The Bloodvein River is a wild and rugged river which sparkles and foams for over 370 kilometres from its headwaters in northwestern Ontario to its mouth on Lake Winnipeg in central Manitoba. Owing to its location off the old trade and settlement routes to the west, the Bloodvein has remained unspoiled, its plant and animal communities virtually intact since the last glaciers scoured the area more than 11,000 years ago. Visitors from nearby Winnipeg and Thunder Bay, and tourists from all over North America and Europe have found in the Bloodvein a unique opportunity to experience the great Canadian outdoors. Here, one can explore the Canadian Shield, resplendent with a wide range of plants and animals, and take advantage of unique opportunities for high-quality wilderness canoeing, camping, fishing, nature observation, and wildlife photography.

The Bloodvein River watershed provides habitat for one of the largest herds of Woodland Caribou south of the James Bay Lowlands.

Recognizing these values, the Government of Manitoba nominated its 200 km segment of the Bloodvein River to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System in June, 1984. Ontario followed suit in June, 1986, nominating its own 106 km segment. Working together, the two governments will ensure that the important heritage of the entire Bloodvein River corridor is protected. The river is in fact a link between two very large, contiguous, provincial wilderness parks.

Part of the Nelson River - Hudson Bay - Arctic Ocean drainage area, the Bloodvein River rises 400 metres above sea level (m.a.s.l.) in the vast wilderness of the Canadian Shield, 600 km northwest of Thunder Bay and 500 km northeast of Winnipeg. From its source in the often flat waters of the Berens River Plateau in Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, it flows slowly across the Shield to Artery Lake on the Ontario-Manitoba border. Then faster, narrower channels carry the river on into the rock-rimmed rapids and smaller lakes of the Shield-Prairie transitional forest of “Atikaki”, a large wilderness park aptly named by Manitoba's Saulteaux-Ojibwa peoples as the “country of the caribou”. Finally, the Bloodvein empties into Lake Winnipeg (235 m.a.s.l.), just north of “The Narrows”, 200 km northeast of Winnipeg.

The region through which the Bloodvein passes is roadless, accessible only by float plane and canoe. However, roads do go as far as Red Lake, Ear Falls, Bisset, Pine Falls, and Lac du Bonnet, small nearby communities which are economically dependent on local forestry, mining, trapping, wild rice harvesting, commercial tourism, sport fishing and hunting.

Manitoba Natural Resources Parks

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
The Bloodvein flows through the Superior Province of the Precambrian Shield, a massive formation of ancient rock which forms the foundation of much of North America. Along its course, it passes through both physiographic subdivisions of the Nelson River Plain — the Bloodvein River and the Mantario plains — through channels which alternate from constricted, fast-water gorges less than 20 m wide, to open, calm water marshes and small lakes. The present-day landscape of elongated lakes with rivers rushing between them, erratic drainages with sudden changes in elevation, thin soils, bedrock outcrops and massive boulders strewn randomly throughout the corridor — all dramatically illustrate the pattern left by retreating Wisconsin glaciers. Since that retreat, the Bloodvein's vegetation and wildlife have evolved undisturbed, providing a scientific view of evolution within the Canadian Shield, virtually free of non-native species.

Flat water and river-connected lakes characterize the western half of the Bloodvein River, in Ontario.

The area's most important natural features are:
- habitat for several animal species which are either uncommon, rare, threatened, or endangered elsewhere in Canada; notably, wolverine, white pelican, double-crested cormorant, bald eagle, osprey, great gray owl, and woodland caribou;
- many uncommon and surprisingly diverse plant species which exhibit a strong prairie-boreal influence including prairie crocus, rush and spike moss, and floating marsh marigold;
- outstanding representation of one of Canada's best known national symbols, the Canadian Shield, with formations such as Kenoran Rock, which, at 2,600 million years, is thought to be the oldest in Canada;
- one of the most significant, undisturbed and almost complete representations of the Central Boreal Upland Forest in Canada with forests of poplar, white birch, black spruce and jack pine, and scattered stands of elm, birch and maple, and wildlife which includes moose, deer, timber wolf, coyote, fox, river otter, fisher, marten, black bear, lynx, turkey vulture, barred owl, loon and Canada goose; and,
- a high-quality river and lake system, habitat for the rare chestnut lamprey, found only in Manitoba, and for sports fish in abundance, ranging from northern pike, 'walleye' pickerel and lake trout to lake sturgeon, whitefish, and channel catfish.

Vertical walls of rock more than 2.4 billion years old rise 20 to 30 metres above the water's surface, providing a surface ideal for native pictographs.

**HISTORY**

The Bloodvein River is steeped in native history. The name itself may have originated from Indian accounts of a fierce, riverside battle between the Saulteaux and their allies, the Cree, against another tribe. Many Indians were killed and the name "Miskwi Isipi" or "Blood River" was applied. The name "Bloodvein" appears to have been first used in an 1818-19 Hudson's Bay Company journal from the Berens River Post, but may have referred to the red granite veins of the river bed.

During the 18th century, the Bloodvein was used by Ojibwa peoples as a trapping area to supply the fur trade, and, from 1790-1821, it served as a secondary fur transportation route. The Indian community of Bloodvein at the river's mouth is still inhabited by descendents of the Saulteaux-Ojibwa people, continuing the traditional native life of hunting, trapping, fishing and wild rice harvesting.

The river's most notable historic features are:
- undisturbed archaeological sites which provide strong evidence of high density occupation by prehistoric, hunter-gathering peoples 6,000 years ago;
- pictographs (native rock paintings of red ochre) dating from between 900 and 1,200 A.D.; the Artery Lake site is considered nationally significant owing to its size, integrity, diverse images, and connection with other sites throughout central Canada;
- records of the Bloodvein River fur trade indicating the presence of Hudson's Bay, North West Company and independent traders' posts; and,
- an historic river environment which captures the mystique of native peoples present here over thousands of years, and presents the challenge of the Canadian frontier met by explorers and fur traders two centuries ago.

**RECREATIONAL USE**

The high natural values and remote, unspoiled nature of the Bloodvein River corridor combine to offer an outstanding wilderness experience, a prized rarity in today's world. Its hundreds of small rapids and waterfalls, quiet lakes, wild rice marshes, and abundant fish and wildlife provide an appealing range of experiences for river travellers and sportsmen alike. The warm, dry summer climate and low precipitation markedly enhance the comfort and appeal of canoeing in this area. Recreational activities for which the Bloodvein is best known are:
- white-water canoeing, kayaking, and rafting which rates among the finest in Canada; in Manitoba alone there are 112 sets of rapids and falls;

Riding fast water on the lower Bloodvein.
- excellent fishing for northern pike, 'walleye' pickerel, lake trout, and sturgeon;
- unique opportunities for viewing and photographing some of the most magnificent of Canadian Shield wildlife and plants, and for studying many rare bird and animal species in their natural setting;
- wilderness camping and hiking within provincial wilderness parks; and,
exceptional chances to visit, by canoe, archaeological sites which bustled with activity thousands of years ago, and to see steep-canyoned walls of pink-grained granite upon which events which characterized early native culture in Canada are recorded in red ochre.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Access: The Bloodvein may be reached by air via a one hour float plane trip from Winnipeg or Kenora. Landing sites along the river are numerous, the favorite starting points being Peisk, Sabourin, Artery, and Sassaginnikak Lakes, quiet stretches of the Bloodvein, its tributaries, and the Gammon River system to the south. Road access to the Bloodvein River itself is not possible. However, it is possible to follow Ontario Highway 105 to Red Lake, within a few kilometres of the river's headwaters, or Manitoba P.R. 304 to "the end of the road" at Wallace Lake on the southeast edge of the Atikamekis wilderness. Both routes put a traveller within a few days’ paddle of the Bloodvein along a variety of routes. The winter road to the river near its confluence with the Leydon is not passable in summer.

Accommodation and Services: No services or facilities are currently provided by the provincial governments for the river-touring public along the Bloodvein in either Woodland Caribou or Atikamekis. Accommodation, outfitting services, short and extended canoe trips and rafting excursions can be arranged through commercial fishing lodges and outcamps on Aikens, Artery, and Sassaginnikak lakes in Manitoba, on Sabourin and Douglas lakes in Ontario, and along the Gammon River. Emergency supplies can be obtained at Red Lake, Bisset, and the community of Bloodvein at the river's mouth; however, trips should be organized in advance using the broader services available in Winnipeg, Kenora, and Thunder Bay.

Canoeing: The river usually provides excellent canoeing from June to freeze up, and may be travelled in late May if one is prepared for the high water volumes during spring run-off. In addition to its own 306 kilometres of challenging white-water canoe routes, hundreds of kilometres of high quality, interconnecting routes also join the corridor, the best being the Gammon, Leydon and Sassaginnikak rivers. Along the Bloodvein, there are more than 70 portages at high water, 51 in Manitoba alone. Most are well marked, and nearly all are easy to traverse, averaging only 200 to 300 metres.

Topographic Maps: National Topographic Series Maps of the Bloodvein at the 1:250,000 scale -- Carroll Lake (52 M) and Hecla (62 P) -- are available from the Canada Map Office, 615 Booth Street, Ottawa, K1A 0E9. Maps at the 1:50,000 scale are also available from the Canada Map Office, from the Map Distribution Office, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Queen's Park, Toronto, M7A 1W9, and from the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, Surveys and Mapping Branch, 1007 Century Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3H 0M4. These include: Ontario - 52M/1,2,3,6,7,8, and Manitoba - 52M/5,12; 62P/8,9,10.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bloodvein River - Park Services, Permits and Regulations: Assistant Deputy Minister, Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, Room 800, 1495 St. James Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3H 0N9, and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Red Lake District Office, P.O. Box 5003, Red Lake, Ontario, POY 2M0.

Tourist Information: Travel Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 3H8; the Northwest Ontario Travel Association, Box 647, Kenora, Ontario P9N 3X8.

Canadian Heritage Rivers System: Secretary, Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, Canadian Parks Service, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0H3.

Additional Reading:
- Woodland Caribou Provincial Park: Background Information. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Queen's Printer, Ontario. 1986.

THE CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a cooperative program developed and run by the parks administrations of federal, provincial, and territorial governments to give national recognition to the important rivers of Canada. The primary objective of the program is to ensure that rivers which are outstanding examples of Canada's natural heritage, which have played a significant role in Canadian history, or which offer outstanding opportunities for recreation, are managed in such a way that their distinctive value is conserved while public use and enjoyment is enhanced.

On January 18, 1984, the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board was established to administer the CHRBS program and to review river nominations for inclusion in that program. The CHRBS currently comprises of eleven members, two appointed by the federal government and one appointed by each of the nine participating provincial and territorial governments. As of February 1, 1988, sections of fifteen different rivers, with a total length of 2600 km, had been nominated to the System.

Nomination of rivers to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System may be made only by participating governments. However, private citizens or groups may suggest rivers to the responsible provincial or territorial parks agencies.

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