

THE OLD SAVANNA PORTAGE

In the northeastern part of Aitkin County, Minnesota, lie two small lakes, Savanne and Wolf, distinguished in no way from thousands of other lakes which make this part of the country a paradise for hunter, fisherman, and tourist; but significant beyond all others because of the physiographic fact that here the waters of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence systems approach each other more closely than at any other place in Minnesota. It was this fact which rendered it inevitable, in the days when transportation was largely by canoe and portage, that this particular region should become the site of one of the most important portage routes in the Northwest.

From a time far back beyond the dawn of historical knowledge, there was probably a portage route between the two streams which drain Savanne and Wolf lakes. During the days of the fur trade, this route was one of the most important avenues of communication between the upper Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes, as attested by the journals of traders, travelers, and missionaries who penetrated this region between 1763 and 1850. After the middle of the nineteenth century, however, a silence falls about it, which may be explained by the decay of the fur trade, the changing routes of transportation, the development of new markets down the great river to the south, and the beginnings of the lumber industry, which found no place in its cosmos for such things as portages. The trail fell into gradual disuse, until, so far as the general public was concerned, it was forgotten. Few, even among the residents of the region, knew its location, and of these none realized its former importance. It existed only in the pages of the chroniclers of the past and promised soon to become little more than a dim tradition.

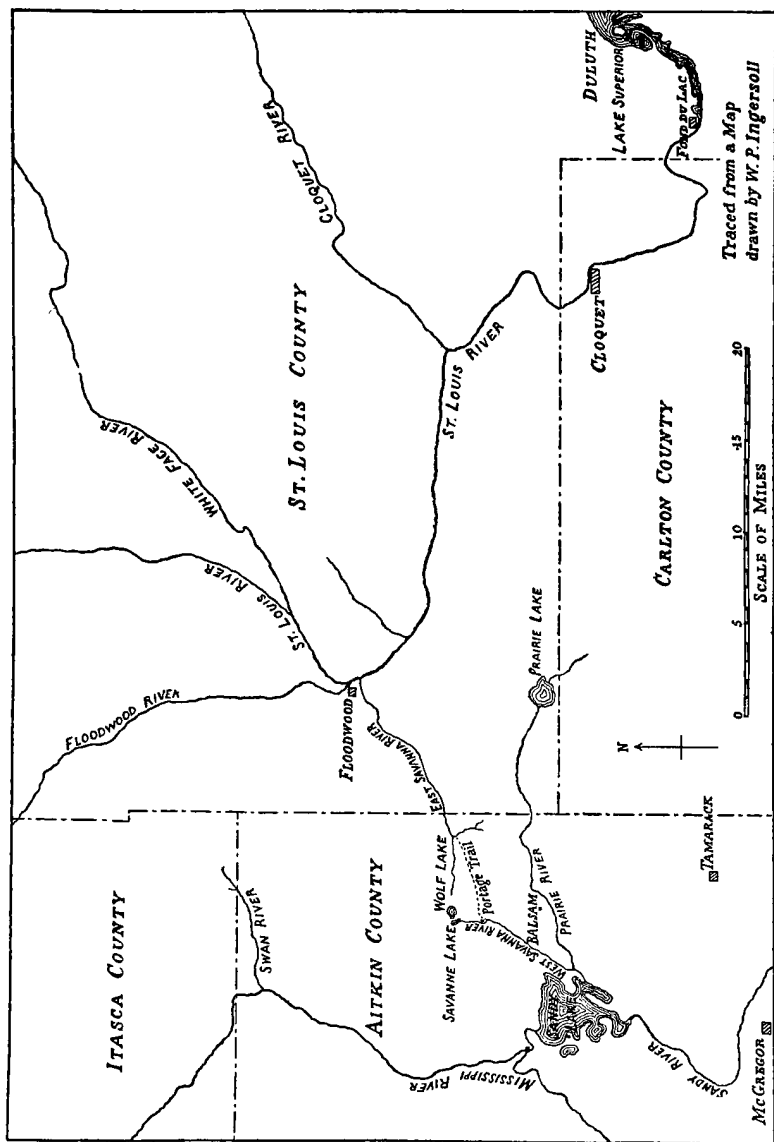
The relocation of this historic route of trade and transportation was a challenge, and, under the guidance of Mr. Wil-

liam P. Ingersoll, without whose woodcraft and intimate knowledge of the region the successful conclusion of the undertaking would have been impossible, the attempt was made in the early fall of 1926.

It is Brower's opinion that this portage had been used by the Indians and their predecessors for centuries before the first white man set foot upon the trail. It seems reasonable to assume that it was by this route that Du Luth made his epochal journey to the upper Mississippi country in 1679.¹ And it is an equally reasonable assumption that it was along this trail that the first Chippewa pushed westward from their homes on Lake Superior into the territory then occupied by the Sioux around Sandy Lake.

The story of the coming of the first Chippewa to Sandy Lake has, down to the present, remained a matter of oral tradition; but, derived as it is from several separate and independent sources, it seems to be of sufficient significance to be recorded. The tale runs thus: Many years ago, when the Chippewa had their homes on Lake Superior, a brave warrior of this tribe, accompanied only by his squaw, ascended the St. Louis and East Savanna rivers, and pushed westward to the West Savanna Valley, seeking new hunting grounds. Crossing the West Savanna, the Indians continued their journey until nightfall, when the brave indicated a place for the squaw to make camp, and himself pushed on a little distance to spy out the land. Within a short time he came to an opening in the forest, across which he saw two loons swoop down in the long plunging flight which these birds make only when settling into the water. A few steps in advance, he came to the brow of a cliff, from which he looked down upon a village of the Sioux, many tepees clustered along the shore of

¹ Jacob V. Brower, "Prehistoric Man at the Headwaters of the Mississippi River," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8:238; Reuben G. Thwaites, "The Story of Chequamegon Bay," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 13:407.



THE SANDY LAKE AND ST. LOUIS RIVER BASINS

an island in the lake a mile or more away. Apparently the Chippewa warrior had been unaware either of the existence of the lake or of the imminent proximity of so large a body of enemies. Realizing the necessity for extreme caution to prevent his presence in the enemies' country from becoming known, he hurried back to the place where he had left his squaw. Before he could reach her, however, she had lighted a fire, and when he arrived she was engaged in preparing their evening meal. Hastily smothering the flames, the two Chippewa hurriedly began to retrace their steps; but the watchful Sioux had seen the warning smoke rising above the tree tops, and gave chase. The pursuit continued for miles, until the Sioux overtook and killed the fleeing brave. The squaw managed to conceal herself in the woods, and, eventually, after many hardships, to make her way back to her own people. And it was in seeking revenge for the death of their fellow tribesman, according to this story, that the first war party of the Chippewa came along the old trail to Sandy Lake; thus beginning the long period of conflict which was to result in the expulsion of the Sioux from the whole region, and in the permanent establishment of the Chippewa on the islands and along the shores of Sandy Lake.²

The warfare between the Chippewa and the Sioux in this region began about 1730 and continued intermittently for almost a century.³ By 1750, however, the Chippewa control of the land lying between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake had been definitely and finally established. Soon after, it is probable that French traders began to make occasional incursions into the region, but thus far no record of these early journeys has been found.

² This story was told to Mr. Ingersoll by Mr. Charles Wakefield, a half-breed Chippewa, and to the writer by Mr. J. E. Murphy. Another account of the coming of the Chippewa to this general region is given by William W. Warren in his "History of the Ojibways, Based upon Traditions and Oral Statements," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5: 157-162.

³ Warren, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5: 155-193.

That by the middle of the eighteenth century the existence of a portage route from the St. Louis to the Mississippi was known to the French is evidenced by Bellin's map of North America, published in 1755, which shows the "R. du Fond du Lac," or St. Louis River and a portage from its source to "Lac Rouge," which is evidently confounded with Mille Lacs. In common with all early maps of this region, Bellin's is extremely inaccurate; but the physiography of the region makes it seem probable that the reference is to the Savanna Portage.⁴

Other than a somewhat obscure reference in an English military memorandum, apparently written in 1777,⁵ the earliest references to the portage routes between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake thus far discovered are those of Jean Baptiste Perrault. Perrault wrote his narrative about 1830, evidently basing it upon diaries kept during the years of his active participation in the fur trade of the Northwest. Between 1784 and 1797, he made comparatively frequent trips back and forth from Lake Superior to Sandy Lake, of some of which he has left more or less detailed accounts. In these accounts he makes mention of two portages between the St. Louis and Sandy Lake, which he calls the "portage de la prairie" and the "portage de la savanne." From the dates given, it is evident that the former was used in the winter months and the latter in the summer.

Accompanying the narrative of Perrault are a number of maps of the regions traversed by him, sketched by himself, one of which is probably the oldest detailed map of the country between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake. This map Perrault has entitled in crude French, "Sketch map of the country from the entrance of the river Fond du Lac Superieur to penetrate to the entrance of the discharge to Lac des Sables [*Sandy Lake*] where it flows into the Mississippi, and where the posts are marked with a zero apostrophe." This map is not drawn

⁴ A copy of Jacques N. Bellin's "Carte de L'Amerique Septentrionale," 1755, is in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁵ *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 12:43.

to scale, and is naturally inaccurate in many details. It shows the St. Louis River, which Perrault styles the "Fond du Lac," with a tributary, the "riviere de la Savanne"; Prairie Lake, unnamed on the map, but called "lac de la pousse" in the narrative; Prairie River, which is likewise unnamed on the map, though Perrault calls it "riviere des prairie" in one account of the portage; and "Lac des Sables," with an unnamed stream by which the lake empties into the Mississippi. The most interesting feature of the map is the fact that two portage routes from river to river are marked by dotted lines; one from the St. Louis River directly to Prairie River just below its discharge from Prairie Lake, and the other from the East Savanna to the Prairie River farther down on its course to Sandy Lake. These two portages are marked as the "portage la prairie" and the "portage la Savanne" respectively. The location of the "portage la prairie" is further confirmed by the mark of a "zero apostrophe" (O'), by which the site of a log cabin built by Perrault in 1785 is shown near the lake out of which Prairie River flows.

From Perrault's references by name to the various physical features on the map, it would seem that they were known and named previous to his first visit to the country and that the trails were already well defined. His errors in the direction of stream flow are no more serious than those of later travelers through the region, whose opportunities for exact observation and record were at least equal to his. The fact that the map does not show the West Savanna River at all casts some doubt upon the identity of Perrault's "portage la Savanne" and the Savanna Portage of later days; but the physiography of the region between the East Savanna and Prairie rivers would seem to preclude the practicability of the use during the summer months of any other route between these two streams.⁶

⁶ Jean Baptiste Perrault, "Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of a Merchant Voyageur," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37: 521, 524, 530, 574, and map facing p. 519.

Another traveler who left a record of the use of this portage route was David Thompson, a Scotch surveyor in the service of the Northwest Company, who in May, 1798, descended the Mississippi to "Sand Lake River," and thence crossed the divide to Lake Superior.⁷ Zebulon M. Pike refers only incidentally to the portage, since it was not included in his route to the sources of the Mississippi.⁸ George Henry Monk, a clerk in the employ of the Northwest Company, writing in 1807, gives a fairly complete description of the entire route from Lake Superior to the Mississippi. He is one of the few to describe the portage who gives the correct direction of the flow of the East Savanna. Monk states that "At the west end of the portage is a small river also called *La Savanne*."⁹

The removal of the headquarters of the Northwest Company from Grand Portage to Fort William about 1802 and the sale in 1816 to the American Fur Company of all its posts and stocks in the territory later assigned to the United States ushered in a new era for this portage. It is to the narratives of travelers who traversed the trail between 1820 and 1855 that we owe the greater part of our present knowledge of the route of the Savanna Portage.

In 1820, Lewis Cass, then governor of Michigan Territory, which at that time included northeastern Minnesota, led an exploring expedition from Detroit to the upper Mississippi region, traveling by canoe along the shores of Lakes Huron and Superior to the head of the latter lake. From here his party ascended the St. Louis and East Savanna rivers, portaged across to the West Savanna, and thence proceeded by way of Sandy Lake and the Mississippi to Cass Lake — at the time believed to be the ultimate source of the Mississippi. Dr. Alexander Wolcott, a surgeon with the Cass party, has left a detailed description of the portage.

⁷ David Thompson, *Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, 283 (Champlain Society, *Publications*, no. 12—Toronto, 1916).

⁸ Zebulon M. Pike, *Expeditions to Headwaters of the Mississippi River*, 1: 321 (Coes edition, New York, 1895).

⁹ See *ante*, 5: 34, 35.

The length of the Savannah portage is six miles, and is passed at thirteen pauses.¹⁰ The first three pauses are shockingly bad. It is not only a bed of mire, but the difficulty of passing it is greatly increased by fallen trees, limbs, and sharp knots of the pitch pine, in some places on the surface, in others imbedded one or two feet below. Where there are hollows or depressions in the ground, tall coarse grass, brush, and pools of stagnant water are encountered. Old voyageurs say, that this part of the portage was formerly covered with a heavy bog, or a kind of peat, upon which the walking was very good, but that during a dry season, it accidentally caught fire and burnt over the surface of the earth so as to lower its level two or three feet when it became mirey, and subject to inundation from the Savannah river. The country, after passing the third pause, changes in a short distance, from a marsh to a region of sand hills covered mostly with white and yellow pine, intermixed with aspen. The hills are short and conical, with a moderate elevation. In some places they are drawn into ridges, but these ridges cannot be observed to run in any uniform course. . . . Where the portage approaches the sources of the West Savannah there is a descent into a small valley covered with rank grass — without forest trees — and here and there clumps of willows. . . . The valley is skirted with a thick and brushy growth of alder, aspen, hazel, &c. The adjoining hills are sandy, covered with pine. The stream here is just large enough to swim a canoe, and the navigation commences within a mile of its source. It pursues a very serpentine course to Sandy Lake, in a general direction northwest [*sic*]. . . .

. . . The river . . . receives a tributary from the south, called Ox creek, and from the point of its junction the navigation is good at all seasons, to Sandy Lake, a distance of six miles.¹¹

Wolcott makes a peculiar error in the direction of the flow of the West Savanna, which he states flows northwest instead of southwest. If it were not for the internal evidence of the description itself and for the later account in the narrative of the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832, which followed the same route, one might conclude that the portage here described lay between the East Savanna and Prairie rivers. There is, however, no place practicable for a portage between these two

¹⁰ Resting places on a portage were known as pauses or *poses*. In speaking of the length of a portage the *voyageur* referred to the number of *poses* involved.

¹¹ Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal of Travels . . . to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820*, 221–223 (Albany, 1821).

streams at which the distance is so small as six miles. Ox Creek, which Wolcott mentions as a tributary, entering the West Savanna from the south, must in reality be Prairie River, which, just before its junction with the West Savanna, curves sharply northward. At the point of union, nowadays, the Prairie is distinctly the larger stream.

Henry R. Schoolcraft, who accompanied Cass as geologist in 1820, himself headed a second expedition to the headwaters of the Mississippi by way of the Savanna Portage in 1832. In his account of this journey, he gives a brief description of the portage, agreeing in intimate detail with Wolcott, but adding the information that for the distance of the first three *poses*, "Trees and sticks have, from time to time, been laid . . . to walk on, which it requires the skill of a balancing master to keep."¹²

With the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832, was Lieutenant James Allen, who in his official report describes the portage. Allen corrects Wolcott's apparent error as to the Prairie River, and is much more nearly accurate in his estimate of the distance from the junction of this stream with the West Savanna to the lake, when he says, "about a mile from Sandy lake it receives a small river from the east." To the description of the portage proper, Allen makes no significant additions.¹³

Another member of the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832, the Reverend William T. Boutwell, a Congregational missionary to the Indians, wrote in his diary a colorful description of the portage, from which the following is taken:

River Savannah. June 30. 1832. . . . To describe the difficulties of this portage, would puzzle a Scott, or a Knickerbocker, even. Neither language nor pencil can paint them. After making about half a pose, our baggage was landed on a wharf made of poles. A dyke was then made, and our canoes brought up through mud and water knee deep, and landed in the portage path. A few pieces were put on board, and one at the bow and another at the

¹² Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Summary Narrative of an Exploratory Expedition to the Sources of the Mississippi River*, 118 (Philadelphia, 1855).

¹³ *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 5: 328.

stern, the latter pushing and the former drawing in mud and water to their middle, made their way in this manner for half a mile, and unloaded on a second wharf. When all was up, a second dyke was made, which raised the water sufficient just to swim the canoes, which were loaded a second time, and carried all to another pose. Some of the gentlemen were carried across in the canoes with the baggage. Others, with myself, forced their way on foot, through mud and water. The musketoes came in hordes and threatened to carry away a man alive, our [*or*] devour him ere they could get him away. . . .

July 2. 1832. . . . The rain . . . has rendered the portage almost impassable for man or beast. The mud, for the greater part of the way will average ankle deep, and from that, upwards. In spots, it is difficult to find bottom—a perfect quagmire. Our men look like renegades, covered with mud from head to foot, some have lost one leg of the pantaloons, others both. Their shirts and moccasins are of a piece, full of rents and mud. Face, hands and necks, look like men scarred with the small-pox.

. . . Mangled toes and bruised legs were brought forward to the Dr. which I venture to say will long fix in mind the fatigues of this portage.

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Within half a mile of this end of the portage, we cross a pine ridge which seems to have escaped the ravages of fire which in past time seems to have destroyed the first growth of timber, and fell into a swamp of fine grass.¹⁴

Boutwell gives the direction of the flow of the West Savanna as northwest, as does Wolcott. The day of their departure to descend the West Savanna was, however, as he indicates, cloudy, thus giving them no opportunity to determine their course by the sun. Schoolcraft perpetuates this error in the map accompanying the narrative of the expedition of 1820. Again were it not for internal evidence and for the exact accordance of the route described with the terrain of that traced out by the writer, one might conclude that the stream then called the West Savanna was what is now known as the Prairie River.

The Reverend Edmund F. Ely, another pioneer Congregational missionary, came to Sandy Lake in 1833, where he estab-

¹⁴ A copy of the Boutwell Journal, in the handwriting of J. Fletcher Williams, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

lished one of the first schools in Minnesota. On this trip he was accompanied by William A. Aitken, the American Fur Company trader at Sandy Lake, and Boutwell. Ely says, in his description of the portage, that at the eastern end "A very small stream runs into the Portage N. W. I should think — this stream when dammed is of sufficient depth to allow a Canoe to be drawn with $\frac{1}{2}$ load . . . about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile[s]." ¹⁵ This suggests that in its first stages the eastern part of the trail may have followed the course of the rivulet by which Wolf Lake then emptied into the East Savanna. The construction of a drainage ditch in recent years, by which the waters of this lake now empty into the East Savanna, and the nature of the low-lying swamp lands through which this part of the trail runs make it impossible at the present time to determine the original course of this stream.

In 1833 William Johnston, a half-breed Chippewa in the service of a rival of the American Fur Company, wrote a very complete description of the entire route from Fond du Lac to Sandy Lake. He characterizes the first half *pose* of the Savanna Portage as "middling," and the next two *poses* as having sufficient water to allow half canoe loads to be dragged through. Continuing, Johnston writes:

Very little labour is required to make this portion passable for canoes, nothing however has been done to it since the Northwest Company[s] time, their traders had a platform made, the extent of the bog, the remnants of which still can be seen; single logs have lately been laid at the extremity, and which is very dangerous to pass, especially with loads. . . .

The remaining Eight poses were dry compared to those first passed; the land gradually rises for about four poses; and then descends; It marks the height of land from each side of which, the waters run to Lake Superior and the Mississippi.¹⁶

Joseph G. Norwood, a geologist in the service of the United States government, made a survey of this portion of Minnesota

¹⁵ Ely Diaries, September 18, 1833. The originals of these diaries are in the possession of the St. Louis County Historical Society at Duluth; the Minnesota Historical Society has copies.

¹⁶ William Johnston, "Letters on the Fur Trade 1833," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37: 170-172.

in 1848. His report contains a record of his passage of the Savanna Portage, from which the following extract is taken.

On the 24th of June, we left Sandy Lake for Lake Superior, by the route over which the Fur Companies have transported their goods toward the far northwestern posts for many years past.

. . . In winter, and occasionally in summer, the Indians, passing from Sandy Lake to Fond du Lac, follow this [*Prairie*] river to its source, and then, by a portage of twelve miles, reach St. Louis River, a few miles below the mouth of the East Savannah River. The distance to Fond du Lac by this route is considerably less than by the Savannah Rivers. In summer, however, the swamps about the head of Prairie River are almost impassable, and then the line of travel is the same as the one pursued by us.

. . . The east end of the portage, for the distance of a mile and a half, runs through a tamerack swamp, which was flooded with water, and next to impassable. It is generally considered the worst "carrying place" in the Northwest, and, judging from the great number of canoes which lie decaying along this part of it, having been abandoned in consequence of the difficulty experienced in getting them over, its reputation is well deserved.

East Savannah River, where the portage strikes it, is about five yards wide. It comes from the northwest, and turning a short distance below the portage, pursues a general northeasterly direction to its junction with St. Louis River.¹⁷

A late reference to the use of the Savanna Portage is that in a letter written in 1855 by the Reverend Samuel Spates, who conducted a Methodist mission for the Indians of Sandy Lake in the forties and fifties.¹⁸

Chambers, who visited the region in 1872, writes :

We slept that night at the mouth of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor of Mr. Libby's historic trading post. "Libby's" has been known for three generations as the point of portage for the "Big Sea Water" (Lake Superior), reached by descending the turbulent St. Louis River.¹⁹

¹⁷ Joseph G. Norwood, "Geological Report of a Survey of Portions of Wisconsin and Minnesota," in David Dale Owen, *Report of a Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota*, 300 (Philadelphia, 1852).

¹⁸ Samuel Spates to Jabez Brooks, March 8, 1855, Spates Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁹ Julius Chambers, *The Mississippi River and Its Wonderful Valley*, 169 (New York and London, 1910).

Chambers did not make the portage trip himself, and spoke of it merely from hearsay. One might conclude from what he says that the route was still more or less in use at that time.

It was with this information in hand, gleaned from historical sources, that in the summer of 1926 a trip was planned by the writer and Mr. Ingersoll, for many years a resident on or near Sandy Lake, in the effort to relocate the route of the old Savanna Portage.²⁰ The historical data were supplemented by interviews with old residents of the locality. The most helpful information was secured from Mr. C. A. Maddy and Mr. J. E. Murphy, both of McGregor, and indirectly from Mr. George Wakefield of Swan River. Both Mr. Maddy and Mr. Murphy were in earlier years timber cruisers and had covered in their wanderings practically every bit of country around Sandy Lake. Both had seen and crossed the old trail many times, and Mr. Murphy was able to locate it on the map with a fair degree of accuracy. Mr. Wakefield's information came to us at second-hand. He was reported to have said that fifty years

²⁰ In addition to the examples cited in this paper, there are on record several instances of the use of the Savanna Portage by other travelers. In order to reach their posts on Sandy Lake and Leech Lake, missionaries seem to have used the portage frequently. Thus J. P. Bardwell made the trip in 1843, Mrs. Lucy M. Lewis in 1844, and John H. Pitezel in 1849, and all three have left records of their experiences. Newton H. Winchell, with two companions, crossed the portage in 1878 while making a canoe trip for the Minnesota Geological Survey through the lakes of northeastern Minnesota. *Oberlin Evangelist*, 6:61 (April 10, 1844); Lucy M. Lewis to James R. Wright, May 29, 1844, Dr. William Lewis Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society; John H. Pitezel, *Lights and Shades of Missionary Life*, 210-212 (Cincinnati, 1883); Newton H. Winchell, *The Aborigines of Minnesota*, 589 (St. Paul, 1911).

Attention may be called to the fact that the portage trail is indicated on a manuscript map of the Northwest by John Dutton, dated 1814, and on one of a section of northeastern Minnesota prepared in 1870 by Alfred J. Hill for Charles H. Baker. The Minnesota Historical Society owns the original of the second map and a photostatic copy of the first, the original of which is in the archives of the Province of Ontario at Toronto. The trail is shown in detail on a map of Aitkin County by Warren Upham, in the Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota, *Final Report*, 1900, vol. 6, plate 57. As here given, the route differs slightly from that indicated on Mr. Ingersoll's map (*post*, p. 131). *Ed.*

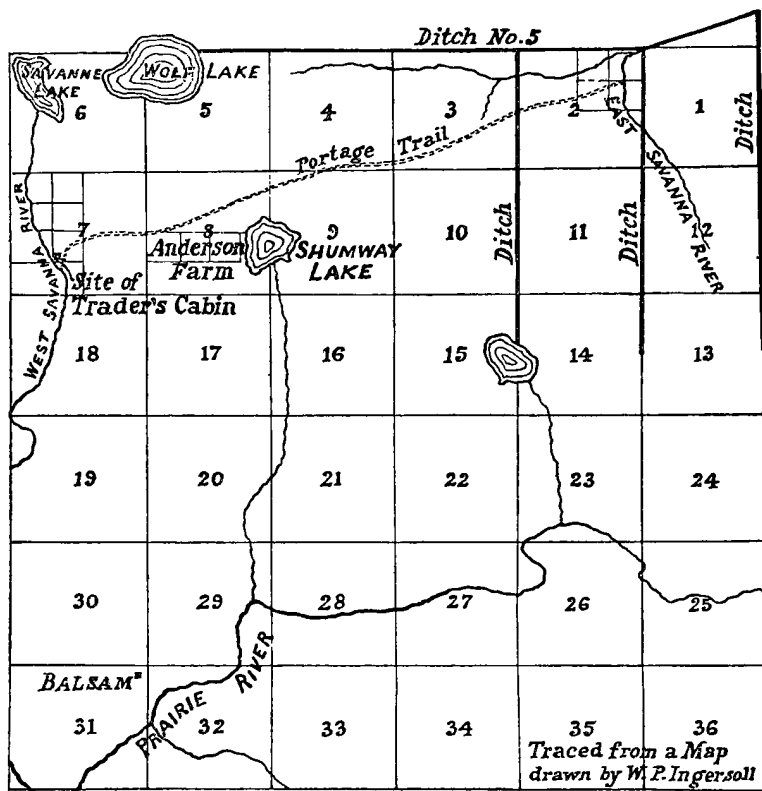
ago, when he was a small boy, his father had carried him the full length of the trail from river to river. His exact description of the location of the west end of the trail enabled us, after one failure, to discover the point at which the portage enters the valley of the West Savanna.

The continual rains of August and September delayed our departure, and compelled us to abandon an earlier project of packing in our supplies and tentage on foot from a point on State Highway Number 5, north of Sandy Lake, to Savanne Lake at the head of the West Savanna River. Fearing that the rivers that we should have to cross would be overflowed to such an extent that it would be impracticable to cross them, we finally elected to proceed by automobile around the south end of Sandy Lake, following the forest roads as far as possible, and then to strike out on foot toward our objective.

Our equipment included the best maps of the portage region that we were able to obtain, of which the most serviceable proved to be the United States engineers' map of the Sandy Lake basin and the township maps based upon the government surveys. From the latter, it appeared probable that the west end of the trail was located somewhere in section 7, township 50 north, range 22 west, as Mr. Murphy had informed us. Wolf Lake is shown for the most part in sections 5 and 6. Mr. Murphy had told us, and the map confirmed his statement, that along the north line of township 50 a drainage ditch had been constructed, with laterals extending southward between sections 2 and 3 and sections 1 and 2. In the office of the secretary of state at St. Paul the writer found later, on his return trip, a map made in 1874 which showed by a dotted line the eastern half of the portage trail.²¹ It would seem probable that at the

²¹ The original township plats made by the government surveyors are in the office of the secretary of state at St. Paul. The surveyor's field notes contain a number of references to the trail; for example in the description of the line between sections 2 and 3 there is a notation, "cross trail bearing E. & W." The dotted line indicating the trail on the plat ends just west of the section line between sections 4 and 5, and the field notes mention a trail bearing north.

time when the original township surveys were made in this region, the eastern part of the trail was discovered; while, either because of lack of interest or because its route was already more or less obliterated, the western part of the portage was left unmarked.



THE ROUTE OF THE SAVANNA PORTAGE,
TOWNSHIP 50 NORTH, RANGE 22 WEST

We left Sandy Lake Tuesday noon, October 5, with the minimum of supplies necessary for several days, intending, if the trip took longer than this, to live upon the country. Our first stop was at a cabin east of the lake. Here we were fortu-

nate enough to find two forest rangers, from whom we received information regarding roads that ultimately saved us miles of useless travel. On their advice, we went on by way of Tamarack, and thence north and west to Balsam post office. From the latter place onward, the road we followed was one of the original ones laid out when the country was new, winding in and out over and around sand hills and through cut-over forests of poplar, birch, and oak.

We finally reached the clearing of a man named Larson, an old settler in the region, from whom we hoped to secure some further information about the trail. These hopes proved to be vain. Mr. Larson, although he has lived here for some twenty-five years, had heard of the trail but had never seen it. He questioned our ability to find it at all, but he did give us at least the information that there were two other settlers, named Anderson and Thompson, either of whose places we could reach before dark. He also told us that there was a lumber camp at the west end of Wolf Lake where we might find lodging for the night.

Despite this somewhat discouraging experience, we pushed on, past the road leading eastward toward Anderson's clearing, into the big woods. Here the road became merely two deep ruts, winding endlessly through heavy timber and made infinitely worse by the constant rains of the past weeks. In order to make progress at all at times, it was necessary to dig and fill and push; but the horse power of the "dependable light car," supplemented by man power, enabled us to keep going. The clouds had begun to break away by now, and the sun, hanging low in the west, was beginning to cast long and ominous shadows which made one think with anything but pleasure of the prospect of spending the night in the rain-soaked woods. At length, however, we came upon a pole gate in a wire fence, indicating the proximity of a clearing, and half a mile farther on we sighted through the trees the roofs of several buildings. A few moments later we came out upon the lumber camp, situated just below Thompson's clearing at the west end of Wolf Lake.

We found the lumber camp in charge of a man named Roe, a likeable young fellow, an ex-service man, who with his wife and three small children makes his year-round home in this lonesome spot. Mr. Roe welcomed us cordially, as do all of these remote settlers when they meet strangers, and offered us the use of the bunk house and its facilities. He explained that his supplies of "grub" were running low, as he went into town but once a month; but he said that we could have all the "spuds" we wanted, and that his wife could let us have some bread.

The bunk house was a rough board shack with three windows, two of which were broken, and it contained an old heating stove, evidently salvaged from some deserted cabin or lumber camp, as it had plainly been exposed to the weather for a good many years. With the assistance of two strands of barbed wire, it managed to maintain a precarious equilibrium; it was piled full of fuel to which Mr. Roe touched a match, and immediately it began to give off a heat which was thrice welcome to the two mud-bespattered explorers. Without further consideration, we accepted the invitation to camp there, spread our bed roll on one of the double bunks, hung blankets over the two broken windows, and proceeded to get our supper.

After supper, we went up to Mr. Thompson's and got what information he had with reference to the trail. He said that he was sure that we could find the east part where it crossed the drainage ditch; but he knew nothing of the west part, and doubted our ability to trace it out beyond the tamarack swamp (the east two miles of the trail), where he said it was still plainly visible. From Mr. Roe, however, although he is a newcomer, we received some information as to the west end of the trail and the location of the old fur company camp on the West Savanna. This he had from Mr. George Wakefield, a timber cruiser for the Wooden Ware camp, a few miles north of Wolf Lake.

We went to bed early in preparation for the strenuous work of the next day. The skies were clear and the stars were shining by bedtime, a faint but often futile promise of fair weather.

Away off in the woods, we heard the occasional howl of a brush wolf. This and the sougning of the wind through the trees, the stamping of the camp horses in the barn near by, and the scurry of the mice in the sawdust-packed walls of the bunk house furnished the music that lulled us to slumber.

Wednesday morning dawned bright and clear, with the first sunrise that had been visible for weeks, promise of the fair weather that was to stay with us till the end of our trip. After breakfast, we started out to find the site which Mr. Roe had described as that of the old camp at the west end of the trail. We found without difficulty a place in the beautiful little valley of the West Savanna where the stream turns its course from the southeast to the southwest toward Sandy Lake, plainly, both from observation and from the map, its most eastern point. Along the eastern edge of the valley, at the foot of a steep hill, stand the remains of a number of log buildings, which we later learned are what is left of an old lumber camp. At the south end of this row of ruins, we found a well-defined trail climbing the ridge to the eastward. No other trail having been revealed by our search, we decided that this must be the one we were looking for and started out to follow it.

The course of this trail, which we followed for several miles, was clearly marked for the eyes of a woodsman by blazes — some of them very old — on the trees. As we went on, however, both the sun and the compass showed us that we were bearing a little south of east, whereas the portage trail was supposed to run north of east throughout the greater part of its course. Finally we were forced to the conclusion that we had taken the wrong route and that what we were following must be an old logging road. As the trail we were seeking ran somewhere to the north, we struck out across country through the dense woods, past a beautiful little lake tucked away out of sight so far from civilization that it has neither name nor place on the maps, until at length we came in sight of a clearing which proved to be Anderson's on Shumway Lake.

Mr. Anderson told us that there was an old trail running northeastwardly through the woods north of his place, which

was said to be the old "Hudson Bay Trail." We found this trail less than half a mile from Anderson's clearing, and followed it until we came upon another clearing, in which stood a deserted cabin and a log stable. Here we lost the trail entirely. After circling the clearing several times without finding where the trail led out eastward, we struck off through the woods, going northeast in a blind search for it. For some time our efforts were unrewarded, but within a few minutes after a brief pause for lunch — supplemented by coffee boiled over a fire of birch-bark, and served on plates cut from the same convenient tree — Mr. Ingersoll discovered the trail again. This part is so completely overgrown with brush that none but an experienced woodsman could ever have found it. From this point on, however, it became increasingly easy to follow. The larger trees have all been lumbered off years ago, with the exception of an occasional oak or birch; but here and there along the trail we found blazes, often almost obliterated by the passage of time, but still discernible. We kept on the course until, according to expectation based on the old descriptions of the trail, it descended into a tamarack swamp. From here on, the going was difficult to say the least. In the old days, this part of the trail was known as "the worst carrying-place in the northwest," and years of neglect have not served to improve it. The way lay clear before us, a well-marked path through the wilderness of swamp, but rendered almost impassable at times by fallen trees and sink holes. The only thing which made it possible for us to make our way at all was the fact that occasionally in the worst places we found, embedded in the morass a few inches below the surface, tamarack poles running lengthwise of the trail. Had this been an old logging road, these poles would have been laid crosswise to form a corduroy road. This discovery was all that was needed to convince us that we were actually following the original trail of the portage, as our notes indicated that the fur companies had laid poles lengthwise of the trail to make passage possible. These tamarack poles buried beneath the marsh mud will, so we were told, last for a hundred years. It may be that some of the poles which

saved us from sinking in the mire are the ones of which Schoolcraft speaks, when he says, "Trees and sticks have, from time to time, been laid . . . to walk on, which it requires the skill of a balancing master to keep." Schoolcraft was right.

After a mile or more of the trail through the tamarack swamp, we came out suddenly upon the lateral drainage ditch between sections 2 and 3, for which our maps had led us to look. Here a bridge led across the ditch to a high and dry road leading off to the north. According to the map, we were within less than three-quarters of a mile of the eastern end of the trail, so we decided to take the easy way around the rest of the swamp by way of the ditch roads. Half a mile north we struck the main ditch with a good road running eastward along its southern edge. These ditch roads are now mere paths which run along the tops of the dikes thrown up by the steam shovels used in constructing the ditches some years ago. The original intention seems to have been to build roads along these dikes, but the hopes and money expended in the attempt to drain the swamps have proved profitless. The land is still hopeless swamp, and so far as anyone can now see will always remain so.

Then, too, on the heels of the human engineers who laid out and constructed these works, have come some natural engineers whose work has gone to undo that of man. At the north end of the lateral ditch, we ran on to the first of twelve beaver dams built across the ditch, which have served to raise the level of the water until, in the upper course of the ditch, it overflows all of the surrounding forest land. We saw thousands of stumps from which these busy little engineers had cut the timber for their dams and houses, some of the cuttings being so fresh and the abandoned sticks lying on the bank so plainly ready to be hauled down the slides into the water, that we believed that we had actually interrupted their operations by our approach. It takes time and patience to get an opportunity to see beavers at work. As we were miles from camp and

the sun was already beginning its downward course, this privilege we had perforce to forego.

Along the eastward course of the big ditch, we traveled until we came to a hay meadow, through the middle of which flowed a winding stream which we recognized as the East Savanna. At the southwest side of the meadow on the west side of the stream were the remains of an old hay camp, and here we struck the portage trail again. We followed this westward until we came in sight of the first lateral ditch upon which we had come in our earlier eastward trek. This completed the tracing out of more than two-thirds of the trail, and all the worst part of it. Retracing our steps to the main ditch, we proceeded westward, covering the five miles that lay between the East Savanna and the east end of Wolf Lake by five o'clock. As we had neither a boat nor means of communication with the Thompsons, our only choice of a route back to camp was to skirt the north shore of the lake to our destination. This last two-mile stretch was the worst of the day. There was no semblance of a trail, not even a game trail, to follow. The way led through an absolute jungle of tangled underbrush over rotting trees, fallen and half-buried in the mire and covered with moss. One small stream, we had to bridge. At last, just at sundown, we came out at Thompson's clearing, having covered more than twenty miles on foot since morning, under conditions as difficult, so far as the going was concerned, as those described by the early chroniclers of the portage. We were duly thankful, however, that we were not burdened as were the men of that early day with the heavy packs which it was their task to carry.

The next morning we broke camp and started back. Mr. George Wakefield had visited the lumber camp during our absence and had left even more exact information regarding the western end of the trail. With this added help and the personal assistance of Mr. Roe, we were able to locate with reasonable certainty the site of the fur company camp on a little knoll

just above the bend of the West Savanna. Our investigations here were very casual. A few spadefuls of earth turned up nothing more interesting than a carved bear's tooth, part of some Indian ornament; but we feel sure that further careful search on this site should prove profitable.

Our search for the western part of the trail, which we had missed the day before, proved equally successful. Our difficulty had been that we had failed to note the fact that the road to Anderson's clearing runs for a mile or so along the old trail, except at the extreme western end where the old trail crosses a swamp which the later road avoids. We followed the road to the place where the original trail branches off to the north, and thence on to the point at which we had picked it up the day before. This ended our search, and we returned to Sandy Lake with the satisfaction that accompanies the successful conclusion of a worthy undertaking.

The first four miles from the western end of the trail are comparatively high and dry. Its general course is north of east, proceeding in a fairly direct line except where it veers to the one side or the other to avoid the ascent of one of the many hills that characterize the region. One who travels this trail can see how every natural advantage was taken to make the route as easy as possible for burdened men. As Mr. Ingersoll frequently remarked, after we had finally located the trail, "You see, it couldn't have gone anywhere else." The timber for the first part of the trail is poplar and hardwood, with many old pine slashings. Some birch and oak trees from seventy to a hundred years old were seen, but most of the valuable timber has been cut off. For the last two miles, the way lies through a tamarack swamp. There is in general a gradual slope to the eastward. The trail is marked by old blazes and a number of later ones, evidence of its use in part as a logging road in comparatively recent times. It is from one to two yards wide in places, but elsewhere is little more than a narrow path, particularly where it passes through the tamarack swamp.

Some means should be found to mark permanently this historic trail. There are no present evidences of forest fires having swept through this region, but as such a catastrophe may occur at any time, there is danger that the exact location may be lost entirely. While it can still be traced throughout its course, an effort should be made to mark for future generations the location of this ancient highway, for it brings back vividly the romantic days when it was an important trade route from the Mississippi Valley to the markets of the East.

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