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National Park Service

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# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

## A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Portage Trails in Minnesota, 1630s-1870s

## B. Associated Historic Contexts

Contact Period (1630s-1837): Eastern Dakota, Ojibwe, French, British and United States

Post-contact Period (1837-1930s): Indian Communities and Reservations.

## C. Geographical Data

The geographical scope of the MPDF covers the entire state.

☐ See continuation sheet

## D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer — Date 5/12/92

State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register — Date 7/23/92

## E. Statement of Historic Contexts

### PORTAGE TRAILS IN MINNESOTA, 1630s-1870s

> These places are called portages, inasmuch as one is compelled to transport on his shoulders all the baggage, and even the boat, in order to go and find some other river, or make one's way around these rapids and torrents; and it is often necessary to go on for several leagues, loaded down like mules, and climbing mountains and descending into valleys, amid a thousand difficulties and a thousand fears, and among rocks or amid thickets known only to unclean animals.
>
> *Jesuit Relations* [1]

### INTRODUCTION

The present Minnesota landscape presents a variegated pattern of trails, roads, and watercourses which has been woven in the course of its twelve thousand year history of human occupation, and this route geography translates into a specific set of cultural resources. Each of the major phases of Minnesota history had its characteristic route geography, developed to serve the needs of particular groups of people at particular times; and each successive phase inherited parts of the earlier route geography, to which it added its own modes of transportation. Portage trails, an important link in waterborne transportation systems which existed up until the late 19th century (some are still in recreational use), were marked out by Native American Indians and were an indelible feature of the historical geography of the fur trade.[2]

What exactly do we mean by portage trail? *Portage* entered American English in the 17th century and has remained in common usage ever since, especially in northern Minnesota in the context of the historic fur trade and modern recreational canoeing. Etymologically, it is an Old French word borrowed from the Latin *portare*, "to carry." Used as a noun, it describes a "carrying place," i.e., a trail or pathway between two water bodies. As a verb it signifies the act of carrying boats and their cargoes

[1] Reuben Gold Thwaites (ed.), The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, 73 vols. (Cleveland, 1896-1901) 37:211-213.

[2] See map, "Major Historic Canoe Routes and Selected Portage Sites in Minnesota," accompanying this form.

overland. As a descriptive term, it is an important place-name that has been applied to many natural and cultural features throughout the northern United States and Canada.[3]

In National Register parlance, portage trails fall within the generic resource classification of sites, which includes archeological deposits as well as the locations of important events. This distinction between archeological sites and historic sites is important with regard to portage trails because while most portages probably possess some archeological research potential, the overall cultural resource value of portage trails is most often the product of their historical and physical association with other aspects of culture history, particularly waterborne transportation and the fur trade of the 17th through 19th centuries.

Portage trails are of interest as historic landscapes because they document the ages-old relationship between human beings and their environment. In the sense here used, landscape is not simply an actual scene viewed by an observer, but an area comprising a distinctive association of physical and cultural characteristics; literally, a "land shape." Landscapes are commonly distinguished as designed or vernacular. As defined by the National Park Service, a designed landscape is a historic landscape that has been consciously designed as a work of art (i.e., landscape architecture). Portage trails, which developed without benefit of schooled engineers and which are significant primarily because of their association with land use, are therefore vernacular landscapes; more importantly, they are cultural landforms, i.e., historic sites shaped by historical processes that create a specific microenvironment based on recognizable forms such as topography, vegetation, place names, structures, and buried cultural deposits. Because of their association with transportation lines, individual portage trails may also be significant as component elements of routes. Finally, portage trail landscapes represent the physical geography behind history. Minnesota geography is dominated by three major drainage systems or watersheds which carry off the surface waters of the state north to Hudson Bay, east to the Great Lakes, and south into the Mississippi River. The rivers, creeks, and associated lakes within these drainage basins essentially describe the route geography of the thoroughfares used by American Indians, European explorers, and fur traders. But water travel was subject to interruption caused by rapids, falls, or shallows, and not all of the major lakes and rivers were interconnected. Moreover, most of the strategic water routes were separated by relatively short distances over land.

[3] Mitford M. Matthews (ed.), A Dictionary of Americanisms On Historical Principles, 2 vols (Chicago, 1951) 2:1288-1289; John Francis McDermott, A Glossary of Mississippi Valley French (St. Louis, 1941), p. 126. For the use of portage modern placenames, see: Warren Upham, Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Meaning (St. Paul, 1969), passim; and George R. Stewart, American Place-Names (New York, 1970), p. 384.

Portaging relied upon two critical technological innovations, both apparently of American Indian origin. The foremost of these was the birchbark canoe, which made portaging feasible over long distances. Like the toboggan and the snowshoe, the birchbark canoe was used by all of the Algonquin tribes of the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes basin and was readily adopted by the French and British. The unique marine architecture and adaptability of the birchbark canoe fascinated European observers. Rene de Brehant de Galinee, a French missionary brother who conducted a reconnaissance of the eastern Great Lakes in 1669, declared: "The convenience of these canoes is great in these waters, full of cataracts or waterfalls, and rapids through which it is impossible to take any boat. When you reach them you load canoe and baggage upon your shoulders and go overland until the navigation is good; and then you put your canoe back into the water, and embark again . . . I see no handiwork of the Indians that appears to me to merit the attention of Europeans, except their canoes and their rackets for walking on snow [i.e., snowshoes]."[4] Wrote George Catlin: "The bark canoe of the Chippeways is, perhaps, the most beautiful and light model of all the water crafts that ever were invented."[5]

The making of such canoes was an elaborate process. According to an anonymous French relation reproduced by Pierre Margry: "These boats are made of the simple bark of birch over which a frame of cedar wood that supports the bark, and they give the shape necessary to carry on water a rather large number of persons and baggage, however so fragile that if they hit a rock or are not carefully handled in taking them out of or putting into water, they are easily damaged; so unstable that ten pounds more on one side than the other makes them overturn, which obliges one to kneel or sit flat; so light that one or two men at most carry them, and yet so made that some will hold six to eight persons with their belongings."[6]

Canoes were made using the bark of the paper birch (Betula papyrifera), which was procured in early spring, a process which involved stripping off the bark in one piece, using wooden wedges, after which the two ends (stem and stern) were sewn together and made watertight with pitch. The ribs of the canoe, called *verons* in Canadian French, were made of white cedar (Thuja occidentalis), and the hull, ribs, and thwarts were fastened using wattap, i.e., binding made from split tamarack or spruce roots, and caulked with the pitch of the balsam fir (Abies balsamea). Although some very large birchbark freighter canoes were propelled by oars, nearly all were paddled. Typically, American Indian canoeists employed paddles with very wide

[4] Louise Phelps Kellogg (ed.), Early Narratives of the Northwest, 1634-1699 (New York, 1917), pp. 172-173.

[5] George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians, reprint edition (New York, 1989), p. 415.

[6] Pierre Margry (ed.), Decouvertes et etablissements des francais dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amerique Septentrionale (1614-1754), 6 vols. (Paris, 1876-1886) 1:192.

blades, which enabled them to use a slow stroke; the Canadian voyageur, on the other hand, used a smaller, narrow bladed paddle, which required a rapid stroke. During portages, American Indian canoemen stowed their paddles inside the thwarts and carried the canoe upside-down on their shoulders, using the paddle handles as a yoke.

The two principal birchbark canoe types generally used in the Minnesota region were the *Canot du Maitre* or Montreal canoe and the *Canot du Nord* or North canoe, both adapted from traditional American Indian designs. The Montreal canoe was a Great Lakes bulk freighter, designed for the long haul from the St. Lawrence River to western Lake Superior. Approximately thirty-five feet long, from four to six feet feet abeam, measuring approximately thirty inches from gunwale to keel, these canoes could carry sixty ninety-pound packs and a half ton of provisions. With a crew of eight or ten (paddling or rowing), they could make three knots over calm waters and four or six strong backs were required to transport it, bottom up, over the portage trail. Henry Schoolcraft declared it "altogether one of the most eligible modes of conveyance that can be employed upon the lakes." "I never heard of such a canoe being wrecked, or upset, or swamped," wrote Archibald McDonald of the Hudson's Bay Company; "they swam like ducks." The workhorse of the fur trade transportation system was the North canoe, a craft specially made and adapted for speedy travel through the lakes region. About one-half the size of the Montreal canoe, it was of approximately thirty-five packs' burden and was manned by four to eight men. The North canoe could be safely carried by two men and was portaged in the upright position. Other bark canoes types seen on Minnesota waters, although much less common than the North canoe, included the *canot batard*, a slightly larger version of the standard North canoe; and the *canot allege*, a small Native American Indian craft only ten to twelve feet in length (the term was also used for a canoe traveling without cargo).[7]

Of only slightly less importance than the canoe itself was the portage collar, essentially a broad leather strap employed to pack baggage over the portage trail. Unlike the now familiar backpack or rucksack, the portage collar secured the load to a band worn around the portager's forehead. During the fur trade era, the standard load

[7] Edwin T. Adney and Howard I. Chapelle, The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America, U. S. National Museum Bull. 230 (Washington, 1964), is the classic work on the subject. Descriptions of historic canoes and canoe travel are to be found scattered throughout the voluminous literature of North American exploration and the fur trade; see. e.g., Nancy N. M. Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime, 1699-1763 (New York, 1916), pp. 55-58; Grace Lee Nute, The Voyageur (St. Paul, 1955), pp. 23-32; Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence (London, 1801), pp. xlvii-xlviii; and Archibald McDonald, Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific by Sir George Simpson, edited by Malcolm McLeod, reprint edition (Rutland, Vt., 1971), pp. 41-42.

for a voyageur was two *pieces* or packs: the typical two-piece load weighed 160 to 200 pounds. Securing the two ends of the portage collar to one of the pieces, the voyageur placed the band around his forehead and, assuming the portaging position (stooping, knees bent), let the load rest on the small of his back. His hands being free, he then hoisted the second piece up over his head and left it perched atop the first pack. This mode of carrying had the advantage of distributing the weight more or less evenly over the upper and lower torso. Customarily, two pieces are carried with more ease than one, on account of the direction of the body, but occasionally a voyageur volunteered to hoist up and carry a third piece. "The experience of traders, and observation of the manner of the Indians, have proved this to be the most convenient way of carrying, in this country," noted Lieutenant Allen. "It is accordingly practiced by all; and every thing to be transported over portages, is put up with a view of this method of the portage collar. All the portage roads, too, are selected with the same view."[8]

At the dawn of the Contact Period, canoeists desiring to transit from one waterway to another had to rely on poorly marked native portage paths. With the acceleration of the trade, there was a pressing demand for locating and improving critical portage routes. While most portages were little more than trackways, a few key routes eventually developed into roads, with designated landings, campsites, and poses (rest stops) along the portage trail. Some, like the Rat Portage from Lake of the Woods to the Winnipeg River, even had hewn log causeways over boggy areas. It wasn't long before the most strategically important portages found their way onto contemporary maps.

Defining a portage as "the longest distance between two points," the historical geographer Ralph H. Brown went on to note that "the portage paths around falls or between rivers were likely to become gutters of mud in rainy weather . . ."[9] Indeed, the major impediments to portaging were trail obstructions and high water. Depending on climatic variables, some portage paths were impassable because of standing water. Fallen trees and boulders abounded but swamps were the worst natural obstruction: being often located in low, swampy areas, portage paths tended to become more difficult and dangerous to traverse over time. Trails which were passable one year were sometimes closed the next. Most were little more than narrow trackways and tended to shift their positions over time. In winter, some portages remained open for use by sledging parties, but most were impassable.

The literature of exploration and the fur trade is filled with random observations

[8] Journal of Lt. James Allen, in Philip P. Mason (ed.), Schoolcraft's Expedition to Lake Itasca (East Lansing, 1958), p. 192.

[9] Ralph H. Brown, Historical Geography of the United States (New York, 1948), p. 176.

on the vicissitudes of portaging, of "saulting" rapids and traversing hills and swamps, "dirty little portages" filled with fallen logs and boulders, mud, black flies, and mosquitoes. "The transportation of the goods at this grand portage, or great carrying-place, was a work of seven days of severe and dangerous exertion," wrote the elder Alexander Henry of his experiences on the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River in 1775.[10] Half a century later, Major Joseph Delafield, surveying the United States-Canada boundary waters, noted that where the old track of the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River was not mud it was rock, "and the old road is so closed with a young growth of trees and bushes, that is is difficult to carry anything the size of a canoe piece without injury, if there has been a dew or rain, and to carry the canoe is still more difficult."[11] Lieutenant Allen, accompanying Henry Schoolcraft's 1832 expedition to the source of the Mississippi, described the notorious *Portage aux Couteax* or Knife Portage of the St. Louis River as a "mere uncut path through bad woods . . . No idea can be formed of the difficulty of this portage without witnessing it."[12] (The portage path took its name from the knife-like, moccasin-tearing rocks over which the trail ran.) Joseph N. Nicollet wrote in his journal about a portage near the Mississippi headwaters, where his party "plunged into shallows filled with toppled trees in full decomposition, accumulated there by centuries of time, covered with a thick coat of damp moss mixed with other wild vegetation. One might well call it a buried forest over which there grew another."[13] Captain W. J. Twining, surveying the United States-Canada boundary west from Lake of the Woods in 1872, described the Roseau River Portage as traversing eight miles "through a swamp where the traveler sinks from 1 to 3 feet into the mud and water, and may consider himself fortunate if he does not once or more disappear entirely beneath the surface."[14]

Portage trails survive in the modern landscape as cultural relicts, i.e., formerly dominant but now obsolete forms. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of portage trails in the state are found in the Central Lakes and Border Lakes regions, where the greatest concentration of lakes is found. Interconnected to form hundreds of miles of canoe routes, they were the highways of the fur trade. Apart from the still active portage pathways in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and Voyageurs National Park, unnumbered abandoned portage trails in Minnesota remain conspicuous cultural

[10] Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories (Boston, 1901), p. 24.

[11] Joseph Delafield, The Unfortified Boundary: A Diary of the first survey of the Canadian Boundary Line from St. Regis to the Lake of the Woods, edited by Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs (New York, 1943), pp. 404-405.

[12] Journal of Lt. James Allen, p. 193.

[13] Joseph N. Nicollet, The Journals of Joseph N. Nicollet: A Scientist on the Mississippi Headwaters with Notes on Indian Life, 1836-37, translated by Andre Fertey, edited by Martha Coleman Bray (St. Paul, 1970), p. 96.

[14] U. S. Congress, Senate Executive Document No. 41, 44th Cong., 2nd sess. (1871), p. 8.

landforms, despite lumbering, agriculture, road building, and other forms of development.

Several different approaches to documenting the significance of portage trails suggest themselves. This study treats portage trails generally as archaeological sites and as vernacular or cultural landscapes, stressing historical processes and route geography in a broadly regional historical framework. Philosophical and methodological underpinnings for the concept of historic landscape reconstruction will be found in the works of Carl Ortwin Sauer, Ralph H. Brown, John Brickerhoff Jackson, and Donald Meinig. James Deetz, Ivor Noel-Hume, and Stanley South have outlined the principles of historical archaeology and their application to heritage preservation.[15]

As part of the statewide comprehensive preservation planning process, the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society has delineated a range of historic contexts or study units which serve as the basis for identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities.[16] As theoretical constructs, these historic contexts offer a useful framework for organizing information about Minnesota's cultural resources. Each historic context has discrete geographical, chronological, and thematic boundaries, and these conceptual boundaries frequently overlap; together, they represent an overview of the state's 12,000 year history as well as a comprehensive assessment of the state's historic preservation goals and priorities.

Several historic contexts have been developed for the Contact Period, which dates from the earliest encounters between Europeans and Native American Indians, i.e., ca. 1630s, up to the year 1837, when the Treaty of Prairie du Chien began the process of extinguishing native sovereignty over the lands within the boundaries of the state. Of special relevance to portage trails are the historic contexts for Ojibwe and Eastern Dakota American Indian culture history; and the Euro-American contexts for the French, British, and Initial United States occupation of Minnesota. Because the historical significance of portage trails extends somewhat beyond the chronological limits of the Contact Period historic contexts, the Indian Communities and Reservations, 1837-1930s, Post-contact Period historic context is also applicable.

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[15] See, e.g., John Leighly (ed.), Land & Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer (Berkeley, 1963); Brown, Historical Geography; Erwin Zube (ed.), Landscape: Selected Writings of John B. Jackson (Amherest, 1980); Donald Meinig, The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years on History (New Haven, 1986); James Deetz, In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life (Garden City, 1977); Ivor Noel-Hume, Historical Archaeology (New York, 1969); and Stanley South, Method and Theory in Historical Archeology (New York, 1977).

[16] Clark A. Dobbs (comp.), "Historic Context Outlines: The Contact Period Contexts," Institute for Minnesota Archaeology Reports of Investigations No. 39, draft (Minneapolis, n.d.); State Historic Preservation Office, Historic Context Outlines: The Post-Contact Period Contexts (St. Paul, 1985).

## USE OF PORTAGE TRAILS BY AMERICAN INDIANS

The statewide historic context outlines for the Ojibwe and the Eastern Dakota cultural traditions delineate a series of broad ethnohistorical and archeological themes. The Obijwe or Chippewa were Algonquins who migrated into Minnesota from the northern Great Lakes in the early 1700s. By the end of the 18th century, they had occupied most of the Northern Bog, Border Lakes, and Lake Superior regions and had displaced the Dakota from the Central Lakes region. The Eastern Dakota comprised the Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Wakpekute, and Sisseton tribes and were related, culturally and linguistically, to the Western Dakōta or Sioux. At the time of initial European contact, they occupied or exploited the natural resources from nearly all of central and northern Minnesota, with major village complexes at Mille Lacs and around the Mississippi River headwaters. By ca. 1770, the Dakota had relocated to the valleys of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. For both the Ojibwe and the Dakota, interaction with Europeans during the Contact Period revolved around the fur trade and related activities. A series of treaties executed between 1837 and 1889 expropriated vast areas of tribal lands for the use of Euro-Americans and relegated the American Indian peoples to a number of small reservations; indeed, after the Dakota War of 1862, the Siouans were driven out of Minnesota altogether. While the move to the reservations during the Post-contact Period altered the traditional settlement and subsistence patterns to a great extent, the fur trade persisted for several decades after the passing of the frontier, particularly among the Ojibwe bands in northern Minnesota.

It should be noted that portage trails were an important aspect of the pre-European cultural landscape, although the route geography of ancient North America as well as the relative importance of long distance waterborne versus overland trade among various prehistoric peoples have been subjects of some controversy. Traditionally, historians and antiquarians have argued that more or less well established trails made by animals existed long before the appearance of human beings, that ancient Native American Indians followed these trails, and that at least some of the important historic portage routes were originally game trails which evolved into media of communication through their use by prehistoric peoples. This theory is difficult to dismiss, if for no better reason than because it is common knowledge that many species of wild animals of sufficient size to create a visible trail across the land

are also capable swimmers.[17]

The cultural traditions of the Pre-contact Period in Eastern North America are reasonably well understood and it is generally agreed that the various prehistoric and protohistoric groups inhabiting the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley were interconnected by an active, long distance trade network. The late prehistoric inhabitants of Minnesota were highly mobile, efficient, and adaptable, and the distribution of Woodland and Oneota archaeological sites suggests a preference for living near watercourses. Although there are a few prehistoric and protohistoric Native American Indian archaeological sites associated with documented historic portage trails, the case for extensive pre-contact use of major portage routes remains somewhat equivocal.

However, pre-contact trade doubtless gave the ancestors of the Ojibwa and the Dakota their close acquaintance with hundreds, perhaps thousand of potential portage trails within the present state boundaries, geographical lore which was quickly assimilated by Europeans. By the time of initial European contact, Minnesota was crisscrossed with an intricate network of interconnected water and land routes, over which the Ojibwe and Dakota traveled extensively to hunt, to wage war, and to trade, often voyaging hundreds of miles and achieving remarkable speeds that impressed European observers. Canoe travel was most extensive in central and northern Minnesota, where long-distance pedestrian travel was most difficult. Frances Densmore described the importance of the birchbark canoe among the Ojibwe: "As the Chippewa lived along the lakes and watercourses their summer transportation was by canoe. The size of the canoes varied from the small canoes used by children or young people in going along the shore on such small trips as gathering berries up to the large canoes which transported a family and all its possessions." Design lines varied as to function, some canoes being designed for speed and other for freighting, but the typical Ojibwe canoe was "three double arm spreads" in length and approximately thirty-six inches abeam.[18]

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[17] Pre-contact aboriginal and migratory animal use of portages and other land routes is a recurrent theme in Archer Butler Hulbert's "Historic Highways of America" series of books: see especially Paths of the Mound-Building Indians And Great Game Animals (Cleveland, 1902), Indian Thoroughfares (Cleveland, 1902), and Portage Paths: The Keys of the Continent (Cleveland, 1903). See also, Jacob V. Brower, "Prehistoric Man at the Headwaters of the Mississippi River," Minnesota Historical Society Collections 8 (1896):238; Eric W. Morse, "Voyageurs' Highway: Overcoming Navigational Obstacles," Canadian Geographical Journal 63 (1961):7; and Wilbert B. Hinsdale, "Indian Modes and Paths of Travel in Michigan: Waterways," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters 7 (1926):11-20.

[18] Frances Densmore, Chippewa Customs, U. S. Bureau of American Ethnology Bull. 86 (Washington, 1929), pp. 135, 150-151; cf., Adney and Chapelle, Bark Canoes and Skin Boats, pp. 122-131.

While it has been asserted by some writers that these native portage trails were used exclusively by birchbark canoes, this is not at all certain. It is not known when the birchbark canoe was first developed, but it is fairly certain that it was an Algonquin invention and that it was used by American Indians long before European contact. Because the biological range of the paper birch generally delimits the range of the birchbark canoe, it was also adopted by various Siouan-speaking groups, including the Eastern Dakota. Father Hennepin noted that the Dakota enjoyed an important military advantage over their southern enemies because their bark canoes enabled them "to go from lake to lake and follow any river to attack their enemies," whose dugout log *pirogues* could not be paddled as fast or portaged as easily.[19] Generally, the birchbark canoe does not appear to have been common anywhere outside of the Great Lakes region and it was by no means the universal watercraft employed by all of the American Indian groups which inhabited Minnesota at the time of European contact. Historical accounts occasionally describe native boats made of dugout logs (pirogues), elm bark, or buffalo hides stretched over wooden frames, all plying northern waters and presumably portaged where necessary.[20]

## PORTAGE TRAILS AND EUROPEAN DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION

The statewide historic contexts for the Contact Period describe the French, British, and Initial United States presence in Minnesota largely in terms of the fur trade, but the significance of properties associated with discovery and exploration is obvious.[21] The French reconnaissance of Minnesota was carried out largely between ca. 1660 and 1740 and the historical record is dominated by the relations, memoirs, and correspondence produced by a handful of merchants, adventurers, and missionaries. The geographical lore of the British regime, 1760-1803, is somewhat more abundant and is also dominated by the fur trade, particularly with regard to the economic competition between the Hudson's Bay, North West, and other British Canadian fur trade companies. Geopolitical questions regarding competing spheres of influence over Native American peoples and the delineation of international boundaries are themes of no little importance in the context of the Initial United States Presence in Minnesota, which dates to 1803-1837.

The Minnesota region was recognized early by European imperialists as having geographic and economic importance. During the last half of the 17th century, French missionaries and *coureurs de bois* based in the eastern Great Lakes made

[19] Marion E. Cross (trans.), Father Louis Hennepin's Description of Louisiana Newly Discovered to the Southwest of New France by Order of the King (Minneapolis, 1938), p. 99.

[20] See Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, p. 57; Trevor Lloyd, "The Mackenzie Waterway: A Northern Supply Route," Geographical Review 33 (1943):417; and Paul Johnstone, The Sea-craft of Prehistory (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 7, 20-23.

[21] See map, "Major Routes of Exploration and Discovery in Minnesota," accompanying this form.

intermittent forays into the country west and south of Lake Superior seeking converts and pelts. But the western Great Lakes country's earliest attraction was not fur bearing animals or the prospect of recovering savage souls, but the hope of a northwest passage to the Orient. In 1634, Samuel de Champlain dispatched Jean Nicolet on an embassy to to the *Gens du Mer* ("people of the sea", i.e., the Winnebagoes), whom the French had encountered at Green Bay and who were believed to be in contact with the Chinese. Others may have passed west through the Straits of Mackinac before him, but Nicolet's voyage is the first recorded contact with the peoples of the western Great Lakes.

Sometime between 1654 and 1660, the Trois Rivieres-based traders Pierre d'Esprit Radisson and Medard Chouart, dit Grosseilliers, penetrated the Minnesota region and opened the first trade route between New France and the "upper country." Systematic exploration of the upper Mississippi River basin began with the work of Robert Cavelier de la Salle in 1669. Although other Frenchmen had doubtless seen the Upper Mississippi, its discovery is usually accredited to the Jesuit missionary Father Jacques Marquette and the trader Louis Jolliet, who reached the Father of Waters by way of the Fox-Wisconsin waterway in 1673. They were followed in 1680 by the Recollect friar Louis Hennepin, who ascended the river from the Illinois all the way to the Falls of Saint Anthony, which he portaged around. Falling in with a party of Eastern Dakota, the Hennepin party was taken to the main Dakota village at Izatys on the shores of Mille Lacs Lake, where they remained until "rescued" by Daniel Greysolon du Luth. Du Luth, who had been a freelance trader operating inland from Lake Superior since 1678, had recently "discovered" the Bois Brule Portage into Upper Lake St. Croix, which eventually became one of the principal fur trade routes into the interior. La Salle eventually explored the great river to its mouth, where in 1682 he took possession of the watershed for France and named it Louisiana in honor of the French monarch.

The Canadians were quick to realize the economic potential of the Minnesota region. In 1685 Nicolas Perrot, an experienced trader, was commissioned commandant of the west by the governor-general of New France and directed to conduct a reconnaissance of the Upper Mississippi. Sometime around 1687, Perrot founded a post he called Fort St. Nicolas below the mouth of the Wisconsin River near present-day Prairie du Chien. Perrot later established Fort St. Antoine on the eastern shore of Lake Pepin near what is today Trempealeau, Wisconsin, where, in 1689 he formally proclaimed the country of the *Nadouescious* (Dakota) a dependency of New France.

French missionaries were also active in the region and waterways became the common highways for the gospel. Jesuit missions were established at Chequamegon

Bay in 1665, at the Bai des Puans (Green Bay) in 1669, and at St. Ignace at the Straits of Mackinac in 1670. By the early 1700s, French missionaries were active within the present boundaries of Minnesota, operating from permanent establishments at the Lake of the Woods and Lake Pepin.

The early 18th century was marked by an intensification of the French reconnaissance of the Upper Mississippi and Hudson Bay watersheds. French control of the "upper country" was consolidated with the establishment of forts at the Straits of Mackinac and Detroit, and by the colonization of the Illinois region. The search for the *Mer de l'Ouest* opened the Hudson's Bay watershed to European traders and between 1731 and 1743 the explorations of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye opened northern Minnesota to French trade. The La Verendryes, father and son, founded Fort St. Charles on Lake of the Woods in 1732 and identified the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River as the strategic chokepoint for the western Canadian trade.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 awarded Louisiana east of the Mississippi to Great Britain. While Spain claimed sovereignty over what is now southwestern Minnesota, for all practical purposes the whole of the present state was securely within the British sphere of influence. Even after the treaty of 1783, Lake Superior was a virtual Canadian lake, and by virtue of their control of the portage choke-points between the Great Lakes and Mississippi watersheds, British fur trade hegemony in Minnesota went practically unchallenged until after the War of 1812.

The canoe journeys of Jonathan Carver, Peter Pond and Alexander Henry signaled the onset of the British regime in Minnesota. In 1766, Carver transited the Fox-Wisconsin waterway to Prairie du Chien to ascend the Mississippi to the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River, where he wintered. The following spring, Carver journeyed across the upper Mississippi basin, eventually reaching the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River, which he described: "Here those who go on the north-west trade, to the Lakes De Pluye, Dubois, &c., carry over their canoes and baggage about nine miles, till they came to a number of small lakes, the waters of some of which descend into Lake Superior, and others into the River Bourbon." Under the British, the number of literate fur traders multiplied, and the journals, reports, and maps of Alexander Henry, Alexander Mackenzie, and David Thompson brought the most detailed written knowledge of Minnesota geography to light.

Control of the Upper Mississippi was recognized by the United States as the geographic and economic key to the continent. The Treaty of Paris ending the War of Independence fixed the northern boundary of the United States as a line drawn through the Great Lakes to the head of Lake Superior, thence by the ancient fur

traders' waterways and portages to Lake of the Woods. For half a century, the placement of the boundary line between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods was a bone of contention between the two nations. After the War of 1812, the convention of 1818 called for a joint United States-Great Britain boundary survey. The Americans claimed the old French trade route from the mouth of the Kaministikquia River was the customary route, and therefore the boundary, while the British claimed that the St. Louis River-Vermillion Lake route was the boundary. To settle the dispute, several surveys were carried out between 1816 and 1824, laying the groundwork for the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, which adopted the Grand Portage-Rainy Lake-Lake of the Woods canoe route as the international boundary.

So far as the lower regions of Minnesota were concerned, the Americans launched a series of exploring parties, most at least quasi-scientific in character, to reconnoiter the Minnesota region, define its boundaries, and map its natural features. The expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, Stephen Harriman Long, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, George Catlin, Joseph Nicolas Nicollet, and others inaugurated the American regime in Minnesota, and in the process completed the geographical reconnaissance of the region's waterways initiated by the French 250 years earlier.

## PORTAGE TRAILS AND THE FUR TRADE

The fur trade is the dominant theme in all of the statewide Contact Period historic contexts, both in terms of its role in shaping the state's early economic history and because of its impact on American Indian culture. The Minnesota fur trade may be conveniently divided into three phases or periods: that dominated by the French, dating from the mid-1600s to the end of the French and Indian War; the British phase, from ca. 1760 to 1803; and the American fur trade, from 1803 to ca. 1850. Geographically, fur trader interaction with Native American Indians occurred throughout Minnesota during all phases of the Contact Period: canoemen employed by the British Hudson's Bay Company traveled the same routes as their French predecessors, and American Fur Company trading posts were as likely to occupy the former sites of North West Company establishments as not.

It was the beaver and the promise of its bountiful pelt that first brought Europeans to the Minnesota country in significant numbers. Large parts of Minnesota were (and still are) prime habitat for the chisel-toothed rodent, whose felted fur was the staple of the European hat industry. The best quality and largest quantity of beaver were found in northern Minnesota, in the Great Lakes and Hudson's Bay drainages, which were the first areas exploited by the trade. The trade entered the Upper Mississippi watershed last, after ca. 1730.

The fur trade inaugurated by Radisson and Grosseiliers in the mid-seventeenth century was rapidly expanded in the eighteenth. French trading forts had been erected at strategic points throughout Minnesota by 1730, and French traders were active in the Red River as well as the Great Lakes and Mississippi watersheds -- in fact, all of what is now Minnesota was securely within the Canadian sphere of economic influence. Resident traders established themselves at the principal American Indian villages and brought their furs down to the annual rendezvous held at the trading forts. Although there were relatively few important French trading forts actually located within the present state boundaries, all of Minnesota was once considered part of New France. French policy varied from time to time, but as a rule the fur trade of the "upper country" was farmed out to individuals with monopoly privileges granted by the crown, such as the 17th century Company of One Hundred Associates. However, unlicensed *coureurs de bois* operated throughout the region on a freelance basis and were a constant source of trouble for colonial authorities.

The essential route geography of the Minnesota fur trade was established during the French regime.[22] Furs collected throughout Minnesota were funneled through posts along the Lake Superior basin, thence, via Michilimackinac, to the great fur trade entrepot at Montreal. These routes were delineated by Henry Schoolcraft: "There are two grand routes of communication pursued by the north west traders, namely; -- 1. By way of the Grande Portage, commencing on the north shore of Lake Superior . . . which leads through a succession of small lakes to the Rainy Lakes, and thence to the Lake of the Woods; -- 2. By the St. Louis River and Savannah Portage into Sandy Lake and the Mississippi, and thence through Lake Winnipeg and across the Turtle Portage into the Rainy lakes, or, -- by following up the St. Louis to its source which is near the borders of the little Rainy lake."[23] The first route, known to history as the Old Road, crossed the Height of Land into Lake Saganaga, Basswood Lake (Lac Bois Blanc), and Crooked Lake, and continued west to the Lac a la Pluie (Rainy Lake). According to Grace Lee Nute, there were thirty-six portages between Grand Portage and Rainy Lake, with another twenty-six between Rainy Lake and Lake Winnipeg. The principal route from Lake Superior to the upper Mississippi basin led from the St. Louis River across the Grand Portage of Fund du Lac, then crossed the continental divide over the Savanna Portage into the Sandy Lake branch of the Mississippi headwaters. Other strategic avenues of trade included the St. Louis River to Vermilion Lake detour of the Old Road, the Minnesota-Red River route, with portages at Granite Falls and from Big Stone Lake to Lake Traverse; and the route from Lake of the Woods

[22] See map, "Major Fur Trade Forts and Posts in Minnesota," accompanying this form.

[23] Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Narrative Journal of Travels through the Northwest Regions of the United States (Albany, 1821), p. 256.

to the Red River via the Roseau and Red Lake rivers.[24]

The trade of the St. Croix and upper Mississippi rivers was focused on Prairie du Chien, at the western portal of the Fox-Wisconsin waterway connecting the Mississippi with Lake Michigan. Some of the pelts were shipped down the Mississippi directly to St. Louis and New Orleans; however, this route did not become dominant until the period of American dominance.

The French withdrew their traders from the Minnesota country in the 1740s and the trade was not resurrected until after the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, when the ranks of the French Canadian traders were augmented by Anglo Canadian traders who hastened west in large numbers. The Grand Portage on Lake Superior soon emerged as the primary staging area for fur trade operations in Minnesota; Fond du Lac and Prairie du Chien were also important regional traders' rendezvous and depots.

The Canadian fur trade was reorganized on a grand scale in 1783 by a partnership of sixteen merchants dominated by Simon McTavish and the Frobisher brothers, known to history as the North West Company. For half a century, the North West Company dominated the fur trade of the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi through its innovative transportation system and hardheaded business management style. By ca. 1790, the North West Company had a virtual monopoly over fur trade operations in the Rainy Lake, Mississippi River headwaters, and St. Peter's (Minnesota River) regions, with major trading posts at Grand Portage of the Pigeon River, Fond du Lac, and elsewhere.

The Hudson's Bay Company trading empire also included parts of northern Minnesota, although the HBC never seriously challenged North West Company hegemony. Founded by royal charter in the City of London in 1670, the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading with Hudson's Bay extended its sphere of influence into what is now Minnesota in 1793, but by 1800 its traders could no longer withstand the aggressive territoriality of the North West Company and were withdrawn, not to return until 1818. Jay's Treaty of 1794 intensified competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company throughout Canada and the Great Lakes country by limiting Canadian traders' access to Native American Indians living in territories claimed by the United States. Several Canadian firms even went so far as to drop out of the Montreal partnership and shifted their operations to the American side of the border, where they did business as the XY Company, founded in 1800. In 1821 the HBC and NWC merged to form the new

[24] Grace Lee Nute, The Voyageur's Highway (St. Paul, 1941), pp. 53-54. See also Eric F. Morse, Fur Trade Routes of Canada/Then and Now (Ottawa, 1969), passim.

Hudson's Bay Company.

Although the British yielded much of what is now Minnesota to the United States at the end of the War for Independence, they did little to restrict their fur trade operations in the upper Mississippi basin and did not surrender their trading posts in the lower Great Lakes until 1796. British fur trade companies continued to dominate the Minnesota country until after the War of 1812.

American traders began to make a strong bid for the Upper Mississippi fur trade after 1796, and after the conclusion of the war with Great Britain in 1815, American interests monopolized the Minnesota trade, with St. Louis eventually supplanting Mackinac as the principal western fur trade entrepot. In 1822 the regional fur trade fell into the hands of John Jacob Astor and his Albany based American Fur Company, which took over the system built up by the French and British.

Unlike the French system with its government monopoly, the British and American fur trade systems were characterized by economic monopoly vested in independent companies of merchant adventurers whose agents bought furs directly from the American Indians. Among the Ojibwe and Dakota, the independent trader engaging in free competition with others of his kind did not become the rule until after the 1830s.

Winter was the season for procuring furs, both because of the prime condition of the winter pelts, and because the beaver were also an important winter food staple for the American Indians. European traders and native middlemen collected beaver skins at wintering posts located near the most important American Indian villages, where they were packed for transport. After the ice breakup, the fur companies shipped their stocks of trade goods from Montreal or St. Louis to their primary depots located on the periphery of the Minnesota fur trade area, along Lake Superior and the Mississippi River, where each spring the traders rendezvoused to pick up their goods and headed off in their canoes to trading posts in the interior. The furs procured during the previous year's trade replaced trade goods and provisions on the return voyage.

Established as commercial outposts beyond the leading edge of the frontier, trading posts tended to be located at the natural breaks in the landscape: in the prairie-forest transition zone, at rapids and at the junctions of major rivers, and along chains of lakes.[25] By the time the various American Indian groups had completed their summer hunts or gathered their corn in roasting ears, the traders were ready with

[25] A map and listing of more than one hundred Minnesota trading posts was published by Grace Lee Nute, "Posts in the Minnesota Fur-Trading Area, 1660-1850," Minnesota History 11 (1930):353-385; see the same author's "Hudson's Bay Company Posts in the Minnesota Country," Minnesota History 22 (1941):270-289.

their stocks of firearms, ammunition, liquor, blankets, beads, axes, kettles, cloth, traps, and other items of European manufacture. Most of the trade was on credit: when competition between companies was greatest, the rate of exchange was sometimes tilted slightly in the natives' favor, but in most years the traders charged exorbitant prices.

The decline of the Minnesota fur trade was slow but inevitable. Native customs were drastically altered by the trade and whole villages were reduced by alien diseases introduced by the Europeans. At the posts, barter was most often primed with brandy, rum, or whiskey, and when the traders departed to the spring rendezvous, their American Indian middlemen went back among their own people to practice the vices they had acquired from the Europeans. Because the trade encouraged rapid depletion of hunting and trapping grounds, the Indians were forced to extend their beaver hunting activities farther and farther from their traditional villages, which increased their reliance upon European goods such as firearms, ammunition, and traps. By the 1830s, the Minnesota trade was starting to dry up for lack of beaver and Indians.

## F. Associated Property Types

### I. Name of Property Type

A single property type is defined for portages in Minnesota. The name of the property type is "Portage Trail" and it includes a number of portage related features, including but not limited to: high and low portage trailways, canoe drags, terminals and landings, poses, bivouacs, caches, and canoe repair sites.

### II. Description

Portage trails exist as archeological sites and as historic landscapes which can be differentiated by function and geographic location but which are all related to historic canoe transportation routes. The problems inherent in attempting to treat such a diverse group of cultural resources must be apparent: portage trails are found adjacent to literally hundreds of Minnesota's lakes and rivers scattered across all of the state's major drainage basins, and the timeframe of their historically documented usage by Native American Indian and Euro-American canoemen spans at least three centuries. In the following paragraphs, portage properties have been grouped into a single collective property type classification: portage trails. The focus is on the various forms of portage trail sites, as well as their functional attributes. In addition, the discussion of the property type is framed in the context of the Contact and Post-contact periods: while Pre-contact Period portages probably share many similar functional and physical characteristics, and are subject to the same environmental constraints, the variation in modes of production would probably result in differences in the archeological as well as the landscape history record.

Portages can be most readily classified as low or high trails on the basis of topographical characteristics. Low portage trails tended to be the shortest and most direct routes between two water bodies and were characteristically narrow, undulating pathways across low-lying, marshy or boggy ground. The length of the low portage trail varied inversely with the elevation of the water table: a mile-long portage passed during high water could be three, five, or even ten miles long in a dry season. In midwinter, low portages sometimes became routes for travelers using sledges or snowshoes. Under certain conditions, some of the smaller low portages could be bypassed altogether by having the occupants of the canoe wade alongside their craft and literally drag it over the obstruction, a process known as *saulting*. As described in the Jesuit Relations: "In ascending these rapids it is often necessary to alight from the canoe and walk in the river . . . The canoe is grasped by the hand and dragged

behind, two men usually sufficing for this."[26] In navigating small streams, voyageurs sometimes dragged their canoes over beaver dams from one pond to the next.

There is very little information with regard to the archaeological characteristics of portages in general, and of low portages in particular: only the Savanna Portage has been studied in any detail. Some low portage routes may have been artificially enlarged or improved to facilitate portaging: fur traders actually excavated a "canal" for dragging canoes along one segment of the Savanna Portage. Fur trade accounts also commonly distinguish between regular portages, where canoes were unloaded and carried overland, and *decharges* (discharges) or "half-portages," where the canoe was lightened and then paddled through the rapids and shallows while the cargo was packed over a portage trail. The term *demi-charge* was customarily used to describe the packs taken out of the canoe and portaged.[27]

High portage trails were the overland routes over which both water craft and their cargoes were transported. High portage trails provided detours around navigation obstructions, linked rivers and lakes, and often spanned watershed divides, connecting the heads of streams flowing in opposite directions. Perhaps the most common form was the riverside trail used to detour around rapids or falls. One of the most notorious high portages was the Grand Portage of the St. Louis River, which was described by Lieutenant Allen, a member of Schoolcraft's 1832 expedition: "No pains have been bestowed to make a road up it; and the ascent is by means of little imperfect steps, just large enough for the toes, they wind up the hill without any regularity as to direction or relative position."[28] Most portage trails were little more than uncut pathways through the woods, rough, narrow, and crooked. Over time, the most heavily traveled portage trails became permanent trackways, rutted and sunken. Some appear to have been marked: Hennepin describes the Fox-Wisconsin Portage as marked by American Indians and notes that his party "passed the night there in order to leave marks and crosses on the trunks of trees."[29] The Savanna Portage trail appears to have been marked by blazes on trees, some of which were still visible in the 1920s.[30] References to the *mai* (maypole) or "lob tree," made by cutting the topmost branches of a tall tree, crop up occasionally in the literature of the fur trade as

[26] Jesuit Relations 49:261-263; cf., Irving H. Hart, "The Old Savanna Portage," Minnesota History 8 (1927):127.

[27] See Guy E. Gibbon and Scott Jacobsen, "The Old Savanna Portage" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.); Nancy L. Woolworth and Alan R. Woolworth, "Savanna Portage Southwest" (unpublished manuscript, 1969). Demi-charge and decharge are defined in McDermott, Mississippi Valley French, p. 65; cf., Henry, Travels, p. 23.

[28] Journal of Lt. James Allen, p. 193.

[29] Cross, Hennepin's Description of Louisiana, p. 126; cf., Paul W. Wallace, "Historic Indian Paths of Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 76 (1952):411-439.

[30] Hart, "Savanna Portage," pp. 134-135.

a portage landmark similar in purpose to trail blazing.[31] Some of the more heavily traveled portages developed into roads, sometimes with log causeways where they crossed streams or swampy areas, and stone steps where the grade was particularly steep.[32]

Portage terminals or canoe landings represent the sites where portage trails begin and end. An important consideration in locating portage landings was the necessity of unloading the canoes while they were still afloat, the bark underside of the *Canot du Nord* being extremely fragile and therefore never allowed to rest on the bottom. The physical characteristics of these sites vary considerably. Some appear to have been highly developed rest and refitting stations where travelers would have prepared for the next stage in their journey; others were hardly more than tracks over bogs or sheer rock faces. Describing the misnamed Portage La Prairie at the west end of Saganaga Lake, Alexander Mackenzie wrote that "there is no ground about it that answers to that description, except for a small spot at the embarking place at the West end: to the East is an entire bog; and it is with great difficulty that the lading can be landed upon stages, formed by driving poles into the mud, and spreading branches of trees over them."[33] Where topography and vegetation afforded good sites for habitation, trading posts, stores, shops, docks, and storage facilities often developed. As a rule, portage terminals do not appear to have been preferred sites for American Indian villages, although at such points temporary native camps were commonly encountered. Some portages were famous as meeting places and campgrounds, and this social function is well illustrated in the literature of the fur trade and northwoods exploration. Over time, a few of the major portage terminals acquired permanent trading posts or forts, but the norm seems to have been intermittent occupation by small traders' depots or stores. Alexander Henry the younger, active on the Border Lakes at the beginning of the 19th century, wrote that an old canoeman named J. M. Bouche had established himself at the Prairie Portage, where he "has built a hut and an oven to bake bread to sell to the winterers en passant."[34] Another example of portage trail-related commercial development is provided by Gibbon's investigation of the Savanna Portage, where archaeological evidence combined with historical documentation suggested that a "trader's cabin" may have existed at the western end of the portage. Other portage terminals appear to contain little or no evidence of cultural deposits, and the historical record may be the only method of documenting

[31] McDermott, Mississippi Valley French, p. 96; see also Florence Page Jacques, Canoe Country (Minneapolis, 1938), p. 46; and Bill Riviere, Pole, Paddle & Portage (New York, 1969), p. 80.

[32] Morse, Voyageur's Highway," pp. 6-7; S. C. Ellis, "Portage La Loche," Canadian Geographical Journal 12 (1936):140-141. Portage trails and improvements are also discussed in Gibbon and Jacobson's "Savanna Portage" manuscript.

[33] Mackenzie, Voyages, p. iii.

[34] Alexander Henry the younger, quoted in Lawrence J. Burpee, "The Story of the Grand Portage," Minnesota History 12 (1923):375.

their existence.

*Pose* (derived from the French word poser "to deposit"), sometimes rendered in English as "pause" or "post," refers to canoe or pack rests established along portage trail routes. The term was also the historic unit of measure for all portages: early travelers reckoned the standard distances between poses to be between one-third and one-half mile, but noted that when the country was rough and the portage grade considerable, the poses were located closer together, while on short, level portage trails the interval sometimes exceeded a mile.[35] For example, the six-mile Savanna Portage, "the worst carrying place in the northwest," was passed at thirteen poses, and the Grand Portage of the St. Louis River was nine miles long and required nineteen pauses, including three pauses in one particularly rugged one and one-half mile stretch known as the Knife Portage.[36] Voyageurs sometimes made fires at poses to gain respite from the mosquitoes or to prepare meals. Bivouacs were similar to poses in concept but entailed an overnight stay and occurred not only along portage trails but also along the river and lake portions of the water transportation route. Delafield, traversing the Grand Portage in 1823, described stopping to spend the night in a "little clearing now covered with high grass," apparently a common fur traders' trail camp.[37] These clearings may have been caused by burning: Dr. John J. Bigsby, traveling the Pigeon River route with David Thompson in 1822, recorded that the mosquitoes were so bad, travelers "burnt the grass after watering it, and lived in the smoke."[38] Archaeologically, these sites may be indicated by the presence of fire-cracked rocks or other types of hearth debris, as well as by diagnostic artifact assemblages. Both poses and bivouacs are characterized by a limited quantity of artifacts which were abandoned or lost during their occupations. The physical record thus produced is subtle and difficult to distinguish, although the presence of poses and/or bivouacs is sometimes indicated by the presence of pioneer plant species.

Cache sites associated with portage trails vary in the contents of the cache but are linked together by the concept of storing important objects for future use. For example, one might expect supply caches to be distributed along some very long canoe routes, not only to lighten the load but also to protect the canoemen from catastrophic occurrences such as storms. It is possible that canoes would have been cached at either end of a portage, especially those which were the longest and most

[35] McDermott, Mississippi Valley French, p. 126; Charles M. Gates (ed.), Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John Macdonell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faries, and Thomas Connor (St. Paul, 1965), p. 97, note.

[36] Journal of Lt. James Allen, p. 194.

[37] Delafield, Unfortified Boundary, p. 405. The social history of portage camps is discussed in Hulbert, Portage Paths, pp. 41-42.

[38] John J. Bigsby, The Shoe and Canoe or Pictures of Travel in the Canadas, 2 vols. (London, 1850) 2:244.

arduous, although canoe caches may not occur as frequently in northern Minnesota as in regions where birch bark was not readily obtainable and where heavy dugout or elm bark canoes were the norm. Some caches may actually reflect the pilfering of trade goods by voyageurs, who stashed items which they hoped to recover later. Cache sites are probably best identified by their artifact content, context, and relationship to portage routes. Archeological features such as pits or rock cairns may also be indicative of caches.[39]

The need for repair, manufacture, or replacement of a canoe did not necessarily coincide with established fur trade posts. Portage terminals along some of the longer, more arduous canoe routes became regular repair and refitting stations, as at the western end of the Height of Land Portage on the Old Traders' Road from Grand Portage to Lake of the Woods.[40] Canoe manufacture and repair sites may be associated with poses and bivouacs and can be identified archaeologically on the basis of the functional nature of the cultural deposits.

## III. Significance

Criterion A

The significance of portage trails under Criterion A derives from their historical, archaeological, and landscape values. Portage trails are significant because of their association, both physical and historical, with the transportation geography of the Minnesota region during the Contact and Post-contact periods. Furthermore, portages are important because they represent diverse themes, such as the evolution of internal transportation networks, the development of the European peltry trade, and the impact of the birchbark canoe on accessibility and mobility within specific geographic subregions.

Portage trails were among the most important American Indian thoroughfares and sites with intact Pre-contact Period archaeological deposits would be extremely significant in large part because of their very existence, inasmuch as no sites of this type have ever been recorded in Minnesota. The early European reconnaissance of Minnesota and the fur trade were based on water transportation by birchbark canoe,

[39] The term "cache" is defined in McDermott, Mississippi Valley French, p. 37. Archeologists have found what appear to be small caches of pilfered trade goods along the Savanna Portage; see Gibbon and Jacobson, "Old Savanna Portage," n.p. The use of canoe caches is described briefly in Wallace's "Indian Paths of Pennsylvania," op. cit. There is an intriguingly-named Canoe Cache Lake near the route of the Grand Portage of the St. Louis River.

[40] Delafield, Unfortified Boundary, p. 408.

employing canoemen (*voyageurs*) of mixed American Indian and Euro-American extraction. The essential problem of the European fur trade was the organization of transporting peltry, trade goods, and people over great distances. Thus, waterways were the common highways of the fur trade and portages were part of an extensive feeder route network which brought people and goods together at fur trade posts. Since the fur trade provided the major impetus to the initial Euro-American occupation and development of the Minnesota region, portage sites represent a significant set of historic sites.

In the context of portage trails, the term historic landscape is used to describe the sum total of an aspect of a site and is the unit concept for the composite effects of geology, soils, vegetation, and the modifications of the natural environment affected by humans. Portage trails are cultural landforms which have been shaped by historical processes and individual sites often retain visual characteristics indicative of these processes. Relict portage trailways are in fact vernacular transportation structures, part of a specific preindustrial historical environment, and as such possess an identity of time and place. Finally, because the historic canoe routes crossed major watersheds which were frequently adopted as boundary lines, some portage trails may be significant because of their association with aspects of political geography.

Criterion B

It appears unlikely that individual portage properties may be significant primarily because of their association with corporate entities or individuals who played outstanding roles in the exploration of Minnesota and the development of the region.

Criterion C

Significant under National Register Criterion A because of their association with important regional historical themes, groups of related portage trail features may also meet Criterion C as representing a type of vernacular or cultural landscape. Routes have always been among the most important of humanity's cultural imprints on the land -- "Nothing is more typical of a civilization than its roads." The fundamental geographical aspect of portage sites is their association with regularly traveled water routes, where they functioned as nodes or vertices, i.e., places where lines of communication converged. The landscape significance of portage trail sites can also derive from manifestations of an historic transportation network or trade route system, such as the Old Traders' Road from Grand Portage to Lake of the Woods.

Portage trails physically comprise a specific type of vernacular or cultural landscape. Borrowing a concept familiar to historical geographers,[41] the authors are inclined to regard portages as cultural landforms that have been shaped by historical and natural processes. In addition to buried artifacts and features, portage trails often retain visual landscape characteristics indicative of their historic function. The findings of the archival research and field survey suggest that that spatial relationships between individual portage trails, their component features, and associated water routes is often critical to evaluating their significance as historic landscapes.

Criterion D

In general, the literature of the history of the European fur trade and exploration of Minnesota does not accurately reflect the importance of portage routes in the development of regional transportation systems. However, a consensus exists among knowledgeable persons that portages are at least as important as relict government roads, oxcart trails, stage routes, and other resources associated with the theme of transportation. Historians generally believe that portages are significant as locations of important events and because of their association with regional historical themes (e.g., the fur trade), the study of which can yield important information about the state's history. Those archeologists lucky enough to have located a portage containing intact cultural deposits or diagnostic artifacts consider portages as potential National Register sites, the excavation of which might provide the answers to specific research questions, e.g., Do portage trails predate European contact and if so, how old are they? When were specific regions opened to the European fur trade? How did the material culture of the *voyageur* change over time?

The archeological record of Minnesota's portage sites has not been adequately assessed, but the present writers are inclined to believe that many portage sites are relatively undisturbed, although their potential for containing buried deposits is extremely difficult to determine. Cursory site inspections have revealed traces of portage trails, but very little systematic survey or testing has been done, except at a handful of sites. Likewise, known locations of other historic portage trails have not been systematically surveyed. Because there are relatively few extant historic sites which date from the fur trade and exploration era, portage sites from that period take

[41] The concept of the cultural landscape in historical geography was developed by Carl Ortwin Sauer; see his 1925 article, "The Morphology of Landscape," reprinted in Leighly, Land & Life, pp. 315-350. Two excellent examples of studies which have treated the landscape qualities of routes are: Robert C. West and James J. Parsons, "The Topia Road: A Trans-Sierra Trail of Colonial Mexico," Geographical Review 31 (1941):406-413; and Milton B. Newton and C. Nicholas Raphael, "Relic Roads of East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana," Geographical Review 61 (1971):250-264);

on added importance.[42]

## IV. Registration Requirements

To be considered under any of the four National Register criteria, the portage trail must have been in use during the period of significance, ca. 1630s-1870s.

Criterion A

Portage trail properties that reflect the European reconnaissance of Minnesota and the development of the fur trade, or are directly associated with important exploring expeditions or fur trade companies, are significant under National Register Criterion A. Obviously, to be considered for nomination to the National Register a portage property must be related to a specific canoe route. Maps, physical remains, and written records must be used to support this relationship. Individual properties may have the potential to provide significant research data concerning historic canoe routes because they represent aspects of this mode of transportation.

Integrity is problematic for several reasons. Physiographic characteristics as well as climatic variations over time would seem to be the significant variables in identifying low portages and canoe drags. Low portage trails were generally less stable than those on higher ground; indeed, most were impassable for many months of the year because of overflows from neighboring lakes or swamps. While canoe drags are probably archeologically invisible, metal detectors or other remote sensing

[42] For actual portage surveys in Minnesota, see: Guy E. Gibbon and Scott Jacobson, "Portage Survey and Excavation: An Example from Minnesota" (unpublished manuscript, 1991); Gibbon and Jacobson, "Old Savanna Portage"; Gibbon and Eugene Willms, "The Savanna Portage: An Archaeological Study" (unpublished manuscript, 1985); Susan C. Mulholland and George Rapp, Jr., "Archaeological Survey on Submerged Portions of the Fond du Lac Pond, on the St. Louis River, Carlton and St. Louis Counties, Minnesota" (unpublished report, 1990), p. 7; Mulholland, Rapp, et al., "Report on a Stage I Cultural Research Survey for the St. Louis River Hydroelectric Project in Northern Minnesota" (unpublished report, 1990); and Mary K. Whelan, "South Pike Bay to Moss Lake Archaeological Survey" (unpublished report, 1990). Mulholland, et al., searched for the Knife Portage; Whelan's team investigated the portage route used by Schoolcraft in 1832. Several potential portage sites in the Chippewa National Forest were documented by Nancy L. Woolworth and Kathleen A. Ratzell in their "Cultural Resources Overview of the Chippewa National Forest" (unpublished report, 1979). For studies of portage sites which tend to ignore the trail and route aspects of these properties, see Erwin N. Thompson, Grand Portage: A History of the Sites, Peoples, and Fur Trade (Washington, 1969); Robert C. Wheeler, Walter A. Kenyon, Alan R. Woolworth, and Douglas A. Birk, Voices from the Rapids: An Underwater Search for Fur Trade Artifacts, 1960-73 (St. Paul, 1975); Alan R. Woolworth, "Archaeological Excavations at Grand Portage: An 18th Century Fur Trade Metropolis," Minnesota Archaeologist 29 (1967):3-17; and William A. Fox, "Prairie Portage Archaeological Salvage Project, Quetico Provincial Park" (unpublished report, 1974).

might be useful in locating artifacts deposited as a result of accidents that might be construed as evidence of a portage trail.

On the other hand, high portage trails are sometimes fairly easy to discern because they tend to be entrenched or sunken: Gibbon found segments of the Savanna Portage path with ruts one-half to one foot deep. Impacts to the soils along portage trails are sometimes evident in the form of disturbed or truncated soil horizons. Landscape change brought about by portaging also extends to vegetation: some upland portage trails are recognizable both from aerial photographs and on the surface by the linear pattern of pioneer plants along the route. The actual portage trail plant community is variable, depending on microenvironmental factors such as elevation, soils, etc.

Criterion B

It is unlikely that any individual portage can be evaluated as significant because of its association with a particular individual who played a leading, pivotal, or important role in shaping Minnesota history.

Criterion C

Although relatively few portage trails have been identified and evaluated as archeological resources, many extant portage properties are potentially significant under Criterion C as historic landscapes. Many portage landscapes, particularly high trails, can be identified quite readily by two physical characteristics: they are entrenched and they are associated with a particular vegetation complex. The morphology of portage trail landscapes is due in large part to the erodability of the soils on which they were established. The initial entrenchment of the portage trail resulted from the compaction and abrasion of the pathway caused by the passage of pedestrians; successive clearing and disturbance of vegetation along the pathway tended to give the route a precise definition, which led in turn to further entrenchment. Over time, the beaten path actually sinks, with depth dependent upon soil conditions as well as on variations in grade and slope. These trail ruts may be one or two feet deep and there is often evidence of gully erosion along ridges traversed by high portage trails.

Visible ruts are not a characteristic feature of low portage trails or canoe drags, although in parts of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area low portages used by recreational canoeists are characterized by shallow, flat-bottomed linear depressions. Once a track is worn down over wet ground, rainwater tends to be channeled along

the pathway and an uneven surface develops. It is likely that these low trailway surfaces are readily modified by intermittent fluvial action after their abandonment.

The identification of portage trail landscapes in the field is sometimes facilitated by the distinctive vegetation complex associated with them. Portage trails, poses, and other portage-related sites are remarkable in terms of ethnobotany for being the sites of invasions of disturbed-upland and riverine plants, the result of selective thinning and topsoil disturbance caused by human use. A typical northern Minnesota high portage trail might have a floor covering of scrubby trees, native grasses, and forest litter: a tree-scrub complex often associated with old fields or logging roads. Some portage trails appear as galleries of bottomland tree species that extend into pine-covered uplands. Sunken sections of low portage trails are sometimes occupied by bogs and ponds dominated by aquatic plants. The sites of poses and bivouacs are often observed to have been colonized by sumac, wild raspberry, and other pioneer plant species. It may be possible that some of the bogs now found along the route of historic portage trails result from disturbances in surficial drainage patterns caused by compaction of the portage pathway. Finally, the integrity of some portage landscapes is defined not on the basis of individual artifacts but on cultural landforms: for example, portage trails are often confused with logging roads and skid trails, and in such cases geomorphology and biology become the most important determinants of portage trail morphology.

Criterion D

While the case can be made that portage trails are significant as cultural landforms, properties will also meet National Register eligibility requirements under Criterion D on the basis of their archeological research potential. Portage sites which contain intact subsurface deposits with good research potential bearing on the material culture of American Indian or Euro-American groups possess high research value. However, archeological deposits associated with portage trails difficult to find, and as of 1991, only one portage route (the Savanna Portage) has been subjected to intensive survey by competent archaeologists.

Portage trail archeological site integrity (i.e., the ability of a property to convey its significance) is recognized at three levels: sites which are located or are likely to be located underwater and which are directly affected by fluvial processes (e.g., low portage trails), sites which can be identified by the presence of alterations of the natural landscape (e.g., high portage trails, poses, and terminals), and sites which are defined by artifact assemblages (e.g., poses, bivouacs, caches, and canoe manufacture and repair stations). The archeological integrity of individual portage properties may vary in the sense that in some instances artifacts will probably be found

in a secondary context as a result of erosion, logging, or agriculture. Nonetheless, knowledge of the general location as well as the recovery of diagnostic artifacts contributes significant research data, although this concept might not be applicable to some sites, such as poses or bivouacs, where the distribution of individual artifacts is the critical variable in answering questions about the social function of space.

Another quality of portage trail archeological sites is their spatial association. Recent research by Gibbon has indicated that certain portage trail features, such as poses, may be regularly spaced along individual portage trails. One might expect a similar distribution pattern for bivouacs and cache sites, depending on certain historical variables -- e.g., caches of pilfered trade goods are likely to be found randomly distributed along a specific trail route, but supply and canoe cache site locations may be predictable.

## G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

[x] See continuation sheet

## H. Major Bibliographical References

[x] See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- [x] State historic preservation office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Specify repository: _____

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## G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The present study of Minnesota portage trails was prepared by R. C. Vogel and Associates and the Highland Cultural Research Center (HCRC) under contract with the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Robert C. Vogel, a historical geographer, and David G. Stanley, an archaeologist, acted as co-principal investigators. The project was administered by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), with Scott A. Anfinson, Thomas H. Hruby, and Susan Roth serving as project coordinators. Work began in October 1990 and was completed in June 1991.

As conceived by MHS, the project was intended to address the research and heritage preservation values of portages as part of the state's evolving transportation system. It was expected that the study would focus on American Indian and Euro-American water communication and that portages surveyed would be surveyed within the framework of statewide historic contexts for the Contact and Post-contact periods and evaluated under National Register of Historic Places eligibility criteria.

The scoping document stated five general work elements or goals:

1. Undertake archival research to identify portage properties in Minnesota.
2. Survey a number of portages to document their locations and assess their eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.
3. Prepare a final report summarizing the archival research and survey.
4. Prepare a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for portage properties in Minnesota.
5. Nominate a minimum of one portage property to the National Register of Historic Places.

The first step in carrying out the project was the formulation of a written research design. In October 1990, the co-principal investigators submitted a research design based on the following premise: if portage properties are to be preserved and protected by listing in the National Register, preservation planners will need to evaluate individual properties in a regional cultural/historical context. Therefore, the centerpiece of the research design was the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), with its emphasis on developing historic context and describing property types. Although sensitive to the archaeological potential of portage sites, a key feature of the original research design was archival research, including systematic, critical

analysis of primary texts (both French and English) and maps. A significant portion of the budget was earmarked for an exhaustive search of the inventory files maintained by SHPO and the State Archaeologist's Office (SAO) and a review of the pertinent archaeological and preservation planning literature. Ten days were allocated for field work.

Early on, the authors realized the need to develop a working definition of the terms "portage" and "portage site." As used in this report, portage is defined as a place where water-borne cargo and passengers were temporarily transported overland. In the context of the fur trade, a portage was literally a *carrying place* between water routes, distinguishable from a path or road by its relatively short distance and by the portagers' need to carry their vessels with them from one waterway to another. Portage properties may be either archaeological sites or vernacular landscapes.

Vogel carried out the archival research in primary and secondary sources, while Stanley reviewed the pertinent archaeological and historic preservation literature. Both co-principal investigators conducted a search of the cultural resource management (CRM) and site inventory file managed by SHPO at Fort Snelling.

The initial literature search and records review identified a number of critical information gaps. First and foremost among these was the near total lack of an historic preservation perspective on portage trails. Four portage properties in Minnesota have been successfully nominated and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. They are: the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River in the Grand Portage National Monument (Cook County), the Height of Land Portage in the Superior National Forest (Cook County), the Grand Portage of the St. Louis River in Jay Cooke State Park (Carlton County), and the Savanna Portage in Savanna Portage State Park (Aitkin County). While the documentation accompanying these National Register nominations is quite superficial with regard to historic context, physical description, and boundaries, there is a small but slowly growing body of archeological literature dealing with these specific properties.

Archival research was conducted in a wide range of primary and secondary source materials. To have examined all of the published and unpublished sources which contain information pertaining to the history of water transportation during the Contact and Post-contact periods in Minnesota would have been a gigantic undertaking. Primary sources, including printed documents and manuscript materials, were identified through a variety of research guides and bibliographies and examined at MHS or the University of Minnesota libraries in the Twin Cities. Some microfilmed material and photocopies of maps were obtained on loan from the National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, and the Public Record Office in

Ottawa. No attempt was made to assemble more than a sampling of the voluminous secondary literature of the fur trade travel and exploration. The portages survey was never intended to result in a comprehensive study of the history of transportation, European exploration, or the fur trade in Minnesota. Indeed, the present writers scrupulously tried to resist the temptation to assemble a book-length summary of regional history during the Contact Period. Furthermore, the authors' experience with MPDF's has led them to conclude that book-length historic contexts are probably not cost effective -- or, to put it more bluntly, historic contexts do not need to be long-winded to be useful, either in terms of their cultural resource management applications or their contribution to scholarship. The result was a compact but general historic context overview that touched on several major themes.

Research in historic cartographic sources produced unforeseen results. More than one hundred different maps and atlases were consulted, but very few were found to contain accurate, detailed geographical data on individual portage trails. Regional maps from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to show the general locations of major portages, such as the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River and the Savanna Portage, but lesser fur trade routes are usually not depicted in any great detail. However, the maps drawn for the United States and British boundary commissions, as well as General Land Office surveys, offer a wealth of site specific location data. Many of the historic portage trails in northeastern Minnesota are still used by recreational boaters and canoeists and appear on current maps published by the United States Forest Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

A considerable quantity of anecdotal information about portage trails was accumulated through interviews and correspondence with archaeologists, historians, foresters, preservationists, and local historical society personnel from around the state. The SHPOs of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan were contacted by telephone and letter.

The original goal of the survey was to identify, on the basis of the SHPO and SAO inventory files search, between six and ten portage trails which the co-principal investigators had reason to believe might be eligible for nomination to the National Register, and then document these properties in the field. Due to the lack of useful site inventory data, the archeological field survey element of the research was scaled back to allow for more intensive archival research in primary sources.

The survey confirmed that the archeological and landscape history research values of portages is significant but often extremely difficult to evaluate. On the basis of archival research, the co-principal investigators identified twenty-five portage properties, including those already listed in the National Register, which were selected for the survey.

After inspecting three of the four National Register listed properties (the Height of Land Portage in the Superior National Forest was not surveyed), the locations of ten unregistered historic portage trails were visited, with mixed results. Only six of the portages could be located at all and archeological field survey was completely negetaive. Although public land management agencies were extremely cooperative, several portages indicated by archival research were located on private property and landowner permission was not always forthcoming. Fieldwork was carried out during the monthes of April, May, and June, and several portage locations were inaccessible due to high water. Field identification of portage trail remnants was extremely problematic, except in those cases where the portage trail was still active as part of a recreational canoe route.

After the completion of the field survey, the co-principal investigators completed a Minnesota historic site inventory form for each property identified in the survey. In evaluating the properties identified by the survey, the co-principal investigators applied conventional National Register criteria within the historic contexts, property types, and registration requirements discussed in the MPDF.

Upon completion of survey data review and evaluation, the co-principal investigators, in consultation with SHPO staff, determined which portage properties were eligible for nomination to the National Register. Nine portage trail properties emerged as likely candidates: the Turtle Mound Portage between Little Cut Foot Sioux Lake and the Bowstring River in the Chippewa National Forest, Itasca County County; the Leech Lake to Lake Winnibigoshish Portage in the Chippewa National Forest, Cass County; the Height of Land Portage between the Embarrass and Pike rivers in St. Louis County; the Crane Lake Portage on the Vermilion River in the Superior National Forest, St. Louis County; the Prairie Portage on Basswood Lake in the Superior National Forest, Lake County; the St. Anthony Falls Portage of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Hennepin County; the Little Ball Club Lake Portage to Lake Winnibigoshish in Itasca County; Schoolcraft's Portage from Lake Alice to Lake Itasca in Hubbard and Itasca counties; and the Turtle Lake Portage across the continental divide between Cass Lake and Red Lake in Beltrami County. Because of time and funding limits, the co-principal investigators decided to select a single portage trail for nomination to the National Register.

In the end, one stood out from all others: the Height of Land Portage. This property was originally surveyed in 1976 and nominated to the National Register. However, the nomination process was never forwarded to Washington. Upon reviewing the site file documentation on file at SHPO, the authors concluded that the original National Register nomination contained a number of imperfections which

could be remedied through archival investigation and field survey.

Final products consisted of the completed MPDF and National Register nomination documents, site forms for twenty-one previously unrecorded portage properties identified in the survey, and a file folder containing a collection of reprints of articles, documents, and maps pertaining to Minnesota portages. Copies of the survey data, the MPDF, and the Height of Land Portage National Register nomination were circulated for peer review and public comment; the other materials were deposited in the SHPO files at Fort Snelling.

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