

Voyageurs

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Voyageurs National Park

Welcome to the Park



A Unique Place

"This is the moment, I think, when I've really given my heart to our canoe country, though I've been entranced with it from the first. But here its special quality of wild innocence touches me sharply and deeply." Florence Page Jaques, Canoe Country

On January 8, 1971 Congress created Voyageurs as the nation's 36th National Park. President Richard M. Nixon stated these words. "The uniquely scenic and historic Voyageurs National Park, stands as a monument forever to the dedicated citizens and conservation organizations whose vision, ingenuity and courage match the splendor of this superlative wilderness area. Rich in the history of the early, exciting exploration of our great country, Voyageurs will serve as a living legacy linking generation to generation and century to century."

On April 8, 1975, Voyageurs National Park was established "to preserve for the inspiration and enjoyment of future generations, the outstanding scenery, geological conditions, and waterway system which constituted part of the historic route of the Voyageurs who contributed significantly to the opening of the Northwestern United States."

Forested Lake-Country

Voyageurs National Park is a land and water environment of great beauty, exceptional natural and cultural resources, and abundant recreation opportunities. Located in the lake-country of northern Minnesota, the park protects 218,054 acres that include roughly 134,000 acres of woodlands, 84,000 acres of water, 655-miles of undeveloped shoreline, and hundreds of islands. The park's 55-mile northern boundary is the international border between the United States and Canada.

This forested lake-country along Minnesota's northern border was once the scene of an epic chapter in North American history. The park's complex system of waterways includes an important segment of the "transcontinental highway" traversed

by French-Canadian voyageurs during the late 1700s and early 1800s. For more than a century, voyageurs plied the maze of lakes and streams in birch bark canoes and transported vast quantities of furs and goods between Montreal and the Canadian Northwest. The economic impact of the fur trade during this era was immense, as was the effect on natural and social systems.

Although the park is named for the voyageurs and their role in the North American fur trade, there are other human stories here -- from the native peoples who lived on this land beginning 10,000 years ago, to the gold miners and settlers of the past century.

Forested Lake-Country

"There are yet no leaves and the branches are only beginning to bud. They [the Indians] all told me that they would not come until the leaves were the Size of Beavers Ears." (HBC Lac la Pluie Post Journal, J.D. Cameron, May 16, 1831

The rocks tell the oldest story here. Lying in the southern portion of the Canadian Shield, the bedrock of Voyageurs National Park is between 2.1 and 2.8 billion years old, some of the oldest exposed rock in the world. Younger rock formations do not appear here. Perhaps they never existed; but more likely a series of glaciers removed them. Those glaciers, more than a mile high, also scoured out the lake and river beds here and set the stage for vast forests.

"The rock formation of this whole country, I read somewhere, is part of the great Canadian Shield, so called because its surface of more than a million square miles, surrounding Hudson Bay on three sides and coming down into the United States at this point, is in the shape of a vast shield. This shield is of pre-Cambrian rocks, the oldest on the crust of the earth."

Florence Page Jaques, Canoe Country Voyageurs is unique among national parks as a place where the southern boreal forest meets and mixes with the northern hardwood forest. Wildlife thrives here. Voyageurs is one of only two national parks in the continental United States with an indigenous population of the Eastern timber wolf. Bald eagles, black bears, moose, beavers, river otters, loons, and many other animal species also live here.

But it is water that dominates the landscape. Within its boundaries more than 30 lakes fill glacier-scoured rock basins. Once visitors arrive at one of the park's four entry points, most of them leave their cars behind and set out by water, much as the voyageurs did centuries ago. Today park visitors can still enjoy those same waterways and sense the spirit that beckoned Native Americans and French-Canadian voyageurs.

Fun Facts and Figures

Located on Minnesota's border with Canada, Voyageurs' 218,054 acres include four major lakes - Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan, and Sand Point, and twenty-six smaller inland lakes that together make up more than a third of the total park area. The smaller inland lakes are scattered throughout the park, but primarily on the Kabetogama Peninsula. The peninsula is Voyageurs' largest landmass and can be reached by water in summer or over the ice in winter.

Rainy Lake is 60 miles long and 227,604 acres in size; it has 929 miles of shoreline. Only 1/3 or 36,418 acres of Rainy Lake is within park boundaries. Within the park Rainy Lake has a maximum width of 12 miles, a maximum depth of 161 feet, an average depth of 35-feet, and 200 islands. Rainy Lake was often called Lac la Pluie by Native Americans and translates to "mist from the falls." In 1688, French-Canadian voyageur Jacques de Noyon passed through Rainy Lake and noted that it was called "Ouchichiq" by the Cree Indians. Explorer LeVerendrye called it "Tekamamihouenne" in 1783.

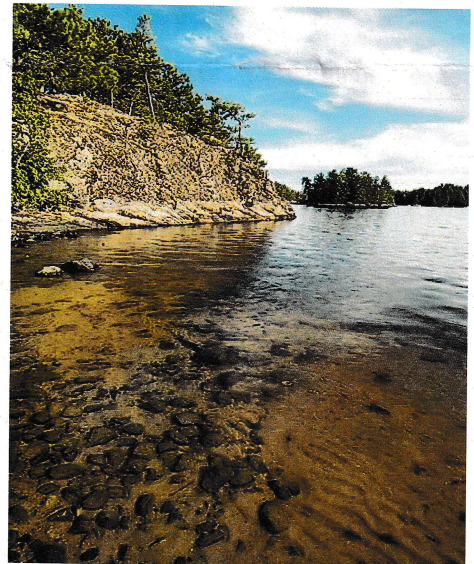
Kabetogama Lake is 15 miles long and 25,760 acres in size. It has 78 miles of shoreline, a maximum width of 4 miles, a maximum depth of 80 feet, and 200 islands. All of Kabetogama Lake is in the park. Kabetogama has an Ojibwe Indian name - Ga-bi'-to gum-ag' za'-gai-i-gun that translates as "the lake that lies parallel or double with another lake," meaning Kabetogama lies parallel to Rainy Lake. French fur traders referred to Kabetogama Lake as "Travere" or "Travers" which translates as "abreast or alongside." Kabetogama has been spelled a variety of ways through the years including Kahpetogamak and Capetogama.

Namakan Lake is 16 miles long and 25,130 acres in size. It has 146 miles of shoreline, a maximum width of 7 miles, and a maximum depth of 150 feet. The park encompasses 12,323 acres of Namakan Lake. The name Namakan figures prominently in

history. Name' or Nah-mee means sturgeon in the Ojibwe language.

Sand Point Lake is located along the voyageurs route and is described by early explorers and fur traders. It is named for a large, sandy point on the Canadian side of the lake. Sand Point Lake is 8 miles long and 8,869 acres in size. It has 92 miles of shoreline, a maximum width of 5 miles, a maximum depth of 184 feet, and 115 islands. There are 5,179 acres and 66 islands of Sand Point Lake within the park. "A narrow strait which connects Crane Lake with Sand Point Lake, and called by the Indians Wa-ba'-bi-kon,"

The normal pool elevation is 1,108 feet above sea level for Rainy Lake and 1,118 feet for Kabetogama, Namakan, and Sand Point Lakes.



Ray Klass © 2006