

PORTAGE TRAIL TRAVELERS

DANIEL GREYSOLON SIEUR DULHUT 1680

DuLhut wrote that he entered a river where he cut down some trees and broke through about one hundred beaver dams before making the portage into the St. Croix. Interestingly enough, he makes no mention of seeing fish in the river. DuLuth's mission was to prepare the way for the French fur trade by making peace with the Indians and exploring trade routes.

PIERRE LESUEUR 1693

It was with a view to keeping open one of DuLhut's old routes, the Bois Brule and the St. Croix Rivers, that LeSueur was dispatched by the authorities of New France. He built a stockade on Madeline Island for guarding the northern approach and another on an island in the Mississippi, near the town of Red Wing, Minnesota. (Vol.XIII, p.408 Wisconsin Historical Coll.)

JONATHAN CARVER 1768

An English cartographer (mapmaker), Carver was interested in finding the "northwest passage" to the Pacific Ocean. Returning to England, he published a book and maps, which contained ample imagination along with maps and stories of the "new world".

MICHEL CUROT 1803

There was good news and bad news about Curot. The good news was he wrote about his journey up the Brule River and down the St. Croix in great detail. The bad news was Curot was evidentially not cut out for the life of a fur trader. He was often "out foxed" in deals with the natives and met an early death about a year later.

JEAN BAPTISTE CADOTTE 1819

Cadotte was one of two highly skilled woodsmen brothers active in the fur trade at this time. Sons of a French fur trader father and Indian mother, the boys also had a reputation for their troubles with alcohol.

HENRY SCHOOLCRAFT 1820

Credited with discovering the source of the Mississippi River at Lake Itasca, Minnesota. Schoolcraft was returning east after this discovery in 1832 when he traveled this portage. Lt. Allen, in a party of US Army soldiers traveling with Schoolcraft (and slightly behind him) made the earliest note of seeing trout in the Brule. The 1820 date shown on the boulder was probably a reference to a stopover Schoolcraft made at the Mouth of the Brule 12 years earlier.

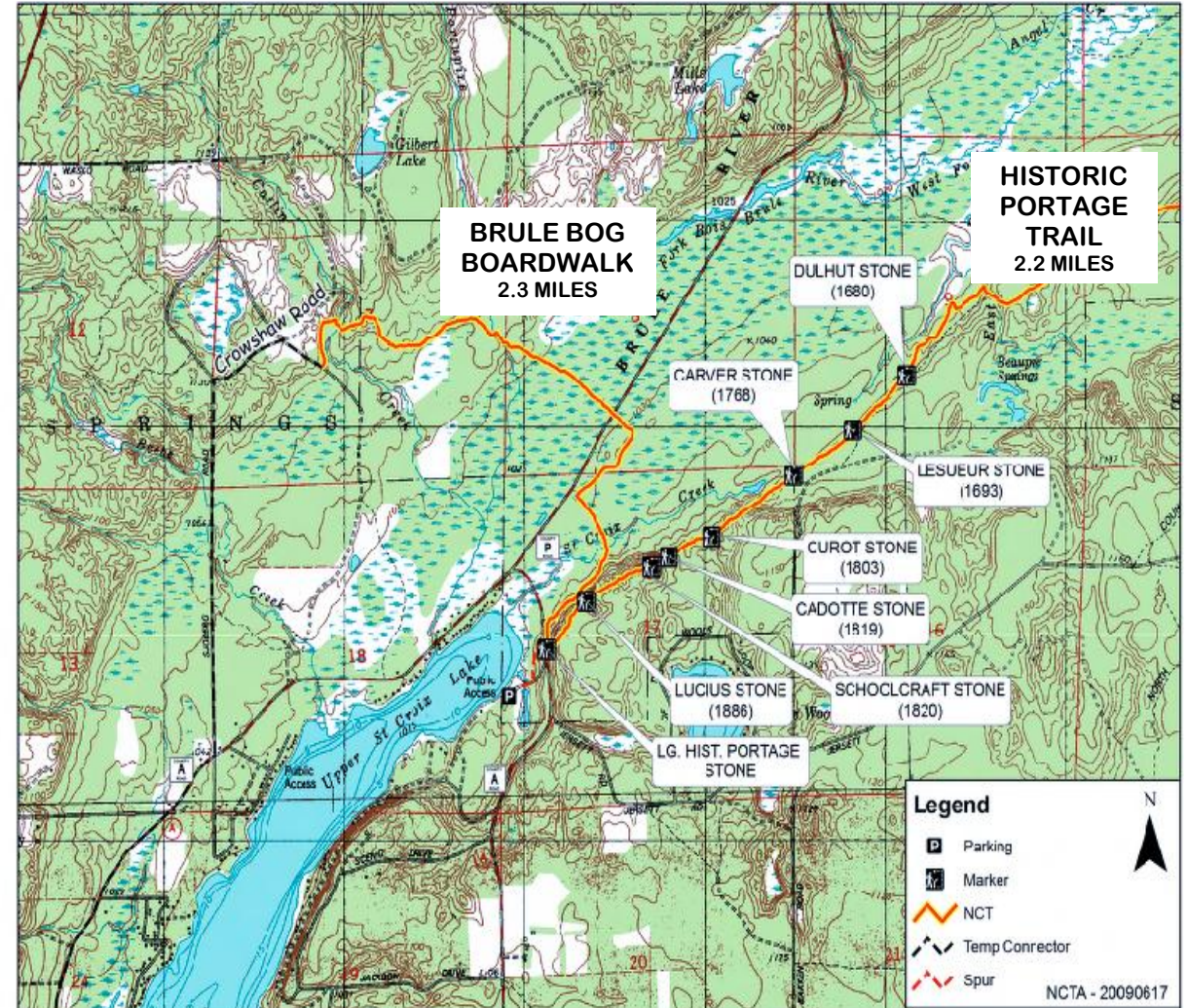
GEORGE STUNTZ 1852

A noted early frontiersman and government surveyor in the western Lake Superior region. Stuntz was one of the first settlers in Duluth and Superior. He was one of the promoters of the Vermillion Iron Range in Minnesota and published articles on the feasibility of connecting St. Croix and Lake Superior waters. This monument was lost for several decades and finally located at the foot of the slope. It was returned to its approximate original location in April of 2009

NICHOLAS Jr. AND JOSEPH LUCIUS 1886

These notable and long-time residents of Solon Springs were among the last to utilize this trail for transportation. Shortly thereafter, the first overland roads were built in this area and the trail was abandoned. Joseph was also well known for his ability in building cabins and canoes for residents of the Brule River.

Historic Portage Trail and Brule Bog Boardwalk



Brule-St. Croix Chapter
North Country Trail Association
www.northcountrytrail.org



Brule Bog

Following the retreat of the glaciers, Lake Superior drained southwestward through what are now the Bois Brule and St. Croix River valleys. This created the long, narrow, steep-sided and relatively straight valley, which exists today and possesses many unusual ecological attributes. The present Brule River originated from springs within an extensive conifer swamp near Solon Springs, and flows north to Lake Superior. South of the conifer swamp is a bog surrounded by uplands of sandy pine barrens. The uplands absorb precipitation, which is stored in the organic soils of the bog and seeps into the Brule, producing stable summer flows. Numerous rare plants and animals are found within this diverse area. Some of the rare plants are sheathed sedge, sparse-flowered sedge and the endangered Lapland buttercup. Nesting birds include olive-sided flycatcher, golden-crowned kinglet, Lincoln's sparrow, saw-whet owl and black-backed woodpecker. The zebra clubtail, an uncommon dragonfly, cruises this stretch of the river. The Brule Glacial Spillway is owned by the DNR and was designated a State Natural Area in 2003. It includes two natural areas that were previously designated in 1980--the Bois-Brule Conifer Bog and Upper Brule River.

Brule Bog Boardwalk

The Boardwalk begins at the west end of the Portage Trail and continues for 2.3 miles to Crowshaw Road. After 1 mile, it crosses County Road 'P' and continues through the Bog. 3500 feet of the Trail is boardwalk. It is handicap accessible from County Road 'P' going west.

Historic Portage Trail

GEOLOGY

About 10,000 years ago, a river flowed south out of a much higher glacial Lake Superior carving a gorge that today is the valley of the Brule River and Upper St. Croix Lake. As the glaciers retreated north and the land rebounded, this mighty southerly flow dried up leaving Lake Superior to drain east to the Atlantic as it does today. Two rivers began in an area of springs in this ancient valley, just north of Upper St. Croix Lake. One flows north to Lake Superior (the Bois Brule River) and the other flows south into the St. Croix. The imperceptible rise of land between the two streams is called the continental divide.

HISTORY

The Brule River drops over 420 feet in elevation in its 44 mile journey to Lake Superior. This made a natural transportation route in the days when waterways were the "highways" of early travelers. The gap between the navigable portions of each river, where boats must be carried, is called a portage. Native Americans, explorers, traders, trappers and missionaries used this approximately 2 mile connecting footpath between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River system. The first known explorer to record this route for posterity was Daniel Greysolon Sieur DuLhut in 1680. DuLhut, for whom the city of Duluth was named, was a French frontier "diplomat", whose assignment was to make peace between the warring Chippewa and Sioux Indians to prepare the way for the fur trade. On the trail, you will find 7 small boulders each

with the name of one of those travelers who recorded their journey over this very same portage trail (see back for more information).

THE TRAIL

The Portage Trail is listed on the Wisconsin Register of Historic Places. The Daughters of the American Revolution, local garden clubs, the town of Solon Springs and the Douglas County Highway Department worked together in 1933 with the assistance of Joseph Lucius, one of the last users of the trail, to permanently mark the trail for posterity. The trail of today is assumed to follow quite closely the original route, which was in use for over 300 years. Since there was no easy way to remove large trees, the trail probably meandered around windfalls. Most likely, forest fires swept through the area more than once, rearranging the vegetation. In fact, diaries of some of the travelers refer to an area of burned pines and others to a piney woods.

BRULE RIVER STATE FOREST

Nearly all of the Portage Trail is protected by Brule River State Forest owned lands. The most recent purchase of property in 1998 included 1/2 mile of the trail. You will see this property as you come to a steep decline in the trail north of the Henry Schoolcraft monument. You may also notice that the trees here are much younger, just growing back from timber cutting on the private property in about 1990.

A MIGHTY HAIL STORM IN 2000

As you carefully scan the vista from near the Schoolcraft rock, you will notice a disturbance in the vegetation near the

northern and western horizon. In August of 2000, one of the most devastating hail storms ever known to visit our area struck an east/west swath across the Brule Valley. Leaves were torn from trees and shrubs alike, but the carnage did not end there. Small tree branches were stripped from their moorings and tree trunks were heavily bruised. The forest floor was littered with shredded vegetation. The next day piles of hail were still evident on the ground. Most of the trees in a 5,000 acre area of the Brule River State Forest were either killed or severely damaged. Foresters were faced with a ruined forest that would languish with disease and insects. Nature's way would be to clean up the mess with a forest fire. The prescription chosen for renewal of the forest was to harvest what could be salvaged and to sever and flatten the remainder to make way for a new forest. And that's what has taken place on state land in the hail damaged area. As you near the Brule end of the portage, you will witness some storm damage and some of the radical surgery of the logging process. Logging will be followed by planting of seedlings in some cases and natural regeneration in others.

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The Historic Portage Trail also has another national significance. Essentially all of its 2 mile length coincides with the North Country National Scenic Trail. This trail was established by Congress to stretch from New York to North Dakota. Parts of this trail are still under construction by volunteers from the North Country Trail Association. The local chapter is known as the Brule-St. Croix Chapter.