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SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT ON  
LAKE NIPIGON FUR TRADING POSTS

by  
K. C. A. Dawson

1970

Supplementary Report On  
Lake Nipigon Fur Trade Posts

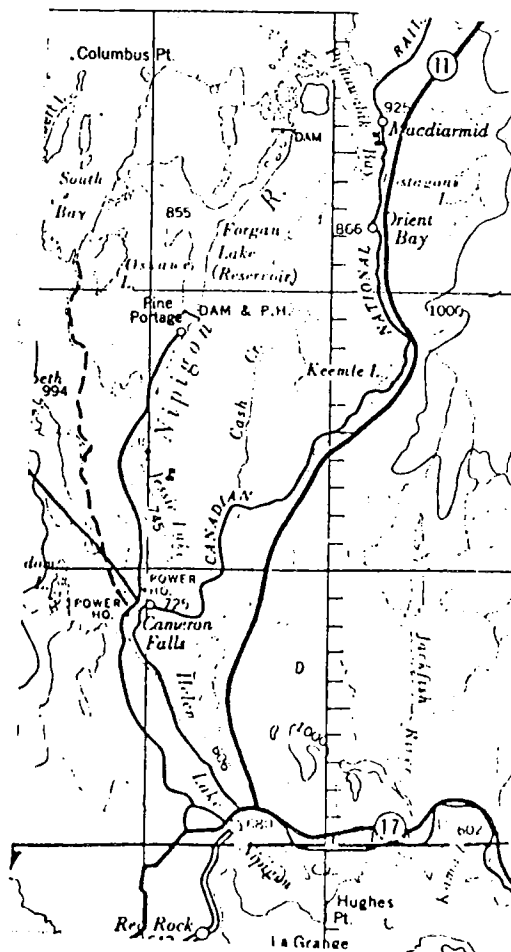
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SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT ON  
LAKE NIPIGON FUR TRADING POSTS

by  
K. C. A. Dawson, Lakehead University

Under support of the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board an attempt was made in 1969 to locate the many fur trade posts which until the twentieth century characterized Euro-Canadian presence on Lake Nipigon. The report filed with the Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives suggested that a number of locations warranted further initial investigation (1). In accord with these suggestions the north shore of Lake Nipigon and the Nipigon River mouth to Lake Helen were re-examined. This supplementary report records the results.



Map 1  
Nipigon River Area  
Scale 8 miles to  
1 inch

Nipigon River Area

H.B.C. Red Rock Post

Ground examination in the preceding year recorded a small stone foundation on the west shore of the Nipigon River below the CNR line which was believed to be from the period of the Hudson's Bay Company (Figure 1). Re-examination of the location in conjunction with local historic records shows this to have been the powder magazine built by the H.B.C. about 1885. A brief history of this post is presented to provide the background upon which the conclusion was based.

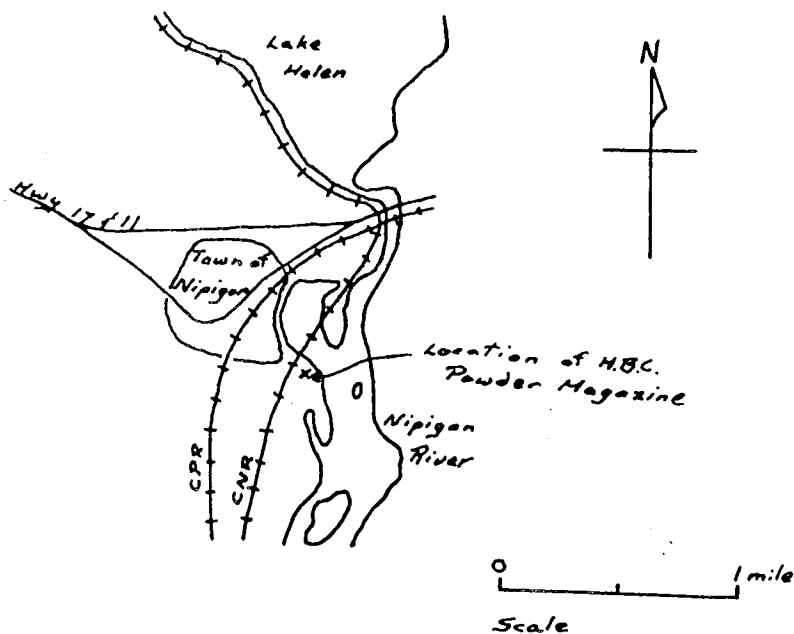


Figure 1  
Town of Nipigon.

The establishment was an outpost of Fort William which was erected in 1859 at the mouth of the Nipigon River to protect the post on the west shore of Lake Nipigon from the endeavors of the American traders to penetrate the interior (2). In addition to traders in the area such as Bradshaw & Co. from Superior City and a trader named Bolton, (3), (4), Alexander Clark built a post at the mouth of the river the year after the establishment of the H.B.C. post (4), (5).

The Hudson's Bay Company post was known as the Pierre Rouge or Red Rock (1). The name was changed in the trading season 1900-01 to Nipigon and Nipigon which was the name of the interior post was changed to Nipigon House (6).

Some indication of the location and buildings at the original post can be gleaned from the records. In 1871 when a decision was made to remove the headquarters of the District of Nipigon to Red Rock "...there were only two or three dilapidated log cabins..." (7). These appear to have been two buildings for protection of goods, a small shanty for the men and a wharf (8). With the transfer of the headquarters the post was rebuilt and expanded (9). An inspection report of 1888 includes a plan showing the post in relation to other buildings at Red Rock (10). The powder magazine is shown south of the main cluster of buildings. A later plan accompanies the 1895 report. This shows the powder magazine beyond a small creek which ran through the settlement (Figure 2), (12). The position corresponds to that of the foundation recorded in 1969. The building is of stone, roofed with tin.

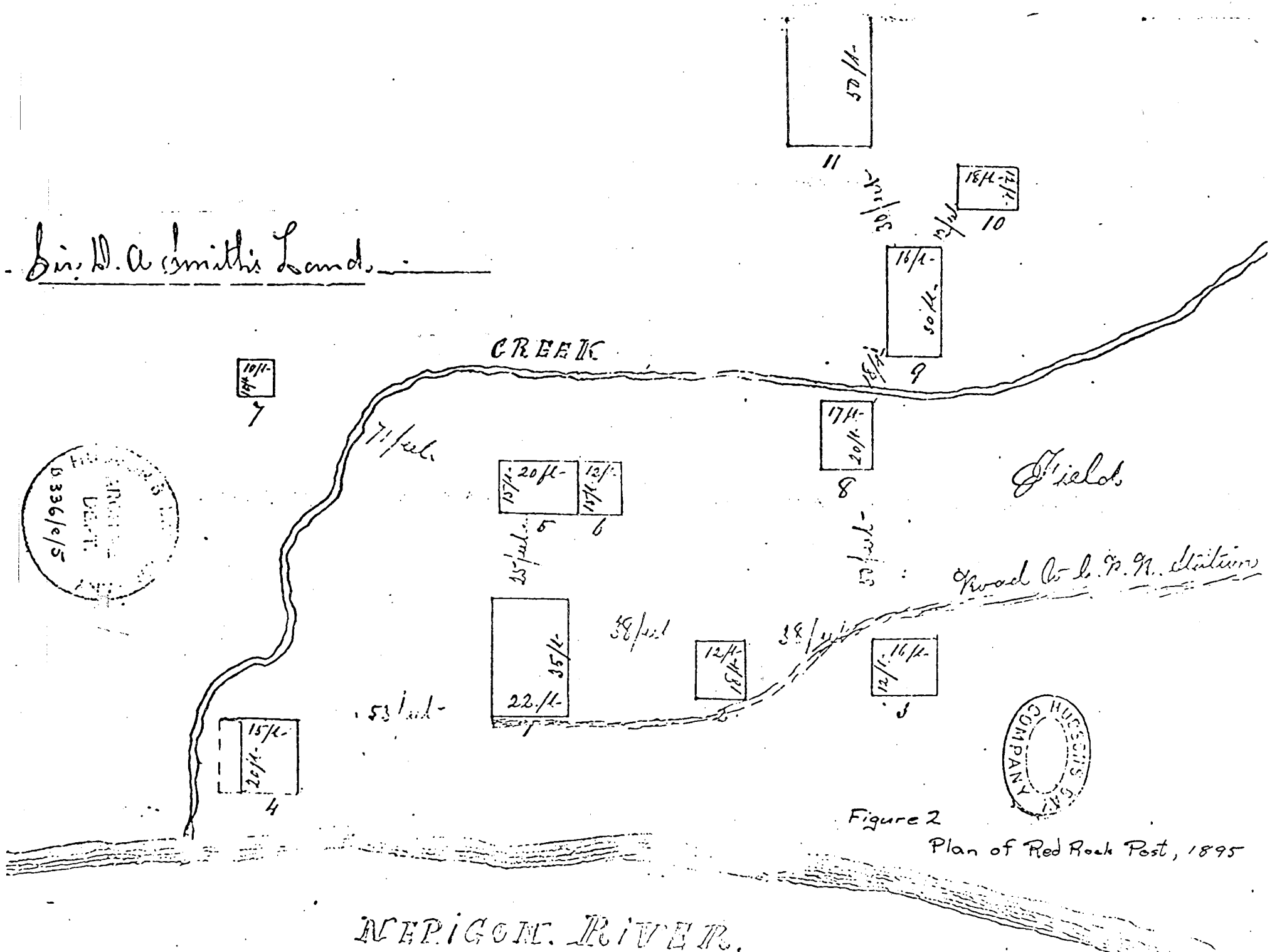
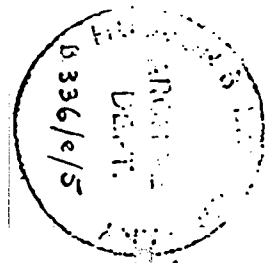
Based on the presence of the magazine in the report of 1888 and its apparent absence in a water colour believed to date about 1880 (Figure 3) the powder/must have been built between 1881 and 1888. No other foundation ruins were in evidence. Test pits in the area north of the creek along the shore might reveal evidence of the store and wharf warehouse. This would require town permission for the area is now a road right of way.

The copy of the water colour referred to above came from the Reynolds family. Mr. T. A. Reynolds was a postmaster at Nipigon between 1880 and 1881 (11). He presumably acquired the picture during his period of service at the post. The original is now in the possession of Mr. W. J. P. Thompson of Rural Route Number 4 of Sudbury whose wife's mother was Mrs. Maurice Reynolds of Brockville. It is of interest to note that the water colour shows the Canadian Pacific Survey crew flag over the tents.

Figure 4 is an Armstrong picture of the post circa 1870 and Figure 5 is a photograph of the post about 1884. The latter date is based on the incomplected C.P.R. trackage shown in the foreground. This track was completed by 1885. Figure 6 shows the approximate location of the H.B.C. overlaid on a recent town map.

No evidence of the other trading posts at the mouth of the Nipigon was discovered apart from the town records which indicate the Revillon Freres post was on Front Street and that McKirdy's store was opposite the railway station.

Sir D. A. Smith's Land.



CREEK

Fields

Wood to the P. & N. station



Figure 2

Plan of Red Rock Post, 1895

NEPIGON RIVER.

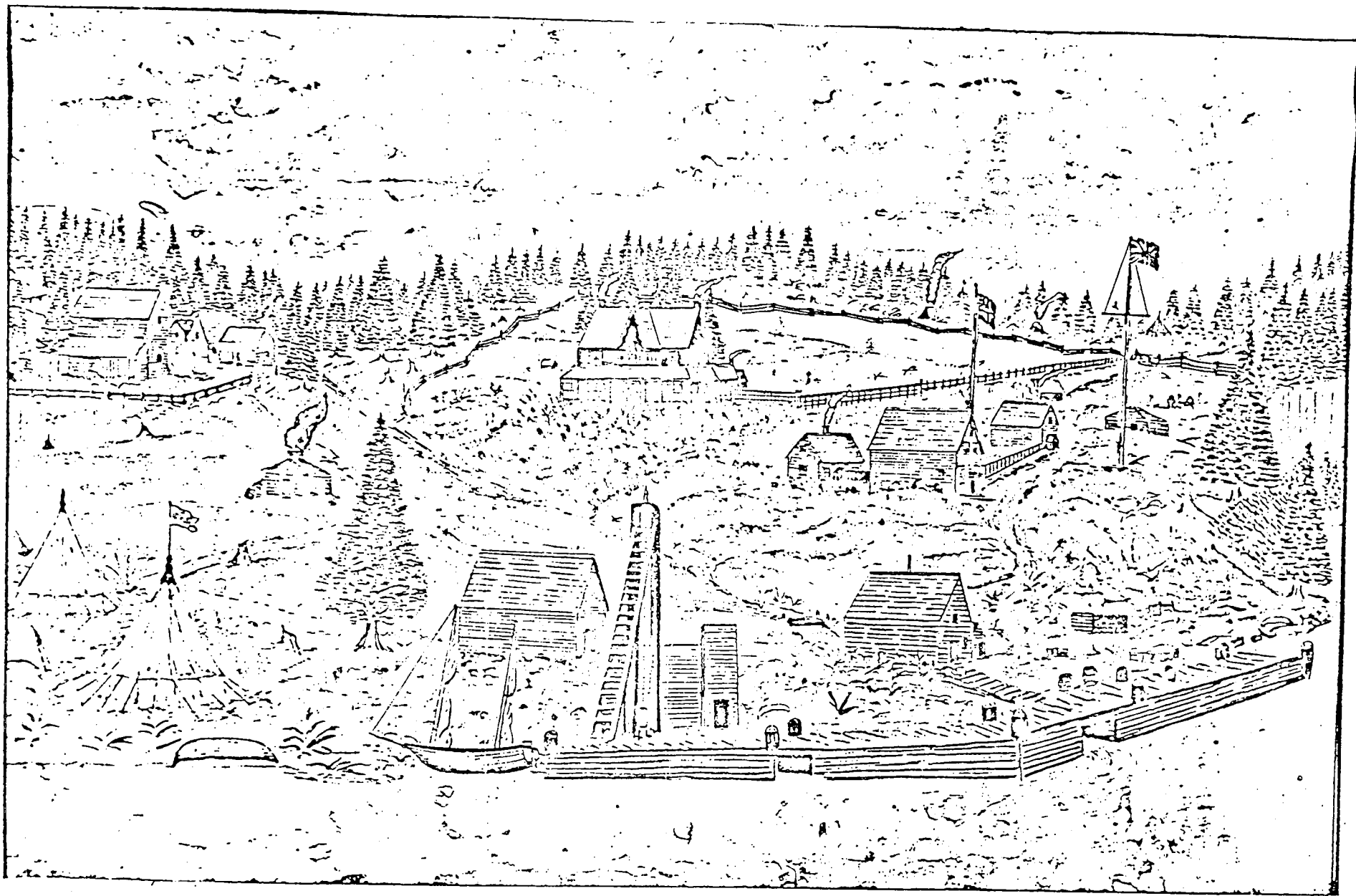


Figure 3

U.S. COY POST RED ROCK, NEVADA TERR.  
1861

Sketch of Red Rock - Circa 1861



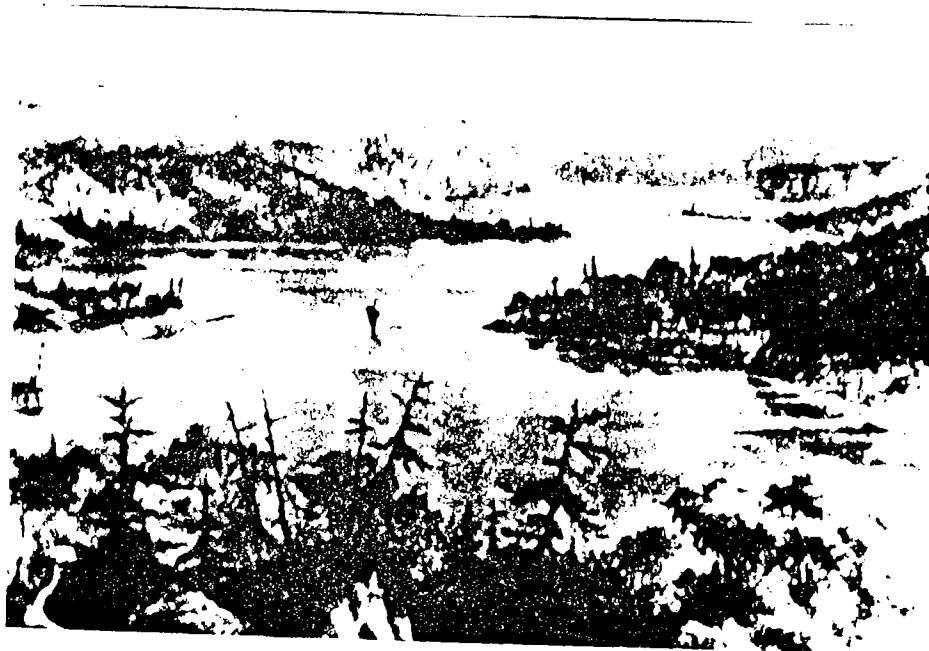


Figure 4 Armstrong Painting of Red Rock  
circa 1870



Figure 5 Photograph of Red Rock Circa 1884

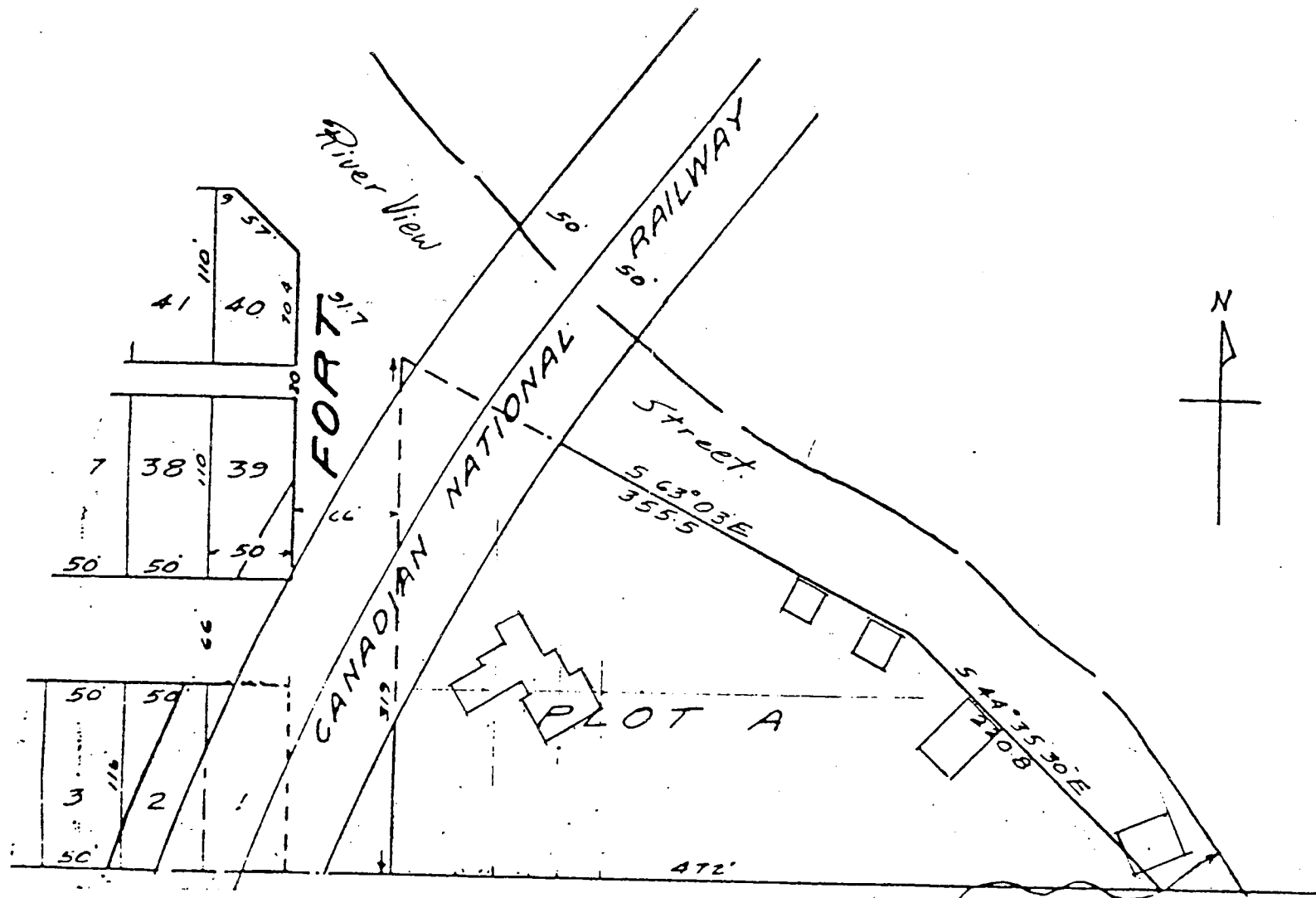


Figure 6 Plan of part of the town of Nipigon showing post location.

Fort Ste. Anne

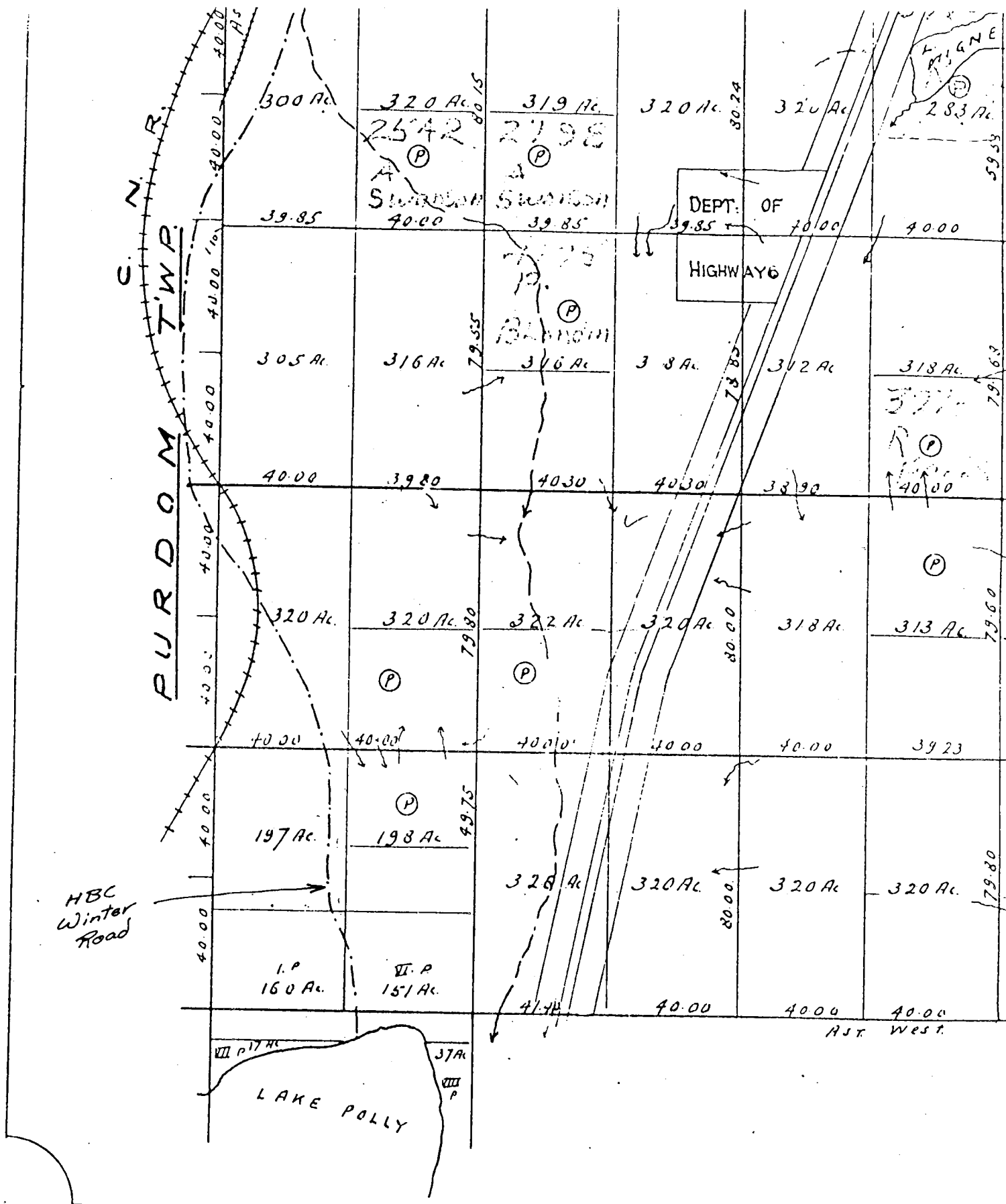
Examination of the east bank of Nipigon River at Lake Helen a possible location of Fort Ste. Anne, as noted in the 1969 report, did not reveal evidence of the post. This would be an unlikely location for here the river current is fast and treacherous. The same comment could be made about the west shore of the river at this point, thus this location was also considered unlikely.

The more attractive location and the one which appears closer to the position given in early maps would be further east in the shallow bay at the bottom end of Lake Helen. This is now land occupied by the Lake Helen Indian Band. While this location was not examined in the light of day local reports tell of hummocks and depressions near the water front suggestive of possible ruins. The location is now being cleared as a trailer park for tourists. It is suggested that given permission of the Indian Band the location at the south end of Lake Helen be subjected to archaeological test excavation in an endeavor to establish whether the French post of 1717 was located at this point.

Hudson's Bay Company Road

The winter road cut in 1890 from Red Rock to Bay View on Lake Nipigon was also the subject of investigation in 1970. On the west side of the Nipigon River at the junction with Lake Helen there is a cut which may be the beginning of the road. However it has been used by logging operations in the area for years, thus if it was the original road it has been markedly changed.

Again examination of a clearing on the north shore of Polly Lake which is believed to be the location of the stopping place referred



T.B.111

LEDGER TWP.

Figure 7 Undated Plan of Ledger Township

to as being ten miles from Red Rock resulted only in evidence of a logging operation. The route from Polly Lake to Lake Wanogosh is marked on an undated plan of Ledger Township (Figure 7). The area has been cut and burned thus the only way it could now be accurately located would be a land survey. There is a possibility that some sections might show out on aerial maps but these were not examined. The terminus of the road on Pijitawabi Bay on the basis of local reports is believed to have been at Orient Bay but this was not established in terms of ground evidence.

#### Sand Point Post

The ruins on the east shore at the mouth of Pijitawabi Bay reported in 1969 were examined in detail and are reported on separately (12). They were the remnants of a late Indian settlement and fur trading post (circa 1890-1939). The latter was established by John Fitzback. He, together with a number of others, appears to have arrived in the area from Quebec about the time of the railway survey. They settled at the Sand Point Indian community, took wives and engaged in the fur trade. Figure 8 shows the trading post settlement.

#### North Shore of Lake Nipigon

The shore west of Mud or Pikitigushi River was examined. The mouths of several creeks and the shore line from Mt. St. John to Rapid Creek were examined with little firm results, the area being inundated. Kenna Creek opposite the Windigo Islands did reveal evidence, in the form of squared timber outlines under a foot of water and a few fragments of broken glass bottles, of a Euro-Canadian establishment. It may be the remains of Windigo Bay H.B.C. post but it was impossible to identify.

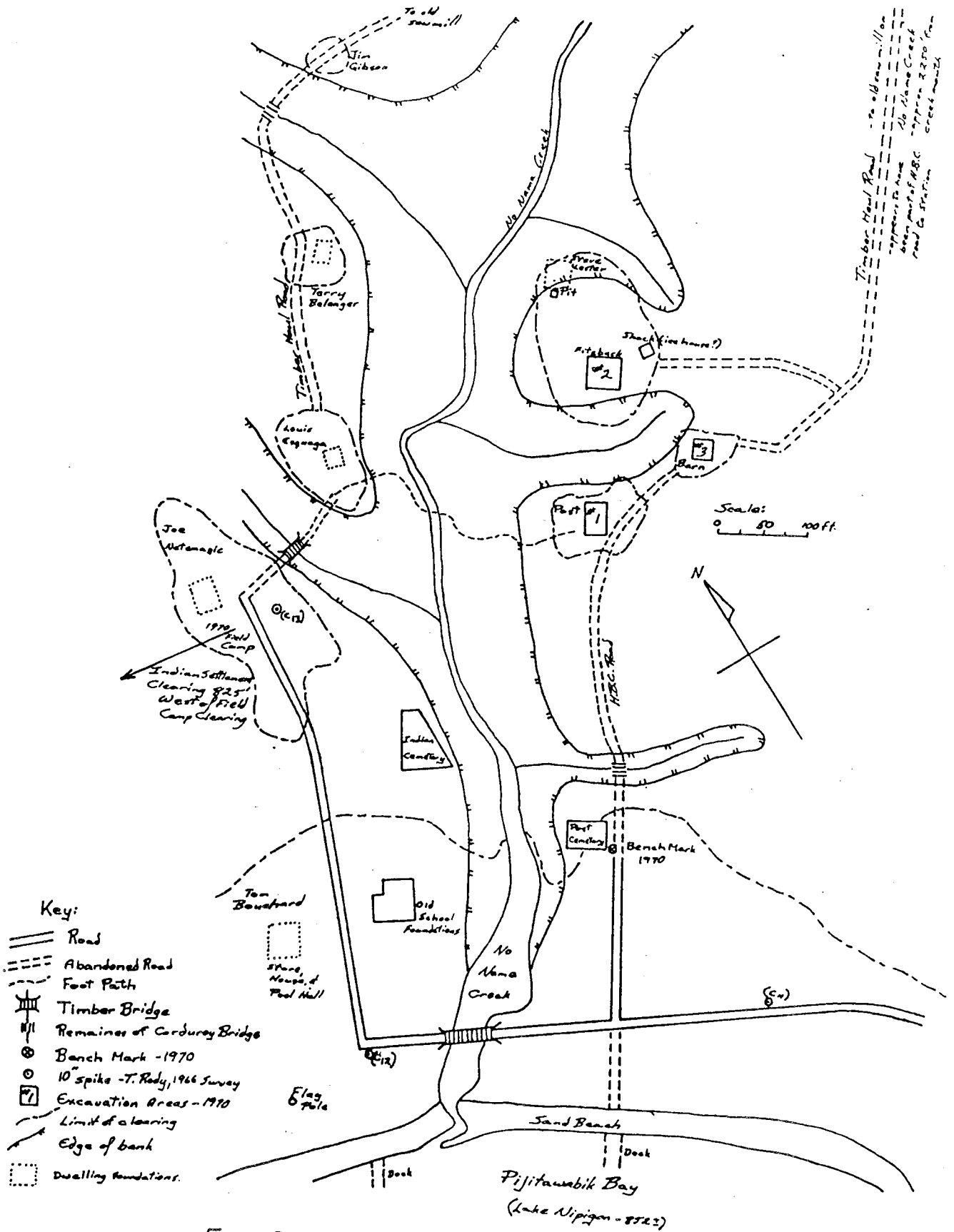


Figure 8  
Blackhead Provincial Park, Sault Point Trading Post  
showing locations of buildings & surrounding features.

(Map 2)  
Figure 9/ shows the location of the post and Figure 10 provides details on the exact location.

Meeting Point, the reported area of conflict between the Revillon Freres and the Hudson's Bay Company, was examined and the portage between Ombabika Bay and North Bay on North Penninsula was examined. In neither case was there evidence of historic settlement.



Figure 9 H.B.C. Post Kenna Creek, Windigo Bay (Map 2)



PHONE 20-7198

# WHITE BOAT & ENGINE WORKS

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WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

November 12/52

Brompton Paper Company  
Nipigon, Ontario.

Gentlemen,

Some months ago we wrote to you about some property we had on Lake Nipigon. This property was formerly owned by the Hudsons Bay Company. It is located on Windigo Bay, and the line of the East side starts about half a mile West of Keena Creek. The Hudsons Bay transfer gives a legal description, but it is rather confusing. However there is an Indian at Willet who works on the section gang. The Tourist Camp operator at Mud River advises me he is familiar with the lines of the property, and possibly arrangements could be made to have him go over the property with someone. We were down there this fall, and the timber seems to be heavy in this area. There is 144 acres in the property.

We realize it is difficult to do much till you know where the property is. The legal description is as follows. In the Province of Ontario in the district of Thunder Bay, and being that parcel or tract of land at Windigo Bay, Lake Nipigon, as shown on the plan of survey of Joseph Cousens, Provincial Land surveyor, dated 29th January, 1834, of record in the Department of Crown Lands.

Reserving on said block of land an allowance of one chain in perpendicular width for a road on the shore of Lake Nipigon and reserving free access to said allowance for road, for all vessels boats and persons.

On property of this type, could you give us an idea as to usual amount of pulpwood per acre, and what is paid per cord for it in standing condition.

Awaiting your reply, we are.

Yours very truly

White Boat & Engine Works

Per.

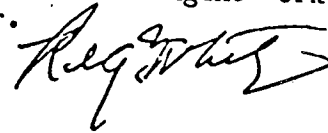
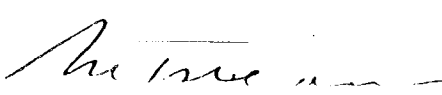


Figure 10 Letter Respecting Post on Windigo Bay

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3. H.B.C. Arch. B. 134/b/28, fo. 749.
4. H.B.C. Arch. B. 134/c/85, fos. 27-28.
5. S. Smith, H.B.C. Winnipeg letter February 10, 1970 to Bob Edwards, Thunder Bay.
6. H.B.C. Arch. Report on Fur Trade for the year ending 31 May 1901, fo. 30.
7. H.B.C. Arch. B. 129/e/14; B. 134/c/123, Crawford to Bissett, 31 July 1872; B. 134/c/125 same to same 26 July and 26 August 1873.
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11. J. G. Gagne, Public Relations Office Northern District Postal Region, North Bay, letter to Postmaster Nipigon 15 October 1970.
12. K. C. A. Dawson, Archaeological Investigations at the Site of the Trading Post at Sand Point, Blacksand Provincial Park, Ontario, 1970, Public Records and Archives, Toronto.

## A REPORT ON LAKE NIPIGON FUR TRADING POSTS

by  
K.C.A. Dawson  
Lakehead University

In the summer of 1969 a search for the early fur trading posts which stood on the shores of Lake Nipigon was undertaken. This investigation was made possible through the generous support of the Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives, Archaeological and Historic Sites Board. The results of this search together with investigations undertaken in earlier years for the Department and observations made during the course of prehistoric reconnaissance over the years is herein recorded.

The report presents a short history of the area based primarily on early maps with emphasis on the early posts located on the interior route from Lake Superior to James Bay. While the route was pioneered by the French traders it was also known to the English from an early date for Thomas Moore's map, circa 1674-78 shows the Albany River (Checittuan) north of the Moose River extending to connect Lake Superior via the Kanogami (Minchenakami) and Lake Nipigon (Timapege Sakehikon) (Thorman, 1941). Each suggested post location is separately discussed and the results of the physical examination of sites are given. The possible discovery of the post established by Dulhut in 1684 on the northeast shore of Lake Nipigon holds the most promise. A detailed archaeological excavation would have to be undertaken to establish the authenticity of discovery. Other later posts were established but the posts in the middle time period remained illusively undetected.

Excerpts pertinent to the area of consideration taken from Statues, Documents and Papers Bearing on The Discussion Respecting Northern and Western Boundaries of the Province of Ontario, 1878, together with salient maps and sketches of the areas investigated are provided at the end of the report.

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EARLY HISTORY OF THE NIPIGON LAKE AREA

A route via Lake Nipigon to James Bay appears to have been known to the French before the first post was established on the lake (circa 1684). In 1660 a Jesuit father -- believed by Reuben G. Thwaites in his edition of Jesuit Relations to have been Druilletts (Vol. XLIV, XLV: Preface, p. 16) -- reporting on activities in 1658, records the story of two Frenchmen who had made their way far inland (Vol. XLIV: p. 237). The two believed to be Radisson and Groseillers (Ibid: Preface, p. 16; Vol. XLV: p. 272, note 23) recorded that, "The upper Algonquins reach the sea in seven days, going in three days on the lake called Alimibeg, and thence descending in four days to the Bay of the Kiliscinons which is on the coast" (Ibid: Vol. XLIV, p. 243). Thwaites suggests that this route was via Lake Winnipeg (Ibid: p. 324, foot note 20). While the starting point of the journey is not specifically stated, it would seem to have been Sault Ste. Marie but even if it were the opposite end of Lake Superior, it would not be possible to reach the bay via Lake Winnipeg in the time suggested. Considering these factors and the general description of the route and the fact that the reference is to Ojibwa peoples going to the bay of the Cree peoples, no route other than via Lake Nipigon fits this description.

The subsequent volume of the relations records statements of an Indian leader by the name of Awatanik respecting routes leading out of Lake Superior. He states that "... following a river toward the

north, we arrive, after eight or ten days journey at Hudson Bay in fifty-five degrees of latitude. From this place, in a northwesterly direction, it is about forty leagues by land to Button Bay, where lies Port Melson (Nelson) on the fifty-seventh degree of latitude and two hundred and seventieth of longitude." (Vol. XLV: p. 223). While it appears there has been some interpolation of the author's story it does nevertheless clearly indicate a route to James Bay not Hudson Bay. Considering the time taken this route would also have to have been via Lake Nipigon for the shorter route via Michipicoten and the Moose River would not require 'eight or ten days' and the route via Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson River would take longer.

A route from Lake Nipigon to the northern salt waters was unquestionably established as early as 1684 when Du Lhut sent a messenger, generally considered to be Jean Baptists Pere (Nute 1943: p. 24, note 22), to James Bay. While it is not stated it is assumed that he would have left from the location of the post established in that year on Lake Nipigon. The subsequent use of Pere's name or variations of his name as the name for the river extending east from Lake Nipigon to James Bay, indicates the general route. On some maps the name is also applied to the Albany River.

The Perry River would appear to have been the Ombabika River at the mouth of which is the generally accepted location of the first French post (White, 1914: p. 904). It could however, have been the Onaman or the Sturgeon (Namewaminikan) or even the Jackfish or the Pikitigushi (Mud) Rivers. The Jackfish and the Pikitigushi River route to the bay would be by way of the Ogoki River to the Albany River. The Ombabika and the Onaman Rivers might also take this route but the more

Disagree

likely route would be via the Little Current (Petit Courant) and the Kenogami Rivers to the Albany River. The Sturgeon River route via the Kenogami to the Albany is farther south. It appears to be closer to the Perry River shown on Franquelin's map of 1686-8 (Giraud: 147). All of these routes lead to the confluence of the Kenogami and the Albany Rivers, the probable location of <sup>an</sup>the early interior French post. ← It is also noted that it is possible once on the Kenogami to reach the bottom of James Bay by going up the Kabinakagami River to the lake of the same name which is at the headwaters of the Missinabi River which flows into the Moose River which drains into James Bay.

Creuxius map of 1660 (Thwaites, Vol. XLVI: front plate) shows a river running north (Kilestonum) from Lake Superior to Lake Alimibeg. From the east side of this lake a river (Fl Eitacgi Kqtahidganus) flows into the bottom of James Bay (Sinus Kilistonum). It also shows a river (Assinipoualacus) extending to the interior from the west shore. While this is suggestive of the Wabinoš River route, it is probably meant to represent the Albany River which extends west above the height of land. Du Creux's map of the same date shows a similar route to the Bay which Robinson and Conacker state is the Lake Nipigon route discovered by Groseillers and Radisson (1951: note on map opposite p. 68).

Lahontan records in his journal of 1703 that the coureurs de bois go to a remote place, Lake Nenemipigon which Thwaites says is Lake Nipigon (1905, Vol. I: p. 304, foot note 2). He states further that they traded with Indians at Baquasch, Lemipisaki and Chaquamigon (Ibid: p. 315). Lemipisaki is the name given by Lahontan to a river

running northeast from the north shore of Lake Superior (Ibid: map opposite p. 156). He shows seven rapids which correspond to the Nipigon River. He shows further Fort Kamonistigoyan abandoned on the west bank. It would appear that his reference was to the Kaministikwia River. Although this river is not shown, an unnamed river is shown to the west leading into Lake Nemipigon which is believed to represent Lake Winnipeg. Lahontan has confused the Nipigon with Kaministikwia River but this is understandable, since he did not proceed beyond Sault St. Marie, thus his information of necessity would have had to be at best second hand.

Chagouamigon can be accepted as the bay upon which a post was established by Radisson and Groseillers on the south shore of Lake Superior (Ibid: p. 315, foot note 2) but the location of Baquasch is much more difficult to establish. It may have been Michipicoton on the north shore of Lake Superior for this was a known early trading area or as is considered more likely, it may refer to the Nipigon area. A river spelled Bagouagache does appear on a map in 1756 east of the Nipigon with a note that Duluth had a post on the west bank (Ontario, 1878: p. 136x) and on D'Anviller map of 1763 the first river east of the Nipigon is called Bogonac.

A map of the rivers and lakes of western Canada after the explorations of members of the La Verendrye family published in 1754 (Crouse, 1956: opposite p. 4; Burpee, 1927: opposite p. 53) shows the Alempissaki River east of I'lle Royal. The river extends south from an unnamed lake. Immediately above this lake a river (a L'Orignai) extends over the height of land to the bottom of James Bay. Above this is the du Perrai River and above this again is the Albany River



which extends west to an interior unnamed lake. Jeffrey's 1762 map and D'Anville 1763 shows Lake Alempigon drained south by the Alempissaki River and a river on the east side of the lake called the Perray or Perrai extending to the bottom of the bay. Carver's map of 1778 shows the same configuration but it also shows a second lake to the north connected to Lake Nipigon by a river. From the east side of the lake the Albany River flows into James Bay and from the west side of the lake a river leads into an interior lake known as Assinipeuals (Carver: front page).

The topography of the early maps is often grossly inaccurate and this combined with deliberate distortions introduced to establish national boundaries, for example, the ". . . French geographers 'decapitated' the rivers flowing into James Bay from the south . . ." (White, 1914: p. 904) limits their usefulness in attempting to locate the remains of the early posts. The situation is further confused by varied and inconsistent names applied to the posts. As a first step an attempt was made to establish the general locations of the several interior French posts. The results are shown in tabular form. Once this was done then "on the spot" examination of the general area was undertaken. Details of this investigation follow.

It is significant in dating the later posts to note that Umfreville records no trading post operating on the lake in 1784 and mentions only traces of two old French establishments. He gives a latitude for one of these establishments at the mouth of Gull Bay but it does not correspond to modern maps. His subsequent description however clearly indicates that the location was modern Champlain Point. At this time, he reports the only trace was a clearing. Examination

