

Rock pictographs worth taking the trouble to see

I recently went to Thunder Bay on the north shore of Lake Superior. On the return trip I followed Highway 17 back to Sault Ste. Marie.

It is a very picturesque route, so I took my time. Just south of Wawa, I saw a sign which mentioned pictographs or rock paintings. I pulled in to take a look.

In order to get to the rock paintings one had to park and take a short trail through the trees. Just a few yards down the trail a series of stone steps began.

They led down toward the shore of the lake. I was glad I had on my walking shoes. Even though they were dry, the rocks were as smooth as glass in some places and quite slippery.

Wooden steps

The trail led down between two high walls of rock. Suddenly it came out alongside a sheer cliff. At the base of this cliff were huge flat rocks which sloped down to the waters of the lake.

Wooden steps went down the last few yards but stopped at the flat rocks. Beyond the steps there was only a chain to grasp to keep from sliding into the lake. Here and there thick ropes dangled out into the



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our town

water in case you lost your grip on the chain and fell in.

A couple of boys who had already scrambled out on the rocks as far as they could go, pointed out the rock paintings on the face of the cliff.

Dragon

The largest figure was what looked like a dragon with what appeared to be sharp points running down its back and tail.

Behind it was a canoe with five or six people in it and below it were a couple of snakes which appeared to be swimming.

The pictograph was done with what appears to be red ochre and is very old.

This particular rock painting was probably done by the Ojibway people whose ancestors have lived in the region since about 9000 B.C.

There are dozens of rock paintings in Ontario and more in other parts of North Ameri-

ca. I even saw a sign along a highway on Vancouver Island in British Columbia about 10 years ago. I didn't have time to turn off to look at that rock painting. Maybe I'll be back that way again some time. If I remember right, it was near Victoria, B.C.

Sign posts

According to a Hopi elder I once heard speak, people set out long ago into the four directions from the Southwest of North America.

The hundreds of people who came in this direction could not all stay together of course, so the leaders left rock paintings as sign posts for those coming later.

Another explanation of the painting of the creature on Agawa Rock which I saw is that it represents the great horned lynx spirit of Lake Superior. Misshepezhieu, as this spirit was called, protected Chief Myeegun and more than 50 of his men who crossed Lake Superior in four or five canoes. This trip began on the south shores of the lake and ended four days later at Agawa Rock.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a freelance writer who lives on the Six Nations reserve.