

BEAR RIVER MERCANTILE – BOWRON LAKE BC

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Info Sheet #1 - Gear Suggestions for a Backcountry Paddling Trip

The equipment listed below is only a suggestion of what is needed to safely paddle the Bowron Lake Circuit.

Luxuries such as folding chairs and tables are nice, but please remember, the more you bring, the more you will have to carry over the portages. There are about 10 km of portage trails around the circuit. Even though most people transport their canoe over these portages with a canoe cart (strap on wheels), the Park limits the amount of gear you can carry inside your canoe while portaging it on top of the wheels. Only 28kg (60 lbs.) of gear can be carried inside your canoe, all the rest must be packed on your backs. Backpacks are essential for this. (Note – West side paddlers and kayakers are exempt from this weight limit)(See Info Sheet #3 for more info on Portaging and Packing your Canoe)

Some essential items are exempt from this weight limit, meaning you can transport them in your canoe while portaging, over and above your allowable 28 kg. These items are gear belonging to your canoe such as the canoe itself, cart, PFD's, paddles, rescue throw rope, bailer and sponge; and items deemed essential such as an axe, daily drinking water (only need to carry one day's worth, you pump or treat water at each campsite for each day), a tarp (emergency shelter) and first aid kit.

For your safety, you should ensure that you can load all your equipment and paddlers into the canoe and still have at least 15cm (6 inches) of freeboard when the canoe is floating in the water. (Freeboard is the vertical distance between the water and the rim of your canoe at its lowest point). You should test this before you leave home. If there is less than 15 cm of freeboard, you either have too much gear or too small a canoe.

Equipment for paddling:

- Canoe or Kayak
- Three paddles (one extra per canoe as per BC Boating Regulations)
- Life jackets/PFD - one per person (mandatory)
- 30m (100ft) of 5mm rope to tie up canoe

- Flashlight (if paddling after dark - BC Boating Regulations)
- Good Raingear - hat, jacket and pants
- High energy snacks & water bottle
- Small personal survival kit- Band-Aids, aspirin (see Emergency Kits, Info Sheet #4)
- Repair Kit (See Emergency Kits Info, Sheet #4)
- Food barrel (part of the 28 kg carried in your canoe cart)
- Tarp & Rope – to tie gear into the canoe
- Rescue throw bag, bailer and sponge (BC Boating Regulations)
- Whistle (1 per canoe as per BC Boating Regulations)
- Water shoes or old running shoes (something that can get wet)
- Sunscreen, sun hat and sunglasses
- Map of the lakes (park brochure)

Equipment for Portaging:

- Canoe Cart (if using) or sturdy carrying yoke on your canoe
- Large comfortable pack back or river pack with shoulder straps and hip belt
- Hiking boots or sturdy walking shoe and socks
- Foot care kit (see Emergency Kits, Info Sheet #4)

Personal Camping Equipment:

- Tent - good quality with waterproof fly, mosquito netting and pegs
- Sleeping bag to at least 0°C (32°F) & Sleeping pad
- Flashlight/ headlight and spare batteries
- Bowl, cup, plate & eating utensils
- Personal water bottle
- Pocket/ camp knife
- Insect repellent, lip balm, sun screen
- Toilet Paper
- Personal wash kit - towel, tooth /hair care, contact lens care/ medications

Group Camping Equipment:

- One burner portable stove and fuel (two burner if you're a large group)
- Tarps for stringing over tents and cooking area / ropes
- Water treatment system and 10 liter water jug
- Cooking pots and pans - lightweight nesting type
- 1 Pair of leather work gloves for camp work and handling pots over a fire
- Can opener, spatulas, large spoon & other cooking utensils
- Small folding grill (optional some campsites have built-in grills on the fire rings)
- Dishwashing gear - scrubby, biodegradable dish soap, dish towel
- Axe or hatchet (full-size axe is best)
- Matches/ lighter in waterproof container
- Fire starter
- Group First aid kit (See Emergency Kits Info Sheet #4)
- Bear Spray (optional – one for every two or three persons is sufficient)
- LED Camp lantern (no glass globes) and batteries

Clothing Suggestions:

Use fleece, polyester or wool clothing, and dress in layers. Jeans and other tight weave cotton items are not the best for the Circuit as they do not dry easily in damp weather and Bowron is known to have damp weather, even in the summer. A fleece or wool hat/toque can be a life saver, since a high proportion of body heat is lost through the head. A toque can also keep you warm in your sleeping bag during cool nights.

Following is a sample clothing list to use as a guideline:

- 2 pairs of pants; wool blend or pile (fleece)
- 2 t-shirts (not cotton if possible)
- 2 long sleeve shirts, 1 warm, 1 light for sun protection
- 1 wool or pile sweater
- 1 pair summer shorts or bathing suit
- 2 sets underwear

- 1 pair long johns (polypropylene) can also be used as your sleeping clothes
- 3 pair fleece or wool socks
- Sun hat and wool hat (toque)
- Warm jacket (wind proof & loose enough to fit over several layers)
- 1 extra vest or light jacket
- 1 good quality set of rain pants, jacket and hat (already mentioned in paddling equip)
- Warm gloves or mitts
- Hiking boots and water shoes (already mentioned in other lists)

Of these plan on wearing one set of clothes and packing the second set. Pack as frugal as possible, backcountry camping is not a fashion show.

Not Essential but Nice:

- Camera, film and spare batteries
- Mosquito head net
- Field guides to birds, plants etc. and binoculars
- Deck of Cards
- Reading and writing materials (a trip journal)
- Collapsible fishing rod and some lures / fishing license
- Small folding camp stool

What past Bowron Paddlers have to say:

- Jeans get wet and stay wet, they are too hard to dry.
- Use lightweight nylon with rubber coating or Gortex rain gear. The heavy rubber stuff is too bulky.
- Always bring a real (rubber or nylon) rain suit, small ponchos are not enough. Contrary to what some people say, Gortex does not stay waterproof, especially after an hour of heavy rain. Make sure your gear is in good condition and waterproof everything before arriving.
- Rubber boots might have been nice - when running shoes get wet they stay wet.
- Filtering your water saves on the extra fuel you would have to pack in, if you were to boil it.
- Make sure everything is tied securely into the canoe at all times.
- Moisturizing cream would have been nice.

- If I had more time I would spend 12 days and poke around the edges more.
- A large axe was of more use than a small hatchet.
- Eat plenty of food throughout your trip and get a lot of sleep.
- Bring spare clothing (in a waterproof bag) and dress in layers.
- Carry plenty of matches and lighters, again in a waterproof container.
- Bring both an axe and a stove, don't assume pre-split wood or the ability to get a fire going.
- If you dump your canoe in cold water, make it to shore immediately, get out of your wet clothes and get warm.
- Listen to your body; if you are shivering, have numb appendages or are drowsy - get warm.
- Bring a winter hat, you never know in Canada.
- Always wear your lifejacket, hypothermia sets in fast and spares no stupidity.
- Even if you use barrels or dry bags, nothing stays totally waterproof. Just to be safe, keep your sleeping bag and emergency clothes in sealed plastic bags inside the river pack.
- Add an extra day's worth of food for every few days of your trip in case you have to wait out bad weather.
- If you get hypothermia, put your homophobic feelings aside. The best warmth you can get is wrapping yourself around your partner - body heat can save you.
- Don't forget to take your clothes off the clothesline before condensation sets in around dusk and dawn or they'll get even wetter.
- Keep a snack bar, emergency blanket, and fire starter in your lifejacket pocket in case you get separated from your group, or have your survival kit in a fanny pack.
- Pull out the stove and heat up soup or a hot beverage at lunch; it'll warm you inside and out.
- Alcohol and canoeing don't mix, but if you're having a wee bit around the campfire drink in moderation as alcohol lowers your body temperature.
- Set up your tent out of the wind.

Paddling in Cold Weather:

The Bowron circuit can be gorgeous in the shoulder months of autumn. Cool, crisp mornings, sunny Indian summer days and dazzling fall colors make this time of year especially appealing. And to top it off, most people are back to work and the bugs are gone for another year. The solitude and relaxation that the autumn months offer make it a prime paddling time.

Even so, during September and October the air temperatures can drop to near freezing and it doesn't take long before a dunking becomes a body numbing experience. A little chilly discomfort can be one thing, but hypothermia can pose a real danger to canoeists. Keeping your body temperature at a normal level requires a little common sense and sound preparation and can go a long way in making an autumn trip not only a highlight of the year but an enjoyably, comfortable one at that.

Your autumn checklist should include lots of warm clothes. Neoprene water boots and socks can help keep feet warm. A warm paddling jacket and polyester long-sleeved shirts help protect you from the cutting winds and are quick drying. Neoprene or wool gloves aren't a bad idea, either.

Around the campfire, fleece is the way to go - slightly expensive but, like wool, it stays warm when it gets wet and it dries fairly quickly. Wool is great but it is little less comfortable than fleece and it gets heavy when wet. Both can also be worn on the water as long as you have extra clothing for the night. The main thing to remember is to stay away from cotton. Cotton fabrics don't retain any warmth when wet and take forever to dry.

Hiking boots keep your feet warm and dry and are preferable to running shoes, at any time of the year. Gortex-lined boots are great, so are leather hiking boots, just make sure you waterproof them well. If your shoes do get wet, wear plastic bags on your feet. It's better than slogging around camp wishing you were at home. Add some wool socks to your wardrobe and you will be a happy camper.

When it's time to lay your head down for the night, use a good Thermo-rest sleeping mattress, spruce boughs, your partner, or anything, to keep you off the cold ground. Not enough can be said about having a decent, cold-weather sleeping bag or a loved one to cuddle with. Flannel or fleece bag liners can also provide an extra bit of warmth. If you are still cold, a light reflective survival blanket or even a tarp will surprise you with the warmth it can provide, just don't put your head under it or you will get soaked by condensation.

This takes care of your camping gear, which as you can see, adds up to quite a bit of weight and bulk. Over and above this you have to include your food (see Backcountry Food, Info Sheet #2) so it is imperative that you pack as sparingly and light as possible.

I hope you find this info sheet helpful. I look forward to any other suggestions or comments you can provide.



Gear for 2 persons / 9 days in September: L to R on couch 1) Red river pack - two sleeping pads, tent, misc. stuff, first aid kit, rope. The emergency tarp (shelter) is in front. 2) Orange dry bag – day pack, snacks, water bottles, sun cream, hats, sun glasses, etc. 3) Grey Pack – clothes, jackets, toiletries, personal items. 4) Red river pack – 3 sleeping bags (one extra for cold evenings), ground sheet, 2nd tarp for over the tent, sleeping clothes, miscellaneous night time stuff, camera bag & fishing gear attached. L

to R on floor 5) blue barrel - food, stove, fuel. 6) Orange dry bag - spare shoes, rain gear, toques, gloves. 7) Red top bucket - Kitchen kit (pots, pans, dishes, utensils, clean-up stuff etc.) 8) Yellow top barrel – more food, bread, perishables, misc items that wouldn't fit in the barrel. Axe is not shown.



Same gear loaded in the Canoe



Loaded Canoe with lots of Freeboard

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