

FALL 2020



SWAN RIVER FISHING PACKAGE



The Swan River has been referred to as one of the most under-utilized fisheries in the Swan Valley area. The system headwaters originate near Par Hill Lake, in the Porcupine Hills, SK. It then flows south before turning northeast into Manitoba and eventually flowing into Swan Lake near Lenswood, MB.



THE FISHERY:

The upper reaches are regularly stocked with brook and rainbow trout by the province of Saskatchewan. Generally, stocked trout remain in the clear, cold-water habitats of the upper reaches and seldom travel to the middle and lower reaches within Manitoba. In the middle reaches the river slows and becomes turbid from the accumulation of prairie sediments. These areas are dominated by native species with walleye and northern pike being the most targeted by anglers. The walleye population



is a natural one which has been supplemented by erratic fry stocking over the past decade or so. The lower reaches near Swan Lake home a variety of cold and warm water species including walleye, northern pike, lake whitefish, yellow perch, mullet (multiple species), cisco, goldeye, freshwater drum and common carp. Today, Swan Lake is a commercial fishery for northern pike, walleye, and mullet.



THE RIVER:

Mapping for this promotional package focused on the Manitoba section of the river (Saskatchewan Border to Swan Lake). Based on the nature of the river, the river has been split into seven stretches. Beginning at the Saskatchewan border and continuing to Cotton (Harlington) Bridge the river could be described as having abundant sand-gravel riffle/runs. In this section the best fishing holes were 1-2 m in depth.





The next section (Cotton Bridge - Golf Course Ford Crossing) the river slows considerably with fewer interspersed riffle/runs. In this stretch pools on bends were often jammed up with woody debris, and the best pools were 1-2.5 m in depth. The next stretch, or the section through the Swan River Townsite (Golf Course Crossing - Museum Bridge), the river gradually begins to speed up again and consists of sand/gravels runs closer together. In this segment some of the best fishing holes were >2 m. Not far downstream from the Museum Bridge the river begins to drop in elevation

considerably and has long stretches continuous gravel, cobble rapids with interspersed boulders. This section continues to the Honoway Ford Crossing, and very few fishing holes were noted in this stretch of river. Downstream of the Honoway Ford and continuing to the Old Craigsford Crossing, the river begins to slow again with areas of continuous sand/gravel run and some of the most beautiful scenery the river has to offer. In this stretch the best fishing holes were noted to be 2-3 m in depth. Downstream of Craigsford the river slows yet again, the bottom types become dominated by silt/sand shallow areas with very few riffle/runs. In this section the best holes were 2-3 m and continues beyond the Lenswood Bridge to the Bipole III crossing. From the Bipole III crossing to the river mouth at Swan Lake the river slows considerably yet again and is relatively deep bank to bank. This section is the only part of the river that could be navigated with a powerboat during summer and has the deepest pools with some of the best ones reaching 4-6 m in depth.



SOME HISTORY:

The river has a rich history and was a popular First Nation travel route which eventually became a Fur Trading route in the late 1700's. Because the river was only navigable during spring, a trail was established to facilitate trade along the river, which was later named the Pelly Trail by the Europeans. Along the river and Pelly Trail there are many historic sites, including First Nation Archeological Sites, trading posts (Hudson Bay Company – HBC & Northwest Company - NWC), crossings, and smaller posts/settlements. Today, the exact locations of these sites are either unknown or kept secret to protect the integrity of the site(s). Because the Swan River has such a rich history, there is a chance that anglers may come across some historic and/or archeological sites. In these circumstances, please refrain from disturbing these sites and contact the Manitoba Archeological Society at the earliest opportunity.





PLANNING A TRIP: The Swan River can be explored most of the year besides shoulder seasons and the general spring closure. In spring, heavy runoff and turbulent water could make angling a challenge. Generally, by opening day for the Southern Division (mid-May), flow has receded enough to allow angling opportunities. During the heat of summer, heavy rains may cause water levels to rise significantly overnight. Fishing opportunities exist late into fall until the river begins to freeze. Following this it can take some time until the river can support safe ice fishing opportunities.

FROM SHORE: Shore fishing opportunities are great options for part-day or shorter trips. There are multiple drive-to locations with good fishing holes. Some of the best drive to shore fishing locations include: Vopni Ford Crossing, Golf Course Ford Crossing, the Legion Park, the Rotary Park, the Rex Leech Museum Trail, the Honoway Ford Crossing, and the Old Craigsford Crossing. Shore fishing is also possible at some fishing holes further from river crossings/access points. In these situations, you can follow the shoreline (30m from high water mark) to your chosen destination. Sometimes it may be easier to research landowners and ask permission before cutting across private land to access a particular fishing hole.



FROM A BOAT: Another option, or perhaps the one of the most enjoyable ways to fish the Swan River is by floating it. Find a floating craft (i.e. tube, kayak, canoe) and begin at one access location - paddling/floating downstream until your out-location, fishing along the way. There are dozens of options and combinations that could be considered for a floating trip down the Swan River. Remember, when padding there are times during mid-summer when the water levels get very low. In these durations be prepared to wade through riffle/run areas. Another option is the use of powerboats, but only when conditions are favorable. Generally, summer water levels would not allow the use of power boats in the Swan River, however in the spring or following heavy rainfall the river may be navigable in the middle reaches. The lower reaches near Swan Lake can be explored with a

motorboat all summer, however you must do your research and ask permission from crown lease holder and/or private land owners in order to find a suitable launching area in the lower reaches.

FROM THE ICE: Ice fishing as a trip option during the hardwater season is an excellent winter outing. Look through the Mapbook and choose a hole or series of holes that spark your interest. There are many snowmobile access points along the system, which are also outlined in the Mapbook. Travel and explore the system, fishing at your leisure. It is advisable to have SVSFE's depth data uploaded on your smartphone to pinpoint the deeper areas. Be cautious as there are riffle areas that may not completely freeze during the winter months. Also, be aware as slush is known to accumulate in the lower reaches so never travel with only one snowmobile. Anywhere with significant depth should hold fish in the winter months, especially in the lower reaches near and into the lake. The trick is getting them to bite.



FISHING: When angling smaller rivers for walleye the first places to look are areas with cover. Cover can come in many forms including depth, water turbulence, undercut banks, overhanging trees, floating vegetation, boulders, and instream woody debris. Perhaps the best advice would be to do more looking than actual fishing, and always watch behind your lure for the distinctive white tip on the bottom of a walleye's tail following your lure. The Swan is a shallow river with holes seldom exceeding 2 meters in depth. In summer walleye were noted to be lurking in all areas having cover from the biggest holes to the shallow shady areas in less than 1m depth. Walleye are sensitive to sunlight, therefore in shallow habitats they will generally be found in shady areas behind boulders or beneath woody debris. Walleye tend to feed more extensively at dusk and dawn, on cloudy/overcast days, and under turbulent conditions when light penetration into the water column is disrupted. Walleye often school with others of similar age or size, so if you find one there will likely be others nearby.

The next step is catching them, and the first consideration is what gear to use. Rod and bait combinations are endless, but most anglers prefer a spinning rod for this type of situation. In terms of line, it is not recommended to fish with anything lighter than 8lb test because of the prevalent pike population and



many snags hidden in the water column. Shorter rods, even the use of ice fishing rods, were found to be convenient. Shorter rods make pitching into tight spots easier and sight fishing by jigging directly beneath the boat possible, which is a huge advantage. Polarized sunglasses will increase your success considerably. If you happen to see walleye in the area, you will be less reluctant to move onto the next location. With regards to using spinning tackle, perhaps a jig and minnow/plastic has yielded more walleye than any spoon, spinner, hard bait, or fly combined. Trolling and/or bottom bouncing in this system is not recommended, however possible in certain stretches. A simple jig and bright coloured grub seemed to yield the most success during surveys in 2020. The key is to keep working until you find a bait and technique combination that appears to be working on that particular day, because as we know walleye fishing is not continuous, and often requires technique and lure adjustments from day to day.



Technique is arguably more important than lure selection. Folks may assume that fishing for walleye in such tight quarters would be easy; this could not be further from the truth. Approaching a potential fishing location should be done with care. When approaching a pool be as quiet as possible and avoid casting your shadow into the depths. Approaching from downstream often minimizes the risk of being spotted because fish are usually facing upstream ready to ambush incoming prey items. Try precision casting as close to the cover as possible. A tried and true shore fishing method is the good ol' pickerel rig. Casting is also a good option to catch more active fish. When fishing from a boat, it was found that the most effective method was jigging or pitching into the holes and slowly retrieving the lure while popping it off the bottom. If you happen to spot a walleye or two in a hole, do not give up on them. Try retrieving at different speeds, changing your hook and/or presentation. Generally, it will only be a matter of time before one will take the bait.



PRO TIPS: When exploring the Swan River, perhaps the best tip to is to use georeferenced depth charts and data files. From the SVSFE website, visit the Swan River page and download the Swan River Contour Data to an offline mapping application on your smart phone. *GAIA GPS* is the recommended free application for displaying depth data in an aesthetic format for both .IOS and Android operation systems. When identifying fishin’

holes without using SVSFE depth data look for the outside corner of bends, near muskrat/beaver lodges, at bottom of rapids/runs, or on the downstream side of islands.

Water levels can be the determining factor for when and what type of fishing trip you choose. While mapping the system in June of 2020, water levels were ideal providing relatively easy paddling and minimal wading through riffle/runs. To determine where current water levels are in comparison, there is a water level benchmark located on the north pillar (east side) of the Museum Bridge along PTH #10N. During the 2020 mapping, levels averaged - 0.1 m on this benchmark level. Water levels lower than this benchmark would require more effort to travel through the system, specifically through riffle/run areas. With water levels higher than the benchmark, the rate of travel and risk will increase as water volumes increase. Use extreme caution when paddling during high water as the river can become quite dangerous; specifically, the section between the Museum Bridge and the Honoway Ford Crossing.

The lower reaches are home to a variety of warm and cold-water species that are seldom/if ever targeted by anglers. This underutilized and unexploited fishery provides ample opportunity for anglers to put a new fishery on the map. The challenge with exploring the lower reaches is access. There are two known locations in the lower reaches where a small craft can be launched. On both the north and south sides, access is through a combination of community pasture and/or crown lease. In these circumstances, it is highly advised that anglers gain permission from the lessee before accessing the lake. In addition, ensure that all gates are closed behind you when entering and exiting crown lease and/or community pasture.



TRIP OPTIONS: The Swan River provides endless opportunities for fishing excursions. Create your own trip using the maps provided or choose from the following:



SHORE FISHIN' TRIPS: Some of the best ways to take advantage of the Swan River Fishery is through part or full-day shore fishing trips. Remember, walleye most actively feed at dusk and dawn so focus on these times for the best chance at landing a few.

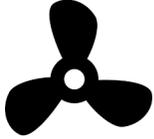
- a. **Vopni Ford Crossing:** Upstream of the Vopni Ford Crossing is a consistent walleye spot. South of the crossing along the west side of Rd 167W is a good hole which runs along the east bank. If fishing off the concrete rip-rap shoreline you are in the right place. Approximately 500m upstream there is another good hole on a bend if you feel so inclined.
- b. **Golf Course Ford Crossing:** There are popular holes both up and downstream of the Golf Course Ford Crossing. In morning and evening, casting upstream while standing on the concrete ford has yielded walleye as they are up feeding in the shallows. Explore the other in the areas by walking the shorelines and fishing as you please.
- c. **Legion and Rotary Parks:** Right within the town of Swan River are some exceptional angling opportunities. At the Legion Park there is a good hole near the big rock and also beneath the powerline crossing the river. Within the limits of the Rotary Park are multiple fishing opportunities as well. Use the Mapbook to pinpoint these locations. Perhaps the best hole is east of the Rotary Park along a footpath downstream from the stormwater drain. A surprise rainbow trout was caught in this hole back in 2013 which likely travelled downstream from Saskatchewan.
- d. **Rex Leech Hiking Trail (Museum Trail):** A commonly overlooked spot is along the Rex Leech Hiking trail. Start at the trailhead within the museum grounds and use the Mapbook to locate the various holes adjacent to the hiking trail. Perhaps the best one is near the trailhead - approximately 500m down the trail along the outside bend of the river.
- e. **Honoway Ford Crossing:** The Honoway is a local hotspot for sucker fishing in the spring. The migrations occur during the spring closure where dip-netting walleye is prohibited. Long after the spring sucker run there is a sneaky hole downstream of the Ford Crossing which is often overlooked as a summer spot.
- f. **Old Craigsford Crossing:** This crossing was decommissioned years ago; today it is primarily used as an access point for anglers and other users. Immediately downstream of the old crossing location is a hole which has historically been a popular angling destination. The hole is at the bottom of the rapid directly downstream of the old crossing location.



FLOATIN' TRIPS: Floating trips are probably the most enjoyable ways to enjoy the Swan River Fishery. There are multiple ins and outs throughout the system. Use the Mapbook and create your own trip or try out the examples below. Water levels dictate the rate of travel on the Swan River considerably, therefore make sure you are always well prepared with a lifejacket, extra paddle, and back-up plan in case of emergencies.

- a. **Benito Bridge to Cotton Bridge:** This section of river is gorgeous aesthetically and provides good angling opportunities with a couple exceptional holes. This stretch is approximately 22 km; which could take all day if river levels are low.
- b. **Golf Course Ford to Museum Bridge:** This section is most popular amongst the locals, who often float it in spring/summer when the days are long. This stretch runs through the Swan River Townsite therefore in and out locations are abundant. In terms of fishing quality, this area arguably receives the most pressure, however some of the best holes are further from public access points.
- c. **Museum Bridge to Honoway Ford Crossing:** This stretch has a couple great fishing holes near the beginning; beyond this fishing opportunities are limited. This section is noted because it can be very fun at certain water levels, or extremely dangerous when the water levels are high. Use extreme caution when travelling this stretch.
- d. **Honoway Ford Crossing to Old Craigsford Crossing:** This stretch is aesthetically stunning and provides some of the best angling opportunities and stunning views the river has to offer. About halfway there is an out location at the 366 Highway (~12 km). The entire stretch is 23 km which could make a long day during low water levels.

Swan River Entry and Exit Locations		
Enter	Exit	Approx. Distance (km)
Benito Bridge	Cotton Bridge	22
Cotton Bridge	Vopni Ford Crossing	11
Vopni Ford Crossing	RR 210 North Access	12
RR 210 North Access	Golf Course Ford Crossing	10
Golf Course Ford Crossing	Swan River Bridge	9
Swan River Bridge	Legion Park	1
Legion Park	Rotary Park	2
Rotary Park	Museum Bridge	2
Museum Bridge	Honoway Ford Crossing	14
Honoway Ford Crossing	RR 152 West Access	8
RR 152 West Access	HWY 366 Bridge	4
HWY 366 Bridge	Craigsford Access	11
Craigsford Access	Lenswood Bridge	19
Lenswood Bridge	Swan Lake	40
TOTAL		165



POWER BOATIN' TRIPS: Powerboat trips are limited and heavily reliant on water levels and flow conditions. When using a motor or jet boat on this river it is highly recommend your equipment is reliable and you have a back-up plan in case of emergencies.

- a. **Golf Course Upstream:** This is an option that anglers have used in the past to angle the various holes upstream of the Golf Course Ford. Launching can be dangerous depending on water levels making smaller craft the only option for this section. After launching travel upstream exploring and fishing the various holes. Depending on water conditions it may be possible to travel as far as the Vopni Ford Crossing before having to turn back and return to the Golf Course Ford.
- b. **Old Craigsford Crossing:** From the Old Craigsford Crossing (access on the west side) it is possible to drag and carry a small craft with an outboard motor. From here you can travel upstream to the various fishing holes until the rapids downstream of the Roaring River confluence. Another option is to travel downstream to Gust's Fishin Hole. From here you could arguably travel further but angling options are limited beyond this point.
- c. **The Lower Reaches:** Boating trips are the best way to explore the lower reaches. The lower reaches are remote and the only reasonable launching areas are through community pasture/crown lease. Even the launching areas on Swan Lake are either through private land or through the Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation land.

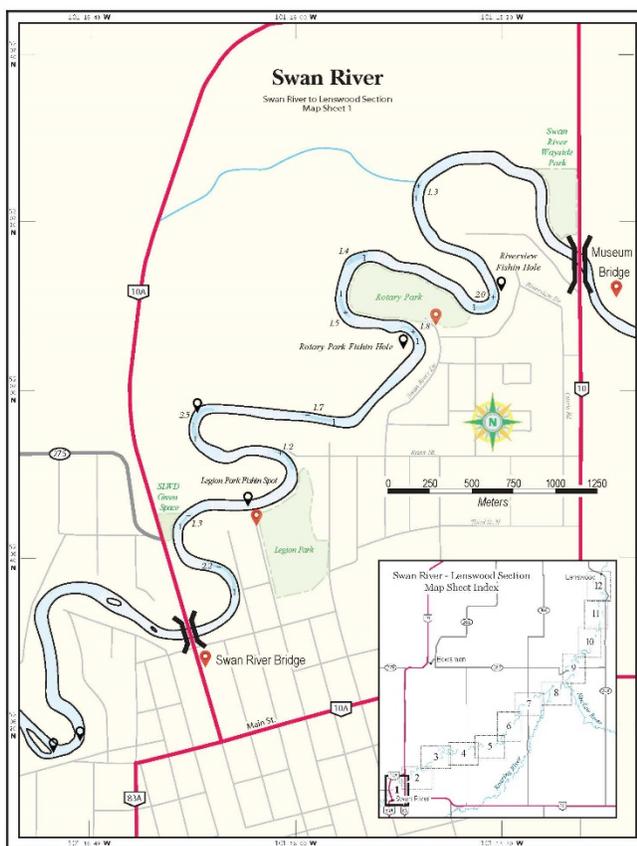


ICE FISHIN' TRIPS: Ice fishing opportunities are endless in the Swan River. Ice formation can be unpredictable in riffle/run areas, therefore be extremely cautious when travelling the river, particularly in the upper and middle reaches. Common access points for snowmobilers include, but are not limited to: the Snoman Crossing (Benito), the Vopni Ford Crossing, the Golf Course Ford Crossing, the Museum Bridge, the Honoway Ford Crossing, the Old Craigsford Crossing, the Lenswood Bridge, and the Community Pasture (Swan Lake). Past telemetry surveys have found that walleye overwinter in deeper areas throughout the middle and lower reaches, and that fish tend to travel quite a bit during the winter months. In fact, in the Swan River multiple species tend to exhibit upstream migrations including walleye, mullet, burbot, and even pike throughout the hard water season. It is not completely understood why these species tend to migrate so much each winter, but it may have something to do with dissolved oxygen levels. Use the map book to determine a hole or series of holes and make a day out of it. It is recommended to use SVSFE depth data on an offline mapping application to pinpoint the deep spots. If you see an open rapid, stop and take a look, as there may be fish travelling through. Remember it is illegal to dipnet walleye and spear fishing of all species is strictly prohibited. The most popular winter walleye spots are by far in the lower reaches and into the lake just out from the river mouth. These areas tend to be best in early season but will produce all winter. If you prefer to get away from the crowds (other anglers, domestic harvesters, and commercial fishers), try your luck in the deeper areas of upper and middle reaches.

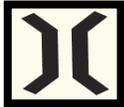
**USING THE SWAN RIVER FISHING PACKAGE
MAPBOOKS:**

The Mapbook was created by combining data collection, local knowledge, and personal experience to provide anglers insight on the angling opportunities present in the Swan River. Bathymetric and angling surveys were collected by Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement Inc. between June 9th-25th, 2020. Water levels during the survey remained stable averaging - 0.1 m on the Museum Bridge benchmark water level. When interpreting maps, it is recommended to check the benchmark to better gauge what current conditions are as levels fluctuate throughout the open water season.

The river has been split into three sections (1) Saskatchewan Border to Swan River (townsite), (2) Swan River (townsite) to Lenswood, and (3) Lenswood to Swan Lake. Each section is made up of numbered maps which illustrate the riffle/run areas, holes/areas with depth (all depths are in meters), public access points, “fishin holes”, crossings, parks and more. Anglers are encouraged to utilize these maps to explore the various opportunities the Swan River has to offer.



LEGEND

			
<i>Fishin' Hole</i>	<i>Access Point</i>	<i>Depth <1m</i>	<i>Snowmobile Access</i>
			
<i>Historic Site</i>	<i>Crossing</i>	<i>Riffle/Run</i>	<i>Park/Trail</i>

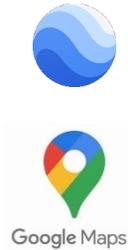
Note: The fishin' hole symbol represents either a well-known fishing spot, or a spot where gamefish were observed/angled during 2020 bathymetric surveys. There are many other fishin' holes throughout the Swan River Fishery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Surveys were funded by the Fish & Wildlife Enhancement Fund (FWEF), while cartography was completed by Eric Weinckowski, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Many individuals assisted SVSFE in creating this package by providing personal knowledge and allowing access to various reaches of the river. Thank you to fellow anglers; Terry Scales, Greg Hunter, Brian Hunter, Henry Barkowski, Glen Roberts, Sean Purdy and Larry Cole and local landowners; Kyle Schure, George Lumax, Brent Watts and Dale & Delores Hycyk.

USING THE SWAN RIVER FISHING PACKAGE GEOREFERENCED DATA:

SVSFE is dedicated in providing anglers with the best information through various media to enhance their angling experiences. To achieve this, the bathymetric data, along with river access points, fishin holes, etc. which were collected in 2020 are available in a georeferenced format. These digital formats are available on the SVSFE website: <https://swanvalleysportfishing.com/lakes/swan-river/>

Here anglers will find the option of using:



Online Applications - Google Earth or Google Maps

On Google Earth contour data and points of interest can be viewed. On Google Maps, only the points of interest are available. Points of interest include public access points (red pins), high quality fishing holes (blue pins) and the river benchmark (black pin). To find out more info on each location, simply click on the pin to view coordinates, site description and photos.



Offline Applications - Gaia GPS App

SVSFE recommends Gaia GPS as this free app displays the data in an aesthetic format for both .IOS and Androids users. The contour data of each river sections is available in .kmz files and points of interest in a gpx file. By downloading these files to an offline mapping application, anglers will have georeferenced depth data and site info at their fingertips when out on the water. The only downfall is site photos are not available with this media type but with the Gaia GPS app, you can add your own.

A few tips for when downloading the data for offline use:

- a. Ensure the mapping software is downloaded on your smart phone. GAIA GPS (or other).
- b. Visit the SVSFE website (link above). For IOS ensure using Safari web browser.
- c. Under the Data Files & Maps, click the desired stretch of river you wish. For example: *Swan River-Lenswood.kmz* and click Download. The files are separated by the three sections as each file is quite large. In this same section you will find the points of interest file which includes fishin holes, access points and the river benchmark.
- d. Open your downloads, which is different for IOS and Android (Tip: downloads are usually depicted by an arrow pointing down). Click the file and open with Gaia GPS or your preferred offline mapping application that supports .gpx and .kmz files.
- e. In the Gaia GPS app, click on the map tab to view the depth contours and POI sites along the Swan River which will also geo-reference your location while exploring the river.
- f. In this app, the data files are located in the "Saved" tab. The high-quality fishing holes and access points .kmz files will be displayed as red pins. By clicking on the pins anglers will find site descriptions. The contour data is displayed with colored contour lines and shades and by clicking on the contour line, anglers can see the depth in meters. (Tip: ensure the eye icon next to the file name does not have a line across it or is faded. This means the file is hidden from the map. Simply click the eye icon to display the file).

This promotional package was created by SVSFE in 2020 as an effort to provide anglers with the information required to help plan trips and explore the fishery that is the Swan River. Access information, crossing conditions, and barriers are subject to change over time. Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement Inc. will not be held liable for any damages or injuries that may occur from anglers using this promotional information.