

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 Neguagon 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 Ottetail, 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 Ottetail 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."

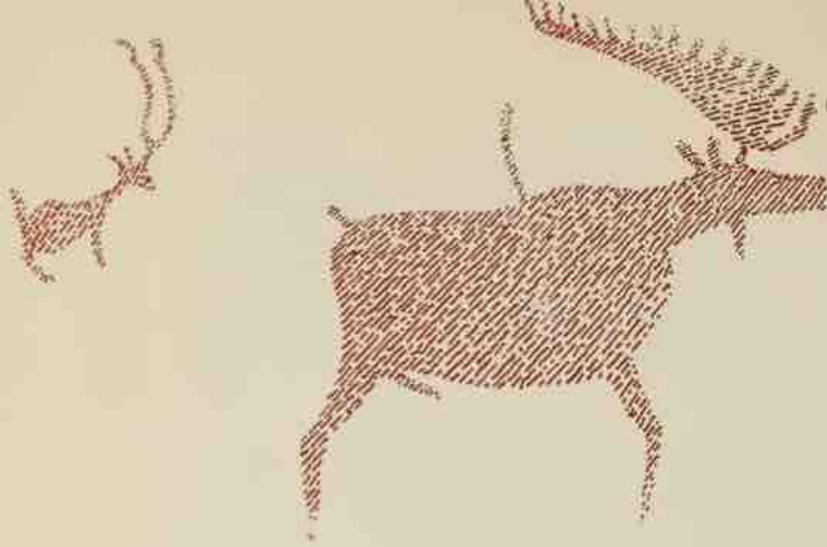
Yet there was little he knew about the pictographs: only that he was sure they had been there when the treaty of 1873 was signed.

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



Site #4





*Opposite:*

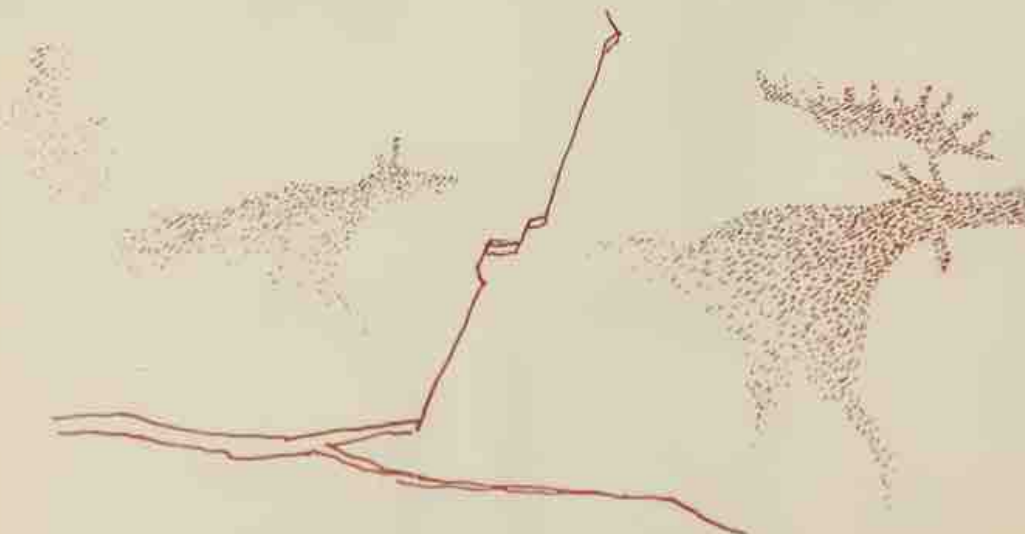
Lac la Croix moose  
Face II

And while we can no more guess at the "caveman's" conscious purpose than we can at our own aborigine's, there can be no doubt about the pleasure the former took in most of the forms he chose to depict.

Paintings of hands are interpreted by Schoolcraft as "have done"; by Copway as a sign of death. Either way we might interpret the group of handprints at Lac la Croix that surround a small, but unmistakable fox as the record of a successful war party, led by a chief with either the personal or clan name of Fox. I still

*Opposite:*

Blindfold Lake site,  
Face II



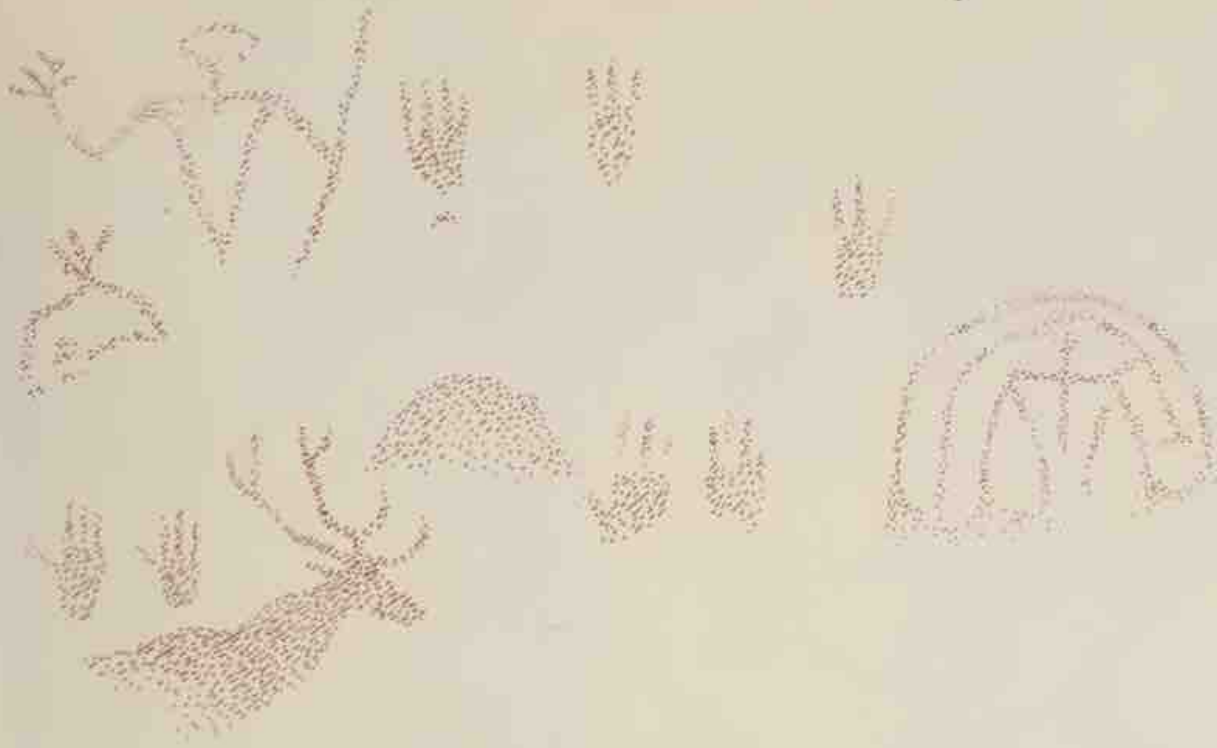
like—but recognize as sheer conjecture—my translation of the extensive smearing of pigment below this group as saying in effect: “See what we have done with the blood of our enemies!”

It was from these smearings that I scraped samples of pigment for analysis in Toronto. The findings identified the pigment as ferric oxide, but the traces of organic material which would indicate the binder were so slight that carbon-dating was out of the question. On top of that there was no guarantee that the minute

quantities found did not represent stray material out of the air that had lodged accidentally on the surface of the paint. I am hoping eventually to find a slab of rock that has fallen from a site so that a microscopic study can be made of the pigment in relation to the rock grain, and to what extent and how permanently it bonds itself to the rock.

I have dubbed the pictographs illustrated above as the “Warrior Group” on the assumption that the half-length human figure is holding a weapon. Faint but fascinating material





is scattered over this face: a mound-like form, a caribou (or elk?) head, and the suggestion—too faint to be certain—of a human figure in a lodge.

I recorded this site in my first summer, and was still using the tedious techniques of string coordinates and chalking out grids, previously described. The northern faces here could be recorded from rocks underneath; but it was otherwise with the Warrior Group and the Fox Group, painted on a sheer face that rises overhead some thirty feet, and descends an estimated eight to ten feet underwater. Here they could only have been painted from the water, perhaps in early spring from the ice; more likely in summer from a canoe.

The day we recorded them a brisk south wind brought waves sweeping vigorously along the rock face. We had a rope along the base of the cliff

that gave us some control of the canoe, but my son Peter had also to make sure the canoe was not slapped against the rock. We had our hands full: he with paddle and rope, I with chalk and tape and sketch-book, while the water tossed us up and down and splashed my paper and colours with aggravating persistence.

The Lac la Croix site is in a magnificent setting: great blocks of the granite bedrock rising in steps above the water a hundred feet or more.

It is a mystery to me why not one mention in the literature has been found so far of a site on the main water route to the West, passed annually in the height of the fur-trade days by a thousand canoes.

The Crooked Lake site, on the Minnesota side of the border waters south of Quetico, *does* appear in the records, but on account of Sioux arrows stuck in a cleft high above