

# With Cass in the Northwest in 1820

*Edited by Ralph H. Brown*

[THE SECOND installment of the journal of Charles C. Trowbridge, a member of the expedition under Governor Cass which explored the wilderness of frontier Minnesota in the summer of 1820, is presented herewith. The first section, with an introduction by Professor Brown, appears ante, p. 126-148. It covers the period from May 14 to June 18 and carries the party from Detroit to a point on the south shore of Lake Superior a little beyond the Sault de Ste. Marie. The present section continues the journey westward to the mouth of the St. Louis River, up that stream, and over the difficult portages that mark the divide between the rivers emptying into the Great Lakes and the southward flowing waters of the Mississippi system. Ed.]

Monday June 19th. As we were about starting this morning our indians brought us intelligence that boats were in sight. This was very gratifying news, for we anticipated the arrival of Mr [William] Morrison, a clerk in the employment of the American Fur Com<sup>py</sup>, and we were not disappointed. Mr M. had a brigade of five barges loaded with Furs, on his way to Mackinac. The interview was not only pleasing but very important to us, for on the information received from him depended in a great measure our route. We had determined, provided the season would permit, to visit the Lake of the Woods; but Mr Morrison informed us that more than a month additional time would be required for that purpose, and considering the lateness of the season, combined with other powerful causes, we have concluded to take another route vis, to ascend the Fon[d] du Lac [of Lake Superior] or St Louis River, by which a communication is had with the Mississippi.<sup>40</sup> After our conference with

<sup>40</sup> The Lake of the Woods had earlier been assumed to be the source of the Mississippi. The import of this meeting between Schoolcraft and Morrison, two claimants to the discovery of the true source, has often escaped attention. If Morrison knew in 1820 that he had been to the headwaters of the Mississippi, surely this was the time for him to speak out. It cannot be supposed that he would withhold such information from an official exploratory party on its way to the headwaters. It was thirty-six years later, on January 16, 1856, that Morrison wrote to his brother, saying, "For the information of the H[istorical] Society, I will state to you all about what came to my knowledge, by which you will perceive that H. R. Schoolcraft is in error and that he was not the first

Mr Morrison was ended we embarked, but had not made more than 13 miles when a violent wind arose, and we were obliged to land.<sup>41</sup> Nothing could be more disagreeable to us than to be subject as we are to the winds on this Lake, for the waves roll so wonderfully, that it would evince in us little regard for personal safety, should we attempt to proceed. This stop however was productive of agreeable consequences, as an express with letters sent on by Mr [Ramsay] Crooks of the Am. fur C<sup>o</sup> overtook us at this place, and the satisfaction of hearing so directly from our friends was an ample compensation for the loss of time.<sup>42</sup>

We met this afternoon 14 canoes loaded with indians on their way to Mackinac. They appeared highly gratified to see their great father, and after we had given them what most could please them, some tobacco, we continued on, but only made to day 20 miles. To day we experienced one of these dreadful mists so common on this Lake: it is dangerous to travel in them, for the most prominent objects are scarcely distinguishable at a short distance, and unless the guides are competent we are every moment running the risk of lozing our canoes.

Tuesday June 20<sup>th</sup>. We made a very early start this morning and stopped not until we arrived at the Two hearted River, or La Riviere du deux coeurs, (a small stream 47 miles from Shell Drake River,) where we breakfasted. We thence continued our voyage as usual for 21 miles when we were gratified with a sight of Lagrand Sable or grand Sand Banks, a place much spoken of by Voyageurs. These Banks are from 100 to 250 feet in height, and present not a single indication of vegetation; one of our Indians whom curiosity induced to ascend them had much the appearance of a child when running on the summit of the hills, and when he returned to the canoe he was almost exhausted with fatigue.

person who made the discovery." Morrison states in this letter, which is one of three published versions, that in 1803-04 he went up La Biche or Elk River to "near Lac La Biche," and that "Lac La Biche is the source of the Great River Mississippi, which I visited in 1804, and if the late Gen. [Zebulon M.] Pike did not lay it down as such when he came to Leech lake it is because he did not happen to meet me." See J. V. Brower, *The Mississippi River and Its Source*, 122 n.-124 n. (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 7 — Minneapolis, 1893); Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:116 n. Schoolcraft announced his discovery of the river's source following his second trip into the region in 1832. Lac la Biche of the early maps is the body of water he named Itasca. Folwell, in his *Minnesota*, 1:116, concludes that Morrison's "claim may well be just, but the failure to make any report or record, and a silence of forty years or more, debars Morrison from credit as an exploring discoverer."

<sup>41</sup> This encampment was probably at Whitefish Point, the western limit of the great bay of that name.

<sup>42</sup> For an article on "Ramsay Crooks and the Fur Trade of the Northwest," by J. Ward Ruckman, see *ante*, 7:18-31.

We passed the Grand Sable and encamped about 5 miles distant from them on a narrow sandy beach, unprotected from the winds and waves.

(The G. Sable extend nine miles.)

Wednesday June 21st. We experienced last night the most violent Thunder Storm I ever knew; our tents were blown down, our canoes carried from their resting places by the wind, and every person was obliged to exert himself to save the baggage from the impending destruction. Fortunately however nothing was lost or injured, though we saved the articles at the expence of our rest; and the sea ran so high this morning that we considered it imprudent to set out. we therefore waited until 11 o'clk when the waves having in some measure subsided, we ventured to launch our little barks and brave the rolling waters.

It is only 12 miles from LaGrand Sable to the Pictured Rocks, one of natures works of grandeur and sublimity. These rocks extend 13 miles, are perpendicular, and generally about the height of 150 feet. They are of that kind of Rock called by Geological men "Gra[y]wacke", which resembles sand stone, and is of a dusky white colour, it is easily worn and the action of the waves has caused as far as their influence extend, a succession of caverns, in many of which a boat of considerable size might be safely moored.

They are called the pictured rocks from the circumstance of their being variegated with the veins of different kinds of ore running through, and colouring the surface, and among these the carbonate of copper is most pleasing. On the whole, the natural colour & height of the Rocks, the numerous caverns, arches and variegations and the beautiful cascades which here abound, render it one of the most romantic and picturesque views possibly imaginable. The traveller is lost in amasement, and the insignificance of man is pourtrayed in the most striking manner. Near the middle of these rocks, is an alluvial flat of some extent, on which in a central location is a singular arch, which from its appearance we named the Doric Arch.<sup>43</sup> The French boatmen call it "Portail" "Arch". This is

<sup>43</sup> The fame, now somewhat faded, of the Pictured Rocks was extended by an account in the *Detroit Gazette* for February 16, 1821, which says that they furnish "one of the most astonishing and magnificent natural curiosities that can be found in this country. An intelligent gentleman, who accompanied Governor Cass in his tour last summer, describes them as surpassing, in grandeur, the far-famed Cataract of Niagara." The item concludes with a poem "composed a short time since by a young lady after hearing a description of the Pictured Rocks." The frontispiece of the Trowbridge journal is a view of the "Dorick Arch, in the Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior," clipped from the elaborate title page of Schoolcraft's *Narrative Journal*.

an arched rock, supported by two pillars on each side, of the doric order, and bearing on its summit very large pine trees—it may be about 30 feet high, and resembles at a distance the arch of a fire place, by which name or “mantle piece” it is generally known.

What renders it more curious is, that no other rocks are nearer to it than  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile, and it is plainly seen at the distance of one mile from the shore. It is said by those of our company who have seen the Niagara falls, that the scenery there will bear no comparison to the Pictured Rocks.

Near the Doric Arch, Miners River empties its waters into the Lake. By this river th[r]o' a long and difficult route, a communication is had with the Mississippi River—it is not often used and may be termed an injudicious course.<sup>44</sup>

It is six miles from the end of the Portaille to Grand Island. This island lays about 3 miles from the shore and is 9 miles in length—it contributes, with the shape of the opposite shore, to form one of the safest and most commodious harbors on the waters of the west.<sup>45</sup> Vessells of any size may ride here without the least apprehension from wind or waves, and the beauty of the scenery renders it an enchanting place.

As it had grown late we landed on the foot of the island and encamped: we had not been ashore many minutes before we were visited by ten or a dozen indians who had come to pay their respects to the great Father, as the Gov. is universally called by them. They were dressed in their best apparel, and one who spoke the french language fluently, and appeared from his dress to be a young chief, brought us the pipe of peace, and desired us to smoke. This was soon accomplished, and they then assembled around our flag where they danced and related their achievements in war, until we were heartily tired of their company. Their object was to get Tobacco & Whiskey, but we could not make them satisfied with a reasonable quantity and were obliged to send them away. They parted with many expressions of gratitude and attachment to the Americans, and promised to call on us again, which promise the[y] punctually adhered to.

Their music consists of a drum constructed of a hollow log and covered with the skin of the deer, and a kind of rattle made with the Hoofs of the same animal.

<sup>44</sup> This route extended to Green Bay, and thence followed the Fox and Wisconsin rivers to the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien.

<sup>45</sup> The harbor of the present city of Munising.

Thursday 22nd June. At 6 o'clock we parted with our friends, for so they style themselves, and continued our journey—nine miles from Grand island, in the bottom of a deep bay [*Train Bay*] La Riviere aux Trene or Sleigh River empties its waters. The Shore of the Lake on either side of Grand island is rocky, principally sand stone; near Sleigh [*Train*] river is another called Laughing fish River, a very deep stream, but only 12 yds wide and rises in a march [*marsh*] a few miles back. From every appearance at the mouth, this river is well named, for there were many lodges left standing and the ground was covered with the bones of the fish caught. Here we stopped to eat, and proceeded 18 miles to Chocolate [*Chocolay*] River, from thence 6 miles to Dead River both of which empty into a deep bay near presque Isle which is 25 or 26 miles from Laughing fish River.<sup>46</sup> The Country near presque Isle is very mountainous and presents a handsome prospect. About 2 hours before dark we landed on Presque isle near a small River, which bears no name.

Friday 22nd June. This morning we passed a number of small Rivers, vis: Garlic River 15 miles from Dead River, River St Jean, 15 miles further, Salmon Trout River 12 miles from that, and Pine River distant from the last 6 miles. About 3 p. m. it commenced raining very hard and we were under the necessity of landing at Huron River, which is narrow at the mouth, but widens to about 70 yards, above the bar which obstructs the entrance, and is very deep. These rivers are all too small to be navigable for larger vessels than canoes, and even they cannot be made to ascend a great distance, as they generally rise in swamps a short distance from the lake.

Soon after our landing we discovered the grave of an indian very handsomely constructed, of cedar bark and enclosed with pickets of the same: at the head was placed a narrow board on which was carved the figure of a Beaver, which we were informed was the sign or mark of the person buried there; and also several curious marks denoting the number of persons he had slain in battle. A Bow, dish and other necessaries for his passage were deposited with the body of the deceased.

Saturday 24th June. We left Huron river early this morning after passing a sleepless night on account of the musquitoes and a small gnat. This little insect is venomous beyond description—it is not larger than the head of a pin, and consequently nothing can be constructed to prevent them from committing their depredations. They crawl into the hair

<sup>46</sup> The bay is the harbor of the present city of Marquette.

and under the clothes, and every place they touch is instantly inflamed.

From Huron river we crossed a deep bay to Point au beigne or Cakepoint, succeeding which is the bay called Keewenahneh, which is 12 miles wide, and from Cakepoint 45 miles deep;<sup>47</sup> from which point also it is 45 miles to the extreme end of Point Keewenahneh, make [*making*] the whole length of that Point on this side 90 miles. From Point au beigne we crossed to Portage River, (directly opposite to P<sup>t</sup> au bene); during our passage across this bay the wind blew so violently that three of our canoes were obliged to return to the shore from whence they set out and remain until the next morning. Our canoe (The Govr<sup>s</sup> had crossed before the storm rose) was very large and strong, though heavily loaded, and we were obliged to use our utmost exertions to enliven the spirits of the Voyageurs, who tho't of nothing but crossing themselves and going to the bottom. We succeeded however after buffeting the waves for 5 hours, during a part of which time we gained hardly an inch, in make [*making*] the mouth of the River, where we arrived in safety to the surprise of the Gov<sup>r</sup> and his party. During our passage we kept one man constantly at work to throw out the water.

The Portage river like most others emptying into this Lake is narrow at its mouth but soon widens and becomes very deep. Here we landed & encamped for the night, and

on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June about 9 a. m. our canoes having crossed we proceeded up Portage River 6 miles to a lake of the same name which is 12 miles in length and 3 in breadth.

From the extreme end of this Lake the communication with the portage is by a very small and almost wholly artificial stream, the outlet of a swamp, the channel of which is so narrow, so crooked and so much obstructed that we found much difficulty in getting our canoes through. Our men were obliged to get out and wade in the mud up to their breasts, and it was only by dint of the most obstinate perserverance that we at last succeeded with our largest canoe.<sup>48</sup> The portage which is 1½ miles long leads through a swamp about ¾ m, and then the land changes into a fine high country.

At 7, we arrived at the Lake, where we found about one half of our

<sup>47</sup> The reference is to Point aux Baie, now known as Point Abbaye, a peninsula that forms the eastern limit of Keweenaw Bay.

<sup>48</sup> The cities of Hancock and Houghton are situated in this vicinity. The western section of the portage route, which the journalist terms "almost wholly artificial," is now in fact an excavated channel.

lading. The usual load on the portages is 2 packs or 180 pounds, but our Yankees cannot bear burdens so great.

Here Mr Schoolcraft found many very interesting specimens, one of virgin copper  $\frac{1}{2}$  a lb in weight, and a number of pieces of agate and cornelian, quite as beautiful as those brought from India. He tells us we shall probably find them abundant on the head waters of the Mississipi.

Tuesday 27th June. The early part of yesterday was taken up in transporting our lading across the portage, after which a rain commenced accompanied by high winds and prevented us from Setting out; but this morning we rose at 4 and with a fair wind embarked and steered for the River Ontonagon, one of the moving springs of our expedition, for here is deposited the enormous mass of copper so much spoken of in the civilized world.

In our passage to day we saw as usual a number of Rivers — vis, The Salmon trout, Grave rods, and Fire Steel — all small — at 2 o'clock we arrived at the Ontonagon a distance of 51 miles from the portage.

At the mouth of this river are five permanent lodges of indians, who seldom leave this place, but subsist chiefly on sturgeon which they take in great quantities.

There number is 60, including men women & children. Immediately after our arrival we were visited by the men of the village who welcomed us to their country, made some long speeches and presented as is customary the pipe of peace. The men had no sooner gone than their wives came, and brought us sturgeon in such profuse quantities that we could not do ourselves the pleasure to accept of all.

We learned that the mass of copper so celebrated is about 30 miles up the River, and our party this afternoon left us in two canoes with some indian guides, M<sup>r</sup> Forsyth M<sup>r</sup> Chase & myself staying behind to regulate the camp. We were anxious to accompany the gentlemen, but as it was absolutely necessary to stay and regulate the camp in their absence, we could not but lose the anticipated & so much wished for pleasure of seeing that wonder of the North western world.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Schoolcraft, in his *Narrative Journal*, 171, points out that this deposit "has been known from the earliest times, and is noticed by all the travellers of the region. La Hontan, Charlevoix, Henry, Carver, and McKenzie, have successively published accounts of it, which have served at various periods, to arrest the public attention, and to confer a notoriety upon the country, which it had otherwise certainly lacked." Following his visit, Cass wrote to Calhoun that "Common report has greatly magnified the quantity, although enough remains, even after a rigid examination, to render it a mineralogical curiosity." Cass to Calhoun, October 21, 1820, in Schoolcraft, *Summary Narrative*, 281.

Thursday 29th June. This morning, our party returned, fatigued beyond description and disappointed in their expectations. They ascended the river about 30 miles, nearly all of which distance they were, on account of the rapids and rocks in the river, obliged to walk, and over mountains too of immense height. When they arrived at the spot sought after they found, instead of a mass of pure native copper weighing from five to ten tons, a rock of the kind called *serpentine*, through which copper of a pure and maleable nature ran in veins. The greatest length of which is  $3\frac{8}{12}$  feet, the greatest breadth  $3\frac{4}{12}$  feet, and the average thickness 1 foot, estimated by Captain Douglass to contain 12 cubic feet & to weigh one Ton.<sup>60</sup> Thus ended all the marvellous stories we have heard about the copper mines of Lake Superior, which some have gone so far as to represent inexhaustible. Some specimens of copper were procured, but they were very small. The Rock bears evident marks of having been frequently visited, and the ground is strewed with old chissels, &c.

On this return the Governer succeeded in procuring a piece of [copper] the indians found on the bank of the Lake near this which weighed 7 pounds, and was perfectly pure.

The River Ontonagon is computed to be 120 miles in length, and is supposed to be connected with the Menomini, by which a communication is had with Green Bay — it is about 160 yds. wide, at and near its mouth, is very deep, & its waters, like those of all rivers emptying into Lake Superior, are thick and muddy.

About 6 miles from the mouth of this river the Indians have constructed a weir, by means of which they take all their sturgeon — it extends entirely across the stream, and on the lower side seats are constructed on which they sit with perfect ease, holding in their hands a long pole to which is attached an iron hook, and with this when the fish are dropping down against the weir, the[y] make a dexterous and sudden pull which fastens it in the body of the finny prisoner. This manner of taking

<sup>60</sup> Apparently by the time Schoolcraft prepared his narrative for publication, some of the disappointment which attended the finding of this ore was forgotten. He says that the rock was possibly "much diminished since its first discovery," but "notwithstanding this reduction, it may still be considered one of the largest and most remarkable bodies of native copper upon the globe, and is, so far as my reading extends, only exceeded by a specimen found in a valley in Brazil, weighing 2666 Portuguese pounds." Furthermore, "it is, indeed, notwithstanding the exaggerated accounts, a wonderfull mass, and viewed in connexion with the mineral appearances of the surrounding country, leaves little doubt that extensive mines of this metal exist in the vicinity. But to explore it with any degree of satisfaction, a week or a fortnight affords a very inadequate period." *Narrative Journal*, 176, 181.



their food, is peculiarly adapted to the indolent habits of an indian, and here they sometimes sit from morning till night imagining themselves if we may judge from appearances, the happiest mortals in existence.

After they have caught a considerable quantity of fish they return to the village, where [it] is immediately delivered to the women, whose office is to slice and dry it for preservation. Every article of food besides these fish is esteemed by these indians as a luxury, for they are too poor to supply themselves with ammunition at the extravagant price demanded by the Traders and the wooden traps in which they sometimes catch wild animals, is a very inefficient mode of supplying themselves with food. They informed us that they were obliged to pay a Beaver Skin for a gill of powder, the same for a shirt, 3 do for a Blanket, one for 30 Balls.

The Otter is seldom taken here. From the mouth of the Ontonagon the Porcupine Mountains are distinctly seen, which rising in the south west and running to the very banks of the Lake, present a pleasing contrast to the low sandy plains by which they are surrounded.

Friday June 30<sup>th</sup> Agreeably to their promise and our anticipation, the indians of the village came over to our encampment, and amused us for a long time with their different dances, of which they have as many kinds as a modern french dancing master could find names for in all his vocabulary. They have the War Dance, which is, as we would say, the most fashionable, the pipe dance which is used only in peace, the Bear Dance & the Buffalo Dance, descriptive of their respective achievements in the chase. In one of these dances our attention was attracted and our affections excited towards a young chief, whose conduct clearly demonstrated to us, that greatness of mind, suavity of manner and filial affection are not altogether confined to the civilised world.

He made a speech of some length to the Governor, in which after apologising for his ignorance, and awkwardness of manner, he said, that he was the son of [a] powerful chief of the north; that his father had died while we was very young, but that he could distinctly recollect his earnest endeavours to inculcate in him the strongest affection and respect for their fathers the americans, and his advice to him never to go to war with any nation if an honorable way could be found to avoid it. That, he had always sincerely followed the advice of his father, that he loved & respected the american people; that he had shown many marks of fidelity to their traders, but that he had never received a single proof

of their confidence. He then presented the Gov. with an elegant belt of wampum, which he had received from his father while on his death bed, and which had hitherto served to remind him of the advice & instruction received with it, and he concluded by observing that in return he hoped to receive something which would still serve to remind him of his duty towards his fathers the Americans.

His modesty and sense of propriety induced the Gov. to give him a medal and a flag; the latter he immediately attached to a pole which he prepared in anticipation and so long as we saw him he carried it, promising to sit under and guard it for life. The other indians after receiving some presents of tobacco &c returned to the village.

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July. This morning we succeeded in getting under way at four, well pleased to leave a place where we had met with so much disappointment and fatigue. In a few hours we passed the mouth of Iron River, a small stream, 15 miles from which is Carp River, which rises in the Porcupine Mountains. From Carp River to Presqu' Isle River is 6 miles, thence to Black River 6 miles. There is so much sameness in the size and appearance of these rivers that a minute description of each would be unnecessary.

At 7, in the afternoon we landed on a very rocky shore, about 8 miles beyond Black River much more fatigued than interested with the events of the day. The Shore from the Ontonagon to this river is generally low, sandy, & thickley wooded.

We made to day 50 miles without wind.

Sunday July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1820. At 5, we left our encampment, and at 9 had arrived at Montreal River, where we landed for breakfast. this is 30 miles from Black River. About 200 yds from its mouth this river has a beautiful fall of 70 feet, over rocks, and directly below in the eddy a weir similar to the one on the Ontonagon is erected, which serves not only to facilitate the convenience of taking fish, but adds much to the scenery around. By the Montreal river a communication is had with Green Bay, tho' the difficulties attending the route are so great as to deter most traders from the undertaking.

After breakfast we continued our voyage to Mauvais or Bad River, 12 miles, thence 6 miles to Point Cha-goni-ma-gon.<sup>51</sup> This is a long sandy point, from which a bay runs in about 15 miles to the south; it is laid

<sup>51</sup> Chequamegon Point and its insular extension, Long Island, partly enclose Chequamegon Bay, at whose head the city of Ashland is located. Across the bay is the Bayfield peninsula, which was frequently confused with Keweenaw Point by early cartographers.

down on no map but that of Charlevoix, a french Historian who many years since was a missionary in this country. Directly opposite Point Cha-goni-ma-gon, and distant 3 miles, is situated the trading establishment of Mons<sup>r</sup> Cadotte on Isle au[x] Chené or Oak Island. This island is one of that cluster called by Carver the twelve apostles, but their number is much greater than he represented them.<sup>52</sup>

We landed at Mon<sup>r</sup> Cadottes trading house or fort, (all trading houses in the indian country are enclosed by pickets) but we had not the pleasure of seeing Monsieur, he having sailed for Mackinac. The indians however were very well pleased to see us, particularly our old pilot Monsieur Roi, whom they knew; they fell on his neck and wept for joy.<sup>53</sup>

These islands form an excellent harbor for shipping.

After distributing a little tobacco among our indian friends we proceeded on about 5 miles and landed, having made 39 miles.

Monday 3rd July Got under way at 6 o'clock, and 10 miles from our encampment passed the mouth of Raspberry River, from which it is only five miles to another called Sandy River. Here we landed for breakfast, but the wind rose and detained us until

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July at 1 p.m. when we embarked, and determining to make up lost time, we continued on till we had made 33 miles, when the fatigue of the men obliged us to land and pitch our tents.

Here we were much troubled by our little enemies the gnats which assisted by their allies the mosquitoes made terrible work with our already vexed dispositions. Indeed we often wished ourselves out of the power of these tormenting little insects.

Wednesday July 5<sup>th</sup> We rose this morning as much overcome with fatigue as if instead of fighting mosquitoes, &c we had been celebrating the birthday of our national independence, in the usual dissipated man-

<sup>52</sup> There are nineteen charted islands in the Apostle group, the largest being Madeline, Stockton, Oak, and Outer. Cadotte was probably "Kind-hearted" Michael Cadotte, one of the sons of Jean Baptiste Cadotte. Trowbridge appears to have erred in stating that Cadotte's post was on Oak Island. Doty and Schoolcraft independently state that the post was on St. Michaels, now Madelaine, or Madeline. The authentic map drawn about 1840 by Dr. Douglas Houghton, and now preserved in the University of Michigan Library, shows a "factory" on Madeline Island. The subject is fully discussed by R. G. Thwaites in "The Story of Chequamegon Bay," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 13:397-425.

<sup>53</sup> This was probably Jean Baptiste Roi, who was engaged as a boatman and interpreter by the American Fur Company at Mackinac on July 8, 1818, and employed in that company's Fond du Lac department. He joined the party during its Lake Superior passage. His name is included on a list of "American Fur Company Employees, 1818-19," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 12:166.

ner of carousing over a wine table—but the cause of our feelings was far from “the feast of reason & the flow of soul”—(or the other feast either.) However we left our encampment at the early hour of 3 a m, and soone came to La Riviere Broulé, or Burnt River, 48 miles from Sandy River, and a short distance from the mouth of the Fon[d] du Lac River, which is the principal, and the last one I have to name, as emptying into this Lake on this side.<sup>54</sup>

About 2 miles from the mouth of this river is an indian village containing 7 lodges, and here we landed for the purpose of engaging the indians to assist us in transporting our goods &c over the portage which we expect to make to morrow.

They engaged to assist us, and we continued to ascend the River with a fine wind, for twenty four miles, when we arrived at the Establishment of the Am. Fur Company, under the command or charge of Mr Coti a very gentlemanly frenchman.<sup>55</sup>

M Coti received us with all that politeness and respect characteristic of the french in general and proffered his services to us in any way that we might feel disposed to command them. We landed.

This is the principal establishment of the Am. Fur-Company.<sup>56</sup> They have some houses built, and a few acres of land cleared, on which they raise potatoes. We saw a number of cows, Bulls, & horses, [which had been brought from Mackinac in batteaux.]<sup>57</sup> Each of the canadians here (we saw 5) has a squaw and family, & they enjoy themselves if we may

<sup>54</sup> The Fond du Lac is now known as the St. Louis River. There and elsewhere the explorers depended largely upon hearsay information relative to the river routes connecting the upper Great Lakes with the Mississippi and Green Bay. Despite Calhoun's injunction to inspect the river routes, the party ascended only the Ontonagon to a distance of thirty-five miles. Possibly realizing this deficiency, Cass later proposed a second and more detailed exploration of the inland routes by several parties to be dispatched from the frontier forts. Each party should comprise, in his view, an officer and eight or ten men. Cass to Calhoun, September 27, 1820, Department of War, Letters Received, National Archives.

<sup>55</sup> This was doubtless Pierre Cotté, who was employed in the Fond du Lac department. That his position was one of some responsibility is indicated by his annual salary of \$2,400. See *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 12:158. The name is spelled “Cotes” by Doty, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 13:202, and “Cotte” by William W. Warren, in his “History of the Ojibways,” in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:381, 383. The latter refers to Cotté as a trader, on salary, for the American Fur Company, and notes that he was employed earlier by the old Northwest Company.

<sup>56</sup> This post, according to Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:104 n., “was on the site of the present village of Fond du Lac” near Duluth.

<sup>57</sup> In the original journal, the passage enclosed in brackets was crossed out by the author.

judge from appearances, quite as well as those whom in contrast with them we would term civilised beings. In fact it is dangerous for a man to live here unless he takes a wife, for the natural jealousy of the indians induces them to go all lengths, if he thinks his bed dishonored, to gratify his passion for vengeance.

On the other hand an alliance of this kind if with a considerable family in the tribe, gives the trader perfect security in his property and much influence over the nation.

The Fond du Lac River, or the River at the Extremity of the Lake, is for some miles above its mouth about a mile in width; it then narrows considerably, and at the establishment is only about 80 rods; its general course is west, tho' it is very crooked.

The length of Lake Superior, from Point Iroquois, at the head of the river St Marys, to the mouth of the Fond du Lac, is agreeably to our computation, which is made from the Voyageurs accounts, 484 miles.

Thursday July 6<sup>th</sup> We found on enquiry from M<sup>r</sup> Coti, that our large Canoes would be no longer serviceable to us, on account of the difficulty in transporting them across the portages: we therefore concluded to leave them and take smaller ones in exchange on the opposite side of the first, which is called the Grand portage of Fond du Lac.<sup>58</sup>

The indians about 30 in number, including their squaws, came this morning according to agreement, and we loaded our canoes, and set out. We carried all our baggage in the canoes for two miles, where we unloaded, and the canoes alone were pushed up 3 miles further, while at the first landing place, the men commenced their difficult and truly laborious task.

The whole of Thursday, Friday and Saturday were taken up in transporting our Goods, &c across the Grand portage, and the labor was rendered much more unpleasant than it would have been, by a violent storm which commenced with our setting out; and in consequence of which the men, who had never been in the habit of transporting their goods and furs in rainy weather, murmured at what they termed their hard lot, to remedy which we were obliged, after having carried our own baggage across, to return and assist them with their burdens.

<sup>58</sup> To avoid possible confusion with the more famous Grand Portage of the Pigeon River, it is desirable to use the early expression "Grand Portage of the Fond du Lac." See Grace Lee Nute, ed., "A Description of Northern Minnesota by a Fur-Trader in 1807," *ante*, 5:32 n.

This manœuvre, while it facilitated the accomplishment of our task, caused perfect satisfaction in the minds of the men.

The usual load of a French Voyageur is about 180 pounds, or two packs, which weight they carry without great fatigue, through the mud, sometimes (as on this portage) up to their knees. But we found an astonishing difference between these men and our soldiers and indians, who seriously felt the consequences of their exertion, altho' they carried only about half the weight of the others.

The method of transporting goods is rather singular. The portage is divided into "Pauses" or resting places, distant from each other in some places a quarter of a mile, in others half a mile, the same being regulated by the state of the road. From the commencement, the[y] carry *all* the goods to the first pause, thence to the second, and so on. We supposed this to be a waste of time, and the Governor made a different regulation, but was soon obliged to abandon it, for we found little improvement could be made in the "ancient usages" of these men of the forest. They asserted, and it was satisfactorily demonstrated to us, that in returning from their usual short pauses, they were a good deal relieved from the fatigue of carrying to them, but that to continue with their monstrous burdens for three or four pauses, was an excess of exertion, and rendered them incapable of performing the same journey immediately. So that we were well pleased to give that part of the management up to the Engagées.

The Grand Portage is 19 pauses in length, which agreeably to our computation make about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles, and the road for the whole distance is very narrow.

Sunday 9th July. While the men were employed last evening in repairing the canoes, (which is done by applying a composition extracted from the young pine and boiled down to the consistency of pitch, when it is called gum. This is heated and applied to all the seams or openings in the boat, and renders it altogether impervious to water.) we delivered the presents promised to the indians for their services, and left a medal and flag for their Chief who is absent, with M<sup>r</sup> Coti the Agent &c

So that we were prepared this morning to bid adieu probably for ever to the Grand Portage of Fon Du Lac. This we very willingly did about 7 o'clock, and ascended the River  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles to another portage called La Portage aux Couteaux, or Knife Portage, so called from the abundance of Slate, which lays in perpendicular strata, shooting above

the ground, and greatly incommoding the traveller, particularly the Voyageur, who is obliged to travel so often over it. Altho' we used all imaginable caution, we unfortunately ran one of our canoes on a rock of this Slate, which lay hid, (some of them only 6 inches under the surface of the River) yet imperceptible from the Black and muddy nature of the water.<sup>69</sup> Fortunately for us however we have an excellent guide in the person of Mr Defour, an engageé of the Am Fur Co, sent on to us by M<sup>r</sup> Crooks with his express on Lake Superior. This man is a native of this country, of french & indian extraction, and I am convinced that without him we would find it dangerous to proceed, for our guides are destitute of that correct knowledge of every part of this country, which from his long residence here and his pursuits he possesses in an eminent degree.

There are many rapids between these two portages, and we were much pleased to see the expertness of these men in managing the canoes; sometimes in the water up to their necks, lifting them over rocks, and the next moment in the Boat, setting with their poles, to save our whole cargo from apparent destruction.

Contrary to the information received we found this portage not only better than the first, but tolerably good; and by one o'clock everything was ready for another move up stream, but as our men were excessively fatigued, it was thought advisable to devote this afternoon to rest.

We learned of M Defour, that the river above this portage is very rapid and difficult of ascent; that our soldiers are too unskilful to manage a canoe with facility, and that if some of our party could walk to Sandy Lake, it would be a great relief to the balance: we therefore made enquiries of M<sup>r</sup> Coti respecting the practicability of such a jaunt, and he informed us that in the winter one of his men had travelled through in one day, but that the Country was interspersed with small Lakes, which we would be obliged to travel around, in this season, whereby the distance would be made greater, by one day. He told us however that he would send us two young men who had hunted in that country, from whom we could get better information, and who could act as guides, if we chose to employ them.

<sup>69</sup> Schoolcraft refers to this rock as argillite. "Some idea may be formed," he says, "of the singular appearance of the rock, by comparing it to the leaves of a book standing edgewise. The effect of this arrangement of the strata, upon the mockasins and feet of the voyageurs . . . has led to its name." See his *Narrative Journal*, 208. A good description is contained in William Johnston's "Letters on the Fur Trade 1833," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37:170.

Accordingly the young indians came, and after representing the country as very open and dry, and the road direct, said that we might travel it in two days at most; upon which representation it was resolved that the soldiers at all events should go, and as many of the Gov<sup>r</sup> suite as would consent.

Mr Schoolcraft, Mr Mackay, M<sup>r</sup> Doty, M<sup>r</sup> Chase, Ryley Interpreter, and myself volunteered with pleasure, to undertake such an agreeable walk — and prepared ourselves with Knapsacks, & provisions for five days.<sup>60</sup>

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July. At 5 this morning we took leave of the Gov<sup>r</sup> & our companions, and set out for Sandy Lake, 16 in all, including the guides. We had not proceeded more than 6 miles, when to our great surprise the path ended, and we found ourselves at the edge of a horrible swamp, covered with water or mud, in which we sunk to our knees at almost every step. The travelling was more difficult on account of the trees which had been blown down in great numbers by a violent wind. Over these we were obliged to climb, sometimes to a great height and not infrequently at the risk of our necks.

We succeeded after a painful struggle, in getting through this swamp about the middle of the afternoon, but it was succeeded by another much worse.

This was of a kind called Tamarack Swamp, from the timber that grows in it, tho' we found very few trees of this kind here. These swamps are covered with water as the others, on which lays a thick moss, so tender that it will not bear the weight of a man. Consequently at every step we took we were entangled in the moss, and often prostrated headlong in the water.

It is only necessary to say that these two kinds of swamps continued

<sup>60</sup> The immediate objective was the post on Sandy Lake, southwest of present-day Floodwood in St. Louis County. This post, according to Irving H. Hart, "was the first enduring establishment of its type west of Fond du Lac on Lake Superior, and, from the date of its erection in 1794 to the close of the period of British occupancy of the region after the War of 1812, it was one of the most important fur-trading stations in the Northwest." See "The Site of the Northwest Company Post on Sandy Lake," *ante*, 7:311. The post maintained its importance for many years after the time suggested. A fur trader wrote, on September 17, 1833, that "Sandy Lake is considered as the central trading post, of the Fond du Lac department, from which clerks separate for Upper and lower Mississippi; and occupied by the principle trader. It is only for the above cause that it is occupied, and the clerks having always to rendezvous at this place before proceeding to the Lake." But by 1833 the Indian population had so dwindled that "in point of trade the proceeds of this post, are the least in the whole department." Johnston, in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37:173, 174.



alternately for three days, when on the evening of the third day we found to our inexpressible joy, a hunting path which our guides told us led directly to Sandy Lake. We could hardly content ourselves to lay down, so great was our anxiety to see the end of this injudicious journey. However, the fatigues we had endured, having been heightened by a heavy rain which had continued for two days to fall in torrents, overcame every other feeling, and we placed ourselves before a large fire, with nothing but our cloaks for a Bed & covering, and under the influence of patient dispositions, (which were now much more so than a few days before,) we received the rain as it fell.

On Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> at 2 p m we arrived at the Lake, but unfortunately on the side opposite to the Fort.<sup>61</sup> We commenced firing our guns, as signals of Distress, but the indians who were at the fort became alarmed at so much noise, and refused to come for us. About two hours after we commenced firing a canoe approached us containing two men, and as we soon found them to be, white men too: A joyful sight! These were two of the Clerks of the [American Fur] Company, Mr Ashman and M<sup>r</sup> Fairbanks; by them we were taken to the fort where we found a number of indians assembled to witness our arrival, a circumstance altogether novel to them, and as we had reason to believe, not a little gratifying.<sup>62</sup>

The Distance from La Portage aux Coutou to this Lake is about 70 miles by land. The timber in the first mentioned swamps principally cedar. We saw no wild animals on our route, tho' the tracks of the Moose and Bear, were visible in many places, and in one particularly, where the track made by a Bear, would with great ease admit the foot of a man,

<sup>61</sup> Trowbridge and his companions had followed what was known as the long portage between the St. Louis River and Sandy Lake, where the American Fur Company was occupying a post in 1820. The precise site has been identified as Brown's Point on the northwestern shore. Mr. Hart's study, *ante*, 7:311-325, includes a detailed map and plan reconstructed from descriptions and a few vestiges.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Ashmun, Jr., and John H. Fairbank, clerks, who had been stationed at Sandy Lake since 1818, tell of the arrival of the explorers in letters written to a correspondent in Champlain, New York, on July 24, 1820. The letters have been published in the *Moorsfield Antiquarian*, 2:19-22 (May, 1938); film copies are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. "After having passed 2 Month in solitude," writes Ashmun, "you may judge My surprize at seeing such a Brigade arrive. The Gov<sup>r</sup>'s Suit consists of 7 or 8 Professional Gent Mostly from New York. They appeared Much surprized after so long a voyage to find a fort and Conveniences in this wilderness but More particularly Chairs and Beds." Fairbank reported that "the Governor is trying to make a peace between the Chippewys and the Soux," and referred to the brigade, using the fur-traders' terminology, as consisting of forty-five men including "11 passengers, the interpreter and cook."

These animals are very strong in this Country, and we are told that they frequently kill the largest Buffalo.

We passed several small Lakes in our journey, In some of which the water was transparent as crystal.

Immediately after our arrival at the fort we were invited [to] take supper; welcome news to us, for our provisions were exhausted before our arrival at the Lake. We found on the table a plate for each person, containing each a Boiled Duck and a large slice of Buffalo meat, dried in the sun.

The quantity seemed repelling, but we had learned to eat, as well as the indians, and we were astonished at looking at our plates in a little time, to find them all empty. The principal food of these voyageurs, consists of the meat of the Buffalo, and wild Rice, which latter grows in great quantities in this Country; and for these they are dependant on the natives. Buffalo meat is easily cured, by being cut in thin slices as soon as killed, and dried on poles.

The taking and curing of the Rice is attended with more difficulty — it is gathered by the squaws, who go to the Lake in a canoe, and while one manages the boat, the other with a stick bends down the Rice and beats out the young grain.

After a canoe load is collected they return to their encampment, where it is cured. For this they have two different methods, one by parching it in a kettle, the other by drying it in the sun, or on platforms over a slow fire. The latter mode, tho' the most tedious is yet the best, as the grain is much more nutritious than when cured in the other way.

It is threshed in a singular manner: This is by digging a hole in the ground, which after being lined with a moose skin, is filled with Rice, and then a man treads on it until the hulls are entirely off — a very laborious manner of performing this process.

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July. Viewed the situation. The fort is situated on a point of land extending some distance into the Lake, and is very handsomely enclosed with pickets 25 feet high, and flanked by Bastions of the same height. It was built by the old N[orth] West Company, (who employed experienced workmen) and at the time of its erection was absolutely necessary, on account of selling liquour to the indians. It is now useless, the indians being perfectly peac[e]able in their behaviour.<sup>68</sup>

Adjoining the fort is a large garden under cultivation, but they suc-

<sup>68</sup> For a reconstructive sketch of the fort, see *ante*, 7:322.

ceed in nothing but potatoes, on account of the curiosity or perhaps the unrestrained disposition of the indians, who leave nothing untouched.

In the winter season one of these young gentlemen is stationed at Leech Lake, by water 300 miles distant from Sandy Lake, in a N. W. direction—Tho' it is supposed to be only 100 miles by land.<sup>64</sup> They transport no goods, nor do they trade much in the Summer and in the winter all their goods are drawn by Dogs, even to the most remote parts of the Country.

These animals are of a mixed breed and remarkably strong. Attached to a sledge peculiarly constructed for the purpose, they are capable of drawing a small outfit for trade, the baggage, and even the person of the trader; and they generally travel 60 miles in a day; but this is always on a hard snow crust, or on the ice. Generally two dogs are attached to each sledge, but sometimes three and even four. When travelling they are fed raw fish, which they take in the streams on which they travel. Even on this simple and unwholesome food they subsist and are capable of enduring great fatigue.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July. This afternoon Mr Schoolcraft and M<sup>r</sup> Mackay who had set out yesterday to meet the Gov<sup>r</sup>, returned accompanied by His Excellency and party—very much fatigued but all in good health and Spirits.

The Governor ascended the Fon Duc Lac from La Portage aux Cou-teaux 58 miles, to a small branch called the Savannah; which they also ascended 7 miles to a portage of 13 pauses or about 6 miles, after crossing which they found themselves on another branch of the *Savan* (which empties into Sandy Lake,) and only about 24 miles distant from the Lake. "La Portage du Savann" is much worse than either of the others, owing to the swampy nature of the soil, from which circumstance it derives its name.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The canoe distance between the two lakes is only about a hundred miles; an over-land journey in winter probably would measure seventy-five miles. Fairbank wintered at Leech Lake in 1818-19, according to Ashmun's letter of July 12, 1819. *Moorsfield Antiquarian*, 2:18.

<sup>65</sup> This portage path was carefully described and mapped by Irving H. Hart in 1926, and in the summer of 1940 the trail was located, cleared of underbrush, and marked by Eagle Boy Scouts from Minnesota, Montana, and North and South Dakota. See Hart, "The Old Savanna Portage," *ante*, 8:117-139. It may clarify the present narrative to state that the section of the party under Cass traveled up the East Savanna, a tributary of the St. Louis River, and portaged to the West Savanna, an affluent of the Sandy River. Both this route and that followed by Trowbridge, Schoolcraft, and their companions are indicated on the map, *ante*, p. 138.

In descending the Savann the party were obliged to make two or three dechargés, or half portages,<sup>66</sup> and its general character is represented to be much the same with the Fon du Lac, on which they experienced wonderful fatigue; and in fact were obliged to get into the water and assist the men in their labors.

[*To be concluded*]

<sup>66</sup> Mackenzie offers the following definition: "The place where the goods alone are carried is called a *Decharge*, and that where goods and canoes are both transported overland, is denominated a *Portage*." See *Voyages from Montreal*, I: xxxi n.



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