

but it was a recognised thoroughfare of the fur trade for half a century or more. The Nipigon route was discovered by Unifreville in 1784, but was never used to any extent.

Disregarding a number of minor portages, on the various routes between Lake Superior and the Lake-of-the-Woods, and on the Winnipeg river, the next notable portage is at Grand Rapids, where the Saskatchewan discharges its waters into Lake Winnipeg. Ascending the Saskatchewan, about midway between its mouth and the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan, a portage route leads north by way of Cumberland lake. Trading posts were built on this lake in the early days of the fur trade, by both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Company. Joseph Frobisher, one of the traders from Montreal, first discovered and named Frog portage, long known as Portage de Traité (or Traitté), which connected the Churchill with the Saskatchewan, in 1774. Peter Pond, following Frobisher's lead, turned up the Churchill to its source in Lac-la-Loche, and discovered Methye portage or Portage la Loche, in 1778. This portage, noted for its beautiful scenery, which has been described by Mackenzie, Franklin, Back, and other northern travellers, leads from the Churchill over to the Clearwater, and so to the Athabaska and the vast systems of northern and western waterways that lie beyond. Another important key to the water systems of the west was Giscome portage, leading from the headwaters of the Parsnip, a branch of the Peace river, to the upper waters of the Fraser.

The earliest of Canadian travellers, who were sometimes explorers, sometimes fur-traders, and often both, adopted the birchbark canoe of the Indian as the most efficient means of transport on North American waters. Because of the vital part this type of vessel played in the early history of Canada, and particularly of what is now western Canada, it seems worth while to quote the description in Keating's *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of the St Peters River*:

"We were divided into three bark canoes, known by the name of 'canot du nord'. Although these are made nearly on the same model, yet there is great difference in their speed, burden, soundness, etc., according to the skill manifested in their construction. A canoe of this kind is generally constructed of ribs of cedar bent so as to impart to it its proper form, the ends being secured to a band that forms the superior edge of the vessel, and acts as a gunwale; over these ribs the birch bark is laid in as large pieces as possible, generally so that there shall be but two longitudinal seams, and two or three transverse; between the bark and the ribs very thin splints of cedar are placed, so as to prevent the bark from splitting; all the joints are sewed with long threads obtained by splitting the roots of a tree called by the