

Keji Backcountry Camping and Safety Guide

General Information

A trip into Kejimikujik's backcountry is your chance to experience the tranquil, wild landscape that makes this National Park so special. As you travel, by canoe or on foot, relax and slow to the pace of the natural world as you explore Kejimikujik's waterways and woodlands. This National Historic Site was the ancestral home of the Mi'kmaq. Tall trees that sheltered native travellers over 300 years ago still stand. As you canoe where they canoed and camp where they camped, it will be hard not to imagine yourself transported back to centuries past.

Today, Kejimikujik protects the rich cultural heritage and natural wonders of this 381 square kilometres of gently rolling landscape. Over 80% of the Park is backcountry, accessible only by canoe or hiking trails. Campsites, trails and portages have been provided to enable you to travel in safety and camp without disturbing the land. Park staff will advise you about the various trips that are possible and reserve a campsite for you. It will be up to you to leave the area as unchanged as you found it — pristine for others to discover.

Seasons

Visitor use is heaviest in July and August, and on the spring, summer and fall holiday weekends. Experienced campers prefer the spring and fall when they have the best choice of campsites and rarely encounter other travellers. Many consider the period from early September to mid-October our best season, with moderate temperatures and brilliant autumn foliage. From mid-November to mid-April there is limited backcountry access.

The Natural Environment

- Summer waters are warm. You can swim anywhere in the Park, but most shorelines are shallow, rocky or swampy.
- High winds may be encountered in all areas of the Park during any time of the year.
- No poisonous snakes are found in this region.
- Black bear are common, but usually avoid people. Precautions should be taken not to attract them to campsites with food or garbage. Ask for a copy of the brochure titled *You Are In Bear Country*.
- From April to October you will encounter the normal range of stinging and biting insects common to Southwestern Nova Scotia. For more specific information on these insects or preventative measures contact Park staff directly.

You must register at the Visitor Centre before beginning an overnight trip, and drop your used permits off there when leaving the Park. We recommend advanced reservations.

You can make reservations for the backcountry campsites 60 days in advance of your trip. A reservation fee and nightly camping fees are charged. These can be paid in person or by credit card. You must camp at the established sites, which have been designed to provide good facilities and concentrate use at selected locations so that most of the backcountry will remain undisturbed. Each site has 2 gravel tent pads, an outhouse toilet, fireplace and a picnic table. Cut firewood is provided at all campsites.

Group Size

The number of people who may stay at a single backcountry campsite is limited, and most accommodate a maximum of six people. This keeps impact and erosion within acceptable limits, and controls the number of people in the backcountry so that everyone can experience the tranquillity and solitude they seek. Campsites C (Big Dam Lake), 7 (Frozen Ocean Lake) and 12 (Ritchie Island, Kejimikujik Lake), can accommodate groups of seven to ten people.

Canoeing is the best possible way to experience Kejimikujik. By using the craft of the early Mi'kmaq, you can enjoy the unfolding landscape as you travel from still waters to small lakes and across the island-studded expanse of Kejimikujik Lake. The routes described below are classified Level I (very easy), by Canoe Nova Scotia. All canoeing is in flat water and portages are good. Normally, no white-water canoeing is available in the Park except on some stretches of river in the spring, or during flood periods.

Be Prepared

- Paddlers may encounter high winds and waves, and should have navigational and canoe camping skills. Foul weather may force you to stay put until conditions permit safe travel. Ensure your trip plan allows for extra time and provisions in case this happens to you.
- Portages, marked with yellow and brown signs, are provided around all areas which are hazardous during high-water periods, or impassible when water levels are low. You will have to carry your canoe at all portages.
- Transport Canada regulations require that you have a personal flotation device (PFD) for each person. These should be worn at all times.
- You must have a bailer, 15 m buoyant heaving line and a noisemaking device for attracting attention if you require help. Each canoe must have two paddles and one extra is suggested.

Protecting Canada's Natural Heritage

Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site of Canada is dedicated to preserving nature and fostering an understanding of sound camping practices. To ensure an enjoyable wilderness experience, now and in the future, please observe the following regulations and practices.

Backcountry Camping Regulations

- Firearms are prohibited within National Parks.
- Keep the wildlife wild. Do not feed animals.
- Pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Pets are a threat to wildlife, and wildlife can hurt pets. We recommend that they not be taken into the backcountry.
- A National Park Fishing Licence is required to fish.
- Registration for use of backcountry sites is mandatory.
- You may camp only at designated campsites, and must pitch your tent on the pad provided.
- Backcountry camping permits must be returned to the Visitor Centre when you depart. This notifies park staff that you have returned safely. A search may be initiated after 24 hours overdue.
- All garbage must be packed out.
- Wash water must be put down the toilet and not directly into forests, lakes or streams.
- Do not disturb wildlife. Observe animals from a distance and avoid small islands where common loons and other waterbirds nest.
- Do not pound nails into trees or remove branches for camping purposes. This can kill trees.

Drinking Water and Food Storage

- Water in Kejimikujik varies from clear to natural dark brown. Boil, chemically treat or filter your drinking water against natural forms of contamination.
- Never store food in your tent. Raccoons, bears and other animals are attracted to food and food waste. Food should be sealed and placed out of their reach, by suspending it from a tree limb.

Campfires

- A portable stove is required for cooking.
- A fireplace is provided for evening fires at each campsite. Open fires may be built in these fireplaces only. Please build small fires to conserve firewood.
- When the forest fire hazard is high, open fires may be banned.
- You may not gather any wood, bark or kindling from the forest. Burn only the firewood provided. Make your kindling from this firewood.
- Do not burn garbage.
- For your personal safety and the safety of others, ensure that fires are dead out before leaving the site.

Trip Planning

Checklist:

- o Axe and Knife
- o Sun Screen and Insect Repellent
- o First Aid Kit
- o Rainwear
- o Compass and Map
- o Change of Clothes (waterproof)
- o Portable Stove and Fuel
- o Waterproof Matches
- o For Cold Weather, Layered Clothing
- o Extra Food, Emergency Provisions
- o Fire Starter Cubes
- o Tent, Tarp and Rope
- o Flashlight or Candles
- o Water Filter or Purification Tablets

Avoid:

- Individually packaged items.
- Disposable items.
- Canned and bottled items.

Choose:

- Powdered drinks, soups and dried foods.
- Bulk foods, to eliminate redundant packaging.
- Reusable items such as ceramic mugs, plates and bowls, durable pots and cutlery, liquid fuel stoves and lanterns, etc.
- A biodegradable soap.

Local suppliers and outfitters:

- Canoe rentals and a shuttle service which drives you to the beginning of your trip are available in the Park at Jakes Landing (reservation recommended; prices and information on request).
- A supermarket, general store, hardware stores, and several convenience stores are located within 15 km of the Park.

Describing the Backcountry

Big Dam/Frozen Ocean (26 km)

Starting Point: Take Portage Q (0.4 km) from the Big Dam Lake parking lot.

This is the best route for inexperienced canoeists, or the firsttime visitor who wants a two- or three-day outing. After years of experience, it may well remain your favourite. Each lake is unique, but Big Dam Lake is the most striking. Joined in the middle by a narrow passage, it is really two water bodies in one. The southeast portion has clear water fed by springs and runoff, while the northwest portion is filled with dark red-brown water borne by a large brook which flows through a bog.

All along the route you'll notice the tips of old logs floating just above the surface. Sphagnum moss, sundew and cranberries now grow on logs which were lost while being driven downstream many years ago. The last logging drive was in the mid-1950s; the first was about a century ago. While this trip can be done in two days, plan on taking three to enjoy it best. Spend a night on Frozen Ocean Lake and then one on Kejimkujik Lake. If you start late, stay at Big Dam Lake the first night and at Frozen Ocean the next.

Except for Kejimkujik Lake, the lakes are generally small and are usually not too windy during the day. The still waters and the flowing part of the river are easy canoeing. Portages are of short to-moderate length and, on a multi-day trip, the going is easy.

Kejimkujik Lake (8 km x 5 km)

Starting Point: Begin and end at Jakes Landing, or at the Mersey River Bridge (Eel Weir) below Kejimkujik Lake.

The shoreline and islands of Kejimkujik Lake, and the rivers leading into it, can be explored without portaging. The mood of the big lake changes constantly — from misty mornings through bright, windy afternoons, to peaceful sunsets. The islands vary from tiny sandspits to large forested islands, each with its own personality. Some have small hidden beaches, others may harbour a doe and her fawn.

The rivers leading from the lake are excellent for viewing beaver and deer; the open lake is good for spotting loons, gulls, terns and the occasional osprey.

Peskowesk Lake System (48 km)

Starting Point: Cross Kejimkujik Lake from Jakes Landing, or start from the Mersey River bridge below George Lake (Eel Weir).

Here, you will experience wilderness canoeing at its best. Fewer people travel this route because more portaging is necessary than in other areas. Many old-timers favour this part of the Park, whose landscape of windswept stands of red and white pine is reminiscent of the Canadian Shield. This system of a dozen lakes is connected by thirteen portages. Some of the lakes are spring-fed and clear, others are fed by dark brown streams flowing through bogs. As their name implies, the Silver Lakes are among the clearest in the region. As you paddle, you can see the rocks and plants, metres below on the bottom.

You should be well prepared to portage, and anticipate stiff winds on both Peskowsk and Peskawa lakes in mid-day.

With over 100 km of trails, Kejimikujik provides numerous opportunities to explore forests, lakes and rivers. For the hiker who takes to the backcountry, true solitude prevails. Away from the canoe routes, more bobcats walk our trails than hikers. You will pass through every imaginable type of forest (we count 21 different types), wade through hip-high ferns, cross small brooks and skirt some lakes. Each season has its allure, but autumn is best. Trails are dry, days are cool and invigorating without the extreme heat of summer, and there are no insects.

Be Prepared

- Trails are designated with brightly coloured markers.
- Footwear suitable for hiking, and the ability to read a map, use a compass and carry a heavy pack for long distances are required.
- In spring, when brooks are full and wetland sections of the trails are flooded, hikers will get wet feet—probably every day. In late summer and early fall, hiking conditions are excellent.

Liberty Lake (60.5 km)

Big Dam Lake Parking Lot - Campsite 45 11.5 km

Campsite 45 - Campsite 42 14 km

Campsite 42 - Campsite 37 16 km

Campsite 37 - Campsite 28 12 km

Campsite 28 - Lower Mersey River (Eel Weir) 7 km

This, the Park's longest hiking trail, stretches from the Big Dam Lake parking lot along the Park's western boundary to the lower Mersey River bridge below George Lake (Eel Weir). Although four days (three nights) is ample to complete the route, experienced hikers find that five days allow them to enjoy the natural environment to its fullest. This is a wild-country hiking trail, with rough footing and varying from a 3-metre-wide woods road to a narrow path. In some places, it is wet and boggy with streams running through it; other areas are dry and rocky. Near Big Dam Lake, take the "Hemlocks and Hardwoods" loop through a magnificent stand of ancient hemlocks, where the soft moss undergrowth creates an impression of timeless silence.

Close to the head of Frozen Ocean Lake, Campsite 45, set in a stately stand of white pines, allows you to enjoy the warmth of the morning sun over the lake. Watch the trail markers closely, especially as you approach and cross the headwaters of the West River, where open grass, meadow and alder thickets make the trail less obvious. Lucifée Brook derives its name from the French "Loup cervier" (lynx). Although lynx are no longer found here, you will probably see bobcat droppings along the trail. You will also see evidence of coyote and black bear activity, but few hikers ever actually meet a bear. Several trails, described below, branch off the Liberty Lake trail, offering more places to explore and camp.

Side Trips

Liberty Lake Trail - Campsite 22 19 km Return
(along West River)

Fire Tower Road 15 km Return

Channel Lake (24 km)

Big Dam Lake Parking Lot - Campsite 17 4 km

Campsite 17 - Campsite 5 8 km

Campsite 5 - Big Dam Lake Parking Lot 12 km

This overnight loop trail begins and ends at the Big Dam Lake parking lot. The trail from Big Dam to Channel Lake is dry and rocky. The section from Campsite 17 to Campsite 5 goes inland to avoid the bog around the lake. Just before Campsite 5, you must wade across Still Brook (about two metres wide). **During spring flood and other high water conditions, the brook is impassable. Before starting this trip, ask Park staff about the water levels.**

On the northeast side of Still Brook is a beautiful hemlock stand. Beginning here, you follow a high, level ridge called an inside an ancient melting glacier. When the glacier melted away, the gravel bed remained on the underlying land as a raised ridge about 10 metres high. In this area, they are also known as “Gold Ridges” since small traces of gold were sometimes found in the gravel.

At the head of Frozen Ocean Lake, join the Liberty Lake Trail and follow it back around Big Dam Lake to the parking lot where your hike began.

Big Dam/Frozen Ocean (23 km Return)

Note: This route consists of the first 11.5 km of the Liberty Lake Trail. You must return on the same trail.

This is a good overnight trip, with 4 campsites (1, 3, 45, and 46) en route. The trail, about one metre in width, has dry, rocky, wet and marshy terrain. See the description of the Liberty Lake and Channel Lake Trails for highlights.

Portage Information

Renseignements sur les portages

- A** 1.20 km Dry, rolling terrain, canoe rest provided.
1,20 km *Terrain sec et vallonné. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- B** .12 km Over low ridge. Crosses the Fire Tower Road.
0,12 km *Crête basse. Traverse le chemin de la tour de guet.*
- C** .40 km Over a gradual rise. Short, steep section at the Cobrielle Lake end.
0,40 km *Montée graduelle. Pente raide de courte distance du côté du lac Cobrielle.*
- D** .64 km Dry, rolling terrain. Canoe rest provided.
0,64 km *Terrain sec et vallonné. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- E** 2.30 km Big Hardwood Carry, steep climb from Minards Bay to the Fire Tower Road.
Canoe rests provided.
2,30 km *Portage Big Hardwood. Montée abrupte de la baie Minards au chemin de la tour de guet. Supports de canots le long du parcours.*
- F** .62 km Over rolling terrain. Canoe rest provided.
0,62 km *Terrain vallonné. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- G** .80 km Peskowsk end of this carry is hidden in a cove. Canoe rests provided.
0,80 km *Du côté de Peskowsk, le portage est dissimulé dans une anse. Supports de canots le long du parcours.*
- H** .20 km Over low ridge.
0,20 km *Crête basse.*
- I** .20 km Over low ridge.
0,20 km *Crête basse.*
- J** 1.20 km Follows the Liberty Lake Trail for some distance. Canoe rests provided.
1,20 km *Suit le sentier du lac Liberty pendant assez longtemps. Supports de canots le long du parcours.*
- K** .40 km Steep climb from Peskowsk Lake.
0,40 km *Pente raide du côté du lac Peskowsk.*
- L** .40 km Fairly level terrain.
0,40 km *Terrain relativement plat.*

- M** .20 km Over low ridge. Canoe rest provided. This portage provides access via Pebbleloggitch Lake to the Shelburne River.
0,20 km *Crête basse. Support de canots le long du parcours. Ce portage donne accès au bassin de la rivière Shelburne en passant par le lac Pebbleloggitch.*
- N** .80 km Two separate carries, one short carry around bridge, the other longer over gently sloping terrain, rocky. Canoe rest provided.
0,80 km *Deux portages dont une, de courte durée, qui contourne un pont, et l'autre, plus long, qui traverse un terrain rocailleux en pente douce. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- O** .80 km Gently sloping terrain. Excellent walking. Canoe rest provided.
0,80 km *Terrain en pente douce. Une marche facile. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- P** .20 km Gently sloping terrain.
0,20 km *Terrain en pente douce.*
- Q** .40 km Big Dam Lake access. Level terrain. Excellent walking.
0,40 km *Accès au lac Big Dam. Terrain plat. Une marche facile.*
- R** .80 km Gently sloping terrain. Excellent walking. Canoe rest provided.
0,80 km *Terrain en pente douce. Une marche facile. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- S** .16 km Level, rocky terrain.
0,16 km *Terrain plat et rocailleux.*
- T** .13 km Level terrain.
0,13 km *Terrain plat.*
- U** .33 km Level terrain. Most of the portage is boardwalk.
0,33 km *Terrain plat. Pendant la majeure partie du trajet, les canoteurs empruntent un trottoir de bois.*
- V** .70 km Gently sloping terrain. Excellent walking. Canoe rest provided.
0,70 km *Terrain en pente douce. Une marche facile. Support de canots le long du parcours.*
- W** .45 km Level terrain. Excellent walking. Canoeists may wish to use this carry to avoid high winds on Kejimkujik Lake.
0,45 km *Terrain plat. Une marche facile. Ce portage permet d'échapper aux grands vents du lac Kejimkujik.*