

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
**Minnesota**

COUNTY:  
**Aitkin**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	<b>APR 2 8 1973</b>

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Savanna Portage**

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Savanna Portage State Park**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**near McGregor**

STATE <b>Minnesota</b>	CODE <b>23</b>	COUNTY: <b>Aitkin</b>	CODE <b>001</b>
---------------------------	-------------------	--------------------------	--------------------

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/>	Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Acquisition:	Occupied <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes: Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/>	Private <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/>	Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/>
Object <input type="checkbox"/>	Both <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/>	Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/>	Government <input type="checkbox"/>	Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>	Comments <input type="checkbox"/>
Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial <input type="checkbox"/>	Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	
Educational <input type="checkbox"/>	Military <input type="checkbox"/>	Religious <input type="checkbox"/>		
Entertainment <input type="checkbox"/>	Museum <input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific <input type="checkbox"/>		

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNERS NAME:  
**State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources**

STREET AND NUMBER:

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

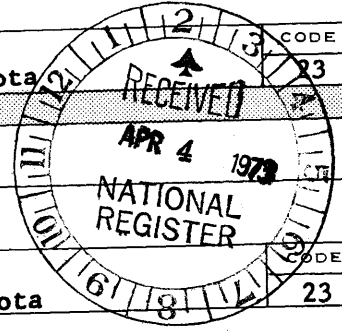
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Aitkin County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Aitkin**

STATE:  
**Minnesota**

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **3200 acres**



**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Minnesota State Register**

DATE OF SURVEY:  
Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Minnesota Historical Society**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**690 Cedar Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**St. Paul**

STATE:  
**Minnesota**

STATE: **Minnesota**

COUNTY: **Aitkin**

ENTRY NUMBER: **23**

DATE: **APR 2 8 1973**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

**7. DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins <input type="checkbox"/>	Unexposed <input type="checkbox"/>
INTEGRITY	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	Altered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unaltered <input type="checkbox"/>	Moved <input type="checkbox"/>	Original Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Savanna Portage passes through about five sections of land within the Savanna Portage State Park in northeastern Minnesota. This six mile portage was generally considered the "worst carrying place in the northwest."

The best early description of the portage comes to us from the account of Dr. Alexander Wolcott, a surgeon who traveled the portage with Lewis Cass and his party in 1820. Wolcott says, "The length of the portage is six miles, and is passed at thirteen pauses. 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."

Today the Savanna Portage is marked by guide posts and flags along its full length. Four miles eastward from the beginning of the trail at the western end of the park, the portage follows as far as possible the ridges of land, affording striking vistas of deep ravines and open valleys. Along this section, the trail passes through wooded areas, which, because of differences in the soil, vary from stands of aspen, maple, basswood, and birch, to stretches of spruce, tamarack, and cedar. Leaving the forested hills, the trail emerges onto a more level plain of brush and tall wild grasses. For the last mile and a half, the portage follows a pole catwalk laid by park employees through the bog to the eastern end at the East Savanna River.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

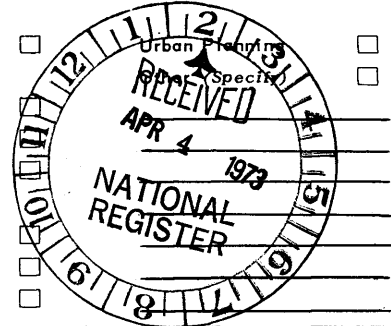
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century   
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |                                       |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/>             | Education <input type="checkbox"/>    | Political <input type="checkbox"/>           |
| Prehistoric <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Engineering <input type="checkbox"/>  | Religion/Philosophy <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Historic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>    | Industry <input type="checkbox"/>     | Science <input type="checkbox"/>             |
| Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/>            | Invention <input type="checkbox"/>    | Sculpture <input type="checkbox"/>           |
| Art <input type="checkbox"/>                    | Landscape <input type="checkbox"/>    | Social/Humanitarian <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Commerce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>    | Architecture <input type="checkbox"/> | Theater <input type="checkbox"/>             |
| Communications <input type="checkbox"/>         | Literature <input type="checkbox"/>   | Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| Conservation <input type="checkbox"/>           | Military <input type="checkbox"/>     |  |
|   | Music <input type="checkbox"/>        |  |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

During the days of the fur trade in Minnesota the Savanna Portage was one of the most important avenues of communication between the upper Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes, and has been described in the journals of traders, travelers, and missionaries who penetrated this region between 1763 and 1850. Historians believe that this portage had been used by the aboriginals for centuries before the first white man set foot upon the trail. It seems reasonable that it was by this route that Du Luth made his epochal journey to the upper Mississippi country in 1679.

Among the earliest written references to the portage routes between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake are those of Jean Baptiste Perrault. Perrault wrote his narrative about 1830, basing it upon diaries kept during the years of his active participation in the fur trade of the Northwest between 1784 and 1797. 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".

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 crossed the divide to Lake Superior. Zebulon M. Pike refers incidentally to the portage, but it was not included in his route to the sources of the Mississippi.

In 1820, Lewis Cass, then governor of Michigan Territory, led an exploring expedition from Detroit to the upper Mississippi region, traveling by canoe to the head of Lake Superior. From here his party ascended the St. Louis and east Savanna rivers, portaged across to the West Savanna, and proceeded by way of Sandy Lake and the Mississippi to Cass Lake - at that time believed to be the ultimate source of the Mississippi. Henry R. Schoolcraft, who accompanied Cass as geologist in 1820, headed a second expedition to the headwaters of the Mississippi by way of the Savanna Portage in 1832.

The portage was also used frequently by missionaries in order to reach their posts on Sandy Lake and Leech Lake. 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

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Hart, Irving H., "The Old Savanna Portage", Minnesota History, Vol. 8, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, 1927.

Holmquist, June and Jean Brookins, Minnesota's Major Historic Sites, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, 1972.

Nute, Grace Lee, "The Diary of Martin McLeod", Minnesota History Bulletin, Vol. IV, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, 1922.

Perrault, Jean Baptiste, "Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of a Merchant Voyageur", Michigan Pioneer Collections, Vol. 37, 1909-10.

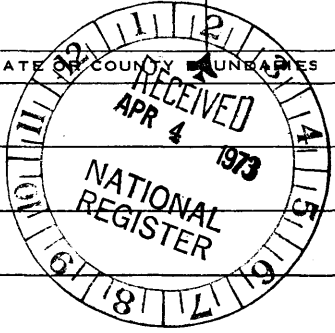
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN ONE ACRE		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	46° 51' 25"	93° 10' 38"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	46° 51' 25"	93° 04' 15"		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	46° 49' 39"	93° 10' 38"		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	46° 49' 39"	93° 04' 15"		° ' "	° ' "	

NO  
UTM  
CD

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Diana Mitchell, Survey and Planning (Approved: Charles Nelson)**

ORGANIZATION: **Minnesota Historical Society** DATE: **March 16, 1973**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Building 25, Fort Snelling**

CITY OR TOWN: **St. Paul** STATE: **Minnesota** CODE: **23**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name Russell W. Fridley

Title Director, Minnesota Historical Society

Date 3-27-73

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robert M. Utley  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 4/23/73

ATTEST:

[Signature]  
Keeper of the National Register

Date 4/16/73

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE <b>Minnesota</b>	
COUNTY <b>Aitkin</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	<b>APR 23 1973</b>

(Number all entries)

**8. Significance**

Minnesota.

Historically the water routes of Minnesota are an important part of our pioneer heritage. The portages were unavoidable links in these water routes, passed on to us by the aboriginal inhabitants of the state. We are fortunate to have this publically owned site with which to interpret this facet of early travel and communication.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Minnesota	
COUNTY Aitkin	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
APR 23 1973	

(Number all entries)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Schoolcraft, Henry R., Narrative Journal of Travels...to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820, Albany, 1821.

Tyrrell, J. B., ed., David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812, The Champlain Society, Toronto, 1916.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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

---

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

for Keeper Melvin Lynn  
1/19/89

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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

---

**Note: These changes apply to  
Savanna Portage in Aitkin County,  
Minnesota.**

**REFERENCE NUMBER:** 73000963

**STATE:** MINNESOTA

**COUNTY:** Aitkin

**RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC):**

**CITY:**

**VICINITY OF:**

**ADDRESS:** off Co. Hwy. 5 in Savanna Portage State Park

**CERTIFICATION DATE:**

**REMOVED DATE:**

**COMMENTS:**

*Nina M. Archabal*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nina M. Archabal  
State Historic Preservation Officer

JUN 17 1988

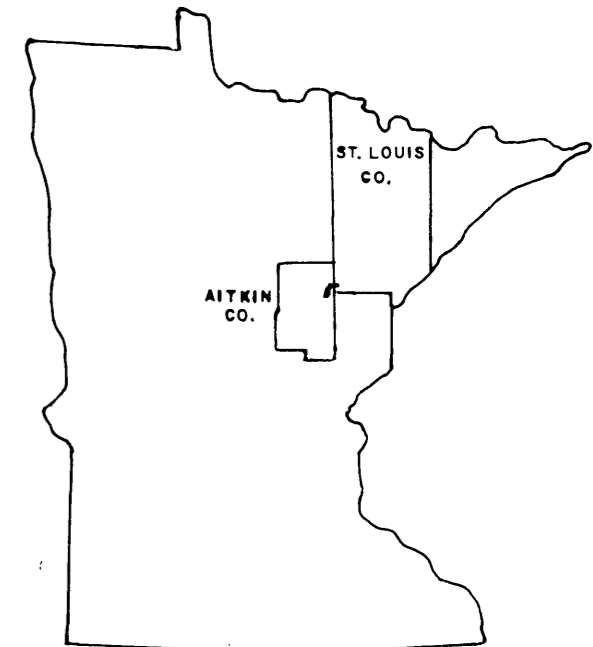
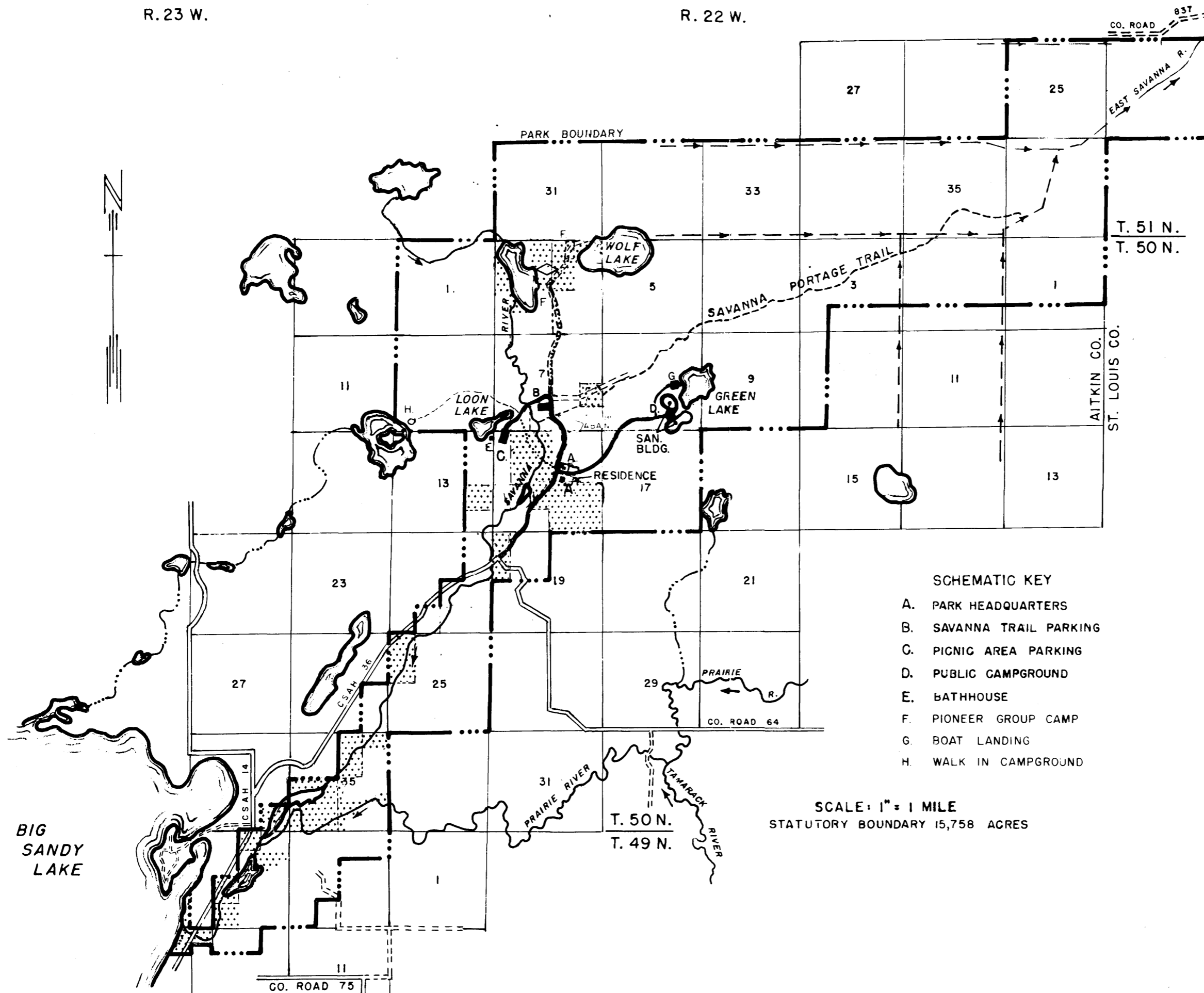
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date




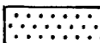

R. 23 W.

R. 22 W.

R. 21 W.



OWNERSHIP KEY

-  STATE LAND
-  PRIVATE LAND
-  LIFE

SCHEMATIC KEY

- A. PARK HEADQUARTERS
- B. SAVANNA TRAIL PARKING
- C. PICNIC AREA PARKING
- D. PUBLIC CAMPGROUND
- E. BATHHOUSE
- F. PIONEER GROUP CAMP
- G. BOAT LANDING
- H. WALK IN CAMPGROUND

SCALE: 1" = 1 MILE  
STATUTORY BOUNDARY 15,758 ACRES



MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION		
STATE PARK SITE		
SAVANNA PORTAGE STATE PARK		
AITKIN & ST. LOUIS CO. - NEAR MCGREGOR		
T. 49, 50, 51 N. R. 21, 22, 23 W. 4 TH P. M.		
DRAWN DAD 12-4-62	BUREAU OF ENGINEERING	SURVEY
CHECKED MWR 12-5-62		DATUM
REVISED LDS 9-7-71	<i>R. J. Howland</i> CHIEF ENGINEER	
OWNERSHIP REV. REQ.	SHEET	FILE
61-6	19	P.068.00.01

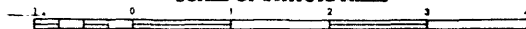
BIG SANDY LAKE

# GENERAL HIGHWAY MAP

# AITKIN COUNTY MINNESOTA

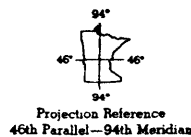
ISSUED BY THE  
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS  
IN COOPERATION WITH THE  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS  
DATA OBTAINED AND MAP PREPARED BY THE  
PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING DIVISION  
OFFICE OF  
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

SCALE OF STATUTE MILES



1969  
BASIC DATA 1965\*

Polyconic Projection  
North American Datum  
of 1927



Projection Reference  
46th Parallel—94th Meridian

## LEGEND

### ROAD AND ROADWAY FEATURES

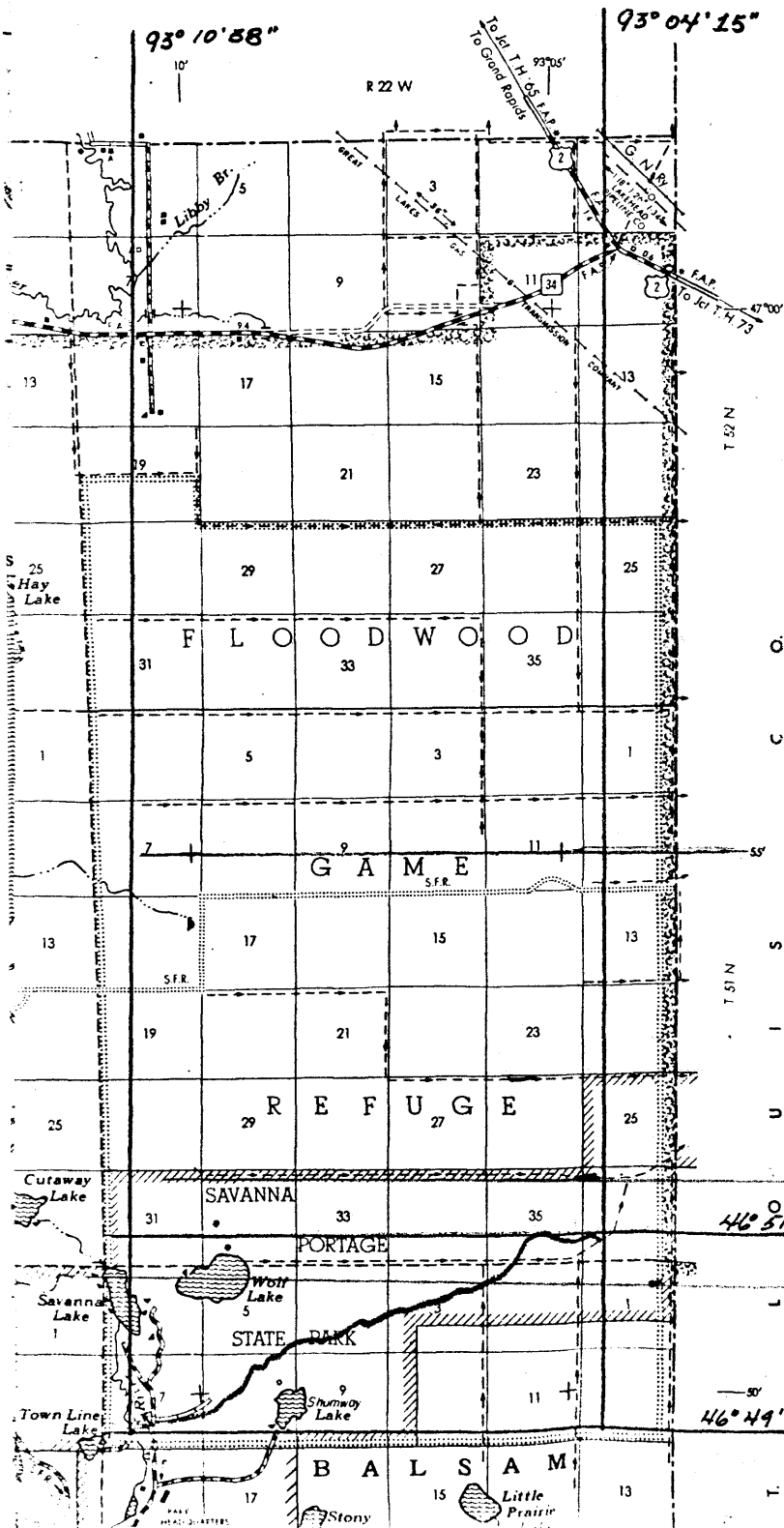
- TRAIL (Hiking).....
- PROJECTED ROAD.....
- PRIMITIVE ROAD.....
- UNIMPROVED ROAD.....
- GRADED AND DRAINED ROAD.....
- SOE SURFACE ROAD.....
- GRAVEL OR STONE ROAD.....
- BITUMINOUS ROAD.....
- PAVED ROAD.....
- DIVIDED HIGHWAYS.....
- TERMINUS OF DESIGNATED ROAD.....
- TRUNK HIGHWAY UNDER CONSTRUCTION.....
- TRUNK HIGHWAY TRAFFIC BEING ROUTED THROUGH CONSTRUCTION ZONE.....
- ROADS IN UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES.....
- EXTENSIONS OF LOCAL ROADS.....
- F.A.S. (WITHIN MUNICIPALITIES AND FRONTAGE ROADS.....
- POINTS BETWEEN WHICH DISTANCES ARE MEASURED INDICATED THUS.....
- GRADE SEPARATION HIGHWAY—HIGHWAY.....
- FULL TRAFFIC INTERCHANGE.....
- PARTIAL TRAFFIC INTERCHANGE INDICATING TRAFFIC MOVEMENT.....

### NAVIGATION

- BARGE LINES ON NATURAL STREAMS (SEASONAL).....
- SHIP LINES ON INLAND LAKES.....
- DOCK PIER OR LANDING.....
- FERRY (IF FOR FUEL FERRY.....
- WATERABLE STREAM (SEASONAL).....
- RAILROAD STATION.....
- DAM WITH BARRAGE.....
- RIGHT HOUSE.....
- CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
- PUBLIC GROUND.....
- AT GROUND, FIELDED, ETC.....
- BEACHES, SWIMMING AND BOAT LANDING.....
- LOGS.....
- PORT RANGER STATION.....
- GUARD OR RANGER STATION (NOT FULLY OCCUPIED).....
- WATERWAY.....
- PROMONT ELEVATION.....
- GOLF COURSE OR COUNTRY CLUB.....
- GUN CLUB.....
- ATHLETIC FIELD OR AMUSEMENT PARK.....
- SMALL PARK SP—STATE, CP—COUNTY, AP—MUNICIPAL, WP—WAYSIDE.....
- ACQUONEMENT (SMALL).....
- DRIVE-IN THEATRE.....
- FAIR GROUND, RACE COURSE, SPEEDWAY.....
- PUBLIC ACCESS POINT.....

### ROAD SYSTEM DESIGNATIONS

- NATIONAL INTERSTATE AND DEFENSE HIGHWAY..... 35
- UNITED STATES NUMBERED HIGHWAY..... 66
- STATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM..... 18
- COUNTY STATE AID HIGHWAY..... 9
- COUNTY ROAD..... 12
- COUNTY STATE AID HIGHWAY IN ADJOINING COUNTY..... (24)
- GREAT RIVER ROAD..... F.A.R.
- FEDERAL AID INTERSTATE SYSTEM..... F.A.I.
- FEDERAL AID PRIMARY HIGHWAY SYSTEM..... F.A.P.
- FEDERAL AID SECONDARY HIGHWAY SYSTEM..... F.A.S.
- END OF FEDERAL AID ROUTE..... F.A.S.
- NATIONAL FOREST HIGHWAY..... N.F.H.
- NATIONAL FOREST DEVELOPMENT HIGHWAY..... N.F.D.
- INDIAN SERVICE ROAD..... I.S.R.
- STATE FOREST ROAD..... S.F.R.



Form 10-301  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY MAP FORM**

*(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)*

STATE <b>Minnesota</b>	
COUNTY <b>Aitkin</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	<b>APR 23 1973</b>

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

<b>1. NAME</b>			
COMMON: <b>Savanna Portage</b>			
AND/OR HISTORIC:			
<b>2. LOCATION</b>			
STREET AND NUMBER: <b>Savanna Portage State Park</b>			
CITY OR TOWN: <b>near McGregor</b>			
STATE: <b>Minnesota</b>	CODE <b>23</b>	COUNTY: <b>Aitkin</b>	CODE <b>681</b>
<b>3. MAP REFERENCE</b>			
SOURCE: <b>Minnesota Department of Highways General Highway Map</b>			
SCALE: <b>1" = 2 miles</b>			
DATE: <b>1969</b>			
<b>4. REQUIREMENTS</b>			
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS			
1. Property boundaries where required.			
2. North arrow.			
3. Latitude and longitude reference.			

