- always keep your eye out for hazards.



## Plant and Animal Life

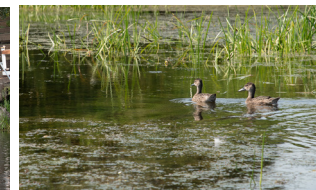
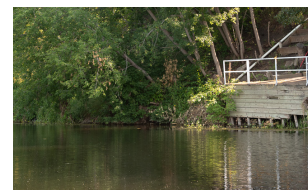
The healthy riparian areas provide habitat for a variety of animals. Ducks and geese raise their young along the river and swallows live in the riverbanks and under the bridges. The forest surrounding the river is a good place to spot deer and also provides food and building material for beavers. Beavers also build dams that Battle River canoeists become accustomed to crossing. Leeches, though not overly prolific, will attach to one's feet as you stir up the riverbed during the paddling divergences. Check between your toes! At certain times of year, you can also see large, pin clouds in shallow water. These are copepods, a small crustacean that is an important food source for fish.

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## Local Attractions

### Historic Dam

The remnants of the C.P.R. Dam can still be seen in the Battle River river at certain times of year. This dam has served many purposes: including transporting timber from Pigeon Lake, and at one time was even the hot spot for Northern Pike fishing and swimming. The remnants of this historic dam can be found adjacent to Chipman Avenue in Ponoka.



### Ponoka Stampede

Ponoka is known for being the rodeo hot spot in the watershed, and if you plan your paddle for the Canada Day long weekend be sure to take part in all the festivities they have to offer! From concerts, to a carnival midway, farmers market and of course, rodeo events of all kinds!

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# BATTLE RIVER PADDLE GUIDE: FERRY POINT REACH

Edberg Weir (Hwy 56) to Ferry Point Campground

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## Why Go?

There are very few meanders along this section of river! If you want a "straight-forward" paddle, this is as good as you will get on the Battle. The river is wide and maintains a good level of flow long into the summer. The reach is about 12km long, so plan to be on the water for 3-5 hours, depending on the flow. The shuttle between put-in and take-out is only about 15 min.



## Know Before You Go

There is a No Boating sign at the weir. We've checked with the GOA and have approval that people are able to put in here, just do not try to go over the weir (or even go near it!)

The BRWA did a riparian restoration program along here in 2014 to support landowners in keeping cattle out of the river. Although many folks participated, you will still see a lot of cows drinking from the water. Try not to splash it in your mouth and wash your hands before eating.

If you need to get a bite to eat after you take-out, try the Double Dam Golf Course!



## Plant and Animal Life

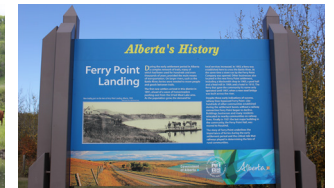
The weir at the start of this stretch changes the aquatic ecosystem in just the right way to create a birdwatchers paradise! Unlike a dam, the weir allows some water to pass by, creating fast flowing water that freezes later than other parts of the river. For this reason, fishing birds like bald eagles frequent this spot for an easy spring or fall meal. In the summer, fish begin traveling through the river to spawn, and sometimes encounter a lineup at the fish ladder- their only entrance into Dried Meat Lake. This attracts birds galore! A great blue heron is known to frequent the weir, can you spot him?



## Local Attractions

### Ferry Point Campground

A ferry boat to transport people and goods across the river was established here in 1902. There was a small but vibrant community here, until the railway boom drew people to towns along rail lines. There is a small campground with a playground, picnic shelter, washrooms, and campsites available seasonally.



### Meeting Creek

The Railway Station and Grain Elevator are both historical landmarks and volunteers have worked hard to maintain their original charm and create exhibits. Call 780-672-3099 for guided tours. There is also the Linear Park Trails, 2 km trail surrounded by native prairie complete with a labyrinth and interpretive signs.

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