St. Croix Scenic Byway
Logging and the Great Hinckley Fire
Teacher Study Guide

This Guide is designed to be used with students before and after visiting Byway locations associated with the *Logging and the Great Hinckley Fire* story theme. It has been designed to include information and activities that will increase student understanding of the great pine forests, their demise, and the dangers of unrestrained and unsafe practices of harvesting timber in the late 19th century. This Teacher Guide may be reproduced for handouts to your students but not reproduced for profit.

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Who, What, When, Where:

The St. Croix Scenic Byway is a roadway designated by the Minnesota Scenic Byways Commission that runs 124 miles from where the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers come together at Point Douglas, to a point north of Sandstone, Minnesota near Askov. Along the route there are many stories of history and culture. Logging in the northern areas, floating the logs down the rivers and streams to the mills of St. Croix Falls, Osceola, Marine, Arcola and Stillwater where logs were sawed into lumber. When the logs were cut, branches and stumps were left behind as a potential fuel source that would cause unintended consequences when the slash ignited and contributed to the massive scale of the great fire that killed over 400 people and destroyed the Hinckley, Mission Creek and Sandstone areas in 1894.

The North Woods of our nation's imagination at the start of the 19th century was demonstrably centered on the St. Croix River region, a storied latticework of rivers and lakes, abundant wildlife, and vast tracts of native pine as far as the eye could see. But things were about to change. Settlers, and the Ojibwe and Dakota peoples who had lived here for centuries, could not have envisioned that the region was about to undergo a transformation by clear-cutting the pine forests, that would forever alter a traditional way of life for native peoples, and the nature of the landscape itself. Looking back, the story actually begins in the 17th century and recalls a place rich in fur and pine, so valuable in fact that extraction of natural resources over the next 200 years would inevitably become a dominant focus of an expanding American economy. Our region's contributions to a rise in wealth of our nation came, however, at a substantial cost to the natural environment and to traditional ways of life for Native Americans and the early pioneers. These natural and cultural costs also came with lessons attached, about the consequences of unwise use of resources.

What had been the largest forest resource in the Upper Midwest, nearly four million acres of St. Croix valley pine forest 200-300 years old, was simply gone in little more than 50 years. More than 15 billion feet of logs had been floated down tributaries and into the St. Croix River—enough logs to fill 2.2 million railroad cars—enough rail cars to have reached around all of North America 6 times—just from the St. Croix valley. It is small wonder that the St. Croix has been called the River of Pines. Part and parcel of this pine-cut frenzy and rapid exploitation of the pine forests, it should come as no surprise that plenty of operators, lured by quick cash, employed irresponsible logging practices that left needled crowns of old growth pines lying on the ground—slash piles, brush, stumps, and tree branches as far as the eye could see—drying in the sun and getting ready to ignite.

On Saturday, September 1, 1894 the worst forest fire in Minnesota history swept across 480 square miles and burned 350,000 acres—in five hours—consuming entire towns and claiming over 400 lives. That morning started out with an unusually clear sky in Hinckley. Later a "gray-white" or "blue-gray" smoke filled the area over the town. Soon the sky darkened and a pale yellowish glow illuminated the countryside. By late morning citizens noticed dense blackness to the south and the light wind blew in hot smoke. By 1:30 p.m. the southerly wind had increased noticeably in speed. At about 2:00 p.m. the fire chief summoned fire department members to the southwest corner of town. Nobody thought there was much danger, even though the fires were burning again in the mill yard. They soon had a bigger job on their hands because the fires were growing and threatening to cross the St. Paul & Duluth tracks into the town. Men began to show up with wagons loaded with barrels of water. The telegrapher at the Depot received a message that Pokegama, a town 9 miles to the south, was in flames.

Time Line:

- In the early 16th century Ojibwe peoples began a migration from the Lake Superior area into the northern part of the Dakota homeland, and over the next two centuries the relationship between Dakota, Ojibwe, 17th century French fur traders and, later, English fur traders, creates the North Woods story of the heartland's first business—furs
- During the period between 1680 and 1865 river transport of furs on interconnected waterways between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River was the heart of the regional economy.
- Second half of the 19th Century the pine forests of the northern St. Croix River valley were logged off using the clear cut method and leaving all the fallen limbs behind.
- As early as 1870 tourism in the St. Croix valley had become an established business.
- 1891 through 1894 the Weather Bureau in St. Paul reported a steady loss of moisture in central Minnesota.
- The summer of 1894 averaged 4.2 degrees above normal, and barely 2 inches of rain fell in Hinckley and the surrounding areas from May through September 1. All through the late spring and summer of 1894 a haze of wood smoke hung over the town of Hinckley.
- 1894—On Saturday, September 1, the worst forest fire in Minnesota history swept across 480 square miles and burned 350,000 acres—in five hours—consuming entire towns and claiming over 400 lives.
- In 1895 and 1900 Minnesota and Wisconsin, respectively, established the first Interstate State Parks in the nation facing each other across the St. Croix River. The Interstate Parks are the second oldest park established in Minnesota and the oldest park in Wisconsin

Fact Or Fiction:

Interstate Park in Minnesota is the second oldest park in Minnesota and the oldest in Wisconsin. Fact or Fiction

The first historical inhabitants of the St. Croix River region were the Dakota. Fact or Fiction

The economic practices of the fur trade eventually exhausted the supply of fur bearing animals in the region but the physical landscape and natural habitats had been left largely intact after more than 200 years Fact or Fiction

Paul Bunyan and his blue ox Babe logged all the trees in Minnesota. Fact or Fiction

On Saturday, September 1, 1894 the worst forest fire in Minnesota history swept across 480 square miles and burned 350,000 acres—in five hours—consuming entire towns and claiming over 400 lives. Fact or Fiction

As the fire was passing over Hinckley, Duluth pedestrians, more than 70 miles from the fire front, were being assaulted by ash and cinders and the air felt like furnace blasts. Fact or Fiction

Smokey the Bear helped fight the Hinckley forest fire. Fact or Fiction

The Part You Play:

When you are on a field trip to an historic site or sitting in class listening to a teacher or other adult telling you about history you are an important audience member and have a large part to play in how much you and your classmates learn, by your actions and attention.

- Listen carefully and watch closely.
- Laugh when something is funny.
- Applaud when the time is right.
- Talking or whispering is not okay; it will distract the person presenting the information to you.
- The more you respect the people you are learning about the more open your thoughts and heart are to learn about what is being said.
- The more you learn about others the less you will fear them.
- The less you fear someone the more comfortable you are around all kinds of people.
- The more people you know or know about the more interesting your life becomes.

- Our ability to see is a powerful tool for experiencing the world around us. We did not live in the 1880's, so to learn about that time we need to listen and imagine.
- Sound adds a richness that sight alone cannot provide.
- When listening be aware of the noise your movement makes, when you walk do you hear your feet shuffle or your clothes rustle?
- Hearing about life in the 1880's is an option we have for experiencing it and imagining what it was like to be there.
- Listen quietly and immerse yourself in the historic time period of the 1880's and the history of logging and the Great Hinckley fire.

What Did You Learn?

1. Furs and fur trading was the first business venture in the St. Croix Valley.

2. The pine forests of the St. Croix were thought to be enough to last a lifetime, but were exhausted in less than 50 years.

3. By 1900 the logging boom was over—the Pineries of the St. Croix River region, and extending into the outermost reaches of the Upper Midwest, had produced more money and created more millionaires from logging and lumber production than in the California Gold Rush.

4. Stillwater, Minnesota had many sawmills and became the world's largest producer of pine, due to the logs being floated down the St. Croix River and its tributaries to the Boom Site near Stillwater

5. Among the communities destroyed by the fire that came to be known as The Great Hinckley Fire, were the Scenic Byway towns of Mission Creek, Hinckley, and Sandstone.

6. Just beyond Sandstone a bridge stood 115 feet above the Kettle River. As the train approached, the bridge was afire from one bank to the other. Incredibly the two bridge watchmen had stayed by their post and as the train approached screamed "for God's sake, go on—you can cross it now and it will go down in five minutes." The northeast portion of the 1600-foot long bridge fell shortly after the train crossed. Before the train traveled another 2000 feet the entire structure collapsed.

7. As early as 1870 tourism in the St. Croix valley had become an established business. The people came to use the rivers and lakes, view the logjams, get away from bigger cities and simply enjoy nature, much the same as the tourists do today.

Logging & Great Hinckley Fire Circle A Word Puzzle: Insert puzzle

Additional Information

www.stcroixscenicbyway.org
Marine on St Croix 150 Years of Village Life, James Taylor Dunn, 1989
Marine on St Croix From Lumber Village to Summer Haven 1838-1968, James Taylor Dunn
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From the Ashes, The Story of the Hinckley Fire of 1894, Grace Stageberg Swenson, 1979
Saving the River, The Story of the St. Croix River Association 1911-1986, James Taylor Dunn
The St. Croix Midwest Border River, James Taylor Dunn, 1979
The Great Hinckley Fire 100 Years 1894-1994, Hinckley Fire Commemorative Association
Life & Times in Taylors Falls, Taylors Falls Historical Society
Minnesota Beginnings, Records of the St. Croix County Wisconsin Territory 1840-1849, History Network of Washington County, 1999
From White Pine to Clover, Harold S Olsen, 1983
The Taylors Falls & Lake Superior Railroad, Richard E. Thompson, S J Monson, 2005
History of the Saint Croix Valley, Vol 1 & 2, Augustus B Easton, 1909

All books listed, if available for sale, can be found on Amazon.com.
Check out local and on-line library sources or for research only, not for check out, at the office of the St. Croix Conservation Study Center, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin.