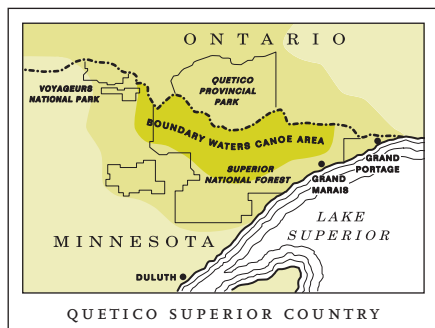


# Wilderness News

FROM THE QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION SUMMER 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.

“But most of all I return from these trips with my memories and with these indescribable feelings of respect and awe that I have for the land. A canoe trip even if it’s only an hour, or a week, or for a month, touches me profoundly and inspires me creatively, physically and spiritually. And ultimately all of these experiences fuel within me a desire to protect and preserve our remaining wild places.”

– Becky Mason

Closing remarks from her presentation *Adventures Through the Boreal Forest* made at the North House Wooden Boat Show and Summer Solstice Festival on June 19th 2005 in Grand Marais, Minnesota.



## Wilderness News

Published by the Quetico Superior Foundation  
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## WOODLAND CARIBOU PROVINCIAL PARK *Where Nature Still Rules*



THIS IS A PLACE ONE IS MORE LIKELY TO COME ACROSS A WOODLAND CARIBOU, OR HEAR THE CRY OF A WOLF THAN ENCOUNTER HUMANKIND. IT IS AN ANCIENT, WEATHERED LANDSCAPE OF HAUNTING PHYSICAL SOLITUDE AND SPIRITUAL SOLACE. A SOJOURN TO THE HINTERLANDS OF WOODLAND CARIBOU IS A VOYAGE THROUGH TIME. BY CANOE, ONE CAN FOLLOW THE WATERWAYS OF THE OJIBWAY AND JOURNEY PAST IMAGES OF ANIMALS AND SHAMANS PAINTED ON STONE.

By Timothy Eaton, Wilderness News Editor

Established in 1983, the Woodland Caribou Provincial Park is the 6th largest park in the Ontario Parks system. It is 450,000 hectares or about 1,150,000 acres, roughly half the size of the BWCAW. The park is classified as a wilderness and is located in Northwestern Ontario about 20 miles west of Red Lake and 60 miles north of Kenora. The Park was identified as one of the nine featured areas within Ontario’s Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (1999). These featured areas contain significant natural and cultural features and boast high-quality wilderness recreation opportunities. To learn more visit; <http://www.ontarioparks.com>

### A Boreal Prairie Forest Wilderness

The Woodland Caribou Park is a unique mix of boreal and prairie ecosystems. The dry climate, well-drained plateau topography and proximity of the prairie have all contributed to a unique forest mosaic. In its complex



Woodland Caribou. Photo courtesy of John Fahlgren.

and composition the woodlands are mainly boreal (northern), with large strands of fire dependent, lichen rich, jack pine on the dry, sandy soils of the uplands. In the river valleys, around some of the lakes and on south facing slopes, where more favorable conditions of soil and climate prevail, white spruce, balsam fir, trembling aspen and balsam poplar form mixed stands with rich and diverse layers of shrubs and flowering plants.

Some of Ontario’s oldest rocks. The park lies on a relatively flat plateau of granite rock about 2.5-3 billion years old. Glaciers scoured, scraped and molded the bedrock. As the glaciers retreated the landscape was flooded by the waters of Lake Agassiz. Sands and gravel, deposited throughout ages of varying water levels, filled the lowlands and linear depressions. Today, the landscape is characterized by elongated lakes, erratic drainage patterns, abrupt changes in elevation, thin soils,

continued from page 1

granite bedrock outcrops and massive boulders.

Throughout the park there are remnants of the adjacent prairie. Prairie grey-stemmed goldenrod and prairie crocus are but two of more than 100 plants of a drier, generally prairie habitat found in the park. The term 'Prairie Boreal' reflects the shared similarity of the Woodland Caribou forests with the dry boreal forests of the adjacent prairie provinces rather than the wet boreal forests found elsewhere in Ontario. In addition to the prairie plants, more than 300 boreal species also thrive there. Of the 400-plus plants, 14 are considered provincially rare and 124 are significant to the region.

The Woodland Caribou forest is a mosaic pattern of fire succession. The park has never been logged, however, half of the park has burned within the last 30 years. Paddle any canoe route within this park and you will pass by forests in every stage of fire succession—from the black and soot of recent burns, to the sudden and colorful profusion of herbaceous growth that flourishes after a fire, to the slow return of a mature forest of jack pine or spruce. The ashes of the forests past are the soils that sustain forest renewal today.



New forest takes root 15 years after wildfire, Bulging Lake.

### A Wilderness Canoe Tripping Paradise

Over 1,100 miles of waterways weave a pattern of interconnected lakes and rivers ideal for canoe tripping. There are four primary river systems which include the historic



Spiritual solace.

Bloodvein and Gammon rivers as well as the Oiseau (Bird) and Haggart. These rivers along with the small meandering creeks connect the innumerable chains of small and large lakes. All the waters in Woodland Caribou lie within the Nelson River drainage basin and flow north to Hudson Bay. The general direction of water flow is from east to west. The exception is the Haggart River system which flows in a northwesterly direction while the water routes south of Haggart Lake flow in a south-southwest direction.

While paddling this park you can retrace the fur trade routes of the historic Hudson Bay and Northwest Companies or paddle a chain of lakes to places where few have ever passed. Woodland



A blazed tree marks the portage.

Caribou Provincial Park is a wild sanctum for the body, mind and soul.

Primitive signs mark the portages, creeks and overland routes. The Woodland Caribou Park remains a wilderness today. Travel in this park requires reading primitive signs and navigating by compass. Blazed trees and rock cairns mark portages trails. Hiking over land and exploring off-route lakes can be part of a Woodland Caribou experience, adding a good challenge for the most experienced outdoor enthusiast.



Fireweed.



Artery Lake picture writing site dates back 1,000 years.

The rewards of this wilderness are found on stone. Onamin or wunnamin are Ojibway words for red ochre, a chalky red mineral that was mixed with animal and fish oils and used by the shaman to record their stories of power, medicine and celebration. These picture writings are found on rock faces throughout the park and considered to be spiritual sites. (See our book review, page 5).

The many 'writings' (pictographs) in Woodland Caribou tell wondrous and fascinating stories of Ojibway traditions and spiritual beliefs. Many of these writings are from 1,000 years past, when a shaman healer carefully enchanted medicinal powers from the land and the animals, or when the land and the animals answered his call. In the Ojibway world the animals and earth are embraced as brother and sisters, each with their own powers and temperament.



Haggart River.



A Shaman holding an otter medicine bag. Power lines radiate from his head, Bloodvein River.

*They say that when you pass by a pictograph in the Woodland Caribou Park to paddle slowly and quietly— "maybe you'll hear a murmur or chant; the song of the healer resonating in the depths of your wilderness".*

It is customary, when encountering one of these writings, to make a small offering (tobacco was a traditional offering) and to ask the manitous (pronounced *muni-doe*) for permission to pass. The manitous were the spirits that inhabited every special place on the landscapes; they lived in the rock.

A park aptly named Woodland Caribou. The boreal population of forest-dwelling woodland caribou are listed as nationally threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. About 120 animals roam within Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. The group represents one of the largest concentrations in Ontario south of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

### Access, permits and fees

There are no roads or ranger stations within the Woodland Caribou Park. Access points are few and limited by rough logging roads and adjoining waterways. Float planes, however, are allowed to land in the park and can provide shuttle service to and from the park's interior. Permits are required; visitors will need either a day use permit or an interior camping permit. To obtain a list of fees and regulations visit the Ontario Parks web site or contact the park office in Red Lake. All revenues generated from usage fees are used exclusively to support the Ontario Parks Provincial Parks Program.

Unlike the BWCA, the Woodland Caribou Park is not overused. From 2002 through 2004 the average number of interior camping permits issued was under 230 per season representing an average of 775 campers visiting the park from May to September each year.

*The Woodland Caribou Provincial Park is truly a place "Where Nature Still Rules".* □

### For more information contact:

Superintendent  
Woodland Caribou Provincial Park  
PO Box 5003  
Red Lake, Ontario POV 2mo  
E-mail: woodland.caribou@mnr.gov.on.ca



The Isle Royale Property Owners' Association, with families, at Rock Harbor Lodge, 1925. Summer residents and resort owners organized in 1922, when 65,000 acres of land were sold to a Minnesota lumber company; there were fears that the recreational qualities of the island might be damaged. Reorganized as the Isle Royale Protective Association in 1931, the group supported the idea of a national park but sought to protect its interests by calling for regulation of commercial fishing to protect sport fishing and life leases for summer residents, their children, and grandchildren. Photograph from *Isle Royale A Photographic History*, by Thomas and Kendra Gale.

# Isle Royale; 65 Years Later

By Charlie Mahler, Wilderness News Contributor

**In a brewing controversy reminiscent of those surrounding the removal of cabins and resorts in the Boundary Waters Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park, holders of life leases to cabins in Isle Royale National Park are seeking to change sales agreements their families made with the Park Service leading to the establishment of the island park in 1940.**

With many lessees – typically the former minor children of islanders who sold land for the park while retaining provisional rights to their vacation homes – reaching old age they, through efforts of their organization, the Isle Royale Family and Friends Association, are seeking to extend claims to their vacation “camps” beyond the generation of family members named in the original agreements with the government.

Roughly a dozen families, many of whose surnames decorate the Isle Royale map, still hold private claim to ancestral cabins in the 572,000 acre park which is otherwise almost entirely wilderness. The Park Service owns the land on which the private cabins stand as well as the cabins themselves. Lessees own the personal property inside their cabins and have rights to the cabins during the lives of those listed in the original agreement.

In the last decade, a handful of cabins have reverted to the Park Service, while others have stayed with families who have negotiated temporary access to their ancestral dwellings via special use agreements after the death of the last listed lessee.

Beginning in late 2003, however, the Association has attempted to engage the Park Service in discussions to grant the remaining lessees indefinite leases. The Association argues that the families’ continued presence in the Park is critical for the preservation and interpretation of the cultural history of the park.

“I don’t think the Park Service can allocate the funds or has serious enough interest in keeping up the structures unless people are there to keep them up themselves,” Grant Merritt, vice-president of the Association says. “It costs money and I don’t think they want to spend the money on that.”

Additionally, Merritt stresses that the life lease-holding families are vessels for vast amounts of cultural history regarding the island and the families who settled it, and should get consideration on that account. “I don’t think just preserving structures up there makes a lot of sense,” he said. The Association has been offering guided tours, hosted by family members, of some of the historic cabins. The Association is also underwriting a documentary film about island families and has hopes of establishing an interpretive program for park visitors.

Sensing that another avenue might be needed to reach their goal of continued occupancy, however, and encouraged by the recent passage of a law protecting a similar historic vacation community in a California national park, the Association recently informed Park Superintendent Phyllis Green that it would seek federal legislation to ensure permanent residence in the park.

“We’re going to work with the Park Service all the way up to the Director in Washington to see if they are making any changes in their traditional view, that the inholders should be removed when the life leases expire, or if they are going to change in light of the Mineral King case,” Merritt said. “We don’t want to delay getting a bill introduced in Congress to pursue the legislative action.”

**“I don’t think the Park Service can allocate the funds or has serious enough interest in keeping up the structures unless people are there to keep them up themselves,”**

– Grant Merritt, Isle Royale Family and Friends Association

Mineral King is a community of vacation cabin residents in Sequoia National Park that won the right to indefinite residence in the park after legislation passed by the last Congress was signed into law by the President in late 2004. The community won its rights, over the opposition of the local Sierra Club chapter, in part by characterizing itself as a living historic community.

Marvin Roberson, the Mackinac (Michigan) Chapter of the Sierra Club’s Forest Policy Specialist suspected the organization would oppose similar legislation aimed at extending life lessee tenure on Isle Royale.

*continued on page 4*

***“We’re in favor of as few structures and as few permanent residents in the park as we can have.”***

***– Marvin Roberson, Sierra Club***



The 1911 Merritt cabin near Blake Point. Photograph from *Isle Royale A Photographic History*, by Thomas and Kendra Gale.

*continued from page 3*

“Those houses were purchased, not taken without compensation,” he explained. “And, a life lease is fairly generous. Many leases are 25-year leases. We’re in favor of as few structures and as few permanent residents in the park as we can have.”

Roberson noted that lease holders across the national park system typically fight the termination of their occupancy, and typically lose the fight.

So far, Superintendent Green has kept the Association’s proposals at arm’s length. In her written responses to Association correspondence, Green has acknowledged the importance of the original lessees and their families to the park, has largely supported the educational and interpretive efforts the Association has undertaken or is planning, but has stopped short of opening the door to extending the leases.

Green did offer the Association the possibility of providing housing for Association members working on cultural and historical projects supported by the Park Service, but wouldn’t commit to “unrestricted continued use” of the members own summer cabins after the lease had expired.

Association President David Barcum dismissed Green’s offer in a letter earlier this year asking rhetorically: “How would we convince anyone among our families to expend time, energy and financial resources in the goal of preservation of historic park resources in those circumstances?”

Green ultimately looks to the Park’s Cultural Landscape and Historical Resources planning process as the proper avenue to determine the future of the park’s historic physical structures. Green admits, however, that the planning process will likely take three years and is only in the early stages.

Likely scenarios for cabins and other historic buildings – many of which are eligible for consideration for National Register status – in the park include use by Park Service officials (the Artist in Residence and a Park Service law enforcement ranger each use ceded cabins now), use as short-term rentals to the general public, preservation as museum-like historic sites, and demolition.

“Some folks I talk to would like to see them quietly molder away or be demolished,” Green offered. “Some folks that we talk to say, the cabin owners had a great opportunity for a long time, if you’re going to keep them as a historic structure can the public have access to them?”

Green encouraged citizens make their opinions on the topic known to the Park Service. Citizens can be placed on a mailing list to receive information about the cultural and historical planning process by contacting Liz Valencia at Isle Royale National Park, 800 East Lakeshore Drive, Houghton, MI 49931-1895 or [liz\\_valencia@nps.gov](mailto:liz_valencia@nps.gov).

## Voyageurs National Park Names New Superintendent

*By Michael Banker, Voyageurs National Park Association*

**On August 11, 2005, Kathleen (Kate) Miller was named the new Superintendent of Voyageurs National Park (VNP). The position was made vacant last May when Barbara West left her post of ten years as the Park’s Superintendent to assume the role of Superintendent at Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico. Miller, who was Deputy Superintendent of VNP under West, has been the acting Superintendent for the Park since West’s departure.**

As the new Superintendent, Miller will play an important role for VNP that includes broad authority over most aspects of park management, setting and interpreting park policies, and working with gateway communities and other stakeholders on behalf of the Park.

Miller is enthusiastic about her new assignment, recently noting, “Over the past three years as Deputy Superintendent, I have become deeply committed to the magnificent resources and talented staff at this park.”

A native Minnesotan, Miller comes to the position well qualified for the new leadership responsibilities that she will officially assume on August 21. Her diverse background includes extensive experience, both within and outside of the National Park Service (NPS), providing leadership and direction to a broad spectrum of programs involving historical and natural resource preservation, public education, and citizen involvement.

During her time with the NPS, Miller has directed the NPS history program in Alaska, worked as Historian, Assistant Chief of Resources Management and Chief of Resources Education at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, and Superintendent at Effigy Mounds National Monument. Additionally, Miller has spent time outside of the NPS as the Executive Director of the Sigurd Olson

Environmental Institute and Vice President of Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin and as Department Head of the Minnesota Historical Society’s Northern Historic Sites.

Former Superintendent West will be remembered for the many positive impacts she had on the park during her tenure. Successfully maneuvering her way through the sometimes-contentious debates surrounding the park, consistently dealing evenhandedly with the various stakeholders in the issues, West was integral to a number of efforts establishing the long-term preservation of the unique natural, recreational, and historical resources in VNP. These efforts included helping to institute



Kate Miller

better water level management initiatives in the Namakan and Rainy Reservoirs and directing the creation of the park’s current General Management Plan.

# John S. Pillsbury, Jr. Remembers NWNL's Ile de Bord



Photo courtesy the  
Star Tribune

*John S. Pillsbury, Jr. died on March 28th at the age of 92. We'll remember John as the former chief executive of a life insurance company, a Minnesota gubernatorial candidate, a civic leader and, as an avid and enthusiastic, sportsman. In an interview given to Wilderness News in November 2004, John recalled his fond memories for the Northwestern National Life Insurance Company's lodge, Ile de Bord, on Basswood Lake.*

*by Diane Rose, Wilderness News Contributor*

From the 1930s through the 1950s, today's Boundary Waters Canoe area (BWCA) was home to a thriving community of private resorts, and Basswood Lake was a prime destination. More than 30 buildings once ringed the lake, most of which were independent lodges catering primarily to vacationing fishermen.

Unique among the Basswood structures was a collection of cabins and other buildings on an island near the southern tip of the lake. The island, known as Ile de Bord because of its location next to the Canadian border, was owned by Northwestern National Life Insurance Co. (NWNL). Every summer from 1933 to 1958, the 20 winners of a sales contest conducted the previous October were treated to several days of fishing, feasting and relaxing at Basswood Lake.

John S. Pillsbury, Jr. was president of NWNL at the end of the Ile de Bord era. He presided over the company's sale of the island to the government in 1958, as international wilderness protection efforts grew. By the 1950s, seaplanes had been banned and government land purchases were accelerating. The Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibited road building, logging, motorized travel and commercial businesses in the BWCA.

Pillsbury was sorry to see the property go, and he remembers the days of what were known as the "ABC Club parties" fondly. "Ile de Bord was highly regarded by the NWNL agents, and was my home on the lake as long as we went up there," Pillsbury said, recalling private trips to Basswood Lake with his wife and three children.

Fishing was the highlight of all visits to Ile de Bord, according to Pillsbury, and photos printed in an NWNL newsletter provide evidence that the walleye, northern and bass were plentiful and sometimes very large. The insurance salesmen didn't leave their sense of competition back at the office while at Ile de Bord. In fact, \$10 jackpot prizes were awarded each evening for biggest fish of the day. One of the 1958 prizes was won by Pillsbury but, he said with a twinkle in his eye, "not legally."

Meals were also a big hit. The *N/W National News* newsletter from August 1, 1958, describes the preparation of fresh-caught fish for a shore lunch. The fish "are prepared by the guides with a few expert strokes of a sharp knife, and immediately immersed, after a coating of flour and corn meal, in a boiling cauldron of lard and bacon drippings.

In a minute or two the fillets are done to a golden brown and are served with sliced tomatoes, onions, beans or corn, toast, bread, jam and topped off with fruit, cookies and cake."

The NWNL newsletter describes the ABC parties as "one of the finest outdoor experiences available on the North American continent." The long, descriptive story about that summer's party begins: "Tanned by the sun, armed with anglers' proverbial tales and refreshed after four days of fishing in the invigorating, pine-scented air of the wilderness country on the Ontario-Minnesota border, members of the 1958 ABC party returned home earlier this week." A full page of photos carried this headline: "Be a Basswood Leader in October and This is What You'll Have in Store Next Summer!" □



## Book Review

### Reading Rock Art

Interpreting The Indian Rock Paintings Of The Canadian Shield

by Grace Rajnovich

Published by Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc. (2nd Edition 2002, 191 pages, \$21.95 Softcover)  
ISBN 0-920474-72-1

Reviewed by Timothy Eaton

***Have you ever discovered, while paddling the lakes and rivers of Quetico Superior Region, the picture writings of the Algonkian, Cree and Ojibway peoples only to be dumbstruck by their mysterious presence, their use of symbols and the stories they must tell? If so...***

... Grace Rajnovich's book [Reading Rock Art](#) will unravel the mysteries of these ancient writings for you. Her book offers new and plausible explanations to this awe-inspiring rock art found throughout the Quetico Superior Region.

She uses her 14 year study as a field archaeologist for the Ontario government to build upon previous studies of her peers, J.W. Powell, Kenneth Kidd and Selwyn Dewdney to present us a theory and explanation based on the Midewiwin Medicine Societies of the Algonkian peoples.

She points out that these rock paintings, with their bright red figures of people, animals, canoes, and bows-and-arrows common to the boreal forest life are also bound with the signs of medicine—drums, rattles, medicine bags and other items precious to the Indian healers (see [Woodland Caribou Park story pictograph](#)).

The Algonkian-speaking peoples relied on "medicine" and a deep spiritual connection to the manitous (pronounced *muni-doe*), the spirits who live in the rock. And "medicine" held a broad meaning; it could mean "mystery" or "power" and included not only the activity of curing with tonics from plants and minerals but also the receipt of powers from the manitous for healing, hunting and battle. "Rock art," she concludes, "is a spectacular record of achievement painted by the seekers of medicine".

Her book draws more attention to the astonishing legacy of the "picture writings" left by the Algonkian, Cree and Ojibway peoples; astonishing both in their antiquity and their

ability to elicit an awe-inspiring sense of wonder with every new discovery.



## Wilderness News

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### CONSERVATION ISSUES

# Using Science for Sustainable Forest Management

The long-range health of Minnesota's forests will some day be improved by management decisions that better recognize the opportunities for restoring ecological forest health while maintaining economic productivity. The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) is pursuing this opportunity by advocating for range of natural variability based forest management at the federal, state, county and local levels and by developing practical applications of the science behind this type of management. The MCEA believes this science-based initiative holds great promise for ensuring positive system-wide change in the way forests are managed.

### Range of Natural Variability – A Science-based Vision for Healthy Forests

The Range of Natural Variability (RNV) refers to the expected range of conditions in a naturally functioning forest. These conditions include the age, mix and distribution of forest types throughout the forested regions of the state. RNV provides a benchmark for measuring these conditions against the current state of our forests over time. RNV-based management attempts to emulate natural forces, like wind and fire, with the goal of returning Minnesota's forests to the naturally diverse and economically productive landscapes that have been so important to our state's heritage.

### Creating Tools to Measure the Range of Natural Variability

The MCEA with the support of the Marbrook and Weyerhaeuser Family Foundations has been working with the Natural Resources Research Institute to develop a computer modeling tool that will allow measurement of forest conditions. The RNV tool will provide a science-based, quantifiable way to evaluate the effects of

proposed timber harvests and to suggest alternatives for improving forest management.

The RNV analysis tool utilizes a variety of data on existing and historic forest composition, including: soil types, climactic factors, and historic frequency and severity of natural disturbances such as wildfire and wind. Using computer models, MCEA and other users can determine whether the proposed land management moves conditions toward or away from the range of natural variability, which is the historic make up of a healthy forest.

MCEA will utilize the tool to evaluate proposed timber harvests and work with land planners and managers to improve long-term forest health. When the tool is complete, MCEA will use the modeling results to identify management options that best achieve healthy forests that include a broad range of natural diversity. Combined with other information, tools, and MCEA's in-house forestry expertise, RNV aids in developing sustainable forest management strategies and evaluating the trade-offs among management alternatives.

### ALONG THE TRAIL



Photo courtesy of Andy Breckenridge

Our *Wilderness News* correspondent Charlie Mahler (far left) and his canoe mate, John Skemp (center) were spotted in Nunavut on the Kazan River near Thirty Mile Lake on July 23rd, by Andy Breckenridge and his wife Rachel (far right). Charlie and John set out from Kasba Lake on July 1st headed for Baker Lake travelling some 500 miles retracing part of Ernest Oberholtzer's legendary 1912 route to Hudson Bay. We anxiously await his return to the *Wilderness News* quill in early September. (See Charlie's story on Isle Royale in this issue).

### Contact Wilderness News

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

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