



Foundation Document Overview

Grand Portage National Monument

Minnesota



Contact Information

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Purpose



GRAND PORTAGE NATIONAL MONUMENT commemorates the cross-cultural interaction and exchange among Ojibwe people and early Europeans that influenced the 18th century exploration of the northwest and the expansion of the Great Lakes fur trade industry. The National Park Service works collaboratively with the Grand Portage Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa to interpret and support the heritage and lifeways of the Ojibwe people and to preserve the premier sites, route, and unique historic values of the Grand Portage trail, known to the Ojibwe as Gitchi Onigaming, the Great Carrying Place.



Significance

Significance statements express why Grand Portage National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Grand Portage National Monument is in the homeland of the Grand Portage Ojibwe. Their intimate knowledge of and connection to the land, water, plants, and wildlife of the area allowed them to endure in the sometimes harsh environment, before and after European exploration and nation-building. As other cultures explored this area, the tools and technologies of the Ojibwe were adapted by newcomers to exploit the natural resources as global commodities.
- The Grand Portage has been a critical transportation route for thousands of years. It was part of an ancient transcontinental trade route connecting the Great Lakes to the interior of the continent. The portage enabled European expansion into the northwest in the 18th and 19th centuries and it was a focal point in developing the international boundary between Canada and the United States in the 19th century.
- The Grand Portage, bypassing unnavigable portions of the Pigeon River, connects Fort Charlotte with Lake Superior, where thousands of tons of furs and materials were transported to Europe and beyond. The footpath and these depot sites served as the headquarters and central hub for the North West Company as it competed in the global fur trade.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Relationship with Grand Portage Band**
- **Grand Portage Corridor or Gitchi Onigaming (Great Carrying Place)**
- **North West Company Headquarters and Depot**
- **Fort Charlotte**
- **Grand Portage Reservation Village**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Portage Experience**

Grand Portage National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Reconstructed Buildings and Structures at the North West Company Headquarters Site**
- **Mount Rose**
- **Stone Bridge**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The Grand Portage was a vital part of both American Indian and fur trade transportation routes because of the area's geology, topographic relief, natural resources, and strategic location between the upper Great Lakes and the interior of western Canada.
- The fur trade was a driving force for the exploration, mapping, and early settlement of much of North America by European Americans, and it also played an important role in setting the boundary between the United States and Canada. It was part of an effort of several European countries to expand their colonial holdings worldwide.
- The Grand Portage Ojibwe, a people with a distinct culture and proud heritage, have lived for centuries on or near Grand Portage where their culture thrives today.
- The fur trade industry was an important part of the international economy, involved a complex transportation system, involved both American Indian and European American technologies and practices, and had extensive impacts on the natural resources and native cultures of North America.
- The extensive archeological resources of Grand Portage National Monument represent not only the fur trade, but also thousands of years of American Indian life.
- The fur trade flourished during a time of unrest with native nations and colonial powers, each struggling for power and occupancy of the land and its resources.
- The fur trade was a catalyst for cross-cultural exchange between native peoples and European Americans that invariably affected both populations.
- The working relationship, an alliance between the National Park Service and the Grand Portage Band, is unique and benefits both parties. Fundamental building blocks of the relationship are the Tribal Self-Governance Act agreement, proximity to one another, and many mutual interests.

Description

The Grand Portage, known to the Ojibwe as Gitchi Onigaming (Great Carrying Place), is the 8.5-mile portage trail that allowed American Indians, explorers, and voyageurs to bypass high falls, cascades, and gorges along Minnesota's north shore of Lake Superior to the international border with Canada on the Pigeon River. The Grand Portage is the place of a historic rendezvous point for the exchange of North American furs for Eastern trade goods by what became the North West Company, the largest fur company in the world. Through time the portage has proved invaluable to those traveling what is known today as the border route.

The Grand Portage was a vital part of both American Indian and fur trade transportation routes because of the area's geology, topography, natural resources, and strategic location between the upper Great Lakes and the interior of western Canada. The portage was the most direct route from the Great Lakes into the Canadian interior. Between 1731 and 1804, thousands of men shuttled tons of supplies and furs over the portage and in and out of warehouses at either end of the woodland trail. The dynamic enterprise that thrived along the Grand Portage forged diverse relationships between American Indian and non-Indian peoples as early as the 18th century. The adoption of native technology and the cultural exchange that took place led to pioneering exploration of the continent.

The community is the homeplace and center of tribal government for the Grand Portage Band (the Band) of Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe) Tribe.

The Grand Portage Ojibwe have persevered for centuries, through the European incursion into North America and the division into two countries, the United States and (then British) Canada. Approximately half of the land for the national monument was donated by the Grand Portage Band.

The national monument is 710 acres and consists of two "districts," which are connected by the Grand Portage trail. The eastern, or lakeshore, district consists of the major visitor service area with a reconstructed stockade, a great hall, a kitchen, and a canoe warehouse. It is here that the bulk of interpretation of the Ojibwe heritage and the fur trade occurs. The western, or Fort Charlotte, district is named for the historic Fort Charlotte, which today is a camping area with primitive campsites, a point of debarkation for modern canoe travelers leaving the boundary waters to the west, and a destination for hikers following in the footsteps of the voyageurs from the lakeshore. A vernacular monument made of river stones marks one end of the Grand Portage trail, or Fort Charlotte in general.

Grand Portage National Monument is near Isle Royale National Park, which is visible from the heritage center. The national monument supports Isle Royale management by providing an embarkation point for boat transportation, supporting operations logistics to the island, providing select administrative functions including participation in the Tribal Self-Governance Act agreement with the Grand Portage Band, and providing museum and archeological assistance. This has resulted in a close, cooperative relationship between the two parks.

