

BROKEN SKULL RIVER

23 DAY CANOEING ADVENTURE



Nahanni National Park Reserve named a "Must-See Place" by National Geographic!

PADDLING BELOW THE VAMPIRE PEAKS.
PHOTO: NRA ARCHIVES



TRIP DETAILS

Clear water, unforgettable views and an intimate wilderness experience, the Broken Skull offers all of this from its beginning high in the alpine to its mouth at the South Nahanni river.

SKILL LEVEL

Class 2 whitewater

RENDEZVOUS POINT

Fort Nelson, BC

DURATION

23 Days (includes 11 days on the Nahanni River)

TRIP TYPE

Canoe

ITINERARY

DAY 1

Rendezvous at the Fort Nelson airport upon arrival of the Central Mountain Air flight. Following introductions, we will load the van and begin our drive north. We will make a brief stop in Fort Nelson on our way to the Alaska Highway where we will shop for snacks for the drive. Our route to the headwaters of the Nahanni River takes us west through the northeast corner of the Rocky Mountains.

The landscape has a rugged beauty all of its own. We will make sightseeing stops at Stone Mountain and Muncho Lake Provincial Parks. Guests in the past have lost count of the number of wildlife sightings on the first day alone. From the van we are sure to see stone sheep and mountain caribou along the way. We will camp

for the night at Liard Hot Springs where we will enjoy a relaxing soak.

DAY 2

Back on the road we'll drive to Watson Lake and walk through the historic Sign Post Forest. At Watson Lake, Yukon we drive north on the Robert Campbell Highway and then onto the Nahanni Range Road for our detour back into the Northwest Territories and the road to our flight base on Flat Lake. This remote road boasts incredible scenery and will give you a peak of the mountain ranges you will fly over on your way to Divide Lake.

Weather permitting we will make the short flight to Divide Lake upon arriving at Flat Lake. We will enjoy the peace and beauty of this alpine lake as we toast our arrival into the Naat'sich'oh National Park Reserve

and its stunning wilderness. The lake also provides an excellent venue to practice canoeing skills before setting out the following morning.

DAY 3

After an introduction to preparing canoes for travel and river safety we will paddle from Divide Lake onto a crystal clear creek that will take us to Swallow Falls, named for the swallows that nest in the cliffs around the falls.

A short portage through dwarf birch takes us around the falls to the start of a small canyon. Depending on water levels we will paddle or line this tight canyon and revel in the clear water pouring over boulders. We will camp at the exit of the canyon and watch the sun set over the canyon walls.

DAY 4

Shortly after setting out we will arrive at the Broken Skull River and get our first taste of it's famous, friendly whitewater. We will weave our way through boulder fields enjoying class 1-2+ waves. As necessary, we will scout wave trains to identify the best line at our water level.

The whitewater will last for most of the day but will lessen off in time to allow our gaze to shift to the incredible views on all sides.

We will make camp in the heart of the mountains and enjoy delicious three course meals prepared over the fire. There is no shortage of daylight so you can linger around the fire watching the evening light play on the mountain ranges.

DAYS 5-6

The thrills continue on the river with continual stretches of beautiful, friendly whitewater. Standing waves around every corner, perfectly spaced boulders to weave through and the occasional opportunity to 'thread the needle'.

Even the most restrained paddlers won't be able to wipe the smile off their face. There are ample opportunities for hiking and exploration off the river. Your guides will make opportunities available based on the group interest, water levels and weather.

A 'must do' is the Broken Skull hotspots, a 2.5km hike up a small tributary of the Broken Skull river. The water temperatures will not disappoint and after a few days of paddling, the soak will be a welcome chance to revive tired muscles.

For an intrepid few, a dunk in the nearby creek can be interspersed with soaking in the piping hot pools.

DAYS 7-9

As the Broken Skull river grows it maintains its crystal clear water. At this point in the trip some groups have added grizzly bears, porcupines, moose, caribou and wolves to their list of wildlife sightings.

The Broken Skull river is an active wildlife corridor where you will be sure to see tracks of many of these mammals. We will paddle through the 'Mini Gate', named for the Gate on the South Nahanni River. This smaller but equally photo worthy geological feature provides an opportunity for staging fun photo shoots. We will enjoy drifting through the still pools of this special landmark before paddling on to more whitewater.

As we paddle from the Naats'ich'oh Park into the Nahanni National Park Reserve we will get our first glimpses of the Ragged Range which includes the highest peaks in the Northwest territories. We will camp on a gravel bar with small, delicate rocks that will ensure we sleep soundly under the midnight sun.

DAYS 10-11

Dwarf fireweed dots the river's edge with its magenta blossoms as we paddle towards the confluence with the South Nahanni river.

The Vampire Peaks loom large as



PADDLING THE BROKEN SKULL RIVER.
PHOTO: NRA ARCHIVES

the clear water of the Broken Skull swirls into the Nahanni's grey green waters. Paddle 'high fives' will be passed amongst the group as you congratulate yourself on having paddled a river only a handful of groups experience each year.

Now you can sit back and enjoy the quiet waters of the South Nahanni. Put your feet up and gaze into the Cirque of the Unclimbables, the renowned hiking and rock climbing area a two day trek from the South Nahanni river. The armchair glacier of Mount Edna is your first landmark for the impressive peaks of the Cirque.

You may get to wave hello to a group departing from Britnell Creek to hike into the Cirque of the Unclimbables, a gentle reminder that the outside world exists after likely not having seen another group since arriving on the river.

DAY 12-14

We will enjoy an interpretive hike, guided by Nahanni National Park personnel (subject to availability of Park staff) to view the Rabbitkettle Hot Spring and Tufa Mounds. We then begin paddling down river towards Virginia Falls.

This section of the river is dominated by U-shaped valleys which were scoured out by advancing cordilleran

glaciers thousands of years ago.

We paddle 120 km (72 mi.) on the smooth flowing water to Virginia Falls. Along the way we will camp beside beautiful creeks such as Hell Roaring Creek and Flood creek and will feast our eyes on Rabbitkettle Mountain, a myriad of alpine ridges and the Sunblood range.

DAY 15-16

Everyone will appreciate a rest day at Virginia Falls. At over 90 m (300 ft.) Virginia Falls is twice the height of Niagara, and is the spectacular centrepiece of Nahanni National Park.

The options for these days are many – you can lounge in the group camping area, explore the Falls with your camera, or strike off on an invigorating hike to the grassy summit of Sunblood Mountain. Virginia Falls is a fascinating place to discover.

DAY 17

Following our layover day, we complete the 2 km portage around the Falls and reload our canoes. For the following week we will immerse ourselves in the spectacular scenery of the lower Nahanni River.

The lower Nahanni is canyon country and is often described as the Grand Canyon of the North. Beginning with Painted Canyon, so named because of

its brightly coloured walls, you will experience the thrill and excitement of this whitewater section. On this night we will camp in the vicinity of the confluence with the Flat River.

DAY 18

Downstream we enter Third Canyon with its imposing 1200 m walls formed as the Nahanni has carved its way through the Funeral Range.

We will camp in the shadow of the Gate; where the river has sliced a narrow chasm on the apex of a hairpin meander. An optional hike to the top of the Gate presents magnificent views of the river valley with imposing Pulpit Rock 460 m below.

DAY 19

Today finds us completing the 35 km Third Canyon and continuing on through Second Canyon, (15 km) where the Nahanni has carved its route through the Headless Range and into Deadmen Valley.

This valley is known for its legend and mystery made famous by the mysterious deaths of the McLeod Brothers. Here the vista is noticeably different, as the valley opens up, with distant views of the Tlogotsho Plateau.

Deadmen Valley offers an abundance of exploratory options. The massive



PADDLING SPARKLING MOUNTAIN WATERS ON THE
BROKEN SKULL RIVER. PHOTO: NRA ARCHIVES



Prairie Creek alluvial fan provides excellent camping, hiking and wildlife observations.

DAY 20

We start the morning with a run through the exhilarating waves of George's Riffle and on into First Canyon.

The imposing walls of First Canyon reach heights of over 1400 m. Groups often drift the length of this magnificent 26 km canyon, immersed in its splendour. The canyon walls are dotted with hundreds of caves. Close to its exit we will camp for the night at Lafferty's Canyon, with good hiking opportunities.

DAY 21

Following breakfast, it's down to Kraus' Hot Spring for a soothing dip in its 32 C plus waters.

From here we bid farewell to the canyons and make our way to the Nahanni's Splits, a 70 km run through a maze of islands.

DAY 22

On our final morning on the river we will continue on to the Native village of Nahanni Butte. (Pop. approx. 120). This remote community is located on the banks of the Nahanni just above its confluence with the Liard river. A stroll into town provides insight into a culture far removed from most of

North America. Following lunch we will board the Nahanni Butte River taxi for the 15 km ride to the Nahanni Butte Road Landing on the Liard River.

The awaiting shuttle vehicle will take us by road to Fort Simpson. You will need to book accommodation for this final night in Fort Simpson. The group can meet for dinner (not included) at a restaurant in town for a final farewell meal and goodbye to your guides.

DAY 23

After a leisurely morning, you will be transported to the Fort Simpson airport to begin your travels home.

Please note: The above is a tentative agenda and has been designed with much thought to capitalize on the most scenic and exciting parts of the river while making time on other sections. Your guides will adjust the schedule to make the best use of river and weather conditions. We adhere to the departure regulation system of the Park which works to ensure that all river travelers have the same wilderness experience.

Under certain conditions (weather, forest re, plane availability and upriver conditions) we may face a delay in flying into the river. Meals while en route to our float plane base are not included.

SUGGESTED READING

Your guides will carry a small reference library which include field reference books. Following are some books for winter reading:

Nahanni – River of Gold... River of Dreams by Neil Hartling

Nahanni – The River Guide by Peter Jowett & Neil Hartling

Nahanni by Dick Turner

Wings Over the North by Dick Turner

Dangerous River by R.M. Patterson

A Naturalist's Guide to the Arctic by E.C. Pielou

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