



The Strauss trunnion bascule lift bridge on the Lasalle Causeway that marks the southern end of the Rideau Canal

Rideau Canal Paddling Guide 1: Kingston to Colonel By Lake

Rideau Canal National Historic Site & World Heritage Site, Ontario, Canada

by

Ken W. Watson

This area is bounded by the City of Kingston at the south end (the Lasalle Causeway marks the southern limit of the Rideau Canal) and the lower end of Colonel By Lake to the north. It includes Cataraqui Bay – the foot of the Cataraqui River. The southern area (south of the Lasalle Causeway) has exposed the open water of Lake Ontario and is subject to wave action so paddlers, particularly canoeists, should ensure that they do a weather check to make sure the winds are light prior to heading out.



No specific route descriptions have been given. The map included in this guide can be enlarged (while viewing the PDF) to any level of detail you desire as an aid for travel planning.

This Guide

This guide is designed for the day/weekend paddler. Those planning to paddle all or a major section of the Rideau Canal will want *Watson's Paddling Guide to Rideau Canal* which contains all 18 day paddling guides in one package. It can be downloaded from: www.rideau-info.com/canal/paddling/

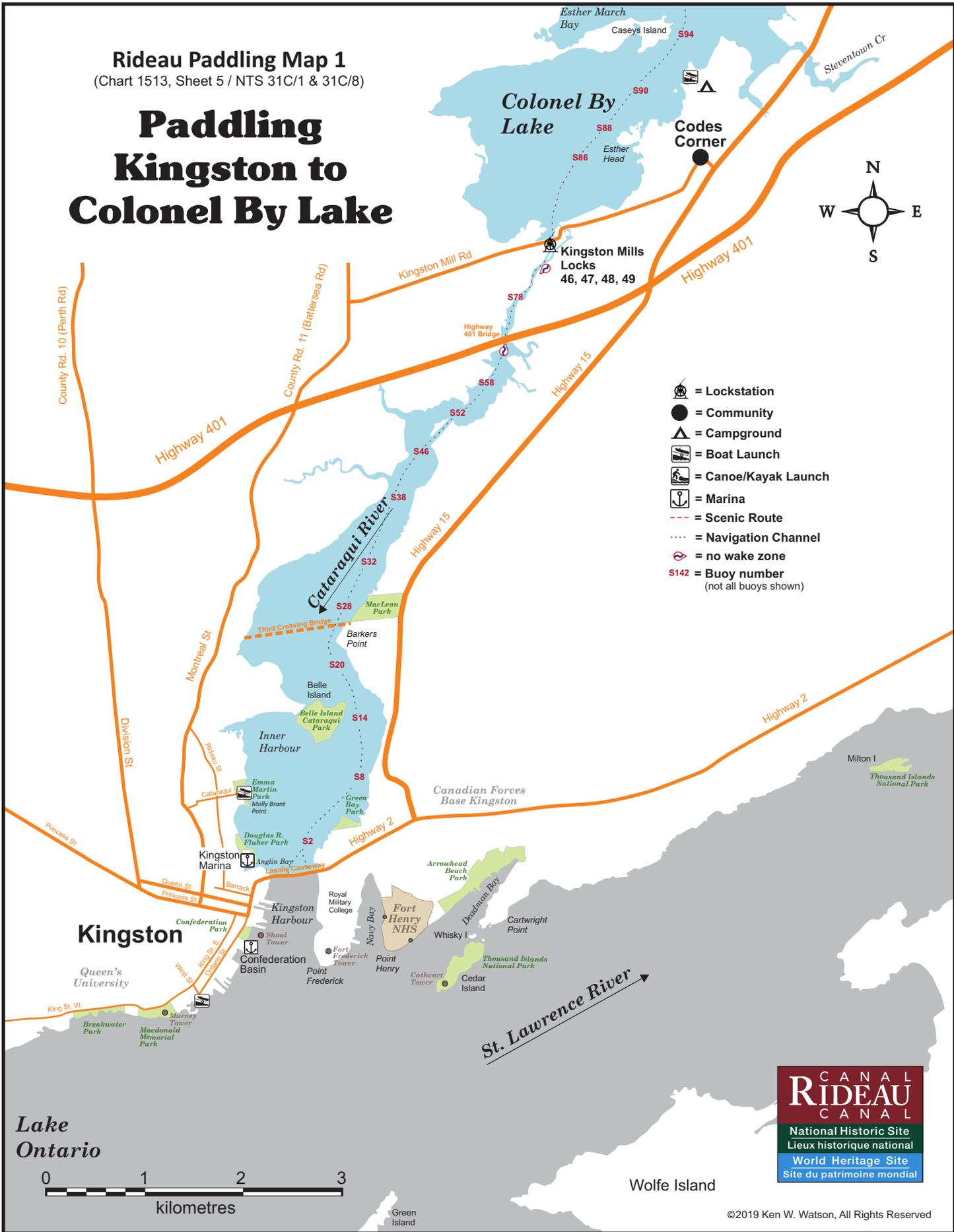
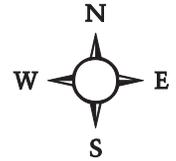
Water Access

At the south end, the quietest access is the small concrete ramp (44° 14.550'N - 76° 28.790' W) in **Emma Martin Park** (formerly Orchard Park) at the foot of Cataraqui Street in Kingston. It's located adjacent to the Cataraqui Canoe Club. There is also the public ramp at the foot of **West Street** (44° 13.430'N - 76° 29.140'W), but the caveat with this is that you're putting into Lake Ontario which can have severe waves. There are also several marinas in this area; Rideau Marina, Kingston Marina and Confederation Basin Marina.

At the north end, there is the **Kingston Mill Locks** – although a portage will be required to either the top or bottom of the locks from the parking area. You can also put into Colonel By Lake at the beach or ramp at **Rideau Acres Campground** (44° 18.440'N - 76° 25.560'W).

Rideau Paddling Map 1
 (Chart 1513, Sheet 5 / NTS 31C/1 & 31C/8)

Paddling Kingston to Colonel By Lake



- = Lockstation
- = Community
- = Campground
- = Boat Launch
- = Canoe/Kayak Launch
- = Marina
- = Scenic Route
- = Navigation Channel
- = no wake zone
- = Buoy number
(not all buoys shown)

**CANAL
 RIDEAU
 CANAL**
 National Historic Site
 Lieu historique national
 World Heritage Site
 Site du patrimoine mondial

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Facilities

Lodging: If you're paddling and camping, the lockstations are a good choice for camp spots (a camping fee applies). There are also campgrounds, B&Bs and hotels/motels in Kingston. For information about local accommodations see: www.tourism.kingstoncanada.com and general lodging sites (i.e. Airbnb, bbcanada).

Supplies: A local source for supplies is Kingston (full services).

Big Boats

You'll be sharing the Rideau with big power boats (cruisers). The Rideau is generally not a crowded waterway and often you'll find the large boats in "packs" – travelling from lock to lock – once they pass by you won't see any for a while. Some of these boats can generate a large wave. The general rule for a paddler and large waves is to meet them head-on, this can actually be fun in a kayak (not as much fun in a canoe). If you see waves approaching, turn into them.

The main navigation channel is shown on the maps as a blue dashed line – this is where the big boats will be travelling. So, if you wish to avoid these, pick a route away from the navigation channel. Many paddlers prefer paddling near shore, it's more interesting (i.e. wildlife, cottages) and it keeps you farther away from the waves produced by big boats.

There are several "no wake" zones on the Rideau – these have been marked on the maps. Boaters within these areas are supposed to be travelling at a slow enough speed (less than 10 kph) that their boat doesn't generate any potentially damaging or dangerous waves.

Most power boaters are considerate of the paddler and slow down, although this can sometimes cause a problem as a big boat goes from high to low speed, generating a large wave in the transition. These large transition waves can also be generated at the start and end points of No Wake zones (the locations where power boats slow down or speed up). So, be on the lookout for this type of wave.

Wind

A question often asked is which way does the wind blow? The prevailing wind, powered by the jet stream, is from the southwest. That's about the only rule of thumb. If a front is moving in then the wind can come from any direction. I've been on several paddles where I've been paddling into the wind on the way out in the morning and into the wind on the way back in the afternoon because the wind swung around 180 degrees (for some reason it never seems to work the other way around - at your back both ways). So, if you're going to travel the entire Rideau, going from Kingston to Ottawa improves the odds of having the wind at your back - but be prepared for anything.

Etiquette

Your trip planning should include a "leave no trace" approach - carry out what you carry in. Many areas are un-serviced (no garbage cans) - so plan to be self-contained. The lockstations provide waste disposal facilities.

Preparation & Safety

Please read the trip planning information on www.rideau-info.com/canal/paddling/. While these lakes are easy paddling, normal paddling preparations should be made (all required safety gear, maps, food, water, first-aid kit, etc.). Zebra mussels are present in many areas along the Rideau, so a pair of water shoes (to avoid cut feet) is recommended.

Please take all normal safety precautions, including checking the weather forecast before you head out and making sure that someone on shore knows your planned travel route and itinerary

Navigation

While the Rideau is generally easy to navigate, taking along a set of maps is a must (in addition to any GPS you might have). Although the map in this guide is an accurate 1:50,000 representation of the waterway (when printed to 8.5" x 11"), you may also wish to also have the 1:20,000 hydrographic chart for this section (Chart 1513). For power boat navigation, the charts are an absolute must (the map in this guide should not be used for power boat navigation). The charts are also very handy for the paddler, since they show the Rideau in great detail, including depths (which can be helpful when looking for wildlife habitat or just interesting places to paddle).

The charts also show all the navigation buoys. These are all numbered (red buoys have even numbers, green buoys have odd numbers) and so can be used as an aid in locating yourself on the map when you're on open water. A subset of those buoy numbers have been included on the paddling guide maps.

For those wishing to go off the beaten path or want to know more of the topography and geographic features of the surrounding countryside, the 1:50,000 NTS maps for this section are 31C/1 and 31C/8.

The Locks

Most Rideau lockstations offer facilities such as washrooms, water, recycling cans, waste cans and picnic tables. Most also allow camping for paddlers travelling the Rideau for a modest camping fee. Paddlers can portage the locks for free, but you owe it to yourself to lock through at least one lock in order to get the full experience of paddling the Rideau Canal. See www.rideau-info.com/canal/ for the current fee schedule.

Distances:

Circumference distances are approximate, following the main shorelines and bays. The navigation channel is shown on the map.

- Lasalle Causeway to Kingston Mills along navigation channel: 6.9 km (4.3 mi)
- Cataraqui Bay (Lasalle Causeway to Kingston Mills) circumference: 18 km (11.2 mi).

Cataraqui River

Lasalle Causeway to Kingston Mills Locks

In the pre-canal era this area was much the same geographically as it is now, the outflow of the Cataraqui River through marshland. Some of the geography is affected by the rise and fall of Lake Ontario, which since 1918 has shown a fluctuation of 4.6 feet / 1.4 m (which is close to the 4 foot / 1.2 m fluctuation of the lake noted by surveyor Samuel Clowes in 1824). There was some minor deepening of shoals during the construction the canal.

Belle Island (originally Bell Island) was a height of land in a swampy area - much of that swampy peninsula (a golf course today) has been filled - but the originally outline remains mostly unchanged.

One of the earliest detailed maps we have of this area, Joshua Jebb's 1816 map, shows essentially what you will be paddling through today.

An interesting geographic features in this area is the southern limit, on the Rideau Canal, of the Frontenac Axis, a neck of the Canadian Shield (very old metamorphic and intrusive rocks). This is located just south of Kingston Mills and you'll see it as a significant topographic change caused by exposures of granite and syenite just north of Highway 401.

In the southern section of the Cataraqui you'll see a fair bit of urban development on or near the shoreline but as you paddle north this changes into natural shorelines (marshlands).

The Lakes

Colonel By Lake

In the pre-canal era this was a meandering section of the Cataraqui River which wound its way to Cataraqui Falls (location of Kingston Mills Lockstation). The damming of the river at Cataraqui Falls with the building of the first mills in 1784 created the initial lake - a mill pond that extended to just south of Caseys Island. The lake was expanded to its current size with the completion of canal dam and extensive berms at Kingston Mills in 1831. This raised the water level at this end of the lake by 26 feet (7.9 m).

The lake is shallow, the deepest point is 25 feet (7.6 m) and the lake averages about 10 to 15 feet (3.0 to 4.6 m). The shallow nature of the lake and the fact that it's at the lower end of the watershed means that it is nutrient loaded, the water normally being green (algae). A potential hazard located outside of the marked navigation channel are stumps (drowned trees), mostly in the northern part of the lake, with the tops just a few inches below the water at normal navigation level. Shallow drafting vessels such as canoes and kayaks will normally not have any problems with these except in times of low water. The green algae in the water make the stumps very hard to see.

The land bordering the lake is privately owned except for the federal lands around the lock. Much of the lake has moderate density cottage and summer home development.

Points of Interest (listed south to north)

Kingston: Known as the Limestone City for its many stone buildings, Kingston has many attractions. It's worth taking a wander through the downtown, starting with Confederation Park on the waterfront.

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Kingston, in particular the naval harbour in Kingston, was the reason for building the Rideau Canal. Kingston was found to be potentially vulnerable to not being supplied with men and materials during the War of 1812 (war with the U.S.) since the supply route, from Montreal to Kingston, up the St. Lawrence, was in range of American guns. So the Rideau Canal was proposed (and eventually built) to create a safe supply route from Montreal to Kingston.

For details about Kingston visit the many Kingston websites.

Kingston Harbour: If you're in a kayak or a good canoeist (or it's a calm day) it's certainly worth a tour of the Kingston waterfront – to see Kingston and Fort Henry from the water. Check the weather before you do this. Early morning is usually best since wave action often increases as the day progresses.

Fort Henry: This fort was built to protect the naval harbour in Kingston. Today's fort and the four associated Martello towers were built between 1832 and 1837 and are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site that includes the Rideau Canal. The fort seen today replaced a much smaller fort originally built during the War of 1812. Fort Henry was garrisoned firstly by British troops and then by Canadian troops until 1891. In 1936 the first restoration project was done on the fort and it was opened as a public museum in 1938. It remains one of Kingston's most popular tourist attractions – visit www.forthenry.com for full details.

LaSalle Causeway: The LaSalle Causeway marks the southern limit of the Rideau Canal. The most prominent feature of the causeway is the Strauss trunnion bascule lift bridge, built in 1915-16. Paddlers can easily slip under the bridge. There is also a channel on the east side for small boats which has a clearance of 4.3 m / 14 ft. The earliest bridge in this location may date to 1819 but the first documented bridge dates to 1829, a wooden bridge on masonry piers with a draw bridge at the west end (later replaced by a swing bridge). The causeway, opened in 1917, has three bridges, one at each end and the bascule lift bridge in the centre. The end bridges, originally steel truss bridges, were replaced with concrete beam bridges, the east bridge in 1962 and the west end bridge in 1993.

The LaSalle Causeway is named after René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, a French explorer who oversaw the construction of Fort Frontenac in 1673 (area to the western (downtown) side of the causeway).

Cataraqui Bay: There are urbanized shorelines until you get north of Belle Island (originally called "Bell Island"). The west side of the river from this point north features extensive marshlands.

Third Crossing Bridge: Construction on this new bridge is scheduled to start in 2019. It presently has the name "third crossing" since it's the third bridge (after the LaSalle Causeway and the Highway 401 bridge) to crossing the Cataraqui River/Bay in this area. It will likely be given a new name upon completion.

Highway 401 Bridge: This is a fixed high level (6.7 m / 22 ft) bridge which carries Highway 401 across the Rideau Canal. It was built in the late 1950s (lane expanded in 2017-2020).

Frontenac Axis: Just north of the Highway 401 Bridge you'll see the topography start to change, with granitic outcrops marking the southern edge of the Frontenac Axis. These are very old rocks, originally formed 1.35 to 1.06 billion years ago (Precambrian: middle to late Proterozoic age) and then deformed and metamorphosed 900 million years ago. These rocks are part of the Canadian Shield. The rock types that you'll be able to see as you travel through the Frontenac Axis include granite, syenite, monzonite, migmatite, gabbro, quartzite, marble, gneiss, pegmatite and conglomerate. Many of the lakes are underlain by marble (crystalline limestone) which provides some buffering against acid rain. This neck

(axis) of rocks connects the extensive area of the Canadian Shield to the north and the Adirondack mountains to the south. On the Rideau, the Frontenac Axis extends to the northern part of Big Rideau Lake. On either side of the Frontenac Axis are younger, 520 to 460 million year old (Paleozoic: Cambrian to Lower Ordovician age) rocks including limestones, sandstones, dolomites and shales (laid down in a shallow sea that covered this area at that time). For more information see the Geology section.

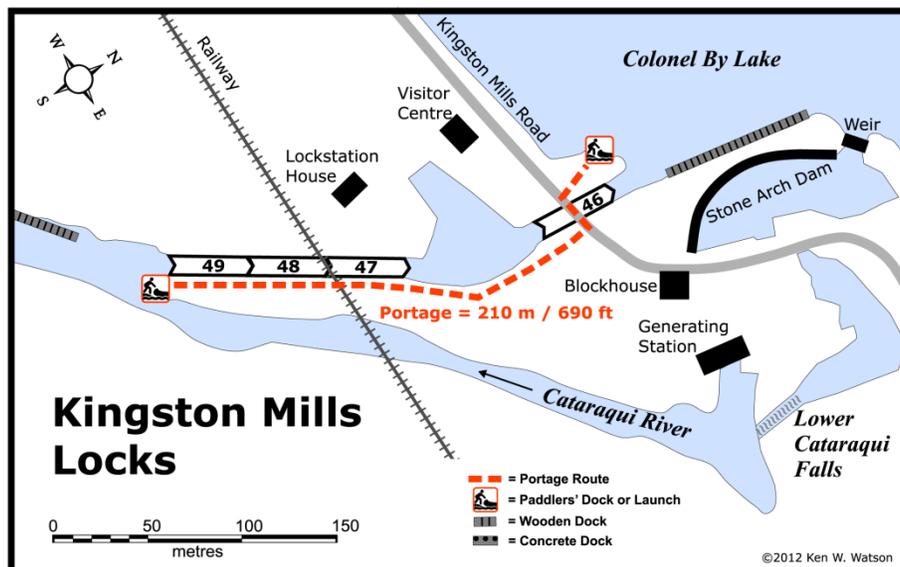
Kingston Mills Railway Bridge: The first railway bridge, a wooden bridge, was built by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1855. In 1890 it was rebuilt as a steel bridge with a double track and in 1924 the pier stands were rebuilt with concrete. It is presently owned and used by the CNR.

Cataraqui Falls: The hard granitic rocks of the Frontenac Axis in this area are the reason for the Cataraqui Falls, the lower part of which can still be seen today (the dam, basin and power dam cover the upper part of the falls). A native portage used to lead around the falls for paddlers travelling along the Cataraqui River. These falls, which originally had a drop of about 20 feet (6.1 m), were the site of the first mills in the area, the King's Mills, built in 1784. A succession of both timber mills (1794-1863) and grist mills (1794-1904) were built and used here. In 1913-14, the hydro generating station that can be seen today was installed.

Kingston Mills Lockstation: This lockstation features four locks, three in-flight and a detached lock. The total lift is 48.0 feet (14.6 m). The lockmaster's house (Robert Anglin House) now serves as an visitor's centre for the locks. The small blockhouse dates to 1832 and is one of only four built along the Rideau. It has been restored to the military period and is sometimes open with an interpreter.

An interesting configuration at Kingston Mills is the basin formed by the old dam and the new dam. Originally there was just the stone dam with incorporated waste water weir (sitting on the bedrock head of Cataraqui Falls). When it was proposed to add a hydro generating station in 1913, a new concrete dam was built below the stone dam - this formed the basin. The configuration is such that the Rideau Canal (Parks Canada) maintains full control the water flow (via their weir).

Note too the large berms to both the east and west of the locks (rebuilt in 2004). Originally, two locks were going to be placed farther upstream (at Jack's Rifts and Billidore's Rifts), but as with all the lockstations, plans had to be changed to meet conditions. It was decided to put all the locks at Kingston Mills and raised the water from here all the way to Lower Brewers. This meant creating these large



embankments (berms) to help impound the water.

The original bridge across the upper lock was a double leaf timber drawbridge built in 1831. It was replaced some time later by a wooden swing bridge (easier to use than a drawbridge). In 1956 a steel through plate girder swing bridge was installed. That bridge was replaced by another steel swing bridge in 1988.

The first bridge at Kingston Mills was a fixed timber bridge, placed across Catarauqui Falls, when the Kingston-Montreal road was completed in about 1801. In 1909 a steel bridge was built to replace the previous wooden structure. This fixed bridge has been rebuilt over the years and it is now scheduled to be replaced prior to 2020.

The railway bridge that crosses the locks was first constructed by the Grand Trunk Railroad as a wooden bridge in 1855. In 1890 it was rebuilt as a steel bridge with a double track and in 1924 the pier stands were rebuilt with concrete. It is presently owned and used by the CNR.

The locks bypass Catarauqui Falls of which only the lower portion is visible today (the canal dam is built on the head of the falls). A native portage used to lead around the falls. These falls, which originally had a drop of about 20 feet (6.1 m), were the site of the first mills in the area, the King's Mills, built in 1784. A succession of both timber mills (1794-1863) and grist mills (1794-1904) were built and used here.

Colonel By Lake: The west side of this man-made lake is mostly undeveloped (farm frontage) while the east side has cottage and summer home development - so you'll find the best wildlife viewing opportunities along the west shoreline. The foot of the channel at the head of the lake (Harriet Point) is the location of Jack's Rifts - a small set of rapids (now drowned) where a lock was originally proposed.

Route Suggestions

The only suggestion, other than your own putterings, is to make sure to take a poke up the river to see Catarauqui Falls. When you come to the foot of the locks at Kingston Mills, stay in the river (bearing east/right), head under the railway bridge and paddle up to the falls (only 300 m / 1,000 ft from the locks).

Geology of the Rideau Canal

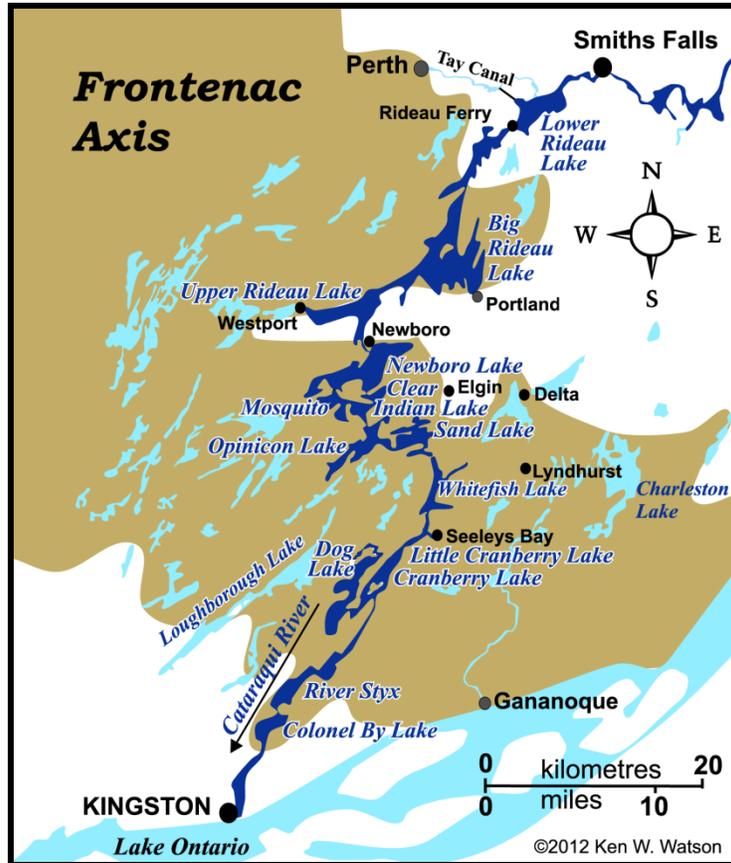
As you paddle the Rideau Canal, the route you follow is defined by its geology. The area is underlain by part of an old mountain range, the Grenville Mountains, eroded down over many millions of years. Much of this eroded mountain range has been covered by younger sedimentary rocks, but portions of the old mountains are exposed, partly a result of their original topography and partially due to the eroding away of younger overlying rocks. This area is known as the Frontenac Axis. In essence, if you paddle from Kingston to Smiths Falls, you'll be paddling over a (very old) mountain range.

The Frontenac Axis can be thought of as a ridge connecting the extensive area of the Canadian Shield to the north and the Adirondack mountains to the south. On the Rideau, the southern irregular boundary of the Frontenac Axis is near Kingston Mills and the northern irregular boundary is on the northern reaches of Big Rideau Lake. The Frontenac Axis is made up of rocks formed 1.35 to 1.06 billion years ago (Precambrian: middle to late Proterozoic age) and then deformed and metamorphosed 900 million years ago. The rock types that you'll be able to see as you travel through the Frontenac Axis include granite,

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syenite, monzonite, migmatite, gabbro, quartzite, marble, gneiss and pegmatite. Many of the lakes are underlain by marble (crystalline limestone) which provides some buffering against acid rain.

To the north and south of the Frontenac Axis are younger, 520 to 460 million year old (Paleozoic: Cambrian to Lower Ordovician age) rocks including limestone, sandstone, dolomite, shale and conglomerate. Most of these rocks were laid down in a shallow sea that covered this area, which was near the equator at that time (part of Laurentia which eventually became part of North America due to continental drift). The rocks near Kingston are dominated by limestone which provided much of the building material for the early town (hence the nickname, Limestone City). In the centre part of the Rideau, on the margin of the



Frontenac Axis, the younger sedimentary rocks tend to be dominated by sandstone. Beyond that, from Smiths Falls to Ottawa the rocks are mostly dolomite, limestone and shale.

More recently, three events have impacted on the landscape - the ice last age, glacial Lake Iroquois and the Champlain Sea. During the last ice age, which peaked about 20,000 years ago, the Rideau area was covered by ice up to 1.5 kilometres (1.0 mi) thick. The ice polished and moved rocks, excavated some of the landscape and left large deposits of sand and gravel. The weight of the ice depressed the landscape by about 175 m (575 ft) below where it is today.

By 14,000 years ago, the climate began to warm up, melting the glaciers and forcing them to retreat. In the area of Lake Ontario, today's exit of the lake down the St. Lawrence River was blocked by ice and a large lake, about 30 m (100 ft) higher than today's Lake Ontario, formed. That lake, known as Lake Iroquois, extended as far north as Perth and Smiths Falls.

Evidence of that lake exist today in form of glaciolacustrine (a big word for glacial lake) deposits. These include near shore sediments such as gravel and gravelly sand, and deeper water deposits such as silt and clay. These deposits are found all over the southern Rideau, including on heights of land, such as near the top of Rock Dunder. This is because the overall landscape was depressed, and features such as Rock Dunder formed part of the bottom of this large lake.

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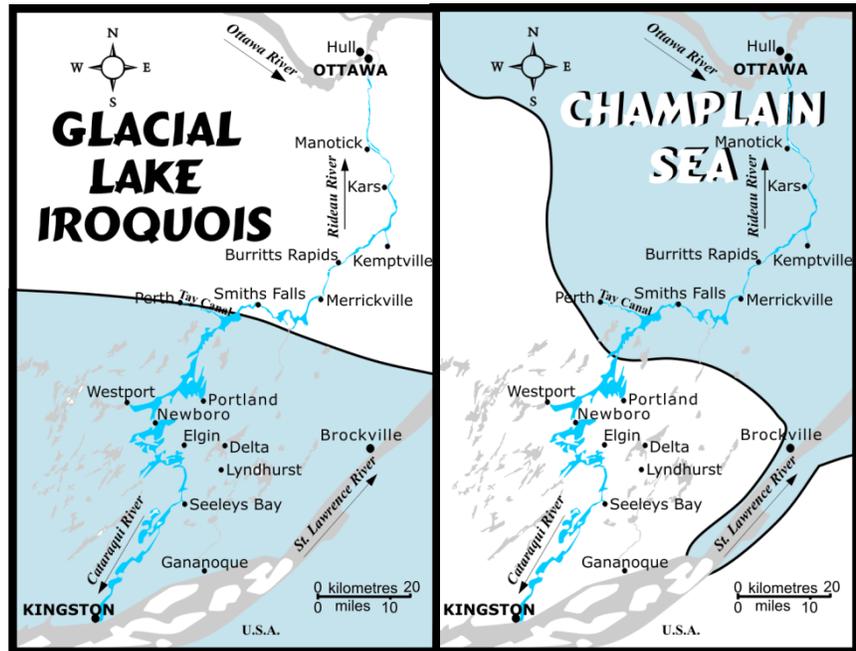
By about 13,350 years ago a channel opened up in the ice dam (near Rome, NY), rapidly draining much of the lake. At the same time the land was rising as the weight of the ice was removed (this rising is called “isostatic rebound”).

As Lake Iroquois and subsequent glacial lakes were getting smaller, the glaciers were continuing their retreat from the St. Lawrence lowlands. About 13,000 years ago this allowed waters from the Atlantic Ocean to mix with glacial melt-waters and river drainage to create a brackish sea known as the Champlain Sea which extended past (west and south) of Ottawa.

The southern limit of this sea on the Rideau Canal was near Nobles Bay of Big Rideau Lake. If you were paddling the sea back then, you would have been enjoying it in the company of whales. The bones of a humpback whale were found near Smiths Falls and beluga (white) whale bones have also been found in Champlain Sea deposits. This sea retreated as the glaciers moved north and the land continued to undergo isostatic rebound. By about 11,100 years ago, the central Rideau had risen above sea level and the land that we see today was being revealed. Rivers and streams continued to modify the landscape up until the building of the Rideau Canal.

There are a some interesting geological features in the Ottawa area. The northern part of the Rideau River is the youngest part of the waterway (outside of canal altered sections) since, in the immediate post-glacial period, the Ottawa River had a channel to the south of where it is today, across much of urban Ottawa to the Mer Bleue area (where the trace of the old Ottawa River channel can be clearly seen). It eventually shifted north (due to isostatic rebound) to its present location and cut a deep channel. The faster excavation by the Ottawa River, through the underlying limestone rocks, compared to the Rideau River, formed Rideau Falls.

Another geological feature at Ottawa is that much of the area is underlain by a thick clay layer, a type of “quick clay” known locally as Leda clay (named after a type of small clam found in the clay deposits). Quick clay is a clay that is not well bonded and is subject to liquefaction, that is, when vibration is induced, it can turn into a liquid and flow. When undisturbed, it looks and acts like a normal solid form of clay. It was formed by glacial silt settling out on the bottom of the Champlain Sea. There it formed a stable type of marine clay, “glued” with salt. When the sea retreated due to the rising land, this clay was exposed to rainfall that removed much of that salt bonding, creating the unstable clay that is present in much of the region today. Earthquakes can cause this clay to liquefy, leading to landslides. Ottawa is a seismically active region (earthquake prone) and, in the future, an earthquake is going to play havoc with the city (if I lived in Ottawa, I’d check to see if my house is sitting on bedrock or on clay).



Very generalized representations of glacial Lake Iroquois and the Champlain Sea in the Rideau region.

Mining in the Rideau Region

The rocks of the Frontenac Axis are host to some small mineral deposits, several of which were mined in the mid-late 1800s and in the early 1900s. In the Rideau Canal region, minerals such as apatite (for phosphate, used as a fertilizer), mica, feldspar, graphite and iron were mined. A few of these old mining areas have been noted in the guides.

Some of the earliest mining in the region was for rocks to be used for the dams and locks of the Rideau Canal. Rocks of the Frontenac Axis were not suitable for this purpose (too hard and often fractured) and so quarries to mine rocks for the canal were established in the younger sedimentary rocks, mining sandstone or limestone. You can see the local geology reflected in the type of rocks used for the building of the locks and dams along the Rideau; limestone in the southern area, sandstone (Potsdam sandstone) in the central Rideau and dolomitic limestone and limestone in the northern part.

The first mine on/near the Rideau Canal (excluding the small scale iron mining near Lower Beverley Lake in the early 1800s) was the iron mine on Iron Island near Newboro opened by the Chaffey brothers, John, Benjamin and Elswood, in about 1850. Phosphate mining (for fertilizer, most was shipped to England) started in the Rideau area in about 1867 and continued to the early 1890s. By the late 1880s, mica mining was also underway. Apatite (phosphate) and mica form in the same geological environment, so several mines which started off mining phosphate were later mined for mica. Mica mining ended in the 1920s as the value of the mineral fell to uneconomic levels.

Today, mining in the region is mostly surface quarrying for sand, gravel, and stone.

Wildlife of the Rideau Canal

The Rideau spans a wide variety of ecosystems, due in part to the underlying geology and man's activity in the last 200 years. The Frontenac Axis, a section of the Canadian Shield (Precambrian rocks - very old) underlies the Rideau from Kingston Mills to Lower Rideau Lake. These hard rocks form rugged topography (hills, ravines), including the basins for the lakes on the system. Most of the lakes are underlain by crystalline limestone which acts as a buffer against acid rain (hence the lakes are very productive for fish and other aquatic life). Outside of the Frontenac Axis, younger (Palaeozoic) flat lying sedimentary rocks form the underlying bedrock (it is from these rocks that the stones for the dams and locks were quarried).

The area has been actively logged since before the canal was built, the entire area cut over several times. Most of the region (including many of the islands in the lakes) was farmed or used for cattle pasture at one time. By the early 20th century, small farms on poor Frontenac Axis lands were being abandoned in favour of better (more productive) pastures.

So today, along the Rideau you'll find forested areas (some now 100 years mature), active farmland, scrubland and abandoned farmland, low density cottage/summer home developed (rural) land and urban land. The forests are generally mixed, deciduous trees (oak, maple, ash, basswood, birch, elm) and conifer trees (most commonly white pine, white spruce and cedar). On flat lying topography you'll find cedar swamps, hardwood (black ash & silver maple) swamps, and bogs. Along the margins of the Rideau Canal you'll find cattail marshes. All these areas support a varied and healthy wildlife population.

The following is a list of the most common wildlife that you might spot on your Rideau journey. Note that photos of many of these birds and animals can be found on my Rideau website at:

www.rideau-info.com/canal/ecology/fauna.html

Water Birds

Common Loon - on all the lakes, this bird is distinctive for its haunting call. It's a diving bird, swimming underwater to catch fish

Great Blue Heron - along the entire Rideau, a large bird usually seen wading near shore.

Green Heron - most commonly in the shallow water sections (Colonel By Lake, River Styx, Rideau River) this is a small heron. Usually seen perched in a tree.

Canada Goose- yes, we have these (more each year)

Ducks - most commonly the Mallard duck (quacks when flushed), American Merganser duck (a pointed red bill) and Wood duck (squeaks when flushed).

Pied-billed Grebe - In some areas you'll also spot the reclusive Pied-billed Grebe (a small diving bird).

Ospreys - now common along the Rideau - often spotted in their large nest made of sticks perched high in a pine tree or a power line stanchion. It dives to catch fish (quite spectacular to see)

Ring-billed Gull - a gull with mark on bill

Terns - the Common Tern, a large white tern with dark bill and the Black Tern, small tern with black body (adult)

Trumpeter Swans - An extirpated native species in this region, they were re-introduced in the 1990s. Favourite haunts include Opinicon Lake and Big Rideau Lake (near Narrows and Portland).

Other Birds

There are many other types of birds that you might spot in the near-water environment; red-tailed hawks, red-winged blackbirds, turkey vultures, turkeys, ruffed grouse and many more (bring along your bird book).

Reptiles and Amphibians

Turtles: we've got lots of turtles - most common are the Common Map Turtle (a peaked shell and yellow-orange lines on the skin and shell); Midland Painted Turtle (a flat smooth shell with bright red splotches along the edge) and the Common Snapping Turtle (can get very large, a prehistoric looking turtle). You'll often find Map and Painted turtles sunning themselves on logs and rocks. The Snapping turtle almost always stays in the water, you'll find it floating or slowly swimming near marshy areas. There are also three other less commonly seen turtles, the Stinkpot Turtle (aka Musk Turtle) a small turtle found in areas with aquatic plant growth; Blanding's Turtle with a "war helmet" type shell and bright yellow chin and throat, usually found in wetlands and the Spotted Turtle, a small turtle with bright yellow spots on its shell, usually found in areas with aquatic plants and a silt bottom.

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Frogs: we have lots of frogs that will provide you with a nightly serenade. The two biggest are the bullfrog and the green frog. Also the leopard frog, spring peeper and many others.

Snakes: we do not have any poisonous snakes. The two largest snakes are the Northern Water Snake and the Black Rat Snake - both generally found near water. The common garter snake can also be found throughout the region.

Mammals

In the near shore environment you'll likely spot muskrats and beavers. You may even spot the somewhat reclusive river otter (found in the lakes here as well as rivers). And there are the usual Eastern Ontario mammals to be sometimes found near the water: raccoons, black, grey and red squirrels, chipmunks, foxes, coyotes, white-tailed deer and skunks. Black bears, although quite rare in the region, are present.

Fish

The Rideau is home to healthy populations of many fish species. The lakes and most of the rivers are home to species such as Large Mouth Bass, Small Mouth Bass, Northern Pike and Crappie. Lake Trout are present in some lakes that have depths in excess of 80 ft / 24 m (i.e. Big Rideau Lake). There are Walleye in some areas (i.e. Upper Rideau Lake and the Rideau River) and Muskellunge (Musky/Maskinonge) in some sections of the Rideau River.

Aquatic Plants:

The Rideau hosts quite a variety of aquatic plants.

Submerged Plants: Waterweed (like aquarium plants); Pondweed; Smartweed (holds flower above surface of water); Tape-grass (like underwater grass, flower on coiled stem); Coontail (like a thick furry coon's tail); Water-milfoil (one species an invasive plant).

Aquatic Plants (floating): White Water-lily (white fragrant flower); Bullhead Water-lily (round yellow flower); Frogbit (invasive alien, small floating leaf like water lily); Duckweed (food for ducks, tiny plant)

Aquatic Plants (emergent): Cattail (big brown seed heads); Pickerelweed (blue flowers on stalk); Flowering Rush (invasive alien); Arrowhead (arrowhead-pointed leaves, white flowers); Purple Loosestrife (invasive alien, now controlled by beetles in some areas).

Oh - and those amorphous green blobs floating under the water in near-shore areas. They are benign (not due to pollution), a type of filamentous green algae. Their abundance is due to zebra mussels which don't eat this type of algae, but do eat their competition (single-celled algae) - and so, by removing the competition, have allowed these blobs to expand in numbers and length of season.

My thanks to Simon Lunn and the Rideau Roundtable (www.ridearoundtable.ca) for assistance with the wildlife and aquatic plants information.

Those interested in some tips for taking good photos of wildlife should view "The Nature of Wildlife Photography" on my website at: www.rideau-info.com/canal/ecology/nature-photography.html

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One photography hint, a very simple one, is to choose a paddling route that puts the sun to your back for most of the day. Try to choose a route that has you on a west shore in the morning, a north shore at mid-day and an east shore in the afternoon. For those doing the entire Rideau, this means going from Kingston to Ottawa rather than the other way around. This will put the wildlife that you see on your paddle in the best light.

Errors

If you find any errors or omissions in this guide, please let me know (rideauken@gmail.com) and I'll get them fixed.

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