Portage Canal Segment  (Atlas Map 57f-E; Databook page 54)

SNAPSHOT

3.0 miles: Agency House Rd. to STH-33 Wisconsin River Bridge (south end)

This segment takes hikers through one of Wisconsin’s most historically significant communities.

- At the Historic Indian Agency House (when open), Veterans Memorial Field/Columbia County Fairgrounds and Pauquette Park. Restrooms also available at Riverside Park.
- From the Fox River.
- At nearby Veterans Memorial Field/ Columbia County Fairgrounds (see Area Services).
- At the Historic Indian Agency House, STH-33 Portage Canal parking area, Riverside Park and Pauquette Park.
- At Pauquette Park and Veterans Memorial Field/Columbia County Fairgrounds.
- Hikers will not have any interaction with hunting on this segment.
- Dogs should be leashed (8-ft max) and under control at all times.
- Segment overlaps Portage Canal Bike Path.
- Wisconsin River Levee Trail.
- Portions of this segment may be suitable for those using wheelchairs or similar devices.

TRAIL ACCESS AND PARKING

Agency House Rd.: From I-39 exit onto STH-33 and follow it east through Portage to the east side of town. Turn left onto E. Albert St. and then take a quick right onto Agency House Rd. (Rustic Road R69). Head north past the Indian Agency House to the parking area.

STH-33 Wisconsin River Bridge (south end): From I-39 exit onto STH-33 east. Park at Pauquette Park on the north end of the bridge on the west side of STH-33 or the DNR parking area at the south end of the bridge on the east side of STH-33.

Additional Parking: (i) STH-33 Portage Canal parking area on the east bank of the Portage Canal. Entrance located on the north side of STH-33. (ii) Veterans Memorial Field/Columbia County Fairgrounds. (iii) Riverside Park. (iv) Pauquette Park. (v) City and County public parking areas along the canal.

THE HIKE

This segment’s name is inspired by the compelling history that surrounds the Portage Canal, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The City of Portage is located between the Wisconsin River flowing toward the Mississippi and eventually the Gulf of Mexico and the Fox River flowing toward Lake Michigan and ultimately the Atlantic Ocean. The canoe portage here between the rivers was an important transportation route to Native Americans, French explorers and fur trappers moving between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi basin with access up the Missouri River to the northern plains. Construction on the now historic Portage Canal began in 1838. Although boats used the canal from the early 1850s, the canal was not finished until 1876 when the Army Corps of Engineers completed construction. Boats used the canal until 1951 when the locks were permanently closed. The peak use of the canal occurred in 1908 for recreational boat traffic.
The segment starts on the west side of the Portage Canal at the Agency House Road Trail access parking area. The Historic Indian Agency House ([agencyhouse.org](http://agencyhouse.org)), listed on the National Historic Registry, is just to the southwest of the parking area on Agency House Road. Built in 1832, it is one of Wisconsin’s earliest homes built for European settlers. The U.S. government constructed it as a residence for John Kinzie, the first Indian agent to the Ho-Chunk tribe. Over the years, the Agency House has also been used as a tavern, trading post and boarding house. The Kinzies’ granddaughter was Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts.

From the Trail access parking area, hikers will cross a footbridge and walk on a flat, wide, packed-gravel path that follows along the east bank of the Portage Canal for about three-quarters of a mile to another Trail parking area, just north of STH-33, that includes benches and a kiosk. From this parking area, the Fort Winnebago Surgeon’s Quarters ([fortwinnebagosurgeonsquarters.org](http://fortwinnebagosurgeonsquarters.org)) is a 0.5-mile side trip northeast on STH-33. The Surgeon’s Quarters is the only remaining building of Fort Winnebago, a National Historic Landmark (1828–1845). Among other functions, the fort protected traffic crossing the Fox–Wisconsin portage. Also of note along STH-33 is where it intersects Wauona Trail, a street that follows the route of the canoe portage used 300 to 400 years ago. A wayside along Wauona Trail commemorates this famous route.

Hikers should head south under the STH-33 bridge and continue along the canal to another underpass, this one of an active railway. The boardwalk under this second underpass can be very slippery when wet. The segment travels briefly...
through woods bordering the canal, emerges onto a mowed area and continues to parallel the canal. After passing behind a large light gray metal building, hikers should immediately turn left out to Mullett Street (NC2).

The segment follows Mullett Street southwest to the intersection with Thompson Street. Hikers should turn right on Thompson Street and shortly rejoin the now-restored Portage Canal, turning left along a bike trail beside the canal. Upon reaching busy Wisconsin Avenue (USH-51), hikers should cross using the marked crosswalks and then rejoin the bike path next to the canal. The segment passes a pedestrian bridge that leads to the Portage Levee shared-use path along the Wisconsin River, from which hikers can view the historic restored watch tower. Continuing on, the Trail reaches the Wisconsin River lock at the south end of the canal, jogs to the right on Lock Street and then follows Edgewater Street to the left. At the Wisconsin River lock a pedestrian bridge will be built over the historic canal.

Along the way the segment passes 506 Edgewater Street, a large white Greek Revival style house built in 1906 by Pulitzer Prize winning author Zona Gale and now home to the Portage Women's Civic League. Her study and other exhibits on local history can be seen nearby at the Museum at the Portage (portagemuseum.org) located about half a mile off the Trail at 804 MacFarlane Road in a house where the author lived after her marriage. Historian Fredrick Jackson Turner also called Portage home.

As the segment continues toward its endpoint it arrives at the STH-33 bridge across the Wisconsin River. On the northwest corner of the bridge crossing is Pauquette Park, named after Pierre Pauquette, an agent for the American Fur Company. Pauquette operated a ferry and trading post at the site between the mid-1820s and 1834. The segment follows STH-33 across the river and ends at the bridge's south end.

**AREA SERVICES**

Portage: Restaurant, grocery store, convenience store, general shopping, lodging, camping, library and medical service. On Trail. Most services on USH-51/STH-16/Wisconsin St. and on STH-33. Camping and showers at Veterans Memorial Field/Columbia County Fairgrounds (608-742-2178, portagewi.gov; available during non-event weekends and weekdays; call in advance during business hours). For area info, contact the Portage Area Chamber of Commerce (608-742-6242 or 800-474-2525, portagewi.com). Train service at the Portage Amtrak Station (800-872-7245, amtrak.com), an unstaffed station consisting of a small waiting room with no station services.

**POINTS OF INTEREST**

Man Mound Park: See Baraboo Segment, p. 193

Aldo Leopold Legacy Center: See Devil’s Lake Segment, p. 200

International Crane Foundation (ICF): See Devil’s Lake Segment, p. 200
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