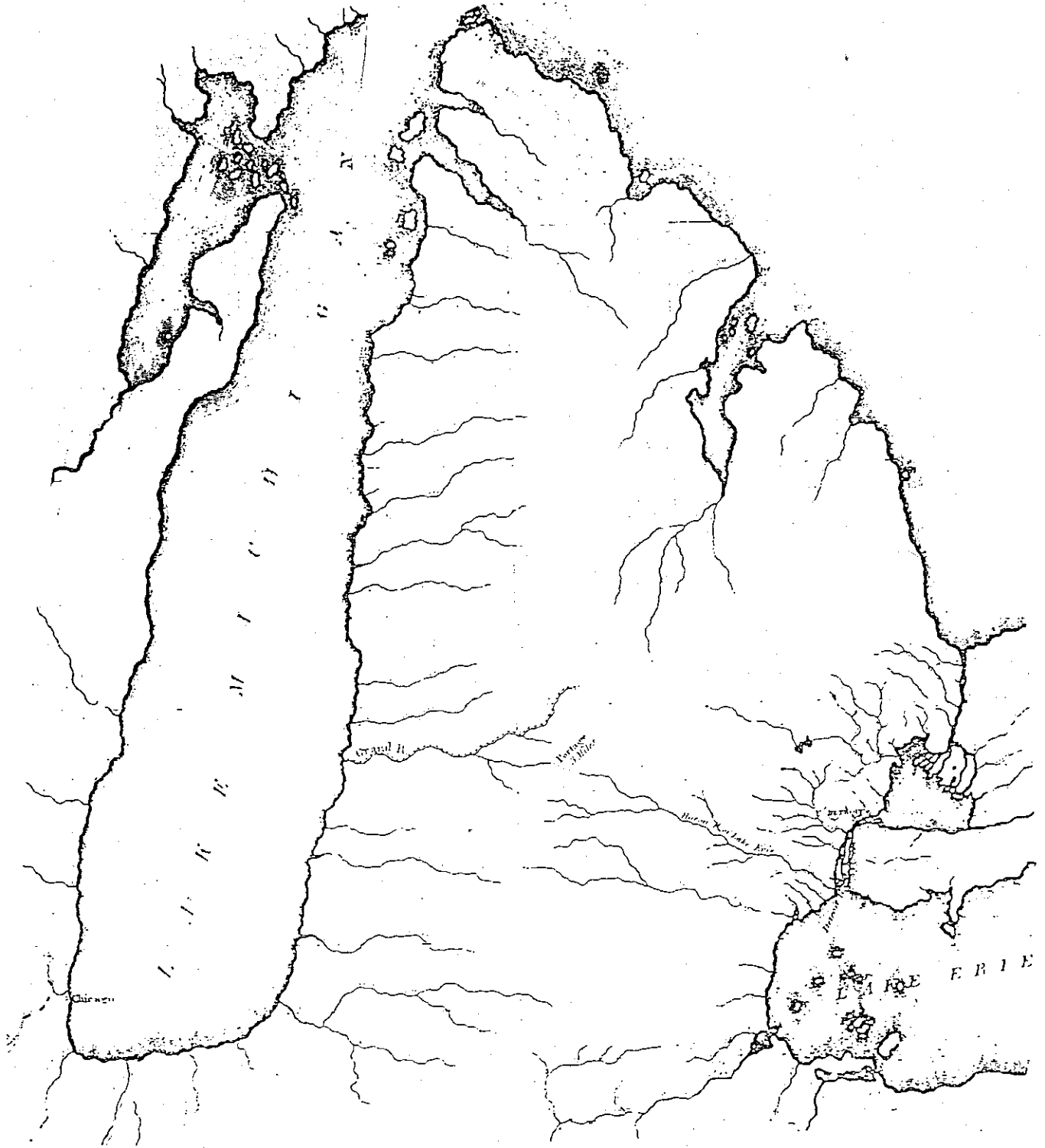


ACROSS LOWER  
MICHIGAN BY CANOE  
1790



Jim Woodruff

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

One of the great things about retirement has been finally having the time to pursue old interests and develop new ones. I have long had a fondness for Michigan history, topographic maps, and canoes and canoeists. I indulge these three passions through my hobby of "topology" (topographical study of places in relation to their histories). I like to take primary-source accounts of journeys and explorations and, using modern topographic maps and library research, try to recreate their routes and determine the locations of events they describe.

In this case I have taken the personal journal of one Hugh Heward describing a 1790 trip by canoe across the Lower Peninsula and, applying the principles of topology, attempted to work out his route.

Although I have been working on this project off and on for 15 years, the impetus to finish it came from my involvement in Grand River Expedition 2000 when, as leader of the History Team, I issued the "Hugh Heward Challenge" daring expedition canoeists and kayakers to try to match the Heward party's long-distance dash down the Grand River on April 24, 1790. It has since become an annual affair.

Verlen Kruger, Michigan's far-famed long-distance canoeist, made a vital contribution to this project in 1990 by paddling and bushwhacking his way from the Huron River to the Grand River to validate my theories as to how the Heward party made that trip 200 years before.

I must also give recognition to Jim Meyerle and his Project Lakewell re-enactors. My visit to their 1989 voyageur campout at Lansing's Riverfest led to my involvement in Grand River Expedition '90 and the rest, as they say, is history.

Word processing and computer graphics are by "Paddlemom", Nancy Anderson, who has completed the "Hugh Heward Challenge" three times. My special thanks to her and to Charlie Parmelee, President of the Lansing Oar and Paddle Club; who, upon seeing my manuscript, volunteered to get it typed and then talked Nancy into doing the work.

Jim Woodruff  
6506 Old River Trail  
Lansing, MI 48917

*Thanks for  
your interest  
Jim Woodruff*

February 2004

*Matt Turner copy  
Rec'd 4/15/2013  
From Jim Woodruff  
@ his residence in  
Lansing, MI.  
M.T. 4/15/2013*

## INTRODUCTION

The main text of this paper covers in some detail the trip of British trader Hugh Heward and seven French-Canadian “engagés” crossing the Lower Peninsula in two birchbark canoes in 1790. It is based on his personal journal which was included in *The John Askin Papers* published in 1928 by the Detroit Library Commission.

**Appendix 1, *Who Was Hugh Heward?***, is a brief biographical sketch based on footnotes in *The John Askin Papers*.

**Appendix 2, *Detroit in the 1790's***, contains a contemporary description of the Detroit from which Heward and his crew departed.

**Appendix 3, *What Kind Of Canoes Did The Grand River Indians Build?***, is my speculation as to the types of canoes being constructed in the Upper Grand River valley in the late 1700's and early 1800's. The speculation is based on my considerable research leading to articles on elm-bark canoes and dugouts published in *Wooden Canoe* magazine.

**Appendix 4, *The Hugh Heward Challenge***, covers the results of the challenge I first issued to canoeists and kayakers during Grand River Expedition 2000.

**Appendix 5, *The Return Route?***, is an exploration of the then-available alternatives for returning from the Mississippi to Detroit. If Heward kept a journal of his return trip it has never been found.

**Appendix 6, *Where Were The Campsites?***, is my attempt to determine or guess the locations of the 27 campsites used by Heward and his crew between March 24 and May 9.

# ACROSS LOWER MICHIGAN BY CANOE – 1790

Jim Woodruff



# ACROSS LOWER MICHIGAN BY CANOE – 1790

by Jim Woodruff

It is early spring of the year 1790 on the Detroit River. It has been 111 years since the explorer LaSalle sailed up the river in the *Griffin*, the first sailing ship on the Upper Great Lakes. It has been nearly 89 years since Cadillac came down the river and founded the settlement on the right bank by building Fort Ponchartrain du Detroit. It has been 30 years since the British took over after the French and Indian War, but only 17 years since Pontiac's Indians ended their siege of Fort Detroit. It will be six more years before the British give up here what the Americans won in the Revolutionary War.

British trader Hugh Heward and seven French-Canadian “engagés” in two birchbark canoes are heading down the river on a journey that will take them across Lower Michigan from Lake Erie to Lake Michigan by way of the Huron River and the Grand River.

Happily, Heward's detailed day-to-day journal of this trip has been preserved. It was published in 1928 as part of *The John Askin Papers*, also known as Volume I of the *Burton Historical Records*. It is entitled “*Journal of a Voyage made by Mr. Hugh Heward to the Illinois Country.*” (**Appendix 1** contains biographical material on Heward.)

Here is his first entry:

*Detroit, March 24<sup>th</sup> 1790 took my departure for the Illinois, had much Trouble as Customary in getting the Engageés off in which hurry we left a keg of pork behind...*

(A scarcity of punctuation and his random use of capitals often make the journal difficult to read and analyze. See the sample pages.)

In 1790 the Detroit was no longer a wilderness river, being lined on both sides by French

upon about 5 o'clock came to two Cabins of Otawas who confirmed us that we were in the Grand River & at night met two Cannots mount<sup>s</sup> to go to Detroit the Lands on this River seem low & very thick Wood plum Trees Hickory & Bois blanc & on the higher Lands Oak a very steady but not rapid Current Camped & at Night the Indians came & told us we would meet many Cannots coming for Detroit.

Friday Ap<sup>l</sup> 23<sup>a</sup> 1790 Wrote M<sup>r</sup> Robertson by Indians going to Detroit in two Cannots continued our Rout till about 10 o'clock the Course nearly West & it then turned all at once to North by East or nearly North a fine Day & good Current Met about 11 o'clock with Indians spearing Sturgeon an ill looking Band of about 12 who seem to be refugees from the Otaways & peutowatomas strong fat Vagabons bought a Sturgeon for Tobacco & set off when a reinforcement was coming the River from here became large & fine with a strong Current & Stony Bottom the course West Nore West & continued 'till about 3 o'clock when it increased in Water & run in large Turnings with Points and Marrey [?] & not so strong a Current the course Nore West 'till about Six o'clock & then came to an opener Course nearly the same Direction passed a strong Rapid & Camped. fine Land & heavy Wood of all Sorts on both Sides.

Saturday Ap<sup>l</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> 1790. Refited our Cannots with Gum & set off passed a Rapid in about an hour after which high broken Land & some pine Trees the Banks of Red Land from thence came to a River from the East<sup>13</sup> & a little lower two Cabins of Indians from Sagana they were providing Cannots for their Departure the course to this Time nearly Nore West by Nore from thence high broken Land & some pine & Cedar about 11 o'clock came to an Island in the Middle of the River & a long Rapid & afterwards another Island about Mid Day. Dined the Course West Nore West & came to another Island afterwards three

<sup>13</sup> Apparently Cedar River, which joins the Grand at Lansing in northwestern Ingham County.

Small Islands & some pine Trees on each Side of the River & high Rocks on the North & a small Run of Water from the South after which another small Island & a long & pleasant Drift of an equal & strong Current the Banks high but the Beach level & Gravelly Bottom to another long but not very strong Rapid & to another small Island the Course West by North to again high Banks to the North to another Island from thence to another Island from thence to four others all together following from here a high Sandy Bank with some pine Trees on the South Side after which a Large Island & two small ones following afterwards three Sm[all] Islands & two Sm[all] Meadows to North this last Course nearly West heavy Wood on all Sides Encamped.

Sunday Ap<sup>l</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> Opposite an Island<sup>14</sup> after a rainy Night set off from hence a number of small Islands following to a River from the East<sup>15</sup> where was a Cabin of Otawas the Course here nearly North with high Banks & some pine trees to the East from thence to a Villiage the river very full of high Banks [and] some pine Trees & at this Villiage a large Turning & Point the Course Nore West arrived here at Mid Day. from thence low Bottoms with high Banks at a Distance very full of heavy Wood with the finest places possible for making Sugar the River running level deep & not a very strong Current with many Turnings the course nearly West Duarrier lost a Quart Jack some Time ago put on Shore early to rig our Oars hull Corn & C.

Monday Ap<sup>l</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> 1790 Set off & arrived abo<sup>t</sup> 10 o'clock at a Wintering place a little above a River from North East that goes to Sagana<sup>16</sup> the Frenchman we were told by Squas was gone & indeed his Wintering place seemed very miserable & desolate continued our Course to West but there was a brisk Wind ahead which annoyed us much here the River Wider but not more Current at mid Day

<sup>14</sup> It seems apparent that the words "opposite an island" properly belong with the word "encamped," immediately above.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently Looking Glass River, in southeastern Ionia County.

<sup>16</sup> Maple River in eastern Ionia County.

“ribbon farms” and with a “...windmill at every point and headland...” \*

Windmills were the most prominent structures along the river. To quote author Ernest J. Lajeunesse in “*The Windsor Border Region*” (1960):

*A familiar sight...in the eighteenth century was the windmills with their sweeping arms and flapping sails, where the farmers brought their grain to be ground. These were tower-shaped buildings about thirty feet in height and about twenty feet in diameter. The roof was conical and to it were attached long arms or wings fixed to an axle fitted with small sails.*

Sheryl James in “*Roads, Roots & Ribbon Farms*”, a 2000 article in *Michigan History* magazine, explains that ribbon farms were only 400 to 900 feet wide but quite deep away from the river. *The farms were narrow for convenience, safety, and access to water, the only ‘road’ then.*

Canadian author Hugh Cowan in his book *The Detroit River District* (1929) describes the appearance of these farms from the river:

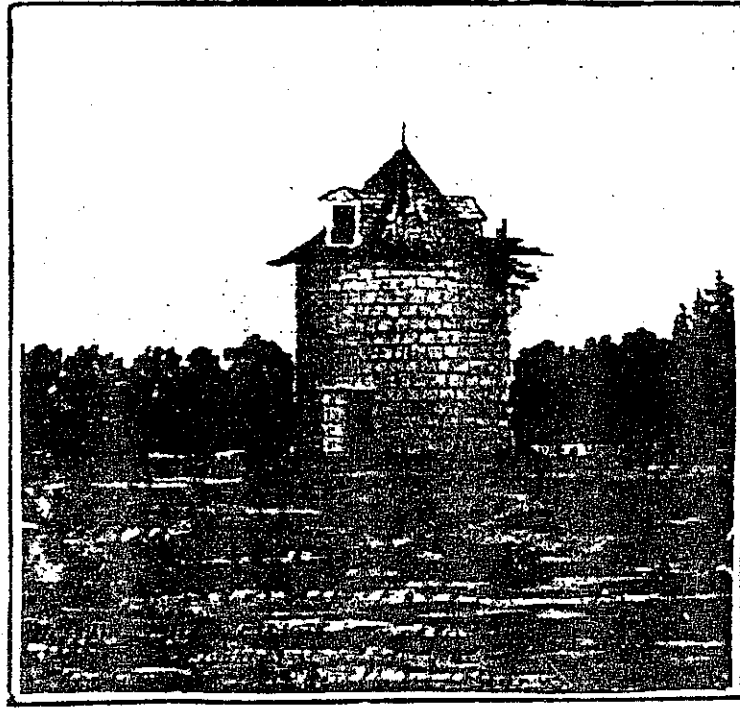
*Their houses were well built log structures, neatly dove-tailed at the corners, sometimes hewed and sometimes left in the rough, but in most cases whitewashed both inside and out...At the front of the house was the garden where, in addition to many varieties of flowers, the vegetables for domestic use were grown. The orchards were set behind...the river bank displayed the appearance of one continuous village...*

Despite the civilized and settled look of the river’s banks, there were still nearby Indian villages:

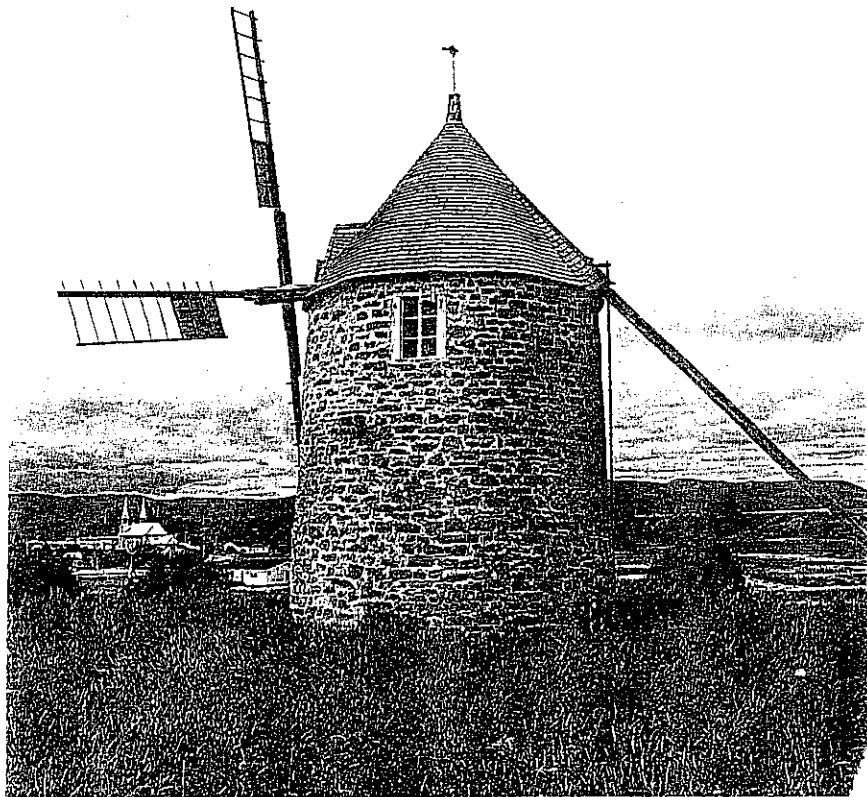
*The village of Pottawatomies adjoins the fort; they lodge partly under Apaquois, which are made of mat-grass. The women do all the work. The men belonging to that nation are well clothed...their entire occupation is*

---

\* “*The Historical Geography of Detroit*”, Parkins, A.E., 1970



REMNANTS OF OLD PETROIT RIVER WINDMILL



OLD FRENCH STONE WINDMILL STILL  
IN EXISTENCE IN QUEBEC



*hunting and dress...*

*...the Huron also dwelt on the west side...This is the most industrious nation...They scarcely ever dance, and are always at work; raise a very large amount of Indian corn, peas, beans; some grow wheat. They construct their huts entirely of bark, very strong and solid...*

*The Ottawas are on the opposite side of the river...Their cabins resemble somewhat those of the Hurons...They are as well dressed and very laborious, both in their agriculture and hunting.*

These extracts are also from Cowan's book and are attributed to one Isaac Weld. (**Appendix 2** contains extracts of Weld's description of Detroit in the 1790's.)

The interior of the Lower Peninsula through which Heward's party would be traveling was still mostly wilderness where replenishing their provisions would be difficult. Thus it was important that they retrieve the keg of pork they left behind while departing.

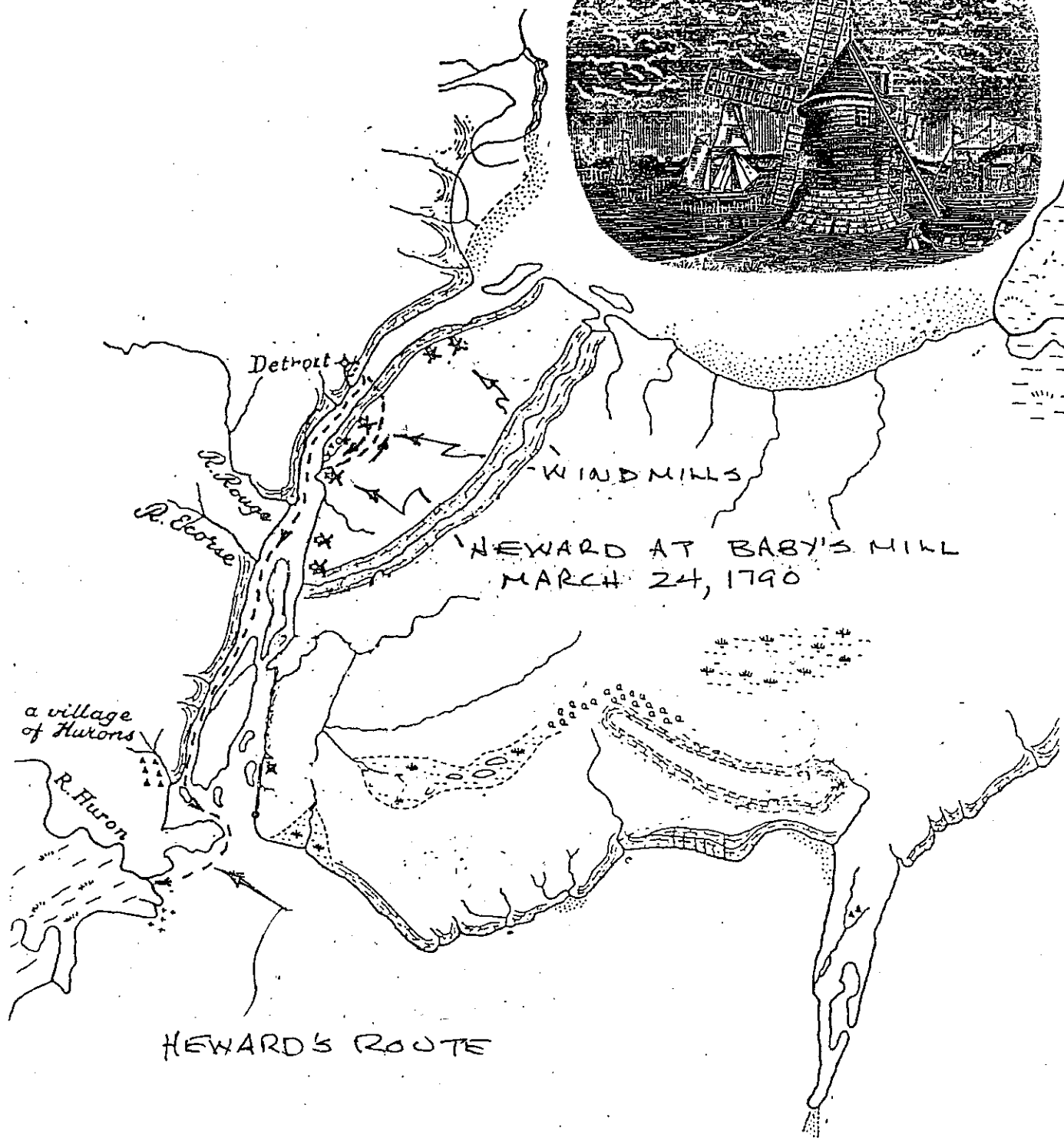
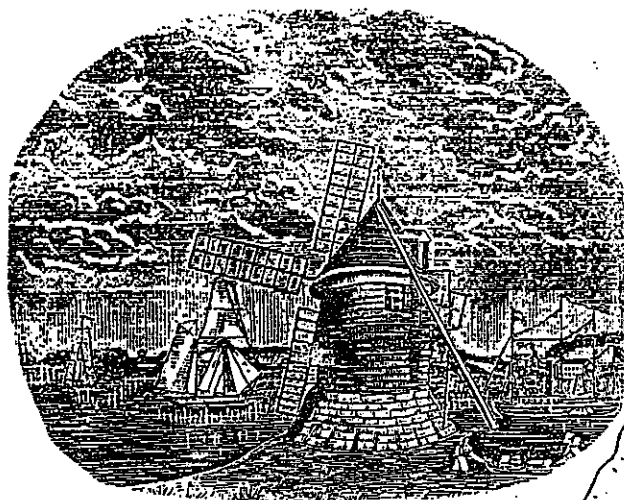
In his journal Heward describes how he and one of his engagés paddled back upstream to Baby's Mill (a windmill located on the left bank at a location that is now a part of Windsor, Ontario) and:

*...walked up opposite the Fort & borrow'd a Cannot to cross-had just Time to get the keg & get out of the gate at 9 oClock cross'd & return'd the Cannot from thence carried the keg of pork each his turn to our cannot at Mr Baby's Mill, Slept there. & next morning the 25<sup>th</sup> very wet & disagreeable we from there joined our other cannot at Labourses Mill...*

(I have been able to pin-point the location of Baby's Mill but not Labourses'. I believe it was on what is now the American side.)

**Map No. 1** is from a 1791 survey. It shows six mills on the left (Canadian) bank but

MAP No. 1



LACKING RIVERS SUITABLE FOR WATER-POWERED MILLS "... THERE WAS A WINDMILL ON EVERY PROMINTORY AND POINT..." IN THE DETROIT RIVER AREA. (MAP FROM 1791 SURVEY)

none on the right (American) bank. Some written descriptions have led me to believe there might have been more, including some on the right bank.

The “cannots” used by the Heward party were birchbark canoes, most likely of the Algonquin style. It is the opinion of Tim Kent of Ossineke, author of *Birchbark Canoes of the Fur Trade*, that their canoes probably would have been “bastard 16-piece” (or “half-size”) types 18 to 24 feet long. The “16-piece” designation refers to the capacity to carry 16 pieces of cargo. (I don’t know the origin of the term “bastard”.) The canoes were propelled by either paddles or poles. Canoe-men normally provided their own paddles, either hand-carved or purchased from fur-trade company stores. “Setting” poles would have been cut along the way as needed.

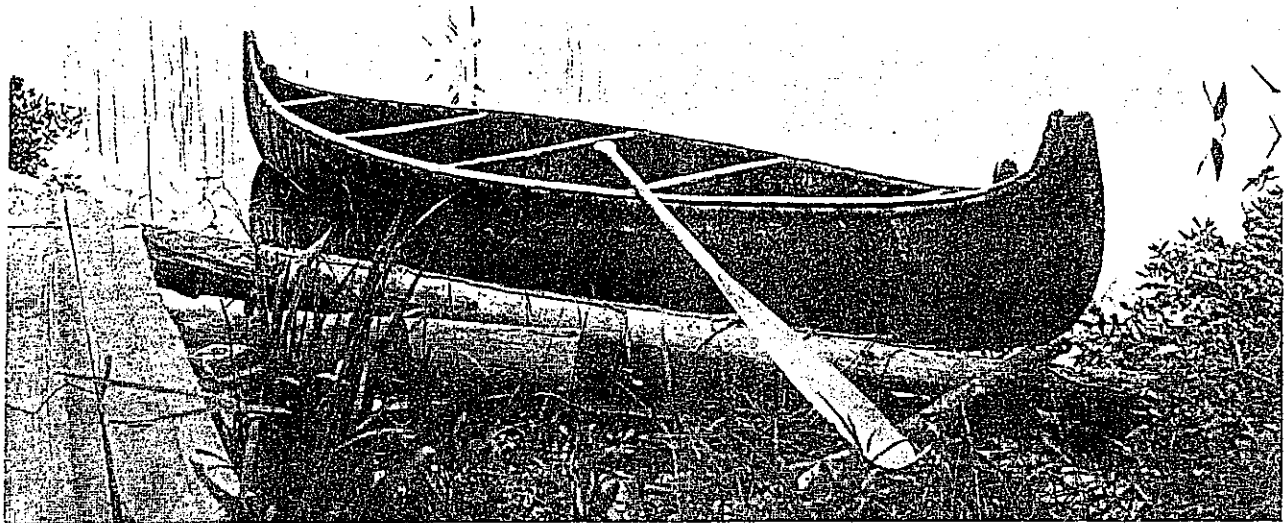
We know from later entries in Heward’s journal that they also had sailing capability.

Between forgetting the keg of pork and bad weather, their progress down the Detroit River to Lake Erie was very slow. It wasn’t until March 28 that they reached the mouth of the Huron River and started upstream. The Huron was in flood with the current strong against them.

In his journal Heward daily recorded weather conditions “...*wind rose suddenly & detained us all day...fine Weather only frosty...Cold Weather that the ice hung in the Branches...*”, current strength “*Current stronger & more difficult than before...Current for about 2 Leagues exceeding Strong...*”, water levels “...*River very high and overflowed on all sides...River falling but still overflowing...*”, bank conditions “...*Land on all Sides in general very low & wet...the Banks very high...Banks still high & barren...*”, trees observed “...*abound’g with Elem ButtonWood & c...Culture abound’g principally with Black Oak...Diminutive Red Oak Trees & Soil with Fern...*”, and bottom conditions “...*firm Gravely Bottom...*”.

After four days of strenuous upstream paddling, Heward and his engagés arrived at a small trading post and settlement. He calls the place “SansCraints” or “Sancraints Village”.

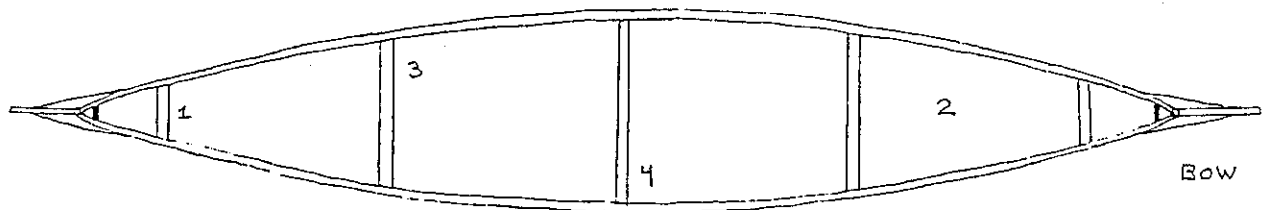
THIS IS THE TYPE OF CANOE THEY USED



ABOUT 26' LONG

TWO MEN TO CARRY

ONE BRITISH TRADER & 7 ENGAGÉ'S  
MEANT FOUR MEN IN EACH CANOE



THIS DIAGRAM SHOWS WHERE THE  
FOUR PADDLERS SAT OR KNEELED

FOUR PADDLERS COULD MOVE A CANOE  
RAPIDLY DOWNSTREAM OR POWERFULLY  
UP STREAM

There was also a Wyandot (Huron) Indian village there.

It is important to this narrative to determine where this was located since here he negotiated for provisions and guides and he twice returned here from upriver.

Everything I have found on the matter points to the site now occupied by Ypsilanti.

**Appendix 6** includes a discussion supporting this conclusion and a map.

At the Indian village Heward tried without success to hire a guide: *“Could not get an Indian to pass the portage but engaged one to meet us at the Fork of the River to conduct us...”* The portage to which he wished to be guided was that crossing the divide between the Lake Erie and Lake Michigan watersheds.

About mid-morning of April 2 they resumed their journey. By the afternoon of the 3<sup>rd</sup> the river became shallow enough to use poles but the current was still strong.

On Sunday April 4 they were rained in all day, but the next morning they were on their way again, and late in the afternoon they arrived at the fork. They were at the location of present-day Dexter.

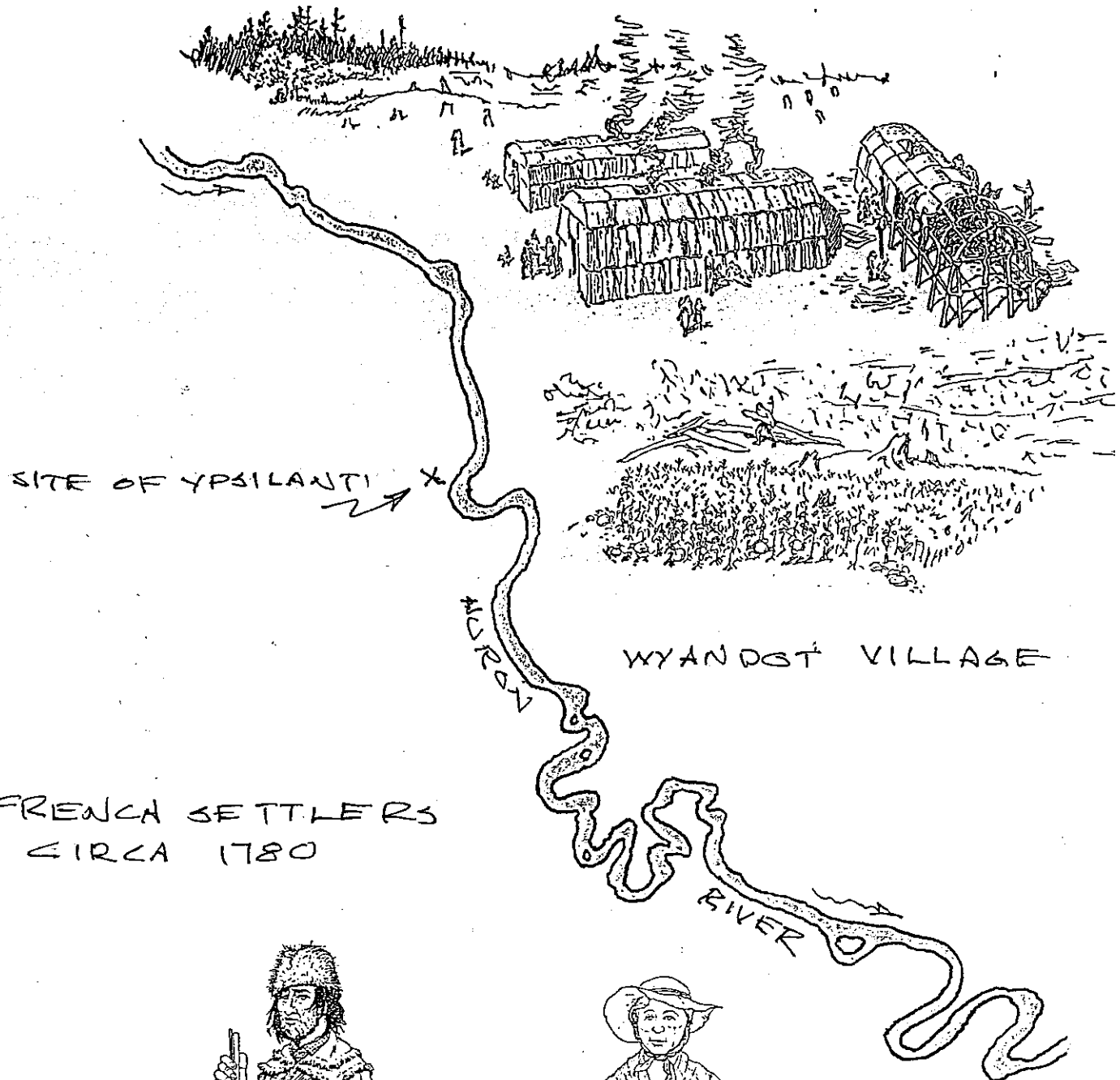
The journal says:

*...about five oClock arrived at the Forks which from the River on a West Course divides one Branch South West & the other North West that of the South West being our Course we proceeded about four Miles up & encamped...*

What they had done was mistake a tributary that is now called Mill Creek for the mainstream of the Huron. They were later to name this stream “Wrong Fork.” The Indian who was to meet them at the fork never showed.

Heward spent April 6 through April 9 wandering around on foot trying to find a way to the portage. A sampling of journal entries for those days reflects his frustrations and hardships:

*...followed it (the stream) ‘till it wasted in Marshes...Returned very fatigued*



FRENCH SETTLERS  
CIRCA 1780



*having Walked very hard...Night & obliged to sleep under a Tree a hard frost & cold sleeping...Went to sleep being very Weary & having in the Day fatigued two good Walkers & myself never remember to have walked more in one Day...went further into the Country West Nore West & found many Round Lakes & high Mountains but no running Water returned very Weary...*

Using Heward's narratives and detailed topographic maps one is able, with a fair degree of confidence, to trace his wanderings around four Washtenaw County townships surrounding Chelsea.

Heward finally gave up and decided to return to the village to find a different Indian to guide him, so he and one of his engagés followed an Indian trail back. It was not unusual for there to be a foot trail along a river providing an alternative to water travel (frozen rivers are not canoeable). Sometimes there were two trails, one along the river and another on high ground above the floodplain.

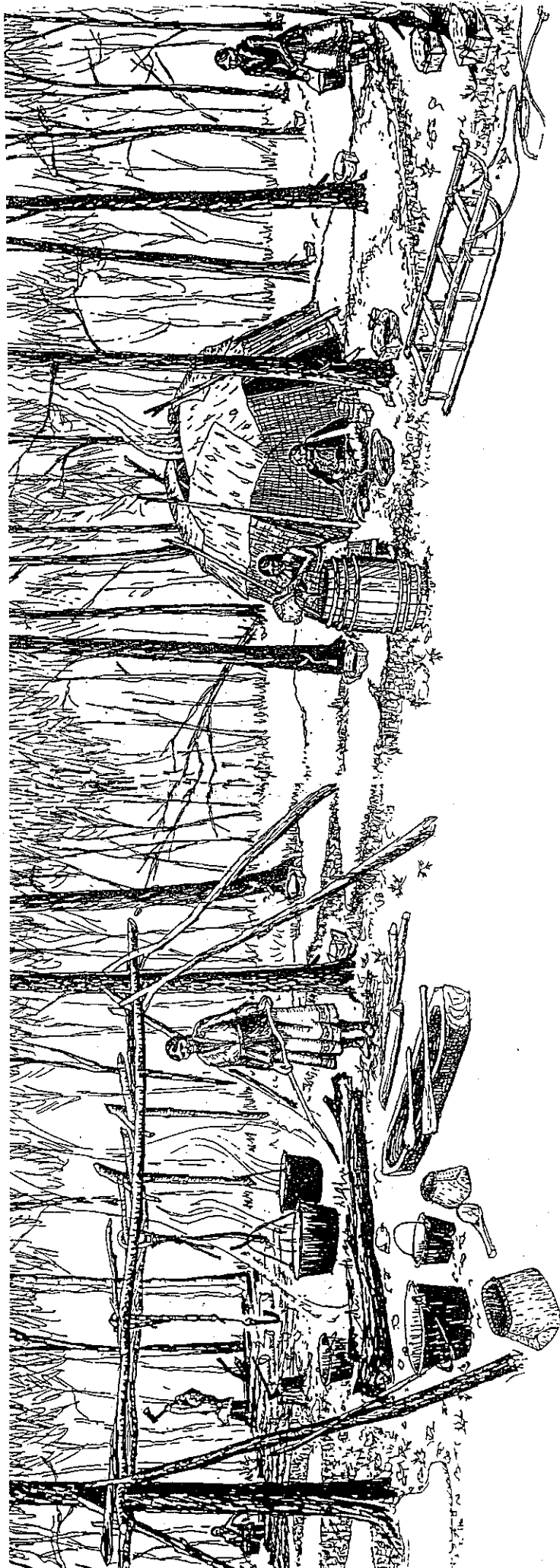
They found the settlers disputatious and unhelpful and the Indians at their sugar ground. An Old Indian guided them to the sugar ground and was rewarded with "25 Broaches."

Heward engaged a guide and they set off the next day for the camp on the west branch. As they passed the fork the Indian told them it was the wrong branch.

The journal entry for April 12 says: "*Went with the Indian from our Encampment down again to take the Fork leading Nore West & arrived about Mid Day. Proceeded up the Branch which turns more North East about four Leagues...*"

Thus, six days after they first arrived at the fork (now Dexter) they, headed north up what we now know was the mainstream of the Huron (**Map No. 2**).

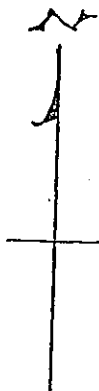
From here on I will occasionally "translate" Heward's entries by supplying punctuation, adding or subtracting capitals, correcting spelling, and sometimes condensing or rearranging



INDIAN MAPLE SUGAR CAMP

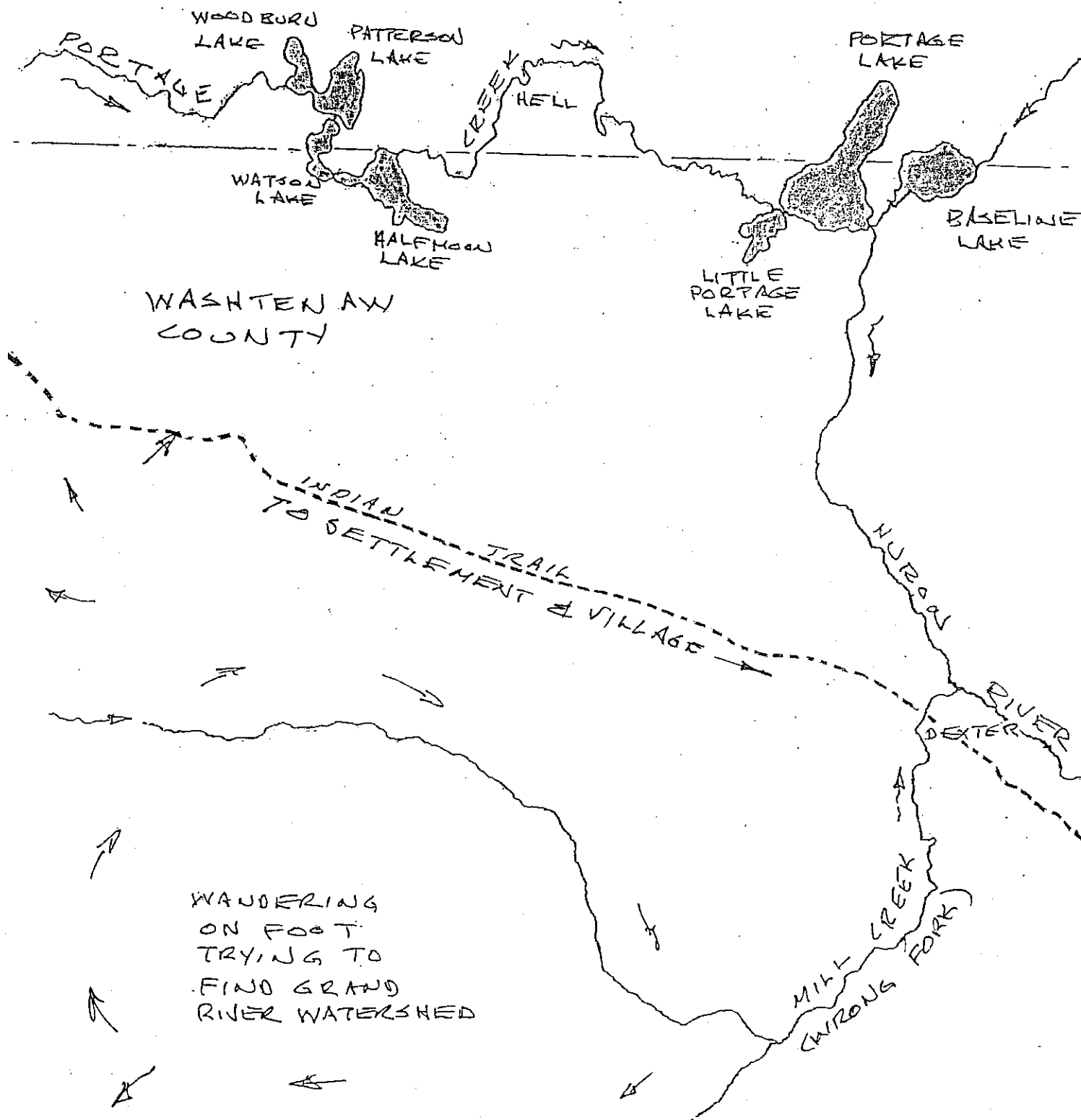


UPSTREAM OF ANN ARBOR  
APRIL 5 - 12, 1790



LIVINGSTON  
COUNTY

WASHTENAW  
COUNTY



WAUDBERING  
ON FOOT  
TRYING TO  
FIND GRAND  
RIVER WATERSHED

INDIAN TRAIL  
TO SETTLEMENT & VILLAGE

MILL CREEK  
(WIRON'S FORK)

NUREAU  
RIVER  
DEXTER

WOODBURY  
LAKE

PATTERSON  
LAKE

PORTAGE  
LAKE

WATSON  
LAKE

HALFMOON  
LAKE

LITTLE  
PORTAGE  
LAKE

BASELINE  
LAKE

PORTAGE

CREEKS  
HELL

phrases or sentences. I will also add pertinent parentheticals.

For example, Heward's entry covering the time when they left the Huron River is:

*...to a Cabbin where it divides into two Lakes the River at this place about 20 yds Wide & between 4 & 5 foot Water here one of these Lakes points Nore East & the other nore West the last we pass to West nore West which after a Traverse of about a League brought [us] again into a small Serpentine River rung from the same Direction about 6 Yds wide & about 3 ½ foot Water to the banks but being overflowed we had 4 or 5 feet Water. The Lake unpassed is about a League each way and seemingly deep where we could see the Bottom it was fine Gravel & Sand as also the River to about 2 Leagues up where we encamped late.*

My translation is:

*We came to a cabin (Indian lodge) where the river divides into two lakes. The river at this place is about 20 yards wide and 4 or 5 feet deep. One of the lakes points northeast (Baseline Lake) and the other northwest (Portage Lake). We passed (traveled through) the latter lake to the west north west, which, after a traverse of about a league, brought us to a small serpentine river (Portage Creek) running from the same direction. It was about 6 yards wide with about 3 ½ feet of water but being overflowed had about 4 or 5 feet of water depth. The bottom was fine sand and gravel. We went up the river about 2 leagues and encamped late.*

Heward's journal for April 13 describes in detail the series of lakes and streams through which their guide led them. These descriptions generally fit a series of lakes along the Livingston-Washtenaw County line which are interconnected by Portage Creek. There are two types of discrepancies, however, between his descriptions and what is shown by modern topographic maps. At the far-famed community of Hell there is a dam with a backwater called

Hi-Land Lake (formerly Mill Pond) which drowns the creek. The other is the fact that the shapes and sizes of some of the lakes he described do not fit these lakes as they exist today. The obvious reason for this is the lowering of the water table since settlement, by deforestation and agricultural drainage. For example, in describing their travel through what is now called Ellsworth Lake in Lyndon Township of Washtenaw County, Heward says, "*We continued this course 'till abot ¼ Mile of a Bay at East & then took a turn up the Run which pointed Nore West...*" Today's Ellsworth Lake, with a surface elevation of 901 feet above sea level, has no "Bay at East." If however, in your mind's eye or by use of a highlighter on the appropriate topographic map, you raise that water level to 910 or more feet, a bay appears on the east side.

They went but a short way up the "run" (still Portage Creek) and, "*being late & likely for a bad Night we encamped.*"

His April 14 entry starts out, "*A rainy Night & wet morning made it late before we started in about a Mile & half farther up the Run came to the portage which points nearly South or South by West.*"

There is an issue as to where this portage was located. In a footnote Milo M. Quaife, who edited the *Askin Papers*, states:

*The route followed by Heward from the Upper Huron River to the headwaters of the Grand is involved in some obscurity. Prof. W. B. Hinsdale of the University of Michigan has kindly studied this portion of Heward's journal and is responsible for statements concerning it which are here subjoined...*

Hinsdale was the author of the monumental *Archaeological Atlas of Michigan* which was published three years after the *Askin Papers*.

With respect to the portage Hinsdale's footnote says, "*Near the Village of Stockbridge in southeastern Ingham County. The portage was made to Otter Creek (also called Orchard*

*River), the northwest branch of the Grand River.”*

The professor got it wrong. Note that Heward’s journal said they made a turn up the run (Portage Creek) and camped. Then the next morning they went about 1.5 miles farther up and came to the portage. The distance upstream on Portage Creek from Ellsworth Lake to any dry landing near present-day Stockbridge is more than five miles. Even though he could only estimate distances, and it is particularly difficult to estimate distances along a meandering stream, the experienced Heward could hardly have been off by a factor of nearly 4 to 1. Further, any possible portage path between Portage Creek and Otter Creek beginning at any location near Stockbridge had to have trended westerly. Heward plainly described his portage as pointing nearly south or southwest. Also, in his journal entry for April 19 he tells about measuring the portage “...beginning at the south end...”.

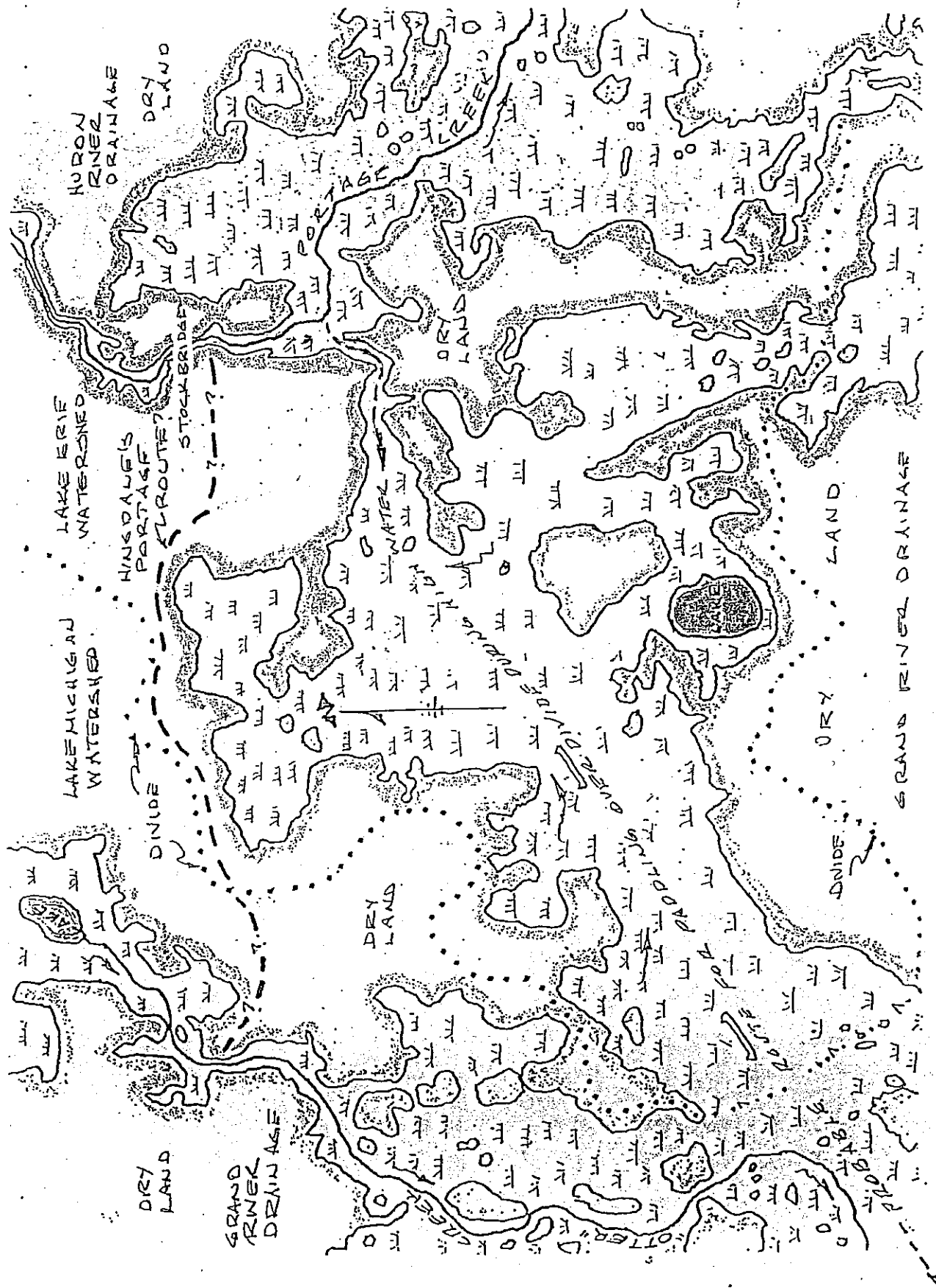
**Map No. 3** shows the terrain between the Stockbridge vicinity and Otter Creek (which is called Thornapple Creek on current United States Geological Survey topographic maps). The map also shows how the route postulated by Professor Hinsdale would have to trend east-west because of the relationship of marsh and dry land. \*

Back to Heward’s journal entry for April 14 after they arrived at the portage: “...*I have gone across the portage & it seems about 2 Leagues...*” Here I think he meant to either say about 2 miles or one league, for later he measured it at 14,100 feet (2.67 miles).

He left to his men the task of transporting the canoes and loads across the portage while he and “the savage” set off to return to the settlement. He needed to obtain additional food supplies for the trip onward and the Indian guide had completed his job after leading them to the portage. For compensation he received a gun, a white shirt, and a little powder and shot. They

---

\* The Village of Stockbridge, which is in the Huron River watershed, intends to build a 3-mile pipeline following Hinsdale’s route so as to discharge its sewage plant effluent into the Grand River watershed.



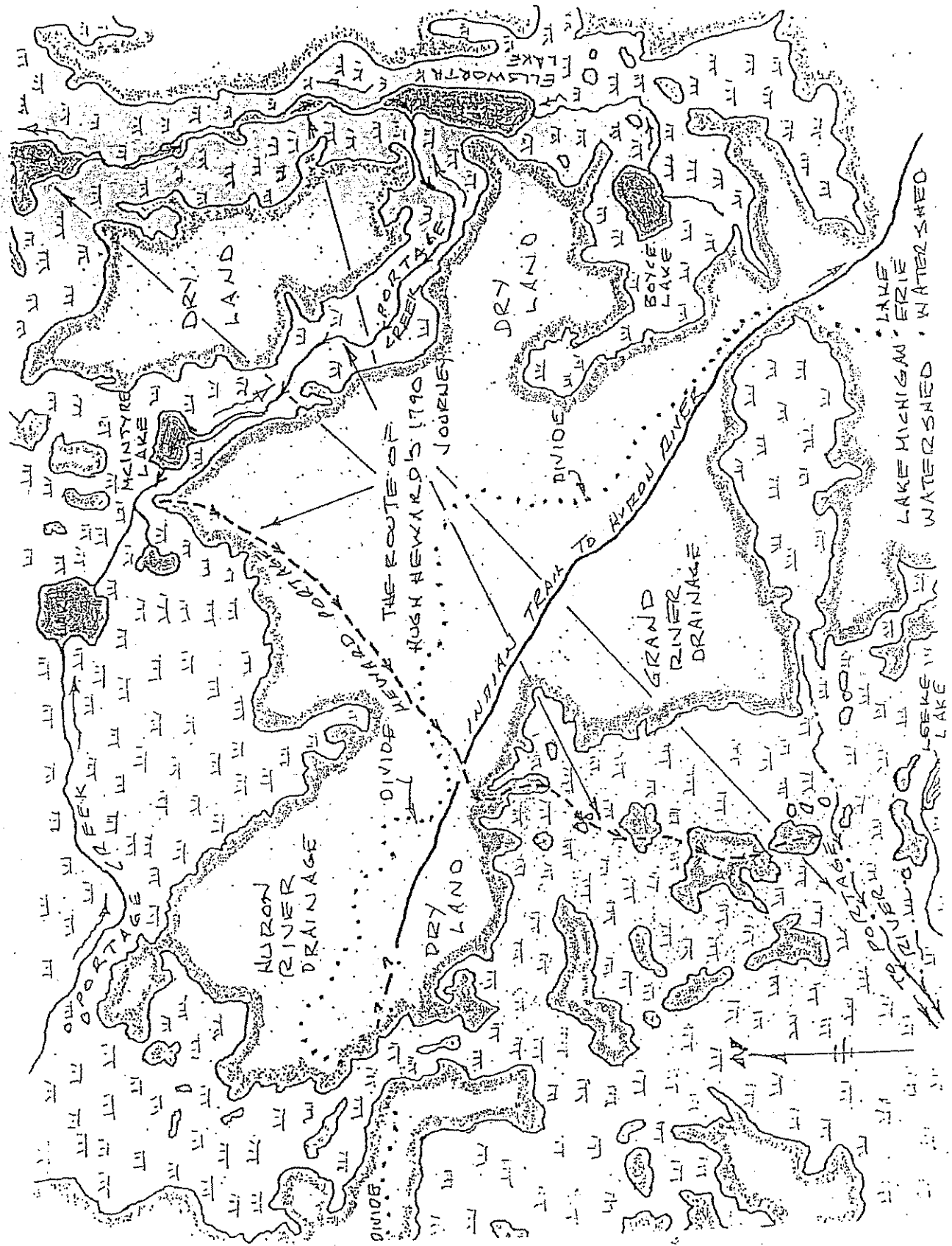
PORTAGE ROUTE PER HINSDALE'S FOOTNOTE 2

took an overland trail back to the forks of the Huron (now Island Lake Road) and then followed the river trail back to the settlement. Although he found most of the settlers and traders uncooperative and reluctant to sell him provisions at reasonable prices, he was able to procure some corn, grease, maple sugar, a turkey, and an Indian to help him get the provisions back to the portage. There he paid this Indian three calico shirts and some powder and ball.

Heward and one of the engagés undertook to measure the portage with a 100 foot rope. Starting at the south end they measured 1,500' dry; 50' wet; 1,750' dry; 400' swamp; 900' dry; 1,400' wet; 400' dry; 300' wet; "*here nearly half Way,*" 7,400' dry "*...to the North Stream.*"

In 1990, 200 years after the cross-peninsula journey, I worked out Heward's route from the Huron to the portage. This effort was a project for Grand River Expedition '90, an expedition of 50 plus canoes traveling the length of the Grand River for the purpose of studying and publicizing the river and its problems and potentials. I used Heward's journal entries, detailed topographic maps, historical research, and road reconnaissance. I was satisfied with the results but the proof is in the paddling, so Verlen Kruger, the world-renown long-distance canoeist, put his solo canoe in the Huron near Portage Lake and paddled and bushwhacked all the way to Ellsworth Lake. There he made the same turn up Portage Creek that Heward's party did in April 1790, and after a relatively short paddle came to a point of land that he said looked just like a portage head. I take this as the judgment of a real expert for few, if any canoeists, now or in the past, have encountered as many portages as Verlen.

Taking this location (SE ¼ Section 31, Unadilla Township, Livingston County) as a starting point, and utilizing Heward's 1790 directions and measurements, and detailed topographic maps, I worked out the route that is the best fit to the local topography. The result is shown on **Map No. 4**. Note that the southern terminus of the portage is at the edge of a marsh



PORTAGE ROUTE PER HEWARD'S JOURNAL

now known as the Portage Lake Swamp. In 1790 with a higher water table canoes would probably have floated but Heward's journal gives the impression that the canoe men could not get right in and paddle or pole:

*I had ordered the cannots to load & go as far as they were obliged to walk & haul them & wait for us insted of which they have gone past a point direct South & from thence the Course Westward...was very angry for their obliging me to walk so far in following.*

In other words, the engagés went farther than they were told, thus forcing the boss to wade a long ways through the marsh to catch up (**Map No. 5**).

The Portage Lake Swamp was, and still is, a very extensive marsh (wetland with grasses and sedges) that contains the headwaters of the Portage River, a tributary of the Grand.

The day after leaving the portage the party was snowed in. The next day, April 21, after a late start, they set off down the Portage River. The journal describes in considerable detail their journey down the pristine river; past wooded bluffs, meandering through grassy lakes and wides and past entering tributary creeks. Today the Portage River is a channelized, barren ditch. Except for where the Grand flows between concrete walls in the City of Jackson, it is the ugliest stretch of stream in the Grand River drainage basin. To me it is symbolic that the Portage enters the Grand near the nation's largest walled prison. The only place the original meanders can now be seen is on a Jackson County map. Before it was channelized the river was the border between Henrietta and Leoni Townships. They straightened the river but not the meandering township line (**Map No. 6**).

Although it was channelized around 1919-1920, the stretch of the Grand downstream of the junction with the Portage does not have the desolate appearance of that river. Second growth timber covers, and to some extent, camouflages the spoil banks, and it is bordered by swamps



FROM JOURNAL OF  
HUGH HEWARD'S  
1790 CANOE TRIP  
ACROSS LOWER  
MICHIGAN

MAP NO. 4

③ April 13 — "The Course turns West more West Continued this course with Many Turnings to where the Run entered into another Lake at West."

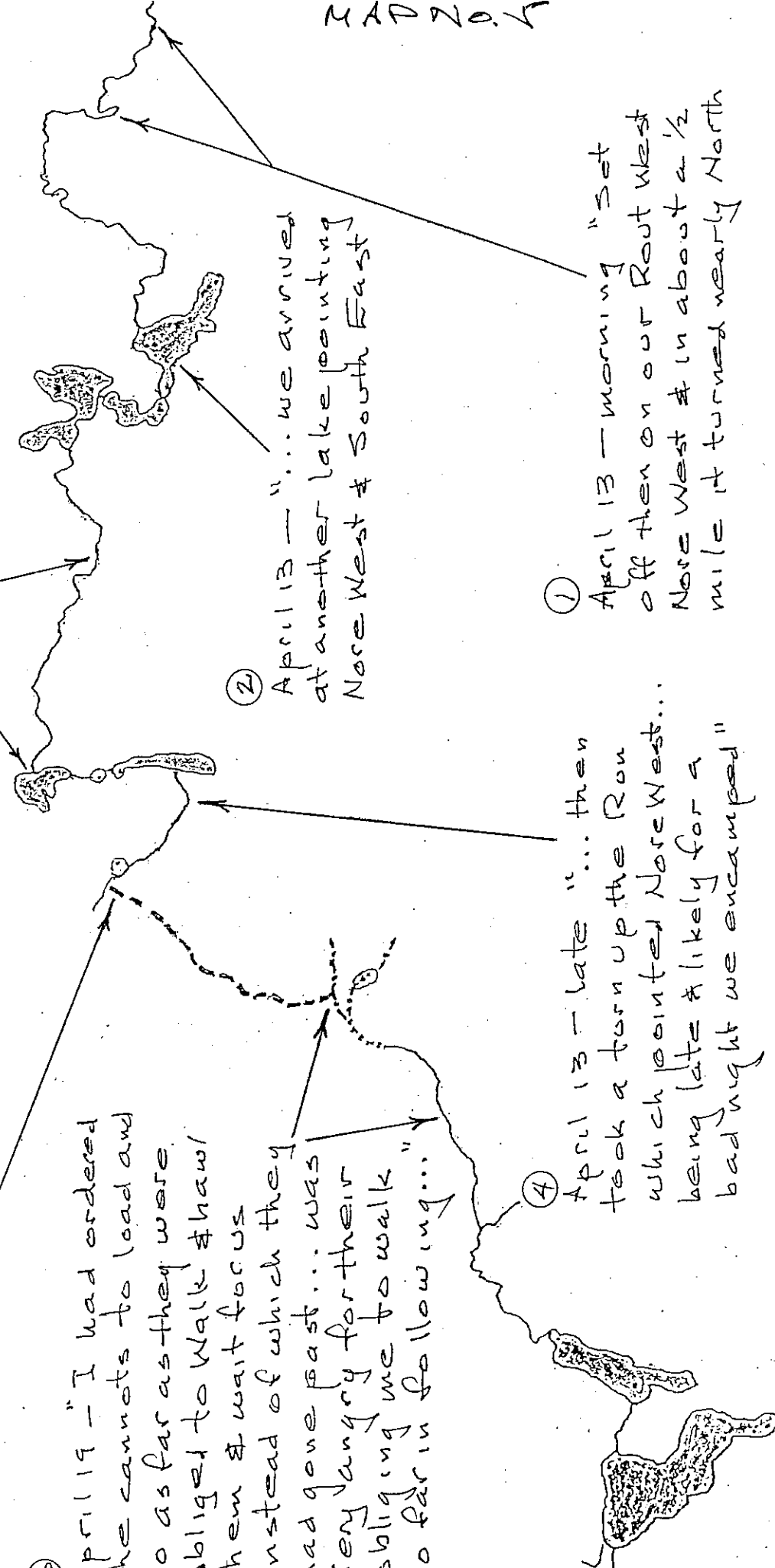
⑤ April 14 — morning ... in about a mile & half farther up the Run came to a portage which points nearly South or South by West"

⑥ April 19 — "I had ordered the canoets to load and go as far as they were obliged to Walk & haul them & wait for us instead of which they had gone past... was very angry for their obliging me to walk so far in following..."

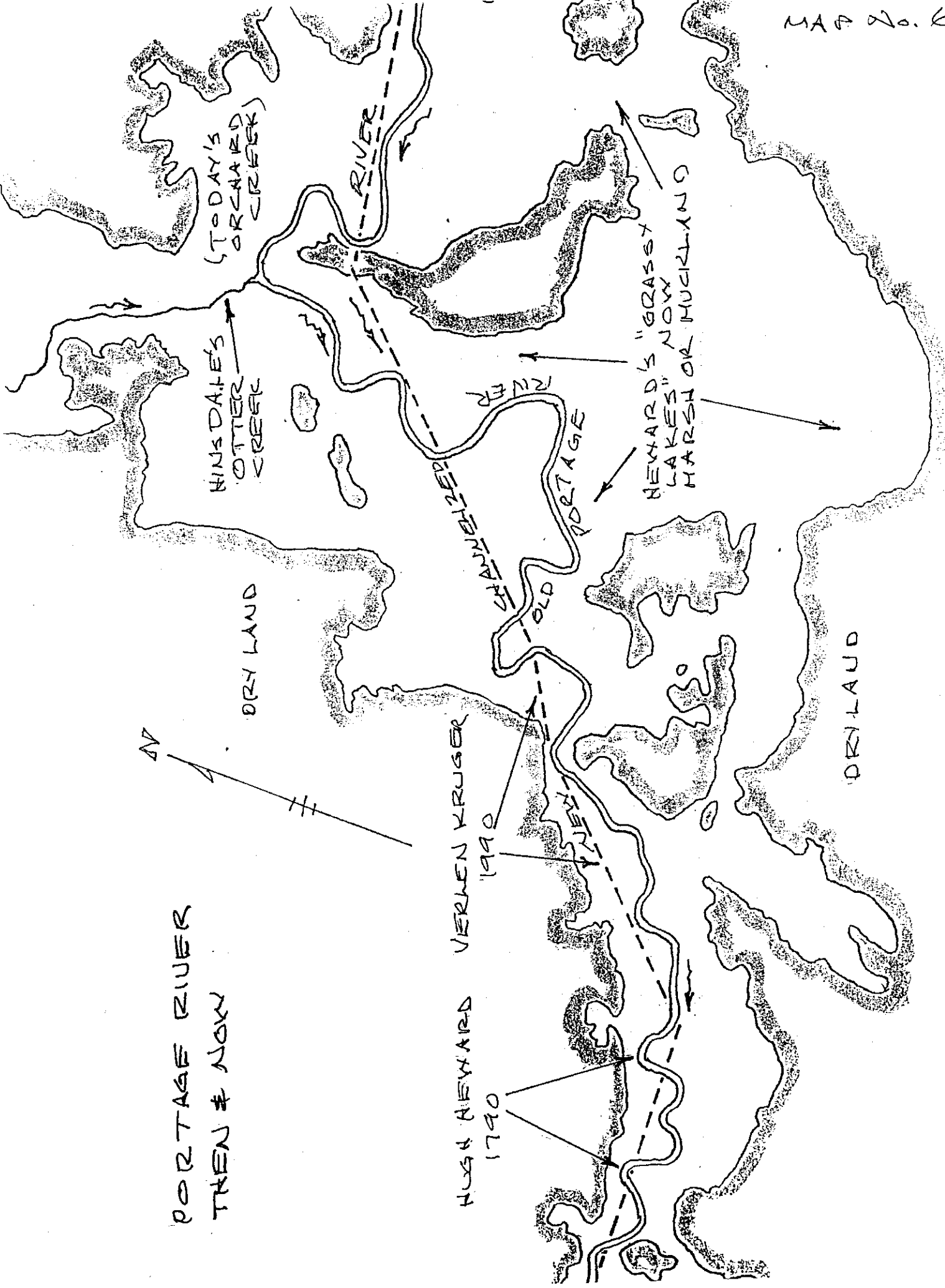
④ April 13 — late "... then took a turn up the Run which pointed more West... being late & likely for a bad night we encamped"

② April 13 — "... we arrived at another lake pointing more West & South East

① April 13 — morning "set off then on our Rout West more West & in about a 1/2 mile it turned nearly North



PORTAGE RIVER  
THEN & NOW



HUGH NEWARD  
1790

VERMEN KRUSER  
1990

HINDS DALE'S  
OTTER  
CREEK

(TODAY'S  
ORCHARD  
CREEK)

NEWARD'S "GRASSY  
LAKES" NOW  
MARSH OR HUCKLAND

DRY LAND

DRY LAND

N

RIVER

CHANNELIZED  
PORTAGE  
RIVER

VERMEN  
KRUSER

OLD  
PORTAGE  
RIVER

(wetland with trees).

Heward's journal entry for the afternoon of April 22 says (my translation):

*At midday we entered more into the woods. The course was west by north with a strong current. It was a large body of water. Continued the same route...The woods were very thick and there were many fallen trees to traverse. About 5 o'clock we came to two lodges of Ottawas who confirmed we were on the Grand River. (The Indian name for the Grand was Owashtenong Sepe.)*

Verlen Kruger had a similar experience in coming down the Portage to the Grand in 1990. Because of the nature of the extensive swampland he wasn't sure he was on the Grand River until he came to a road and bridge that he knew crossed the Grand.

Heward's brief comment on the problem of fallen trees (The journal's actual words were "*...the Wood very thick & many trees cut across to traverse*") is the only mention of what must have been a continuing problem for them, the necessity of lifting over or carrying around fallen trees or floodwood barriers. Even today canoeists are plagued with this problem, especially on the Upper Grand in Jackson County.

In 1680 the French explorer LaSalle walked and waded across lower Michigan from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie. When his party encountered the Huron River they stopped and built an elm-bark canoe, hoping to float down to the lake. Here are LaSalle's own words on what followed after they launched their canoe: "*Our journey was a short one; for as the river was almost everywhere encumbered by heaps of wood, which the swollen waters carry down or cast into its bed, we got weary of carrying our baggage every moment when the masses of wood prevented the canoe from passing...*" After 5 days of this they abandoned the canoe and walked cross country to the Detroit River.

Back to Heward's entry for April 22: That night they met Indians in two canoes heading

for Detroit, who told him he would meet many canoes making the same trip. He took advantage of this chance meeting to send a report back to his employers.

**Appendix 3** is a discussion on what kind of canoes these and other Indians in the Upper Grand River valley would have been making and paddling.

April 23 started out as a good day with fine weather and easy paddling but (my translation): *Met about 11 o'clock with Indians spearing sturgeon. An ill looking band of about 12 who seemed to be refugees from the Ottawas and Potawatomies. Bought a sturgeon for tobacco and set off when a reinforcement (more Indians) was coming.*

Following Heward's descriptions of the river's twistings and turnings on topographic maps leads me to believe that this encounter might have taken place near what is now the Village of Onondaga in Ingham County.

My interest in Heward's cross-peninsula expedition was first aroused when I came across a fictionalized version of this incident by *Lansing State Journal* history writer Birt Darling in a 1990 article. One gets the impression from his journal that Heward and his canoe men paddled fast and hard to distance themselves from the "ill looking band." That day they "passed" the rapids for which Eaton Rapids is named before they camped. (I take the term "passed" to mean they ran the rapids rather than portaging around.)

On Saturday, April 24, they paddled nearly 50 river miles:

*Refitted our Cannots with gum & set off passed a Rapid in about an hour (Dimondale) ...came to a River from the East (Red Cedar at Lansing) & a little lower two Cabins of Indians from Sagana (North Lansing) ...another Island about Mid Day (Delta Mills) ...came to another Island afterwards three Small Islands & some pine Trees on each side of the River & high rocks on the North & a small Run of Water from the South (Grand Ledge) ...*

# 200 years

## Area explored in 1790

By BIRT DARLING  
Lansing State Journal

Scanning the channel of the Grand River ahead on the morning of April 23, 1790, a young British fur trader's brawny French voyageur paddlers drove his canoe around a bend.

He couldn't know then that this would be a historical day — one that the Lansing area could celebrate two centuries later.

It was the first recorded sighting of the Lansing area by explorers. You'll find it in "The John Askin Papers," a recording of 18th-century Michigan fur trade events in the archives of the State Library of Michigan.

The Lansing Library will mark the event this month with a display of the "John Askin Papers."

The record goes like this: As the canoes moved through the water east of what later became Dimondale, suddenly there was the flash of a spear. Canoeist Hugh Heward, a trader, jerked his musket to the ready.

The spear slashed into a five-foot sturgeon moving upstream, short of the canoe prow.

Ottawa and Potawatomi warriors, standing hip deep in the Grand, eyed them.

Heward's lead canoe man held out a pouch of tobacco. The war-

riors accepted it, but hesitated letting the two big canoes through.

Suddenly, Heward spotted a file of warriors trotting through the forest toward them. He and his men quickly made a trade — the tobacco for some fish — "and paddled off before reinforcements could arrive," he wrote in his diary the next day.

This close call occurred east of Dimondale near the Ingham-Eaton county line. The explorers camped that night west of Lansing's future site.

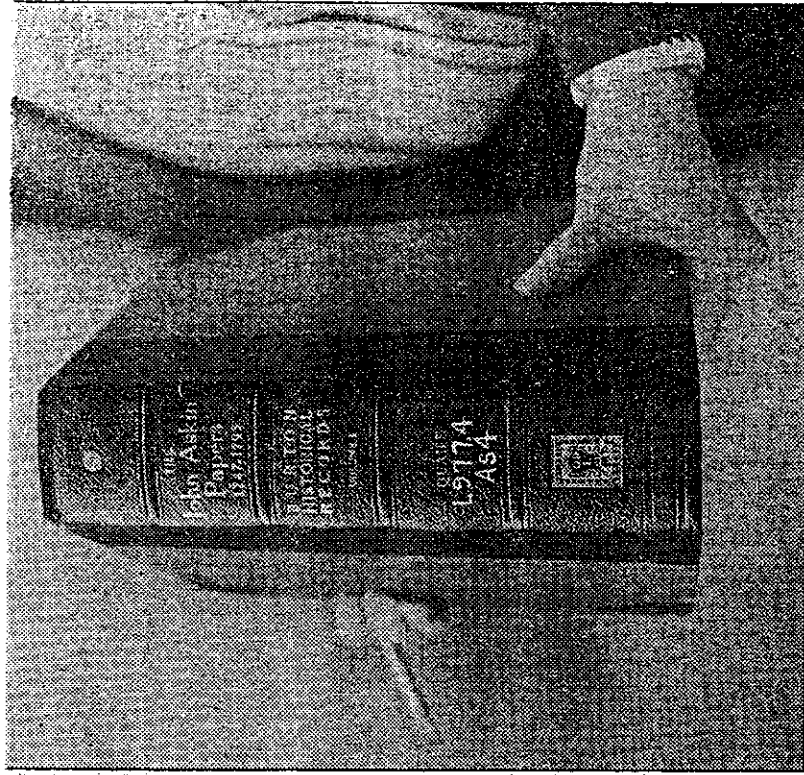
Heward's exploratory trek on behalf of William and David Robertson, Detroit fur traders, turned out to have little practical value since the United States took over the Northwest Territory, including what would become Michigan, in 1796.

But Heward's journal has the first recorded glimpse of the site of Lansing on April 24, 1790:

"... the banks of Red Land thence came to a River from the East & a little lower two Cabins of Indians from Sagana."

The "banks of red land," where a river flowed into the Grand from the east, was the Red Cedar. The "Indians from Sagana" were members of the Saginaw band of Chippewas.

On that day they also came to



The John Askin Papers, on display at the Lansing Library, records the first sighting of Lansing.

an island in mid-river and a long rapid. They were passing through future Delta Mills. When they sailed among three small islands bordered by high rocks they had reached what is now the Grand Ledge area.

They camped that night opposite an island — probably in eastern Danby Township, Ionia County — having covered the greatest distance in a day since leaving Fort Detroit March 24.

Little is known about how

Heward returned to Detroit. That he did return is a matter of record. In 1800 he moved to York (now Toronto, Ontario) where he became secretary to the governor of Ontario. He died in 1803.

**Editor's Note:** Birt Darling is a retired State Journal reporter/rewriter. He wrote "City in the Forest," a history of Lansing, and several historical articles for Michigan and national magazines. He lives in Ocala, Fla.

He then describes the islands, banks, current, and bottom downstream of the Ledges. That night they “...*Encamped opposite an Island...*”

Comparing his inventory of islands with current topographic maps has led me to conclude that their campsite that night was in the northeast corner of Section 19 of Danby Township, Ionia County. Even today that looks like a good campsite, despite being a littered and eroded dead end of a country road. **Appendix 4** covers the “Hugh Heward Challenge”, an annual commemoration of that day’s paddle.

On Sunday morning April 25, 1790, Heward’s party passed “...*a River from the East where was a cabin of Otowas...*” (the Looking Glass River where it joins the Grand at Portland). The next morning: “*Set off & arrived abot 10 oClock at a wintering place a little above a River from North East that goes to Sagana...*” They had arrived at the place where the Maple River joins the Grand at present day Muir and Lyons in Ionia County (See **Map No. 7**).

This is the downstream end of the Upper Grand River, a geologically “youthful” stream full of meanders with a narrow floodplain. From here on to Lake Michigan they would be on the Lower Grand, a wider and slower stream with a wide floodplain which is the ancient channel of the Glacial Grand River. The Glacial Grand drained the meltwater from a lobe of the continental glacier that occupied the Saginaw Valley some 10,000 years ago. At that time the Lake Huron and Lake Erie basins were both buried in ice a mile or more in thickness. Thus all of the meltwater had to flow west via the drainage channel now occupied by the Maple River. When the glacier eventually retreated, uncovering the eastward-flowing Lake Huron-Lake Erie-Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River-Atlantic system, drainage in most of the Saginaw Valley reversed and the Maple shrunk to a relatively small west-flowing stream.

The “Sagana” was, of course, today’s Saginaw River. There was a portage between the Maple and the eastward flowing Bad River, a tributary of the Shiawassee River, which in turn is

HAPLE RIVER AND  
LOWER GRAND RIVER  
FOLLOW THE CHANNEL  
OF GLACIAL LAKE  
SAGINAW DRAINAGE

LOWER  
GRAND RIVER

HAPLE RIVER

WIDTH OF GLACIAL  
DRAINAGE CHANNEL

WHERE WAS  
FRENCHMAN'S  
WINTERING  
PLACE?

DURING  
GLACIAL MELTING  
THIS WAS A TORRENT  
COMPARABLE TO TODAY'S  
NIAGARA RIVER

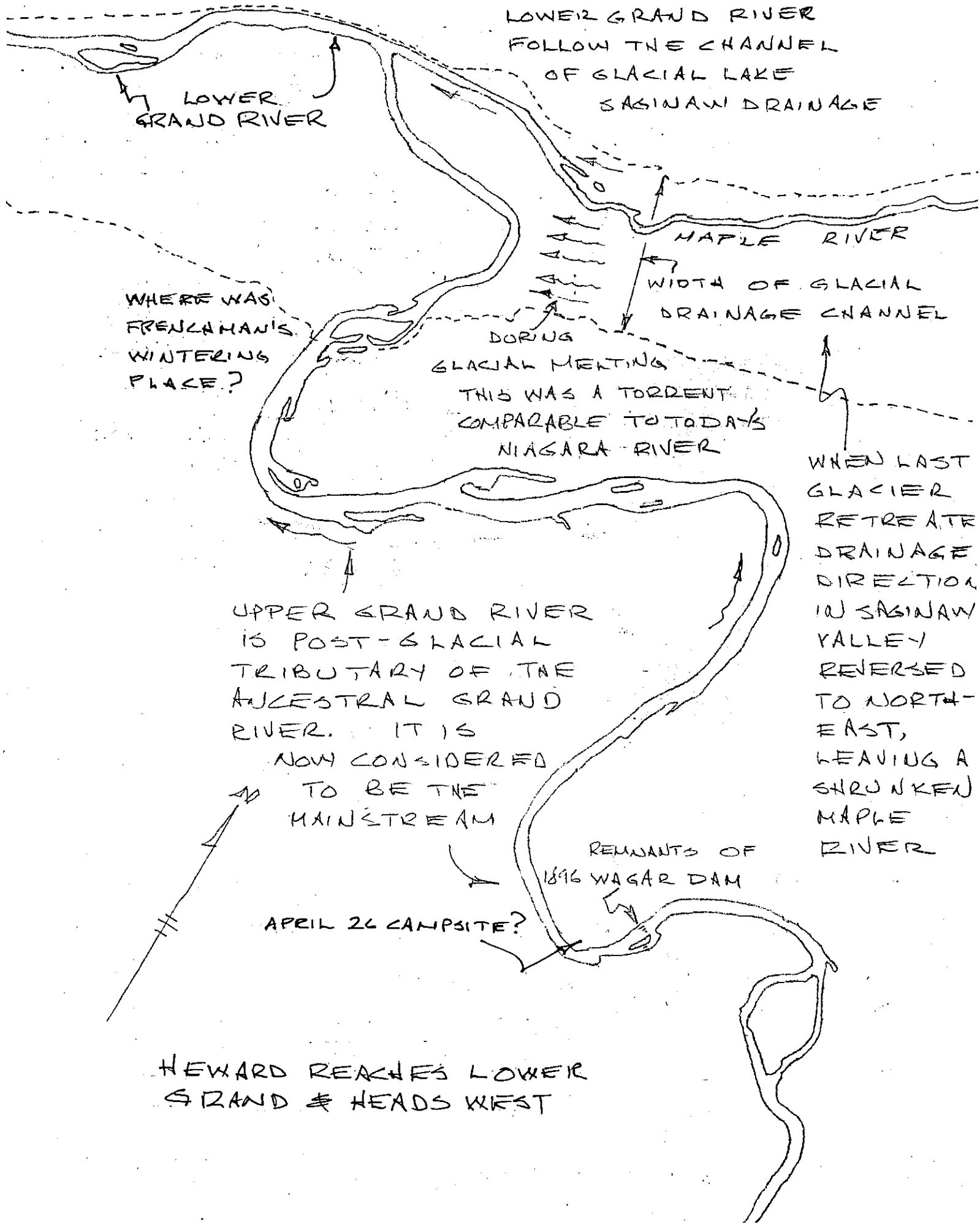
WHEN LAST  
GLACIER  
RETREAT  
DRAINAGE  
DIRECTION  
IN SAGINAW  
VALLEY  
REVERSED  
TO NORTH-  
EAST,  
LEAVING A  
SHRUNKEN  
MAPLE  
RIVER

UPPER GRAND RIVER  
IS POST-GLACIAL  
TRIBUTARY OF THE  
ANCESTRAL GRAND  
RIVER. IT IS  
NOW CONSIDERED  
TO BE THE  
MAINSTREAM

REMNANTS OF  
1896 WAGAR DAM

APRIL 26 CAMPSITE?

HEWARD REACHES LOWER  
GRAND & HEADS WEST



tributary to the Saginaw. There long had been a cross-peninsula trade and travel route from Lake Michigan to Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron utilizing these rivers and the Maple-Bad portage. I am inclined to believe that one purpose of Heward's journey was to explore for an alternative to this cross-peninsula route.

At the "wintering place" Heward was told by "squaws" that the "Frenchman" was gone. Heward described the camp as a very miserable and desolate place. This raises the question: Who was the Frenchman?

A search of various Ionia County histories indicates that the first trader in this area was one Louis Genereau, but he didn't establish his post until about 1825. Thus it appears that the Frenchman was probably a lone, nameless coureur de bois who, living like an Indian, or perhaps not as well, wintered at this place.

At the Grand-Maple junction they turned west, "*...but there was a brisk Wind ahead which annoyed us much...here the River Wider but not more Current...*" Despite the head wind they made excellent progress for, "*...about 1 oClock passed a Village at the forks where a Trader had been but he was gone...*" They were at present-day Ada in Kent County where the Thornapple River enters the Grand. A search of Kent County histories, past *Michigan History* magazines, and various other sources yielded no identity for the departed "trader." To quote a *Michigan History* article:

*In 1821 Rix Robinson was the first known white man to locate in Western Michigan. One of his most important posts was at the junction of the Grand and Thornapple rivers...*

Here again I have to believe the trader must have been another unknown coureur de bois. (Or perhaps the same one who wintered at the confluence of the Maple and the Grand?)

After passing the mouth of the Thornapple, Heward said "*...took the Nore West Fork...*"



This means they headed northwest into the great north to west and back south loop that the Grand makes going around the Kent County highland now partially occupied by Grand Rapids. It has always seemed strange to me that the torrent of meltwater flowing down the Glacial Grand made such a detour.

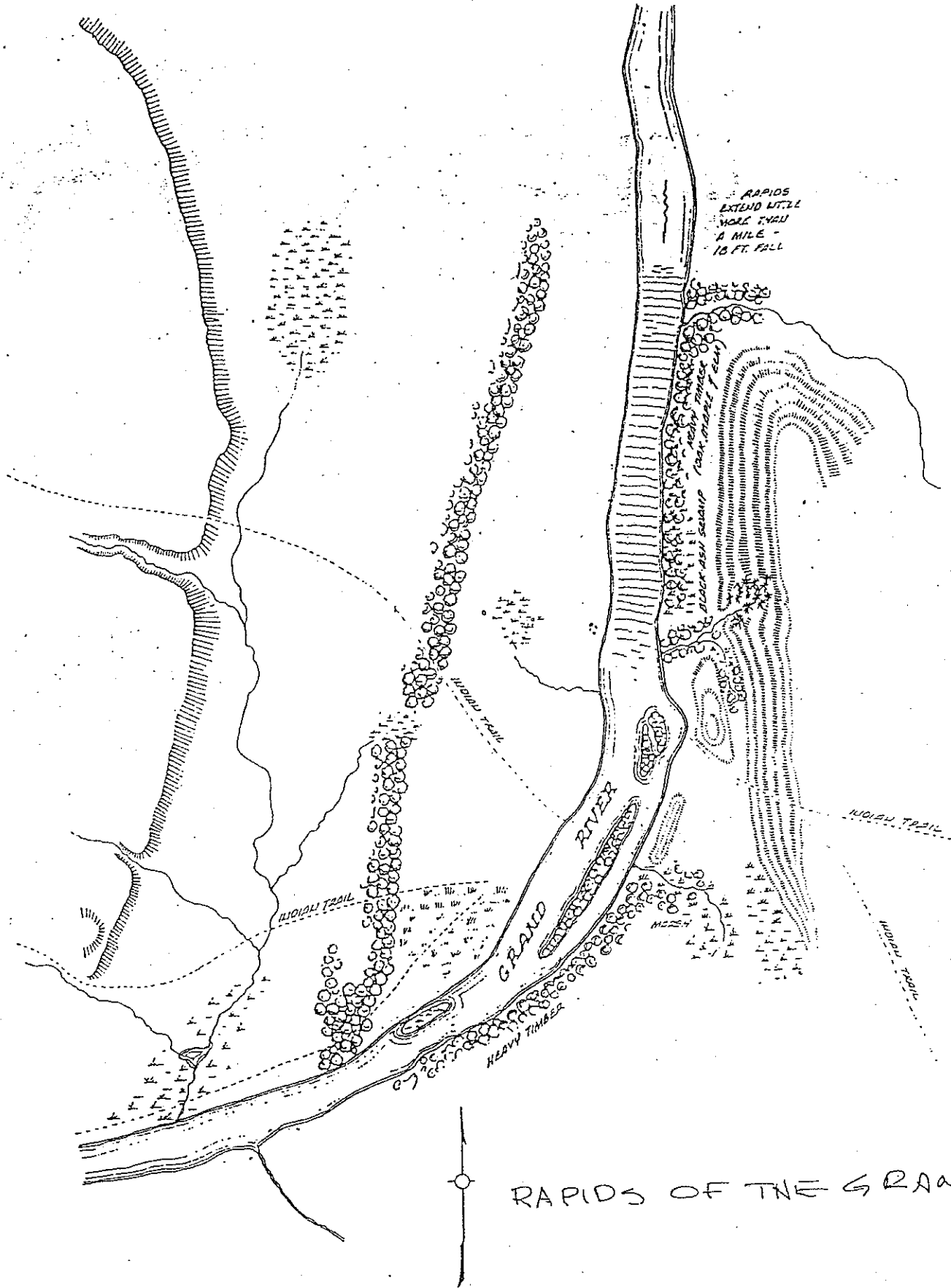
*“Near Sun set arrived at a strong rapid & village...”* They were at the rapids of the Grand, for which the city was named. The Indian village and the portage around the rapids were on the river’s right bank (west side). The east side had islands and channels (long ago lost to landfill) and steep, wooded hills (**Map No. 8**). It is the evening of April 26, a little over a month after they left Detroit. (Today it is an easy three or four hour trip via I-96.)

Here is Heward’s journal entry for Tuesday, April 27, 1790, their last day on the Grand River:

*Embarked after getting some sturgeon & passed a plain to the East in about an Hour where it appears to be a wintering place the River still larger & a good smooth Current but a North Wind strong against us the Course West & the River larger & larger to the Mouth & surrounded with Pine on all sides with Meadows & small Lakes & very wide at the Entrance of the Lake where we arrived at Sun set & found Mr. Langlade who appeared to be very friendly & promised to get me some Gum. Encamped on the other Side there being many Indians with him.*

They had arrived at Lake Michigan at the site of present-day Grand Haven.

In a footnote in the *Askin Papers* editor Quaife says Mr. Langlade was *“Evidently Charles Michel Langlade...”* In a 1965 article in the *Lansing State Journal* Birt Darling characterized Langlade as *“...one of the greatest fur trader and frontier fighters of his time...part French, part Indian, a legend in his time. Then in his 60’s, Langlade reputedly had fought in a hundred battles.”*



RAPIDS OF THE GRAND

Willis Dunbar in his *Michigan – a History of the Wolverine State* (1965) says: “*Charles Langlade...now carried out a plan...to move his headquarters to Green Bay, where he had numerous relatives. Here he spent the remainder of his life...and lived until early in the nineteenth century, continuing his fur-trade business along the Grand River in Michigan.*”

Heward and his engagés wasted no time in heading south along the Lake Michigan shoreline. The next day after they had arrived at the river mouth they:

*...set off the Wind North by West under Sail but before Mid Day the Wind forced so as to oblige us to put into the River a Barbu (Pigeon River) & with Difficulty got in & got some Sprays of the swells & we there camped & unloaded to Gum the Cannots.*

On the following day, Thursday, April 29, they were windbound all day. During the next two days they coasted the shore, arriving at the mouth of the St. Joseph River late on May 1. Here they were windbound for two more days.

These are Heward’s words describing their journey on Tuesday, May 4:

*A very blowing Night the Wind veering to every point; in the Morning A Wind from the Laud continued in a Wavering manner by Blasts & the Swell also from the North not abating & we finding no River or creek to put in & seeming a Risque of taking Water if we put in to unload we continued sometimes under reefed Sail & Sometimes with paddles hoping to reach a River till about three oClock when as sudden as lightning the wind chopp’d round with the Swell & blew a terrible Squal & thunder Gust which obliged us to make the Shore as fast as possible & both Cannots filled We saved the cannots & all the Goods but was wetted we put them out of Reach of very high Seas & camped & made a Fire the best way we could continued a heavy Rain & sometimes hail Storm all the Afternoon. We were happy at being near shore & quick at Landing for a Quarter of an hour would have lost all it was so sudden & excessive that no small Craft*

*could have sustained it.*

Remember, these are eight men in two 20 foot birchbark canoes with all their baggage, food and trade goods, and that Lake Michigan water is numbingly cold in early May.

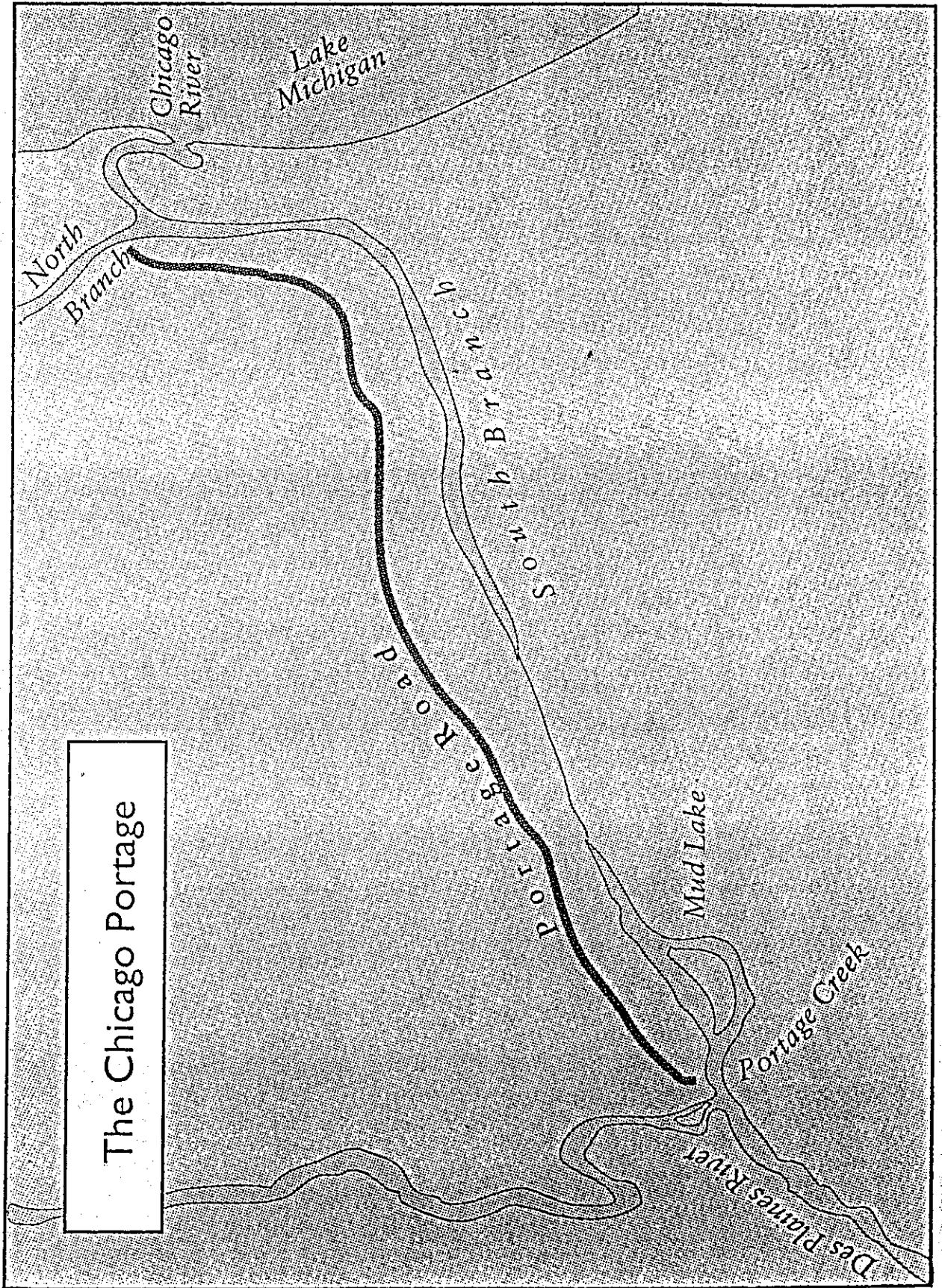
They spent the next three days on the beach drying their goods and gear. On Saturday, May 8, they loaded and set off, arriving in about an hour at the mouth of the Galien River (present-day New Buffalo). From there they followed along the south shore of the big lake until they sailed up to the Chicago portage on Sunday, May 10. Here they traded their birchbark canoes for a pirogue. It must have been a sizeable dugout to hold eight men with their baggage and goods. They hired five Indians to help them across the portage and on Wednesday, May 12, they were on the DesPlains River, the northern tributary of the Illinois (**Map No. 9**). The journal entries through May 20 describe the trip down the Illinois River. The last entry is nothing but the date: "*Friday May 21<sup>st</sup> 1790*".

If there was a record of the return trip it has not survived.

**Map No. 10** shows the progress of the Heward Party – spring 1790.

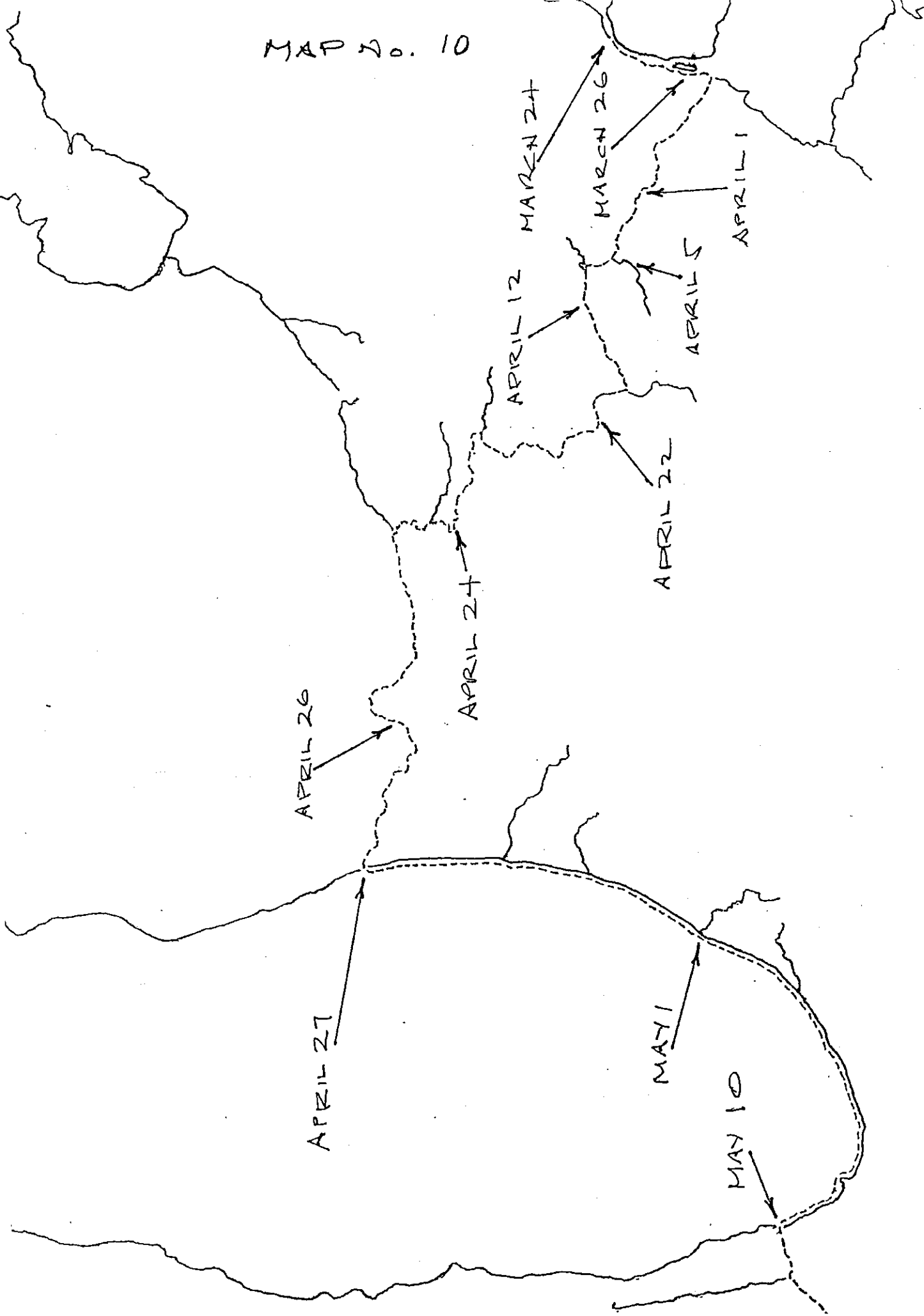
**Appendix 5** contains my speculations as to his return route.

**Appendix 6** is my attempt to determine (or guess) where the party camped each night that they were in Michigan.



The Chicago Portage

MAP No. 10



PROGRESS OF AEWARD PARTY - SPRING 1790

# APPENDIX 1



**WHO WAS HUGH HEWARD?**

## APPENDIX 1

### WHO WAS HUGH HEWARD?

In a footnote to the *John Askin Papers* Editor Milo Quaife has this to say about Hugh Heward: *Hugh Heward was engaged in the fur trade in the Detroit and Wabash regions as early as 1782. In 1786 he was given power of attorney to represent the Miamis Company in French Illinois... (The Miamis Company was a partnership of six Detroit merchants or firms which in the end proved unprofitable.) ...in 1787 he sojourned for awhile in Cahokia... (in 1790) ...he was serving as a clerk and bookkeeper for William and David Robertson (Detroit merchants), in which employment he continued until 1796. In the autumn of 1800 he left Detroit for York (Toronto), where he was employed by the Governor in the capacity of clerk or secretary. There he died in June, 1803...Heward was a man of considerable education, and it is a matter for regret that more of the journals of his wilderness life, which there is reason to suppose he kept, have not come down to us.*

It is known that he was a member of the Militia for the Town of Detroit of which John Askin was Captain. It is also known that in 1787 Heward was involved in a controversy with Louis Lorimer, a well known French-Canadian trader who supported the British during the American Revolution. Acting as an agent for the Miamis Company he sought to seize Lorimer's assets for debts unpaid. Lorimer had been in Kaskaskia, but with the intention of protecting his goods from seizure, he moved them across the Mississippi to the Spanish settlement of Ste. Genevieve (See **Map No. 12, Appendix 5**). This strategem did not work, however, since Heward was able to obtain the cooperation of the Spanish commander and did seize the goods.



As best I am able to determine, Hugh Heward and his French-Canadian engagés were the first white men to travel on the Upper Grand River; that is, that portion of the Grand River from its various headwaters to its confluence with the Maple River, where it enters the channel of the ancestral super-river which drained the meltwater from the retreating continental glacier. This belief is based on more than the fact that I could find no record or other indication of white men being on the Upper Grand prior to 1790. It is plain that Indians regularly used the Grand-Huron route to get to and from Detroit, and thus knew the location of the portage and the geographic relationship between the Grand and Huron tributaries and headwaters. Apparently no white men, French or British did.

Heward and his employers would have had ready access to information anyone in Detroit would have had. The white men nearest the portage, and the settlers and traders at what is now Ypsilanti, seemingly did not know the route to the Grand River watershed nor the location of the portage.

If there were any white men on the Upper Grand before Heward, they most probably would have been unlettered and unknown coureurs de bois. In *Michigan – A History of the Wolverine State*, Willis Dunbar describes them:

*The famed coureurs de bois scorned all regulations and all restraint. They often lived among the Indians for years and took Indian wives. The free and adventurous life of the coureurs de bois had a fatal attraction for the youth of New France.*

If any of these men went up the Upper Grand, one would wonder why. Going from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie, or vice versa, is crossing the peninsula the hard way (See **Appendix 5** for speculation on Heward's return trip). The usual and ancient means of crossing the peninsula was the Grand-Maple-Bad-Shiawassee-Saginaw way. The route most used by both the Indians and



THE COUREUR DU BOIS AND THE SAVAGE

the French for travel between Lakes Erie or Huron and Lake Michigan was via the Straits of Mackinaw.

Subsequent to Heward's trip, the usual way that white men accessed the Grand was to go overland from Detroit to Jackson (then called Jacksonburg), and then go down the river, usually on flatboats. These travelers were mostly settlers heading for such places as Eaton Rapids, Portland, or Ionia.

If one just wanted to travel between Lake Erie and the lower Illinois River or Cahokia or Kaskaskia, the route via the Maumee and Wabash Rivers made the most sense (**Maps 12, 13, and 14 of Appendix 5**).

I believe Heward's journey was more in the nature of an exploration rather than a commercial venture.

## APPENDIX 2



**DETROIT IN THE 1790's**

## APPENDIX 2

### DETROIT IN THE 1790's

In 1929 The Algonquin Historical Society of Canada published the book *Canadian Achievement in the Province of Ontario*. Part of that book is "The Detroit River District", by Hugh Cowan. Included in Cowan's part is a contemporary description of Detroit in the 1790's by one Isaac Weld:

*Detroit contains about three hundred houses, and is the largest town in the western country. It stands contiguous to the river, on the top of the banks, which are here about twenty feet high. At the bottom of them there are very extensive wharves for the accommodation of the shipping, built of wood, similar to those in the Atlantic sea-ports. The town consists of several streets that run parallel to the river, which are intersected by others at right angles. They are all very narrow, and not being paved, dirty in the extreme whenever it happens to rain; for the accommodation of passengers, however, there are footways very close to each other. The town is surrounded by a strong stockade, through which there are four gates; two of them open to the wharfs, and the two others to the north and south side of the town respectively. The gates are defended by strong block houses, and on the west side of the town is a small fort in form of a square, with bastions at the angles. At each of the corners of this fort is planted a small ordnance at present in the place. The British kept a considerable train of artillery here, but the length of time against a regular force; the fortifications, indeed, were constructed chiefly as a defense against the Indians.*

*About two thirds of the inhabitants of Detroit are of French extraction, and the greater part of the inhabitants of the settlements on the river, both above and below the town, are of the same description. The former are mostly engaged in trade, and they all*

*appear to be much on an equality. Detroit is a place of very considerable trade; there are no less than twelve trading vessels belonging to it, brigs, sloops and schooners, of from fifty to one hundred tons burthen each.*

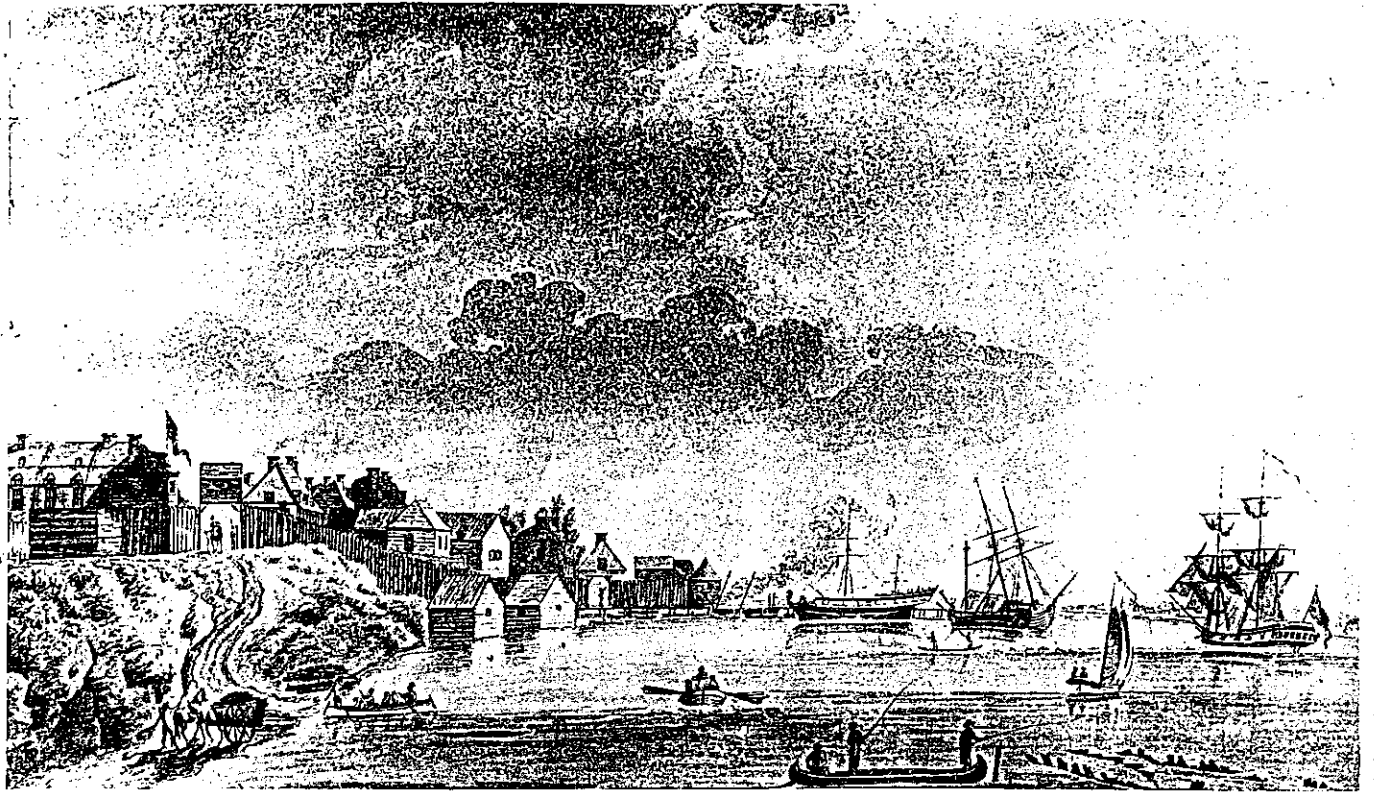
*...The inhabitants are well supplied with provisions of every description; the fish in particular, caught in the river and neighbouring lakes, are of a very superior quality. The fish held in most estimation is a sort of large trout, called the Michilimackinac white fish, from its being caught mostly in the straits of that name. The inhabitants of Detroit and neighbouring country, however, though they have provisions in plenty, are frequently much distressed for one very necessary concomitant, namely, salt. Until within a short time past they had no salt but what was brought from Europe; but salt springs have been discovered in various parts of the country, from which they are now beginning to manufacture that article for themselves...*

*The country round Detroit is uncommonly flat, and in none of the rivers is there a fall sufficient to turn even a grist mill.*

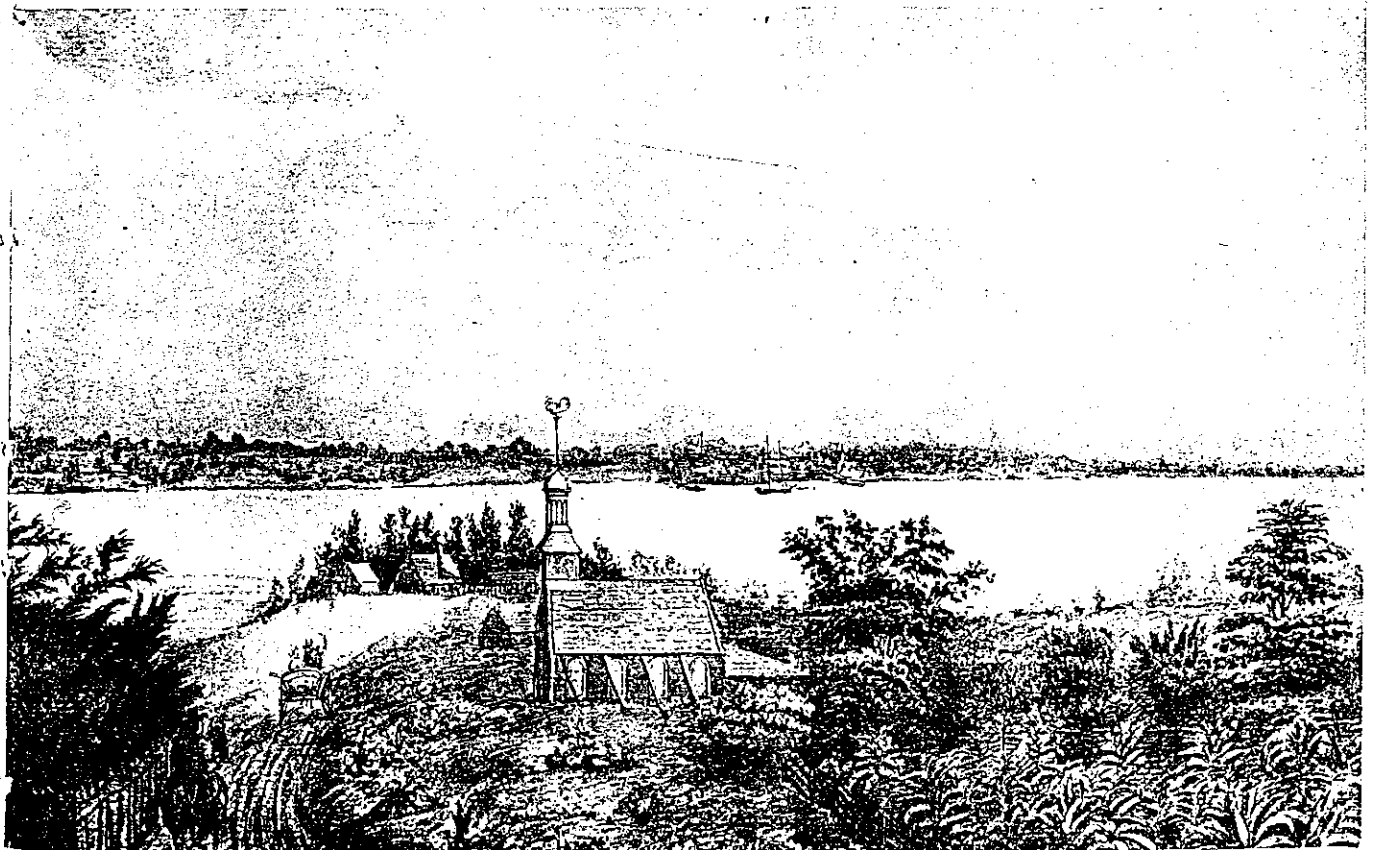
*...They grind their corn at present by wind mills, which I do not remember to have seen in any other part of North America.*

The editor of *Canadian Achievement* has this to say about Isaac Weld:

*The above estimate of the value of the ceded outposts, together with the description account of Detroit, is a Reprint from a valuable book of travels, written by Isaac Weld, Junior, who visited the Detroit region and wrote an account of his observations. The book is not now in circulation, and the number of available volumes, rare. There is a special interest attached to this narrative account of his visitations, seeing that they are the observations of an eye-witness concerning circumstances and places of which we have not too much contemporary history. His judgments, the circumstances of subsequent years have fully substantiated.*



CONSIDERED THE FIRST authentic view of Detroit is this wash drawing of 1794 (*above*) by an unknown artist. Years later much of the area in which ships are shown anchored was filled in. Other early views included one of St. Anne's Street (*right*), and one from the Canadian side



## APPENDIX 3



**WHAT KIND OF CANOES DID  
GRAND RIVER INDIANS BUILD?**



## APPENDIX 3

### WHAT KIND OF CANOES DID GRAND RIVER INDIANS BUILD?

In his journal Heward refers to Indians building “cannots” to go to Detroit. The premier Indian canoe was, of course, made from birchbark; that is, the bark of the white or canoe birch, *betula paperifera*. Heward’s canoes were birchbark as were those of the voyageurs whose strength, stamina, and paddles powered the fur trade. Indians did make dugout canoes, a subject I will cover later in this appendix, but here I am considering only bark canoes.

William Atherton, a Kentucky militiaman, was wounded and captured by an Indian band allied with the British at an 1813 battle at what is now Monroe. He survived the subsequent “River Raisin Massacre” because the band adopted him and took him to their winter hunting grounds on the Grand River. He was eventually freed and wrote an account of his adventures. In that account he said that in the spring, in preparation for going to Detroit, “*All hands turned out to making bark canoes. We made two for each large family.*”

I assume the Indians Heward refers to were also building bark canoes, but since the valley of the Upper Grand is well south of where the paper birch grew, they must have been using some other kind of bark. The following discussion is from my 2002 monograph *Locating Michigan’s Old Canoe Portages*:

“In Adney and Chappelle’s *The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America*, there is a discussion of barks other than birch-bark for canoe construction:

*Many other barks were employed in bark canoe construction, but in most instances the craft were for temporary or emergency use and were discarded after a short time. Such barks as spruce (Picea), elm (Ulmus), chestnut (Castanea dentate L.), hickory (Carya spp.), basswood (Tilia spp.) are said to have been used in bark canoe construction in some parts of North America. Birches other than the paper birch could*

*be used, but most of them produced bark that was thin, and otherwise poor, and was considered unsuitable for the better types of canoes.*

My guess is that the Grand River Indians built canoes of elm bark, either from the American elm (*Ulmus Americana*) or the slippery elm (*Ulmus Rubra*). Both species were plentiful in the Grand River valley and the rest of southern Michigan.

The Iroquois Indians were the masters of the technique for constructing canoes from elm bark. This was necessitated by the lack of birches in their home territory. My research into elm-bark canoes\* indicates that the Iroquois method was known to other Indian tribes and to the French.

In the spring of 1680 the explorer LaSalle and his party of four Frenchmen and one Indian were crossing the southern part of the Lower Peninsula on foot. When they came to the Huron River they decided to build a canoe, hoping to float down that river to Lake Erie.

These are LaSalle's own words, "*I found a stream and had a sort of elm cut down which the Iroquois call Arondugalte, the bark of which can be stripped off at all times...*" He then describes the construction of the canoe in some detail. LaSalle's account is evidence that elm-bark canoes were known and used in Southern Michigan 110 years prior to Heward's journey and 133 years before Atherton's.

Of course the Grand River Indians might have traded for birch-bark canoe building materials from tribes to the north, but it is hard to conceive of a north-south commerce in anything as bulky as rolls of birch bark and spruce root when the interior waterways of the Lower Peninsula trend east-west.

I think the only logical conclusion is that Grand River Indians used locally available bark to build their canoes."

Conventional wisdom seems to have it that dugout canoes made from hollowing out logs were clumsy, heavy craft, hard to steer and harder or impossible to portage. Indeed, many of them would have been, especially those made by inexperienced pioneers without Indian help and guidance. In researching for an article on Michigan-made "whitewood" dugout canoes which

---

\* Done to write a monograph on elm-bark canoes, a condensation of which was published in *Wooden Canoe* magazine, Issue No. 82, August 1997.

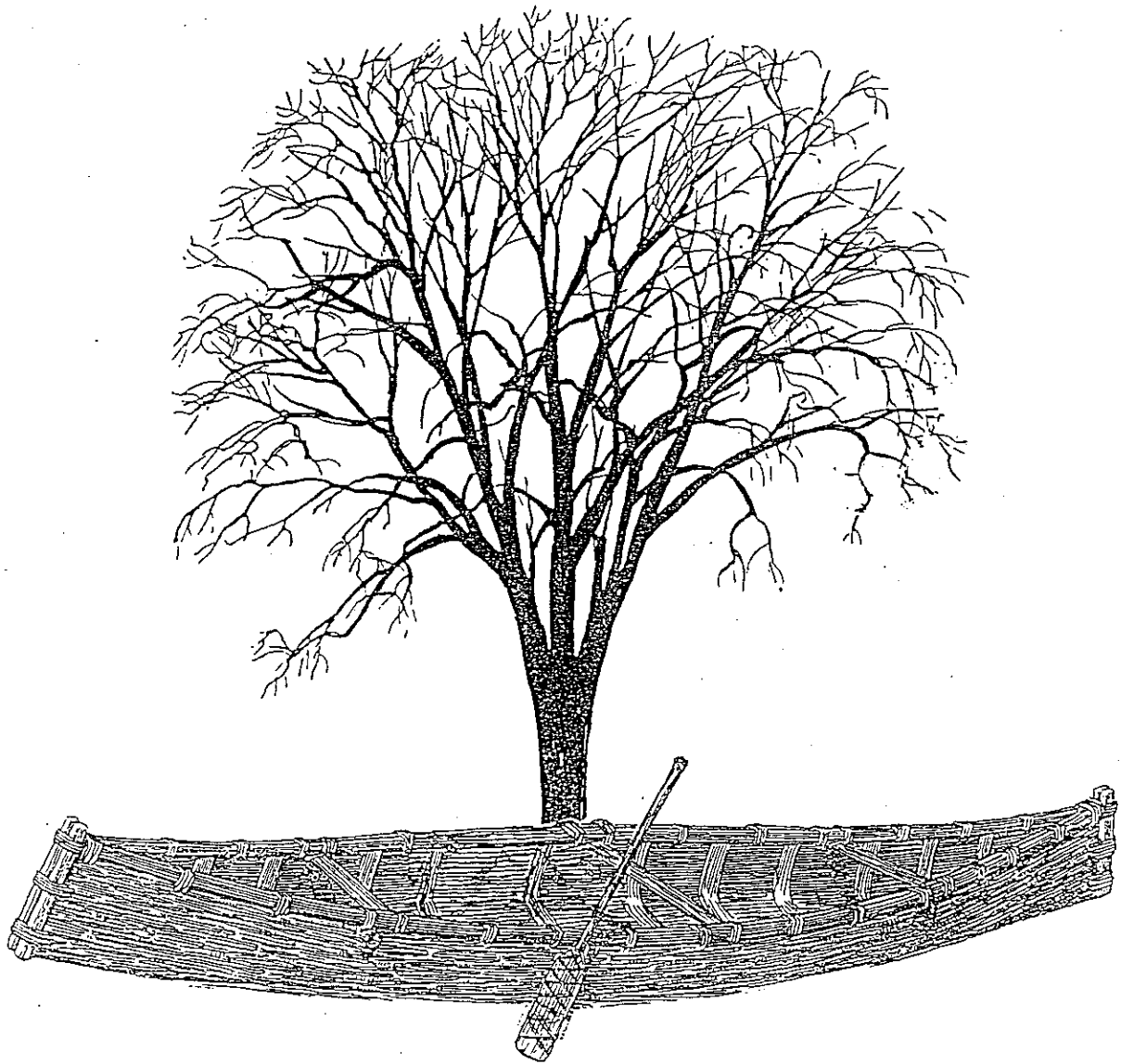
was published in *Wooden Canoe* magazine (Issue 93, June 1999), I found several examples of this. On the other hand, I have found references to dugout canoes that were apparently quite maneuverable, shapely, and reasonably light in weight.

For example, two pirogues (the French name for dugout canoes) from Detroit were paddled across the divide between the Huron and Grand watersheds during a high water period early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To have done this these canoeists would have had to follow the same tortuous route up the Huron River and Portage Creek that the Heward party followed in 1790. Plainly such dugouts could neither have been clumsy nor heavy. **Map No. 3** shows how these pirogues could have crossed from the Huron watershed to the Grand watershed. The channel, now muckland near Stockbridge, is plainly visible both on maps and on the ground.

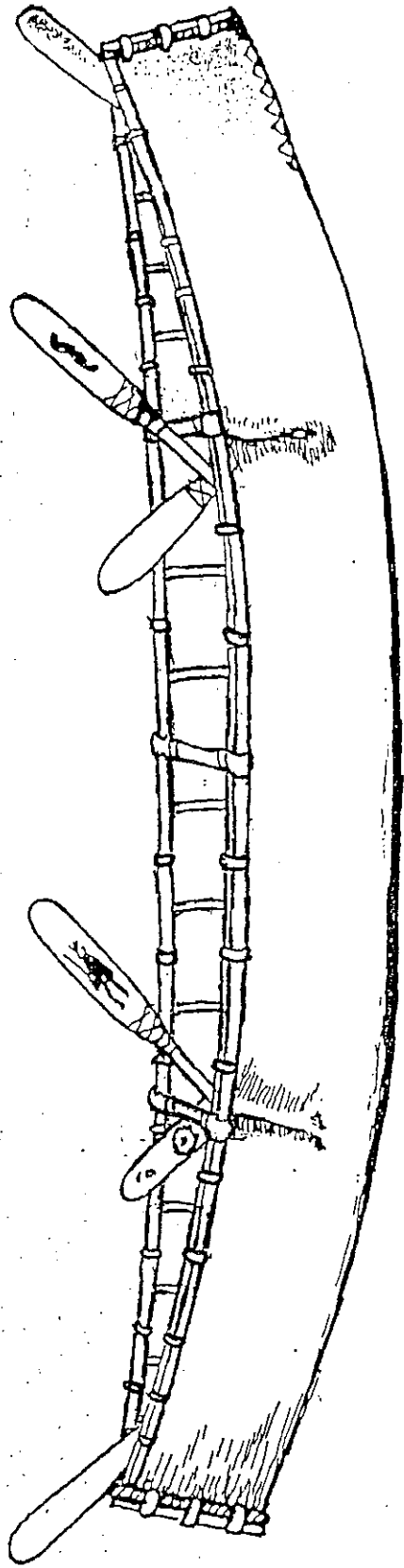
Tim Kent of Ossineke, author of *Birchbark Canoes of the Fur Trade*, who has spent years studying dugout canoes says, "*There is a misconception that (all dugouts) were big, clunky, heavy watercraft that couldn't be portaged. Many were sleek vessels.*"

In his 1931 *Archaeological Atlas of Michigan*, Professor Wilbert Hinsdale says about Indians' use of waterways: "*It was easier and more rapid to travel by canoe...the bark canoes and dugouts were narrow and light and could skim over very shallow water.*"

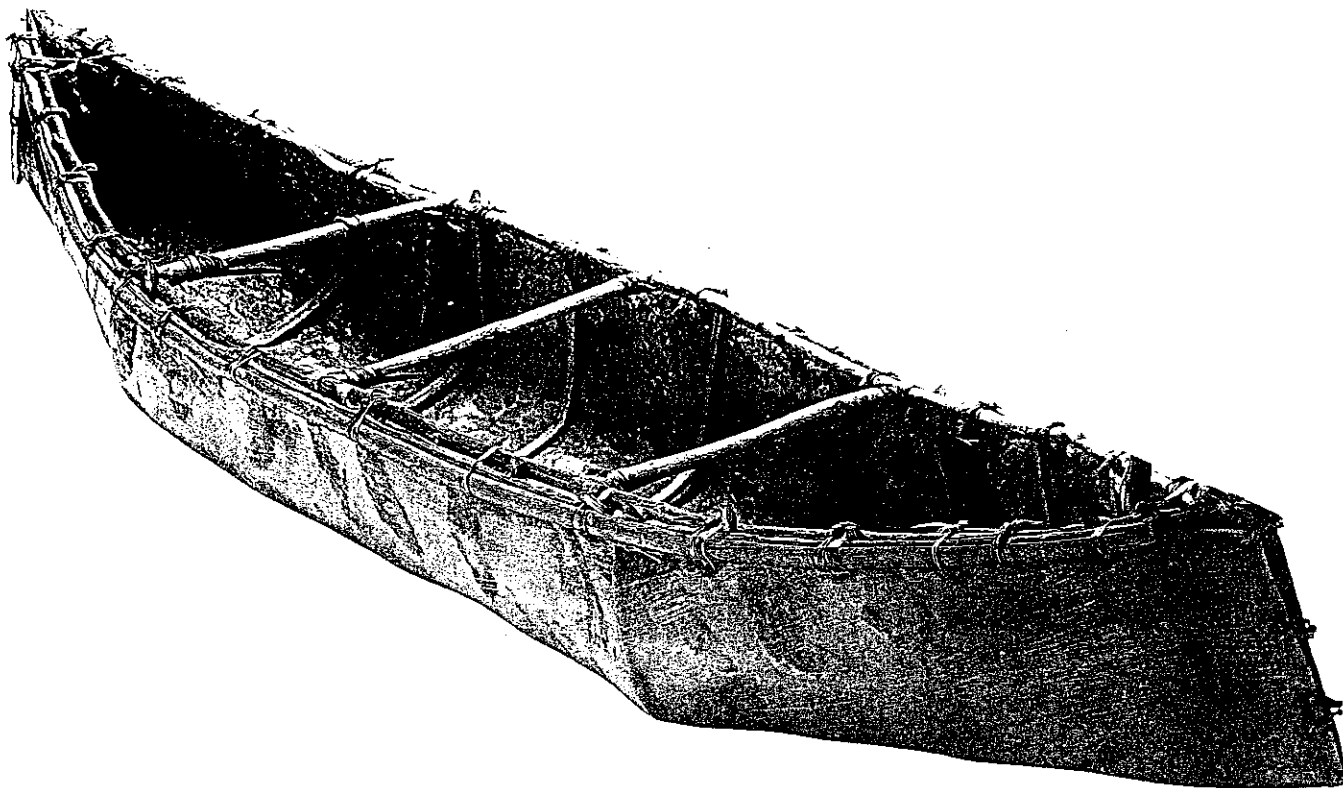
The Chippewa Indians of Michigan were expert birchbark canoe builders, but when circumstances warranted they chose to build dugouts. In 1864 a band of Chippewas was moving out of the Thornapple River valley to a new location on Lake Michigan well to the north of the Grand River watershed. To make this trip they built a fleet of canoes from whitewood (Tuliptree) logs. These dugouts ranged in length from 20 feet to 40 feet.



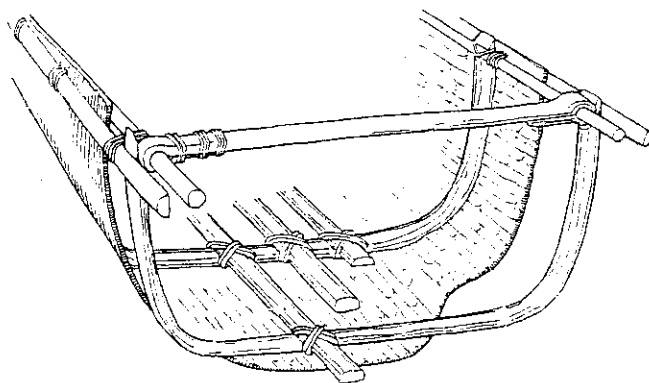
AMERICAN ELM & ELM-BARK CANOE



(ROOUOIS TYPE ELM-BARK CANOE



MODEL OF ELM-BARK CANOE



CONSTRUCTION DETAIL  
ELM-BARK CANOE



POTAWATOMI DUGOUT

"Great Lakes Indians"  
Wm. D. K. Ubiak

## APPENDIX 4



## THE HUGH HEWARD CHALLENGE



## APPENDIX 4

### THE HUGH HEWARD CHALLENGE

As leader of the History Team of Grand River Expedition 2000, a millennium-end reprise of Grand River Expedition '90, I issued the "Hugh Heward Challenge". Expedition canoeists and kayakers were challenged to try and duplicate the Heward party's April 24, 1790, sprint.

In considering how the 2000 paddlers would fare in competition with the 1790 paddlers, remember that Heward's party had four expert and hardened paddlers per canoe. Further, they had no dams to portage around and no sluggish backwaters to paddle through. If the Y2K paddlers were to have any advantage, it would be their equipment: smooth, streamlined synthetic boats and high-tech paddles; plus, they would not be carrying any loads of trade goods and provisions.

A group of expedition members led by Verlen Kruger and the canoeing Smith brothers of Portland took up the challenge. The route was to be from Ingham County's Burchfield Park to the dead end of Erdman Road in Ionia County, a distance of about 47 river miles.

They chose April 15, 2000, to make the attempt. A few dropped out about half way, but the rest finished the trip after about 12 hours of essentially non-stop paddling, proving that today's paddlers can accomplish the same feat as Heward's crew did 210 years before.

April 21, 2001, was the date of the second Hugh Heward Challenge. Five paddlers waited out a thunderstorm at dawn before launching. They waited again under the first Waverly Road bridge for the next thunderstorm that they had just paddled through to subside, before being treated to fine spring weather the rest of the journey. All five (a solo kayak, a solo expedition canoe, a solo racing canoe, and a tandem canoe) finished the entire course before dusk.

The 2002 Hugh Heward Challenge was held on April 20. The event grew to thirty-three paddlers that year, with seventeen of them finishing the entire Challenge.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hugh Heward Challenge took place on April 26, 2003, with an amazing sixty-four paddlers taking part. Thirty-one of these paddlers finished the entire course.

Following is that part of Hugh Heward's journal covering their April 24, 1790, sprint;  
**Map No. 11** showing the party's route, the original Challenge, and stories from the Lansing Oar and Paddle Club's newsletter.

BURTON HISTORICAL RECORDS

upon about 5 oClock came to two Cabins of Otawas who confirmed us that we were in the Grand River & at night met two Cannots mounts to go to Detroit the Lands on this River seem low & very thick Wood plum Trees Hickory & Bois blanc & on the higher Lands Oak a very steady but not rapid Current Camped & at Night the Indians came & told us we would meet many Cannots coming for Detroit.

Friday Ap' 23<sup>d</sup> 1790 Wrote Mr Robertson by Indians going to Detroit in two Cannots continued our Rout till about 10 oClock the Course nearly West & it then turned all at once to North by East or nearly North a fine Day & good Current Met about 11 oClock with Indians spearing Sturgeon an ill looking Band of about 12 who seem to be refugees from the Otaways & peutowatomas strong fat Vagabons bought a Sturgeon for Tobacco & set off when a reinforcement was coming the River from here became large & fine with a strong Current & Stony Bottom the course West Nore West & continued 'till about 3 oClock when it increased in Water & run in large Turnings with Points and Marrey [?] & not so strong a Current the course Nore West 'till about Six oClock & then came to an opener Course nearly the same Direction passed a strong Rapid & Camped. fine Land & heavy Wood of all Sorts on both Sides.

Saturday Ap' 24<sup>th</sup> 1790. Refited our Cannots with Gum & set off passed a Rapid in about an hour after which high broken Land & some pine Trees the Banks of Red Land from thence came to a River from the East<sup>13</sup> & a little lower two Cabins of Indians from Sagana they were providing Cannots for their Departure the course to this Time nearly Nore West by Nore from thence high broken Land & some pine & Cedar about 11 oClock came to an Island in the Middle of the River & a long Rapid & afterwards another Island about Mid Day. Dined the Course West Nore West & came to another Island afterwards three

<sup>13</sup> Apparently Cedar River, which joins the Grand at Lansing in northwestern Ingham County.

JOHN ASKIN PAPERS

Small Islands & some pine Trees on each Side of the River & high Rocks on the North & a small Run of Water from the South after which another small Island & a long & pleasant Drift of an equal & strong Current the Banks high but the Beach level & Gravelly Bottom to another long but not very strong Rapid & to another small Island the Course West by North to again high Banks to the North to another Island from thence to another Island from thence to four others all together following from here a high Sandy Bank with some pine Trees on the South Side after which a Large Island & two small ones following afterwards three Sm[all] Islands & two Sm[all] Meadows to North this last Course nearly West heavy Wood on all Sides Encamped.

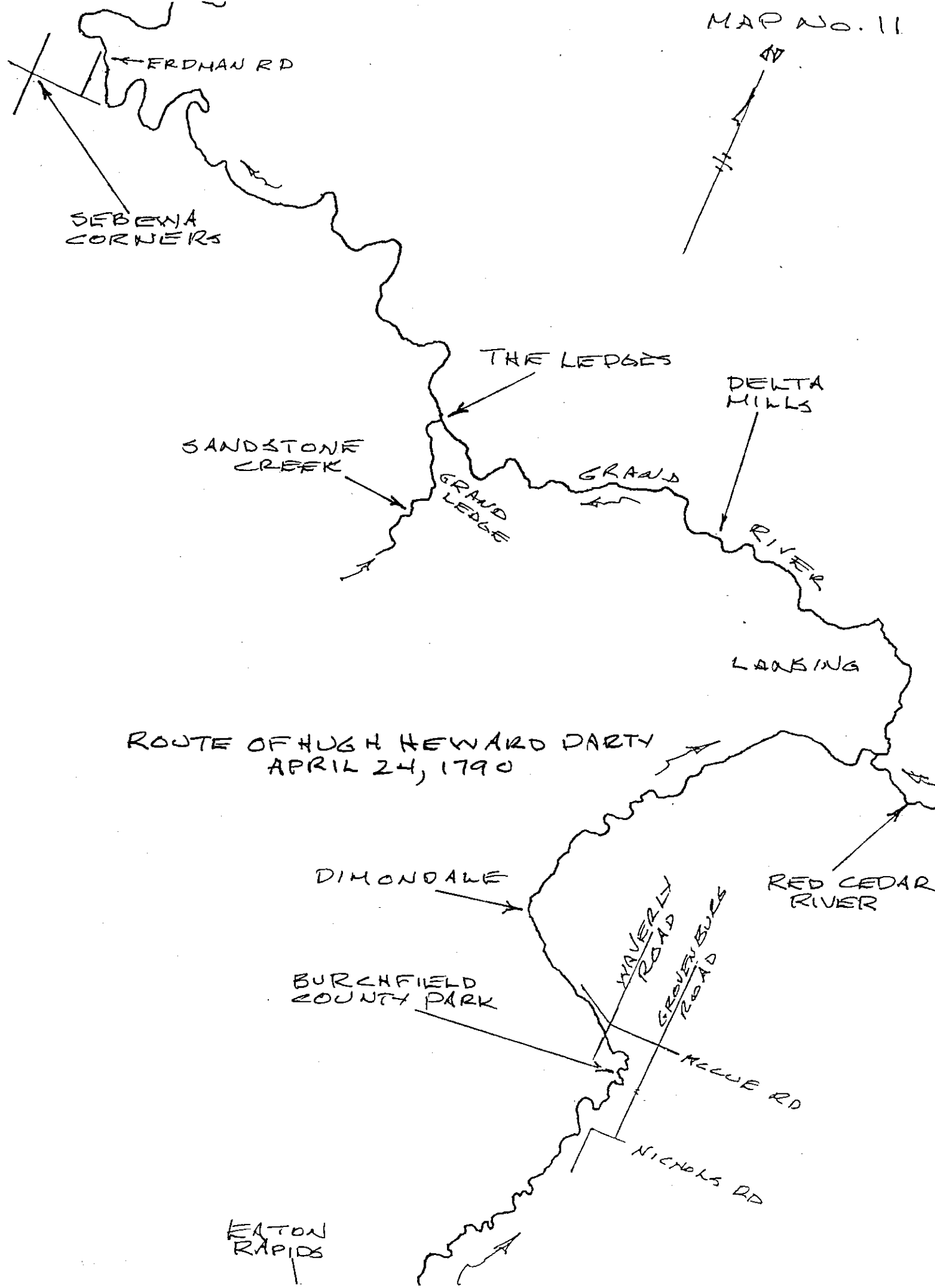
Sunday Ap' 25<sup>th</sup> Opposite an Island<sup>14</sup> after a rainy Night set off from hence a number of small Islands following to a River from the East<sup>15</sup> where was a Cabin of Otawas the Course here nearly North with high Banks & some pine trees to the East from thence to a Villiage the river very full of high Banks [and] some pine Trees & at this Villiage a large Turning & Point the Course Nore West arrived here at Mid Day. from thence low Bottoms with high Banks at a Distance very full of heavy Wood with the finest places possible for making Sugar the River running level deep & not a very strong Current with many Turnings the course nearly West Duarrier lost a Quart Jack some Time ago put on Shore early to rig our Oars hull Corn & C.

Monday Ap' 26<sup>th</sup> 1790 Set off & arrived abo' 10 oClock at a Wintering place a little above a River from North East that goes to Sagana<sup>16</sup> the Frenchman we were told by Squas was gone & indeed his Wintering place seemed very miserable & desolate continued our Course to West but there was a brisk Wind ahead which annoyed us much here the River Wider but not more Current at mid Day

<sup>14</sup> It seems apparent that the words "opposite an island" properly belong with the word "encamped," immediately above.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently Looking Glass River, in southeastern Ionia County.

<sup>16</sup> Maple River in eastern Ionia County.



SEBEWA CORNERS

ERDMAN RD

THE LEDGES

SANDSTONE CREEK

GRAND LEDGE

GRAND RIVER

DELTA MILLS

RIVER

LANSING

ROUTE OF HUGH HEWARD PARTY  
APRIL 24, 1790

DIMOND AWE

BURCHFIELD COUNTY PARK

WAVERTY ROAD

GROVER BUCK ROAD

MCCUE RD

NICHOLS RD

EATON RAPIDS

RED CEDAR RIVER

## GRAND RIVER EXPEDITION 2000

**To: Canoe or Kayak Paddlers**

**From: Jim Woodruff – History Team**

**Subject: Re-Enactment of 1790 Canoe Trip**

In the spring of 1790, British Trader Hugh Heward and seven French engagés in two birchbark canoes traveled from Detroit to the Illinois Country by going upstream on the Huron River from Lake Erie, and downstream on the Grand to Lake Michigan. To get from the Huron to the Grand they had to negotiate a series of streams and lakes along the Livingston-Washtenaw County line and portage to the headwaters of the Grand (Portage River) in Jackson County. They were the first non-natives to pass down the Upper Grand River through present day Eaton Rapids, Lansing, and Grand Ledge.

Sometime after 6 PM April 23 they ran the rapids at present-day Eaton Rapids and camped somewhere downstream. The following is a summary of his journal for April 24, 1790:

- Refitted our canoes with gum & set off
- Passed a rapids in about an hour (Dimondale?)
- After which there was high broken ground and banks of red
- From thence we came to a river from the east (Red Cedar)
- A little downstream there were two cabins (wigwams) of Indians. They were building canoes (North Lansing).
- About 11 o'clock we came to an island in the middle of the river and a long rapids
- Afterwards there was another island about midday (Delta Mills) & dined

- Following the course west north west we came to another island and afterwards three small islands (Grand Ledge). There were pine trees on each side of the river with high rocks to the north (ledges) and a small run of water from the south (Sandstone Creek).

His journal then describes passing a series of 14 islands before camping opposite the 15<sup>th</sup>. My study of topographic maps shows that there are today 28 islands between the dam at Grand Ledge and the mouth of the Looking Glass at Portland. The 15<sup>th</sup> island is in the Portland State Game Area in Sec. 20 of Danby Township of Ionia County.

After careful study of Heward's journal, USGS topographic maps, and the Grand River Expedition '90 River Guide, I conclude that they paddled at least 45 miles that day. The question is: Could today's canoeists or kayakers do as well? Their advantages were (1) no backwaters to paddle and no dams to portage, (2) four paddlers to a canoe – Were their birchbark canoes a disadvantage as compared to modern canoes or kayaks?

My proposed duplication of this 1790 day's paddle would go as follows:

At least two canoes – Start at daylight at Burchfield County Park off Grovenburg Road – mid-day at Delta Mills Park (near Verlen's place) – End at the river a mile east and a mile north of Sebewa Corners.

Presumably Heward and his men gummed their canoes at dawn and camped before dark. If this re-enactment is done later than April 24, it should start at the equivalent time of April 24 daylight – If they finish before dark that proves they are as good as Heward – If not, they have the dams and backwaters as alibis.

What we need are volunteers...

# Grand River Expedition 2000



Volume 2, Number 2

January/February 2000

## G.R. Expedition 2000--6 Months Off!!!

### Historical Aspects

The Indian name for the Grand River was "Washtenong" or "Owashtenong" meaning far flowing or long flowing river. The Grand is Michigan's longest river, flowing from highlands in northern Hillsdale County to Grand Haven on Lake Michigan.

The Grand is one of six rivers with headwaters in Hillsdale county. Three flow to Lake Erie and three to Lake Michigan. The three within the Lake Erie watershed are the River Raisin, Ohio's Tiffin River and Indiana's St. Joseph of the Maumee. The Lake Michigan Watershed rivers besides the Grand, are the St. Joseph which enters Lake Michigan at St. Joseph and the Calamazoo which enters Lake Michigan at Saugatuck.

The first Dam on the Grand is at Liberty Mills in southern Jackson county and the last is at Grand Rapids. There are 11 Dams in all on the mainstem.

The first non-native Americans to paddle on the upper Grand River were British fur trader, Hugh Heward and even french "engage's" in two birchbark canoes in the spring of 1790.

The old state prison in Jackson was

built of sandstone quarried on the banks of the Grand River.

The Great French explorer, La Salle was ambushed by Mascoutin Indians at the Grand River in northern Jackson County in early April 1680. LaSalle and his party was hiking across the lower peninsula from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie. The Mascoutins thought the Frenchmen were an Iroquois war party. When they found out otherwise they didn't harm them.

The upper Grand River between it's headwaters and Lyons in Ionia County is a Johnny-come-lately tributary to the ancestral Grand River. Thirteen thousand years ago it was a channel through which glacial meltwater flowed in torrents to what is now Lake Michigan. The Maple River and the lower Grand now flow through the remnants of that channel. At that time a mile-thick lobe of the continental glacier occupied the Saginaw Valley.

--Jim Woodruff

### The Challenge

"History Team Leader", Jim Woodruff is challenging mid-Michigan canoeists or kayakers to match the feat of British fur trader Hugh Heward and his French crew who paddled their two birch-bark canoes over 45 miles in one day on the Grand River in 1790. In the spring of that year Heward led an expedition from Detroit to Lake Erie

and then across the lower Peninsula to Lake Michigan by going upstream on the Huron River and downstream on the Grand River.

On April 24, 1790, after having passed the rapids at present day Eaton Rapids the evening before, the Heward party paddled all the way past the sites of Dimondale, Lansing, and Grand Ledge to an island in the Portland State Game Area before camping for the night.

As a springtime lead-in to the Grand River Expedition 2000 trip, Woodruff proposes an attempt to duplicate that day's journey by starting at Grand River County Park off Grovenburg Road in Ingham County and ending at Erdman Road near Sebewa Corners in Ionia County. The starting time would be the equivalent of daylight on April 24, 2000.

Woodruff believes that it will be difficult for present day canoeists to meet [or beat] this challenge, since Heward had no backwaters to paddle and no dams to portage, even though modern watercraft might be faster than birch-bark canoes.

We would like to hear from anyone who thinks they are up to this challenge.

## Verlen Solos Stretch of Alaska's Kantishna River

In this issue...

Historical Aspects ..... 1  
The Challenge ..... 1

April 2000



## HUGH HEWARD CHALLENGE

On April 15th at daybreak, a group of paddlers will try to re-create the April 24, 1790 voyage of the Hugh Heward party, the first non-Native Americans to paddle the upper Grand River. Jim Woodruff, history leader of Grand River Expedition 2000, notes that the journal of Heward has the fur trading party of 8 traveling at least 45 miles that day in two birchback canoes. The paddle begins at Burchfield Park and ends at Portland State Game Area. Contact Charlie Parmelee for more info.

## Expedition to be re-enacted

On Saturday, April 15 at daybreak, Verlen Kruger, a world-record long distance paddler, and Mike Smith, also a long-distance paddler, will join several others in a re-enactment of an April 24, 1790 event.

That was the day Heward, with seven Frenchmen in two birch bark canoes (the first white men to travel the Grand River) embarked from somewhere near

William Burchfield Park at daybreak and stopped for the night in the Portland State Game area.

This is a distance of 45-plus miles. The challenge is to see if a man can still do it today. The event is sponsored by the Grand River Expedition 2000 and the upcoming River Cleanup on May 6 of this year.

The Ingham County Parks Department was also instrumental in making this happen.



April 14, 2002

# Paddlers retrace historic route

By JOSHUA SHEPARD

For the Lansing State Journal

This Saturday, canoeists and kayakers from all over the state will gather at the Grand River for the Hugh Heward Challenge.

The annual event, designed for paddlers of all skill levels, consists of a 55-mile course that starts at William Burchfield Park in Holt and finishes at the Portland State Game Area.

The course is modeled after the route that was taken by fur trader Hugh Heward, who in 1790 was the first European to canoe down the Grand River.

"It is a very interesting course because you get a real sense of history when you are traveling along it," said Charlie Parmelee of the Lansing Oar and Paddle Club. "The historical context makes this event more appealing to many paddlers."

Since its inception three years ago, the amount of people participating in the Hugh Heward Challenge has been steadily growing. Parmelee believes it is the fun atmosphere that is fueling the increase.

"At first, I think many people thought this was a race to see who was the best paddler, but that is not the case," he said. "I like to think of it more like golf."

"You are just out there having fun competing with yourself."

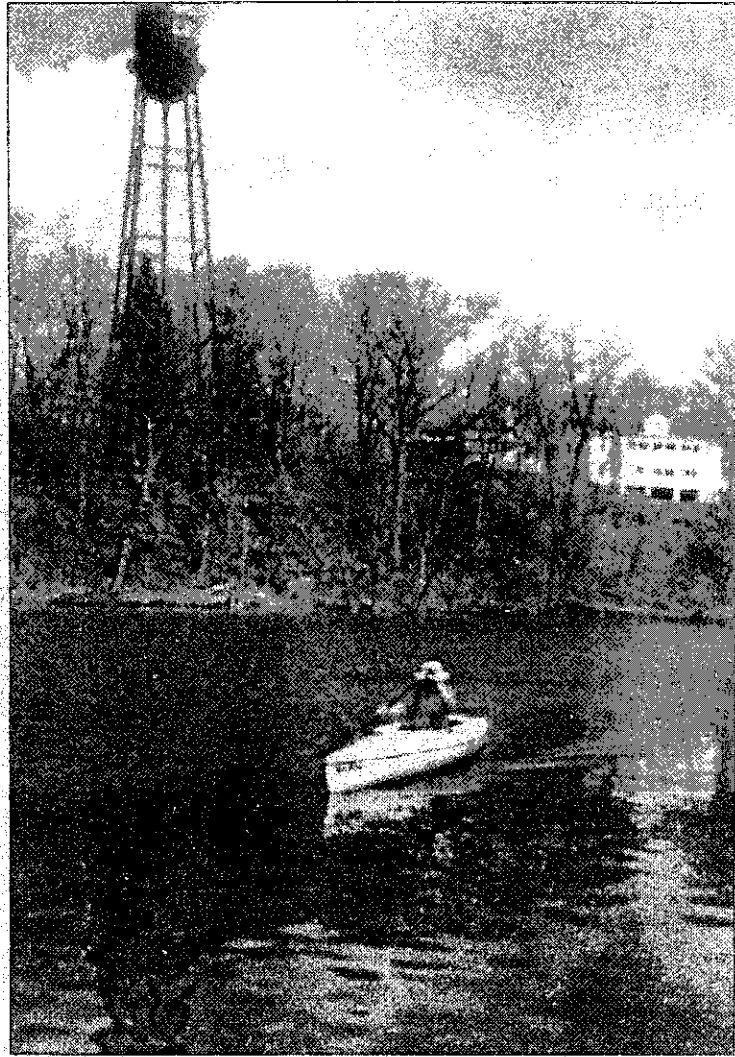
Nancy Anderson, the event organizer for the club, says self-competition is what inspires so many paddlers to attempt the course year after year.

"No awards are given out so it's not really a race in that regard," she said. "The challenge comes from trying to finish the course and trying to beat your previous best time."

During the first year of the event less than 20 people participated. That number is expected to grow to more than 50 this year.

One of the main reasons for the increase is the advent of two separate launches for competitive and recreational groups. Recreational paddlers will launch at 6:30 a.m., while racers will launch around 10 a.m.

"We split the two groups up so



Tuning up: Verlen Kruger paddles during the 2001 Hugh Heward Challenge. Kruger will use this year's event to prepare for his upcoming Yukon River trip.

all skill levels would feel comfortable participating," said Anderson. "It allows slower paddlers to go at their own pace while the more competitive paddlers can zoom down the river."

Another option available for the less experienced is choosing a section of the course to paddle. This allows people with less endurance to enjoy the event without feeling the pressure of having to paddle more than 50 miles.

"It is pretty challenging to complete a 55-mile course in one day," said Parmelee.

"Choosing a certain section and just paddling part of the course is a great option for the recreational paddler."

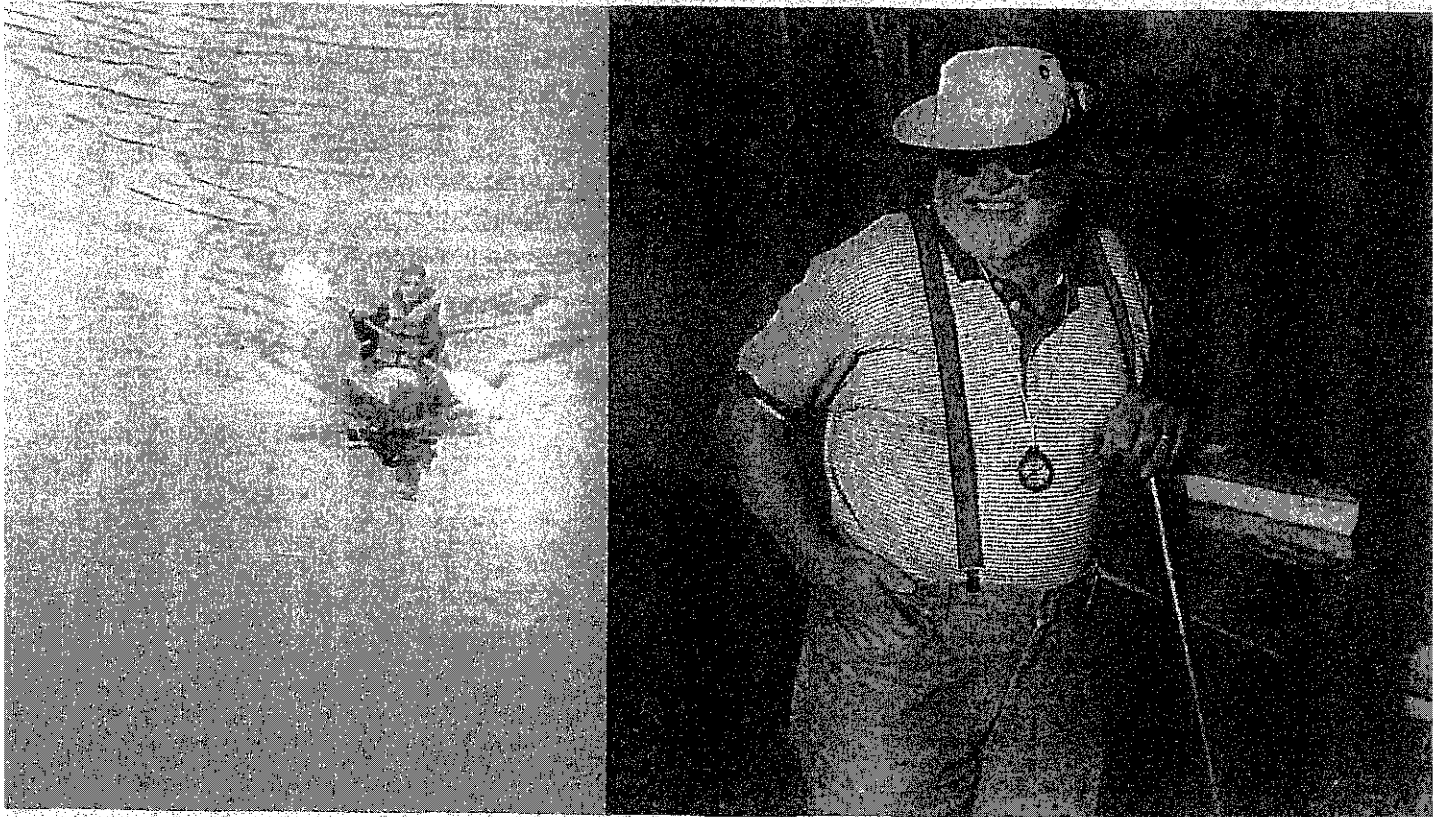
Even though the event is designed for paddle-boat enthusi-

asts, other outdoors lovers are also encouraged to participate. Hikers, walkers and bikers can follow the paddlers as they move along the river.

"I am not a water person at all," said Janet Hill. "Last year I just enjoyed walking down the river trail for a couple miles and watching all the people go down the river."

Boardwalk trails can be found along the river throughout most of the course. Parts of the course in Lansing, Grand Ledge and Portland all have trails that follow the river.

"I think they do a good job of plotting the course around the river trails so spectators can watch," Hill said. "It really makes this an event everyone can enjoy."



**Alex St. Clair (13yrs) – Hugh Heward Challenge – Verlen Kruger (79 yrs)**

**Hugh Heward Challenge Paddle**

By Nancy Anderson

The Hugh Heward Challenge is an annual paddling event re-enacting the April 24, 1790, voyage of British fur trader Hugh Heward and seven hired Frenchmen in two birchbark canoes. Traveling from Lake Erie to Lake Michigan, Heward and his men were the first white men to travel the Grand River through present day Eaton Rapids, Dimondale, Lansing, Grand Ledge, and Portland. Their 1790 journey through our area began at daybreak near present day Burchfield Park. Traveling until dusk, they paddled 47 miles to camp on the current land of the Portland State Game Area.

This year's Challenge was lengthened to 55 miles, with the take-out at Portland's Thompson Field. This came about because of a statement Verlen Kruger made at one of his slide presentations. He referred to the paddler who has paddled "over 50 miles in a single day" as the rarest breed of all. (And, of course, we all want to be rare.)

This year's Hugh Heward Challenge took place on Saturday, April 20. The day dawned with light rain, but that didn't dampen the spirits of the challengers. Eighteen paddlers launched about 7:00 a.m. following a paddler's blessing and prayer

for safety, with friends and family cheering them on their way. At 8:30, six canoe racers launched, making a total of twenty-four challengers attempting the whole distance.

The rain stopped before the paddlers reached the first portage at Dimondale Dam, and they were treated to pleasant, comfortable weather the rest of the day. The first snack/lunch break was at Moores River Park Dam, while others paddled on to the Kruger's home for their break. The land crew's help at the portages was greatly appreciated by all. They made a great cheering section along the way, and had a wonderful chili supper waiting for us at the take-out. Many thanks go out to our all women land crew, and also to the Dan Smith family.



lunch at Moores River Park portage

Most of this year's challengers paddled their way to a new personal best for paddling distance in a single day. Times for the whole challenge ranged from 12 – 15 hours, except, of course, for the canoe racers, who were decidedly faster. Seventeen paddlers completed the whole challenge, including 79-year-old **Verlen Kruger** who led the front pack. They were awarded certificates of achievement. **Alex St. Clair, 13 years old**, completed 43 miles. One paddler made 30 miles, and two others made 22 miles, new milestones for them. Charlie even managed 17 miles before pulling out, after being up sick all night. What a disappointment!

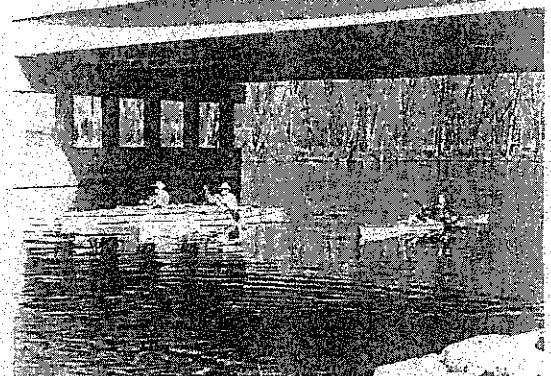
Family and friends that didn't attempt the whole challenge also joined in on the fun. Four paddlers came to experience the Portland State Game Area. Putting in at Jaycee Park in Grand Ledge, they paddled the last ½ of the course, and now refer to themselves as the Half-Hughers.



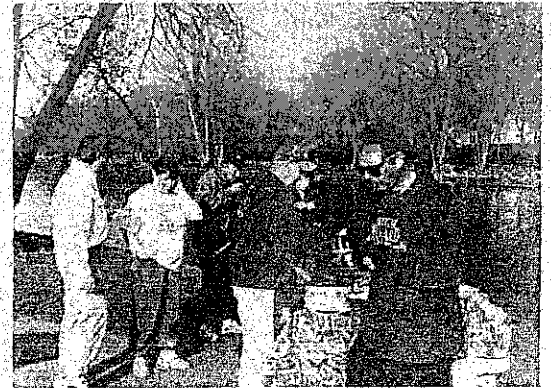
smiling faces of the Half-Hughers at the end

Five more put in at Charlotte Highway and paddled the last 13 miles with family and friends, for a total of thirty-three paddling participants.

All paddlers seemed to greatly enjoy their day on the water. New sights and places were seen. New skills were gained; existing ones refined. New experiences were realized; goals were accomplished. New friendships were formed; others were deepened. And all can now say that they paddled with Verlen Kruger, the paddling legend.



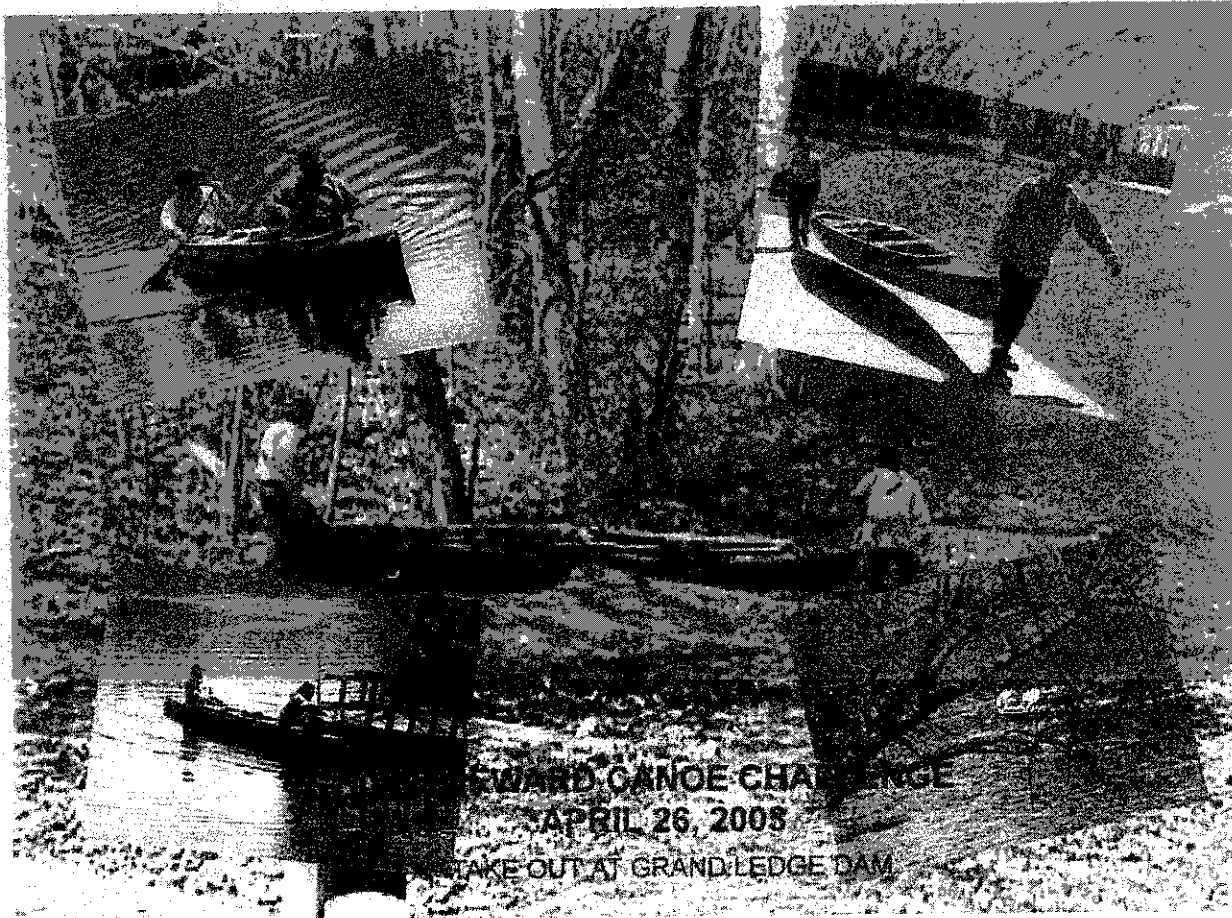
Verlen, Ron, and Nancy – Charlotte Hwy Bridge



chili cookout after the challenge

**Come join us next year and bring the whole family.**

L.O.A.P.C.  
LANSING OAR AND PADDLE CLUB



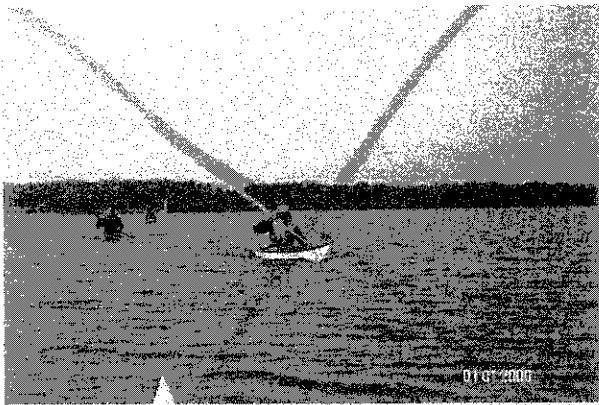
**Hugh Heward 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Challenge Paddle**

Photo collage by Richard Schultz (Mark's dad)

**On the Inside:**

- Page 3: Classifieds; Clubs; Classes
- Page 4: Paddle to Hell by Suellyn VanDeSande
- Page 4: Sleepy Hollow by Mike Svendsen
- Page 5: Hugh Heward by Regina Mingus, John Slawinski, and Nancy Anderson

things to those hot dogs. And filled in the smaller voids with chips and cookies.



Jon Pumplin , David Johnson, Joe Reisner

All in all, a very nice afternoon of fresh air and exercise, a nice day of making new acquaintances, and renewing old friendships. I would personally like to thank everybody for a very nice afternoon.

### Hugh Heward Challenge Paddle

**John Slawinski says:**

Mark Schultz and I bumped into each other at the YMCA and recalled our getting acquainted on the Expedition 2000. We decided it would be fun to get together and do some paddling and pedaling. Mark checked the LOAPC schedule and discovered the upcoming Hugh Heward challenge. We began a somewhat rigorous training schedule that involved upstream conditioning, cycling, and a two-session practice run of the actual course. Our goal was to set a benchmark time and make Verten proud of us, as we paddled a Kruger Cruiser in the event. Apparently our Polish Practice Regimen paid off. We stayed out in front in spite of relentless pursuit by a pair in a Wenona. (Who were those guys?) We received a cell phone call from Mark's dad informing us that they were still there after completing the portage in Grand Ledge. One C2 racer leaked in just ahead of us at Portland as we finished in 10 hours and 30 minutes. The pair in the Wenona stayed just 5 minutes behind us the entire time. What a riot! Talk about fur traders and Indians! We have since participated in two more LOAPC paddles and continue to have a ball. My boat was baptized on the "Paddle to Hell" and Mark took third in class at Manchester, with a time on the River Raisin just under 35 minutes.

Our checks are in the mail as new members of the club and we look forward to future events. I would like to give special thanks to outing organizers and the folks at Kruger Canoes for putting up with our antics.

**Regina Mingus says:**

arrived to the park in the dark and just as the Park Ranger was unlocking the gate on his morning rounds. Within 10 minutes, our Challenge leaders had arrived with

tables, packages for all the paddlers, bottled water and the lovely "green, traveling latrine".

In a matter of minutes, tables were set up and ready to register the 64 paddlers of the day. They came in groups, or they came solo. Some as a couple were traveling tandem. In a kayak or a canoe, they all came with a smile and excitement for the day. There were many comments about how well organized everything was. They all were glad to have their own map (and plastic coated) with phone numbers of road crew to contact if anyone needed help.

On that beautiful morning, when everyone's gear was unloaded and all vessels ready, we stood by the water and an invited minister said a special prayer for the paddlers. Then one by one the challenge started for the 55 - mile descent down the Grand River. Retracing the same stretch of the Grand that the English fur trader traveled many times and many years ago. Hugh Heward is his name.

**Nancy Anderson says:**

April 26, 2003, dawned crisp and cool, perfect for paddling. A record number of 64 paddlers and 1 dog showed up to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hugh Heward Challenge. They came with happy faces and the adrenalin flowing, ready for a long day.

Following registration, Pastor Gerhard Weigelt gave the paddler's blessing to start us on our way. We launched about 7:30, with the marathon canoe racers following at 9:00. Boats were as varied as the paddlers. There were recreational kayaks and sea kayaks, both tandem and solo. There were Loons and Seawinds. There were regular canoes and racing canoes, also both tandem and solo. And there was one Kruger Cruiser.

Some came to paddle a few miles with family and friends, and some came to see how far they could go. Some came to paddle through the Portland State Game Area, while others planned on going the whole distance. Here are their statistics:

6.4 miles -	3 paddlers
12.8 miles -	1 paddler
14.0 miles -	3 paddlers
16.3 miles -	1 paddler
19.3 miles -	1 paddler
24.8 miles -	10 paddlers
29.2 miles -	8 paddlers
30.2 miles -	5 paddlers
42.0 miles -	1 paddler
55.0 miles -	31 paddlers

The 31 finishers included 4 kayaks, 3 Seawinds, 2 regular canoes, 11 racing canoes, and 1 Kruger Cruiser. Ten of these boats were tandem. Times ranged from approximately 9 hours to 14 hours, slower than last year due to lower water levels. All 31 finishers received certificates of achievement.

Several paddled to new milestones. Most impressive to me was Mary Bricker. Her previous long paddle in a

single day was 20 miles. She completed the whole 55 miles in her hand built Pygmy Arctic Tern 14 kayak. Way to go, Mary!

A welcome new addition to the challenge this year was the "lean, green traveling latrine", complete with hand sanitizer and mirror. Charlie was dubbed as the official sh\*t, I mean waste hauler. Some worried that he would drive off without checking to see if someone was still inside. Others worried that they would get locked inside. Anyway, it was a good idea. Thanks, Charlie!

And a big thank you goes to our land crew: **Bruce Anderson, Charlie and Deb Parmelee, and Regina Mingus**. They did a fantastic job. We all couldn't have done it without you! You made a long hard day a fun, memorable time for everyone. Some comments sent to the club afterwards include: "The hospitality that we experienced was outstanding and it does paint a picture of how friendly the community is....Once again, thanks for the experience, it will be an excellent part of my shared adventure experiences around the USA," said **Heath Powell**, Assistant Recreation Director, Northeastern Illinois University. "Thank you for volunteering the time and effort so I could have such a good time. You all did a superb job."  
"BRAVO for a job well done." "We want to express our gratitude for the great time we had on the Hugh Heward Challenge. It was just the inspiration we needed to get even MORE involved in paddling."

Many paddlers stayed afterwards to enjoy a chili supper while swapping stories about their day. Thank you **Connie Cannon and Patty Pape** for supplying the dessert goodies. They were great!

All paddlers seemed to greatly enjoy their day on the water, despite the hard work. Many are already planning on more training earlier next spring so they can complete the whole distance next year. We hope they do. See you next year!



OPENING CEREMONY



LEAN, GREEN TRAVELING LATRINE



FISH LADDER PORTAGE



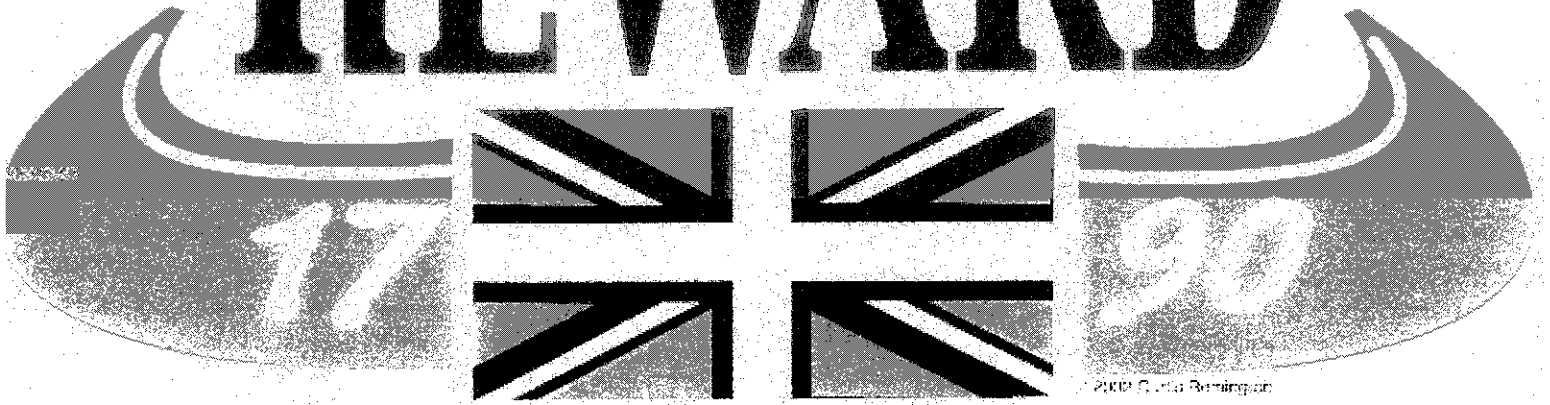
SEA WIND AT KRUGER BASE CAMP

Verlen Kruger celebrated his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday on Monday, June 30, with John Slawinski on the Red Cedar and Grand Rivers. Under wonderful blue skies and temperate weather Verlen enjoyed this celebration to the fullest.

This was an unhurried paddle on the Red Cedar River from Meridian Road into the Grand River, through Lansing and on into Delta Mills, Verlen's home, Kruger Base Camp. From what I hear, there was no racing, but trying to keep up with Verlen would be a race in itself for anyone.

Happy Birthday, Verlen! You are an inspiration and continually show us the way to enjoy paddling to the fullest.

# HUGH HEWARD



© 2001 C. J. & B. Remington

# CHALLENGE

*in the Grand River*



*The Route of the*  
**HUGH HEWARD**  
*Party*  
April 24, 1790



## APPENDIX 5



**THE RETURN ROUTE?**

## APPENDIX 5

### THE RETURN ROUTE?

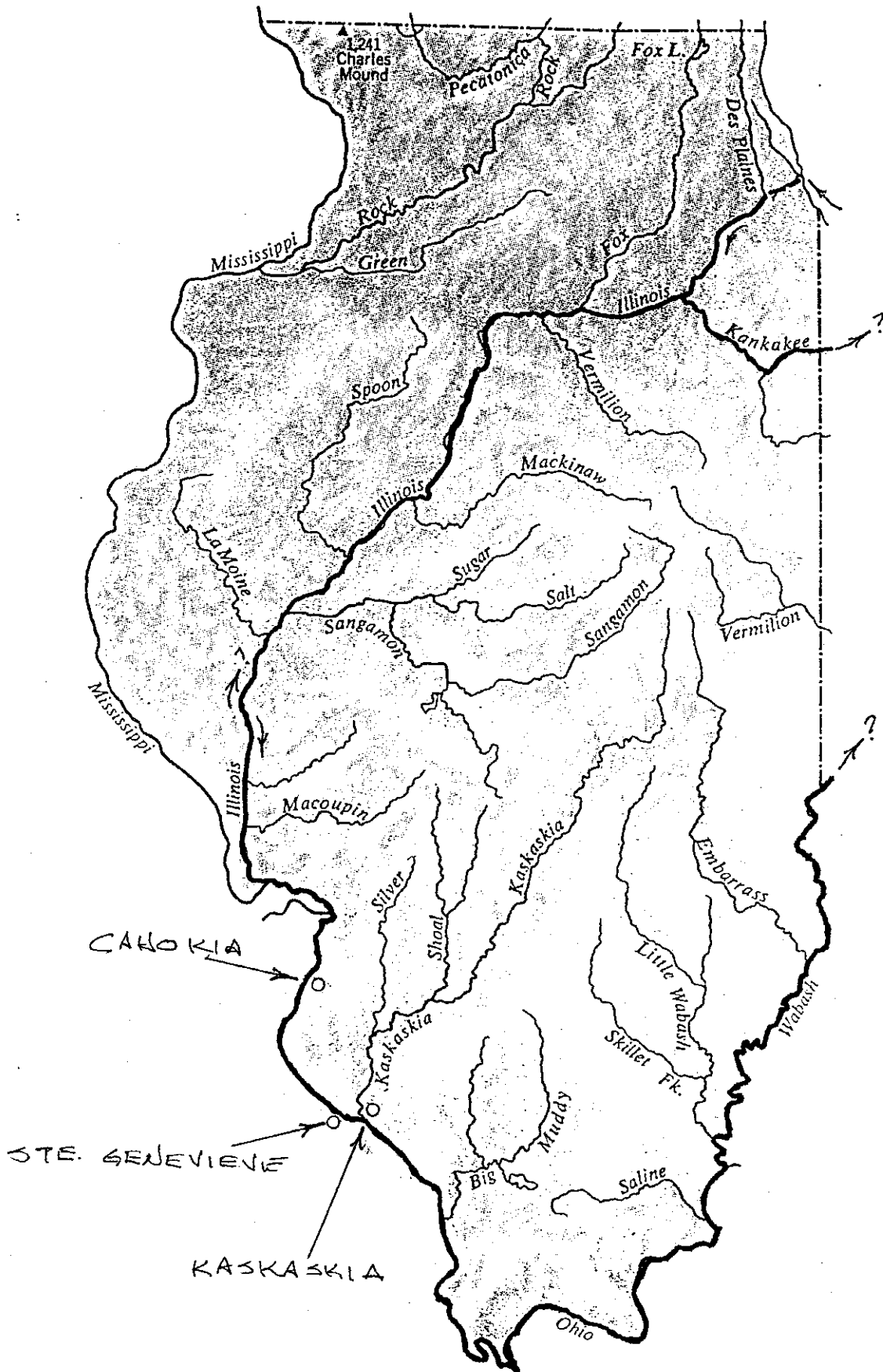
It could be that Heward did not return to Detroit by the same route he took to reach the Illinois country. He had gone down the Illinois River all the way to the Mississippi.

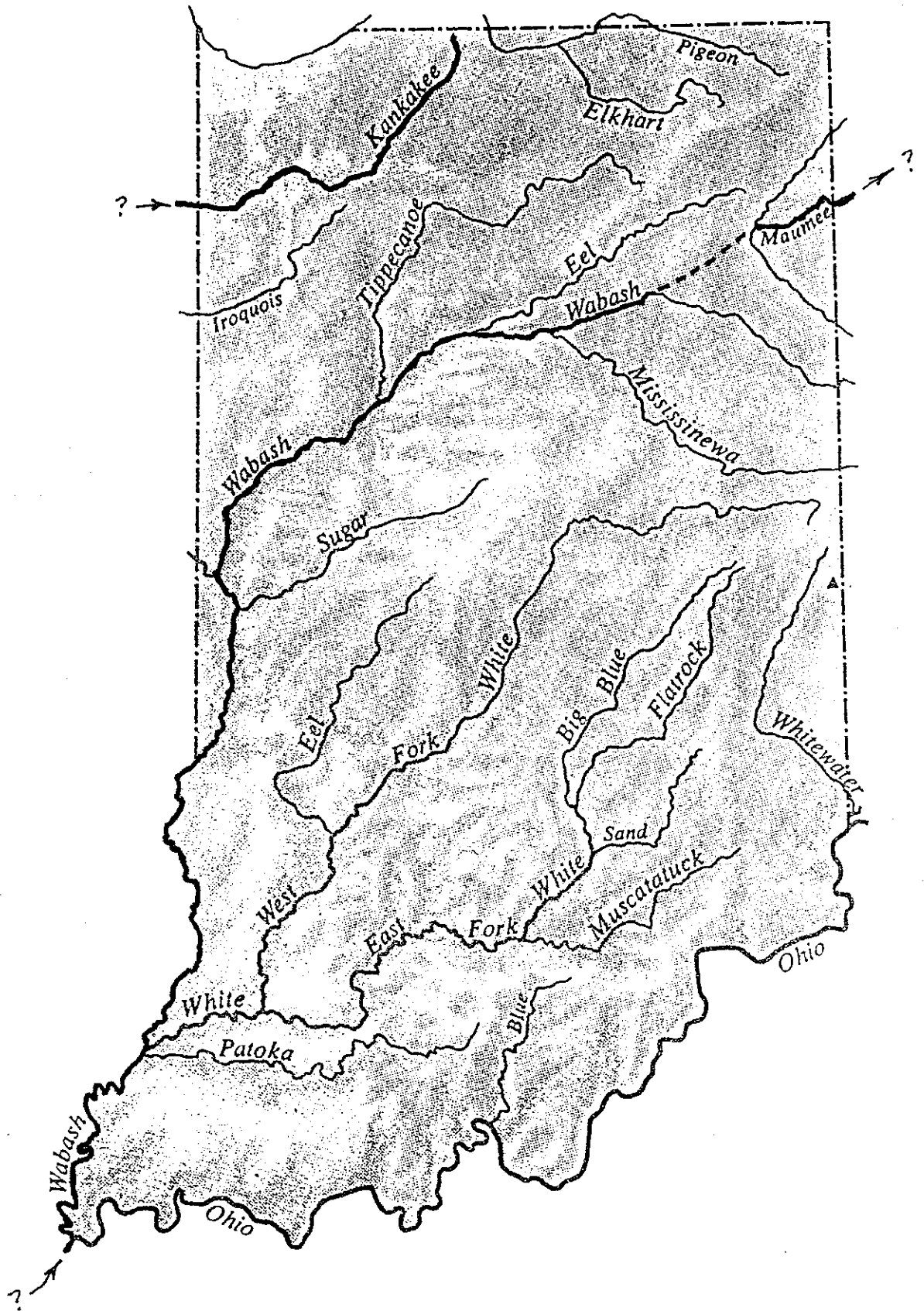
Although the journal ends at this point, I think it is reasonable to assume that the party continued on to at least Cohokia, and probably on to Kaskaskia where Heward had been three years earlier (**Map No. 12**). **Appendix 1** includes an account of his prior activities at Kaskaskia and environs.

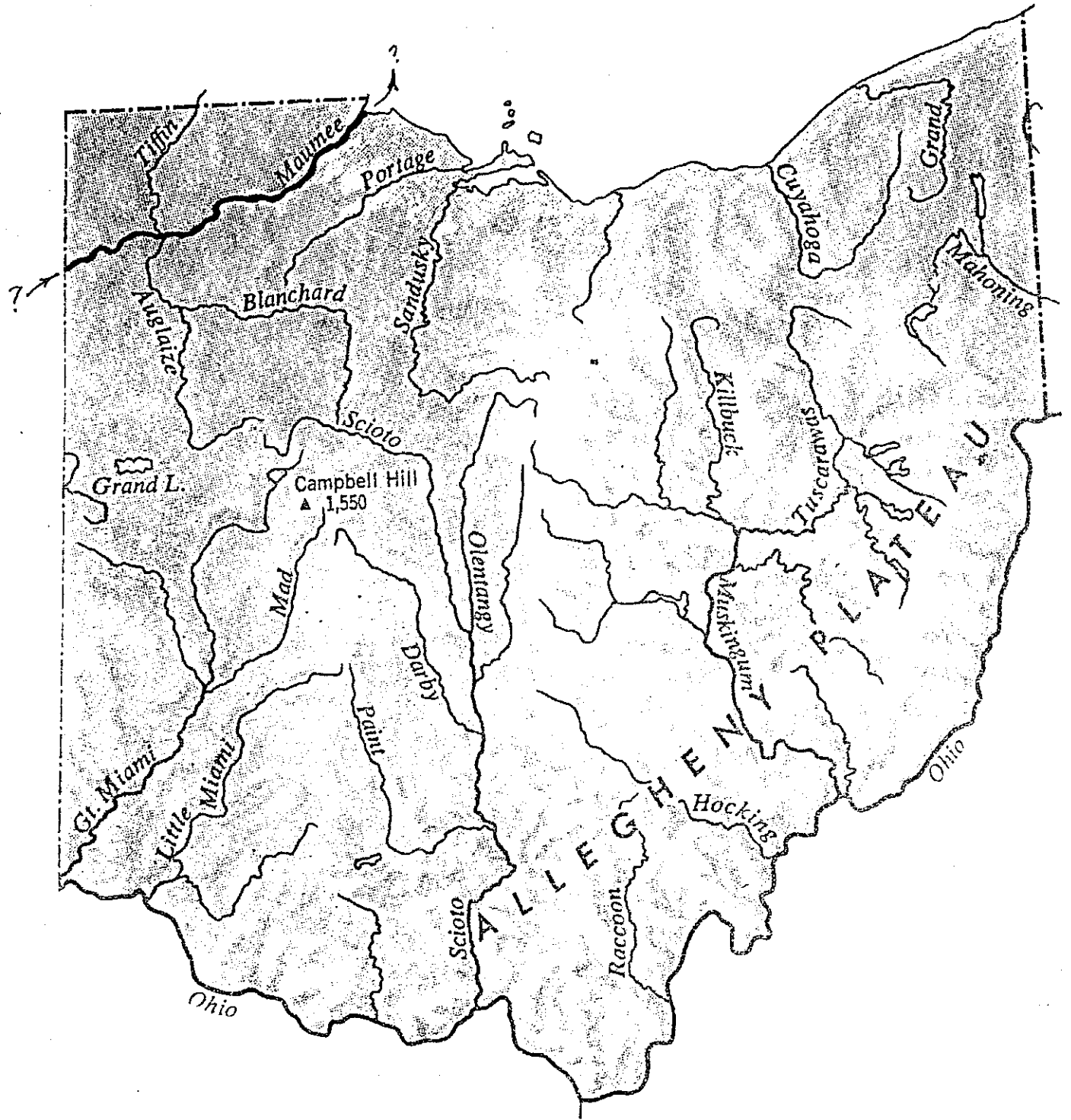
We do not know which, if any, of the engagés returned to Detroit with him. While coming down the Illinois, at least two of them gave notice that they would not continue to accompany him.

To get back to Detroit, Heward could have gone on down the Mississippi to its confluence with the Ohio River, and then upstream on the Ohio to where the Wabash River joins it. The Wabash has its headwaters in northeastern Indiana, and in its lower reaches forms the border between Indiana and Illinois. The Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie at Toledo, begins where the Little St. Joseph River and St. Mary's River join at Ft. Wayne. In Heward's time there was a nine mile portage between the Wabash and Maumee (**Map No. 13**). Thus by going upstream on the Wabash and downstream on the Maumee, Heward would have reached Lake Erie, and crossing the west end of this lake, would have been again on the Detroit River (**Map No. 14**). The reverse of this is probably how he got to Kaskaskia before.

Another alternative way to return would have been to go back upstream on the Illinois and divert to the Kankakee River at the fork where the Kankakee and Des Plaines rivers join to form the Illinois. Going up the Kankakee to its source, a series of ponds in a large marsh at what







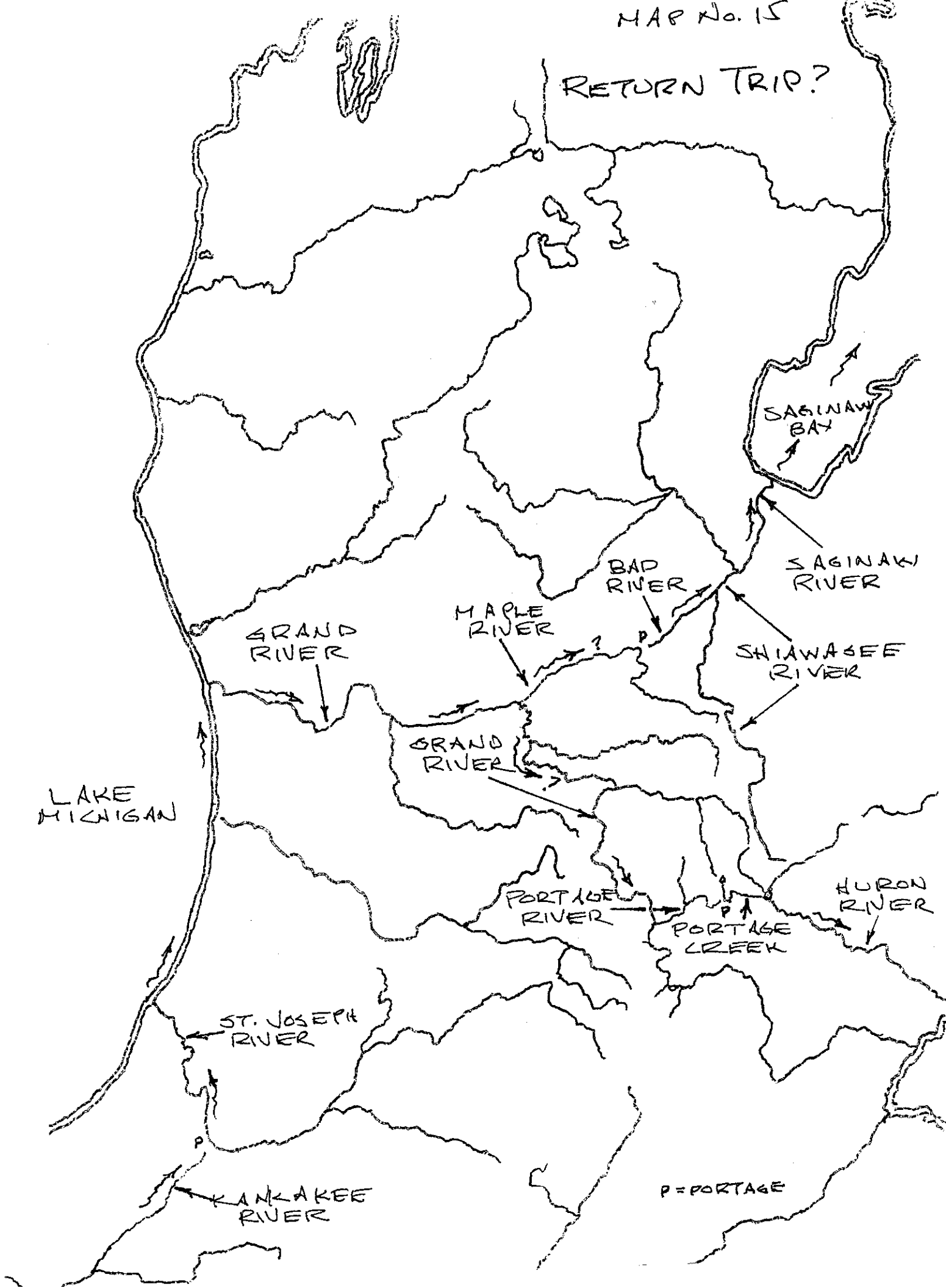
is now South Bend, would have brought Heward to the portage to the St. Joseph River often used by French explorers going back and forth between Lake Michigan and the Illinois River. The St. Joseph flows into Lake Michigan at the city of the same name.

If by using this route or the reverse of his trip down the Illinois he returned to the Grand River, he then had his choice of two ways across the Lower Peninsula. He could use the Upper Grand – Huron – Lake Erie route which would be upstream most of the way through many meanders and against a strong current; or he could go up the relatively straight, slow moving Maple River to the portage to the Bad River. From then on, all the way to Detroit, he would either be going with the current or be on open water. This route goes downstream on the Bad, then the Shiawassee, then the Saginaw to Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron, St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, and finally the Detroit River (**Map No. 15**).

Any of the alternatives would have required him to get rid of the large Chicago pirogue and again acquire canoes.

There is practically no chance that we will ever learn which way he returned. What we know for sure is that he did return to Detroit.

RETURN TRIP?



## APPENDIX 6



**WHERE WERE THE CAMPSITES?**



## APPENDIX 6

### WHERE WERE THE CAMPSITES?

My retirement hobby is “topology” (the topographical study of an area in relation to its history). As an exercise in topology, I have tried to figure out where Heward and his engagés camped each night based on the notations in his journal, study of detailed topographic maps, some historical research, and road reconnaissance.

#### CAMPSITE CRITERIA

Ideally, campsites for canoeists should be high and dry, but not so high or steep as to make landing or launching canoes difficult. There should be enough room for shelter tents or tarps or overturned canoes, and wood for fires should be readily available. Additionally, for canoeists such as the Heward party traveling in wilderness country whose inhabitants are not necessarily friendly, the campsite should provide some concealment, but at the same time provide good views up and down the stream so as to minimize the chances of being surprised. A campsite in the woods on high ground at a bend in the river would be what one would hope for at the end of a long day’s paddle.

At the time of year Heward’s party was traveling across Michigan, the trees and bushes were leafless and insects were not a problem. Firewood generally would have been abundant. “Squawwood” \* from dead branches and downed trees would have been readily available in the undisturbed woodland and from floodwood accumulations. The general locations of some of Heward’s stops are readily identifiable. Examples are Ypsilanti, the portage southeast of Stockbridge, Grand Rapids, and Grand Haven. But pinpointing the probable campsites at these locations presents somewhat of a challenge. Locating several of the other campsites presents a

---

\* Firewood that can be collected without the use of tools.

more difficult challenge which I will try to meet through the study of his journal and the application of topology. The locating of some of the stops will involve guesswork, but it's guesswork based on careful study of the journal and topographic maps.

There are some campsites I believe I can identify with precision. I have had the experience while reconnoitering Heward's route by road or river, of having a topographic feature figuratively jump out at me, causing me to inwardly exclaim, "That's it! That's where they had to have camped!" An example is a knoll on the right bank of Mill Creek about the right distance upstream from Dexter, that is obviously a superior campsite. It would have looked in 1790 about the same as today, except for the disappearance of the surrounding forest. I have had Canadian wilderness canoeing experience that daily brought the need to choose an overnight campsite. If I had been paddling upstream on Mill Creek (Heward's "Wrong Fork"), that is the site I would have chosen.

### CAMPSITES

Their first day out of Detroit, six of the eight-man party stayed at Labourses' Mill (Heward and one engagé stayed at Baby's Mill after returning to Detroit to retrieve the keg of pork left behind.). I have been unable to pinpoint Labourses' Mill, but believe it was on the right bank of the Detroit River, perhaps about at Wyandotte.

We know exactly where they camped on March 26. Heward's journal says: "*...got to the last Island opposite Browns Village. the Weather still foggy & Wet – Encamped on the Nore West point of the Island...*" Editor Quaife presents convincing evidence in a footnote that this was Celeron Island, offshore from Gibraltar in Wayne County. From there they went down to Lake Erie and started up the Huron River.

It is about 65 river miles from Lake Erie to Dexter, a distance that took the Heward party eight days of paddling and poling upstream. This is an average of just over 8 miles per day.

Heward's journal sometimes indicates that they made about the same amount of progress each day: "*...our Distance nearly the same as Yesterday...Distance as Yesterday...Distance & Course nearly as yesterday.*" If we assume about 8 miles of travel each day, campsites would have been as follows: Just downstream of Flat Rock (March 28), in Willow Creek Metro Park (March 29), in Huron Metro Park (March 30), at Belleville (March 31), in Ypsilanti (April 1), at Concordia College (April 2), at the western end of Barton Pond (April 3), and finally up Mill Creek from Dexter (April 5).

This approach is certainly overly simplistic, but I have found it useful in that it provides me with a sort of mental travelogue on how Heward and his seven engagés might have progressed up the Huron that springtime long ago.

With respect to the April 1 campsite, was it actually at present day Ypsilanti? Heward's journal entry for that day says, "*...arrd at Sans Craints before Sun Set.*" His entry for April 2 says, "*this Post seems to furnish good small peltrie Sanscraint seems to have about 12 packs.*" Obviously, then, "Sanscraints" was a fur trading post.

The place now occupied by downtown Ypsilanti was particularly well suited to be the location of a trading post. Four different Indian trails converged here. The Sauk Trail, which connected the Detroit River with the Chicago Portage, crossed the Huron here. Today this trail is Michigan Avenue and US-12. A trail called the Potawatomi Trail followed the left bank of the river. The Ypsilanti location was also the northern terminus of a north-south trail leading to the mouths of the River Raisin (Monroe) and Maumee (Toledo). And finally, although Heward didn't know it at the time, a trail on the Huron's right bank led to the portage he was seeking, passing through present day Ann Arbor and Dexter on the way. Professor Wilbert Hinsdale, in his *Indians of Washtenaw County*, calls this the Dexter and Grand River Trail. The continuation

of this trail to the east along the river's right bank he designates simply as the Trail down Huron River. **Map No. 16** shows these trails.

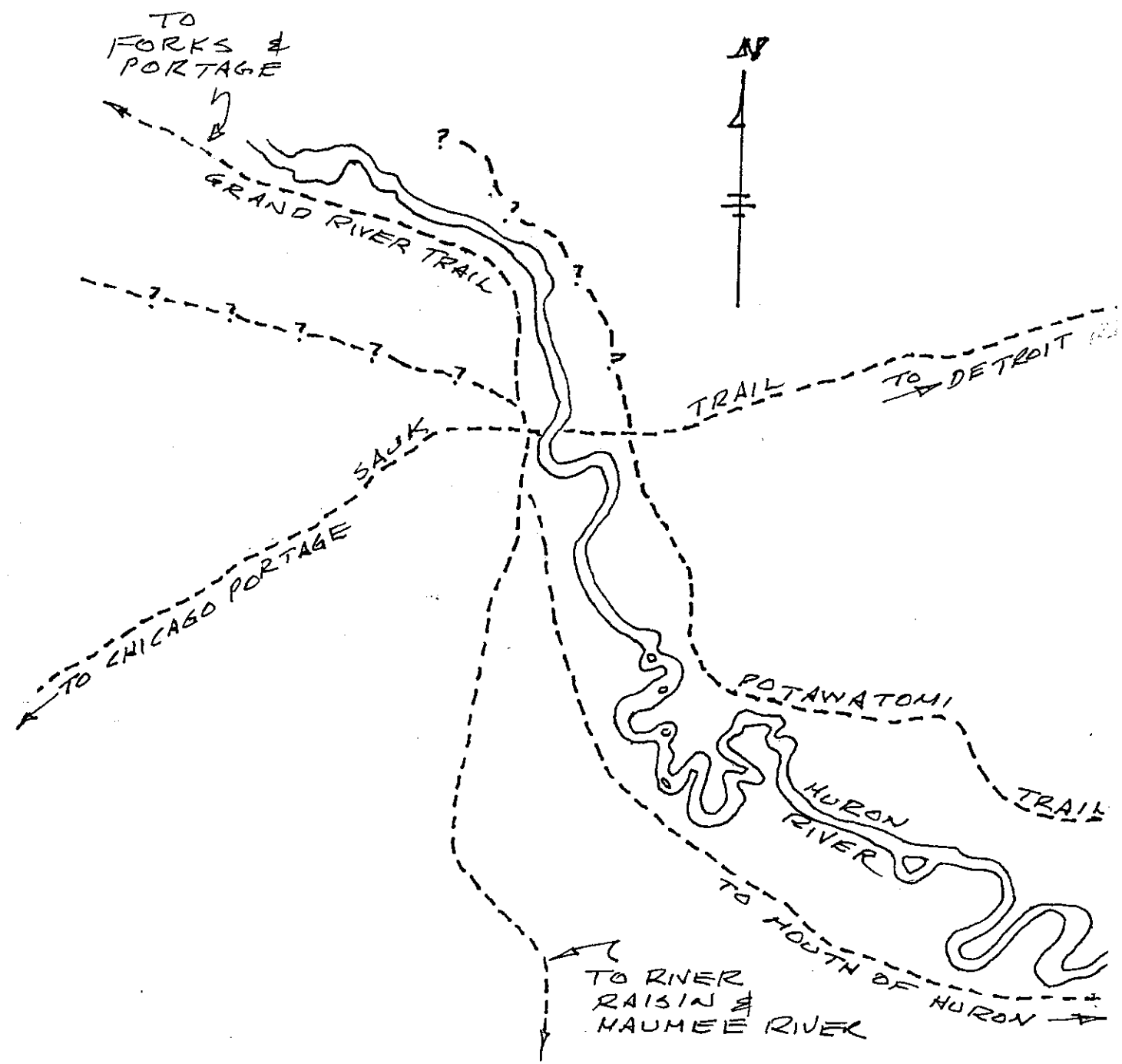
In this book the professor shows the Wyandot village as being south of the Sauk Trail river crossing, and an Indian burying ground to the northwest.

I have previously described the place I think the party camped on April 5 and six days thereafter. It is located in the southwest corner of Section 18 of Scio Township of Washtenaw County.

The next campsite after they finally abandoned the "Wrong Fork" was "*...about 2 leagues up...*" Portage Creek which he called "*...a small Serpentine River...*" This was on April 12. The next day, in about a half mile, the stream turned nearly north. Up to that time the stream was trending west north west. The place that fits that description is in Pinckney Township of Livingston County about a mile and a quarter southeast of Hell. There is a likely looking campsite on a knoll on the left bank of Portage Creek where it is crossed by Tiplady Road. I got the "this is it" feeling at that spot.

The next day (Tuesday April 13) they "*...took a turn up the Run which pointed Nore West being late & likely for a bad Night we encamped*" There is a point of high and dry land rising from the marshes through which Portage Creek flows about a quarter mile upstream from Ellsworth Lake. My guess is that this is where they camped that night. It is about at the center of Section 5 of Lyndon Township of Washtenaw County.

For the next five days the party camped at the portage. My observation of the terrain over which the portage passes leads me to believe they would have camped on dry land about half way across near where Farnsworth Road dead ends at M-52, southeast of Stockbridge. This would be just north of where the portage trail descends into the marshes of Portage Lake Swamp and island-hops to its south end.



YPSILANTI SITE  
TRADING POST &  
INDIAN VILLAGE

Heward's party camped twice on the Portage River between the portage near Stockbridge and the Grand River. Any chance of making even an educated guess as to where these campsites were depends on my being able to interpret his descriptions of meanders and lakes, many of which no longer exist.

His journal entries for April 19 and April 21 (they were snowed in on April 20), make it plain that they were following a current through a series of grassy lakes, rather than a well defined river. The upper and lower portions of the wilderness environment through which the party traveled on these two days have experienced widely differing fates. Except for a lowered water table, the stretch from the south end of the portage to Little Portage Lake must look much the same as it did two centuries ago. It is within the Portage Lake Swamp, a part of the state-owned Waterloo Recreation Area, which has been kept essentially free of development.

In contrast, the lower reach of the Portage River from Big Portage Lake to the Grand has been straightened and channelized for agricultural drainage. The grassy lakes of Heward's journal are now mucklands and the meandering current has given way to a geometrically precise, oversized ditch.

In his journal entry for April 19, he describes a route away from the portage as "*...direct South & from thence the Course Westward to the Entrance of another small Lake...Camped.*" The one spot that fits is where the Portage Lake Swamp outlet channel is crossed by Waterloo-Munith Road. This is in Section 22, Waterloo Township, Jackson County, near the Waterloo Farm Museum. My guess is that they would have camped on the south side which is higher and dryer than the north side.

His journal entries for April 21 and 22 provide sufficient current, course, terrain, and tributary detail to allow me to confidently choose a particular location as the April 21 campsite. At the south edge of Section 5 (Township 2 South, Range 1 East) of Leoni Township, there is a

bridge where Hawkings Road crosses the Portage River. Just to the southeast of that bridge, there is a point of land that would have been above the level of the grassy lake in 1790.

The end of Heward's April 21<sup>st</sup> entry is "...passed...West to the Entrance of another Lake & [it] appearing to be a Stormy Night camped on a Small point to the South." His April 22<sup>nd</sup> entry about starting on their way says, "Doubled the point & opposite to the Nore West found a Run came in to that we were following..." Just downstream of the Hawkings Road bridge a nameless stream enters the Portage from the north.

To me these entries and the description of the subsequent meanders and course of the current are conclusive. No other location fits. If the water level were to be raised to a pre-settlement elevation, this location would be a peninsula in a grassy lake rather than a muck-farm knoll.

The only clues as to where they camped their first night on the Grand River are his description of the banks and trees: "...the Lands on this River seem low & very thick Wood plum Trees & Boisblanc (Sycamore) & on the higher Lands Oak..." But the next day's entry does provide a lead: "...continued our Rout till about 10 oClock the Course nearly West & then it turned all at once to North by East or nearly North..."

The Grand makes its sharp right turn to the north just north of Tompkins Center in Jackson County, downstream of where Sandstone Creek flows in. This means their April 22 overnight campsite was somewhere to the east. Since their course was westerly, their campsite had to have been somewhere west of where the flow of the Grand changes from northerly to westerly. This occurs in Section 10 of Rives Township, Jackson County. The reach of the river bracketed by these two turns flows mostly through swampland, touching high and dry ground in relatively few places. One of these places is on the right bank at Berryville, in Section 12 of Tompkins Township, where Rives-Eaton Road crosses the river. Another candidate site would

be on the left bank where Churchill Road crosses the river, on the section line between sections 8 and 9 of Rives Township. This is just downstream of where Huntoon Creek flows in from the north.

April 23 was the day of their encounter with the “...*ill looking Band*...” of Indians spearing sturgeon. They did not dawdle after leaving them and kept paddling until well after 6 o’clock. They ran the rapids at today’s Eaton Rapids before they camped. About an hour after they started the next day, they ran the rapids at what is now Dimondale; thus they camped somewhere between these two towns, but his journal gives no clue as to just where. For purposes of the Hugh Heward Challenge (**Appendix 4**), I have assumed it was at or near Burchfield (formerly Grand River) County Park, in Section 31 of Delhi Township, Ingham County.

I believe the campsite for the night of April 24-25 was at the dead end of Erdman Road, northeast of Sebewa in Danby Township, Ionia County. My rationale is explained in the main text at page 14.

The next night their campsite was upstream of the Muir-Lyons area where the Maple River enters the Grand, but downstream of Portland where the Looking Glass River joins the Grand. In following Heward’s descriptions of flow directions and bank conditions on topographic maps, one has to visualize the river as it was before the Portland and Weber Dams were built. The river would have been narrower and at a lower elevation, and the banks would have been higher. After conducting this exercise in topology, I conclude that the site of the now breached Wagar Dam was most likely the place where they “...*put on Shore early to rig our Oars hull Corn & C.*” This site is located on the west side of Section 28, Lyon Township, Ionia County.



As indicated in the main text, their campsite on April 26 was the west side of the river at Grand Rapids.

Their last camp on the Grand River was at Grand Haven. The only question is: On which side of the river mouth did they camp? The quote from his journal in the main text tells that it was on the opposite side from the trader Langlade. Apparently Heward thought Langlade had too many Indians with him.

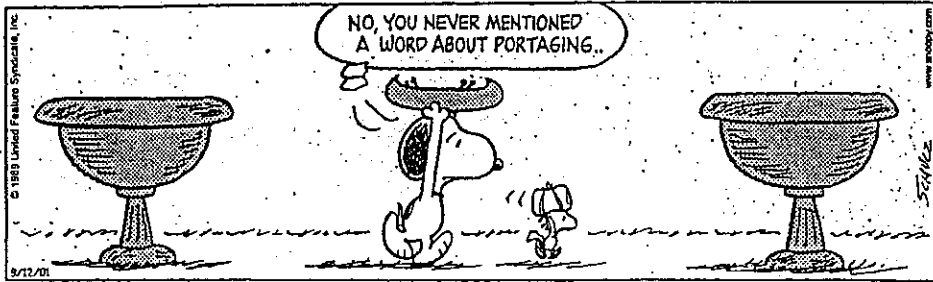
The Indians called the place where the Grand entered Lake Michigan “Gabagouache”, their word for “big mouth”. My guess is that Langlade would have had his operation on the solid ground on the south side where the city is today. Thus Heward’s party would have camped on the sand dunes or beach on the north side.

This campsite was the 21<sup>st</sup> of the cross-peninsula journey of Heward and his engagés. Four more campsites, three at river mouths and one on a beach, and they were gone from what is now Michigan.

#### **HEWARD PARTY CAMPSITES**

March 24 & 25	Labourses Mill (where?)
26 & 27	Celeron Island
28	Flat Rock ?
29	Willow Creek Metro Park ?
30	Huron Metro Park ?
31	Belleville ?
April 1	Ypsilanti
2	Concordia College ?
3 & 4	Barton Pond ?
5 - 11	Mill Creek near Dexter

April 12	Southeast of Hell
13	Lyndon Township
14 – 18	Southeast of Stockbridge
19 & 20	Waterloo-Munith Road
21	Henrietta Township
22	Berryville ?
23	Burchfield County Park ? (Ingham County)
24	Near Sebewa
25	Wagar Dam Site ?
26	Grand Rapids
27	Grand Haven
28 & 29	Pigeon River
30	Near Ganges or Glenn ?
May 1, 2 & 3	St. Joseph
4 – 7	Warren Dunes State Park ?
8	Gary, Indiana
9	Chicago



This volume is not copyrighted -  
Feel free to make copies

JIM WOODRUFF  
Topologist

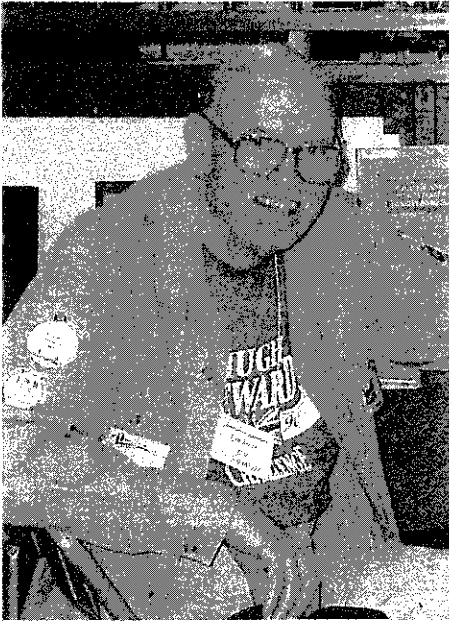
Canoes and  
Michigan History

6506 Old River Trail  
Lansing, MI 48917  
(517) 323-4528  
thetopologist@

~~www~~ sbcglobal.net



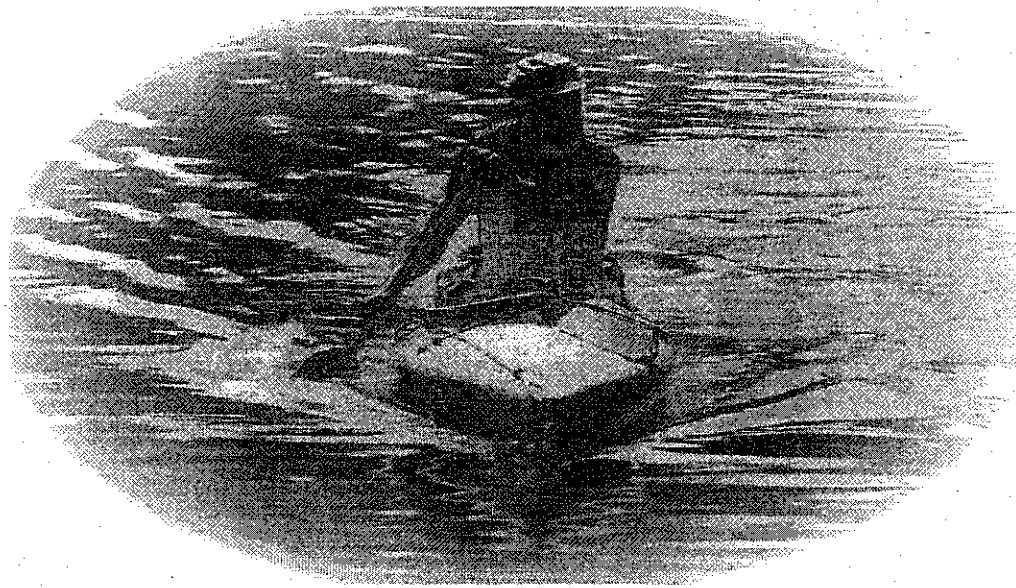
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jim Woodruff is a retired engineer who lives on Michigan's Grand River about 400 yards up stream of Verlen Kruger, the far-famed long-distance canoeist. What these two have in common is that both were born in 1922 and both are World War II veterans. But While Verlen paddles up and down the river at all hours in all sorts of weather; Jim mostly sits on the bank with a Coors beer in his hand, cheering him on.

Jim's retirement hobby is "topology," defined as topographic studies of places in relation to their histories. Spin-offs from this hobby have resulted in several canoe and history related articles in *Wooden Canoe* magazine and *Michigan History*. In addition to this *Across Michigan by Canoe – 1790*, he has completed similar monographs entitled *LaSalle and Michigan's History* (about LaSalle's 1680 walk from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie) and *Locating Michigan's Old Canoe Portages* (with 70 maps).

Jim's family has been canoeing off and on since the early 1900s when his grandfather bought an 18 foot Morris wood and canvas canoe for the family cottage on Paw Paw Lake in southwestern Michigan. That canoe still exists. Jim's parents used it on their honeymoon in 1921. About this he says, "Despite my speculations, my father assured me that I was not conceived in the canoe. Too bad."



## “The Verlen Kruger Award”

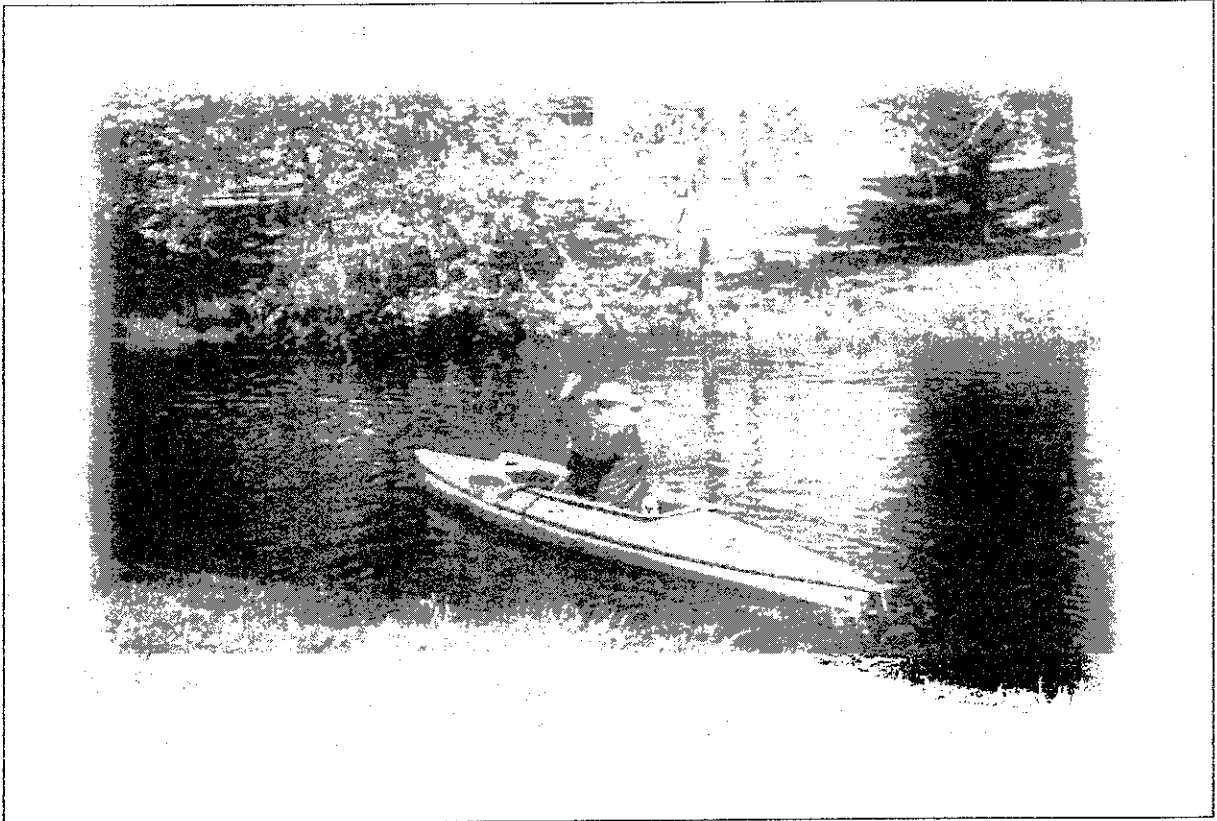
Presented to

James C. Woodruff

*in recognition of outstanding accomplishments in documenting the heritage of Michigan waterways and watercraft. James Woodruff has authored several monographs and numerous magazine articles on Michigan Rivers and watercraft. Be it further recognized that he has contributed in drawing attention to Mid-Michigan's environmentally sensitive Grand River and has helped foster its preservation and history.*

Presented at the 2004 Quiet Water Symposium  
by the Mid-Michigan Paddling Community

## EPILOG



**Verlen Kruger**  
**June 30, 1922 – August 2, 2004**

After four decades during which he paddled over 100,000 miles on two continents, Verlen Kruger paddled his last mile in mid-summer of 2004. That final paddle took him downstream on the Grand River, passing behind my home. He died on the second of August at age 82. His gravesite in Delta Township's Hillside Cemetery overlooks his beloved river.

J.W.