



BWCA and Quetico Park History

BWCA

Established in 1978, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) has changed little since the glaciers melted. With over 1,500 miles of canoe routes, nearly 2,200 designated campsites, and more than 1,000 lakes and streams waiting, the BWCA is visited by over 200,000 people a year. It is the most heavily used wilderness area in the United States.



QUETICO

Quetico Provincial Park covers 4,800 square kilometers of untouched wilderness in Northern Ontario's Pre-Cambrian shield rock forest. Quetico Park is the second largest "natural" park in Ontario. It was established as a park in 1913, but at that time trapping, commercial fishing, mining and logging were still allowed within its boundaries. Quetico Park is located roughly 160 km west of Thunder Bay and covers 4665 square km of rough terrain. The park lies within the Superior Structural Province. Its bedrock is composed of siltstone, slate and graywacke commonly metamorphosed to biotite-quartz-feldspar.

NATIVE AMERICANS

Unlike today's travelers to the BWCA and Quetico Park, Native Americans knew no limitations. All the necessities of today's canoe trip - travel permits, international boundaries and use restrictions - did not hinder their travels.

The vast wilderness which encompasses the BWCA and Quetico Park has seen many different tribes of Native Americans. As early as 11,000 years ago pre-historic Indians first roamed the shores of Lake Agassiz, which at one time covered much of northern Minnesota and extended well into Canada. As the Native American cultures grew and developed, Huron, Chippewa and Cree traveled the paths and waterways. Soon those tribes were displaced by the Dakota and finally, by the Ojibway (or Ojibwe) people. Each people left behind remnants of their heritage in the BWCA and Quetico Park for all to discover and enjoy.

Symbolic reminders of past accomplishments, pictographs, a reddish brown rock painting, depict hunting parties, Native American mythology, and wildlife. Examples of pictographs can be seen on the Basswood River, Agnes Lake, Kahshahpiwi Lake, Kewatin, Payne, Hulburt, Lac LaCroix, Fishdance, Hegman and in many other areas. Most require a minimum of 1 to 2 travel days to reach the pictograph areas.

VOYAGEURS

As the European influences reached the north woods, fur trappers and traders harvested a bounty of furs. Jacques de Noyons was believed to have been the first white man to travel through what is now the BWCA. The French explorer and fur trader Sieur de la Verendrye visited the area in 1731, and returned in the spring of 1732 to establish trading posts on the border lakes. This began the era of the fur trade and the French-Canadian voyageur. Trading with the Native Americans and fellow European adventurers, the voyageurs traveled the waterways collecting beaver, mink and other fur bearing animal's hides to send to Europe. The unlimited and renewable resource helped to fire the fashion industry which provided beaver top hats, capes, muffs and other desirable goods for the fashion-conscious of Europe.

Voyageurs traveled the smaller inland waters in birchbark Northern canoes approximately 25 feet in length. The selection of voyageurs was intense. It was indeed an honor to be chosen. Since the canoes had a limited carrying capacity, height was important. Frustrated



was the young man who grew to a height of more than 5'6". A singing voice for passing the time was also important. Strong shoulders and legs for carrying two packs weighing over 90 pounds each was also a must.

A typical season found the voyageurs leaving their winter posts in the Canadian Northwest in mid-May. Traveling the smaller inland waters in their Northern canoes, the voyageurs typically reached their "rendezvous" point at Grand Portage by mid to late summer. The voyageurs carried with them their collected stores of furs. Their counterparts also began their travels in mid-May from Montreal. Montreal canoes were 36 feet in length and carried the food stuffs and trade goods that would be exchanged for the furs. After the exchange was made at Grand Portage, both parties returned to their winter posts before the winter storms set in.

LOGGERS AND MINERS

Continued growth and colonization of the New America soon brought the lumber industry to our area. Although much of the area was logged off during the late 1800s and early 1900s, pristine timber stands still exist. The discovery of rich deposits of iron soon brought the mining industry to northeastern Minnesota. Underground mines still exist and are located outside of the BWCA and Quetico Park wilderness areas. To tour an underground mine, plan to visit the Tower-Soudan Mine located 20 miles west of Ely.

TODAY

Present day Ely offers a variety of adventures for all walks of life. Museums, hiking trails, resorts and of course, wilderness canoe trips allow visitors to experience our unique area according to their abilities and vacation desires.

