THE VALUES

—OF—

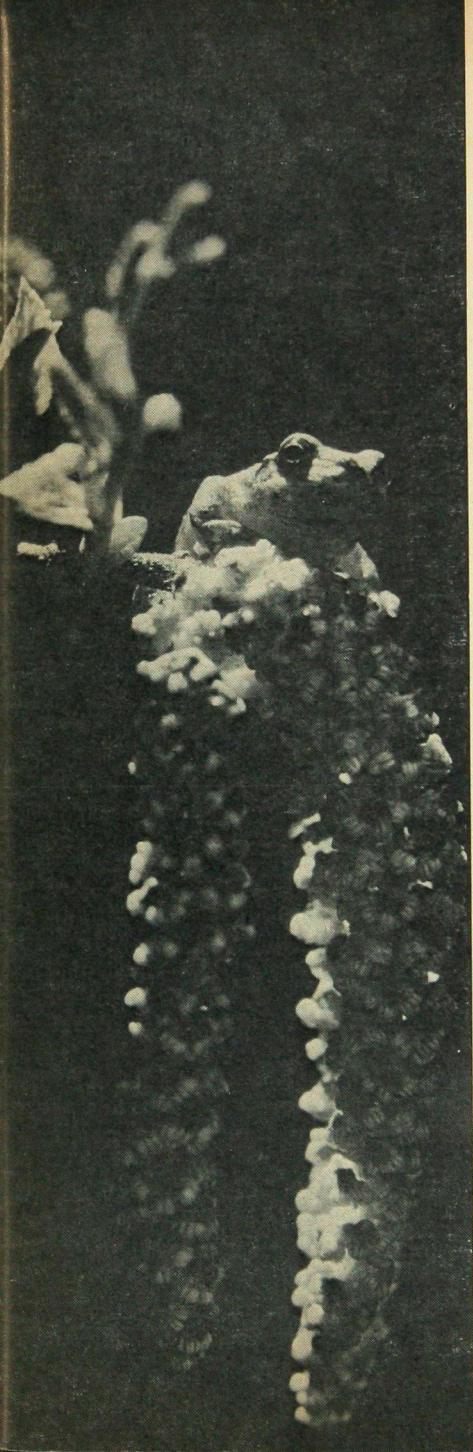
VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

SIGURD F. OLSON

My first canoe trip into the land of the voyageurs is as vivid today as the morning some fifty years ago when I stood on the shore of Fall Lake ready to head north to the Canadian border and the Quetico-Superior country. The world was fresh and sparkling that morning and my three young companions were as filled as I with the excitement of the adventure before us. Some of those early experiences stand out more clearly than others, such as our first glimpse of Knife Lake. The roaring falls of the Kawishiwi, the plunging torrent at Pipestone, the enormous reaches of Basswood Lake had been magnificent, but Knife was something different.

It was sunset when we finished the last long portage and dropped our packs and canoes on its shore. A golden glow lay over the water and over my mind as well. Rocky islands floated in the distance and the shores loomed dark and mysterious. As I

Sigurd Olson, without question, has become a living Minnesota legend. From his books (The Singing Wilderness, The Lonely Land, The Listening Point and most recently: The Hidden Forest); his many articles — and countless speeches — all have been dedicated to getting us to care. His is a lifelong preoccupation with protecting our Boundary Waters Canoe Country and saving our wilderness. All in all, he is a man who has set a personal example for all of his fellow citizens.



ABOUT THIS EDITION

Writers for this edition were contacted in early January and graciously consented to contribute to this special edition of the Minnesota Volunteer *on Voyageurs National Park, trusting that the wisdom of the Legislature would prevail as the authors went about preparing their assigned areas.*

We are especially grateful to our distinguished authors, and to Mr. Jim Brandenburg and Glenn Maxham Films, Duluth, for sharing with us the photo art for this edition.—Editor.

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stood there looking up that unknown waterway, an overwhelming joy was mine.

The loons were calling and I hear them yet, echoes rolling back from the shores and from unseen lakes across the ridges until the night was alive with their music. This untamed sound, the distances, the feeling of belonging and mystery filled me and that moment I entered into a new way of life knowing that someday I would explore not only the wilderness before me but all the vast hinterlands of the north.

I soon came to know the border country well enough to guide canoe parties beginning to come to the area. In time I learned not only the lakes and rivers of the Superior National Forest but those of Quetico Provincial Park as well and never lost my zest

A Tree Frog . . . One of infinite natural treasures of Voyageurs.



the Pine Marten . . .

for wilderness travel, or the first excitement at its beauty and meaning.

Eventually I extended my canoeing into waterways further north, followed such great highways of the fur trade and exploration as the Churchill, came to know the routes into Hudson Bay, Reindeer Lake, Athabasca, Great Slave, as far into Northwest Territories as Great Bear and the Mackenzie; felt at last I had an overall view of the vast wilderness of the Canadian shield and the nebulous way to the Northwest Passage and the Orient.

But each time I returned to the Quetico-Superior I said to myself: "This is the most magnificent and beautiful lake and river country on the continent, possibly in the world, nowhere such a combination of smooth glaciated and lichen covered rocks, red and white pines, bogs, and forests in such fantastic and glorious profusion; hundreds of thousands of lakes elsewhere but nothing like this. Of all that vast land this was the best, no country to log, mine or exploit, but one to preserve and cherish for ever."

Voyageurs National Park is an integral part of this Quetico-Superior Country, the very reason it was considered for national park status. Eighty years ago Minnesota's legislature passed a resolution urging the federal government to set the area aside as a national park. Countless people have worked for this goal over the years holding the firm conviction that this superlative section of the Minnesota-Ontario border country must be preserved as a national park.

Cultural, esthetic, and intangible values are a composite of many things: beauty of terrain, geological and ecological understanding, and the background of human history. Knowledge of how the land was formed, its volcanic eras, the vast glacial periods which smoothed, gouged and shaped its surface into what we see today is vital to appreciation of its values. The evolution of wildlife and vegetation, their slow adjustment to climate, water, soil, and land forms are as necessary as having an understanding of the hopes, dreams, and fears of those who lived and labored here hundreds and even thousands of years ago. All this imparts deeper meaning and even enhances its beauty.

As an ecologist, I became convinced that the entire area was an ecosystem of special significance, one of the rare undisturbed regions of the Great Lakes biotic complex with infinite and authentic interdependencies among its many associations. The stands of beautiful red and white pines growing along the lake shores meant more to me knowing they were the northernmost extension of their range, that

while a few stands could be found elsewhere and even beyond the Quetico, it would be spruce or jackpine intermingled with birch and aspen, from here up to the barren lands of the tundra.

Knowing the involved geological formations with their exposures of greenstone and intrusions of granite and basalts, the story of the glaciology with its disturbed drainage patterns and the response of all life to the ancient fire ecology of the north, gave new appreciation of the area's intangible values. The bogs with their paleobotanical records of phantom forests of the past imparted insight to the forests of today.

This maze of waterways had its human history as well, for over its lakes and portages had passed voyageurs on their 3000-mile trek from Montreal into the far Northwest. Here too went the great explorers, Alexander Mackenzie, the Henrys, Verèndrye and a host of others, a stream of heroic figures through the border lakes from Grand Portage and eventually through Crane, Namakan, Kabetogama and Rainy Lake into the park area. Over these routes went tons of trade goods to the west and fortunes in fur for the waiting markets of the east. This was the route of Canadian destiny.

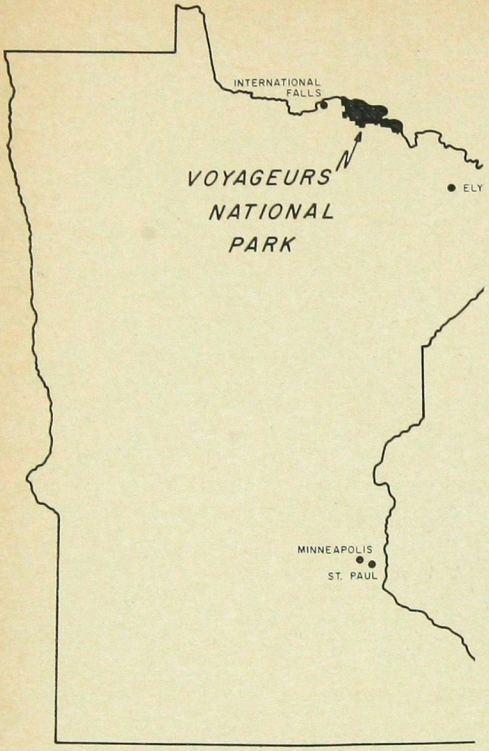
As one paddles down this famous wilderness highway, it takes little imagination to picture the colorful brigades of the past, red-tipped paddles flashing in the sun, the gaudy designs on bow and stern of each canoe. As one sits before a campfire one can almost hear the sound of them and the songs of French voyageurs coming across the waters.



And the Red Fox . . .

Voyageurs National Park is properly named, for all traffic from east and west funneled into Rainy Lake, the canoes from Grand Portage along the border, those from Fort William over the French-Dawson route, those from Lake Superior going up the St. Louis River to Vermilion and La Croix. No wonder an important post was maintained at Rainy as a rendezvous and meeting place for expeditions from Montreal and far away Athabasca. Of such human history are intangible values made, and all add to the beauty and meaning of the Voyageurs National Park area.

Perhaps as important a value as any is the wilderness character of the area between Lake Superior and the Rainy River, where alone of the 3000 mile extent of the Voyageur's Highway, the scene is still relatively unchanged with old pines standing that voyageurs saw as they passed by. This wilderness, the old sense of solitude, and silence can still be felt there.



When we talk about the intangible values of the Voyageurs area we know such values are a composite of all the cultural facets of the region, that Voyageurs National Park is more than terrain. It is in a sense a living storehouse of beauty, of historical and scientific significance. If museums are places where the treasures of a people are safeguarded and cherished then Voyageurs is truly such a place.

The National Park Service will interpret these values to visitors, using all the knowledge and expertise of half a century of experience in making them live. It will do this through interpretive centers, nature trails, and illustrated materials, using modern techniques to explain them to the public. People want to learn about such an area as Voyageurs, especially the young, and the Service knows that knowledge breeds appreciation and a sense of stewardship which hopefully will guard the region from unwise use and preserve its rare and often fragile qualities.

Earth Day of April 1970 marked a nationwide awareness of environmental problems, especially pollution and the growing ugliness of cities and countrysides. People realized too that places of beauty and wilderness were being lost, that more national parks and preserves must be set aside to save what is left. The President announced shortly afterward that the seventies must be dedicated to the protection of environment, and when Congress passed legislation authorizing Voyageurs National Park it voiced the belief of all people that the time had come to give it the status and protection it deserved.

Those who have worked for Voyageurs National Park know its beauty and meaning will be an inspiration for generations to come and that the intangible values found there will make life more worth while not only for the people of Minnesota, but for all the people of America.