

## Canot Du nord "North Canoe"



North Canoes were used to transport furs, trade goods and supplies to, from, and between the various trading posts and forts that belonged to the North West and Hudson Bay Companies.

They were constructed of extra- light weight materials occurring in nature. Originally made by Ojibwe Indians—and later at Fort Lac la Pluie on the Rainy River—the canoes were fashioned from birch bark (for the "skin"), cedar (framework and gunwales), split spruce roots (for sewing the birch bark to the frame), and a sealing compound made from cedar ashes mixed with heated pine pitch to seal all seams.

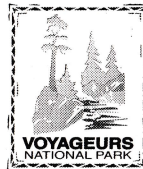
North Canoes were 26 feet long and 4 x 5 feet wide. Manned by a crew of eight, the total weight including freight, baggage and crew was 2,000 to 3,000 pounds.

Because the voyageurs used the canoes so heavily, the life- expectancy was just one year. Constant wear and tear inflicted by running rapids, portaging and other trip related accidents took their toll.

If you would like to paddle into the past and experience the life of a voyageur, please contact the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center or Ash River Visitor Center for a North Canoe Voyage.



*Commemorating the rich history of the voyageurs and preserving the scenery of the area for the enjoyment and use of present and future generations is the mission of Voyageurs National Park.*



For more information about Voyageurs National Park please call the following visitor centers:

Rainy Lake Visitor Center  
218- 286- 5258

Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center  
218- 875- 2111

Ash River Visitor Center  
218- 374- 3221

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Voyageurs National Park

## Voyageurs... Their History, Clothing and Canoes



## **Who were the Voyageurs?** *The Fur Connection...*

Voyageurs were French- Canadian canoe men of the fur trade. Two hundred years ago brigades of voyageurs paddled birch bark canoes on the waters of Rainy, Namakan and Sand Point Lakes, which are now a part of Voyageurs National Park.

As fur coats and hats became fashionable in Europe in the 1700's, businessmen turned to North America in search of furs, particularly beaver. Fur bearing animals were abundant here and Indians were willing to exchange furs for trade goods. When trappers depleted eastern fur areas, traders pushed west and eventually opened up Northwestern North America.

Voyageurs paddling birch bark canoes transported furs from as far west as Lake Athabasca to Montreal, three thousand miles east.

These burly men usually started their voyageur apprenticeship in their teens. Their lives were usually brief because by the age of 30 most were physically unable to continue the back- breaking labor demanded of them. Many turned to a solitary life of trapping. Others became farmers or convoyed explorers or settlers by canoe to the far reaches of western Canada.

This fur connection lasted almost a century. Around 1840, when silk replaced fur as the fashion in Europe, the era of the voyageur came to an end.

## **Beautiful but Functional** *~Clothing of the Voyageurs~*

Every item worn by a voyageur served a purpose and was tested by time.



### **Toque (tuke) ~ hat**

The toque was usually made of red or blue wool. It was used to keep the voyageurs' heads warm in the northern latitudes as well as to carry tobacco to prevent it from getting wet.

### **Chemise d'homme (she.mee.dome) ~ shirt**

Voyageurs favored linen and cotton fabrics dyed in bright colors and made in large sizes. Once tucked into the trousers and secured by a sash, the voyageur could store odds and ends within the shirt. Also, the large sizes provided ventilation and warded off flies and mosquitoes.

### **Ceinture flechee (sen.toor.fle.shay) ~ sash**

A sash was usually 4 to 6 inches wide and 6 feet in length. It took the place of a modern- day weight lifter's belt and helped guard against strangulated hernias.

### **Calcon (Kal.sown) ~ trousers**

Calcons were usually "drop- front" trousers; the voyageur's favorite material was wide- wale cotton corduroy. They were usually only worn as their "dress" clothing. Typically while paddling canoes, voyageurs wore leggings and breechcloth.

### **Guetre (Gay.tr) ~ leggings**

Leggings were typically made of bright colored wool. Voyageurs had two primary uses for them: to "blouse" up pants so they did not chafe the voyageurs' legs and to keep leeches from crawling up the body.

### **Soulier de boef (Sool.yay.deh.buf) ~ moccasins**

Ankle high moccasins were made by the Cree and Ojibwe. They were made from rawhide and considered working boots. They provided more protection against mosquitoes and black flies.

### **Bas (Baw) ~ stockings**

Voyageurs often wore stockings. The stockings reached mid- calf and were made of hand- knitted wool. The color was either gray or off- white.