

VOYAGEURS



INTRODUCTION

The Voyageurs were a group of hardy men employed by the fashion industry from the 1600s – 1800s. They paddled large birch bark canoes thousands of miles across Canada and the northern United States to collect animal furs – called pelts – from Native Americans. When they brought the pelts back to the trading companies in eastern Canada, the trading companies shipped the furs across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, where the furs were made into fashionable hats.

Think of Voyageurs as being similar to the truck drivers who drive big rigs across the country today. Like today's truck drivers, the Voyageurs didn't make the goods they transported; they were simply the people responsible for picking up and dropping off goods.

Did you know: The term "Voyageur" comes from the French word for "traveler." Today the term "Voyageur," refers to men who paddled canoes as part of the fur trade.

WHAT'S IN THE VOYAGEUR ACTIVITY BIN:

- 2 Toques
- 2 Sashes
- 4 Garters
- 4 Cloth Mitasses
- 2 Belt Bags
- 2 Kerchiefs
- 1 Container of Beads
- 1 Beaver Pelt
- Voyageur Route Map

NOTES FOR VOYAGEUR ACTIVITIES:

- All materials needed to create two Voyageurs included – just add kids.
- Complete activity inside the museum or outside on the porch.
- Activity takes about 30-60 minutes.
- Please do not remove this bin from Chik-Wauk grounds
- Check out bin at museum front desk if using it outside on Chik-Wauk grounds.



GET DRESSED!

Although Voyageurs worked for the fashion industry, Voyageurs weren't terribly fashionable fellows.

Because Voyageurs worked hard, long days – sometimes paddling 14-16 hours in a single day – they needed long lasting clothing that dried quickly in case their canoe tipped. Voyageurs also adopted some Native American fashions because they found the clothing suited their lifestyle better than European fashions.

A Voyageur's Clothing

Capot or Blanket A coat made out of a woolen blanket.

Linen or cotton shirt

Moccasins Shoes made out of leather, adopted from the Native Americans.

Trousers or Mitasses The companies Voyageurs worked for issued trousers to the Voyageurs, but many Voyageurs preferred wearing mitasses — leggings made out of leather that Native Americans frequently wore.

Garters Small woven sashes that Voyageurs tied around their knees to keep their leggings on and prevent muscle strain. Not only did the garters hold up Voyageurs' leggings, they also may have protected Voyageurs from hurting their knees when carrying heavy packs.

Sash A woven sash worn around Voyageurs' waists. Voyageurs valued their sashes for many reasons. The sash symbolized their difficult, but adventurous job as a Voyageur. It also held their coats shut during the winter and probably helped them avoid injury when carrying heavy packs.

Belt Bag A small bag which carried Voyageurs' personal items and hung off of Voyageurs' sashes.

Kerchief Used as a cap or headband, Voyageurs also used this for blowing their noses or to wipe off their sweaty faces after a hard portage.

Toque (pronounced TOOk) Knit wool cap, usually red, that Voyageurs wore in the winter.

ACTIVITY

Inside the pack, you'll find several clothing items that you'd need if you were a Voyageur. Pull them out and try them on!

WHERE TO GO?

The Voyageurs used a variety of routes to reach the heart of the North American continent where furs were especially abundant. Voyageurs that passed through Saganaga Lake (the lake Chik-Wauk Museum and Nature Center is located on) worked for the Northwest Trading Company, based in Montreal, Canada.

These Voyageurs traveled more than 1000 miles by canoe. Their journeys began in Montreal, Canada where they loaded their canoes with packs filled with trade goods. They then canoed to Grand Portage where they might exchange their trade goods for furs that other voyageurs had gathered. From Grand Portage, the Voyageurs traveled west to large lakes like Rainy Lake, Lake Winnipeg, or Lake Athabasca, where they traded their goods with Native Americans for the furs. Rather than make the long journey back to Montreal during the very short summer season, the Voyageurs often spent winters in forts like Grand Portage and Rainy Lake.

ACTIVITY

Pull out the map from the backpack.

Have a grown up help you located Grand Portage, Saganaga Lake, and Rainy Lake on the map.

Starting at Grand Portage, use your finger to trace what you think is the best route to get to Rainy Lake. On your way to Rainy Lake, make sure your route takes you through Saganaga Lake.

As you chart out your route, remember that the Voyageurs spent most of their time in canoes and because of their heavy packs, they avoided portaging at all costs.

Did you know: The word “portage” comes from the French word meaning “to carry.” Today, the word refers to the path between two lakes, where canoeists must carry their gear and canoe to the next lake.

WHAT TO BRING?

When the Voyageurs traveled from Montreal, they filled their packs with trade goods to swap with the Native Americans for pelts. The Voyageurs delivered manufactured items to the Native Americans that made their lives easier and which the Native Americans couldn't make themselves. In exchanged for those items, the Native Americans gave the Voyageurs the furs that the trading companies wanted to sell to English hat makers.

The more goods the Voyageurs brought with them, the more pelts they could trade for. Trading companies wanted the Voyageurs to bring back as many pelts as possible. As a result, Voyageurs stuffed their packs full of goods until their packs weighed about 90 pounds.

How heavy? The average third grader weighs 60 pounds. Each pack the Voyageur carried weighed about 90 pounds and when Voyageurs portaged, they carried two packs on their backs for a total of 180 pounds. That's the same as carrying three third graders on their backs all at the same time!

ACTIVITY

Find the small bag of trading goods in the pack. Did you find the container of beads? Don't open it. Why do you think the Native Americans wanted to trade their furs for items like beads?

The Native Americans wanted to trade their furs for items that would make their lives easier, like blankets, muskets, and kettles. They also wanted pretty things they couldn't make themselves, like beads and mirrors.

Now pull out the beaver pelt. Feel how soft it is. Although the fur trade collected furs from many animals, furs from the beaver were most highly prized because of its soft, thick fur.

WHY IT ENDED

The fur trade ended for many reasons in the 1800s. Fashions changed and silk hats became more popular in Europe than beaver hats. Railroads across Canada and United States replaced Voyageurs and canoes as the fastest way to transport goods.

As times changed, Voyageurs took up new lines of work. Some of the men continued to work for trading companies in eastern Canada. Others worked as farmers or loggers and raised families.

The beaver population declined notably during the fur trade. When the fur trade ended, the beaver population recovered and today, both Canada and the United States have healthy beaver populations.

ACTIVITY

While at Chik-Wauk, participate in some more Voyageur activities:

- Touch the beaver and beaver hat in the museum's front room and do the Voyageur activity to see how long it took Voyageurs to get paid!
- Have a grown-up lift the Voyageur bales in the museum's front room.
- Watch the Voyageur film (option #2) or the story of Grand Portage film (option #4) in the theatre area.
- View a beaver house on the Amikwiish Hiking Trail

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED USING THIS ACTIVITY PACK!

We hope you enjoyed your time using this activity pack. Please put everything you pulled out back into bin and return the bin to the museum front desk. Thank you!