

The Algonquin Outfitters Canoe Trip Planning Guide

About this guide

What follows is a general overview of some of the main steps required to plan an Algonquin Park canoe trip for people using the services of Algonquin Outfitters. Rental rates, descriptions of our outfitting programs and a great deal more information can be found on our web site, www.algonquinoutfitters.com, or in our annual newsletter, the Algonquin Outlook. You will notice a number of URLs throughout this article, which are also summarized at the end. There are many Algonquin Park related sites on the Internet, making it a very useful tool for information gathering and trip planning. With a little searching you can find our site, downloadable maps, official park information, unofficial park information, park history, route descriptions, trip reports (even in German!) and more.

Major steps in canoe trip planning

- Gathering information and maps
- Getting a group together
- Setting trip dates
- Choosing a route
- Basic park regulations
- Reserving camping permits
- Deciding which Algonquin Outfitters base to use
- Deciding what type of outfitting you require
- Reserving outfitting needs
- Arranging transportation
- Getting to the access point and back again
- Accommodation
- Questions?
- Useful links for trip planning

Gathering information and maps

If you are reading this, you have completed part of the first step of planning a successful trip: get some basic information about Algonquin Outfitters and Algonquin Park.

If you don't have our complete information package, call, write, fax or e-mail with your name and address and we will send one. It includes the newsletter, outfitting rates, an Algonquin Park brochure, our menu planner and additional information brochures. You can call us at 705-635-2243, fax 705-635-1834 or send an e-mail to info@algonquinoutfitters.com.

An Algonquin Park Canoe Routes Map is an essential tool for planning a trip. It shows the entire park, all access points, campsite locations, portage distances and the many canoe route possibilities. The back side of the map should be required reading for anyone planning a trip to Algonquin Park. It contains a great deal of useful and important management information, including park regulations, permit details and planning tips. If you include credit card information with your information request, we will send a Canoe Routes Map along with the information package. The cost is \$4.95 CDN, plus taxes and extra postage. There is a \$5 handling charge for maps and books sent outside of Canada. You can download the canoe routes portion of the map from the Ontario Parks web site, www.ontarioparks.com/algo-canoeing.html. If you have selected a route and would like more detail, you may want to order the 1:50000 scale topographic maps for the area or the recently released 1:80000 Adventure Map series at www.chrismar.com.

The Friends of Algonquin Park, www.algonquinpark.on.ca, have the 'official' Algonquin Park web site giving essential park information and regulations for canoe trippers.

For the most comprehensive unofficial site, lots of trip planning information and other related links, check out 'Algonquin Adventures' at www.algonquinadventures.com

For general park information, call 705-633-5572, or visit the "Friend's" web site. General park information can also be found in the Algonquin section of the Ontario Parks web site: www.ontarioparks.com.

Getting a group together

This step can be fairly easy or really frustrating. You may already have a family, scout troop or group of friends committed to going on a trip on a certain date. On the other hand, if you end up being the trip coordinator for a loosely committed group of friends, you'll probably end up juggling holidays and spending a lot of time on the phone. Algonquin Outfitters does its best to accommodate changes in trip plans. Once you have made a reservation with us, you can change trip dates, canoe requirements or people numbers at any time. Our cancellation policy

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allows for a full deposit refund up to 72 hours ahead of your trip. The best plan is to make a reservation based on a core group of firm participants as soon as possible, then change later if necessary.

The same approach works for camping permit reservations. Only the \$9 reservation fee is charged when you make a reservation. There are however, cancellation fees and "no-shows" fees. Check www.ontarioparks.com/reservations.html for details.

The permit fee, which is based on the number of people in your group and the number of nights camping, is not paid until you arrive at the permit office to start your trip. If you are planning for a large group, remember that Algonquin Park regulations restrict the number of people on interior campsites to nine per site. Larger groups may travel and eat together, but you will have to organize supervision and sleeping arrangements to accommodate using several campsites. Most lakes in Algonquin Park have sufficient campsites to handle a group requiring two or more sites, but it is important to book these well in advance of your trip. If you feel that you must have your whole group in one place, you should consider using Algonquin's Whitefish Group Campground. Ask us for a brochure or get more information on the Algonquin Park web site.

Setting trip dates

The canoe season in Algonquin Park normally runs from May to October. For an overview of all the seasons, see our brochure or web site for A Year in Algonquin. If your schedule is flexible, plan your trip during the quieter mid-week periods. If you crave solitude, avoid holiday weekends, or at least plan your trip so that you are well in to the park's interior when the weekend crowds arrive. Here are a few "best and worst" points that may give food for thought:

- Best lake trout fishing - late April to mid-May
- Best brook trout fishing - early May to early June
- Best smallmouth bass fishing - late June to mid July
- National black fly month - late May to late June
- Hottest weather - mid July
- Best stargazing - August meteor showers
- Best chance of hearing a wolf howl - mid August to late September
- Fall colours peak - mid to late September
- Highest water levels - May
- Lowest water levels - August
- Busiest long weekend - first weekend in August
- Busiest month - August
- Best time to see moose - June
- Earliest ice out in memory - April 15
- Latest ice-out in memory - May 12
- Most likely time to combine warm weather and few other people - June (prepare for bugs) or early September

Choosing a route

The Canoe Routes Map gives advice on route selection but does not give specific route plans (and gives good reasons why!). If you would like the benefit of someone else's experience, there are at least two excellent guidebooks for Algonquin Park. Kevin Callan's excellent *Brook Trout and Blackflies: A Paddler's Guide to Algonquin* sells for \$16.95. It is filled with entertaining and informative route descriptions. Don Lloyd's fine book, "Canoeing Algonquin Park," is another very useful resource for trip planning. Different areas of the park are described and mapped so that you can put your own trip together. A great deal of historical information and natural history is also presented (\$23 plus tax and postage). We can mail either of these books to customers in Canada.

There are several personal web sites devoted to Algonquin canoe routes. Two of the better ones are Garry Tarr's Canoe Routes of Algonquin Page, www.doe.carleton.ca/~ngt/algonquin/intro.html, and 'Algonquin Adventures' at www.algonquinadventures.com.

If you are still unsure about where to go, we will gladly give route advice to people using our canoe rental or complete outfitting services. The best way to get route advice is to call, preferably on a weekday, with a canoe route map in front of you. Let the route planner know the dates of your reservation, which outfitting plan you are using, the size and makeup of your group and what previous canoe trip experiences you have had. He or she will probably ask you more questions before suggesting a route. Because of the type of background information a route planner needs and with so many variables influencing route selection, it is very difficult to give useful route advice to most written requests. The best way to give good long distance route advice is over the phone, where questions can be asked and confusion easily straightened out. The money you spend on a long distance call will be an investment in reliable, accurate and appropriate route advice.

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Basic park regulations

Like in any park, there are many special laws and regulations affecting the users of Algonquin Park. While these are summarized on the Algonquin Park Canoe Routes map, we felt it would be worthwhile to list a few of the key rules affecting canoe trippers.

- **Access Points:** Interior canoe trips must start from one of the 29 official access points in Algonquin Park. Some are easier to get to than others but all are accessible by road and have parking. Most permit stations are right at the access point and others are on the road in and may serve several access points. Some See the Algonquin Canoe Routes Map for details. Interior camping permits and fishing licenses are available at permit stations.
- **Can and Bottle Ban:** All non-burnable, disposable food and beverage containers and eating containers (ie. glass) are prohibited in all interior areas of Algonquin Park. Returnable metal beverage containers (ie. cans) are banned, but not containers designed specifically for repeated use. Containers of medicine, insect repellent, fuel or other items that are not food or beverages are permitted.
- **Party Size:** A maximum of nine people is permitted to camp on one interior campsite. Larger groups may travel together but must split up to camp.
- **Camping permits:** Anyone camping in the interior of Algonquin Park must purchase an interior camping permit from the Ministry of Natural Resources. Camping fees are paid to the office supervising each park access point. Parties driving to our Brent base should purchase their permits at the gate 10 miles (16 km) south of Hwy. 17. Camping fees and regulations are government controlled and subject to change. These are 2001 rates: Adults, \$8.00 per person per night; Youths (6 -17) & senior citizens, \$3.50 per person per night.

Fishing licenses

Anyone fishing in Algonquin Park needs a valid Ontario license. Licenses are available at any MNR permit station or access point in Algonquin Park. Algonquin Outfitters does not sell fishing licenses. Ontario residents under 18 and over 65 do not require a fishing license.

The following fees cover the province of Ontario (2000 rates). There are some special catch limits and different seasons in Algonquin Park. Anglers should refer to the Ontario Sport Fishing Regulations for details. Conservation licenses have lower catch and possession limits. Details are available where you purchase your license.

- Canadian resident seasonal license: \$20.00
- Canadian resident seasonal conservation license: \$12.00
- Ontario resident outdoors card: \$6.00
- Non resident seven day license: \$35.00
- Non resident seven day conservation license: \$21.00
- Non-resident organized camp member license (per child): \$4.00
- (Groups of children, with at least five people under 18, can fish with this special license. It allows young people to fish when accompanied by an adult with a fishing license)

Up-to-date Ontario fishing license fees and regulations can be found at: www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/fishing/

Reserving camping permits

Permits are required for all park use, year round. Each access point has a limited number of Interior Camping Permits it can issue each day, based on the number of available campsites on each lake. Your camping permit secures you a site on each lake you intend to camp on. You must specify your route when reserving and purchasing a permit.

Once you have a route selected, the next step is to make advance reservations for camping permits. The biggest challenge for most new visitors is dealing with Algonquin Park's permit reservation system. While permit reservations are not required, we highly recommend having permit reservations well in advance for interior trips any time in July and August, on weekends in September and on all holiday weekends. Large groups requiring more than one interior site (the limit is 9 per site) should have a reservation no matter when their trip takes place. On the main holiday weekends (July, August and September) we recommend having a permit reservation before making an outfitting reservation.

Permit reservations can be made year-round, 24 hours a day, up to 5 months ahead of your trip. To make a permit reservation, you must know the access point you intend to start at, which lakes you intend to camp on each night of your trip, the number of people in the group and the number of nights you will be spending in the park. See the Canoe Routes Map or our newsletter for more information on permits. The

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Ontario Parks permit reservation phone number is 1-888-668-7275. There is a reservation fee of \$9.00, so have a credit card handy. On-line reservations can be made for provincial parks other than Algonquin at www.ontarioparks.com. For more information on permits for Algonquin Park see the Canoe Routes Map or the [Friends of Algonquin Park](#) web site.

Deciding which Algonquin Outfitters base to use

Algonquin Outfitters has four bases in and around Algonquin Park. Which one you use depends on your choice of route, the amount of equipment you need and where you traveling from.

- **Oxtongue Lake:** Our main base is located in Oxtongue Lake, just outside the major western entrance to Algonquin Park. It is about 20 minutes from Huntsville on Highway 60, on Oxtongue Lake, near the village of Dwight. Established 40 years ago by Bill Swift Sr. and his family, the Oxtongue Lake base maintains the largest selection of outfitting equipment, canoes and camping supplies. Centrally located to canoe route access points both along Highway 60 and on the west side of the park, this base also offers outfitting and rental services for backpacking, white water paddling and mountain biking. The Oxtongue Lake base is also the summer home of the Swift Canoe and Kayak Company, where a wide variety of canoe and kayak models are available for sale and test paddling.
- **Opeongo Store:** The Opeongo Store and Water Taxi is located on Opeongo Lake, the park's largest body of water and offers excellent access to the east side and central areas of Algonquin Park. At the end of a 6 km (4 mile) road off Highway 60, the Opeongo Lake area is well known for some of the best trout fishing in Algonquin. For canoeists or sea kayakers wishing a trip with no portages, the many campsites dotting the bays and islands of the big lake offer a unique alternative to a traditional lake and river route. A water taxi ride can give your trip a head start by eliminating the 15 km paddle to the main portages at the far end of the lake. Canoe, sea kayak and mountain bike rentals are available and the store is well stocked with groceries and basic camping supplies.
- **Brent Store:** The Brent Store is located on Cedar Lake, on the northern side of Algonquin Park. Although situated at the end of a 40 km (25 mile) dirt road, the drive to Brent is worth it. This small, rustic base is the starting point for canoe routes journeying into the more remote and less traveled northern and central regions of the park. It also offers the best access to the only area of the park where walleye (yellow pickerel) can be found. Canoe rental reservations are essential at Brent and should be made through our Dwight base. White water enthusiasts planning trips on the Petawawa River should note that white water canoes and shuttles are not available at the Brent store. Call Oxtongue Lake for white water canoe rentals and information on shuttle alternatives.
- **Huntsville:** Our base in the town of Huntsville is conveniently located for canoe trippers using access points on Algonquin Park's west and north-west sides. The store carries a somewhat smaller, but no less complete, selection than the main base. Due to the smaller number of canoes and kayaks available there, we highly recommend reservations for any rental from the Huntsville base.

Deciding what type of outfitting you require

Algonquin Outfitters offers two main outfitting options. **Complete outfitting** is an option used by novice and experienced canoe trippers alike. If you don't have your own camping equipment or, for various reasons, find it simpler to show up with a toothbrush and change of clothes and let us do the planning and packing, this is the package you need. People traveling by air or those on a tight schedule will find this a very convenient option. Complete outfitting is not available in the winter.

Partial outfitting is the ideal plan for people who already have most of their own equipment, but may need to rent a canoe, an extra sleeping bag or other bits and pieces of equipment. Many of our regular canoe rental customers are very experienced trippers and possess every imaginable bit of camping gear, but continue to find it more convenient and cost effective to rent a canoe. Renting also allows you to try different types of canoes and leaves the problems of storage and maintenance to us.

If the choice is not immediately clear, read the descriptions of our various outfitting packages and our list of rental equipment. If you start to think that you might need an extensive list of equipment to round out your own gear, you will probably find that complete outfitting is a pretty good value. We also offer two packages that strike a happy medium, Food Only Outfitting and Equipment Only Outfitting.

Reserving outfitting needs

People's schedules for trip planning vary greatly. While you can make an outfitting reservation as far in advance as you like, here are some recommended minimums for key dates and programs:

Canoe rentals -

- (For times not listed, you can generally get a canoe without a reservation)

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- July, August, September long weekends - at least four weeks in advance
- Other weekends in July and August - three weeks in advance
- Other weekends in September - two weeks in advance
- Mid-week in July or August - two weeks in advance
- Group canoe rentals requiring transportation - four weeks in advance

Complete outfitting -

- July, August, September long weekends - at least four weeks in advance
- Other weekends in July and August - three weeks in advance
- Other times - two weeks in advance
- Large group outfitting - four weeks in advance
- Menus: please submit at least two weeks ahead of your trip

Guided trips -

- July and August - at least four weeks in advance
- Other times - three weeks in advance

Arranging transportation

How do I get there by public transportation? For those without a vehicle, getting to Algonquin Park can be a challenge. Anyone flying should arrange to land at Toronto's Pearson International Airport, where a variety of transportation options are available. All major car rental services can be found there, along with bus and taxi connections to the downtown core. Ontario Northland offers both bus and train service from downtown Toronto to Huntsville. There is no public transportation from Huntsville to Algonquin Park, but taxi services in Huntsville will take you there (for a price!). Complete outfitting customers arriving in Huntsville by public transport can arrange in advance to be picked up and brought to our main base. This service is available during our business hours. Please inquire for more details on transportation.

How do I get a canoe to the access point and back again? Canoe trips can start and end at any of the 29 Algonquin Park access points. Most people use their own vehicle to transport themselves and their equipment to the access point. Canoeists using the Opeongo and Brent bases generally start their trip right there. Customers using the Oxtongue Lake and Huntsville bases usually transport canoes themselves, using the car top carriers we have available (car top carriers are also available at Opeongo). Our foam block sets carry one canoe on any car. We also rent Thule or Yakima double wide roof racks that carry two or even three canoes on most vehicles. For a minimal fee, our staff will install the car top carrier and tie down the canoes. We also show you how to tie all the knots so you can return the canoes safely at the end of your trip. For group rentals or for outfitting customers without their own transportation, we can deliver canoes, equipment and people to most access points. Due to insurance regulations, our transportation services are available only to our outfitting customers. Canoes can be picked up at one base and left at another, but there is a repositioning charge of \$20 per canoe for transfers between Oxtongue Lake, Huntsville and Opeongo and \$40 per canoe between Brent and any other base. Please call for rates and details.

Accommodations before or after the trip

Outfitting customers wishing to spend the night before and/or after trips in our area have several options. The Oxtongue Lake base offers rustic tent cabins at \$7.50 per person per night or a campsite at \$3.50 per person per night (minimum charge is \$10 per night per group). We can also e-mail you a list of the phone numbers or addresses of appropriate motels, resorts or B&B's in the area. The only accommodation available at our Brent base is the MNR roadside campsite or the Brent bunkhouse at \$10 per person per night. There are no motels or restaurants within 25 miles (40 km) of Brent. There are no accommodations or prepared meals available at our Opeongo base but the nearby town of Whitney has several motels and restaurants.

Questions?

Many FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are answered in the so-named section of our newsletter and web site. If your question is not answered there, remember that Algonquin Outfitters is open every day of the year but Christmas, so if you have a question at any time during the trip planning process, call 705-635-2243, during regular business hours. You can also reach us by e-mail at info@algonquinoutfitters.com or through our web site at www.algonquinoutfitters.com

Useful links for trip planning:

Here are a few Internet destinations that will help with your planning (all links working as of December, 2001):

General information:

- Algonquin Outfitters web site: www.algonquinoutfitters.com

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- E-mail to Algonquin Outfitters: info@algonquinoutfitters.com
- Algonquin info on the official Algonquin Park site: www.algonquinpark.on.ca
- Ontario Parks site: www.ontarioparks.com
- Campsite reservations information (Algonquin Interior reservations cannot be made on-line): www.ontarioparks.com/reservations.html

Rules and Regulations:

- Boating safety equipment and related regulations for canoes and kayaks in Canada: www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca/obs-bsn/sbg-gsn/canoe_e.htm
- Find out about fishing and fishing regulations in Ontario: www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/fishing/

Maps

- Find out about Adventure Maps for Algonquin Park: www.chrismar.com
- Find out about Canadian Government Topographic Maps www.fedmaps.com/main.html
- Download the Algonquin Park Canoe Routes Map (5 mb file!): www.ontarioparks.com/algo-canoeing.html

Friends of Algonquin maps and publications

- www.algonquinpark.on.ca/mapubl.html

Private Algonquin Park Info Sites

- Barry Bridgeford's very comprehensive 'Algonquin Adventures': www.algonquinadventures.com
- Garry Tarr's Canoe Routes of Algonquin Page: www.doe.carleton.ca/~ngt/algonquin/intro.html

Weather forecasts

- *Huntsville/Oxtongue Lake area:* http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/scripts/citygen.pl?client=ECCDN_e&city=PC9
- *Central Algonquin Park and Opeongo Lake area:* http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/scripts/citygen.pl?client=ECCDN_e&city=ON-1
- *North Bay/Brent area:* http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/scripts/citygen.pl?client=ECCDN_e&city=YYB
- *Ontario weather radar map:* http://weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/radar/composite_que_e.html
- Aurora (Northern Lights) forecast for the Northern Hemisphere: http://www.gi.alaska.edu/aurora_predict/map1/285.html

Information for visitors to Canada (entry rules, customs info, tax refunds & more):

- www.canadainternational.gc.ca

I'm not going to Algonquin Park!

Looking for an outfitter in a different part of Ontario? Check out the other members of Paddling Ontario: www.PaddlingOntario.com/