



Travel by canoe along the route used from 1731-1821 by the brigades of “*Voyageurs*” to transport furs and trade goods from Lake Superior to the North American interior for the North West Company, the X Y Company, and the American Fur Company.

This Boy Scouts of America, Historic Trails Award is administered by the Voyageurs Area Council under the historic trails Program of the BSA. To earn this award you must plan and participate in a unit historic activity. A unit historic activity requires unit members to:

1. Locate a historic trail or site and study information relating to it.
2. Hike, canoe or camp 2 days and 1 night along or in the vicinity of the site.
3. The preferred activity is to cooperate with an adult group (park service, historical society, reenactment organizers) to plan and stage an historic pageant, ceremony, or other public event related to this trail or site. Or cooperate with an adult group such as an historic society to restore and mark all or part of this trail or site. Be sure to check with the park, wilderness area or state DNR before doing any projects. – large enough to merit coverage by the local press.

Your unit leader must then file the attached Historic Trails Application with the Voyageurs Area Council, 3877 Stebner Road, Hermantown, Minnesota 55811 (Telephone (218)729-5811, E-Mail address: lstach@vac-bsa.org)

The information for this trail is explained below.

THE NORTH WEST VOYAGEURS BRIGADE TRAIL

The North West Voyageurs Brigade historic trail includes the following segments:

1. The lakes, rivers and portage trails along the International Boundary between the United States and Canada from the western end of *Grand Portage* to Crane Lake, Minnesota.
2. The lakes, rivers and portage trails along the canoe route around the northern side of “*Hunter Island*” in the Quetico Provincial Park. This route goes from Saganaga Lake on the U.S.-Canada border, through Saganagons Lake, Wet Lake, Kawnipi Lake, Shelly Lake, Chatterton Lake, Russell Lake, Sturgeon Lake and the Maligne River to Lac La Croix.
3. The lakes, rivers and portage trails along the canoe route beginning at Lac De Mille Lacs, via Baril Portage, through the Pickerel River, to French Lake, Pickerel Lake, *Deux Rivieres* portage, Sturgeon Lake, the Maligne River to Lac La Croix on the U.S.-Canada border. This was the remaining segment of the fur trade route used by the North West Company beginning in 1803 when Fort William became the company’s main depot on Lake Superior.
4. The *Grand Portage*. The nine-mile hiking trail from the shore of Lake Superior to the site of the fur trade era’s Fort Charlotte on the Pigeon River and the U.S.-Canada border.

NOTE: Permits and reservations are required for use of most of the North West Voyageurs Brigade Historic Trail segments. These trail segments lie within, or along the edge of, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (1), the Quetico Provincial Park (1, 2, 3), or the Grand Portage National Monument (4).

Information is available at the respective Internet sites listed below.

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THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRAILS

These trails were in use by the American Indians when the European explorers first entered the region in the early 1600's. There are pictographs on the shoreline cliffs of some of the lakes that are



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in excess of 1,000 years old. Trails were of great commercial importance and in heavy use during the fur trade era [-1730-1840] by brigades of the North West Company, the X Y Company and the

American Fur Company. These routes were used as early as 1660 by many European explorers including Alexander Henry, Pierre Radisson, Sir Alexander McKenzie and Jacques De Noyon.. Some in search of the *Northwest Passage* across North America. Unrestricted access to the customary canoe commerce route from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods was so important during the fur trade era that treaties between Great Britain and France, and Great Britain and the United States used "*the customary fur trade route*" to describe the territorial boundary. Treaties went so far as to give unrestricted travel along the lakes, rivers and portage trails of the route to the subjects of either country. Because of the area's historic significance, natural beauty and uniqueness it continues to be protected and preserved as a U.S. National Monument, a U.S. Wilderness Area, or as an Ontario Provincial Park with wilderness park designation.

THINGS TO SEE, DO AND VISIT

1. **Visit Grand Portage National Monument.** The stockade at Grand Portage has been reconstructed as it appeared in the late 1700's by the North West Company. This national monument provides visitors with interpretive programs about life and happenings at the Grand Portage fur trade depot during the fur trade era. Programs and activities are presented by staff members in period costumes. Books, maps and videos about the fur trade era are available.
2. **Visit Old Fort William.** A reconstruction of Fort William the primary fur and trade good depot of the North West Company from 1803 through 1821, is located on the Kaministiquia River, west of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Old Fort William provides visitors with interpretive programs and presentations, and visitor involvement opportunities. Books, maps and videos about the fur trade era are available.
3. **Visit the Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Base.** Located east of Ely, MN on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, the Sommers Base provides visitors and base participants with a glimpse of the life of *Voyageur Brigade* members as they traveled in the interior of the fur trade country. Participating groups are encouraged to incorporate partial re-enactment of the life of the Voyageur into their wilderness canoeing experience.
4. **Visit the North West Company Fur Trading Post.** Located just west of I-35 at the Pine City, MN exit, this post was an historic stop on the way to *The Voyageurs Highway*. The Minnesota Historical Society has reconstructed this typical small fur trading post, originally built and operated by the North West Company during the early 1800's. In-costume employees provide interpretive programs for visitors.

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RESOURCE MATERIALS

BOOKS:

1. **The Voyageur's Highway**, Grace Lee Nute, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1941.
A timeless description of the fur trade route that later became the U.S.-Canada International Boundary.
2. **The Voyageur**, Grace Lee Nute, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1955.
Describes the life, clothing, work and times of the French-Canadian *Voyageur* of the fur trade era.
3. **The Grand Portage Story**, Carolyn Gilman, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992.
An illustrated history of the Grand Portage fur trade depot, the people who built and operated the depot, and a description of the Grand Portage trail.
4. **Superior Rendezvous-Place: Fort William in the Canadian Fur Trade**, Jean Morrison, Natural Heritage Books, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2001. A comprehensive history of the events leading to the establishment of Fort William as the primary fur trade depot of the North West Company.

There have been many other publications about the fur trade era, including edited versions of the journals of fur traders and explorers. Unfortunately many of these are out of print but check with your local library. The above listed books also contain extensive bibliographic reference lists.

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INTERNET SITES:

1. **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**
www.bwcaw.org Permit reservations and information about traveling and camping in the BWCAW.
2. **Grand Portage National Monument**
www.nps.gov/grpo/home.htm Information about the Grand Portage National Monument
3. **Minnesota Historical Society**
www.mhs.org Fur trade era books, and information about the fur trade era historic sites in Minnesota.
4. **Old Fort William**
www.oldfortwilliam.on.ca Information about Old Fort William and the fur trade history programs offered.
5. **Quetico Provincial Park**
<http://ontarioparks.com> Permit reservations and information about traveling and camping in the Quetico Provincial Park.
6. **Canadian Customs and Immigration**
http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/visit/rabc_e.html Information about entering Canada where there is no Canadian customs station, and information on obtaining a remote area border crossing [RABC] clearance to do so.
7. **Northern National High Adventure**

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Hudson's Bay Company Archives / Provincial Archives of Manitoba

Tier
Programs
www.ntier.org
Information about the operated outfitting bases scout groups traveling in the Voyageur Trails area.

