Ishikari River Mouth Canoeing

The mouth of the Ishikari River is somewhat of a paradox. On the one hand, it teems with wildlife and flora, including white-tailed eagles, herons, wild flowers, and an expansive area of wild Japanese roses (with the largest rosehips you’ll ever see). Paddling along the shoreline, you’ll be chasing massive carp as they splash about around you. On the other hand, the Ishikari is one of Hokkaido’s most polluted rivers - with the second-largest catchment area of any river in Japan, and as Hokkaido’s longest river, expectations should be kept in check. That said, this wind-swept end-of-the-world area is well worth exploring on the water.

LOCATION
This route is a loop of the Ishikari River mouth, about 20km north of central Sapporo City. The route starts at a well-used boat ramp at the confluence of the Makunetsu River (真駒内川) and the Ishikari River. You’ll likely be sharing the boat ramp with pleasure boats and jetskis.

GENERAL NOTES
The mighty and powerful Ishikari River.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES
Including time to wander around the tip of the Ishikari Spit, it’s best to allow about three hours for paddling, and an hour for walking – about four hours all up. Allow more time than you expect, as currents can be strong, slowing progress considerably.

Put in at the boat ramp and head towards the river mouth, keeping to the left bank. Along the way you’ll pass the Ishikari fishing port, which is an alternative put in location for a shorter trip. From about 2km out from the river mouth, you’ll notice some confused currents further out in the central channel. Keep to the left bank to avoid this. About 750m from the river mouth, you’ll come across a wide sandy beach. Currents and waves can get confusing and dangerous any further downstream from here, so we recommend pulling up sooner rather than later and walking the rest of the way to the coast. Do not attempt to paddle out to see from the river mouth.

It’s possible to walk right around the point on the beach – just make sure to cross the hamanasu Japanese roses on the official track. The track entrances are fairly well defined. There is a nice shady pagoda and a surprisingly clean public port-a-loo along the way.

Assuming you’ve timed your return right, it is possible to return to the boat ramp via the opposite side of the river. If the current is strong, we recommend returning on the same side as you came – if possible, avoid crossing the river. On this opposite side of the river is a small inlet pond with plenty of birdlife.

TRANSPORT
By car | There is plenty of parking at the boat ramp.
Public transport | It is possible to get within about 1km of the boat ramp by bus from Sapporo Station. In this case, it may make more sense to take the bus all the way to the settlement on the Ishikari Spit, and put in at the fishing port.

SAFETY NOTES
The most objective dangers on this route are the wind and the tidal currents. Windless days are few and far between, and there is very little shelter from the wind even when hugging the shoreline at high tide. Check the weather, and consider a different river if the forecast is for anything much more than 10km/h. Tidal currents coupled with the natural flow of the mighty Ishikari River can form high standing waves. Best to time the trip for a couple of hours either side of high or low tide. Do not attempt to paddle out to sea from the river mouth.

ONSEN NEARBY
The nearest onsen is the Banya-no-Yu Onsen (番屋の湯, 650yen), on the Ishikari Spit. In fact, if paddlers pull their canoes up at the fishing port, it’s only a 300m walk to the onsen, right on the seaside coast.

EXTRA DETAILS
River Details: This route is on Ishikari River (石狩川), or I-sikar-a-pet in the Ainu indigenous language. The river is a Class A (一流河川) river, 365km in total length. This section of the river is between 200m and 700m wide. The gradient for this section of river is 0.1 m/kp (0.53 FPM).
**PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS**

**STEP 1**
Load your printer with A4 printer paper (210mm x 297mm). If you’ve only got Letter size (215.9mm x 279.4 mm), just follow the instructions below. You’ll achieve an accurate scale, but the map will be clipped a little at the top and bottom.

**STEP 2**
Open the print window by clicking on File > Print (or hitting Ctrl + P on your keyboard).

**STEP 3**
Make sure “Actual Size” is selected.

**STEP 4**
For double-sided printing, select “Print on both sides of paper”.

**STEP 5**
For best results, select the highest quality print option available on your printer (settings will vary).

**STEP 6**
You won’t need this instructions page, so just select the pages that don’t include this instruction sheet.

**STEP 7**
Click “Print”.

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**ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS**

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