

What trade goods and provisions did voyageurs carry?

Here's a list for one winterer's canoe in 1806, bound for Athabasca, in northern Canada. The canoe was 24 feet long, 5 feet wide and weighed about 300 pounds. The cargo would be chosen for that area; while the items would be similar, the amounts would differ.

This canoe carried a **cargo load** of about **20 pièces**:

5 bales trade goods * (see next page)	
1 cassette (small locked wood case, 2'4" by 1'4" by 1'4")	
2 bales twist tobacco	
3 kegs gunpowder	
1 keg high wines (raw whiskey)	
2 kegs brown sugar	
2 bags flour	
1 case iron	
1 case guns	
1 bag shot	
1 bag musket balls	1,800 pounds

A *pièce* was a 90-pound package designed for portaging and proper stowage in the canoe. Great care was taken to balance the size of each piece by distributing heavier goods among the lighter. This prevented the *pièces* (whether bales, kegs, bags or cassettes) from becoming too bulky.

Standard baggage and equipment: 200 pounds

- 2 blankets apiece for crew members
- 2 pairs leggings
- 2 bracelets
- 2 shirts
- 2 handkerchiefs

Avant and *gouvernail* positions were allotted 4 carrots tobacco, 3 large knives, 3 small knives, 1/2 pound beads and 1/4 pound vermilion. The lesser *milieux* positions were allotted 3 tobacco twists and only 4 knives.

Provisions: 600 pounds

- 1/4 keg grease (fat)
- 3 bushels corn
- 1 1/2 bushels oats (wild rice)

Canoe supplies (*agrès*): 100 pounds

- 1 small iron kettle – for daily cooking
- 1 oilcloth – to protect the cargo from water damage
- 1 sponge – to soak up water leaking into the canoe
- 1 codline – to tow the canoe up rapids
- 1 axe
- 1 sail – if winds from behind made it possible to sail
- 6 pounds gum – refined and mixed with bear fat and charcoal to seal the canoe seams
- 1 bunch wattap – spruce root to sew canoe seams
- 1 fathom (6 feet) birch bark – for canoe repairs

* **Inside one bale of trade goods** from 1816 (the contents of each bale were different):

1 common blue strouds (coarse woolen cloth or blanket)
1 Molton
1 blanket, 3 points
8 blankets, 2 each of 2½, 2, 1½ and 1 points
7 Moulton cappots, 1 each of 4, 3½, 3, 2½, 2, 1½ and 1 ells (ells measured from elbow to fingertip)
4 pounds net thread
4 pounds sturgeon twine
2 men's cotton shirts
2 men's flannel shirts
26 rolls ferreting silk (narrow decorative silk tape)
23 rolls hair ribbons
2 rolls 9 dozen black
2 pieces 6 dozen colored ribbon
5 pieces 4 dozen colored ribbon
3 pieces galloon (woven braid with silver, lace or embroidery)
3 dozen papers of pins
1 dozen playing cards
1 1/6 dozen shaving boxes
7 5/12 dozen common razors
7 1/2 pounds smallest white beads
3 1/2 dozen brass Jews harps
2 1/4 pounds allspice
21 cases razors
26 setts violin strings
60 lengths basses
1/3 dozen fine scissors
5 dozen silk hat covers
2 dozen tooth brushes
6 1/4 dozen cakes Windsor soap
11/12 dozen rolls blacking
30 nutmegs
25 small jockey caps
22 pounds colored thread

Source:

"Lac La Pluie Bills of Lading, 1806-1809" by Joseph Winterburn. ***Lake Superior to Rainy Lake: Three Centuries of Fur Trade History***: a collection of writings edited by Jean Morrison. Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 2003.

Joseph Winterburn's article described information originally found in a small bound volume labeled "L.L.P Bills Lading" which identified the items bound for the Lac La Pluie (Rainy Lake) fur post, the advance depot for North West Company. The Lac La Pluie post was located half a mile down the Rainy River from Rainy Lake and supplied the special brigades that traveled to the more remote Athabasca region. Agents from those fur posts could not reliably get to Fort Kaminstiquia (later Fort William) and return before their lakes were iced over. Their goods differed from loads bound for nearer fur posts.