



Heart of the Continent

Voyageurs' landscape of abundant rock and dense woods hugs the outer edges of the Canadian Shield and the northern boreal forest. Interconnected lakes—Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan, Sand Point, and dozens of smaller ones—were once routes for travel and trade.

This land of spectacular beauty and rich history was first proposed as a national park in 1891 by people concerned about encroaching industry. It would be another 80 years before Congress authorized the park. In 1975 Voyageurs became the nation's 36th national park.

Leave your car behind and set out on a water highway through the heart of the continent—in the wake of the Ojibwe and French-Canadian canoemen of long ago.



What a way to travel—no trains to catch, no traffic to annoy us, no towns to reach by evening, no appointments to remember! We wander anywhere our whims take us, through these lakes. Freedom surrounds us. We are finding more than peace here. This is an authentic and profound release from modern intricacies.

Florence Page Jaques, *Canoe Country Journal*

Above: Bald eagles thrive in this land of dense forests and food-filled waters.
EAGLE: BIRDS AS ART/ARTIST MORRIS LARSEN/OWEN RAY PLATT

Stories in the Rocks

Voyageurs National Park is one of the few places in North America where you can see and touch rocks half the age of the Earth. The exposed rock you see all around you is the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, a gigantic dome of volcanic bedrock that forms the core of the continent.

This bedrock is from the birth of North America. Massive, explosive volcanoes deposited layer after layer of ash and lava, building up the landmass. Subsequent uplifting, folding, tremendous pressure, and superheating created igneous and metamorphic rock.

Eons of erosion wore down the volcanic mountain ranges. The ice ages brought glaciers, moving rivers of ice that scoured away the younger rock layers. This action

exposed the deep roots of the ancient mountains—granite, migmatite, and biotite schist you see today. As the glaciers receded, torrents of meltwater filled low-lying areas, creating lakes. The geologic forces of uplift and erosion continue to shape the landscape.

The oldest rock in the park tells a recent human story. Fault zones in exposed 2.8-billion-year-old greenstone revealed gold embedded in quartz veins. The discovery sparked a short-lived mining rush in the 1890s. To accommodate the gold miners on Little American Island, Rainy Lake City sprung up on the shores of Black Bay and grew to a population of over 200. No one got rich, and the boomtown was abandoned by 1901. Many of the newcomers stayed for good, and their descendants still live in the region.



The rocks of Voyageurs National Park (left): migmatite, greenstone, mica in quartz, granite-gneiss, and schist. Bedrock on the shore of

Browns Bay (top), a popular destination on Sand Point Lake. A metal winch (above left) remains from gold rush days on Little American

Island. Above: Islands dot the lakes that dot the land in Voyageur country. Right: Migmatite.

Ecosystem on the Edge

The beautiful scenery that surrounds you is in fact a complex ecosystem. Since the retreat of the glaciers some 10,000 years ago, decomposed vegetation has covered the bedrock with less than a foot of topsoil, enough for the southern reaches of the boreal forest to take hold. Hardwoods like birch and aspen, and conifers like spruce and pine merge in a wondrous diversity of plant and animal life. This is a fragile, ever-changing world, affected by various human and natural forces.

One influence is modern industry—logging, mining, and commercial fishing. Fire suppression and timber harvesting have shaped the process of forest succession. The dense forests that blanket the land are a patchwork quilt of second-growth boreal species. Industry has also affected water levels, and management efforts improve habitat for fish, birds, and other aquatic life.

Climate change provides opportunity for new species to take hold. The same environment that welcomes new species

causes others to move out. White-tailed deer and neotropical birds are relative newcomers, while elk, traditional residents, have moved north. Nonnative species like the emerald ash borer compete for food and alter the ecosystem.

Not all change happens on a large scale. The hatching of an eaglet, the lichen that breaks down rock for the forest floor, and the fallen tree that forms a rich micro-habitat—all contribute in their own small way to the character of the great North Woods.



Explore the winter woods (above) by snowshoe (left). Eaglets (top right) wait for mom and dad

to bring back the day's catch. New life sprouts from a pine trunk (above right).

Fortunes from Fur

For several generations the fur trade was one of North America's biggest industries. Trapping, trading, and travel routes were well established by the time Europeans came to North America in search of wealth. By the early 1700s, the heart of the fur trade had moved inland. The Ojibwe Indians were the gatekeepers of the rich fur lands north and west of the Great Lakes. Not only were they skilled traders, guides, interpreters, hunters, and trappers, but they supplied fur posts and canoe brigades with food, birchbark canoes, and other essentials.

The fur trade was a highly competitive commercial enterprise with a complex network of Indian alliances and specialized occupations: trappers, traders, clerks, and canoemen known as voyageurs. Expertly maneuvering the lightweight birchbark canoes through the North

Woods, the voyageurs transported trade goods between Montreal and the Canadian Northwest. They returned with "soft gold"—pelts of beaver and other animals, which were shipped to European markets.

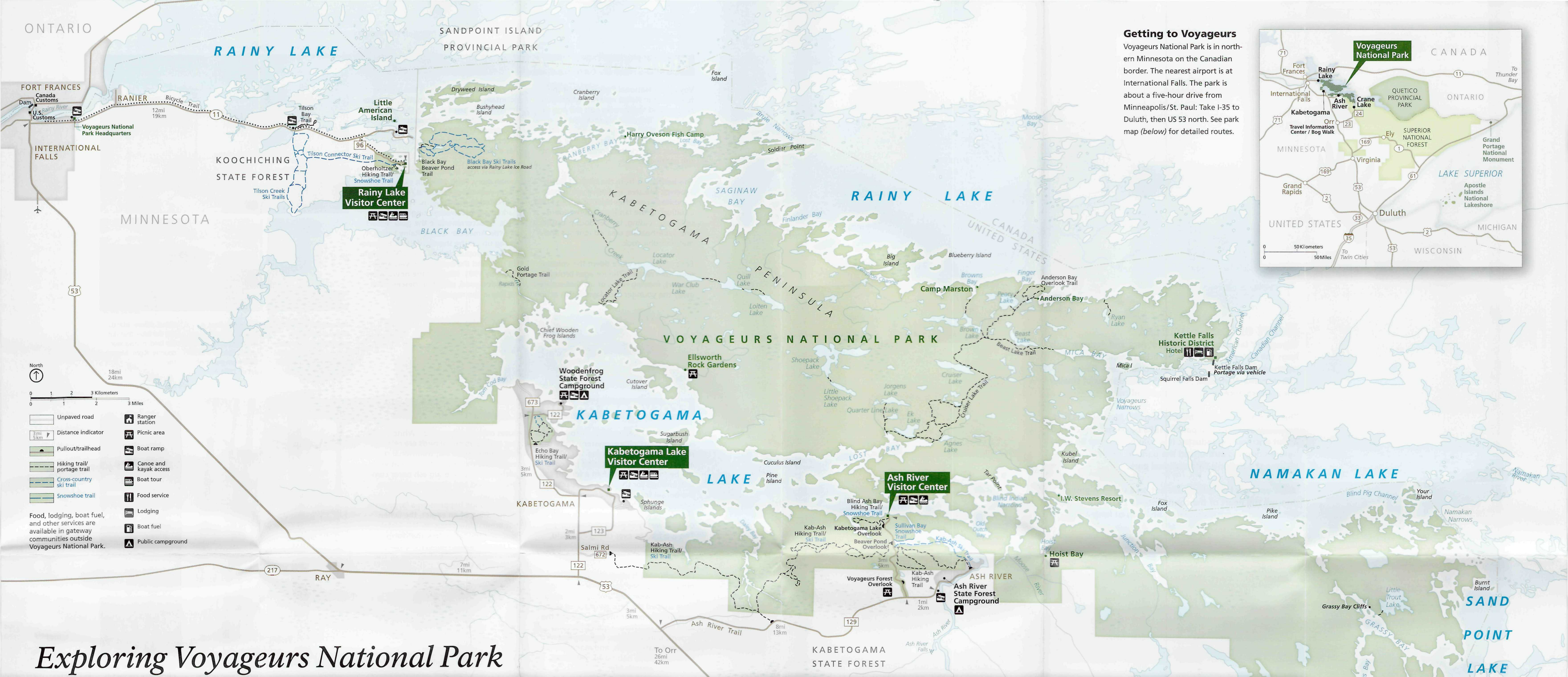
The route of the adventuresome voyageurs was so important that the 1783 treaty ending the American Revolution set the international boundary as the "customary waterway" between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. Today a 56-mile stretch of this water highway adjoins Voyageurs National Park, and is one of the reasons the park was established. The heyday of the fur trade is long gone, but the park still has elements of its illustrious past: place names like Grassy Portage and Cutover Island; stands of birch trees that provided materials for the essential canoes; and habitat for fur-bearing animals like beaver.



Beads (left) were a widespread medium of exchange between European traders and

American Indians. An Ojibwe family (top) and their home, ca. 1860. (Above) Artist Frances

Anne Hopkins' 1879 "Shooting the Rapids" depicts voyageurs en route.



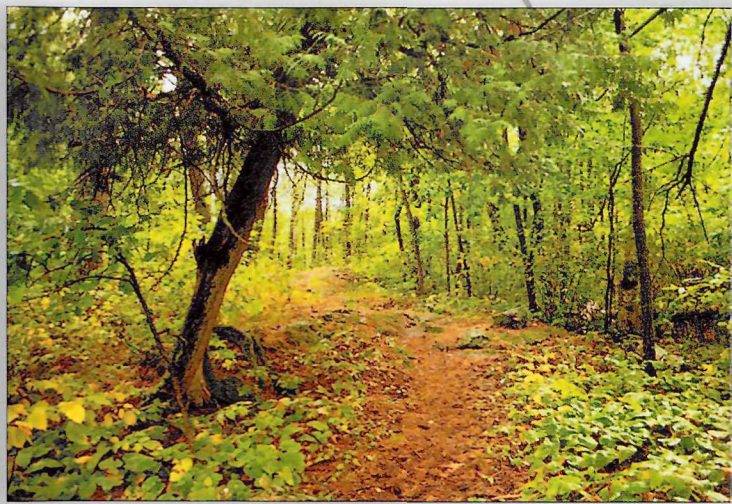
Exploring Voyageurs National Park



Kettle Falls Hotel



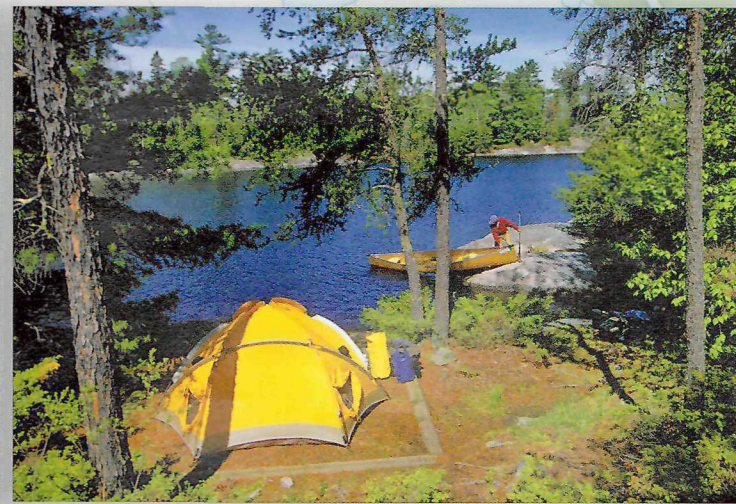
North Canoe paddlers



Oberholtzer Trail



Aurora borealis



Canoe campsite, Sand Point Lake

Stop first at one of the visitor centers: Rainy Lake, Kabetogama, and Ash River. Each has information, exhibits, park movie, bookstore, Junior Ranger programs, boat ramps, hiking trails, and more. Visitor centers are open daily in summer; Rainy Lake operates year-round.

Voyageurs is a water-based park. Travel to the 500-plus islands and 655 miles of shoreline is by watercraft. "Don't Miss" destinations include Anderson Bay, Ellsworth Rock Gardens, Hoist Bay, Kettle Falls, and Little American Island. But with 218,054 acres of land and water, there are countless out-of-the-way places to find your own adventure.

For detailed information, get a copy of the park newspaper *Rendezvous* or visit www.nps.gov/voya.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Scheduled Programs and Boat Tours Paddle a canoe on the Voyageurs Highway. Watch wildlife by day and stars by night. Explore historic Kettle Falls and Hoist Bay. Check the *Rendezvous* newspaper or park website for a current list of these activities and many more. Reservations are highly recommended for boat tours; visit Recreation.gov.

Boating Travel park waters by motorboat, kayak, canoe, sailboat, houseboat, or tour boat. Public boat launch ramps are available at park visitor centers, Crane Lake ranger sta-

tion, and the two state forest campgrounds, Ash River and Woodenfrog.

Kabetogama Lake flows east and Rainy Lake flows west. Water flows from Crane Lake through Sand Point and Namakan lakes to Kettle Falls. Use nautical charts and monitor a weather radio for NOAA broadcasts. Use marine band channel 16 in emergencies.

Camping, Houseboating, and Day Use The park has over 240 designated boat-in campsites, houseboat sites, and day-use sites scattered throughout. There are no

"drive to" sites in the park. Check at a visitor center for up-to-date information on camping regulations.

Fishing These waters are world-renowned for walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, and other freshwater species. Fishing in park waters requires a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) license. In Canadian waters you'll need an Ontario license. Contact US Customs for border crossing regulations.

Hiking The park's 15 trails offer something for everyone—easy, moderate, and strenuous. Some trails or trail sections are mobility accessible. For details check out individual trail maps at a visitor center or visit www.nps.gov/voya.

Winter From mid-November to late March, snow dominates the landscape. In winter you can drive your car on the lakes' ice roads, which begin at the visitor centers. Winter travel elsewhere in the park is by snowmobile, cross-country skis, or snowshoes. You can rent snowshoes and skis at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

MORE INFORMATION

International Border Always know where you are on the water. Check with Canadian and US Customs before crossing the border. Canadian Customs services are available by water at Portage Bay on Sand Point Lake and by vehicle at the Crane Lake Public Landing and at the International Falls Bridge. For detailed navigation information, scan this code or visit www.nps.gov/voya/plan_your_visit/lake-navigation.htm.



Revenue Canada Customs and Trade Administration
302 Scott St.
Fort Frances, Ontario P9A1H1
807-274-3655
US Customs and Border Patrol
Two Second Ave.
International Falls, MN 56649
218-283-2541
customs.ustras.gov

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

For a Safe Visit Know and follow all state and federal boating regulations. Boaters must

Getting to Voyageurs

Voyageurs National Park is in northern Minnesota on the Canadian border. The nearest airport is at International Falls. The park is about a five-hour drive from Minneapolis/St. Paul: Take I-35 to Duluth, then US 53 north. See park map (below) for detailed routes.

