

GRAND PORTAGE STATE PARK

FACILITIES AND FEATURES

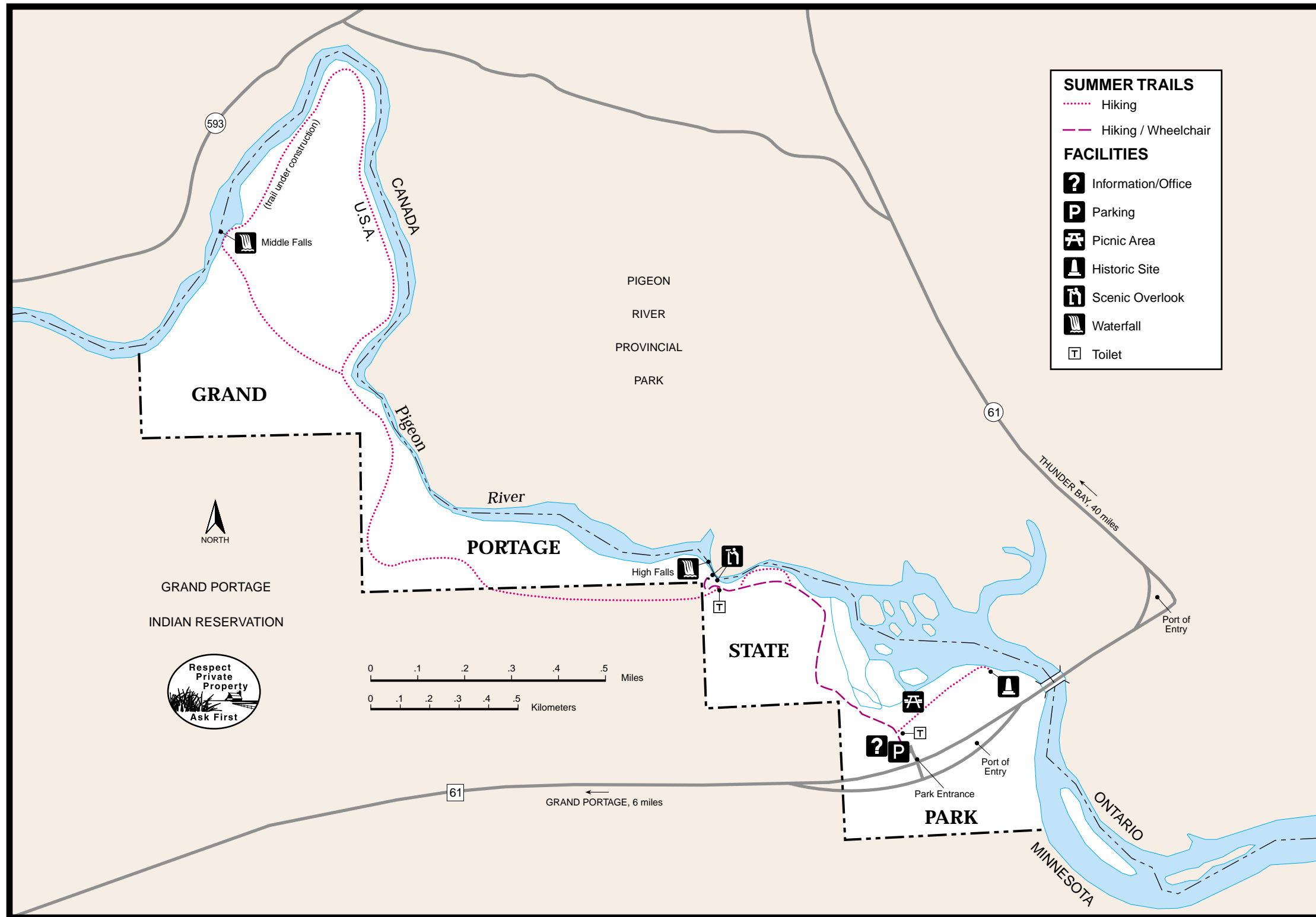
- Day use activities only
- Picnic area on the Pigeon River
- 5 miles of hiking trails
- Nature Store
- Naturalist programs

VISITOR FAVORITES

- Two waterfalls including High Falls, the highest falls in Minnesota

NEARBY

- Pigeon River Provincial Park: 945 hectares (2340 acres), 23 campsites (9 with electricity), gift shop.



LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

The DNR has mapped the state showing federal, state and county lands with their recreational facilities. Public Recreation Information Maps (PRIM) are available for purchase from the DNR gift shop, DNR regional offices, Minnesota state parks and major sporting and map stores.

Check it out - you'll be glad you did.



GRAND PORTAGE STATE PARK

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Grand Portage State Park
9393 Highway 61 East
Grand Portage, MN 55605
(218) 475-2360



Department of Natural Resources
Information Center
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

651-296-6157 (Metro Area)
1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

TDD (Telecommunications
Device for Deaf)
651-296-5484 (Metro Area)
1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

DNR Web Site: www.dnr.state.mn.us

GRAND PORTAGE STATE PARK is located at the easternmost tip of Minnesota in Cook County on the Grand Portage Indian Reservation. The park is located seven miles northeast of the village of Grand Portage on Minnesota Highway 61.

The international boundary of Canada and the United States marks the northern boundary of this 300-acre park. The park was established

in 1989 through the cooperative efforts of the State of Minnesota and the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa. A unique situation exists in that this is the only state park not owned by the State of Minnesota. The land is leased from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) which holds it in trust for the Grand Portage Band. The development and operation of the park rests primarily with the Department of Natural Resources and is implemented through the Division of Parks and Recreation.

The Pigeon River forms the international boundary and is the largest stream along Minnesota's North Shore. The river drains a total of 610-square miles flowing eastward some thirty miles from its source at South Fowl Lake on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Park frontage on the Pigeon River totals about 13,000 feet.

The lower twenty miles of the river is a series of cascades and waterfalls. This section of the river is completely unnavigable and portaging is impossible. For this reason, the "Grand Portage" was necessary to reach the calmer upper waters of the Pigeon. Twenty miles of torrential rapids and falls finally ends in High Falls, a thundering drop of nearly 120 feet. The river rapidly descends through steep-walled gorges and between boulder-strewn river banks transforming once again into a slow-moving, tranquil river only one-half mile below the falls. One mile further the river empties into Lake Superior.

The Falls Trail, one-half mile long, begins at the park office and goes north along the Pigeon River. A 700-foot boardwalk provides easy access on the last part of the trail. Three overlooks, one handicapped accessible, give awesome views of the waterfall. Visitors follow the same trail back to the parking lot.

The Middle Falls Trail, three and one-half miles long, begins at the Park Office and is a winding scenic trail that takes visitors over ridge tops, through heavily wooded forests and along the river bank. Visitors will appreciate the rugged, semi-mountainous terrain with its breathtaking views of the river gorge and Lake Superior. The trail leads to Middle Falls where it doubles back to the park office.

The Middle Falls Loop Trail is an extension of the main trail and follows the river bank to Middle Falls. It is about one mile in length and winds through aspen, birch and spruce stands.

THE GREAT CARRYING PLACE: Git-che O-ni-ga-ming and Grand Portage. Ojibway and French words for "a great carrying place." For many hundreds of years known only to the Indian people inhabiting the region. This nine-mile overland route connected Lake Superior to the Pigeon River and ultimately the inland system of lakes and rivers of the continent's interior. Birchbark canoes were the primary mode of water travel and because they were a fragile craft, a route churning with rapids and cascades was to be avoided at all costs. Even if it meant carrying a canoe and supplies over a nine-mile trail. Such was the scene annually for centuries as Indian people journeyed to and from Lake Superior. The reason? Twenty miles of rapids, cascades, gorges and waterfalls on the lower portion of the Pigeon River. Totally unnavigable even in today's aluminum and fiberglass canoes. By the time the French and English fur traders reached this area the trail was already a well-known and well-worn highway to the interior. The early voyageurs transported on their backs 90-pound bundles, sometimes two bundles at a time, trade goods one way and fur bundles the other way, doing the 18-mile round trip in six hours! The Grand Portage of Gitche Onigaming was "the great carrying place."

HISTORY: Grand Portage State Park and the surrounding area is rich in Indian and fur trade history. Long before the fur traders arrived the Lakota, Cree, and Chippewa (Ojibway) Indians inhabited the area. Hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering fruits of the land were the occupations of these early residents.

The mid-1600s brought the arrival of the early French explorers and marked the beginning of a new era for the Indian people living here.

The 1700s saw the arrival of the fur trade. Indians were hired as guides to take the traders into the fur-rich interior. The Indians were expert and skillful hunters and provided the traders the furs that they desired. In return, the Indians received wondrous new items for their furs. Glass beads and wool blankets replaced

porcupine quills and animal skins. Iron kettles, axes, firearms and traps became necessities in their daily life. Grand Portage eventually became the largest fur-trading depot on the continent.

In the late 1800s logging and commercial fishing became the principal occupations on the North Shore. In 1899, a logging flume was built around High Falls to avoid sending the logs over the falls. A dam was built above the falls to divert water into the flume. The logs were then floated through the flume to calmer waters below the falls and rapids.

GEOLOGY: The semi-mountainous landforms found in the Grand Portage area tell a story of dramatic geological processes. Processes that have occurred sporadically over a period of 1.9-billion years. This rugged relief owes its existence to the mountain building era and the volcanic activity of the Precambrian time period.

Movements in the earth's crust resulted in a rifting of plates that caused fractures to develop in layers of rock strata. These cracks and fissures allowed great volumes of basaltic magma to rise up and pour out upon the surface, forming what is called a dike. One of these erosion resistant dikes formed High Falls.

About 12,000 years ago, glacial ice sheets covered the region. These ice sheets, sometimes a mile thick, scoured their way southward leaving bedrock that was more resistant to erosional forces. Such bedrock was left as the uplands we see today. The Pigeon River eroded its way down through the bedrock and has been able to cut through the softer rock (shale and slate) to form the gorges found in the park. These erosional forces are still at work today.

VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE: Most of Grand Portage State Park is covered by a mixed hardwood forest community dominated by white birch and quaking aspen with occasional white spruce, balsam fir, white cedar, balsam poplar and black ash. The ridges and slopes are occupied by the boreal forest community. It is dominated by white spruce, black spruce, balsam fir, white pine and white cedar. Birch and aspen also exist in this boreal forest community.

The moist alluvial bottomlands along the Pi-

geon River contain green and black ash as well as white cedar, white spruce, and birch.

Many species of wildlife are found within the park. In the spring, the river teems with fish and waterfowl. Walleye and northern pike come into the river to spawn as well as rainbow smelt. Watch for herring gulls and osprey feeding on the smelt. Blue herons, geese, ducks, hawks, and eagles may be seen on any given day. Other wildlife around the park includes the common loon, pileated woodpecker, ruffed grouse, otter, beaver, snowshoe hare, and red squirrel. White-tailed deer are found in the northern portion of the park. Less commonly observed are moose, black bear, red fox, porcupine, pine marten and skunk. Occasionally a coyote or timber wolf are seen. When hiking, watch and listen for these animals.

NEARBY POINTS OF INTEREST: There are many things to see and do while in the Grand Portage area. The scenic views between the village of Grand Portage and the Pigeon River are among the most spectacular in Minnesota.

Wausaugoning Bay, the Susie Islands and Isle Royale provide a panoramic setting for photographers. Take an interpreter-led tour at the reconstructed 1700s fur-trade fort at the Grand Portage National Monument. Daily passenger ferry service for Isle Royale National Park is available at the National Monument dock.



This information is available in alternative format upon request.

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DNR Maps