



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 canoeemen, 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 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 North West 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 one million years, continental glaciers—ice sheets two miles thick—bulldozed their way through the area. They removed previous features, leaving mostly level, peck-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 are common. 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. They may kill large animals such as deer and moose for food, but more frequently feed upon beaver. The timber wolf may cover as many as 40 miles in a single night and can run several miles at 30 to 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 stir from a season's rest. Migratory birds 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.



Visiting Voyageurs National Park

Visitor Centers and Park Activities

Three park visitor centers offer a variety of information, including brochures, books, maps, navigational charts, films, and exhibits. Rainy Lake Visitor Center is open all year. Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center and Ash River Visitor Center are open seasonally. Check at visitor centers for schedules of naturalist-guided activities, such as guided trips on concession-run tour boats, canoe trips, children's programs, and campfire talks. For additional information, write:

Superintendent, Voyageurs National Park, 3131 Highway 53, International Falls, MN 56649-8904; telephone 218-283-9821.

Interpretive publications and navigational charts may be purchased by mail from the Lake States Interpretive Association at the same address or by calling 218-283-2103.

**Boating** Most visitors travel park waters by motorboat, although many also travel by canoe, sailboat, or houseboat. Boating safety begins with knowing your

boat and how it works. Be sure to let fuel vapors disperse before starting your motor. Comply with federal and state regulations. One U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device, such as a lifejacket, is required for each person on board. Better yet, wear it! Use nautical charts: they are essential because there are few topographic landmarks to guide you. Along main travel routes, a U.S. Coast Guard-numbered buoy system guides boaters and marks navigational hazards. But off the beaten path, most

rocks and reefs are unmarked. Watch for floating logs, too. Mastering the "Rules of the Road" and knowing navigational aids will help you boat safely. Know distress signals, and carry signal gear. Don't overload or stand up in a small boat. Load your boat low and balanced. Riding any bow not fitted with railings is prohibited. Heed weather forecasts: tune to local radio stations 640 AM, 1230 AM, 93.4 FM, 104 FM, or 99.5 FM, or monitor a weather radio for NOAA broadcasts. Park rangers monitor marine

band 16 for emergencies. When the water is rough, stay ashore. Storms can arise quickly, and high waves are hazardous, especially to small boats and canoes. If you are caught out on the water, find a sheltered cove and wait for calm.

**Fishing** Fishing for walleye, northern pike, and smallmouth bass in this part of the North Country is world renowned. Muskie, perch, sauger, lake trout, and crappie are also caught. In winter, ice fishing is popular. Fishing in park

waters requires a Minnesota fishing license. In adjacent Canadian waters, an Ontario license is required.

**Camping** One hundred thirty primitive boat-in campsites are scattered throughout the park. Public and private campgrounds accessible by car are found near the park. **Special Notice: to protect park resources, certain campsites may be closed for rehabilitation or to protect nesting birds. Some sites may be closed to wood fires. Check at park visi-**

**tor centers or on bulletin boards for up-to-date information.**

**Trails** Maintained trails for hiking and, in winter, cross-country skiing, are shown on the park map. Trailheads for hiking trails can be reached by boat.

**Winter Activities** From late December to late March snow dominates the landscape. During this time, you can cross-country ski, snowshoe, snowmobile, winter camp, and ice fish. Snowmobiling is allowed on

frozen lake surfaces (except those areas closed to protect wildlife species), safety portage trails on land, and the Chain of Lakes Scenic Trail. Whatever winter activity you pursue, be sure to be adequately prepared. Travel in groups; tell someone your destination, planned route, and expected time of return. Take matches, first-aid supplies, and food. Avoid slush and unsafe ice; check on current conditions. Avoid hypothermia: wear warm clothing in several layers, stay dry, and be particularly care-

ful of the chilling effect of the wind. A map and guide to snowmobile routes is available from the park or local resorts.

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

Park Regulations

The possession of firearms and hunting or trapping are prohibited.

Off-road vehicles are not permitted except on established roads and frozen lake surfaces.

Pets must be leashed and are not permitted on trails or in the backcountry.

Use only dead and down wood for campfires.

Indian artifacts and other historical objects may not be disturbed or removed from the park. A reward is offered for information

leading to the conviction of persons illegally collecting such items.

**Private property** still exists in the park. Please respect property owners' rights; do not trespass.

Black bears, common even on islands, can be serious nuisances. Bears enter tents and easily open ice chests. Hang food and garbage in leak-proof containers 10 feet above the ground on a rope strung between trees. Use bear-proof food lockers where provided.

Pack out all refuse. Ask for a park bear brochure. Nesting birds are commonly seen along shore and on islands. To prevent nest abandonment, please keep your distance. Stay at least 1/4 mile away from bald eagle, osprey, and great blue heron nests. The Shipwreck Islands tern rookery in Kabetogama Lake and all loon nests should be approached no closer than 100 yards.

A complete list of park regulations is available from park rangers and at park visitor centers.



**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.



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.



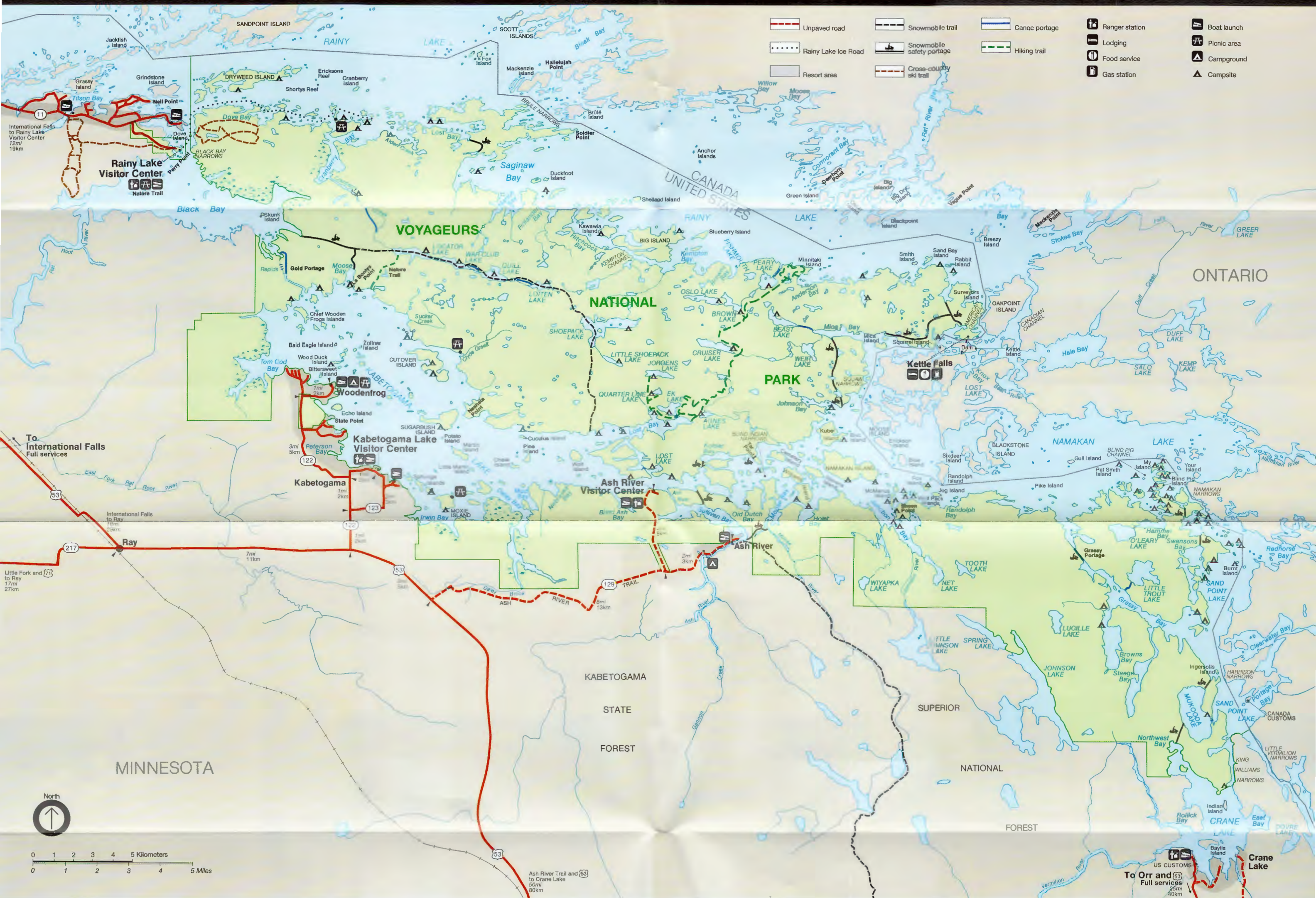
Divers flag warns of the presence of divers, who may be just under the surface.



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



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



## Traveling in and Around the Park

**Getting to the Park**  
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. County Route 122 leads to Kabetogama. Minnesota Highway 11 east from International Falls leads to Rainy Lake on the northwest end of the park.

For those coming to the area by plane, there are

scheduled airlines that serve Hibbing; International Falls; and Fort Frances in Ontario, Canada. Buses serve U.S. 53 between Duluth and International Falls. Transportation can be arranged from airports and bus depots to park access points and resorts outside the park.

See maps for travel routes and town locations.

**Travel in the Park**  
In summer, almost all travel in the park requires water transportation. Visitors may travel by private



boats, rental boats, float planes, or on concession-run tour boats. Boats, canoes, and outfitting, guide, and shuttle services are available at the four resort communities adjacent to the park. In winter, the 7-mile-long Rainy Lake Ice Road provides automobile access into the park. Winter travel elsewhere in the park is by snowmobile, cross-country skis, or snowshoes. Equipment rentals are available from local resorts.

During freeze-up in late autumn and ice-out in

early spring the lakes are inaccessible.

**Park Visitor Centers**  
For information, films, exhibits, and other visitor services, stop by one of the park's three visitor centers. See park map above for locations of centers.

**Rainy Lake Visitor Center**—open all year

**Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center**—open seasonally

**Ash River Visitor Center**—open seasonally

**Area Accommodations and Services**  
Overnight lodging, campgrounds, restaurants, grocery stores, boat rentals, and other services are offered outside the park at private resorts at Rainy Lake, Kabetogama, Ash River, and Crane Lake. Services are available year-round. A park concessioner at Kettle Falls operates seasonally, offering lodging, a restaurant, boat rentals, boat fuel, and other services, including a mechanized portage between Rainy and Namakan Lakes for boats up to 21 feet long.



See maps for locations of resorts. Addresses of resorts and campgrounds are available at park visitor centers or by mail from the park superintendent.

**Traveling Across the United States-Canada Border**  
Before going ashore in Canada and upon returning to the United States, you must report to customs offices. You and your boat may clear Canada customs at Portage Bay on Sand Point Lake or Sand Bay on Rainy Lake. When returning, you can clear U.S. Customs

at the Crane Lake Public Landing or at International Falls Bridge. Voyageurs National Park is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 360 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance.