

GRASS RIVER CANOE ROUTE

Samuel Hearne joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1766 after serving with the Royal Navy and was stationed at Fort Prince of Wales near the present day Churchill. Making three voyages to the Coppermine River in search of the elusive Northwest Passage, he shattered the theories of those advocating it as a viable route to the Orient.



SAMUEL HEARNE 1745-1792
EMINENT EXPLORER

In June, 1774 Hearne organized a fur-trade expedition to penetrate the interior to the south-west of the bay. Leaving York Factory, he paddled upstream on the Hays, Fox, Nelson and Grass Rivers arriving at Paint Lake on July 15th and Selkirk Lake on the 17th. He continued via Herb Lake (Vekuko Lake), Reed Lake, Lokwasum Lake, Elbow Lake, the Cranberry Lakes, Athapapuskow Lake and Goose Lake to the Sturgeon-Wain River where he came upon some Indian families who had been trading with the "Canadiens" who were already "old hands" in the commerce of the region. Undaunted, he pressed to Pasquia (The Pass), but did not consider it to be a suitable location for a post. He paddled some sixty miles further to the west terminating at Pine Island Lake (Cumberland Lake), Saskatchewan where he established Cumberland House, in operation to this day.

The next spring, 1775, Hearne returned to York Factory with some thirty fur-laden canoes, leaving Cumberland House on May 25th and reaching his destination on June 24th. The same summer he again set out for Cumberland House, it being said that he arrived on August 15th in time for breakfast. Returning in the autumn the brigade had to break ice, crossing Paint Lake and about sixteen miles from York Factory they had to abandon the canoe, winter getting the last word. The same winter, in 1776 Samuel Hearne was made Governor of Fort Prince of Wales.

In 1782 Comte de la Pêrouse seized Fort Prince of Wales, taking Hearne prisoner. He was released at Cape Resolution and went back to England, but returned to the Churchill River the following year. The greatest part of his final departure for London, he died in November, 1792, leaving behind a precious description of the Indian people and natural history of the barren land.

Samuel Hearne, a name well worth remembering while travelling on the Grass River, is one of the better known of a breed of courageous, compassionate men. Some places have changed since, he passed by and others have not, in this stretch of the northern fur trade route, where native people, Coureurs de bois, voyageurs, explorers, traders, prospectors, trappers and missionaries have roamed in canoes for centuries. The enthusiasm for adventure and determination possessed by such men, can perhaps be shared by present day Grass River canoeists who are willing to put up with the many hardships, treacherous water, head winds, mosquitoes, infected portages, clamp weather, etc.

They must have in their veins some of the same substance these strange men had and so often the more difficult these trips are, the closer we should feel we are to those giants of the past.

Partial list of Hearne's cargo on his first expedition to Cumberland House.

- 180 lbs Brazil Tobacco.
- 150 lbs Powder
- 200 lbs Shot & Ball
- 6 Gallons Brandy
- 6 Gallons White Water
- Trifling articles of trading goods
- Carpenter's tools
- 2 Packs of Oatmeal
- 12 lbs of Bisquit

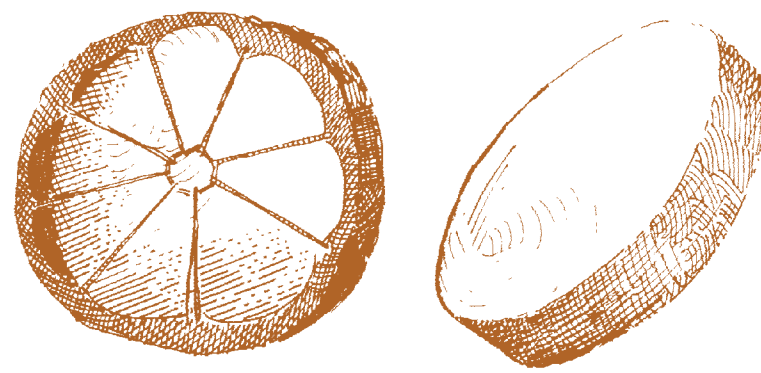
The Grass River Canoe Route is some 325 kilometers (200 miles) in length, cutting through a country known since two centuries ago as "Le Pays du Nord" (Northern Country). Two major fur trading companies, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company maintained a well established network of commerce along this route, almost every lone trading post or store or post on its shore established by a notable trader or explorer.

Reed Lake - 1786 - M.V.C. - Patrick Small
Herd Lake House - 1794 H.B.C.
Herb Lake - 1794 H.B.C.
Paint Lake
Wintering Lake - 1795 H.B.C. - David Thompson
Skiway Lake - 1795-1850 - David Thompson

A great many pages dealing with this part of the area history have been written and printed, but there remains a much older, unwritten history lying dormant under the surface of portage trails, river banks, lakeshores and camp sites. For hundreds and even thousands of years, those fragments of untold human history have, awaited discovery and analysis by a patient archeologist. Concerning preservation, illustration on the part of the canoeist, wandering through "Le Pays du Nord" can contribute to the proper dealing of these traces of the past.

TRAPPING LAKE PETROGRAPHS

One of the most important petrograph sites to be seen in Manitoba is the Trapping Lake one between points A and B on the map. Found along the northwest bank, the red earth colored paintings on the granite rock outcrop include figures of humans, animals, birds, fish & snakes.



Ojibwa drums - Still used occasionally at some of the settlements along the Grass River.



Canoe must be lined at this point as the current is very fast and there are many rocks

62. This portion must be waded and the canoe lined
Course to paddle
Shallow and rocky in this area

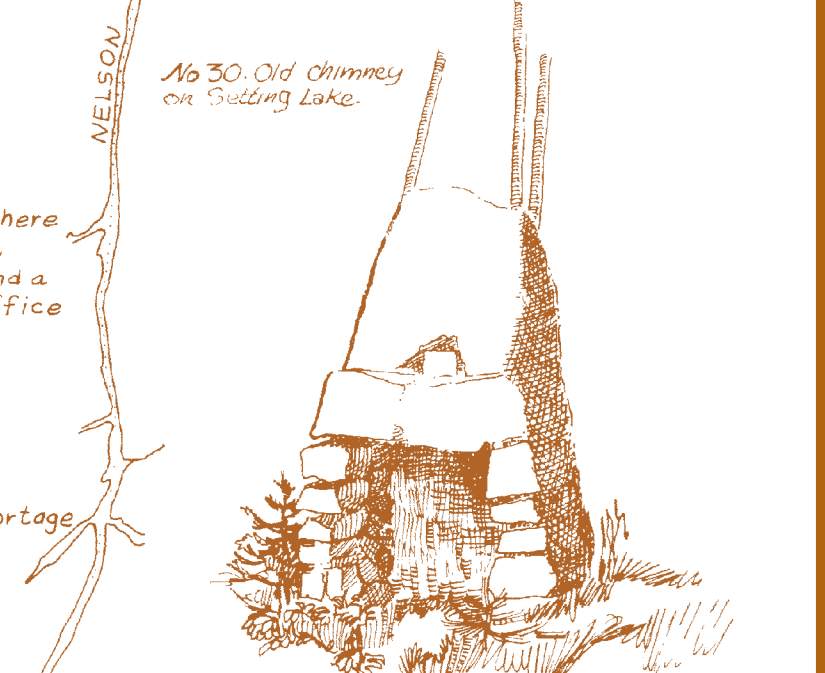
Portage 170 paces
Old cribwork dam
Standing stone

59 Rapids - portage west side 480 paces. Going up the Grass River from Kelsey, the banks are marred by a continuous burn from a 1964 fire

58 Kelsey Dam - portage west side 330 paces. At Kelsey there is no store, however if short on supplies, one might get some from the staff house commissary

57 Devil Rapids - rapids are tamed to a very fast current under the bridge

56 Sawmill at Arnot. For several miles past Arnot is a continuous burn on both banks



No. 30. Old chimney on building

63 At Pikwitonei there are two stores, a forestry station, and a CNR telegraph office

49 Portage 210 paces. At Thicket Portage there is a grocery store, hotel, restaurant, forestry station and an emergency radio-telephone set up

50 Fish camp

51 Beaver dam - lift over

55 Small rapids - roped canoe

54 Rapids - portage 110 paces

53 Rapids - portage 110 paces

52 The "Cross Portage", 4800 paces - good camping areas along the portage excepting at the south end. From this point on and along the Nelson River up to Arnot, there are good camping areas

33 Portage east side 660 paces - easier and more commonly used than two shorter portages via Kuasitchewan

32 Pisew (Cree Indian meaning "Lynx") Falls - 40 feet - portage north side 660 paces - camping area at either end of portage

31 Sasagiu (Cree Indian meaning "keep pissing") Rapids - 12 feet - portage north side 266 paces - good camping area. About 2 miles north there is an old dock and old buildings, the site of an abandoned drilling camp

30 Old chimney 60 paces in from beach - possibly remains of an old fur trading post

29 Highway to Thompson

28 Landing at Setting Lake - good camping area. There is a fish camp at the landing and from here it is two miles to Wabowden. At Wabowden there is a grocery store, restaurant, hotel, liquor store and post office

27 Old Indian cemetery. Here was the site of an old Indian village which was moved to the present site of Wabowden when the Hudson Bay Railway was put through. From here and across Setting Lake one should follow a compass bearing due East to reach the landing

26 Small rapids. In this area flocks of loons and ducks were seen

25 Whitewood Falls - 29 feet - portage north side 110 paces

24 Skunk Rapids - lift over north side

23 Small rapids

22 White Forest Rapids - portage north side 110 paces

21 Falls - 8 feet - portage north side 110 paces followed by small rapids

20 Kansasa Falls - 18 feet - portage north side 90 paces

19 Falls - 12 feet - portage south side 55 paces - good camping area. This part of the Grass River is mostly low-lying land that provides good trapping. Five trappers' cabins were seen in the last 15 miles

18 Rapids - portage north side 60 paces, but trail is steep at lower end - suitable camping spot. Or lift over on south side

17 Falls - 20 feet - portage east side 85 paces - muddy when wet - suitable camping area on island before falls - good camping area on portage

16 Falls - 8 feet - not seen or heard until very close - portage west side 110 paces - good camping area

TENAOUICH' TENEGA, OUCHIK'KA!

An old chanson canadienne, rooted in the times of the Coureurs de bois, it is the story of one of them who had left his village on the banks of the Saint-Laurent, never to return. Many years later one of his old chums, of the same colony, reached "Le Pays du Nord". Here he came upon an elderly Indian dressed in a blanket with tobacco bag hanging at his side, who gave an account of the misfortunes that had befallen his comrade. The old fellow concluded by describing the respectful burial given the Coureur-de-Bois complete with four Indian elders as pall bearers and two Ojebwa Indian women singing the Libera.



ce-est un vers de-esse - ge tout nor, tout
bar-bouil - la, ouer-ka! A-ve de vilie cou-
ver - re et son sac a la-bac, ouch-ka!
ouch-ka - na - ga, ouch-ka! He-ka!
Jec de vilie couverte
Et son sac a tabac, Ouch-ka!
- Ton camarade est mort,
Est mort et enterra, Ouch-ka!

Ton camarade est mort,
Est mort et enterra, Ouch-ka!
Qui portait le sac de la-bac, Ouch-ka!
C'est quater vieux sauvages
Qui portait le sac de la-bac, Ouch-ka!
Et deux vilie sauvages
Qui chantent le libera, Ouch-ka!

38 Sasisigwan (meaning "frying pan") Rapids - portage west side 24 paces at the first set of rapids

37 Kachikaskwatink (meaning "close by the shore") Rapids - portage east side 880 paces - camping area

36 Small rapids - portage east side 60 paces

35 Kuasitchewan (meaning "bright") Falls - 46 feet - portage west side 180 paces - excellent camping area

34 Rapids - portage gear west side - roped canoe

33 The route around Paint Lake is well marked and should be followed because of the many islands. Close attention should also be paid to a map and compass

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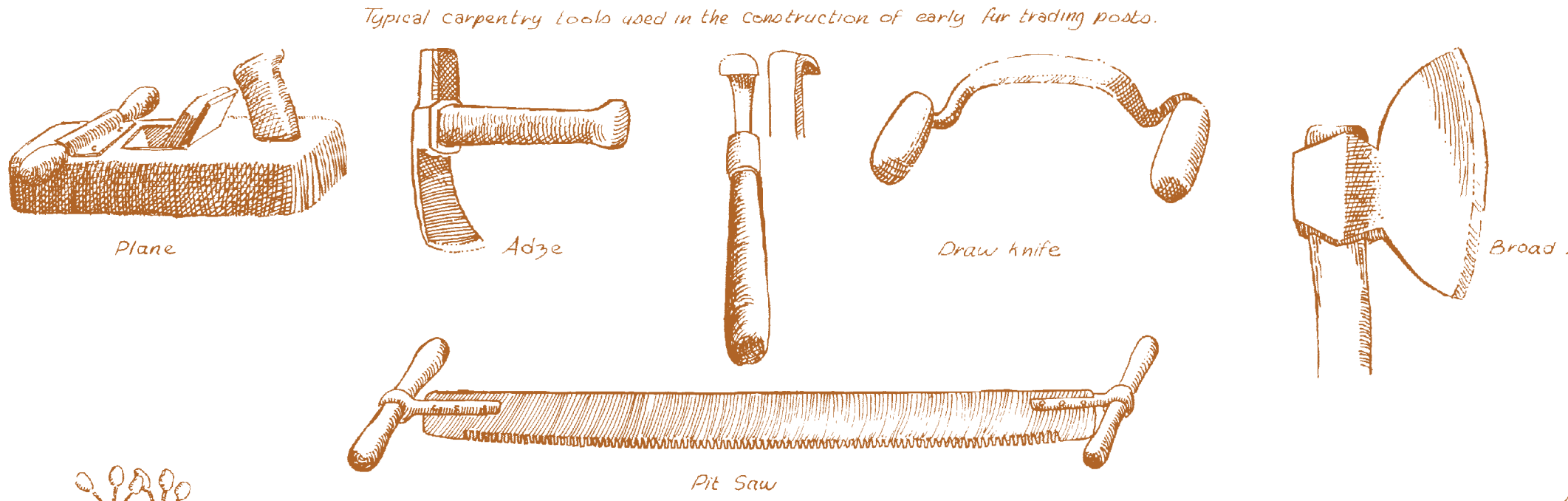
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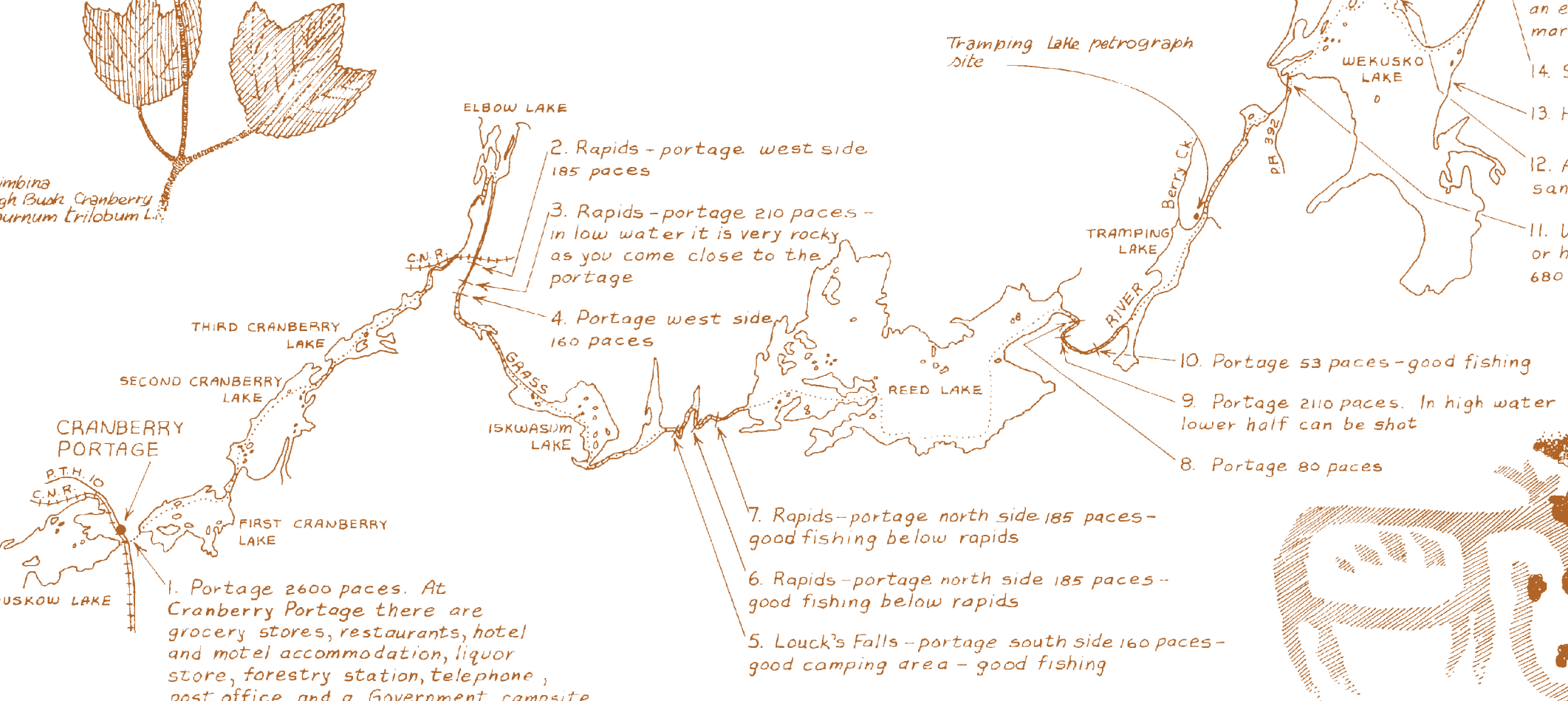
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Typical Carpentry Tools used in the construction of early fur trading posts.



Pimbleberry (High Bush Cranberry)
Place the berries in a pot. Cover with water and simmer for about 10 minutes. Boil for 5 minutes. Strain contents through a muslin bag and for each cup of juice add 3/4 cup of sugar. Bring to a boil again, stirring constantly. Use the common "spoon" test. Jelly testing method and when ready pour into sterilized jars and seal with paraffin.



15 Trappers' cabin - good camping area. About 4 miles north of this is the site of an old burn that makes an excellent camping area. This area is marshy with many reeds and wild rice

14 Suitable islands for camping

13 Herb Lake mine (also known as "Bingo mine")

12 Abandoned fish camp - good camping area - sand beach

11 Wexusko (Cree Indian meaning "sweet grass or herb") Falls - 50 feet - portage east side 680 paces - excellent camping area

10 Portage 63 paces - good fishing

9 Portage 210 paces. In high water lower half can be shot

8 Portage 80 paces

7 Rapids - portage north side 185 paces - good fishing below rapids

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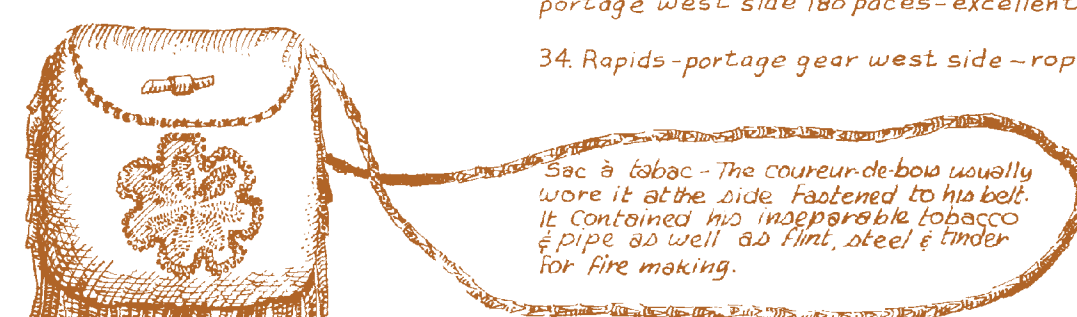
5 Louck's Falls - portage south side 160 paces - good camping area - good fishing

4 Portage west side 160 paces

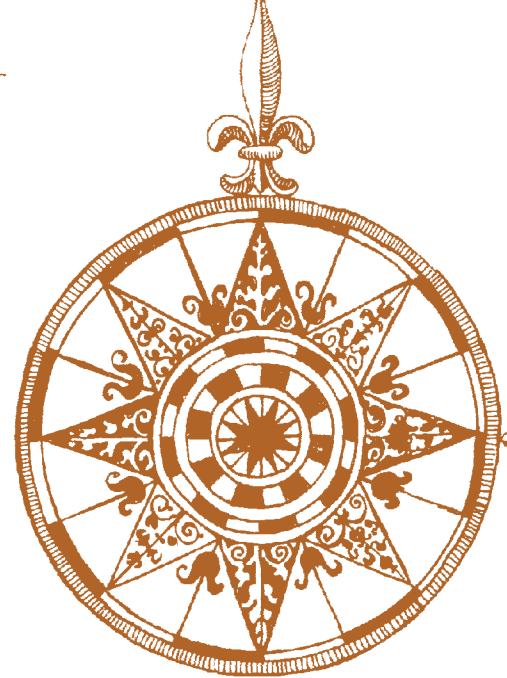
3 Rapids - portage 210 paces - in low water it is very rocky as you come close to the portage

2 Rapids - portage west side 185 paces

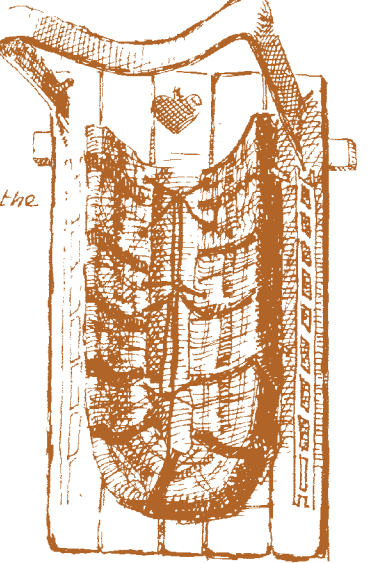
1 Portage 2600 paces. At Cranberry Portage there are grocery stores, restaurants, hotel and motel accommodation, liquor store, forestry station, telephone, post office and a Government campsite.



Sac a tabac - The Coureur-de-Bois usually wore it at the side, fastened to his belt. It contained his indispensable tobacco pipe and small tin, steel & tinder for fire making.



Compass rose



Canoe



Canoeist



Canoe with person



Canoe with person and dog

Manitoba Department of Natural Resources
Parks Branch

CAUTION: This Canoe Route is to be used for general information; it is not a navigational chart. It was prepared in the summers of 1961, 1962 and 1971 and the information recorded, including information with respect to the volume and velocity of water, reflects only the conditions which existed at that time. Because of the constantly changing nature of the waterway, this Canoe Route should be referred to with extreme caution, and only in conjunction with topographical maps and other available data.