

RECEIVED  
JUL 08 1992  
OME No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Height of Land Portage  
other names/site number Hauteur de Terre Portage; Portage of the Twelve Poses

2. Location

street & number off County Road 138  not for publication  
city, town Embarrass, White, and Pike Townships  vicinity Biwabik  
state Minnesota code 22 county St. Louis code 137 zip code 55708

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____ <u>2</u>	_____ <u>4</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ <u>4</u>
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____ <u>2</u>	_____ <u>8</u>
			Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Portage Trails in Minnesota, 1630s-1870s  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date 5/12/92

State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Beth Boland 7/23/92  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/pedestrian-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Landscape/forest

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls \_\_\_\_\_

roof \_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Archaeology (historic-non-aboriginal)  
Exploration/Settlement  
Transportation

Period of Significance

A.D. ca. 1630s-1870s  
A.D. ca. 1630s-1870s  
A.D. ca. 1630s-1870s

Significant Dates

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:  
N/A

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 163.2 acres

UTM References

A 

115	55110410	512777210
Zone	Easting	Northing

C 

115	553120	5272820
-----	--------	---------

B 

115	55391010	51271321810
Zone	Easting	Northing

D 

115	55261610	51271161810
-----	----------	-------------

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Robert C. Vogel, Historian and David G. Stanley, Archeologist  
organization R.C. Vogel & Associates date September 26, 1991  
street & number 270 South Brimhall Street telephone (612) 698-8224  
city or town St. Paul state Minnesota zip code 55105

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota**7. Description**

The Height of Land Portage consists of a network of interconnected portage trails and waterways which link the Embarrass River with the Pike River and Vermilion Lake in northeastern St. Louis County, Minnesota. The property is a representative example of the portage trail property type developed for the Portage Trails in Minnesota, 1630s-1870s, Multiple Property Documentation Form, and includes both high and low portage trails, poses, and probably bivouacs. As shown on the accompanying topographic maps, the area being nominated consists of two discontinuous trail segments in a zone 300 feet wide and approximately 4.6 miles long. Much of the pre-1870 portage trail is not readily visible, having been obscured by logging; nevertheless, the entire route is well documented historically. The rationale for the 300-foot width is that although the historic portage trails were very narrow, they did tend to shift laterally over time. The portage property boundaries also attempt to take into account the potential for as yet unidentified associated portage features, such as the archaeological remains of bivouacs and caches, which may have been located off-trail. Much of the route has been impacted by logging; however, short sections of the trail are visible, and the Embarrass River Portage trail is still used for recreational purposes. A modern logging road follows an approximately one mile long segment of the main portage trail.

The Height of Land Portage was surveyed by David G. Stanley and Robert C. Vogel in June 1991.<sup>1</sup> Using archival data, the upper (northern) terminus of the portage route was located on the south bank of the Pike River in the NW 1/4 SW 1/4 NE 1/4 SW 1/4 of Section 25, T60N R16W. As shown on historic maps, the trail ran southeast, diagonally crossing the SW 1/4 of Section 25, across the modern-day County Road 21 near its intersection with Heitala Road. This portion of the portage route was not subjected to systematic pedestrian survey because the area has been developed into several residential lots, with house clearings surrounded by a thick, immature coniferous forest with a dense understory. A small farmstead consisting of a dwelling and several outbuildings is situated in the center of the portage route at the intersection of Heitala Road and County Road 21.

South of the county road, the portage route heads nearly due south through the N 1/2 of Section 36. As mapped, the trail turns to the east at the half-section line and crosses a narrow tamarack swamp before angling to the southeast along a narrow ridge. After following the ridgetop for approximately 1000 feet, the trail route descends into the low area a little east of the boundary between Sections 36 and 31. Entering

<sup>1</sup> Photographs and sketch maps illustrating the 1991 field survey accompany this form.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

Section 31, the route makes a sharp turn to the southeast for approximately 1000 feet, then turns east where it intersects County Road 301, a north-south gravel road. No visible evidence of the portage trail was observed along the route indicated on historic maps between County Roads 21 and 301. The terrain along this section of the portage has been badly disturbed by logging: the land surface is pockmarked with tree stump holes, bulldozer garfs, and erosional rills that are now covered with long, thick mixed grasses interspersed with stands of aspen, spruce, and tamarack. Random soil cores obtained with a handprobe failed to produce any conclusive evidence of a preexisting or buried trail surface.

The historic portage route parallels County Road 301 on the west for a short distance in the W 1/2 SW 1/4 of Section 31, then turns east and bisects the modern road about 500 feet north of the section line. On the west side of the county road the portage trail has been obscured by logging and residential development. Crossing the gravel road, the route traverses the center of Section 6 and then trends to the southeast through the NE 1/4 of Section 7, T59N R15W, following a low ridgeline or moraine which abuts the higher bedrock ridge (part of the "height of land") to the west. Here the route of the historic portage is occupied by a modern two-track logging road. The vegetation along this section of the portage consists of an immature coniferous forest with numerous grassy openings. The southern terminus of the Height of Land Portage is on a slight rise on the north bank of the Embarrass River approximately 500 feet east of the section line in the SW 1/4 NW 1/4 SW 1/4 NW 1/4 of Section 8, T59N R15W.

The Embarrass River Segment of the Height of Land Portage route has its terminus located below the rapids on the east bank of the Embarrass River a short distance upstream from Sabin Lake, in NE 1/4 SW 1/4 NW 1/4 of Section 18, T59N R15W, from which point a short portage trail runs in a northerly direction around a series of small rapids, returning to the river in the NW 1/4 SE 1/4 of Section 7, T59N R15W. This segment, which is approximately one mile long, actually comprises two older portage trails which were linked together during the mid-19th century. Near its northern terminus, the portage trail appears to cross a boulder-strewn rectangular depression, approximately six feet deep, twenty feet wide and one hundred feet long, which was described by a previous investigator as "a series of patterned rock piles that do not appear natural" -- it is unlikely that this feature is related to the portage trail. It is possible that the Embarrass River Portage was not used by all travelers and may have been used only by canoeists going over the height of land to Vermilion Lake. The Embarrass River channel has been modified as a result of logging, but the rapids would not appear to have been particularly dangerous. Downstream travelers could have saulted the Embarrass River rapids or else made a *decharge*, depending on water levels and the weight of the goods being transported. At the time of the 1991

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

field survey, the Embarrass River Portage was still being used by recreational canoeists. The trail consists of a single well-defined pathway, approximately 2-4 feet wide, which winds its way through a mixed deciduous-coniferous forest along the base of a large hill which overlooks the northern arm of Sabin Lake. In places, the portage trail has been improved with stone "steps" on some of the steepest grades and with short causeways made from aspen saplings over boggy areas.

A short distance above the northern terminus of the Height of Land Portage, historic maps show another portage trail route which cuts across the point of land formed by the eastern bend of the Pike River. This portage trail was not identified during the 1991 field survey but appears on historic maps as following more or less along the line between NE 1/4 of Section 19 and NW 1/4 of section 20 and between SE 1/4 of Section 18 and the SW 1/4 of Section 17, in T60N R15W. This portage has not been included in the Height of Land Portage National Register Nomination, although if identified at some future date it could be included in the portage trail district. Descending the Pike River, canoeists reach Vermilion Lake after two or three short portages.

From a geological perspective, the Height of Land Portage is one of the dominant upland landforms of northern Minnesota. Situated on the Canadian Shield, an eroded Precambrian-aged mountain range, the land surface is rough and broken, interspersed with countless lakes, swamps, and bogs. The height of land crossed by the portage route is the northern terminus of the Giants Range or Laurentian Divide. Bedrock consists of metamorphic rocks with numerous faults and dikes. Glacial erratics abound, and granitic cobbles and boulders are strewn across the land. Topsoils are shallow, sandy inceptisols with poorly developed soil horizons. The trail route crosses two distinct oval-shaped highlands surrounded by swamps. The highlands (which appear to be moraines deposited by the Rainy Lake Lobe) are connected by a long, narrow elevated feature. The latter is dissected in two places by small tamarack swamps. The highest point on the continental divide crossed by the portage route is approximately 1450 feet above sea level, or roughly ninety feet above Sabin Lake (elev. 1364 m.s.l.) and thirty feet higher than the Pike River (elev. 1418 m.s.l.). Some of the highest hills along the divide are popularly designated as "mountains," e.g., Embarrass Mountain (elev. 1857 m.s.l.), due east of Sabin Lake on the Lake Superior slope. The nearby Vermilion Iron Range, discovered in 1865, was for many years one of the most productive iron ore mining districts in the state.<sup>2</sup>

The Height of Land Portage straddles the St. Louis and Rainy River

<sup>2</sup> The continental divide between the Hudson's Bay and Lake Superior watersheds is known variously as the Laurentian Divide and the Missabe Heights. See J. Morgan Clements, The Vermilion Iron-Bearing District of Minnesota, U. S. Geological Survey Monographs No. 45 (Washington, 1903).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 4 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

watersheds. The regional drainage pattern is wholly the product of Pleistocene Era glaciation, which worked the bedrock of the Canadian Shield like a giant abrasive tool. The Embarrass River rises near Babbitt and traces a crooked course through Embarrass Township, where it flows through a series of elongated glacial lakes, the northernmost of which is Sabin Lake, on its way southwest toward the St. Louis River. The St. Louis, which drains one of the largest watersheds in Minnesota, debouches into Lake Superior at Fond du Lac, near present-day Duluth. On the Hudson's Bay side of the divide, the Pike River (formerly known as the Lesser Vermilion) is a north-flowing tributary of Vermilion Lake, draining much of the townships of Vermilion Lake and Pike. Vermilion Lake, at nearly fifty thousand acres the largest lake in St. Louis County, drains northwest through a narrow outlet into the Vermilion River, which affords canoe travelers a navigable waterway into Rainy Lake, thence westward through a succession of lakes and rivers straddling the present-day United States-Canada border to the Lake of the Woods.

The natural vegetation of the Height of Land was dominated by white pine (*Pinus strobus*) and white spruce (*Picea glauca*), with tamarack (*Larix laricina*) swamps in low-lying areas, but the land now supports a second growth forest of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), birch (*Betula alleghaniensis* and *Betula papyrifera*), jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*), and red pine (*Pinus resinosa*), as well as tamarack and spruce. Some burr oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) can also be observed along the Embarrass River.<sup>3</sup> The entire area has been logged and much of the topsoil has been disturbed. Stream morphology has also been affected somewhat by commercial logging, which continues to the present day. Small areas within the northern segment of the route have been cleared for agriculture and residential lots, and a power line clearing bisects the Embarrass River leg of the route. Finally, the route has been impacted by construction of County State Aid Highways 21 and 158 and County Road 301 as well as numerous logging roads and driveways.

The Height of Land Portage was a landscape of critical importance in the route geography of the European fur trade throughout the Contact Period (ca. 1630s to 1837) and the early Post-Contact Period (1837-ca.1870s), because it afforded an avenue of canoe transportation between Fond du Lac at the head of Lake Superior and Rainy Lake, the most important nodes in the regional fur trade. The extent of pre-contact use of the portage route is uncertain, but it is evident that historic American Indians, principally members of the Ojibwe or Chippewa tribe, used the Vermilion Lake to Embarrass River canoe route. Indirectly, the route was a factor in the dispute over the location of the international boundary between the United States and Canada.

<sup>3</sup> The natural vegetation is described in the field notes of the General Land Office surveyors who laid out the section lines in T59-60N R15W in 1868; see Bureau of Land Management, Records of the Public Land Survey of the United States: Minnesota Field Notes and Plats (University of Minnesota microfilm (original MSS in the National Archives, Washington)).



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

After the restructuring of the fur trade in the early 19th century, use of the Height of Land Portage declined, although the route was apparently used during the Vermilion "gold rush" of 1865-1886 and American Indians were observed using the portage well into the present century.

The route itself is fairly well documented in the historical cartography of northern Minnesota. A British map of 1826 drawn by Samuel Thompson to accompany the United States-Canada boundary survey shows the Sabin Lake-Embarrass River Portage route in detail and this data was transferred by Alfred J. Hill in 1866 to his map of Vermilion Lake.<sup>4</sup> The route is shown on the maps accompanying the geological survey reports of Joseph N. Nicollet and David Dale Owen published in the 1840s and on the General Land Office survey plats. George Stuntz also mapped the historic canoe portage in 1868.<sup>5</sup>

A few first-hand accounts of portaging across the Height of Land are extant. In 1822, a party of British boundary surveyors under orders from boundary commissioner Barclay, mapped the entire locality in considerable detail, including the 6,270 yard portage across the continental divide and both the Pike and Embarrass River portages. In the 1840s David Dale Owen, United States geologist, conducted extensive surveys in northern Minnesota. One of Owen's associates, Dr. Joseph Granville Norwood, carried out a reconnaissance of the St. Louis River-Vermilion Lake region in the summer of 1849. Norwood left a detailed account of his traverse of the Height of Land:

The Seventh Lake [Sabin Lake], or, as it is called by the Chippewas, *Ininiwishtigonan*, is one mile and a quarter long, and four hundred yards wide, and is embosomed in hills. There is a portage from the upper end, of one mile in length, around rapids. The portage passes over a hill about forty feet high, covered with innumerable boulders, the most of them being granitic.

About a mile above the Embarrass River Portage, Norwood's party bivouacked for three days at a place the Ojibwe called *Ashawiwisitagon*, "the place from which water runs two ways," to dry out their gear and repair canoes. Setting out from the

---

<sup>4</sup> See the reproductions of these maps which accompany this form.

<sup>5</sup> All of the maps show essentially the same route, represented as a line. Thompson's map is in John Bassett Moore, History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to Which the United States has been a Party, 53rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Miscellaneous Document No. 212, 1898, serial 3267, Vol. 6, maps 38 and 39; it appears to have been used by Joseph N. Nicollet, The Hydrological Basin of the Mississippi River (Washington, 1843), and Alfred J. Hill, Map of Vermilion L. St. Louis Co., Minnesota (St. Paul?, 1866). The General Land Office Survey Plats have been redrawn by J. William Trygg, Composite Maps of United States Land Surveyors' Original Plats and Field Notes (Ely, 1964), sheet 18. Stuntz' manuscript map is in the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

Embarrass on the Height of Land Portage, Norwood described the trail:

This portage is about five and a half miles long, and has several exposures of rock on it. The highest part of the ridge was estimated to be sixty feet above river-level. It is covered with large white and yellow pines, and bears east-northeast and west-southwest . . . About three-fourths the distance from the beginning of the portage, we passed the culmination. It is made up of porphyritic synetite . . . and ascends gradually from a swamp on the south side to the height of forty feet, and descends, probably fifty feet, in a mile and a half, to Vermillion [Pike] River.

An experienced woodsman, Norwood noted that the portage path was generally good, "but a portion of it is as bad as cedar and cypress [i.e., spruce] swamps can make it."<sup>6</sup>

A curious aspect of the Height of Land Portage route is the possible presence of artificial rock dams in both the Pike and Embarrass rivers. These structures were attributed to American Indians by George R. Stuntz of Duluth, a mineral prospector and amateur archaeologist active in the area during the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Douglas A. Birk of the Minnesota Historical Society surveyed and mapped part of the route in 1976, following leads provided by local avocational historians. Birk found several "unspoiled" portage trail segments and other cultural features and concluded that the property was eligible for the National Register.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> David Dale Owen, Report of a Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota . . . (Philadelphia, 1852), pp. 293-295.

<sup>7</sup>George R. Stuntz, "Evidences of Early Man in Northeastern Minnesota," paper read at the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences Bulletin 3 (1883): 76-88. The St. Louis County Historical Society also has a manuscript map by Stuntz showing a purported American Indian stone dam on the Pike. Douglas A. Birk of the MHS was inclined to doubt the pre-contact American Indian origin of the "stone dams" he inspected in 1976; see his unpublished field notes, on file at MHS.

<sup>8</sup> Birk's unpublished field notes, sketch maps, and photographs are on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. A composite map, based on Birk's data, accompanies this form.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

### 8. Statement of Significance

The Height of Land Portage is significant as an example of the portage trail property type (see Portage Trails of Minnesota A.D. 1630s-1870s Multiple Property Documentation Form). Taken as a whole, the portage trail segments convey a sense of historical and landscape cohesiveness through their location, setting, and association with the ancient canoe route between Rainy Lake and the St. Louis River. Except for logging, modern intrusions have had relatively little impact on the integrity of the portage route, which in several places is easily distinguished from the surrounding forest and swamp lands by the presence of a visible foot path which corresponds to the location of the portage trail as mapped by nineteenth century travelers. Subtle differences in vegetation and soils indicate where the historic route segments were not destroyed by logging roads or other disturbances.

The property's significance under National Register Criterion A is the product of its historical association with the themes of the fur trade and European exploration and settlement described by the following statewide historic contexts: Eastern Dakota, Ojibwe, French, British, and Initial United States Occupation, 1630s-1837; and Indian Communities and Reservations, 1837-1930s. The property is the physical manifestation of the fur trade transportation network which linked the interior regions of Minnesota with fur trade entrepôts at Grand Portage, Fond du Lac, and Lake of the Woods. Although the Height of Land Portage is eligible for the National Register primarily on the merits of its historical associations, the property is also significant for its vernacular or cultural landscape qualities, which reflect the route geography of the fur trade, and for its singular physical association with the continental divide which separates the Great Lakes and Hudson's Bay watersheds. The property possesses physical integrity of location, setting, feeling and association and its historical character is still discernible in the form of distinctive trail topography and vegetation. As noted above, while some trail features may have been destroyed or altered by logging and modern development activities, segments of the trail are still visible and the historic route is intact.

Although archeological investigation of the property is incomplete, the potential for intact archeological deposits is also significant under National Register Criterion D and contributes to the scientific value of the property. The archeological research potential of portage trail sites is illustrated by the data generated by Guy E. Gibbon's investigation of the Savanna Portage.<sup>9</sup> Possible archeological features at the Height

---

<sup>9</sup>Guy E. Gibbon and Eugene Willims, "The Savanna Portage: An Archaeological Study" (unpublished manuscript, 1985); and Guy E. Gibbon and Scott Jacobson, "Portage Survey and Excavation: An Example from Minnesota" (unpublished manuscript, 1991).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

of Land Portage include trail surfaces; linear scatters of artifacts denoting trail routes; and artifact scatters, hearths, and structures associated with poses, bivouacs, caches, and portage landings.

The period of time during which the Height of Land Portage achieved the significance for which it is being nominated to the National Register is ca. 1630s-1870s, at which time the portage trail was in more or less continuous use. Fur trade use of the property spans the entire French, British, and Initial United States Contact periods, and extends into the Post-Contact period. Archeological resources associated with the property may also be significant in the context of American Indian occupation and use of the natural resources of northern Minnesota during the Pre-Contact and Contact periods. While the route was also used by various explorers, scientists, surveyors, loggers, and mineral prospectors, and by American Indian as well as Euro-American hunting and fishing parties during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a closing date of ca. 1870 has been selected for its period of significance.

The Height of Land Portage was probably used by Pre-contact American Indians, who may have pointed out its location to early European visitors. The role played by waterborne transportation in the trade route geography of the Pre-contact Laurel and Blackduck cultural traditions is not well understood. During the Contact Period, Siouan-speaking Assiniboin Indians occupied portions of the St. Louis and Rainy Lake watersheds and may have been reached by French traders as early as the 1650s. The Algonquin speaking Ojibwe or Chippewa Indians, driven westward by Iroquois pressure, migrated into northern Minnesota in the mid-17th century and doubtless brought the birchbark canoe culture with them.

The first Europeans to enter the Great Lakes region were the French. Early in the seventeenth century, a company of French merchant adventurers, led by Samuel de Champlain, established a colony on the St. Lawrence River, making Quebec the gateway to the interior of North America. Within a generation, French traders and missionaries were seeking peltry and converts in the western Great Lakes. In 1634, one of these trader-explorers, Jean Nicolet, passed the Straits of Mackinac and paddled down the western shore of Lake Michigan, where he was met with a friendly reception by the Winnebago. As far as French activities in northern Minnesota are concerned, the two pivotal events of the 17th century were the destruction of Huronia by the Iroquois and the establishment of the Crown Colony of New France. An enmity of unknown origin led to a succession of wars between the various Algonquin tribes and the Five Nations of the Iroquois, with the French allied with the Hurons. These wars culminated in the near total destruction of the Huron nation in the 1640s and 1650s and left the Iroquois in control of the southeastern Great Lakes. The destruction of Huronia scattered remnants of the Algonquin tribes to the west, and this diaspora

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

was coincident with the French entry into the western Great Lakes.

The first chapter in the history of the French reconnaissance of northern Minnesota dates from between 1654 and 1660, when a couple of enterprising *coureurs de bois* named Médard Chouart, *dit* Groseilliers, and Pierre d'Esprit Radisson, made two voyages to the nations of the *Saulteurs* and the *Nadouesseau*, i.e., the Ojibwe and the Dakota. The actual routes of the Radisson and Groseilliers expeditions are still the subject of some controversy but it is unlikely that they used the Height of Land Portage route. Radisson and Groseilliers went on to help found the Hudson's Bay Company, the London-based conglomerate of merchant adventurers which would later play an important role in the development of the northern Minnesota fur trade.

The next Frenchman to probe the upper country was Daniel Greysolon Du Luth, who in 1678 carried out an expedition of trade and exploration west and south of Lake Superior, eventually planting the royal standard at the Mdewakanton Dakota village complex of *Izatys* on the shore of Lake Mille Lacs. Establishing fortified trading posts at Kaministiquia on Thunder Bay of Lake Superior and on the upper St. Croix River, Du Luth continued to operate throughout the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi until ca. 1683, acquiring a vast knowledge of the region's geography.

The colonial authorities in New France were quick to realize the economic potential of the country west of Lake Superior. The Company of New France had its charter revoked in 1663 and was replaced by the Crown Colony of New France. As a result, the settlements along the St. Lawrence were expanded and an agricultural base was established under the seigneurial system. Furthermore, colonial authorities were encouraged to dispatch exploring parties to contact distant Indian nations and to establish missions. Pierre Charles Le Sueur, commandant of the trading post at Chequamegon Bay on Lake Superior, in which capacity he traveled extensively throughout the Ojibwe and Dakota tribal territories in the 1680s-1690s, may have been the first European to traverse the Height of Land Portage. Another *coureur de bois*, Jacques de Noyon, carried out a reconnaissance of the Rainy Lake district and discovered the Lake of the Woods in 1688. However, there was little official enthusiasm for permanent colonial outposts in the western Great Lakes and all of the interior posts were abandoned under a royal decree issued in 1696. Nevertheless, some *coureurs de bois* did not comply and continued to use the old traders' rendezvous at Green Bay and Mackinac. The extent of their operations in Minnesota is unknown.

French colonial fortunes improved after the War of the Spanish Succession and the suppression of the Fox Indians. The post at the Straits of Mackinac was

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

regarrisoned in 1715 and traders swarmed west. Two years after the reopening of the western fur trade, Du Luth's old fort on the Kaministiquia River was reoccupied by Zacharie Robutel de la Noue. The intensification of French activities in the upper Mississippi Valley and western Great Lakes after the Treaty of Utrecht brought French traders to the Upper St. Louis River-Vermilion Lake region in significant numbers. Among these were Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de la Verendrye, and his sons. Although traditional histories still insist that La Verendrye's goal was an inland passage to the *mer Vermeille* or Western Sea, the lodestone which attracted the French to northern Minnesota was the beaver. After serving briefly as commandant of the *poste du nord* (at Lake Nipigon, northwest of Lake Superior), in 1731 La Verendrye set out on an officially sanctioned reconnaissance of the Grand Portage route from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake. While wintering on the Kaministiquia River, La Verendrye dispatched an exploring party under his nephew, Christophe Dufrost de la Jemeraye, across the border lakes to Rainy Lake, where he built Fort St. Pierre. The following year, La Verendrye voyaged west to the Lake of the Woods, which he believed to be an arm of the Western Sea, and he built Fort St. Charles on the small headland known today as the Northwest Angle. La Verendrye's associates established a post on Red River in 1734, which they named Fort Maurepas, and in 1738 discovered Portage La Prairie between the Assiniboine River and Lake Manitoba. In 1742-1743, La Verendrye's sons pushed farther west onto the northern Great Plains.

Some of the geographical lore collected by Du Luth, La Verendrye, and others was transmitted to the cartographers in Paris, who produced several remarkable maps of the "upper country" based on written reports and on interviews with returning traders.

The French and Indian War drove the French out of the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi and inaugurated the British regime in Minnesota. There had been incursions into the interior of northern Minnesota by British traders before the dissolution of French hegemony in the upper country. By 1760, three years before France formally surrendered North American possessions to Great Britain, Anglo Canadian traders had established a permanent base at the eastern terminus of the Grand Portage of the Pigeon River, from which they fanned out across the country west and south of Lake Superior. Under the control of the Northwest Company, formed at Montreal in 1779, Grand Portage quickly evolved into an international fur trade entrepot serving a vast hinterland that by 1800 extended all the way to the Yellowstone country.

British fur traders and their French Canadian associates had eagerly exploited the ancient canoe route between the St. Louis River and Vermilion Lake, and the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

Northwest Company established permanent trading stations at Arrowhead Point on Vermilion Lake and on the Vermilion River.<sup>10</sup>

The closing years of the British regime in northern Minnesota were characterized by a shift in fur trade route geography which soon relegated the Height of Land Portage to secondary importance. By the 1790s the focus of fur trading was on the Mississippi headwaters region and the Canadian prairies, and the St. Louis River-Sandy Lake-Mississippi River canoe route (via the Grand Portage-Knife Portage of the St. Louis and the Savanna Portage) emerged as the most heavily used voyageur highway between Lake Superior and the interior. In 1798, Roderick Mackenzie rediscovered the old Kaministiquia River route from Thunder Bay to Lake of the Woods, which replaced the Pigeon River route from Grand Portage, then a bone of contention between the American and British governments.

In 1794, the United States dispatched John Jay to London to negotiate for the evacuation of British fur trade posts located on territories claimed by the United States. Jay's Treaty obtained the British government's promise to pull back from its border posts by 1796. After 1796, American fur trade interests began to make a strong bid for the northern Minnesota trade. Although British influence among the Native American Indians remained strong, after the War of 1812 there was a great influx of Yankees into the region. Congressional action in 1816 paved the way for the Americanization of the Minnesota fur trade by forbidding foreigners to trade with American Indians on United States soil. The merger of the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 consolidated Canadian fur trade interests. Geopolitical factors also affected the Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods trading axis, which became enmeshed in the rivalry between the United States and Great Britain after 1783. The St. Louis River-Vermilion Lake route continued to be used by British traders after 1783, indeed, until after the War of 1812, when effective sovereignty of the northwest Lake Superior borderlands finally passed to the United States. Bowing to American pressure, between ca. 1801 and 1804 the North West Company abandoned Grand Portage and moved its base of western operations to Fort William on Thunder Bay.

Under the American regime, the St. Louis River-Vermilion River route was traveled by traders engaged by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, founded in 1822, which maintained a substantial base of operations at Fond du Lac until the 1840s. There were also permanent American Fur Company establishments at Vermilion Lake and at Crane Lake on the Vermilion River which remained active until

<sup>10</sup> Grace Lee Nute, "Posts in the Minnesota Fur-trading Area, 1660-1850," Minnesota History 11 (1930): 359; Owen, Report, p. 314.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 6 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesotathe 1840s.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout its history, the Height of Land Portage was a critical node in the route geography of the fur trade because it afforded canoe travelers the most easily navigable route between the ancient fur trade center at Fond du Lac and the fortified trading stations at Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. It was preferred over other routes because it was interrupted by relatively few portages. The route had its lower or eastern terminus at the mouth of the St. Louis River, the Fond du Lac or head of Lake Superior; extended up the St. Louis to the Embarrass River; from Sabin Lake of the Embarrass via the portage trail across the continental divide into the Pike River; down the Pike into Lake Vermilion; thence by the Vermilion River into Rainy Lake; reaching its northern terminus at Fort St. Charles (the Rat Portage) on the Lake of the Woods. The St. Louis River, named by La Verendrye for France's canonized crusader King Louis IX (1215-1270) (and not Louis XIV (1643-1715) as is sometimes stated), was first shown unnamed on the Baude map (1673) attributed to Louis Jolliet. It is more accurately represented on maps by Franquelin (1688), La Jemeraye (1741-1742), Bauche (1754), and Bellin (1755) under the name of the Riviere du Fond du Lac.<sup>12</sup> The Embarrass River (the French name of which is an allusion to the driftwood which hindered canoe travel) appears on D'Anville's map (1746) as the headwaters lakes of the St. Louis River. It also was drawn as an unnamed upper reach of the St. Louis River on Dr. John Mitchell's famous "Map of the British and French Dominions in North America" (1755). The "Riviere aux Embaras" is accurately depicted on Samuel Thompson's map (1826) and Sabin Lake appears as the "Second Embarrass R." on Nicollet's chart of the Mississippi basin (1843), which also describes the portage route

<sup>11</sup>Nute, "Posts," pp. 359-360; Timothy Fiske, "Historic Sites Archaeological Survey, 1966," *Minnesota Archaeologist* 28 (1966):180-181. The Vermilion Lake trading posts are shown on Hill's map; see Fig. 22. The John A. Bardon Papers at MHS contain the accounts of Crittenden & Lynde, a small trading company active in the Vermilion Lake area in the 1840s.

<sup>12</sup>Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance* (St. Paul, 1969), p. 476; Louis Jolliet, "Nouvelle Decouverte de Plusieurs nations dans la Nouvelle France" (manuscript map, 1673), John Carter Brown Library, Yale University; Jean-Baptiste Louis Franquelin, "Carte de l'Amerique Septentrionale," (manuscript map, 1688), Archives Nationales, Paris; M. La Jemeraye, "Carte d'une partie de lac Superieur avec decouverte de la Riviere depuis le grand portage" (manuscript map, 1741-1742), Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa; Philippe Bauche, "Carte physique des terrains les plus eleves de la Partie Occidentale du Canada" (manuscript map, 1754), copy in the National Archives, Washington; and Nicolas Bellin, "Carte de l'Amerique Septentrionale" (printed map, 1755), copy in the Library of Congress, Washington.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

across the "Missabay Heights."<sup>13</sup> Vermilion Lake, and the route to Rainy Lake, or *Lac la Pluie* as it was then known, are depicted on Jeffrey's map (1762).<sup>14</sup> The Pike River, also known as the South or Lesser Vermilion River, is named for the first time on Hills' map of Vermilion Lake (1866) with the notation that it was so called by the Native American Indians.<sup>15</sup>

The Height of Land Portage also warrants a footnote in the diplomatic history of the United States-Canada international boundary. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 established the international boundary between British Canada and the United States as the route of water communication between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods, the so-called "chain of waters." The boundary question lay in abeyance until after the War of 1812, when the Treaty of Ghent resulted in the creation of a joint boundary commission to determine the location of the boundary line and mark it on the ground. The boundary question was complicated by both governments' imperfect knowledge of northern Minnesota geography, and during the early decades of the nineteenth century a small army of diplomats, historians, geographers, cartographers, and woodsmen assembled a mass of data in an attempt to negotiate a compromise boundary line. The official British position was that the ancient traders' route following the St. Louis River across the Height of Land Portage to Vermilion Lake and thence to Rainy Lake and River best answered the description of the international boundary contained in the 1783 treaty; and to this end, they dispatched a survey party under the celebrated astronomer David Thompson and his son, Samuel, to map the route in 1822-1824. The Americans argued that the route from the Kaministiquia River on the northwest shore of Lake Superior (the present site of Fort William), following the Pigeon River to its source and crossing the continental divide to Rainy Lake, was the proper border. For several years, survey teams from both nations crisscrossed the border lakes between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. In 1827, the negotiators consented to a compromise boundary line, roughly corresponding to the modern border, essentially splitting the difference between the competing claims. The official

---

<sup>13</sup> Upham, Minnesota Geographic Names, p. 482; Jean Baptiste D'Anville, "Amerique Septentrionale" (printed map, 1746), copy in the Library of Congress, Washington; John Mitchell, "Map of the British and French Dominions in North America" (manuscript map, 1755), Library of Congress, Washington; David Thompson, "Map of North-West Territory of the Province of Canada," in David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812, edited by J. B. Tyrell (Toronto, 1916); Joseph N. Nicollet, The Hydrographical Basin of the Mississippi River (Washington, 1843).

<sup>14</sup> Upham, Minnesota Geographic Names, p. 491; Thomas Jeffreys, A Map of Canada and the North Part of Louisiana (London, 1762).

<sup>15</sup> Upham, Minnesota Geographic Names, pp. 494-495; Hill, Map of Vermilion Lake.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 8 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

boundary was not set until the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842.<sup>16</sup>

After the close of the fur trade era, the Height of Land Portage fell into gradual disuse. Construction of the Vermilion Trail, a project associated with the Vermilion gold rush of 1865-1866, provided a wagon road alternative to the old canoe and portage route.<sup>17</sup> However, several geological exploring parties employed canoes and the Height of Land Portage is documented in memoirs and journals of state geologist and pioneer antiquarian Newton Horace Winchell, Hamilton College mineralogist Albert Huntington Chester, a key figure in the exploration of the Vermilion iron range, and George R. Stuntz of Duluth, all of whom were in the area between the 1860s and 1880s.<sup>18</sup> Use of the portage by Ojibwe hunters and fishers from the Vermilion Lake reservation, and probably some Euro-American traders and fur trappers, persisted well into the 20th century. Although few tourists have portaged the continental divide from the Embarrass to the Pike River, recreational use of the upper and lower segments of the portage route dates from the turn of the century and coincided with the development of the northern Minnesota resort industry.

<sup>16</sup> Moore, History and Digest of the International Arbitrations, pp. 171-195. See also: William E. Lass, Minnesota's Boundary with Canada: Its Evolution Since 1783 (St. Paul, 1980), pp. 3-71; William E. Culin, "Northern Minnesota Boundary Surveys in 1822 to 1826, under the Treaty of Ghent," MHS Collections 15 (1915): 379-392; Ulysses Sherman Grant, "The International Boundary Between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods," MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 1-10; and Alexander N. Winchell, "Minnesota's Northern Boundary," MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 185-212.

<sup>17</sup> The Vermilion Trail was mapped by the General Land Office surveyors and appears on Trygg's Composite Maps, sheet 18. For the gold rush, see David A. Walker, "Lake Vermilion Gold Rush," Minnesota History 44 (1974): 42-54.

<sup>18</sup> Newton Horace Winchell, "The Discovery and Development of the Iron Ores of Minnesota," MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 24-40.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Arrowsmith, A. "A Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries in the Interior Parts of North America." 1814. Copy in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
- Bardon, John A (comp.). Papers, 1845-1880. Unpublished correspondence and business records ["Crittenden & Lynde" accounts]. MHS, St. Paul.
- Bauche, Philippe. "Carte Physique des Terres les plus eleves de la Partie Occidentale du Canada." Manuscript map, 1754. Copy in the National Archives, Washington.
- Bellin, Nicolas. "Carte de l'Amerique Septentrionale." Printed map, no. 13 in Atlas de Abbe Clouet de l'Academie Royale de Rouen, 1755. Copy in Library of Congress, Washington.
- Birk, Douglas A. Unpublished notes from field trip, 8-9 November 1976. On file, State Historic Preservation Office, St. Paul.
- Bureau of Land Management. Records of the Public Land Surveys of the United States: Minnesota Field Notes and Plats. University of Minnesota microfilm (original MSS in the National Archives, Washington).
- Clements, J. Morgan. The Vermilion Iron-Bearing District of Minnesota. U. S. Geological Survey Monographs No. 45. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903. Also printed as House Document 433, 57 Cong., 2 sess., serial 4515.
- Culkin, William E. "Northern Minnesota Boundary Surveys in 1822 to 1826, under the Treaty of Ghent." MHS Collections 15 (1915):379-392.
- D'Anville, Jean Baptiste. "Amerique Septentrionale." Printed map, no. 10 in Atlas General. Paris, 1746. Copy in Library of Congress, Washington.
- Fiske, Timothy. "Historic Sites Archaeological Survey, 1966." Minnesota Archaeologist 28 (1966): 145-192.
- Franquelin, Jean-Baptiste Louis. "Carte de l'Amerique Septentrionale." Manuscript map, 1688. Archive du Depot de la Marine, Paris. Copy in the Library of Congress, Washington.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

Gibbon, Guy E., and Scott Jacobson. "Portage Survey and Excavation: An Example from Minnesota." Unpublished manuscript, 1991. Copy in possession of the authors.

\_\_\_\_\_, and Eugene Willms. "The Savanna Portage: An Archaeological Study." Unpublished manuscript submitted to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, St. Paul, 1985.

Grant, Ulysses Sherman. "The International Boundary Between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods." MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 1-10.

Hill, Alfred J. Map of Vermilion Lake, St. Louis Co., Minnesota. [St. Paul?]: n.p., 1866.

Jeffreys, Thomas. A Map of Canada and the North Part of Louisiana. London: Thomas Jeffreys, 1762.

Jolliet, Louis. "Nouvelle Decouverte de Plusieurs Nations dans la Nouvelle France." [Also known as the "Baude Map."] Manuscript map, 1673. Copy in John Carter Brown Library, Yale University, New Haven.

La Jemereye, M. "Carte d'une partie du lac Superieur avec decouverte de la Riviere depuis le grand portage a jusqu'a la Barriere B." Manuscript map, 1741-1742. Copy in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

Lass, William E. Minnesota's Boundary with Canada: Its Evolution since 1783. St. Paul: MHS, 1980.

Moore, John Bassett. History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to Which the United States has been a Party. 6 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898. Also printed as House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document 212, 53 Cong., 2 sess., serial 3267.

Nicollet, Joseph N. The Hydrographical Basin of the Mississippi River. [Map] Washington: U. S. Senate, 1843.

Nute, Grace Lee. "Posts in the Minnesota Fur-trading Area, 1660-1855." Minnesota History 11 (1930): 353-385.

Owen, David Dale. Report of a Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota: and Incidentally of a Portion of Nebraska Territory. Made under Instructions from the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 3 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

United States Treasury Department. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852.

Stuntz, George R. "Evidences of Early Man in Northeastern Minnesota." Minnesota Academy of Natural Science Bulletin 3 (1883): 76-88.

Thompson, David. "Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada." Printed in J. B. Tyrell, David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812 Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916.

Trygg, J. William. Composite Maps of United States Land Surveyors Original Plats and Field Notes. Ely: privately printed, 1964.

Upham, Warren. Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance. Originally published as MHS Collections Vol. 17, 1920. St. Paul: MHS, 1969.

Walker, David A. "Lake Vermilion Gold Rush." Minnesota History 44 (1974): 42-54.

Winchell, Alexander N. "Minnesota's Northern Boundary." MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 185-212.

Winchell, Newton Horace. "The Discovery and Development of the Iron Ores of Minnesota." MHS Collections 8 (1895-1898): 24-40.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

### 10. Geographical Data

#### Verbal Boundary Description:

The property is a 300 foot wide corridor centered on the historic trail as mapped by Thompson, Hill, and others. The Embarrass River Segment of the Height of Land Portage has its southern terminus on the north bank of the Embarrass River in the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 18, Township 59 North, Range 15 West, from which point the corridor runs in a northerly direction, reaching the south bank of the Embarrass River in the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 7, Township 59 North, Range 15 West. Approximately 400 feet north of the southern terminus of the Embarrass River Segment, an approximately 900 foot long offshoot of the corridor runs in a northwesterly direction and terminates at the south bank of the Embarrass River in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 18. Another approximately 300 foot long offshoot of the Embarrass River Segment occurs approximately 1700 feet south of the northern terminus; this offshoot runs in a southwesterly direction and terminates at the south bank of the Embarrass River in Section 7.

The Height of Land Portage has its southern terminus on the north bank of the Embarrass River a short distance upstream from the terminus of the Embarrass River Segment. The trail corridor crosses the northeast quarter of Section 7 and the center of Section 6, Township 59 North, Range 15 West, then passes through the southwest quarter of Section 31, Township 60 North, Range 15 West, the north half of the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter, and the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter, and the west half of the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 36, Township 60 North, Range 16 West, striking the Pike River in the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 25, Township 60 North, Range 15 West.

#### Boundary Justification:

The 300-foot corridor is centered on the portage trail route mapped by Thompson, Hill, and others and includes all of the visible portage trail features recorded by Birk in 1976 and Vogel and Stanley in 1991. The rationale for the 300-foot width is that while historic portages were very narrow, they tended to shift laterally over time. The portage boundaries also attempt to take into account the potential for hitherto unrecorded archaeological and/or landscape features which may have been located off-trail.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

---

Height of Land Portage St. Louis County, MINNESOTA  
(Portage Trails in Minnesota MPS)  
92000842

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION APPROVED

Edson H. Beall 3/25/94  
Entered in the  
National Register

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAR 7 1994

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

Page 1

Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

### 10. Geographical Data

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The property is a 300-foot wide corridor centered on the historic trail as mapped by Thompson, Hill, and others. The Embarrass River Segment of the Height of Land Portage has its southern terminus on the north bank of the Embarrass River in the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 18, Township 59 North, Range 15 West (UTM 15, E552660, N5271680), from which point the corridor runs in a northerly direction, reaching the south bank of the Embarrass River in the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 7, Township 59 North, Range 15 West (UTM 15, E553120, N5272820). Approximately 400 feet north of the southern terminus of the Embarrass River Segment, an approximately 900 foot long offshoot of the corridor runs in a northwesterly direction and terminates at the south bank of the Embarrass River in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 18 (UTM 15, E552500, N5272000). Another approximately 300 foot long offshoot of the Embarrass River Segment occurs approximately 1700 feet south of the northern terminus; this offshoot runs in a southwesterly direction and terminates at the south bank of the Embarrass River in Section 7 (UTM 15, E552660, N5272445).

The middle portion of Height of Land Portage has its southern terminus on the north bank of the Embarrass River a short distance upstream from the terminus of the Embarrass River Segment (UTM 15, E553900, N5273280). The trail crosses the northeast quarter of Section 7 and the center of Section 6, Township 59 North, Range 15 West, then passes through the southwest quarter of Section 31, Township 60 North, Range 15 West, the north half of the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter, and the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter, and the west half of the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 36, Township 60 North, Range 16 West, striking the Pike River in the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 25, Township 60 North, Range 15 West (UTM 15, E551040, N5277720).

#### Boundary Justification

The 300-foot corridor is centered on the portage trail route mapped by Thompson, Hill, and others and includes all of the visible portage trail features recorded by Birk in 1976 and Vogel and Stanley in 1991. The rationale for the 300-foot width is that while historic portages were very narrow, they tended to shift laterally over time. The portage boundaries also attempt to take into account the potential for hitherto unrecorded archaeological landscape features which may have been located off-trail.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAR 7 1994

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 2 Height of Land Portage  
Vicinity of Biwabik, St. Louis County, Minnesota

---

## Additional UTM References

E Zone 15 Easting 552660 Northing 5272445

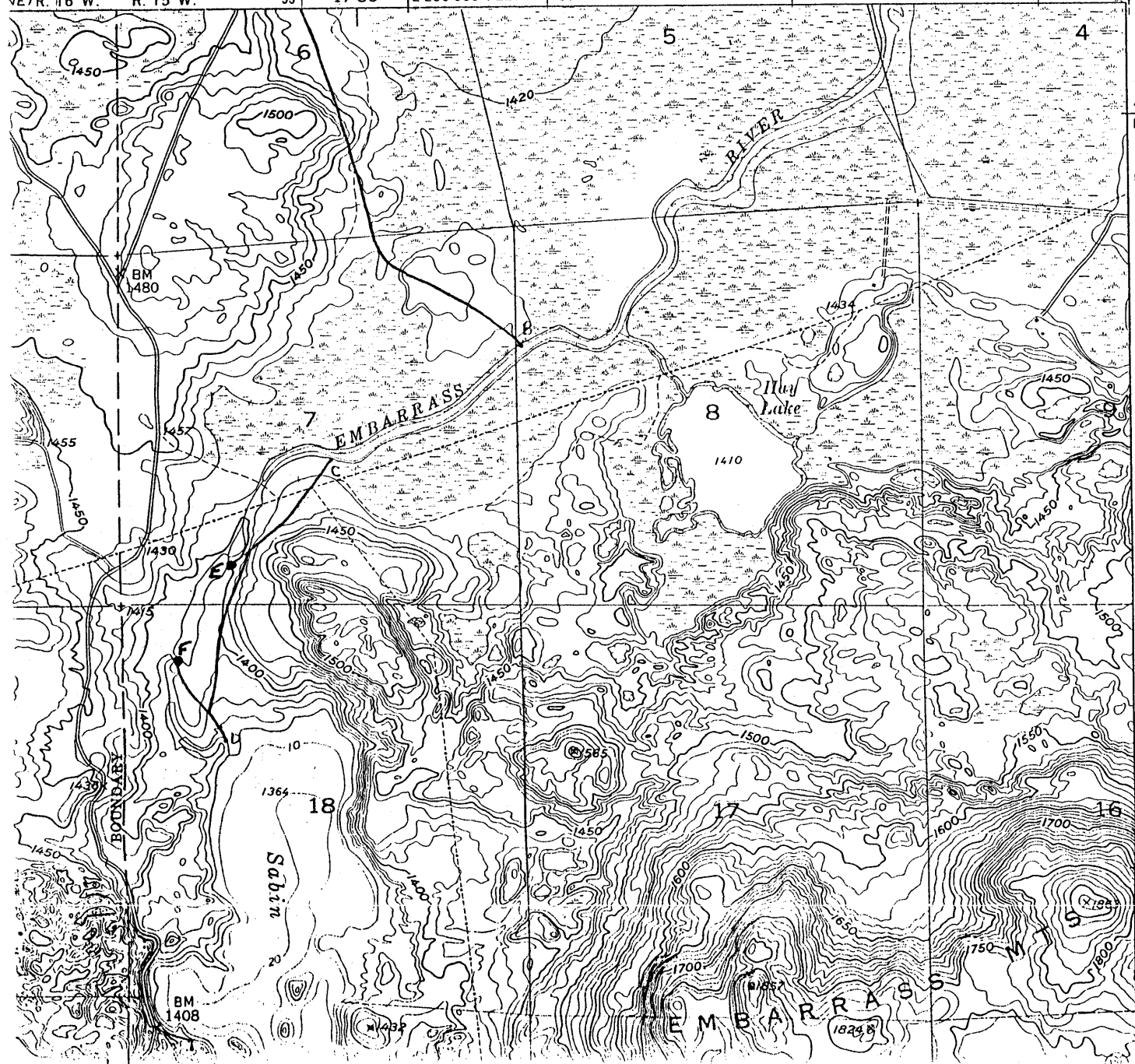
F Zone 15 Easting 552500 Northing 5272000

MINNESOTA  
REHABILITATION COMMISSION

BIWABIK QUADRANGLE  
MINNESOTA-ST. LOUIS CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

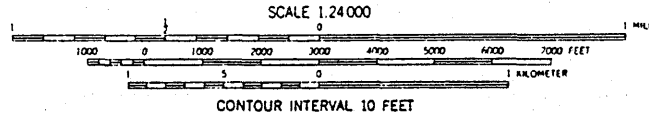
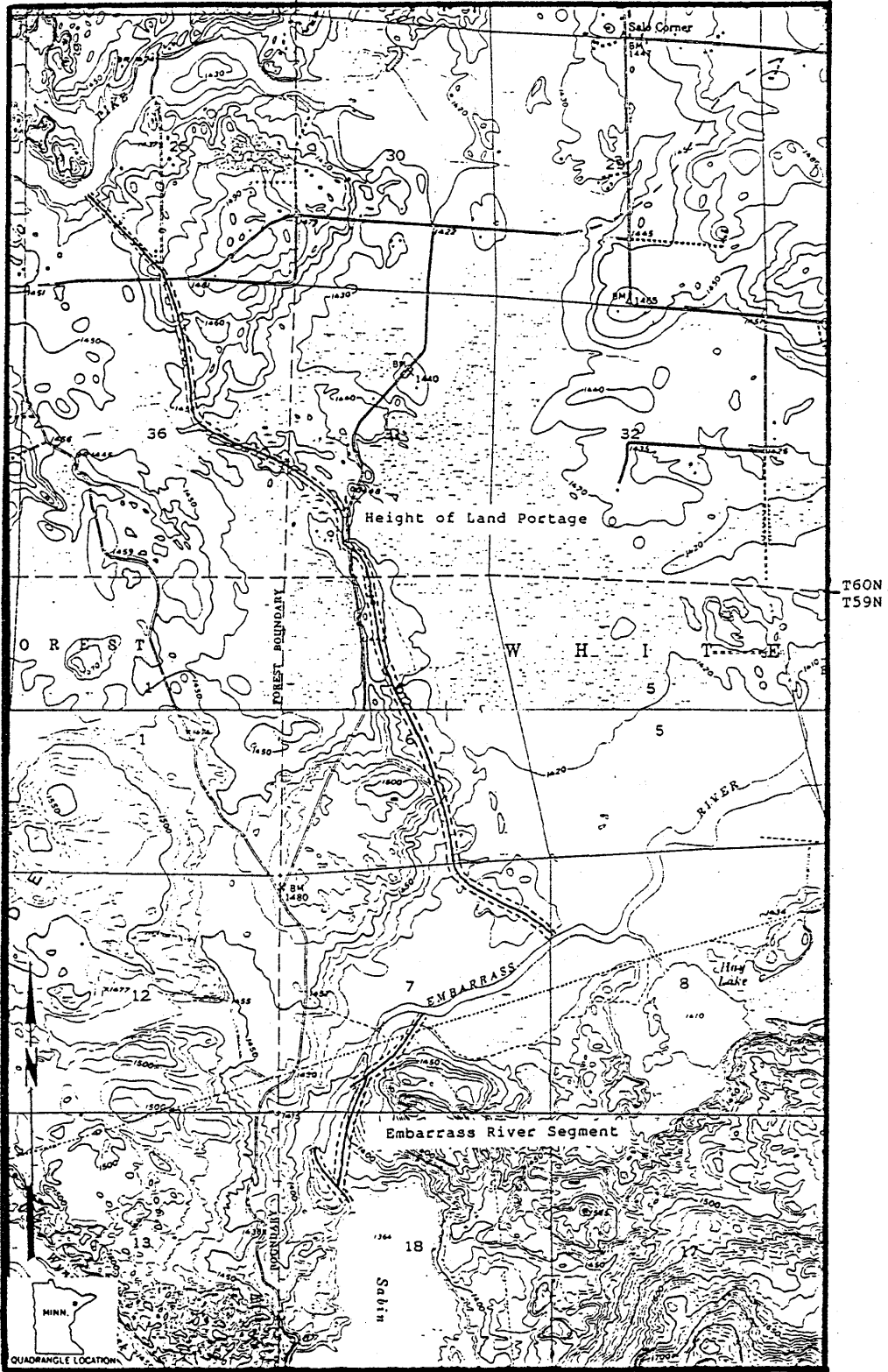
7579 11 NW  
(EMBARRASS)

VE/R. 16 W. R. 15 W. 553 17'30" 2 200 000 FEET 554 555 556 92°15' 47°37'30"

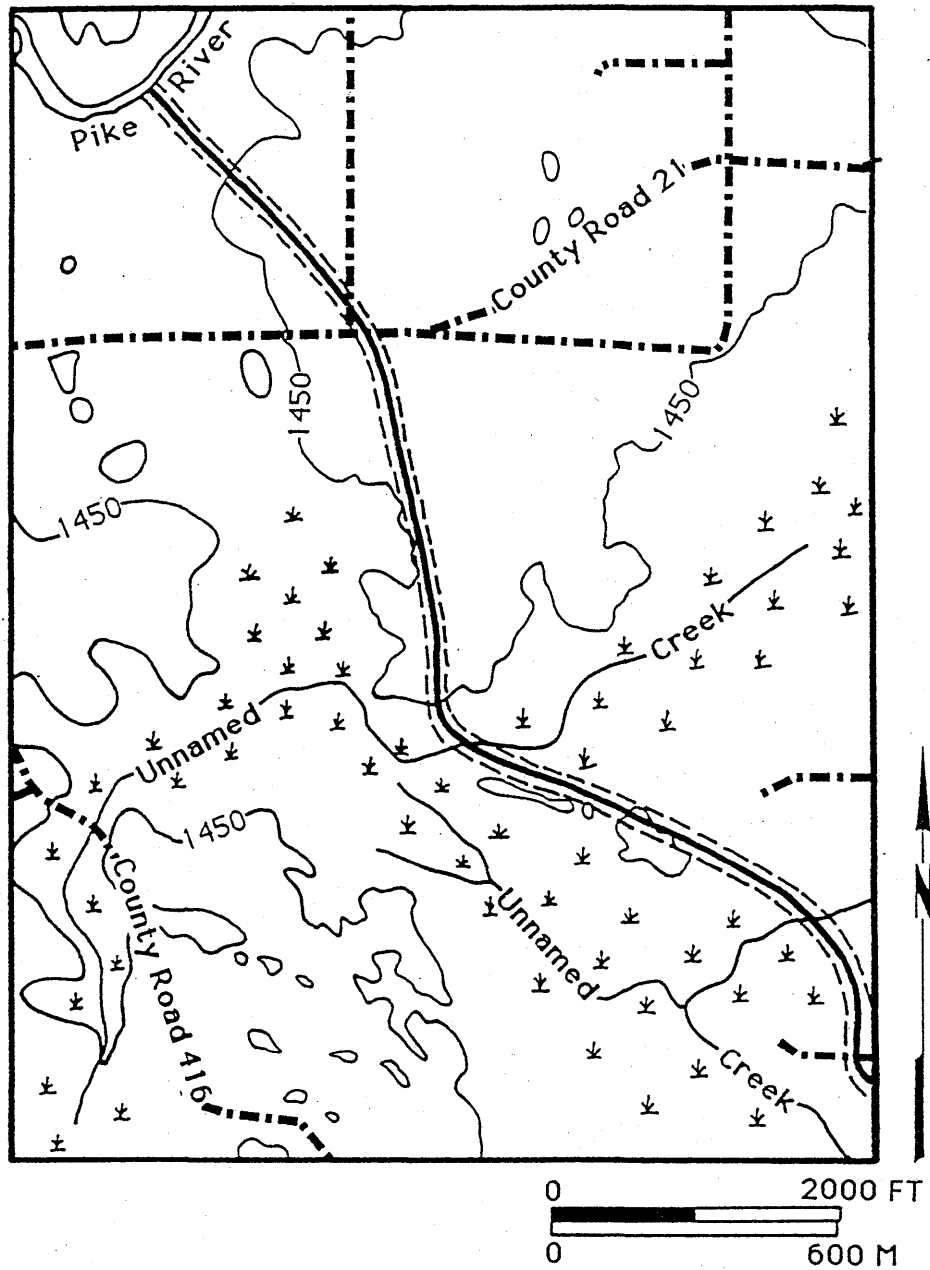


410 000  
FEET  
HEIGHT OF LAND  
PORTAGE  
5274  
ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MN  
B. ZONE 15  
EASTING 553900  
NORTHING 5273280  
5273  
C. ZONE 15  
EASTING 553120  
NORTHING 5272820  
D. ZONE 15  
EASTING 552660  
NORTHING 5271680  
5272  
E. Zone 15  
EASTING 552660  
NORTHING 5272445  
5271  
F. Zone 15  
EASTING 552500  
NORTHING 5272000




WAHLSTON 12 MI  
TOWER 17 MI.



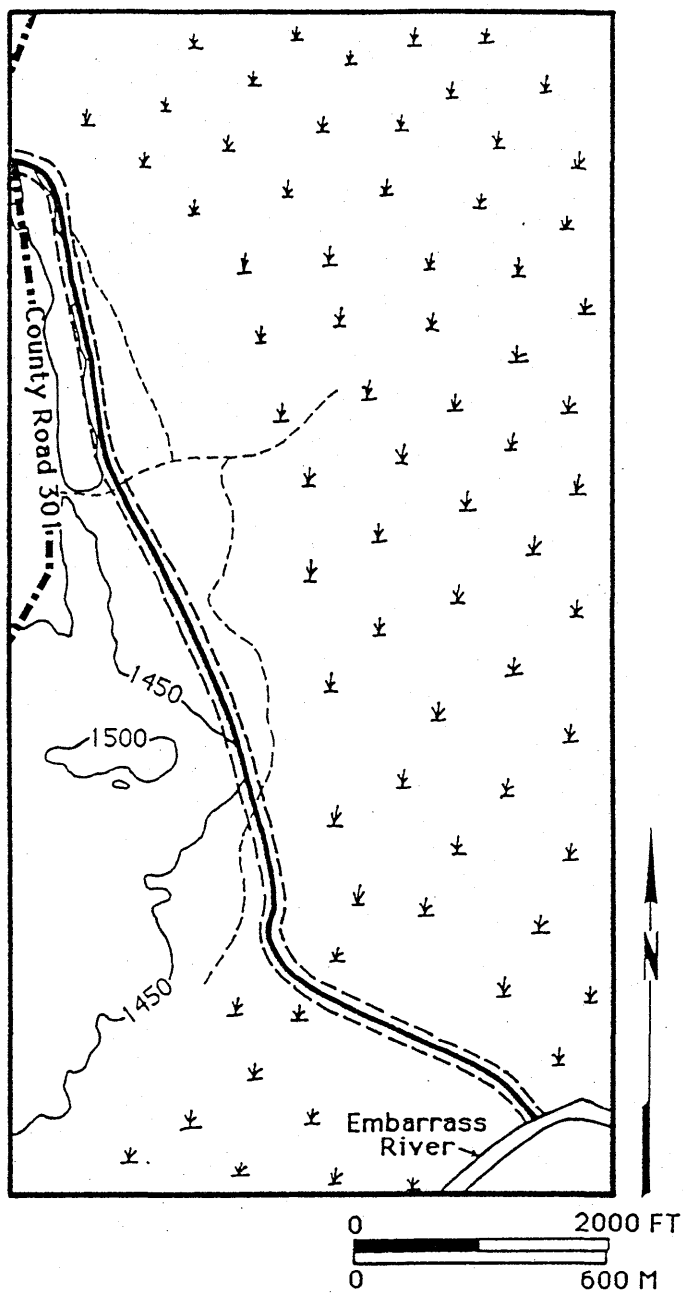
Topographic Map of the Height of Land Portage,  
 St. Louis County, Minnesota, USGS 7.5' Quad Maps:  
 Biwabik NE, Minnesota, 1950; Biwabik, Minnesota, 1950



LEGEND

-  Swamp
-  Roads
-  Portage

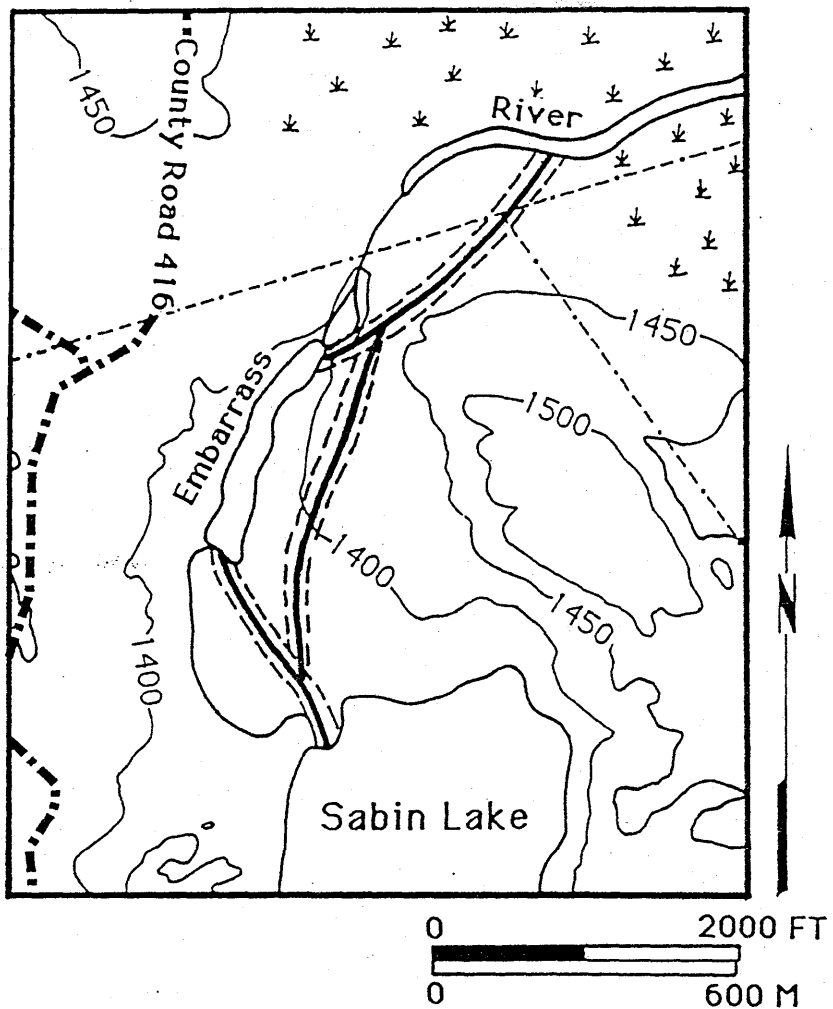
Sketch Map of the Height of Land Portage North Segment



LEGEND

- x Swamp
- Roads
- === Portage
- - - Paths

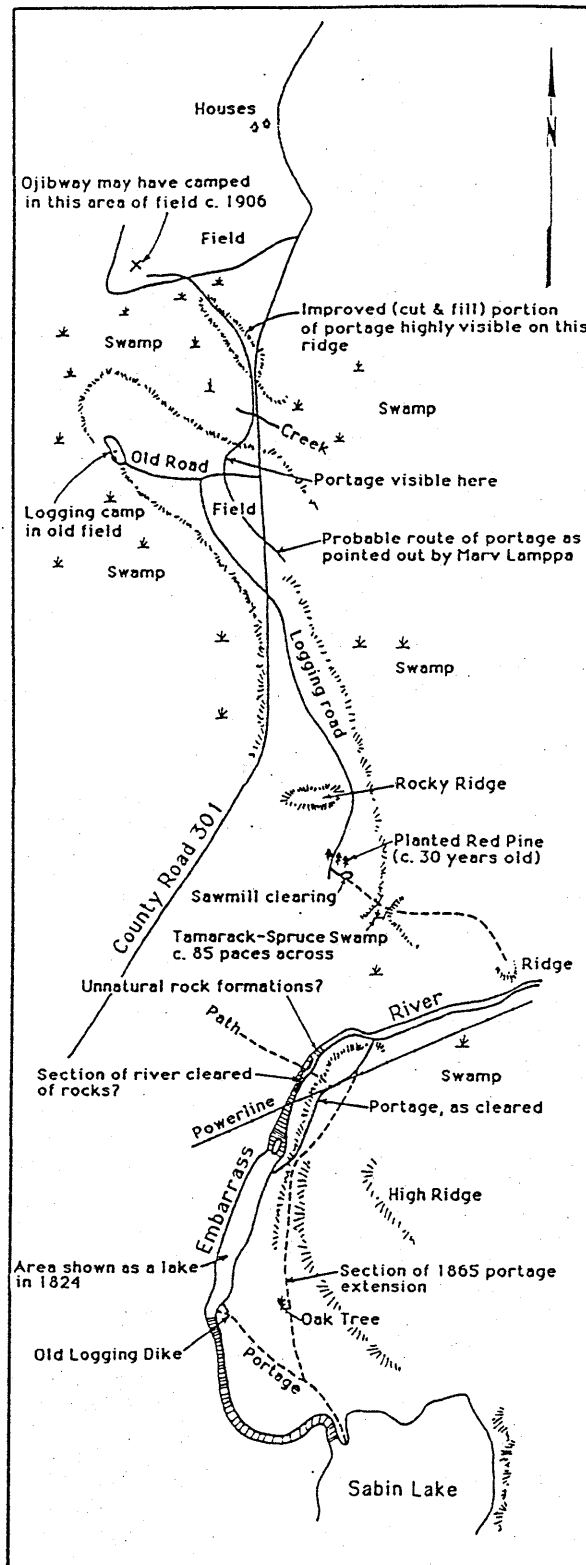
Sketch Map of the Height of Land Portage South Segment



LEGEND

- ↓ Swamp
- Roads
- === Portage
- - - Powerlines

Sketch Map of the Embarrass River Segment



Birk's Survey of the Height of Land Portage