



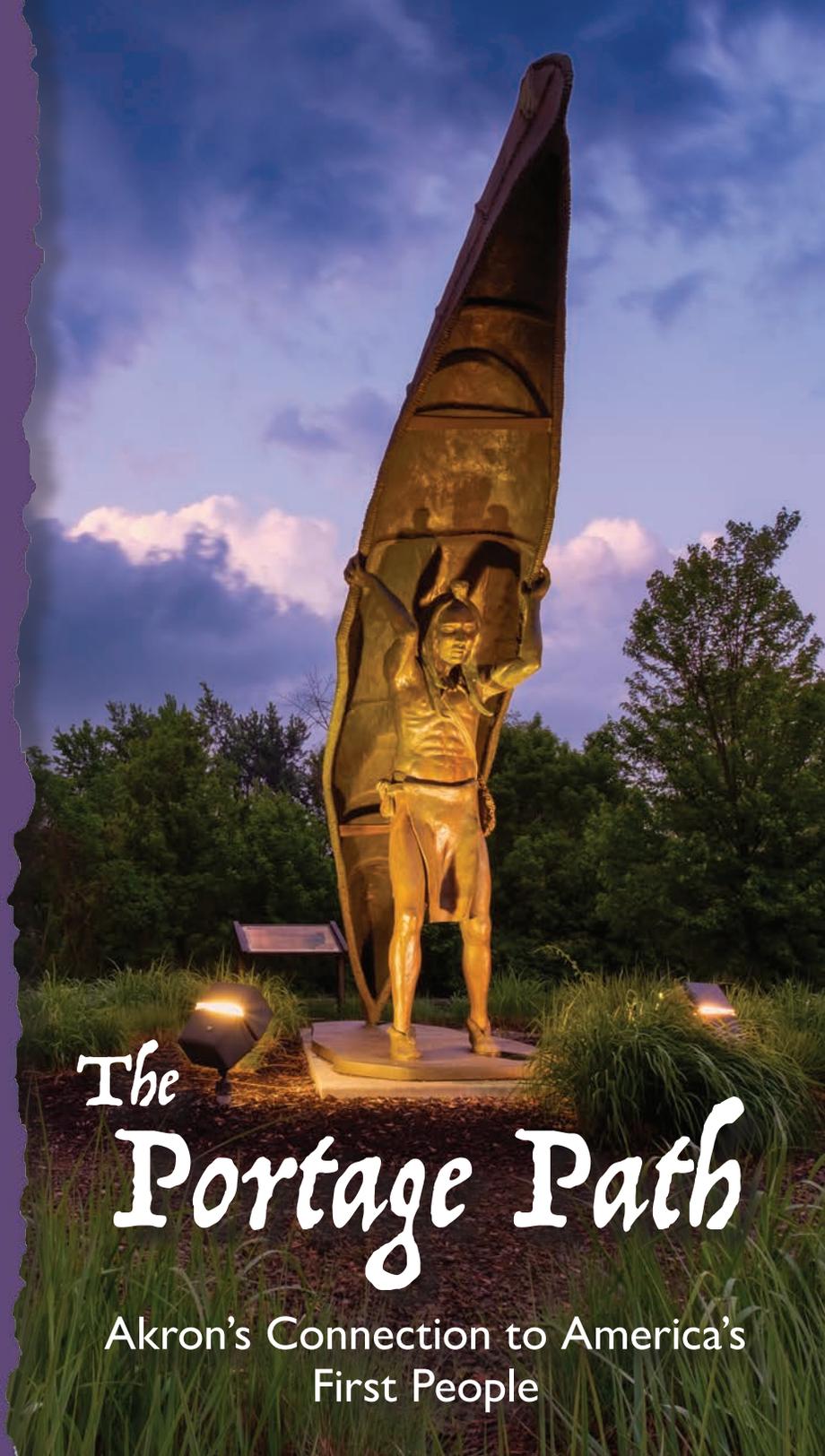
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The Portage Path

Akron's Connection to America's
First People

Akron sits atop one of North America's most abundant supplies of fresh water. It is a continental divide, which separates waters flowing to the Atlantic Ocean from waters which flow to the Gulf of Mexico. It takes its name from the Greek word, *akros*, the "high point" along the Ohio & Erie Canal. A trail first created as long as 10,000 years ago by the First People to occupy this region, the eight-mile Portage Path connected the Cuyahoga River to the Tuscarawas River and allowed Native Americans to travel by canoe from north to south across Ohio and beyond to what is now the entirety of the United States.



(Joseph J. Jesensky Collection, Summit Memory)

Many Native Americans stored their canoes and dugouts by burying them, a common practice for storage of everything, since groups were often moving across the landscape for different resources. The exceptional biodiversity of the open woodlands of the Great Lakes region resulted in fertile hunting, fishing and foraging grounds.



◀ Berry or wild rice basket made of bark and tanned hide from the Great Lakes region, c. 1911. (The Cummings Center for the History of Psychology)



Fish trap made of tanned hide reed and willow. Attributed to the Abenaki of Maine, c. 1910. (The Cummings Center for the History of Psychology) ▶

Foods such as acorns, sunflower seeds, walnuts and the "three sisters" (corn, beans and squash) were stored in pots that were buried and covered to protect from bears, deer, raccoons and other humans. Sometimes these pots, canoes or dugouts were forgotten, left to be unearthed by archaeologists thousands of years later.

The Ringler dugout was unearthed on the banks of Mud Lake in Ashland County, Ohio. It is made of white oak, a common tree species found in the open woodlands of early Ohio and dates to c. 1650-1680.



This prehistoric ceramic pot, found in Liberty Park, dates between 1200 and 1400 A.D.

There may have been several trails used as a portage, since environmental conditions changed over time. When water levels in wetlands between the two rivers were high, the portage may have been as short as one mile. The closest historic approximation of the Portage Path, shown here, is based on a 1797 survey by Connecticut surveyor Moses Warren, who saw evidence of the ancient trail and recorded it in his journal. In the Treaty of Ft. McIntosh of 1785, the portage became part of the western boundary for European settlement of the United States.

KEY

- Portage Path Termini ●
- Historic Portage Path —
- Summit Metro Park ■
- Ohio & Erie Canal —
- Rivers & Streams —
- Lakes & Ponds ■

The *northern terminus* of the Portage Path is at the big bend of the Cuyahoga River.



It is often thought that some trees were modified into distinctive shapes by ancient people to act as navigational aids. There is much debate as to whether the **Signal Tree** in Cascade Valley Metro Park is one such tree.



The *southern terminus* of the Portage Path is at the northern tip of Long Lake channel on the Tuscarawas River. The terminus points of the Portage Path parallel the course of the Ohio and Erie Canal, which broke ground in 1825.



Portages were important navigational features and landmarks. This map from 1778 includes Lake Erie, the Cuyahoga (“Cayahoga”) and Tuscarawas (“Tuskarawas”) Rivers, and the path of the portage linking them together.



(Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)

A historic stagecoach road was built across the Portage in the early 19th century when Col. Simon Perkins, son of Akron's founder, built his Stone Mansion between 1835 and 1837. The Colonel's eldest son, George Tod Perkins, erected the first commemorative plaque to the Portage Path in the stone wall on the western border of the property, where it can still be seen.



A simple frame structure built c. 1830 was rented by the Perkins family as the Stone Mansion was being constructed. In 1844, abolitionist John Brown, who led the raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, made the original two rooms home for his family while he worked for Col. Perkins as a shepherd and business partner.



The sculpture of a Native American portaging a canoe was designed and sculpted by the Iroquoian artist **Peter Jones** (Seneca / Onondaga) of the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation of the Seneca Nation near Versailles, New York. The statue is based on extensive research of the Woodland Indians who lived in the area at the time of European contact. The Indian portaging a canoe wears a breechcloth typical of the time and a headpiece reminiscent of the style pictured in the historic Miami tribes.



Statues mark the ends of the trail at the Cuyahoga River and the Tuscarawas River. Fifty broad blade markers along the 8-mile course describe the location of the trail.

In 2018, Akron's Lippman School joined with The Summit County Historical Society to have the first Monday in October declared as “North American First People’s Day” in the City of Akron, which is commemorated annually by students walking the Portage Path.

Lippman students and faculty, with students from Portage Path CLC and the Northern Cheyenne Nation of Indians, have created a web-based mobile app that provides extensive information about the Portage Path. To learn more, visit www.walkportagepath.org or scanning this QR code.

