



# Wilderness News



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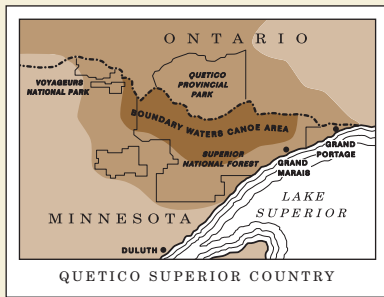


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The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the wilderness, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico-Superior canoe country and region.



## LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

# Bringing the Past to Life

The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the wilderness, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico-Superior canoe country and region.

### Wilderness News

Published by the Quetico Superior Foundation

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The past is often seen as something that once was—a time that has come and gone. Yet in this issue of *Wilderness News*, we see that the past can come to life in the present day through the work of individuals dedicated to preserving stories, ways of life, and tradition.

We meet Erik Simula, a birch bark canoe builder who lived off the grid for 20 years and now teaches traditional crafts. We learn about the North House Folk School in Grand Marais, MN, dedicated to teaching folk arts. We also learn about archeologists painting a picture of what the Quetico-Superior region looked like 12,000 years ago. And we get a glimpse into YMCA Camp Widjiwagan, where kids continue a canoeing tradition that began in 1929.

This issue reminds all of us that the Quetico-Superior region is a place steeped in tradition, where history comes to life every day. I thank you for your continued support of *Wilderness News*, so we can bring those stories to you.

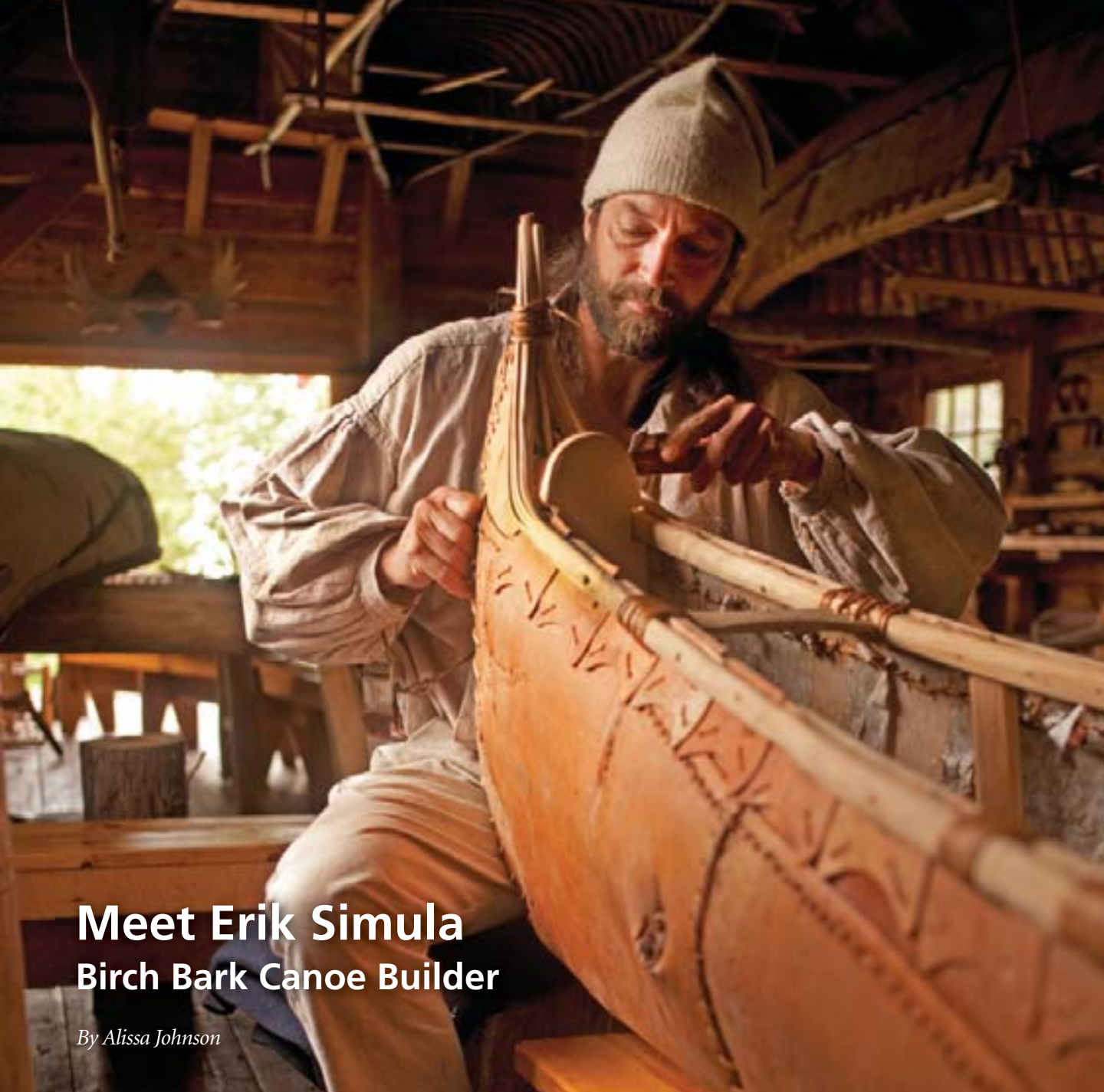
Lastly, please share your newsletter with others who might be interested.

Sincerely,  
 Jim Wyman  
 President, Quetico Superior Foundation

#### On the Cover:

In 2009, Erik Simula paddled 1,000 miles through the Quetico-Superior in a birch bark canoe, including many miles on Lake Superior. Photo by and courtesy of Layne Kennedy.

Tell us what you think and keep up with canoe country issues:  
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## Meet Erik Simula Birch Bark Canoe Builder

*By Alissa Johnson*

2013 North House Folk School Instructor-in-Residence, Erik Simula. Photo by and courtesy of Layne Kennedy.

For twenty years, Erik Simula has lived almost exclusively off the grid near the Minnesota and Canadian border. He hasn't had a refrigerator or a freezer, and bringing home the groceries has meant using a team of sled dogs to haul them over snow.

"For most of my life, I could never drive to my cabin," Erik says. He counts moose, red fox, gray jays, and even bears among his neighbors. "I have a pet moose just like anyone that lives way out."

During the summer, the sled dogs run loose and Erik builds birch bark canoes—he has completed 16 and has

four in progress. Come fall he hunts, nets fish, and harvests wild rice. He has slept in teepees, shacks, shanties, and spent more than a few nights under an overturned canoe.

"I have lived, many different times, for long durations isolated from people, and I never really get lonely," Erik explains. "I've always sought to have isolation for the peace and solitude. I've never been bored in my life here, nature provides that stimulus for me."

Yet living in the bush has not meant being a misanthrope. Erik married an Anishinabe woman, and his work has kept him in close contact with people. He has guided



The traditional birch bark canoe, light in weight, is designed for lake-to-lake portaging characteristic of Arrowhead Region travel. Photo by Layne Kennedy.

sled dog trips for 30 years, and has worked as a wildland fire fighter, a National Park ranger, and a canoe builder at the Grand Portage National Monument. He also teaches at the North House Folk School, where he was the school's first instructor in residence last summer.

"I'm actually a very quiet person. I really don't have a lot to just chit chat about, but when there's something important to talk about I can talk on and on, especially if it's in my field of knowledge or my job," he says.

In these roles, Erik can share his intimate knowledge of the woods and traditional crafts like snowshoe making and birch bark canoe building. He demonstrates the connection between folk arts, the land and native cultures—a wisdom he also brings to his work.

### **The Spirit of the Birch Bark Canoe**

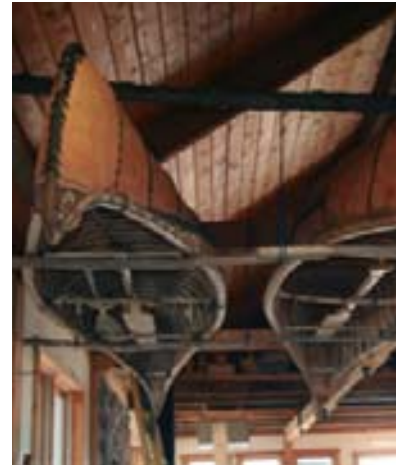
"To fully understand and appreciate the birch bark canoe, you have to fully understand the native culture because that's how it developed. In this region, it's only been in the last 200 years or less that we developed the canoe using different construction techniques and materials," Erik says. In his eyes, those newer techniques will never match the resonance and spirit of the birch bark canoe. A birch bark

canoe is harvested by hand in the forest. It comes from living trees and materials harvested only after tobacco has been offered and a prayer has been said. The canoe is formed by hand, using stone, bone and steel tools, and keeping good thoughts in mind.

"When you go through all the harvesting and construction of the canoe with that type of approach, something magical happens," Erik says. "I can sit down and look at a birch bark canoe and get bubbly inside."

But that doesn't mean they lose their function and become untouchable art. Eric grew up a paddler first and foremost, and he builds his canoes to stand up to white-water, net fishing, wild rice harvesting and wilderness trips. In 2009, he paddled a birch bark canoe from Grand Portage to Grand Rapids, Minnesota to attend his daughter's high school graduation. His return trip took him to International Falls, and through Voyageurs National Park and Quetico Provincial Park. For four months, that birch bark canoe rose to every challenge, and when Erik needed to repair some abrasion from lining rapids, he was able to replace a section of birch bark with natural materials he'd carried with him.

"Few birch bark canoe builders go on and build



Start to finish, building the birch bark canoe at the North House Folk School has been a year long process for Erik and will be completed in the spring of 2014. Photos by Kate Watson and courtesy of North House.

multiple canoes, but even of those few that do, very few are paddlers,” Erik says. “From an artistic point and from an aesthetic point of view a canoe that is built like that might be a work of art but it’s not functional.”

### A Lifetime of Learning

Of course, learning to build a birch bark canoe that can handle a four-month trip doesn’t happen overnight. The learning curve is steep, and it took Erik five years to learn the whole process. He traveled to museums and old resorts, taking pictures and sketching canoes. He visited native elders and other canoe builders, learning something from each one. As he built, he frequently had to repeat steps, learning by doing until he got it right.

“It took another five canoes to understand what I was doing,” he says. “It’s a lot more complicated than a lot of people realize. Over the years of teaching, a lot of students come thinking they can dabble and build a birch bark canoe. After a week of study, they realize there’s a lot more to it than they thought.”

The roughly one canoe per year that Erik builds is much slower than native cultures that traditionally built canoes as a family and finished one in just a few weeks. But Erik uses his canoes during demonstrations for his students and builds them on his own or with his wife. In many ways, his canoes serve a purpose greater than any utility—they serve as a vehicle for imparting knowledge and respect to his students.

“My courses are different in that I bring a lot of students into the field, out in the forest,” Erik says. “I really stress sustainable harvesting and ethics when it comes to the traditional use of forest products like birch bark, spruce root, and cedar wood.”

He weaves in lessons on tribal governments and sovereignty, and respect of other cultures. It’s a fitting role for a man who’s spent his life in the woods, just as it’s a fitting life for a man who grew up listening to stories of his great grandfather in Finland, who was also frequently digging up spruce roots and doing birch bark work.

“Being in a similar climate and making a living out of the forest, working with trees and wood... I think that’s one reason I followed that lifestyle,” he says. “I find it very rewarding to be able to make a living off of canoe building or guiding.”

**To learn more about Erik and his 2009 journey through the Arrowhead Region, visit [arrowheadjourney.wordpress.com](http://arrowheadjourney.wordpress.com).**



White fish netting on Caribou Lake. Photo by Layne Kennedy.



## North House Folk School's Instructor-in-Residence Program

**The North House Folk School is a school of traditional craft—students can learn everything from knitting or making soap to boat building or timber framing. Located on the edge of Lake Superior in Grand Marais, Executive Director Greg Wright explains that it's all about telling a story.**

"We teach to tell the story of the north—its cultures and its landscapes—through the lens of hands on learning of craft traditions," Wright said. He added, "What makes folk arts different from high arts is that they're both beautiful, but traditionally, the folk arts were manifested because people needed to make their way in the world. They needed the utility because they needed to get to the other side of the lake."

At North House Folk School, the overwhelming response suggests that people crave a connection to the cultures of the north and its traditional crafts. Students come from all over North America and sometimes the world to participate in more than 350 classes and events. In 1997, when the school formally opened its doors, it hosted 23 classes.

Last summer, the school introduced its Instructor in Residence program to give first time visitors a taste of what the classes have to offer. In many ways, it was an evolution of what already happened—instructors hung out on campus, set up their craft, and curious visitors asked them questions.

"We thought we could do this with a little more purpose," Wright explained. "The goal was to highlight the instructors and the crafts at the core of the school and use those as a tool for engaging visitors. During the high

season, a lot of people come onto campus and go, 'Wow, this is cool. What can I do?' But if they didn't sign up for a course and didn't have 11 days, we didn't have another option for them."

Formalizing the Instructor-in-Residence program made it possible to engage those first time visitors in a significant way. Birch bark canoe builder Erik Simula was the first instructor in residence, and he routinely saw meaningful connections take place between strangers.

"We'd have 25 people standing around having an engaged discussion... talking about some controversy or great canoe trip or all kinds of topics," Simula said. "There are many different levels of teaching. Just being there and having them ask a few questions—that's a huge interpretative opportunity for me that not only lets them know what we're doing [at the North House Folk School] but also dive into deeper issues of traditional native cultures and interactions with other cultures."

**Learn more about the North House Folk School or request a catalog at [www.northhouse.org](http://www.northhouse.org)**



One of the hidden pleasures for Erik over the summer months is sharing his love of traditional canoe building methods. Photos by Kate Watson and courtesy of North House.

## Meet Stewart Crosby

Board member since 2004

### *Please tell us what your involvement with the Quetico Superior Foundation means to you:*

The Quetico-Superior region is a unique landscape that I have enjoyed visiting all my life. I've lived in other parts of the country and that's made me realize how special the boundary lakes region is and how lucky we are that it's right in our back yard, so to speak.

Of the many interests for the region, I fall on protection of wilderness side. We gain so much as a state and as a country from maintaining the wilderness status of the BWCAW. The region is important for tourism and for ecological health. The Quetico Superior Foundation is an important organization that seeks to protect the wilderness character that is important to me.

*What other ways have you been active in the Quetico-Superior Region?* I try to visit the BWCAW at least once a year. I enjoy visiting the North Shore of Lake Superior as well. It is important to me to introduce this amazing landscape to our kids so they are able to experience wilderness. The Quetico-Superior Region provides an escape from the connected world that is so important for our kids and for us.

I am a member of the Trust for Public Land Minnesota Advisory Board and in that role I serve on the Northwoods Committee. This committee



focuses on the organization's Northwoods Initiative which works to protect the iconic landscapes of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan and preserve a heritage that is at risk of disappearing.

*What is the most pressing issue you see in the region today?* There are two very pressing issues. The first is that fewer people, especially children are visiting the region and exploring the wilderness areas than in the past. This concerns me because the future stewards of this region are the youth that experience it today. The second pressing issue is the potential of large-scale sulfide mining in the region. I worry that mining will cause permanent damage to Minnesota's northern lakes and rivers, including Lake Superior.

*What's one of your favorite memories from the Quetico-Superior Region?* Seeing the reaction of my daughter as she watched, for the first time, the northern lights dance across the sky in the BWCAW.

*What's your favorite spot or way to see the Quetico-Superior Region?* One of my favorite activities is hiking on the Superior Hiking Trail. One of my favorite spots is on Oberg Mountain, one can see magnificent views of the Lake and of the inland forest as well.



Young women make positive relationships and see strong female role models at YMCA Camp Widjiwagan. All photos courtesy Camp Widjiwagan.

## YMCA Camp Widjiwagan: Generations of Exploration

By Greg Seitz

**On the pine-covered shores of Burntside Lake’s North Arm twenty miles northeast of Ely, Camp Widjiwagan has been a launching point for teenagers to explore wilderness since 1929. Today, some families are sending their fourth generation of campers to Widji, where the fundamental experience hasn’t changed much since their grandparents’ days.**

The camp still uses the wood-canvas canoes, still keeps the groups small, and still teaches kids to respect themselves, their equipment, and the wilderness.

The wood-canvas canoes have long been one of the camp’s fundamentals. The handmade crafts demand respect, says Joe Smith, caretaker at Widjiwagan for the past 25 years and a former camper and counselor.

“For a wood canvas canoe to complete a journey successfully, you have to learn how to use the canoe in such a way it doesn’t get beat up, by being dragged on

shore for example. Kids and counselors learn to take a lesson from that canoe and apply it to other aspects of the trip as well,” Smith says.

Many of Widjiwagan’s canoes were built by Joe Seliga, a close friend of the camp and a world-renowned craftsmen. He attended many homecoming banquets and, before he passed away in 2005, Seliga gave his canoe form to the camp so they could keep making his design.

“When Joe gave us his form, he said, ‘I want you to make canoes that will go on trail with 12-year-old kids,’” Widjiwagan’s executive director Liz Flinn says.

After his passing, the camp built a new canoe workshop to continue making the canoes for use by campers, and to maintain its fleet. Smith says that at least one of the canoes he used as a camper four decades ago – an Old Town wood-canvas – is still in regular use today.

The canoes are at their essence a means for transportation through the wilderness, which offers many other lessons to young men and women. John Bussey went through the program as a camper, and then worked seven years as a counselor. Today, he is a member





Working together is a big part of the “Widji Way.” Campers help plan their own trips and learn to cooperate to accomplish difficult tasks.

of the camp’s board of directors, and works in environmental conflict resolution – a career clearly influenced by his Widjiwagan experiences.

“The most important skills I learned at Widji were the interpersonal skills, far more important than any wilderness skills like hiking or paddling. You can’t avoid conflicts, and you have to make decisions collaboratively,” Bussey says.

Widji’s small groups, which are usually five to six campers and one counselor, naturally encourage close relationships. Campers typically go on their first trip when they’re 12 years old, when the kids have no choice but to work together.

“When you have a small group, you have to work together, you’re not going to get over a portage alone,” says executive director Flinn.

Flinn says the wilderness is the ideal environment for teaching such cooperation. Campers learn to think of other people, supporting them with words or help. Three kids might work together to flip a canoe and get it on their shoulders for portages, and the relationships are important.

“For a lot of the boys, it shows what positive male friendship can be like, supportive rather than competitive.

For girls, it shows a lot of female role models who are physically strong, confident, and competent,” Flinn says.

The teamwork begins before they even get their paddles wet. Camp caretaker Smith says an important part of the collaboration is the trip planning.

“A big component of what makes it special is that when kids come to camp, the philosophy includes doing training that also serves as team-building, friendship-building, and the kids have a real personal attachment to the trip that they go on because of the training and they get to help plan the menu and the route,” Smith says.

When Widji was founded by the St. Paul YMCA in 1929, it offered traditional summer camp activities like arts and crafts and tennis, in addition to canoe trips. It was in the 1950s that the board of directors decided to focus on wilderness camping.

Flinn says that it was around that time that the camp also started offering girls trips, which were initially led by male counselors – but not for long. The camp soon hired female leaders.

“Widji was really at the forefront of having women lead girls into the wilderness,” she says.

In the 1970s, backpacking was added to the canoeing curriculum, and an environmental education program was



developed. In the summer of 2013, the camp sent out 152 trips for both canoeing and backpacking, with 658 campers total.

During the fall, winter and spring, Widjiwagan welcomes school groups for its environmental education courses. Students enjoy recreation and education, with topics like Ojibwe Heritage, Glacial Geology, and The Night Sky, alongside instruction in using a map and compass, cross-country skiing, and other outdoor skills.

At its core, what defines Widji is something that hasn't changed: remote wilderness trips with small groups. Board member John Bussey says it was that experience that changed his life.

"I think the most definitional day I ever had was doing the Grand Portage through Widji," Bussey says.



Small trail groups of about five young people and 1-2 counselors is a fundamental element of Widji trips.

"Sixteen-year-olds typically end their Explorer trip with the nine-mile Grand Portage. I was not popular by any stretch of the imagination in high school, I had very low self-confidence. Being forced into a group that learned to work together, and put to a final test on the last day of this three-week trip to do a nine mile portage, it was the most intense thing I've ever done. It completely altered my perspective of myself. If I put my mind to it, and I'm in a team which is mutually supporting, we can accomplish things we never would have dreamed possible."



***For more information:***

***[www.ymcatwincities.org/camps/camp\\_widjiwagan/](http://www.ymcatwincities.org/camps/camp_widjiwagan/)***

## Wilderness Experiences

Everyone who comes up to Camp Widji-wagan takes a part of his or her experiences home with them. Everyone you could talk to will tell you different reasons why Widji has been an important part in their life. I have a unique perspective on Widji's impact on my life because I have been a camper, trip assistant, and camp counselor all within the same year.

Widji has been an important experience for me for a number of reasons. When I first started coming up to camp it was mostly because it was just a fun thing to do in my summers. I considered myself a fairly typical kid who enjoyed the adventure and absolute freedom of the outdoors. As I grew older I started going on the "advanced" trips. I began to have more meaningful experiences alongside the plain adventure of trail life. I also met people who inspired me through their interesting lives and unique perspectives. At the end of my Voyageur trip, I realized imagining a summer without Widji was something I could not do. Widji had made me hopeful and kept me young inside. It made me more willing to take risks and initiative.

Most of the benefits from my experience at camp are hard to describe but easy to apply. I am more confident facing a challenge, dealing with people, or taking on a problem because of my experience on trail and working with kids through Widji. The most obvious benefit that comes to mind from my experience has been the friends I made. People that I spent time with on trail have a special place in my memory. Almost every day I find myself drawing from my trail leadership experience.

*Henry Hark, 2013 Voyageur Camper, Tripping Assistant, and WOLP Intern*



Many Widji campers culminate their camp experience with a Voyageur (canoeing) or Mountaineer (hiking) trip. Voyageur trips are usually about six weeks long and travel rivers in the Far North of Canada. (Henry Hark is in the blue coat on the far right of the group photo.)

# Reconstructing the Past

By Rob Kesselring



Archaeologists travel by canoe and follow BWCAW regulations in their explorations. Photo courtesy of USDA SNF.

## Archaeologists are painting a picture of Quetico-Superior's first people and what the land looked like 12,000 years ago.

Crouched behind a granite boulder we wait. A damp northwest wind off Lake Agassiz raises goose bumps on our naked thighs where our caribou leggings end and what our summer tunics do not completely cover. But we remain poised, ready, our fingers gripping the atlatl and the shaft of its spear. For generations herds of caribou have funneled through the gap in the ridge that we now face. This week we need to kill many animals just to outfit our family with winter clothing and shelter. We are confident hunters. The long stone point on our spear was carefully knapped to a razor's edge from Knife Lake siltstone. You call us Paleo-Indians and we are the first humans to explore the grandeur of the Quetico-Superior wilderness, and we arrived earlier than you might think.

It has been believed that the Quetico-Superior wilderness after being cloaked, scraped clean, and flooded by the last glacial advance was, for a long span

of time, too inhospitable for human habitation, but recent research indicates otherwise. It now appears that people followed the retreating ice like ticks on a moose.

In the modern world, we clench our jaws if we punch the wrong icon on our smart phones and need to spend an instant to correct our mistake. That kind of thinking makes it hard to comprehend the passage of time during the early human occupation of the Quetico-Superior. The ice sheet that covered the area was over a mile thick. It did not melt away in a year or even a century. The ice sheet retreated over the span of a couple thousand years. So slowly, that in a person's lifetime, it would be hard to notice the ice was retreating at all. The biome behind the retreating ice was incubated by a relatively low latitude sun, which created unique and especially nutritious tundra vegetation. This food source created a desirable habitat for a multitude of barren-land caribou, musk ox and likely the now extinct woolly mammoth. With a smorgasbord like that, saber tooth tigers, 300-pound wolves and hungry people were not far behind.

As slowly as life was moving 13,000 years ago, it was a barn dance compared to the speed of geologic processes three billion years earlier. That is when a volcanic



Plano type point found on the Canadian side of Knife Lake. Photo courtesy of Jon Nelson.



Forest Archaeologist Lee Johnson holding a stone adze made from Knife Lake Siltstone by Paleo-Indians. Photo by Rob Kesselring.

mountain range in Canada had worn itself down to dust and settled as silt where Knife Lake is today. The silt became shale and from the heat of nearby granitic intrusions was forged (or metamorphosed) into Knife Lake Siltstone, setting the stage for the first human explorers. Skilled Paleo-Indians could work (or knap) this extraordinary rock into durable knives and spear points. Without the technology of even the bow and arrow, Paleo-Indians esteemed a rugged and sharp spear. No family man wants his or her spear to bounce off a woolly mammoth or a pouncing saber tooth tiger.

Knife Lake straddles the border between Ontario and Minnesota, with Quetico Provincial Park to the north, and the BWCAW on the American side (N48 W091, Elev. 1401 ft.). Its higher elevation than the surrounding landscape kept it above the water level of the massive proglacial lakes of Agassiz to the west and Duluth to the east and gave Paleo-Indians access to the siltstone even as western portions of the Quetico-Superior were still submerged.

Although earlier anthropologists surveyed the area and noticed a preponderance of flakes (sharp-edged stone fragments created by humans striking or prying in the process of tool making), it was Canadian archaeologist William Fox in 1977 who actually discovered the first silt-

stone quarries. But “discovered” is the wrong word. The French fur traders’ name for Knife Lake was *Lac des Couteaux*, or Lake of Knives, pushing “discovery” back a couple centuries. Lac la Croix Ojibwa elders have translated the lake’s Ojibwa name *Mookomaan Zaaga’igan* to mean “Lake where rock used to make knives is found”. In fact, the knowledge of the Knife Lake siltstone may have been uninterrupted for over 13,000 years. It might have been an extraordinary example that sustainable mining is actually possible. But the archaeological record does not seem to support this. Artifacts of later Archaic peoples and more modern woodland cultures are not found atop the Paleo-Indian artifacts near the quarry sites. This indicates that as technology changed there was a preference for different raw materials and that the quarries had been abandoned.

Jon Nelson did the first substantial archaeological research of the quarries about two decades ago. His excellent book, *Quetico Near to Nature’s Heart*, describes his amazing discoveries. Nelson worked on Knife Lake’s north shore. Until recently, it was believed that the only quarries were on the Canadian side of the lake. But the old cliché, when one door closes a window opens, happened. The slamming door was the devastating 1999 blow down. This



A cache of Knife Lake biface blanks used as stock for making points, knives and other tools. Photo courtesy of USDA SNF.

event wrenched the hearts of many lovers of the Quetico-Superior wilderness. However, after the Forest Service completed a series of prescribed burns to reduce the wind-fall fire load, a window was opened. Stripped of the cloak of vegetation, large-scale Paleo-Indian quarry sites were revealed on the American side of the lake.

After this discovery Mark Muñiz, associate professor of anthropology at St. Cloud State University, led several research trips to the area. The research sites are within the BWCAW and Superior National Forest Archaeologist, Lee Johnson, has accompanied and assisted Muñiz with technical expertise and logistical support. Muñiz's groups travel by canoe, portaged their gear and adhered to no trace camping practices. Muñiz's latest findings have garnered headlines and may someday turn conventional thinking upside down. New revelations, a bit of controversy and with wilderness and canoes as the stage? The excitement is palpable. You can almost hear the theme song of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* playing in the background.

It has long been believed that the earliest humans to live in Minnesota did so in the south. That theory is now being tested. Muñiz has collected soils found associated with the stone tools. Using a relatively new diagnostic test, optically stimulated luminescence (OSL), it is possible to determine the date soil samples were last exposed to daylight. If OSL dated soil is found in a layer above the artifacts, it stands to reason that the tools are at least that old. When one soil sample was OSL dated 16,400 years ago



Top: Dr. Mark Muñiz standing beside a Knife Lake Paleo-Indian siltstone quarry. Photo courtesy of USDA SNF.



Above: Prescribed burns after the 1999 blowdown revealed Paleo-Indian quarries on the American side of Knife Lake. Photo courtesy of USDA SNF.

(plus or minus 2,000 years), eyebrows of archaeologists around the world went up. Johnson cautions that this is a preliminary, inconclusive finding. Ideally, similar radiocarbon dates of charcoal found at the site and the discovery of a fluted point indicative of the earlier Paleo-Indian period are needed to corroborate these astonishing OSL findings. Muñiz plans to return to Knife Lake in search of these clues and to do more OSL testing—a process that involves collecting samples in the dark of night and paddling them out of the wilderness in lightproof containers!

Excitement is contagious. Readers may be tempted to do a little amateur archeology. Please don't. What has enabled scientists such as Nelson, Muñiz and Johnson to learn so much from these sites is their undisturbed nature. Archaeological digs are like a layer cake and often the location and position of artifacts is as important as



Barren Ground Caribou were common and likely of critical importance to the earliest inhabitants of Quetico-Superior. Photo by Rob Kesselring, Nunavut Canada.

the artifact itself. In the Quetico-Superior wilderness, this is particularly true because soil layers are extremely thin and fragile. This “no-touch” mandate goes beyond the quarries of Knife Lake. Johnson estimates that 60% of the campsites in the BWCAW are also archaeological sites. It should not be surprising. Canoeists last August or five thousand years ago are often looking for the same thing when it comes time to camp. If you stumble upon artifacts or evidence of prehistoric people, do not dig around or even handle the artifact. Instead, take a GPS reading or mark a map and e-mail the data to Johnson ([leejohnson@fs.fed.us](mailto:leejohnson@fs.fed.us)). In that way, you can be an important part of the science.

Undoubtedly, some key puzzle pieces critical to visualizing the mysterious human prehistory of the Quetico-Superior wilderness are already collecting dust on some canoeist’s family room shelf in St. Louis or Chicago. Don’t be part of the looting. Maybe you already have a stone artifact that you found on a canoe journey

in the Quetico-Superior. Do the right thing now and contact Lee Johnson with the details of where and what you found.

These ancient artifacts are remnants of the first humans to inhabit the region and are an integral part of the wild mosaic that makes the Quetico-Superior special. The First Nation people of Lac La Croix most closely share their blood with these ancient people. Nelson reports that the elders can feel in their hearts how the stone tools resonate with the spirit of the land and create a harmony between this world and another dimension. Like the submerged keel on a sailboat, these ancient artifacts may not be obvious, but play a crucial role in keeping the sailboat or our evolving culture afloat. The energy of that ancient hunter patiently waiting for caribou still stirs in our souls. Pragmatically, modern canoeists have learned that if you honor the sanctity of these ancient implements you will face fewer headwinds, find more dry firewood and experience sunnier days.

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Mushing on Bearskin Lake. Photo courtesy of Arrowhead Journey.



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