

# ALASKA CANOE SCHOOL PADDLE POST

## Chatanika River / Olnes Pond/ Whitefish Campground



Maybe you're looking for a short day trip, a quick overnight canoe camping trip or maybe a place to practice your flat water and gently moving Interior river skills. If you are, the Olnes Pond / Whitefish Campground area on the Chatanika River is a great place to go.

### Overview

At MP 11, on the Elliot Highway, there are two State Parks connected by the Chatanika River, you can paddle for couple or three hours between them and walk the shuttle in thirty to forty-five minutes. Olnes Pond State Park has nice camping places, a lovely pond to practice in, and the Take Out for your short float on the Chatanika River.

Adjacent to Olnes Pond is the Whitefish State Park, with more camping, and good river access at a boat ramp and a gravel bar. There is also good access from a gravel bar just across the river from the campground. Any one of these three places could be your Put In.

### Some Details

We love canoe camping, it's a great way to comfortably get away from it all and do so in relative comfort. Rivers are at the heart of the areas they flow through, land, air and water wildlife are in abundance, so they are watchable wildlife centers. Plus you

have running water! Our goal is to teach others the skills so they can comfortably and safely do similar trips without leaving a trace or harming the environment. This trip could easily qualify as Canoe Camping 101.

Only 21 miles away from downtown Fairbanks, we think this area has a lot to offer for the day tripper or for an over night stay. Two campgrounds give you a wide choice of campsites. Olnes Pond is a wonderful place to practice your canoe strokes and maneuvers, and the several options on the Chatanika River allow you to practice your moving water skills and maneuvers. It's a fairly easy place to learn how to avoid sweepers and log jams.

The best map of the area we've come across is the ATV map for Olnes Pond. It shows both campgrounds and the Chatanika River winding between them. Check out page two of the brochure: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/Assets/uploads/DNRPublic/parks/brochures/lowerchatanikaatvbroschure.pdf>



*Gravel Bar on Chatanika just below the Elliot Highway Bridge, a good Put In.*



*This stretch of the Chatanika is a good place to practice reading a river, your maneuvers and learning to avoid sweepers and log jams. Interior river canoeing 101.*

Of course we always think anyone venturing onto an Alaska river needs some basic paddling and safety skills. That's what our courses are about.

There are five river access points in the Whitefish Campground area: 1 & 2) upstream and downstream of the bridge on river left (left side of the river as you face down stream), 3 & 4) from gravel bars in Whitefish Campground on river right, the map clearly shows access trails to them, and 5) the boat ramp in Whitefish Campground. You could do a really short float between any of the access points. For a longer trip you'll want to float to the access point at Olnes Pond.

At Olnes Pond there are plenty of ATV trails; one of them runs along a creek to an Alyeska Access Road. Any place along this ATV trail you can take out.

We generally paddle / walk up the creek and take out at the access road bridge. Typically we drive to the put in, unload boats, gear, food and water, then drive the car to the take out, park it and walk back to the put in (30-45 minutes). Be sure to bring your keys. This area offers plenty of variations on this basic outline.

## **Summary**

This is a great place for a day trip, easy overnight camping, and a place to practice and develop your paddling skills. We are lucky to have great Public Lands in Alaska, be sure to pay your fees at the State Parks, and be sure to be clean and tidy yourselves and pick up after the slobs who are not (Would they leave a mess in their own or their neighbors yards?) Remember public lands are ours, treat them with respect.

Our check list for Day Trips and Canoe Camping are located on our website.