

Caution: The route described by Martin is remote and can be difficult. Conditions can and do change and an easy portage one day can be difficult the next day. Travelers using this route should be experienced in wilderness navigation and seek the latest available information about route conditions.

Portages from Siderock Lake to Obukowin Lake in Manitoba

by Martin Kehoe August, 2004 Mvkehoe@aol.com

I have tried to find information about these portages for the last three years but the more I found out the more confused I became. A great breakthrough came when I received an E-mail from Jim Dickieson. Jim uses these routes for his wintertime trapping routes and spends the time to keep them clear. In 2004 I took a long solo canoe trip up the Wanipigow River into Woodland Caribou Park. When I had lightened my packs after a few weeks of wandering up and down the park I returned to Siderock Lake through the three mysterious portages. With Jim's notes in my hand I camped at the rock outcrop at the end of the first portage when coming from Obukowin.

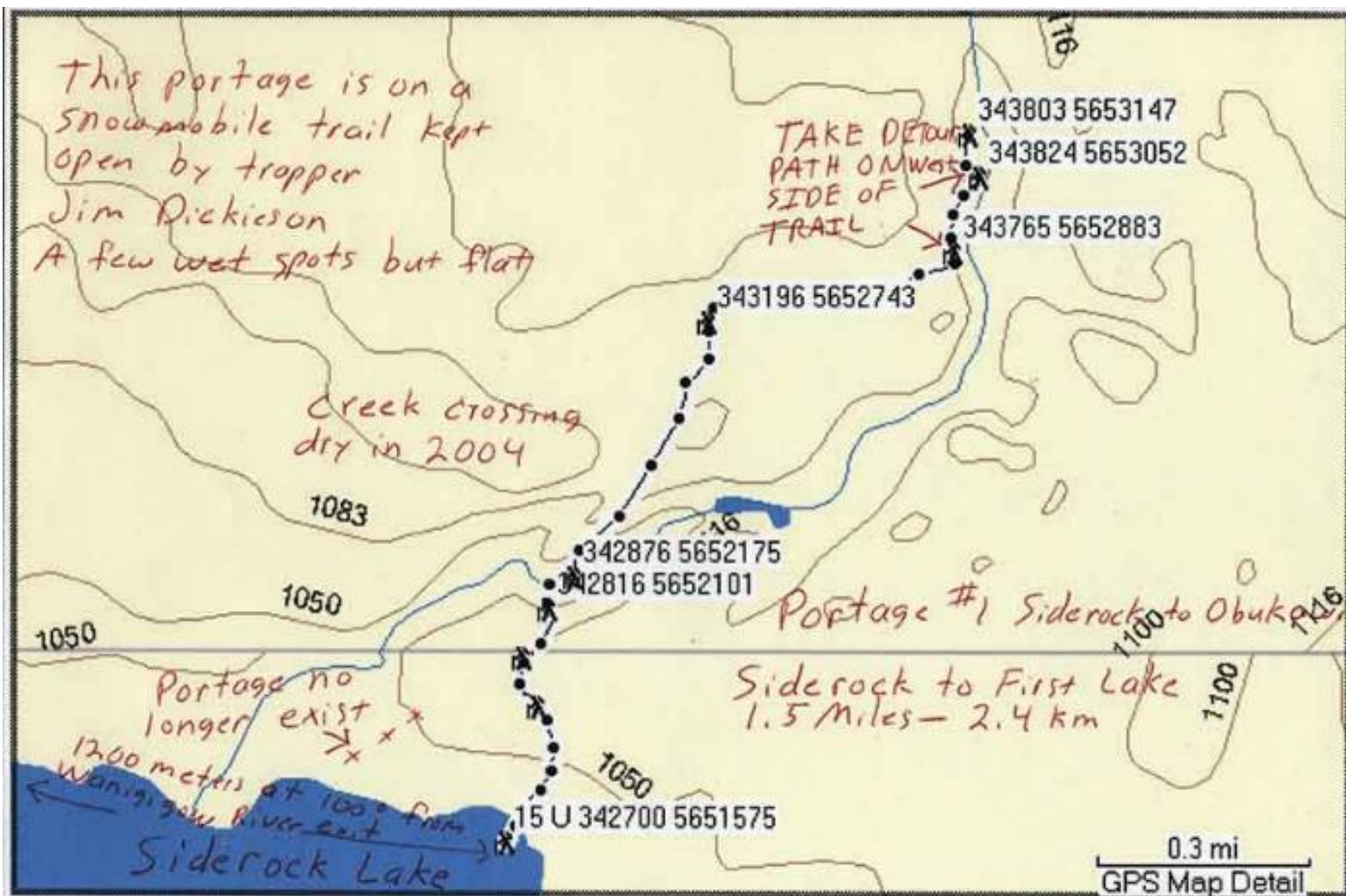
I was checking out the choices I had for portage routes when three canoes came across Kidney Lake. They had just spent all day getting across the middle portage. The previous day they had traveled from Wallace Lake to the end of the first portage from Siderock. Their story of doing long bog walks was not too different from some of the other on line accounts I had read. Now for some good news. If you travel the right route from Siderock to Obukowin you will have very little bog walking in the total of 3 miles (5 km) of portage trail. Because most people using this portage are heading north to the Gammon and Bloodvein Rivers I am going to describe it starting from the campground at Wallace Lake.

You can either paddle up the winding Wanipigow or take a .8 mile (1300) meter snowmobile trail to Siderock Lake. The snowmobile trail exits Wallace on the east end and is easy to find and flat. I have tried both and found that it takes me 2.5 hours to get to the portages by river or the portage. This is with double tripping the portage from Wallace and not stopping to rest. Unless you are single tripping the portage I think it is best to save your portaging for the three carries to Obukowin. There is a very nice campsite on the rock point east of the portage.



First Portage - Siderock Lake

The first portage starts on the NE corner of the bay where the river exits to the West. This is Jim's snowmobile trail and is very easy to follow. You may see maps saying that the portage is just east of the creek in the bay. This is confusing and obsolete information that had caused many a lot of trouble. The new portage is dry and flat until it crosses the creek. In the past many have had to canoe across the beaver flooded waters at this point. In 2004 it is a grassy area and you can step across the water. However, a little ways further along the trail the beavers had some water backed up on the trail and even had a little dam on it. Past this is a big fairly open area with good breezes. There are a few wetter holes that will vary in wetness from year to year. Nearing the final 300 meters of the portage watch for the desired detour on your left as you enter a very wet area. It does not look like much compared to the snowmobile trail but you want to take it to avoid water. I was fortunate that in 2004 the beavers have a dam at the exit to what Jim calls First Lake and I was on solid ground as I loaded my canoe. This can be a boggy place if you have low water. If it is real low think about portaging your gear a little further before going out to the channel. If traveling from the North you will see a white plastic bucket marking the portage start.



GPS Users:

All Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates shown on these maps refer to the North American Datum 1927 (NAD 27).

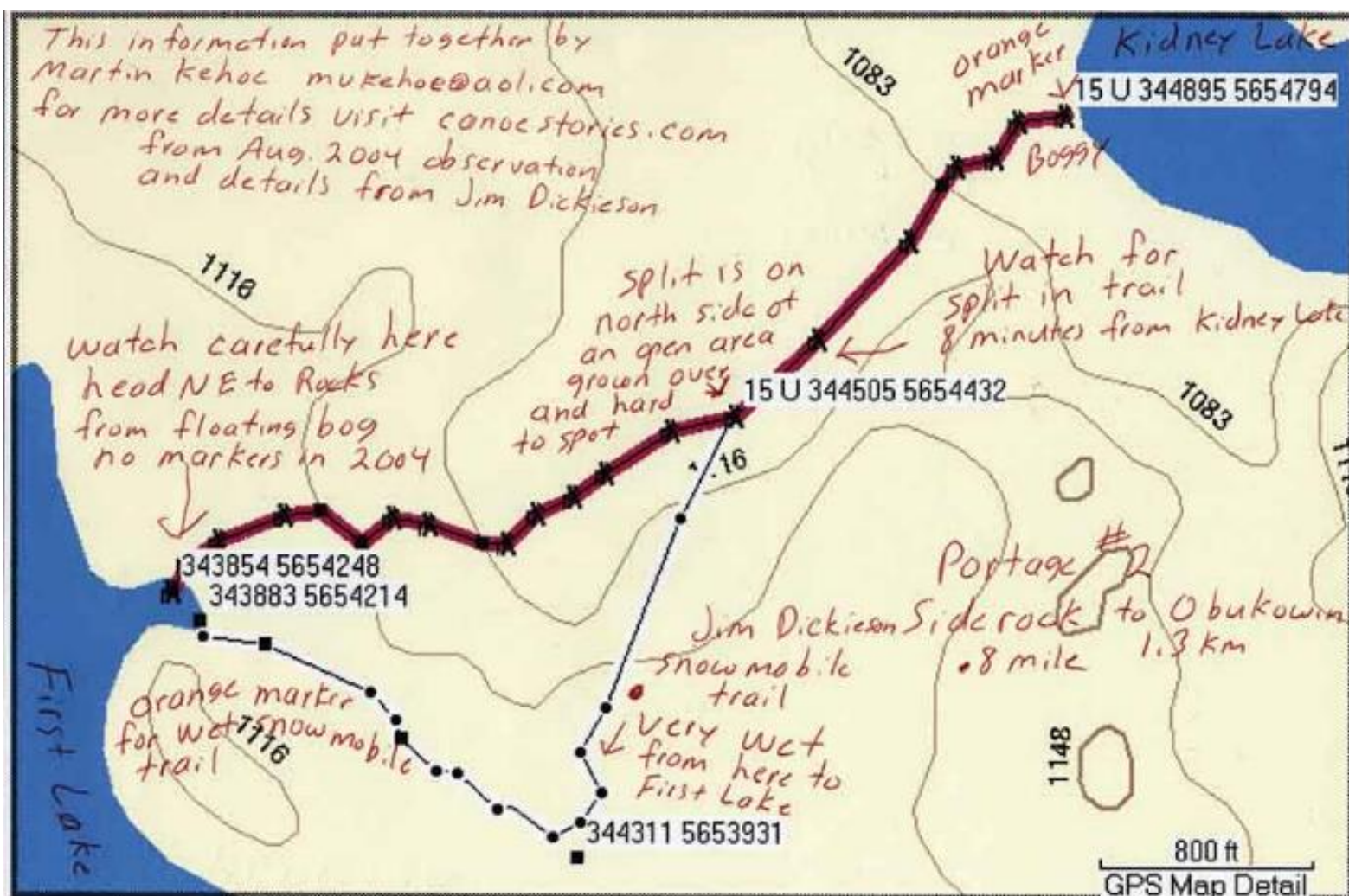
If you leave your GPS receiver set to "NAD 27", all of the UTM coordinates on all of these maps will correctly show portage locations and other features.

The map that covers Siderock Lake, 52 L/14 still uses the NAD 27 datum. The map that covers the majority of the Obukowin portages, 52 M/3, Edition 3, has been converted to North American Datum 1983 (NAD 83). If you carry the Aikens Lake 52 M/3 map with you on your trip and want to use the 52 M/3 map to find out where you are, you will have to change your GPS setting to "NAD 83" (or WGS 84 - NAD 83 and WGS 84 are derived from the same reference system)

(page 2 of 4)

Middle Portage - first lake to kidney-shaped lake

The middle portage starts from the East end of the second bay north of the portage you just finished. Old information will tell you to look up on the ridge to the NE and you will see a big cairn shaped like a man marking the portage. The "Stoneman" is still there but the trees have grown enough since the last big fire that it is very hard to spot. What you will see is a worn snowmobile path on the floating bog marked with an orange marker. This is not what you want, although a lot of canoeists end up on this bog walk by mistake. It will get you to the other side but is very wet and 300 meters longer than the high road going by the Stoneman. The portage you want starts in the NE corner of this bay and is hard to see, especially when everyone is only making marks on the wrong trail for a canoeist. Look NE towards high ground and you may see some weathered tape and drag marks in the floating bog. In about 100 meters you will be on rock and following the cairns until it drops down and passes through a few damp areas before rejoining Jim's snowmobile trail. Be sure to look around in the clearing where the trails join so you make the right turn when you come back for another load. The trails again goes through 200 meters of bog at the end.



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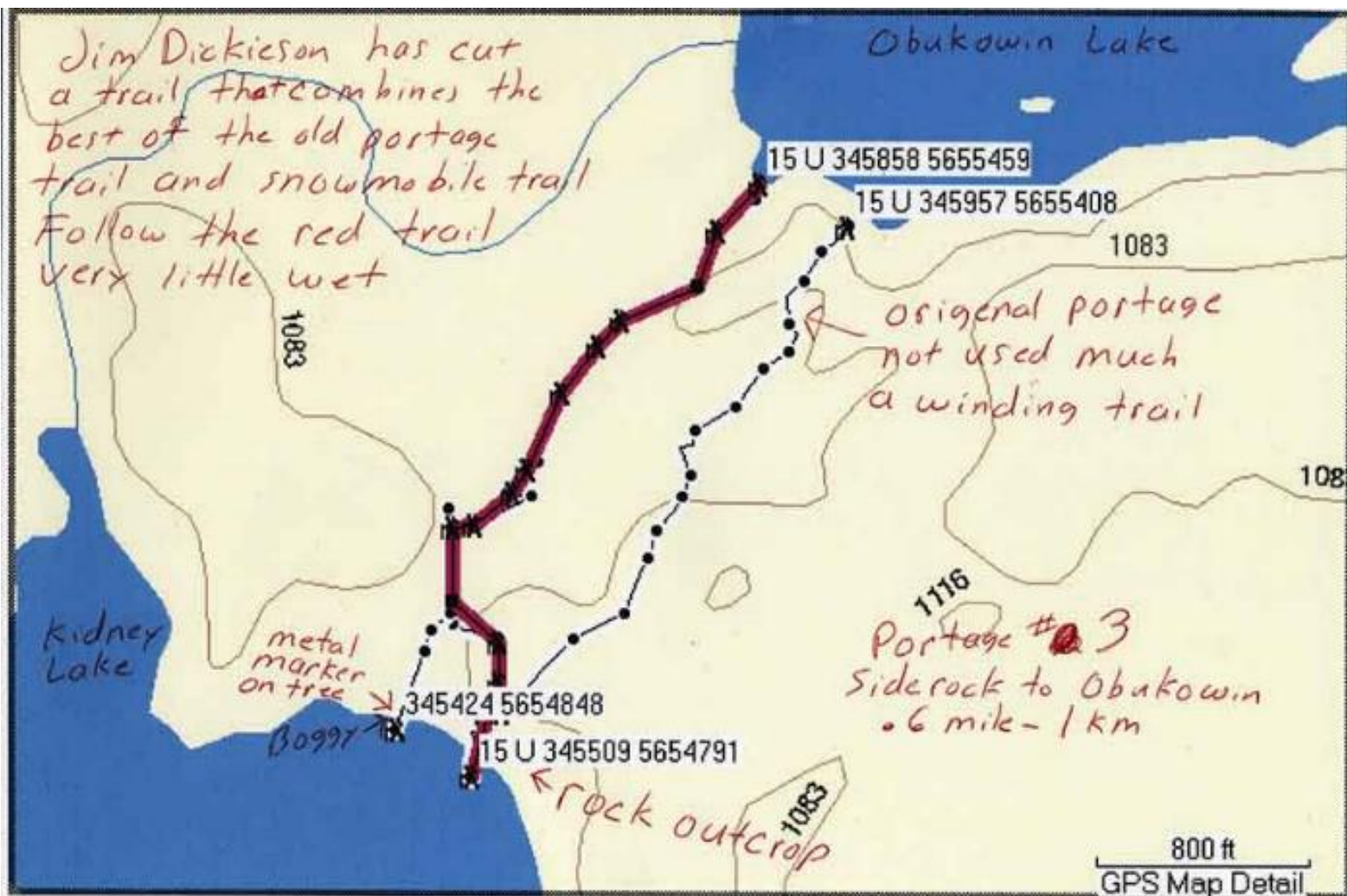
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(page 3 of 4)

Third Portage - kidney-shaped Lake to Obukowin Lake

You are now on what Jim calls Kidney Lake because of its shape. If you look NE you will see a rock outcrop that is the best start of the third and final portage. It is by far the easiest of the three. As you head toward the rock outcrop you will see a silver metal marker on a tree at the edge of Kidney Lake. This marks the boggy start of the old snowmobile trail to Obukowin. Starting at the rock outcrop you will easily follow the marked trail until it rejoins the old snowmobile trail and proceeds to Obukowin. The rock outcrop also marks the start of the traditional portage trail. If you watch very carefully you can see the cairns marking this route on your right less than 100 meters down the trail. The traditional portage is little used and tough to follow as it winds around on its way. If you are traveling from the North the snowmobile trail is marked with a large triangular sign as it leaves Obukowin and an orange marker is on a small spruce as it exits Kidney Lake.



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(page 4 of 4)