

# EDUCATOR'S CHOICE SEARCH

## Explorers: Etienne Brule

Etienne Brule was born near Paris probably in the year 1592. Brulé had come to North America as a servant to Samuel de Champlain, the father of the French colony of New France. He went to Quebec in 1608. In 1610 he requested permission from Samuel De Champlain to live among the Algonquins tribe so that he could learn their language and serve as interpreter between the French and Native Americans. This request was granted and he traveled to the Ottawa River to live among the Iroquet tribe. Along the way he achieved local fame by being the first European to shoot the Lachine Rapids just upstream of Montreal. Brule returned to Quebec on June 13, 1611, having mastered the language and gained the confidence of his hosts. In the next four years he most likely traveled up the Ottawa River into Lake Nipissing, the French River and Georgian Bay. If so he pioneered the main route for the fur trade west. He kept no journals so it is uncertain if this happened.

In 1615 the French and the Huron tribe were preparing a campaign against their enemies the Iroquois. They decided to send a delegation to the Susquehannahs, also enemies of the Iroquois, to try to get them as allies. Brule asked to go along. They traveled from Lake Simcoe in present day Ontario, down the Humber River, across the western end of Lake Ontario and then up the Niagara and Genesee Rivers to the headquarters of the Susquehannah at Carantouan, between Elmira and Binghamton in upstate New York. The mission was a success but by the time the Susquehannahs arrived the Hurons had already been defeated by the Iroquois and had retreated. The Susquehannahs then decided to return home and Brule went with them. He spent next fall and winter visiting tribes and went down the Susquehannah River as far as Chesapeake Bay which had been visited in 1608 by John Smith. By making this journey Brule became the first European to set foot in what is now Pennsylvania.

On September 19, 1615, at the age of twenty, Etienne Brulé became the first European to see Lake Ontario and, later, was probably the first to see Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. He was also the first European to live among the native people and adopt their customs.

On his return to Canada, Brule was captured by the Senecas, a member of the Iroquois confederation. He claims that he was tortured by them but no proof of that is available. He left them on good terms with the promise to work for peace with the French. Most of Brule's journeys are difficult to document but it seems probable that in 1621-1623 he

became the first European to see Lake Superior and to traverse as far as the site of Duluth Minnesota. He also is thought to be the first European to have seen Lake Erie. If so he can be counted as the discoverer of the Great Lakes.

In spite of his exploits, Brule was not well liked by Samuel De Champlain who thought he had adopted too many of the customs of the Native Americans. On the return of the French he left and went to live again among the Hurons. For reasons unknown he was killed by one of the Huron clans in 1633.

Although Brulé ultimately deserted the French and was ostracized by Champlain, his exploration of the hinterland was very important to the expansion of the fur trade

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