

Voyageurs

National Park
Minnesota
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Water dominates the Voyageurs National Park landscape. Within its boundaries more than 30 lakes—some huge, some small—fill glacier-carved rock basins. Between these lakes and adjacent rocky knobs and ridges extend bogs, marshes, and beaver ponds. These waters play a major role in your experience at the park. Once you arrive at one of the park's four entry points, you leave your car behind and set out by water, much as the voyageurs traveled in the heyday of the fur trade in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Voyageurs National Park exists to preserve this natural environment, and its native plant and animal life, for the benefit of present and future generations.

As the fur trade expanded westward, it depended heavily upon the voyageurs, or French-Canadian canoeists, who moved beaver and other pelts and trade goods between Montreal and the Canadian Northwest. The route of these adventuresome men, who paddled up to 16 hours per day, became so established that the 1783 treaty ending the American Revolution specified that the international boundary should follow their "customary waterway" between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. Today, Voyageurs National Park, established in 1975, adjoins a 90-kilometer (56-mile) stretch of that Voyageurs Highway.

The voyageur's character has been described as daring if not brave, knowledgeable though uneducated. Above all, he was colorful. Understandably, varying accounts of these men's lives exist. Daniel Harmon, a partner in the Northwest Company, wrote of them in 1819: "... the Canadian Voyageurs possess lively and fickle dispositions; and they are rarely subject to depression of spirits of long continuance, even when in circumstances the most adverse. Although what they consider good eating and drinking constitutes their chief good, yet when necessity

compels them to it, they submit to great privation and hardship, not only without complaining, but even with cheerfulness and gaiety. . . . Trifling provocations will often throw them into a rage," Harmon continued, "but they are easily appeased when in anger, and they never harbour a revengeful purpose against those by whom they conceive that they have been injured."

Whether by flattery or other motivations, voyageurs were convinced to risk their lives to advance the fur trade. And risk them they often did. The enemy took the form of rival fur company representatives, unfriendly Indians, or nature's forces. They came to know the country well, and they, along with the Indians and lumberjacks, gave this region the bulk of its place-names such as Grassy Portage, Lake Kabetogama and Cutover Island. It is interesting to note that the park's place-names are predominantly water-related. Even today, the ridges and hilltops in Voyageurs National Park bear no names.

The park lies in the southern portion of the Canadian Shield. The ancient sediments that comprise the shield represent some of the oldest rock formations exposed anywhere in the world. Younger rock formations do not appear here. Perhaps they never existed, but more likely glaciation simply removed them. At least four times in the past million years, continental glaciers—ice sheets three kilometers (two miles) thick—bulldozed their way through the area. They removed previous features, leaving mostly level, pock-marked rock up to 2.7 billion years old. Hundreds of ponds, lakes, and streams now nestle in the depressions and some rock surfaces in the park still bear the scrape marks. The glaciers gouged out the lake and river beds and set the stage for vast forests. You might say that the Voyageurs Highway was a gift of the glaciers.

Look out across the landscape here and you will see the elements of the fur trade itself. The waters provided the "highway;" fur-bearing animals provided the goods; and the boundless forests provided the materials for the birch-bark canoe, that marvel of environmental adaptation. The canoes were constructed of birchbark, cedar boughs, and cedar or spruce root bindings sealed with pitch. It was a skill developed by the native Americans and readily exploited by early European explorers. The canoes were light, easily navigable, and quickly repaired with native materials. For several generations the fur trade was the continent's biggest industry, returning investments up to 20-fold. It has been described by one historian as a vast empire held together by nothing stronger than birchbark.

Nature's abundance is evident in other ways here. Osprey, eagle, and great blue heron nests occur throughout the park. Be observant and you will likely see kingfishers, mergansers, loons, and cormorants. Since water covers one-third of the surface of the park, aquatic animals predominate. Creating ponds, the beaver provides not only his own habitat, but also the environment needed by aquatic plants. These plants provide food for aquatic insects and some fish. The fish, in turn, support the wide variety of fish-eating birds. Beaver are fare for coyotes and timber wolves.

Perhaps nothing so symbolizes Voyageurs National Park's enduring primitive character as the presence of its wolves. The park is in the heart of the only region in the continental United States where the eastern timber wolf survives. Wolves are shy and secretive, and contrary to folklore they pose virtually no threat to humans. Their wariness and small numbers make it unlikely that you will see them during a visit, although you might see their tracks in winter. Wolves usually live in packs

of two to twelve and often kill large animals such as deer and moose for food. The timber wolf may cover as much as 60 kilometers (40 miles) in a single night, and can run several kilometers at 50-55 kilometers (30-35 miles) per hour. To hear the wolf's lonesome howl on a moonlit night is a rare treat.

Winter is a force to be reckoned with here. From spring thaw until freeze-up the voyageurs had six months at most to complete their travel. Their round trip between depots at Grand Portage or Fort William on Lake Superior and the subarctic interior of northwest Canada consumed four or five months. Summer is relatively short here, but winter need not be a time of inactivity. From late December until late March, life's pulse is slowed. Ski travel is often possible as snow blankets both land and lake. And warming temperatures and crusted snow in late winter definitely invite snowshoers. However you travel, proper equipment is a must. Take a compass and map, warm clothes in layers, and carry an emergency survival kit. High winds can spring up quickly and, accompanied by low temperatures, can be dangerous.

When the waterways begin to open in spring, animals and insects stir from a season's rest. Migratory species return to summer in the North. It's one of the best times to observe nature here. Both spring and fall favor those who seek quiet enjoyment of nature's continuous show. For many, the display of fall colors marks a highlight of the North Country year.

The voyageur's canoe has long since gone, but his land remains. Here you can take to the waterways of this intricate landscape where moose, wolves, bear, and loon still wander and you can sense the spirit that called the voyageur to adventure.



Activities

Interpretive Programs include guided boat, canoe, and cross country ski trips in season, campfire talks, and visitor center exhibits. **Motor-boats** and all other watercraft can be used on park lakes. Heed weather forecasts and use nautical charts (Tune to 800 or 1230 AM or 162.55 Mhz FM). Charts are essential because topographic land-

marks are lacking. See Lake States Association address on back. **Fishing** for walleye, northern pike, trout, and bass is world renowned. Also caught are muskie, perch, and crappie. Ice fishing is popular in winter. Fishing park waters requires a Minnesota license; Canadian waters an Ontario license. **Camping:** 100 Primitive Boat-In campsites dot

the park, most on islands or near shoreline. Interior campsites reached by portage trails give greater privacy. Public and private campgrounds (car access) are found near the park. **Maintained Trails** are shown on the map. Reach the trailheads by boat and explore the park's interior for fishing or camping. **In Winter**—Christmas to late March—snow dominates. You

can ski cross country, snowshoe, snowmobile, and ice fish. Winter camping—with adequate preparation can be exciting.

Boating Safety begins with knowing your boat and how it works. Comply with Federal and State regulations. Storms arise fast, high waves are hazardous especially to small boats and canoes. Stay ashore when water is rough, if caught out find a sheltered cove and wait for calm. Watch rocks, reefs, and floating logs. Let fuel vapor disperse before you start

your motor. One USCG-approved personal flotation device is required for each person on board. Better yet, wear it! Know distress signals; carry signal gear. Don't overload or stand up in small boats. Load boat low and balanced. Riding any bow not fitted with railings is prohibited. Please master Rules of the Road and navigational aids. **Winter Safety** demands

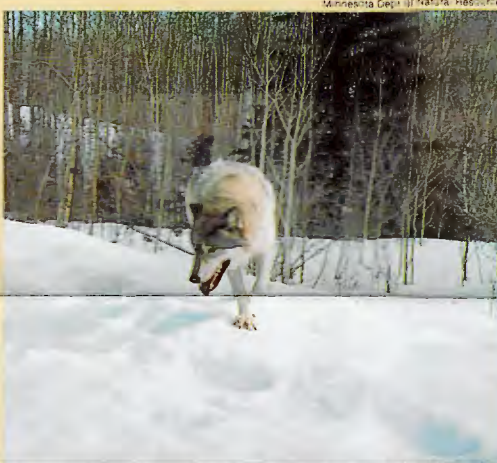
preparation. Travel in groups, tell someone your destination, route and expected return. Take matches, first-aid supplies, and food. Avoid slush and unsafe ice—check on current conditions. Wear warm clothing in several layers and stay dry.

Park Regulations prohibit firearms use, hunting, and trapping on park-owned lands and on or over park waters. Pets must be leashed and are not permitted on trails or in the backcountry. Use only dead wood lying on the ground for campfires. Leave Indian artifacts or other historical objects alone. **Private Property** and cabins

still exist in the park. Please respect them; do not trespass. **Customs** requires that, before going ashore in Canada and upon returning to U.S. soil, you must report to customs offices. You and your boat may clear Canada Customs at Portage Bay on Sand Point Lake and U.S. Customs at the Crane Lake Public Landing.

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) lies east of the park, in the Superior National Forest. For information write: Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest, P.O. Box 338, Duluth, MN 55801.

Black Bears, common here even on islands, can become dangerous nuisances if people don't keep them from eating camp food or garbage. Bears easily open any ice chest. Hang all foodstuffs in leak-proof containers by rope between two trees, at least 3 meters (10 feet) off the ground. Pack out all refuse. Request our free bears brochure.



Aids to Navigation. Please learn these important boating markers for your safety and that of others. Boats must comply with Coast Guard safety regulations. If you have questions, ask a park ranger.

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 Diamond shape warns of danger. Cross in diamond means boats must keep out.

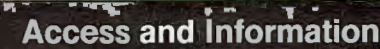


Circled mark means a controlled area. It may carry a speed limit, for example.

 Divers flag warns of the presence of divers, who may be just under the surface.

3
Can buoys are green with odd numbers.
Keep them to the left when going up-lake.

2 Nun buoys are red with even numbers. Keep them to the right when going up-lake.



Roads approach the park from four points along U.S. 53 between Duluth and International Falls. County Route 23 from Orr leads to Crane Lake at the park's east end. The Ash River Trail (County Route 129) takes you to Ash River and Kabetogama Narrows. County Route 122 leads to Kabetogama. Minnesota Highway 11 east from International Falls leads to the Island View area on the park's northwest end. In summer, wa-

tercraft must be used for travel in the park. Boats, canoes, and guide services are available at resorts outside the park. Concession boat tours operate in summer. Floatplanes may be hired locally. (Winter ice roads give greater auto access into the park.) Scheduled airlines serve Hibbing; International Falls; and Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada. Buses serve U.S. 53 between Duluth and International Falls. Amtrak serves Duluth. Trans-

portation can be arranged from airports and depots to resorts and access points. **Send Questions** about the park to: Superintendent, Voyageurs National Park, P.O. Box 50, International Falls, MN 56649, or telephone (218) 283-9821. Stop at the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center or the information stations in International Falls and at Kabetogama Narrows. **Obtain books and navigational charts** at park information stations, from

local businesses, or by mail from Lake States Interpretive Association, Box 672, International Falls, MN 56649.



Resort Services

Accommodations are offered outside the park by private resorts in Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama, and Island View and inside the park by the concessioner at Kettle Falls. Addresses of resorts and campgrounds are available at park information centers or by mail from the park superintendent.

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