

4

The Fur Trade Era: Exploration and Exchange in Wisconsin

Activity 4.3: Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now

Teacher Materials

Preparation/Organization Students will work in pairs for this activity, and each pair will need its own copy of the “Wisconsin Rivers Map” (Student Page 1) and the “Wisconsin Highways Map” (Student Page 3). (**Note:** You will also use these as transparencies.) Each student in the pair will also need his or her own copy of “Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now” (Student Page 2). Optional for each student pair are a standard Wisconsin highway map and a piece of string. A copy of “Notes from *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnaw Sotor*” (Student Page 4) will be needed for any student doing that particular enrichment activity.

Procedure

1. Begin by reviewing the basic map skills needed for the activity, including the parts of a map (compass, rose, scale, key) and cardinal directions (N, S, E, W, SE, SW, NE, NW).
2. Then divide the class into pairs. Hand out a copy of the “Wisconsin Rivers Map” (Student Page 1) to each pair and display it as a transparency. Discuss the features of the map.
3. Discuss early river travel as described in Chapter 4 of *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*. Ask:
 - Why was river travel so important to early Wisconsin people?
 - Why didn’t people travel on highways the way they do now?
4. Explain that, historically, Wisconsin people used the rivers and waterways to travel; when they had to travel from one river or waterway to another, they used short overland trails called *portages*. On the “Wisconsin Rivers Map” have students identify places where portages would have been made.
5. Tell students to imagine that they are early French fur traders at the trading post in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Remind students that they would have gone by water *all the way* from the Atlantic to Green Bay. (Have each pair find Green Bay on the map.) Explain that they now need to travel to the trading post in Prairie du Chien for a rendezvous. (Have students find the town of Prairie du Chien on the map.)
6. Give students time to discuss the travel routes with their partners. Then hand out the activity sheet “Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now” (Student Page 2). Have students work in their pairs to complete the river route, describing it on the activity sheet. Guide students as they give directions for travel, making sure they include the rivers they travel, the direction(s) they are traveling (south, north, southeast, etc.), and any portages.

7. Repeat the mapping activity using the “Wisconsin Highways Map” (Student Page 3). Have students trace the route modern travelers would take between these same two places. Guide students as they give directions for travel and write them in on the “Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now” activity sheet (Student Page 2). Make sure that students include the highways they will be using and the directions they will be taking. (**Note:** As an optional activity, you might have students calculate the *approximate* distance traveled, using string and a map scale.)
8. With the class as a whole, compare and contrast the two routes, stressing that although land travel is fast today, it was difficult and time-consuming in the past. Explain that speed was one of the reasons why traders used water routes to move heavy goods and furs.
9. Have students complete the third part of the activity sheet (Student Page 2). Suggest that partners review their sheets with each other before handing in the pages for assessment.

Enrichment You might try any of the following:

- Have students compare the speed of river travel and road travel, assuming that a canoe travels at about 5 miles per hour and a car at 60 miles per hour. What does this tell us about travel then and now?
- Interested students can find out how to get from their hometowns to Prairie du Chien and to Green Bay. Have students plan their routes on a highway map, using the Internet and other sources to find information about the cities through which they will pass. Students can then compile a list of helpful information sources (including web sites) and turn it in with their with their map routes.
- Have students read about early river travel from an authentic primary source, an edited portion of *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnaw Sotor* by George William Featherstonhaugh (Student Pages 4–5). This work was written in 1835 and published in 1847. Though it will be challenging for even the best reader, the text will provide an interesting and valuable glimpse of life in a distant time. (**Note:** The complete text can be found at the web site <http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/WIReader/Contents/Voyage.html>.)
- Use some of the lessons from the United States Geological Survey to teach more about maps and map skills. Visit their web site for educators, <http://www.usgs.gov/education.html>, or their main web site, www.usgs.org. You can also call and order materials at 1-888-ASK-USGS.

Answers

Then: From Green Bay, go southwest down the Fox River, through Lake Winnebago, and continue southwest down the Fox River. When the Fox starts to loop back to the northeast, portage to the Wisconsin River and continue in a southwesterly direction down the Wisconsin all the way to Prairie du Chien.

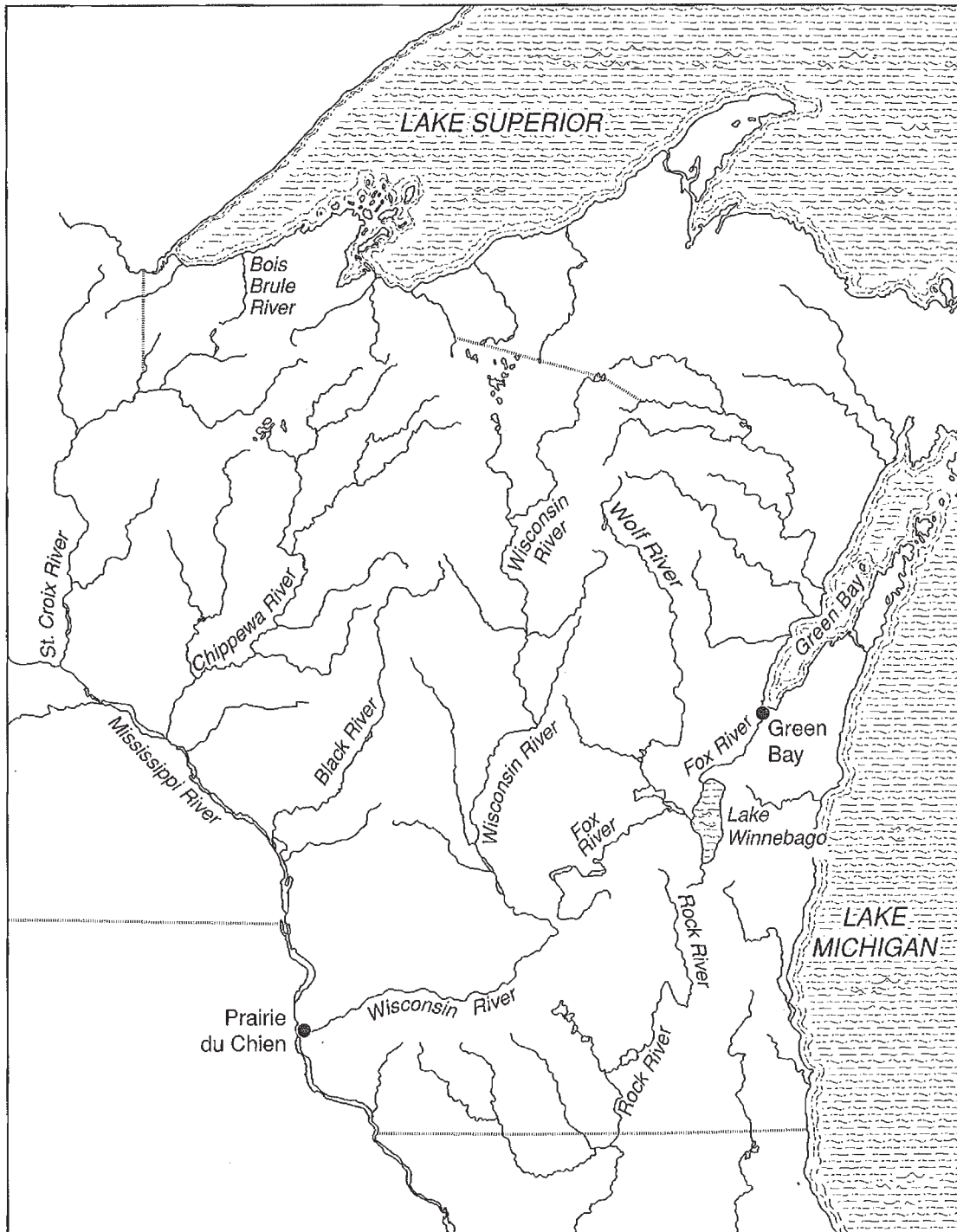
Now: From Green Bay, go southwest on Route 41, passing intersections for Routes 45 and 10. At the southern end of Lake Winnebago, take Route 151 southwest to Madison. There, take Route 18 west to Prairie du Chien.

Then and Now: The river and highway routes are the same in that they both are primarily in a southwestern direction. They differ in that the highway route today goes through towns and cities and goes somewhat farther south than the old river route. The highway route also takes considerably less time.

Name _____ Date _____

Activity 4.3 Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now

Wisconsin Rivers Map



Map by: Amelia Janes/Mike Gallagher, Midwest Educational Graphics

Name _____ Date _____

Wisconsin Travel: Then and Now

Then: Wisconsin Rivers

What river route will you take from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien? Give directions for travel and trace the route on your map. Name the waterways that will help you reach Prairie du Chien, and circle the places that you have to portage your canoe.

Now: Wisconsin Highways

What route will you take from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien? Give directions for travel and trace the route on your map. Name the highways over which you need to travel, and name some of the main cities that you will drive through to reach Prairie du Chien.

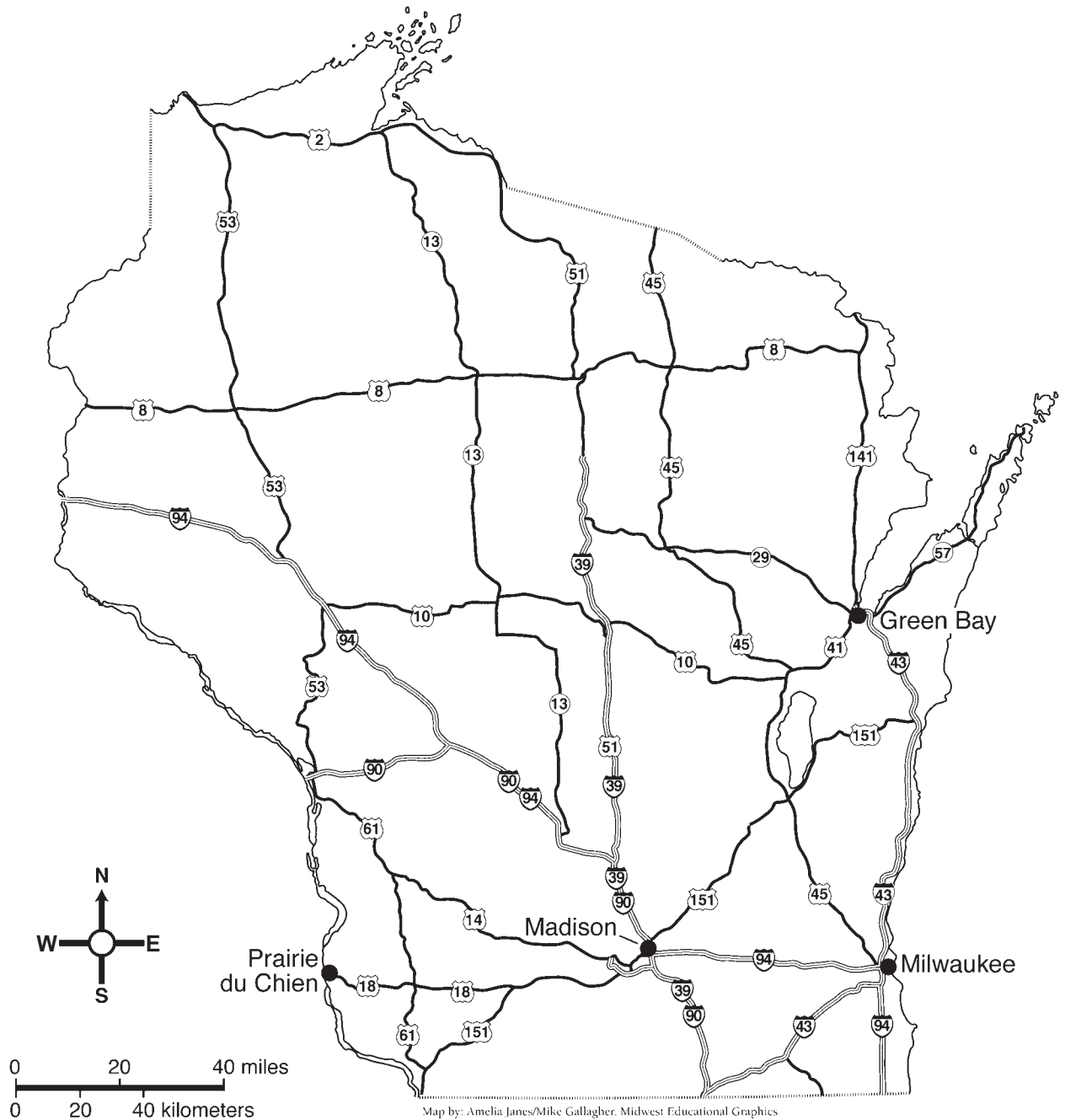
Then and Now

In what ways are the river route and highway route the same?

In what ways are the river route and highway route different?

Name _____ Date _____

Wisconsin Highways Map



Name _____ Date _____

Notes from *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnay Sotor*

by George William Featherstonhaugh (Fan shaw), written in 1835

The following passages are from Chapter 19. We begin at the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers near Ft. Winnebago:

Turning my back upon the waters that flow into the Atlantic, I crossed the portage, and advanced to those that empty themselves into the Gulf of Mexico. The portage was a dead flat of black mud and sand, measuring exactly 2650 paces: it took me exactly twenty-eight minutes to walk across it. The canoe and luggage were conveyed to the shore of the Wisconsin in an ox-cart, and launched upon the river as soon as we reached it. It was a powerful black-looking stream . . . with broad sand-beaches. . . . After struggling so many days as we had against the current of Fox River . . . it was exceedingly gratifying to find ourselves, on one of the most lovely mornings imaginable, carried down stream by a strong current. . . .

At 4 P.M. we passed a picturesque-looking mass of horizontal sandstone, extending with some interruptions for about a mile, distant probably about forty miles from the portage; and at half-past five, observing a comfortable place, near to an ancient abandoned Indian village, I made, to the great joy of the men, the signal for landing. . . .

My rest was a good deal disturbed by the mosquitoes, who had taken possession of the tent; and although I was up early, we could not start for a dense fog that was upon the river. I therefore amused myself looking at the deserted wigwams near us. They were formed with nine poles, about twelve feet high, fixed into the ground in a circle, about two feet apart from each other, and their tops bent to a point and fastened together. These poles were strengthened with others interwoven round them, and the whole covered with birch bark. An Indian house of this kind . . . and with a small fire in the middle, is comfortable in the coldest weather, the smoke escaping through a hole where the poles meet. The fog began to clear away at 7 A.M., and we resumed our voyage. . . .

Soon we passed a fine stream coming in from the right bank. The country here was remarkably beautiful, the slopes of the banks gracefully wooded. . . . For a distance of about three miles the escarpments were about 250 feet [in] height, the rock every now and then jutting out. . . . I observed, too, that . . . the sandstone had been favourable to Indian talent, the figures of deer, men, and horses—sometimes well executed—being cut into it, and sometimes painted with a red bole. The swallows had availed themselves of the softness of the rock by picking holes in it, and building their nests there in innumerable quantities. . . .

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Having made a hearty breakfast we got afloat again, and about 1 P.M. observed a small prairie on the right bank with some Indian mounds. . . . About 2 P.M. the river began to widen, and we were rapidly approaching the point of its confluence with the Mississippi. I could already perceive the lofty right bank of that famous stream at the end of the vista. . . . At half-past 3 P.M. we bade adieu to the charming Wisconsin, and to the enjoyment of floating upon a favourable current, having entered upon the broad surface of the Mississippi . . . and all our force was wanted to contend against the force of the descending stream. . . . We soon came in sight of Prairie du Chien, an extensive level bottom or prairie, closed in to the east by a strong rocky bluff, which was no doubt once the bank of the river. A new scene now presented itself; there was a respectable-looking military post, cattle grazing, a village, and evidences of a settled population, to which I had been for some time a stranger.

