

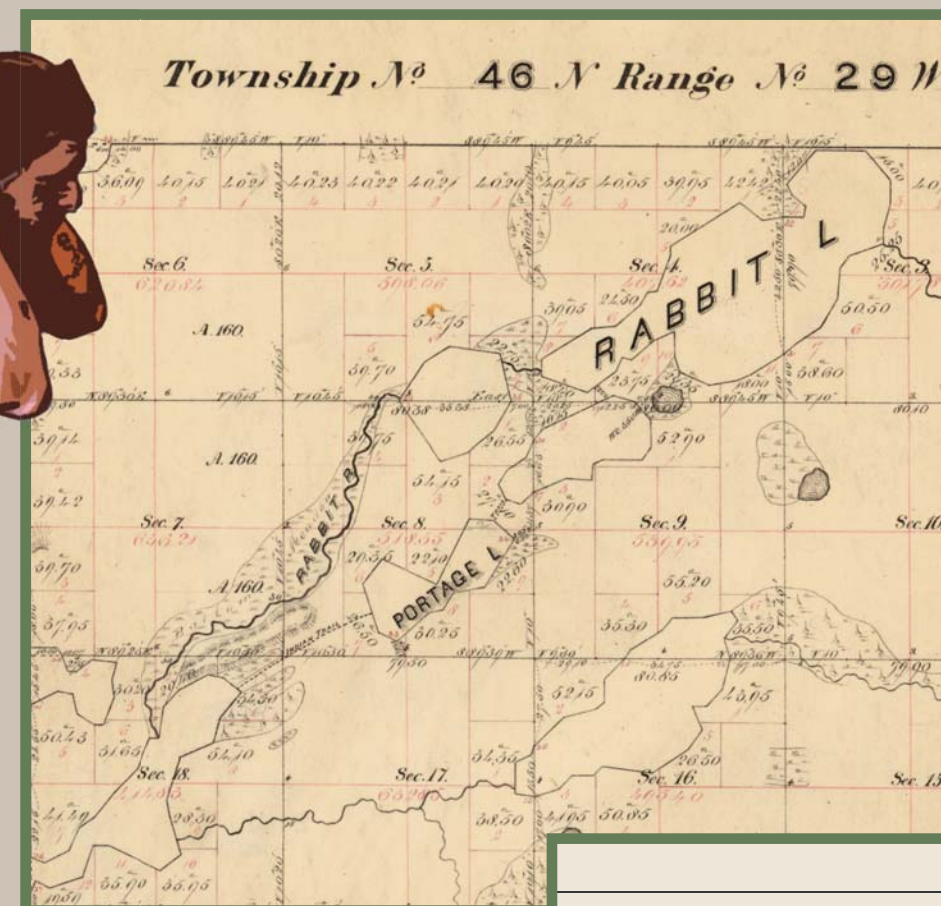
Portage Lake Trail



The Portage

For centuries people used Minnesota's rivers and lakes for travel. Over time efficient, traditional routes were established that included overland trails between navigable waters. Traders and visitors from Europe called these trails *portages*, a word with roots in ancient Latin traditions, a word that has crossed languages and cultures through the years.

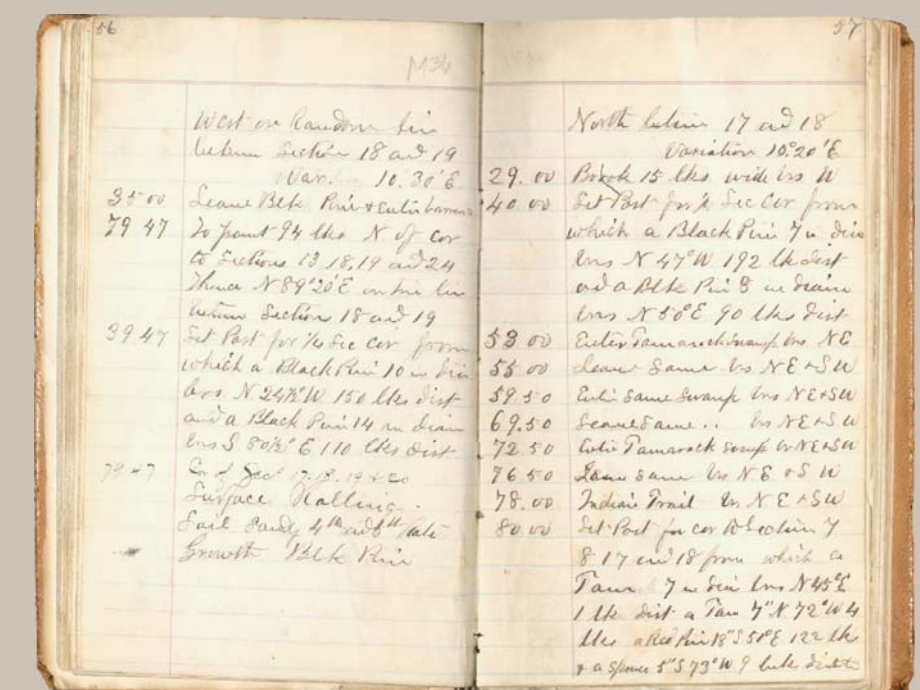
In the late 1700s traders came from Montreal to the Mississippi River in search of furs and trading alliances. Their need to travel overland between lakes and rivers was so common that they arranged trading goods and travel supplies into standard 90-pound portaging packs they called "pieces." Fur traders used the same water and portage routes that had been used by native people for centuries. Portage routes were used frequently and for such a long time that the trails were recognized and recorded by United States Land Surveyors in the latter half of the 19th century.



Surveyor's Sketch Map

In 1868 U.S. General Land Office surveyors worked their way across this area, taking notes and drawing sketch maps that would be used to establish the townships and sections we know today. This surveyor's map shows the Rabbit River Portage Trail, indicated by dotted lines. On the map, what we now know as Mahnomen Lake was labeled Rabbit Lake, which may explain why the present day lakes we call Rabbit and Little Rabbit are so far from one another.

Map and notebook images courtesy of U.S. Bureau of Land Management.



The surveyors used ink pens and leather-bound field books made specifically for their use.



Photograph courtesy of U.S.D.A. Forest Service

Transcribed field notes relating to the sketch map.

The surveyors were working their way north along the line between sections 17 and 18, township 46 north, range 29 west. The column on the left shows distances in *chains*. The length of each chain is 66 feet. The text to the right includes measurements in *links*. A link is 1/100 of a chain, or .66 foot, which is just under 8 inches.

| North between sections 17 and 18 Variation 10° 20' E | |
|---|--|
| 29.00 | Brook 15 links wide, bears W |
| 40.00 | Set post for the 1/4 section corner from which a Black Pine 7 in. diameter lies N47° W192 links distance and a Black Pine 8 in. diameter lies N50° E90 links distance |
| 53.00 | Enter Tamarack swamp, bears NE |
| 55.00 | Leave same, bears NE & SW |
| 59.50 | Enter same swamp, bears NE & SW |
| 69.50 | Leave same swamp, bears NE & SW |
| 72.50 | Enter Tamarack swamp, bears NE & SW |
| 76.50 | Leave same, bears NE & SW |
| 78.00 | Indian Trail, bears NE & SW |
| 80.00 | Set post for the corner to sections 7, 8, 17 and 18 from which a Tamarack 7 in. diameter lies N45° E1 links distance a Tamarack 7 in. diameter, N72° W4 links distance, a Red Pine 18 in. diameter, S51° E122 links & a Spruce 5" diameter, S73° W9 links distance |



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