

A PICTOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF QUEBEC AND THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES  
to determine the incidence of aboriginal rock art sites

undertaken by Selwyn Dewdney  
for the National Museum of Canada  
from June 15th to July 30, 1967

Objectives

Over ten field seasons, from 1957 to 1966 inclusive, working under contracts with the Royal Ontario Museum, the Glenbow Foundation and the National Museum of Canada, I had reached and recorded all the major rock art sites and a substantial sampling of the minor ones in the Canadian Shield Woodlands west of the Ottawa River and James Bay. It remained to be determined: (a.) how far eastward such sites might extend into the Shield Woodlands of Quebec, and (b.) whether related occurrences of rock art existed in the Atlantic Provinces. In my contract with the National Museum I undertook to complete a field survey that would aim at these objectives.

Past experience had satisfied me that, having accumulated all the available information through correspondence, response to publications, and personal contacts, the most efficient procedure was to investigate the reports and rumours of specific sites by travelling to the locality and interviewing knowledgeable persons. If other unreported sites were in the vicinity I would inevitably run across individuals with that information.

I had learned, too, that even reports from seemingly unimpeachable sources could be in error. Where the site was easily accessible I checked it personally. If, however access was time-consuming or expensive it was more efficient to search for individuals at the nearest "jumping-off" point who were familiar enough with the locality of the site in question to confirm and pinpoint the site. Failing that the probabilities were heavily against the reliability of the report.

Foreman was an experienced northerner, and exceptionally well read. His report was the most convincing I had collected, and Lake Nemiscau was my prime target in the Quebec search. To prepare for the ~~visit~~ <sup>Quebec tour</sup> I had contacted the officers of Noranda Mines in Toronto and had contributed an article to "Panorama", their employee publication, asking for information about rock art locations in the province and describing what to look for. This rapport made it easy to ~~find~~ get co-operation in the field from Noranda officials, but not a single report of known sites reached the desk of "Panorama's" editor.

At Noranda-Rouyn, their Chief Geologist referred me to two possible informants:

1. Jerry Leclaire, prospector, had surveyed the whole Nemiscau shore. There are frequent granite occurrences, but he saw no hint of any rock paintings.
2. W.J. Wiltsey, a Noranda Explorations officer, observant and interested in aboriginal phenomena, with a wide experience in northern Quebec, had never seen or heard of any form of rock art in the country.

At Matagami, the nearest road access to Nemiscau, and roughly 100 airmiles south of the post, I interviewed Edward Ottereyes and others of the Cree community there.

Ottereyes, born at Rupert House in 1899 and resident as an adult for nine years at Nemiscau, had neither seen nor heard of any rock paintings anywhere in the country. Yet he was readily informative, to the point where he described details of <sup>the</sup> his dream by which he had acquired the powers necessary for

the shaking-tent performance. Although he possessed a substantial amount of traditional lore his account of the Maymaygwessi myth had no association with water.

At Waswanapi, en route to Mistassini, I interviewed:

1. Sam Gull, a Cree born <sup>in 1902</sup> at Waswanapi, but familiar with the canoe route to Rupert House, had neither seen nor heard of any rock paintings anywhere.
2. Rev. John Gull, a cousin, and local catechist said that both he and his father had scraped their names and the date in rock lichens, and that formerly in the old days, he had heard, this practice was followed when a man died. This was the only hint I encountered of any pictographic associations with

rock formations, from any <sup>native</sup> informant in the province.

At Mistassini Post I found two Cree informants who had lived at Nemiscau:

1. Albert Trapper, middle-aged, well-travelled, had never heard of any rock paintings at Nemiscau or elsewhere.
2. Annie Neeposh, Sr., born and bred at Nemiscau, had no knowledge of any painting on Lake Nemiscau.
3. I also interviewed Robert Gunner, a Montagnais-Naskapi born in 1902 at Lac Albanel, and widely-travelled : never saw or heard of any kind of aboriginal markings on rock.

Three social anthropologists, Peter Sindel, Adrian Tanner, and Ignatius La Rusic were in the region doing field work on the McGill-Cree Project. All had established close rapport with the communities they were working in, and made it easy for me to track down informants and interpreters. All were alerted with descriptions of what I was looking for, as well as with the associated mythology, and undertook to make further enquiries for me.

province of Quebec other than those already recorded are so slight or vestigial as to have escaped notice. Such sites are not likely to be found except by happy accident, for even local people who have seen them are so unimpressed that they are likely to forget their existence.

The hiatus of reports from the region lying between the St. Maurice River and the the Ottawa suggests parallels with the Muskoka-Haliburton-Algonquin Park region of Ontario. Both are well supplied with suitable rock formations. In both one would expect to find at least a few vestigial sites such as that at Rock Lake or the two Brockville sites. Significantly, perhaps, the original water levels have been radical changed by lumbering operations. Most of the resultant dams have become permanent and there may be a number of flooded rock art sites in both regions.

<sup>In</sup>~~of~~ the region east of, and draining into, James Bay, however, there is no basis - other than the single report of a Nemiscau site<sup>A</sup> for believing that there ever have been any rock paintings in the area. And the Nemiscau report is clearly erroneous, probably displaced in the informant's memory from an actual site in northern Ontario.

There is, in fact, only one known pictograph site in the Canadian Shield Woodlands of Quebec. In the course of time I will be able to check on the Lac Buies and Roche de l'Oiseau reports, but such indications as they afford offer none of the features of a typical Shield Woodland site. Nor have enquiries I have made, both personally and by correspondence, as to pictographic occurrences in the Quebec interior eastward to Labrador, or in Labrador itself, encourage<sup>d</sup><sub>A</sub> me to suppose that there is any aboriginal rock art in those regions.