



# BYWAY BUZZ

LAKE COUNTRY SCENIC BYWAY NEWSLETTER

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## "WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

### How Itasca Got Its Name

By: Sue Jesse

"Where does the name Itasca come from?" This is one of the most frequently asked questions at Itasca State Park. Although the question doesn't seem to require a "true or false" answer, it really can be either "true or false." Here's why...

In 1832, Lake Itasca received its name from Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Many well-known explorers had searched for the beginning of the Mississippi, but none had thought to ask the native people where the great river began – none, until Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. An Ojibwe guide named Ozawindib, gladly led Schoolcraft to the lake that the Ojibwe had long known as *Omushkos*, meaning elk lake. While paddling along the south shore of the lake, Schoolcraft asked Rev. Boutwell, another member of the expedition, for Greek or Latin words that would mean "true source" or "headwaters." Boutwell came up with the Latin words *vernum* (true) and *caput* (head.) He then changed *vernum* to *veritas* (truth.) From the word *veritas*, Schoolcraft took the ending letters "itas." From the word *caput*, he chose the beginning letters "ca." (*Veritas caput.*) Combining

the chosen letters, he wrote the word *Itasca* on a slip of paper and announced to Boutwell, "*Itasca shall be the name.*" One can't help but imagine another name for the lake if *vernum* had been used. Would the lake have been called "*Numca*?" Or what if a different mix of letters from each word had been chosen? Try it! What possibilities! At any rate, Schoolcraft chose *Itasca*. That's the true story of the naming of the lake, but that's not the end to the story!

In later years as he traveled Europe telling the saga of his search for the beginning of the great Mississippi, Schoolcraft was frequently asked by his audiences, "Where does the name Itasca come from?" He shared the story about combining the Latin words, but the "truth" of the naming of Itasca must not have pleased his listeners. He created an-

other version of the naming, saying that the name Itasca came from a story told by his Ojibwe guide, Ozawindib. In this version, a beautiful young maiden, named Itasca, was kidnapped away from her family. The mournful tears shed by the maiden Itasca, filled the lake and overflowed forming the Mississippi River. His audiences loved this story! The "truth" of the *veritas caput* version was replaced by the "false" version of the Indian maiden. At the park, both versions are told, and yes, visitors love the second version. Which

*"The truth of the veritas caput version was replaced by the false version of the Indian maiden."*



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## The Naming of Detroit Lakes

*Historical Information courtesy of the Becker County Historical Society.*

The development of the Detroit Lakes Area began in 1871, as the Northern Pacific Railroad etched its way westward through Becker County. Settlers from the East reached this new territory to discover a small country community called Tylerville or Tyler Town.

Tylerville consisted of a collection of buildings near the cabin of Mr. Merwin Tyler, which was located by the Northern Pacific line where the Pelican River meets Detroit Lake. Tyler's cabin also served as the local hotel and post office. Mail brought by the Northern Pacific Railroad was emptied onto a bed for the locals to help themselves.

Detroit Lakes was founded by Colonel George Johnston, who came to Minnesota in 1871 to select lands for the New England Colony. After extensive examinations, Johnston numbered sections which established the Detroit Township. In 1873, Detroit Township boasted the first grain warehouse built west of Duluth on the Northern Pacific Railroad.

The city of Detroit Lakes, originally called "Detroit" came about when a French Catholic Priest camped on the shore of the lake with a view of the sun setting

across the water. The water was low and revealed a sandbar, creating a narrow strait that glistened in the light of the setting sun. The Priest exclaimed, "What a beautiful strait." The word "strait" in French is "detroit." Consequently, the city was named Detroit.

As a result of continuous postal mix-ups between Detroit, Minnesota and the better-known Detroit, Michigan, a special



**By: Frank Mitchell**

When the first wagon road was cut from Park Rapids to Itasca State Park it was called the "Itasca Park Road". It was later called Highway #4, having been rebuilt and straightened 3 times.

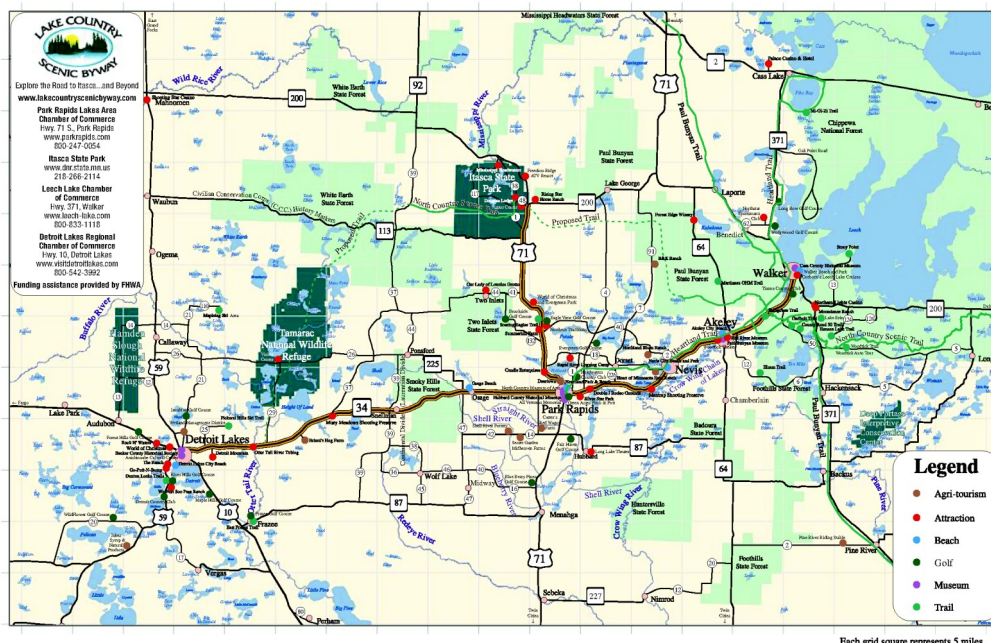
In 1895 Jacob Brower advised that the road from Hay Creek to Niemada Lake in the southeast corner of Itasca Park be straightened. In 1911, \$6,000 was to be spent on a 3 mile strip of this road near

Little Mantrap Lake, making a total of 8 miles of much improved road between Park Rapids and Douglas Lodge.

On May 11, 1916, one hundred county delegates between Itasca Park and St. Cloud met in Wadena and organized "*The Central Minnesota Jefferson Highway Association*." The honorable L.H. Rice of Park Rapids was elected President with W.M. Taber, Park Rapids, as Trustee. This group was organized to keep the Jefferson Highway from being changed to another route. The commissioner of highways was proposing that the route from Elk River to Itasca Park be designated the Jefferson Highway. However this group was able to convince the state to keep the route through Park Rapids.

On July 27, 1916 the headlines in the Park Rapids Enterprise stated "Park Rapids now on Jefferson National Highway".

The first Jefferson Highway socialibility run came into Park Rapids from St. Joseph, MO. The run stayed on schedule within 5 minutes at every town along the route. As it entered Park Rapids 150 local cars joined the procession. They turned onto Main Street and stopped at 2nd Street where an arch had been erected. This arch was decorated with pine boughs and flags with a sign "Gateway to Itasca State Park". Mr. Rice gave a short talk, then introduced Mr. Clarkson who talked about the victory they had won by keeping this highway as the designated Jefferson Highway. Each of the local cars carried a pennant on which was printed Park Rapids, We Like It, You'll Like It! This was adopted as the slogan for Park Rapids.



**Join the Lake Country Scenic Byway Association**

P.O. Box 249  
Park Rapids, MN 56470

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