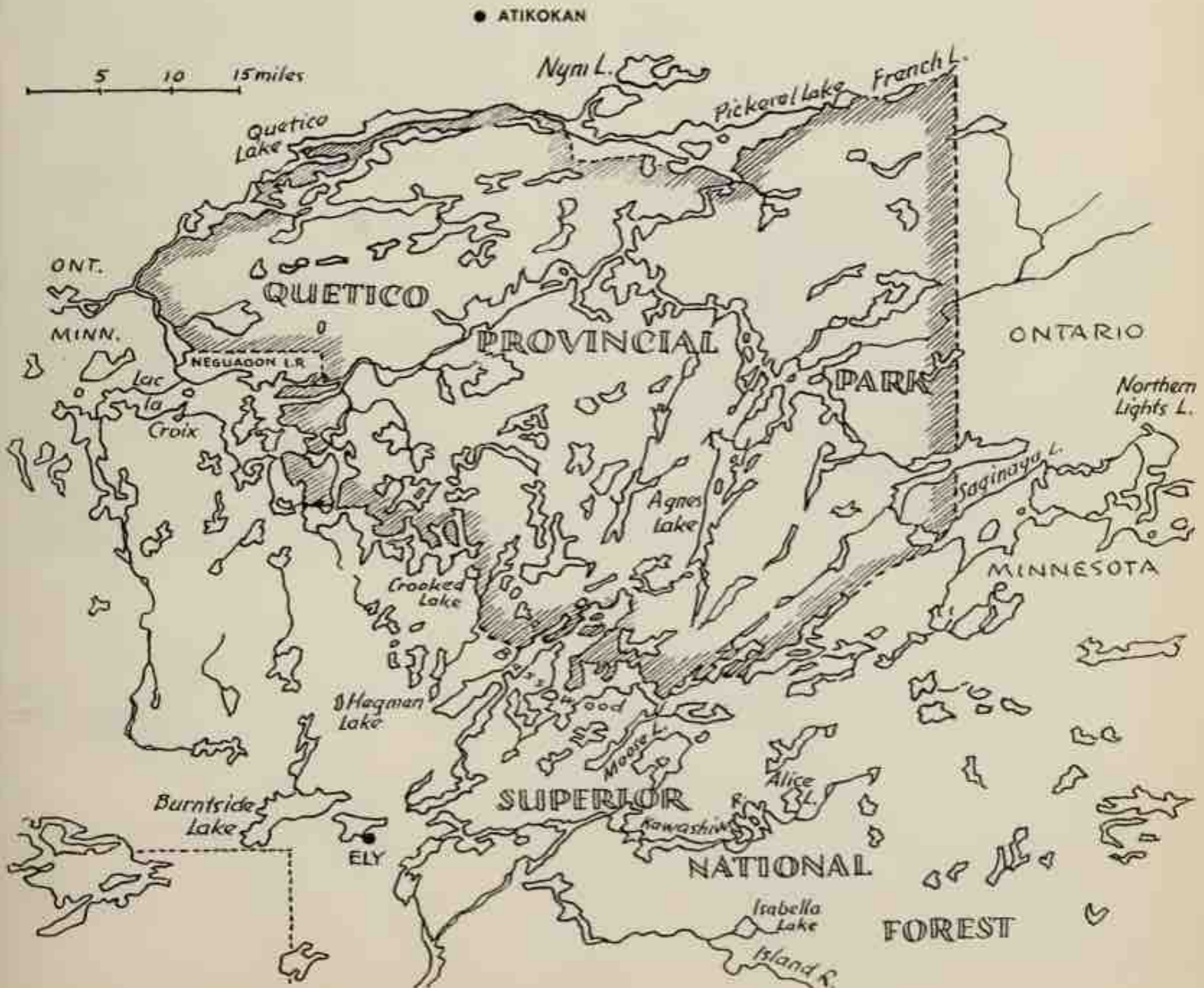


Quetico-Superior Country

I have already mentioned setting up our base camp at French Lake in Quetico Provincial Park that first summer of 1957. A few days after arrival, an airlift via the Park "grub run" brought my son Kee and me to Basswood Lake at the south end of the Park. An hour later we were paddling north, heading for Agnes Lake via Summer, Sultry, and Silence lakes, along a route ringed by pencil marks on our map that indicated the likelihood of pictograph sites (p. 3).

My diary notes on July 9 that "We have now passed through two areas

marked on our maps for possible sites. There has been no sign of anything remotely resembling a pict." By noon of the following day we were out on Agnes Lake, heading south, our "hopes high, heightened by enormous cliffs on right—awesome overhang—magnificent colours." But alas: "We examined every cliff face minutely as we passed, from waterline as high as we could see, and no trace of pict. . . . no pict on the cliffs south-west of the Narrows. . . . One island was left. . . . Paddling around the east side we found a few



undistinguished-looking faces . . . and at the base of one the barest indication of a pictograph. Kee took three colour shots and I one b. & w. I measured and sketched it." So the first—and most unspectacular—site was recorded.

We paddled north again on Agnes, I with the sinking feeling that that year's exceptionally high water had covered all the sites but this. It was with dragging paddle-strokes that we explored a group of islands in the centre of the lake. Then we were suddenly staring at Site #2: fourteen symbols of varying strength in various shades of dull red. A bear, a canoe, and several hand smears were easy to identify. The rest were too abstract or amorphous, with one exception. The latter set our imaginations going in a way that makes me smile now, but also makes me less impatient with wild interpretations from the uninitiated. To my then untutored eyes it looked like a monk and a monster together in a boat. Since then I have seen variations on the same theme: in all likelihood two Maymaygwayshi in a canoe, with upraised arms. In this case I had yet to learn the subtle distinction of shade and colour between the Indian pigment and natural rust stains on the rock, and imagination did the rest.

With two sites figuratively under our belts we set out hopefully for

Williams Lake. This was the most definite report on our list. We had even seen photographs of the paintings. All reports but one agreed that they were on a sizable cliff at the west end. The exception placed it on a neighbouring unnamed lake. As the reader will have guessed we found that the minority report was right. Here we recorded three thunderbirds, a canoe, two simple abstractions, and a weird little moose. The next day we found our fourth site on the little unnamed lake between Agnes and Kawnipi.

The Nequagon Reserve on Lac la Croix, just west and south of Quetico Park, is only a few miles north of the pictographs on the big "Painted Rock." There I interviewed Charlie Ottertail, one of the few older Indians who still cherished his ancestors' ways and beliefs. The sun had set and the light was dim inside the Ottertail cabin. "A small dark room," to quote from my diary, "the frail but still vital Indian on the floor under a grey blanket, rising on one elbow to speak, sinking back between speeches . . . a lean intelligent face."

Yet there was little he knew about the pictographs: only that he was sure they had been there when the treaty of 1873 was signed.

For sheer naturalism there are no other paintings of moose that I have seen in the Shield country to compare



Site #4





A likely Mishipizhiw at Darky Lake

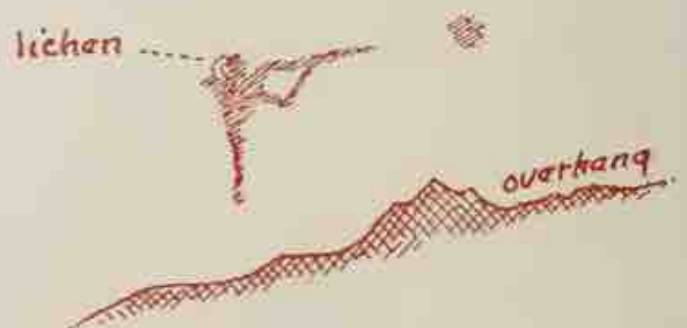
another small site on the opposite shore that we had missed.

On the same trip that Kee and I recorded the Darky Lake site we paddled east to Agnes Lake, recording three minor sites that are not illustrated here. At the Narrows into Burt Lake we found extensive iron stains temptingly suggestive of an early Ford car! Nearby, however, were two genuine handprints and some other faded material. From there on we had no reports to search for, and were delighted to run across

two little moose on the waterway south of Hurlburt Lake. Finally, on the west shore of Agnes, just opposite the little island where we awaited our airlift, we found two painted rabbits, and nearby four animals that I judged to be Indian in origin: these pecked or pounded into the rock but so shallowly that we paddled past them without seeing them at first, although we knew they were there.

These are the only petroglyphs I have found to date on a vertical rock face. At Nett Lake, Cache Bay, Shoal

Darky Lake:
man with gun,
and projectile?



Pictograph Sites

SITES marked by (*) are not illustrated in this book. Sites marked by (†) are outside of the Canadian Shield.

1957

1. Agnes Lake, south of Narrows, Quetico Provincial Park, 23, 24
2. Agnes Lake, centre, Q.P.P., 25, 58
3. "Ahsin Lake," southwest of Williams Lake, Q.P.P., 24
4. *"Keewatin Lake," between Agnes and Kawnipi, Q.P.P., 24
5. Lac la Croix, Irving Island, Q.P.P., 3, 24-9, 82
6. *Lac la Croix, just west of site # 5, Q.P.P.
7. Crooked Lake, Basswood River, Minn., 16, 29-30, 113
8. Darky Lake, Q.P.P., 33, 34, 36, 40, 114
9. *Burt Lake, Q.P.P., 34
10. An unnamed lake north of Hurlburt Lake, Q.P.P., 34
11. *Agnes Lake, central west shore, Q.P.P., 34

1958

12. Cache Bay, Q.P.P., 16, 30, 32, 34, 40
13. Northern Lights Lake, Nelson Bay,
14. Northern Lights Lake, Trafalgar Bay, 32
15. Pictured Lake, southwest of Fort William, 54, 73, 74
16. Hegman Lake, Superior National Forest, Minnesota, 16, 36, 38
17. Kawishiwi River, south of Lake Alice, S.N.F., Minn., 37
18. Burntside Lake, west of Ely, Minn., 37, 73
19. *Island River, south of Isabella Lake, S.N.F., Minn., 36, 37

20. *Nett Lake, Minnesota (petroglyphs), 34, 38, 42
21. Lower Manitou Lake, west shore of Narrows, 71, 72
22. Painted Narrows, Rainy Lake, 16, 40, 89
23. Namakan Narrows, north entrance, 38, 39
24. Namakan Narrows, centre, 38, 39
25. Namakan Lake, island in east end, 38, 39
26. Cuttle Lake, small site, 69, 70
27. Cuttle Lake, large site, 10, 11, 69, 70, 71
28. Southwest of Sioux Narrows, Lake of the Woods, 46, 48, 49
29. Blindfold Lake, 2, 46, 55
30. *"Irene Lake," east of Kenora
31. Northern Twin Lake, 4-7
32. *Orient Bay, south of Royal Windsor Lodge, 75, 76
33. *French River, east of Recollect Falls, 93
34. Ninth Lake, East Spanish River, 88, 89
35. Fairy Point, Lake Missinaibi, 2, 84-87
36. Agawa Rock, Lake Superior Provincial Park, 10, 14, 16, 17, 79-82, 113, 114

1959

37. Mazinaw Lake, Bon Echo Provincial Park, 22, 94-100
38. Little Mazinaw Lake, south of Bon Echo, 94, 95, 100
39. Collins Inlet, Georgian Bay, 92