

# GRAND PORTAGE STATE PARK

## FACILITIES AND FEATURES

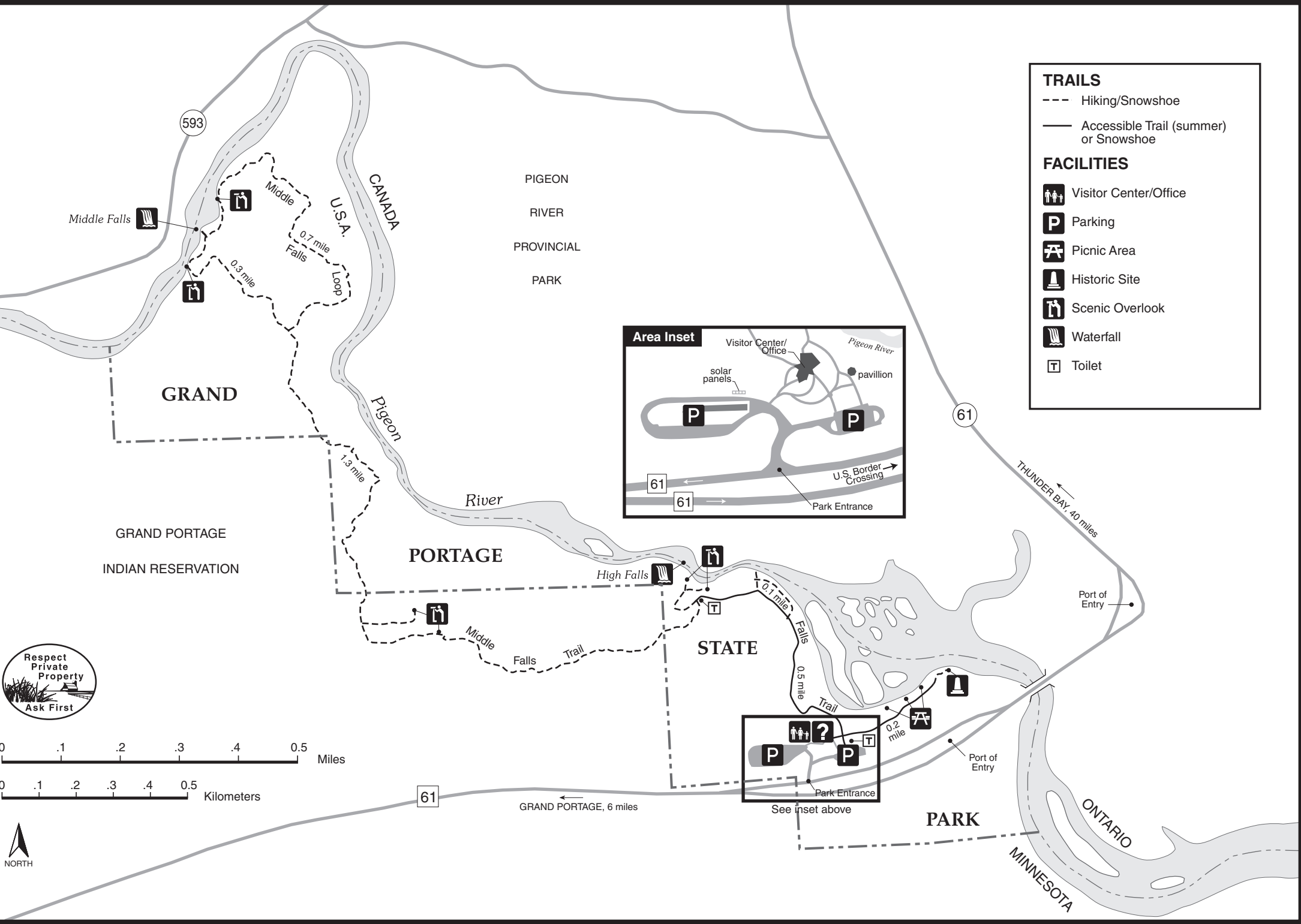
- Day use activities only
- Picnic area on the Pigeon River
- 5 miles of hiking/snowshoe Trails trails
- Nature Store
- Interpretive programs

## VISITOR FAVORITES

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

## NEARBY

- Hiking trails to Lake Superior and nearby peaks.
- Camping at Grand Portage Marina. Scenic views of Lake Superior. 29 RV sites w/ full hookups (water, sewer, electricity). Restrooms & showers. Tent camping available.





# 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)

[mndnr.gov/parks](http://mndnr.gov/parks)

**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 park was established in 1989 through the cooperative efforts of the State of Minnesota and the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa. *The park is unique because the land is owned by the Grand Portage Chippewa*

*Indians, not the State of Minnesota.* The Grand Portage Chippewa lease the land to the state for use as a state park.



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 northern boundary of this 300-acre park. The river is the international boundary between Canada and the United States, 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 round trip, begins at the High Falls boardwalk 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 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 human history. Thousands of years before European fur traders arrived, there was a flourishing culture that mined and traded copper from Isle Royale and Upper Michigan. Copper was made into many useful tools including spear points, axe heads, fishhooks, knives, awls, and decorative items. Many of these copper tools have been found in the area. Copper from the region was also traded all over North America and even into Mexico. Many of the stone hammers found on Isle Royale are made of diabase (the hard, black volcanic rock that forms many of the high ridges in the Grand Portage region) that was brought to the island from the North Shore.

The Anishinabe (Ojibwe or Chippewa) people arrived here several hundred years

ago after a multi-generational migration from the area of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Anisinabe lived with the cycle of the seasons. Spring was the time for the sugar bush—the annual tapping of the maple trees to make maple sugar. *Anishinabe-ziinzibaakwad* (maple sugar) could be formed into molds and stored in birch bark *makuks*. It was used as an all-around seasoning and as a confection. Summer was the time when the people would gather together into larger groups for fishing, gathering berries, ceremonies and celebrations. In the fall, families moved to their favorite ricing lake or river to gather and process *manomin*—“the food that floats on the water.” Winter was the time for hunting, ice fishing, mending clothes and nets, and storytelling.

When the European explorers and traders first arrived in the mid 1600s, the Anishinabe adapted many of their trade goods to traditional uses. Firearms, iron kettles, steel knives and axes, and other goods were the basis for a new market economy driven by European fashion for beaver felt hats. The fur trade continued until the early 1800s.

**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 Pigeon River contain green and black ash as well as white cedar, white spruce, and yellow 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.

Wauswaugoning 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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