

To get to the Gulf of Mexico from Lake Winnipeg, it was only necessary to ascend the Red river and portage over to the upper waters of the Mississippi. The Mississippi could also be reached by various portage routes from the Great Lakes, from Lake Erie by way of the Ohio, from Lakes Michigan and Superior by means of small streams that led to tributaries of the Mississippi.

Also, in the east, the Atlantic coast could be reached by water routes from Lake Ontario to the Hudson, and from the St. Lawrence by the Richelieu river and Lake Champlain to the Hudson. And toward the north, many routes were available, and used more or less by fur traders; from the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence to James bay, by the Albany or the Moose from Lake Superior; and from the St. Lawrence, by the Ottawa and the Abitibi, by the St. Maurice and the Nottaway, and by the Saguenay and the Rupert rivers.

As this marvellous water system was opened up, a number of portage routes came into use, some of which in time became famous. Probably the most notable of these was the Grand Portage route, which led from Lake Superior over the height of land to waters flowing west into Lake Winnipeg and eventually into Hudson bay. Grand Portage was for many years the connecting link between the east and the west, the doorway to the vast Indian country, the fur-trader's paradise.

Other portage routes from Lake Superior to the westward were by way of the Kaministiquia river, by the St. Louis river, and by Lake Nipigon. The Kaministiquia route lay up the river of that name, at whose mouth the city of Fort William now stands, and thence by a series of lakes and rivers to Rainy lake. The Fond-du-Lac route ran up the St. Louis river, from where Duluth stands to-day, and by way of Vermilion river and Lake Namakan to Rainy lake. The Nipigon route was more roundabout. From Lake Superior, the traveller ascended Nipigon river to the lake of the same name, then westward through a series of lakes and streams to English river, a tributary of Winnipeg river.

The Kaministiquia was the earliest of these portage routes to be discovered. In 1688, Jacques de Noyon followed this route to Rainy lake. La Jemeraie, nephew of the western explorer La Vérendrye, first used the Grand Portage route in 1731, and it continued in use until the beginning of the following century, when the Canadian fur traders, organised as the North-West Company, finding that the authorities of the United States had determined to levy customs duties on goods landed at Grand Portage, decided to adopt the Kaministiquia route, which had been rediscovered by Roderick McKenzie in 1798. It is not known when the St. Louis or Fond-du-Lac route was discovered,