Jean Nicollet Encyclopedia Article

Jean Nicollet

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1598-1642

Frenchman who is credited as the first European to explore Lake Michigan and reach the American Midwest. At the age of 20, Nicollet joined a French trading company and set out for Canada to live among the Native Americans and become a company interpreter. With direction from Samuel de Champlain, Nicollet began his journey through the Great Lakes in 1633. Nicollet had hoped not only to negotiate trading arrangements with Native Americans, but also to find the rumored transcontinental route to China. Nicollet made history when he arrived onshore in what is now Wisconsin, dressed in a fine Chinese robe. After this voyage, he returned to Quebec, where he held the positions of colonial interpreter and merchant.