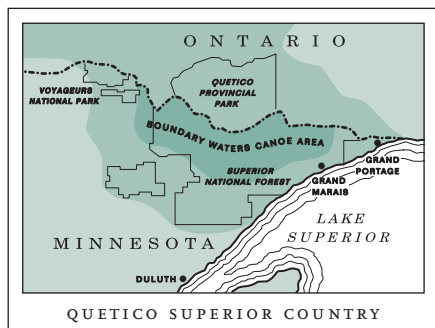


# Wilderness News

FROM THE QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION SPRING 2005



The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico Superior region.

*“One winter night I stood and listened beneath the stars. It was cold, perhaps twenty below, and I was on a lake deep in the wilds... An owl hooted somberly in the timber of the dark shores, a sound that accentuated the quiet on the open lake. Here again was the silence, and I thought how rare it is to know it, how increasingly difficult to ever achieve real quiet and the peace that comes with it, how true the statement ‘Tranquillity is beyond price.’”*

– Sigurd F. Olson *The Singing Wilderness*



## Wilderness News

Published by the Quetico Superior Foundation  
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## Evidence Suggests Humans Inhabited the Superior Quetico Region 10,000 Years Ago

By David Woodward, Archaeologist, Superior National Forest, USDA  
Interdisciplinary Archaeological Studies, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota

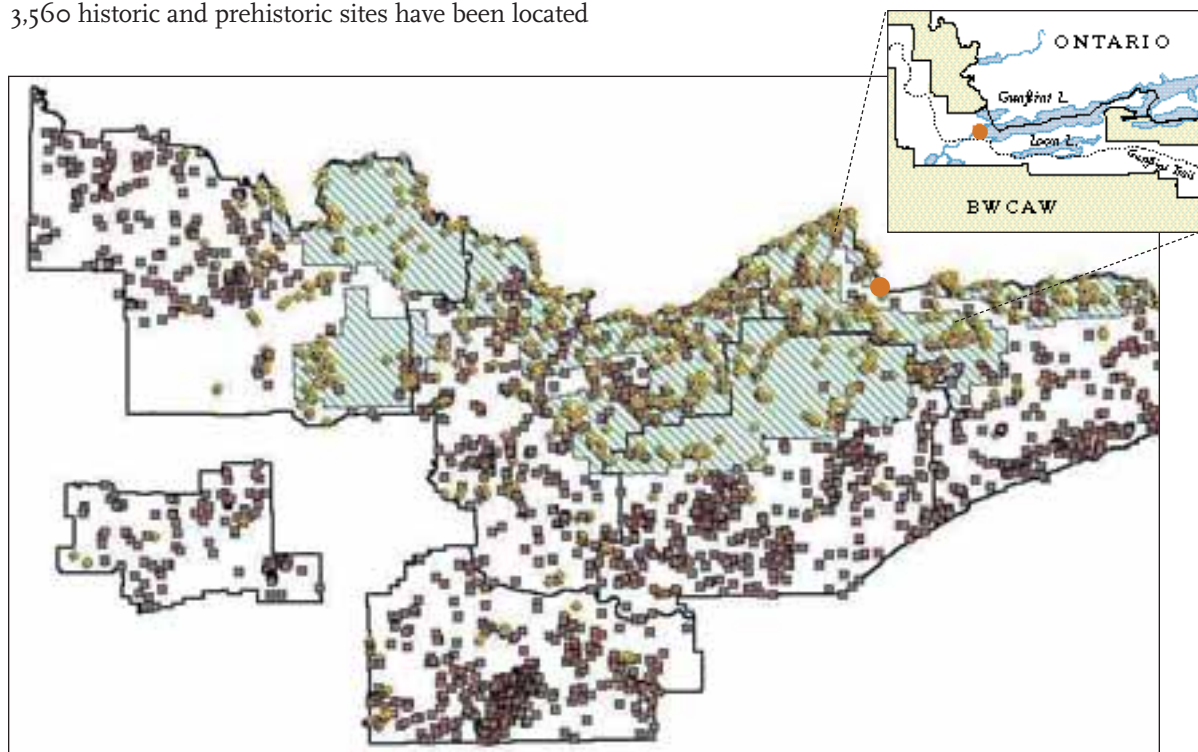
Northeastern Minnesota today is a cultural landscape, a rich land that has been owned, mined, plowed, and clear-cut of timber. It is a land that has been continually molded by history and constantly reminds us in a clear voice of its past. Place names remind us of both its Native American heritage and the more recent European expansion, pictographs stand witness to the ancient inhabitants of this region.

Ten thousand years ago this was also a cultural landscape, but the voice of this era is a whisper. Before there were towns and easily accessed resort areas this was a region cherished and contested by generations of hunter-gatherers whose impact on the land leaves barely a trace today. Archaeologists attempt to visit this landscape and hear the whisper of this distant past. The individual voices are irrevocably lost, but the aggregate voice can still be heard.

It is with this in mind that archaeologists working in the Superior National Forest's Heritage Program survey and evaluate historic and prehistoric sites in an attempt to preserve the scant evidence of 10,000 years of human occupation both in and outside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. In the 25 or so years of the Heritage Program's existence 3,560 historic and prehistoric sites have been located

with about 100 additional new sites found each year. The Heritage Program was developed by the USDA Forest Service in response to federal legislation (The National Historic Preservation Act among others) which mandated that federal land management agencies take into consideration the effects of their projects (such as campsite rehabilitation, prescribed burns, and road maintenance and construction) on historic and prehistoric sites. A major focus of the Heritage Program is stewardship, through public education and involvement. It is hoped that we all can work to protect our fragile heritage. Currently, the Superior National Forest employs 5 to 8 archaeologists and archaeological technicians conducting pre-project site location surveys, site monitoring and the formal evaluation of previously recorded sites.

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Gordon's site is one of 3,560 historic and prehistoric sites located by the Heritage Program in Minnesota.



Aerial view; confluence of Cross River and Gunflint Lake. Photo courtesy Forest Service Heritage Program



Paleo-Indian period artifact, 4cm in length. Circa 10,000 – 7,000 BC. Photo courtesy Forest Service Heritage Program



Large Biface Knife, 11cm in length, circa 7,000 to 3,000 BC. Photo courtesy Forest Service Heritage Program

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Formal evaluation entails detailed excavation of a small portion of an archaeological site to determine if that site meets the criteria to be included on the National Register of Historic Places, which then affords it the highest level of protection and preservation.

It is through this process of site survey and evaluation that we get a glimpse of the prehistoric past. One example of this process is the recently excavated site, the Gordon's Site. The site is located at the confluence of the Cross River and Gunflint Lake. Gordon's Site was found in 1989 during a routine survey of the banks of the Cross River and named after Gordon Peters, the founder of the Superior National Forest's Heritage Program. During the initial survey a small amount of stone debris was found just below the surface on the north bank of the Cross River. The site was monitored to assess the damage caused by the blowdown caused by the 1999 Fourth of July wind storm. At this time bifacial knives and scrapers were found in root throws and on the surface. The artifacts were found over an area of about 400 square meters, a much bigger area than previously thought. No pottery was found at this time and to date only two small fragments of pottery have been found near the surface. In the historic chronology of the region, ceramics appear sometime around 300 BC; the scarcity of pottery is good evidence that the occupation of this site predates this period. Because of its possible age and location at the confluence of two water bodies this site had potential to provide some important information about the ancient pre-ceramic people that inhabited the area.

The Forest Service Heritage Program conducted test excavations on the site during the summer of 1999 and in 2000 returned to the site with volunteers from the Passport in Time Program to continue investigating the site. The Passport in Time is a national organization that provides volunteer opportunities to people interested in history and prehistory. The site was also open to the public for tours and over 1,000 people visited. During these excavations a large amount of stone debris was recovered along with burnt bone from cooking, copper tools, stone scrapers which act as an all purpose tool, stone awls for bone and hide working, and projectile points from the early to middle Archaic period which date from 7,000 to 3,000 BC. The burnt bone has been analyzed and is from beaver, muskrat, and possibly caribou. In addition, the lower reaches of the excavation provided tantalizing evidence of an earlier deeply buried Paleo-Indian occupation on

the sand terraces which rise up from the Cross Bay River. These sand terraces could be ancient beach benches from the Glacial Lake that formed as the large ice sheets began melting. At the time no formal artifact recovered could be placed in the Paleo-Indian time frame dating to the earliest period of human occupation of North America (circa 10,000 – 7,000 BC).

During the summer of 2004 Forest Service Archaeologists returned to the Gordon's Site. This time a more focused approach to the site was warranted. The excavation was limited to the sand beach terraces in an attempt to get better data on the possible Paleo-Indian occupations of the site. Again volunteers from the Passport in Time Program took part in the excavation along with Anthropology students from the University of Minnesota Duluth's Field School. The site was also open to the public. The excavation recovered biface stone knives, scrapers, awls, copper tools, and projectile points along with debris from stone tool manufacturing and a lot of burnt bone from cooking. One of the projectile points can be placed with reasonable certainty in the Late Paleo-Indian Period, which is the evidence that can put this site's occupation at that earliest period.

The thousands of artifacts recovered so far are testimony to the day to day lives of a people now lost to time. We can only construct a very limited picture of what life was like thousands of years ago. We do know that these people were migratory foragers that moved with the seasons and harvested different resources depending upon the season. The environment changed drastically in the 10,000 years before European contact, from cool tundra during the Paleo-Indian period, to a period marked by a warmer, drier, climate with a mixed deciduous hardwood forest during the Archaic and then to the cooler wetter period that begins about 500 BC and continues to the present day. The people inhabiting the region adapted to the changing climate and redirected their subsistence efforts, from large game hunting during the Paleo-Indian to a more diversified foraging during the Archaic and then finally to a slightly more sedentary lifestyle with a reliance on wild rice and larger seasonal villages. At least part of this story is played out at the Gordon's Site from the Late Paleo-Indian to the Archaic. At the Gordon's Site the major Archaic habitation seems to be along the Cross River and a early to middle Archaic projectile point was recovered while the Late Paleo-Indian habitation seems to be at higher elevations away from the current

**The thousands of artifacts recovered so far are testimony to the day to day lives of a people now lost to time... At least part of this story is played out at the Gordon's Site from the Late Paleo-Indian to the Archaic.**



The Heritage Program's 2004 excavation of Gordon's Site. Photo courtesy Forest Service Heritage Program

shoreline of the Cross River. This could reflect the change in environment and subsistence over a period of environmental change.

There are many questions about the past that will never be answered. What did it mean, for example, to draw the figure of a moose with red pigment on a cliff face, or to bury elders in a collective burial mound some 2000 years ago? This work is a case study in reconstructing the lives of hunter-gatherers from the distant past, but it is also a cautionary tale about how limited our abilities are, how soft the whisper really is.

**Archaeologists from the Superior National Forest will return during the summer of 2005 to continue the excavation. The site will be open for viewing from 9:00AM to 3:00PM from June 28th through July 14th including weekends. Again volunteers from the Passport in Time Program will be working with Forest Service Archaeologists. The public is encouraged to visit and learn about the area's rich history. People interested in volunteering to excavate the site should contact the Passport in Time Clearing House at 1 (800) 281-9176 or can be found on line at [www.passportintime.com](http://www.passportintime.com).**

# Superior Hiking Trail

By Charlie Mahler, Wilderness News Contributor

**Not unlike a hiker finishing a long walk, those responsible for building the Superior Hiking Trail from Duluth to the Canadian border, are pacing themselves toward completion of Minnesota's award-winning hiking trail by 2010.**

With construction of the 39 mile section through the city of Duluth now striding into the second of a projected three year work period, trail managers and hikers are looking eagerly to what will be the final chunk of untracked North Shore forest – the roughly 30 mile stretch from the east end of Duluth to the current start of continuous trail near Two Harbors – and to completion, after some 25 years of planning and effort, of the trail's winding 275 mile footpath.

"We want to start building that link starting in 2007," Superior Hiking Trail Association Executive Director Gayle Coyer explained. "If we can keep the momentum going, we'll keep doing a chunk of trail every year. I always tell people it would be nice to have the trail done by 2010."

Currently, the trail ambles continuously for 205 miles from Lake County Road 301 northeast of Two Harbors to Otter Lake Road, just short of the Canadian border (and up the road from the start of the Border Route Trail.) Ambitious hikers can currently piece together a 350 mile forest trek that would take them from Two Harbors to the Pigeon River and then across the BWCAW via the Border Route and Kekakabic Trails to just east of Ely.

The SHT, Border Route, and Kek are all elements of the North Country National Scenic Trail which ultimately hopes to connect Crown Point, New York to Lake Sakakawea, North Dakota via footpath.

The SHT, which has earned accolades from *Backpacker*, *Prevention*, and *Reader's Digest*, stepped into being with a burst of construction in the late 80s and early 90s. Grants from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources totaling more than a million dollars provided a trail construction coordinator on loan from the DNR and pay for trail workers, including laid-off LTV Steel employees. The SHT officially opened – with a ceremonial log-cutting, no less – in 1987. By August 1990 140 miles of trail were completed.



Trail overlook at Bean Lake near Silver Bay.



Since 1993, the SHTA has relied largely on volunteer labor and other funding sources to complete and maintain the trail. Prior to its current focus on the Duluth section, the SHTA, the 3,500-member-strong organization that oversees the trail, had focused efforts on closing two 15 mile gaps in the original layout – one stretch near Little Marais, the other near Hovland.

The section of trail through Duluth built last year and to be officially opened on June 4, National Trails Day, begins at the Willard Munger Trail parking lot at 123rd Avenue West, off Beck's Road. It winds roughly seven miles to a trailhead on Spirit Mountain.

"It's a really, really great trail route," Coyer said. "It takes in Ely's Peak and Bardon's Peak and goes through the Magney-Snively old-growth forest, goes through the Spirit Mountain recreation area. There are just these undiscovered treasures in Duluth."

Another 14 miles of trail through Duluth is tabbed to be developed this year. Ultimately, the Duluth section will track to Hawk Ridge in eastern Duluth via Enger Park, the Lakewalk, and Chester Creek Park.

Route planning for the final, Hawk Ridge-to-Two Harbors stretch is just beginning. Coyer expects that section to parallel the North Shore State Trail and to use St. Louis County lands primarily.

"We want to kind of be in that same corridor as the North Shore State Trail because it follows the high ridge," Coyer said. □

## For More Information:

For more information on the Superior Hiking Trail Association, trail conditions, points of interest, lodging, shuttle service, maps and guide book visit on line: [www.shta.org](http://www.shta.org)



## Invasion of the Great Gray Owls

by Anthony X. Hertzell  
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

In the fall and winter of 2004-2005, Great Gray Owls moved into northern Minnesota in unprecedented numbers. By the end of the winter season, nearly 4,000 observations had been reported to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union. By contrast, the previous winter had a more typical 35 reports.

Great Grays can be found throughout the year across the boreal regions of Canada and their range reaches southward into northern Minnesota. They prey primarily upon Meadow Voles, and when these rodent populations crash, the owls must move to areas where either these or other food sources are more readily available. This is a cyclic event, occurring about every three to five years. The birds travel only as far as is necessary, and the southward movement, this year, halted when it reached central Aitkin and Pine counties in Minnesota. Here, more than 200 owls could be counted in one afternoon by persons driving the county roads.

## For More Information:

University of Minnesota Raptor Center  
<http://www.raptor.cvm.umn.edu/>



A Great Gray Owl seen in Aitkin Minnesota, February 2005. Photo courtesy Tim Eaton.

## Contact Wilderness News

Add your name to our mailing list, send us comments, feedback, or story ideas:

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or email the editor: [teaton@EandA.com](mailto:teaton@EandA.com)

## Wilderness News

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### CONSERVATION ISSUES

## US Forest Service Proposes Management Project Along Echo Trail

Superior National Forest resource specialists recently proposed major management activities near the Echo Trail, in the Forest's LaCroix and Kawishiwi Ranger Districts. The area included in the "Echo Trail Management Project" covers National Forest land north and south of the Echo Trail (County Road 116) from Vermilion River to Burntside Lake and from Lake Vermilion to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW).

The purpose of the Project, according to the USFS, is "to move the area toward vegetation desired future conditions described in the 2004 Superior National Forest Plan." Proposed activities include timber harvest and related actions such as reforestation, road construction and road decommissioning. The Project would also open road access to state and county land.

After a public comment period, the Forest Service plans to proceed directly to an Environmental Impact Statement to document the potential effects of the Project.

### For More Information:

Echo Trail Area Forest Management Project information is available by writing to the LaCroix District Ranger or online at [www.superionationalforest.org/analyses/EchoTrail.stm](http://www.superionationalforest.org/analyses/EchoTrail.stm).

### To Comment:

Send comments via mail, fax or email to: Nancy S. Larson, LaCroix District Ranger  
attn: Echo Trail Area Forest Management Project  
LaCroix Ranger District  
320 North Highway 53  
Cook, MN 55723  
Fax 218-666-0022  
Email: [comments-eastern-superior-la-croix@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-eastern-superior-la-croix@fs.fed.us)

### Editor's Note:

The Echo Trail Forest Management Plan, as presented in the April 9th public disclosure, merits public concern and thorough public dialogue, in the eyes of wilderness advocates. The Forest Service seems too quick to move toward fulfilling the "desired vegetation condition" as described in the 2004 Superior National Forest Plan. The Echo Trail Management Plan would create 50 miles of new roads to thin, and clear cut, 18,000 acres of forest.

Environmental groups advocate for more wilderness. In fact, the Friends of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, propose to expand the BWCAW by 90,000 acres with some of the same lands affected by the proposed management plan — specifically: the Agassa Lake, Baldpate Lake, Big Lake/Portage River, Echo River, Lake Jeanette, Meander Lake, North Arm, Burntside, Urho Creek, and Wolf Lake units, which together total 23,244 acres of wild land immediately adjacent to the BWCA.

If the current plan is implemented before a formal review and due consideration is given to adding these units to the BWCA Wilderness, as Friends has proposed, it could likely preclude them from ever being included. Of what value, if any, will these areas be for addition to wilderness area if they're networked by roads and managed to a 'clear cut' aesthetic?

We feel it is best to slow the process down and dialogue with the public.

### ALONG THE TRAIL



Picture Rock at Crooked Lake by Francis Lee Jaques, 1947.  
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

The art of Francis Lee Jaques, one of the most popular and recognizable visual artists of the Quetico-Superior region, is currently on display in a comprehensive exhibit at the Jaques Art Center in the late artist's hometown of Aitkin, Minnesota. The exhibit, "Francis Lee Jaques: Master Artist of the North Country," which assembles 50 paintings and prints, includes much of the artist's work collected at the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum as well as items from the Center's permanent collection. Jaques is best known for his illustrations for several of Sigurd Olson's books and for his moving interpretation (above) of one of the border route's most striking sites, "Picture Rock at Crooked Lake." The exhibit runs through mid-summer.

### For more information contact:

Jaques Art Center  
121 2nd St NW, Aitkin, MN 56431  
Tel:(218) 927-2363 Fax: (218) 927-4724  
[www.jaquesart.com](http://www.jaquesart.com)