

# Rock Lake Pictographs:

Jeff's annotated canoe tripper's Algonquin Map indicates the location of the Rock Lake pictograph site:

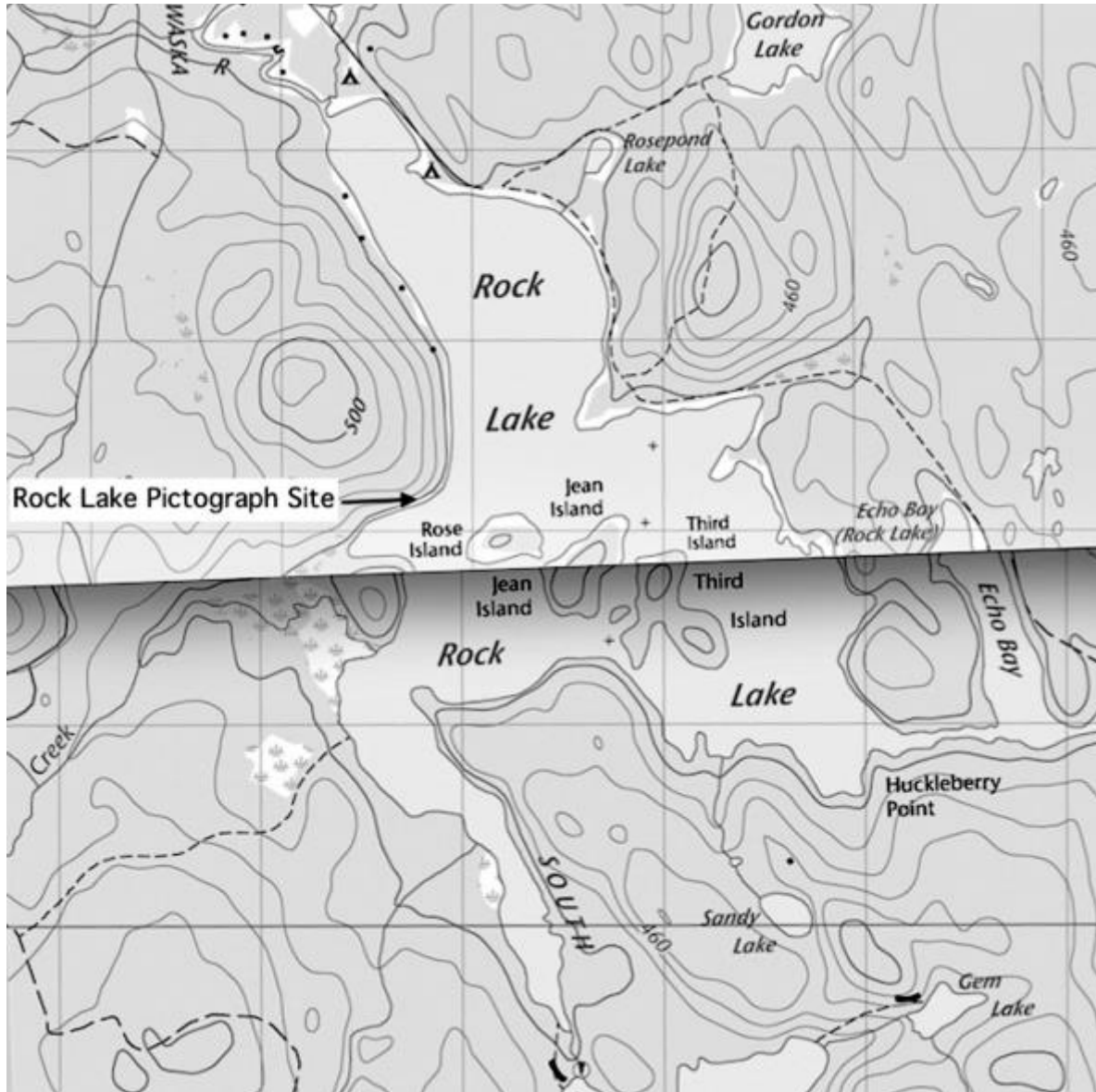


Click on the following link - <http://www.algonquinmap.com/> - to see the Jeff's Maps online version of the four maps which make up the Algonquin Provincial Park paper map set. Rock Lake in on the *Southern Camping Map*.

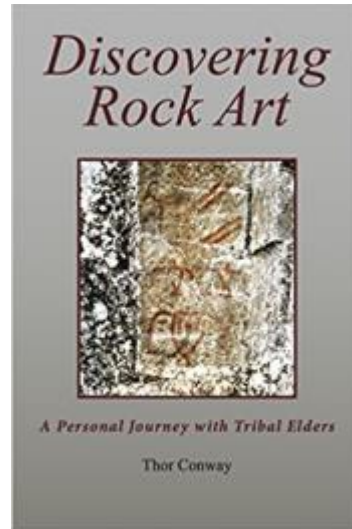
Note: Jeff's Map has something labelled "Vision Pits" above the pictograph site. However, more careful examination of the archaeological record has deunked this notion. Check out Bill Allen's report - *Nineteenth Century Aboriginal Farmers of the Madawaska River* - specifically pages 64-66 for a detailed examination of the evidence.

Click here - <http://www.ottawaoas.ca/Symposium/Allen.pdf>

The south-facing pictograph site is on the rock face on the north side of the small bay Rock Lake's west side. Here is a 1:50000 topo of the lake and the pictograph site location –



The single best source of information on the site is a chapter in Thor Conway's *Discovering Rock Art: A Personal Journey With Tribal Elders* (2016). The book has chapters on a dozen different Ontario rock image sites. See here for more info – <http://thorconway.com/Discovering%20Rock%20Art.html>



He discusses them in terms of two panels, an easterly one (Panel I) and a second one (Panel II) several meters to the west. He notes that “at least 51 ochre paintings are clustered on the two alcoves along the cliff.” (p.93) Perhaps a better term than “painting” would be “marking” given that most of the now very faint applied ochre is in the form of lines, some up to 12 ” (30 cm. in length); the hematite powder/fish oil mix would be applied with a finger running down the rock face. Conway himself writes this –

*With the exception of one image of a person, animal or spirit creature, the pictographs of Rock Lake are tedious to describe, since they are clusters of short lines. Despite not being as attractive as spirit images, these lines are important. Sometime in the past, an Algonquian tribesman chose to make these immortal images on the edge of the lake.*

Other than what may be a Nanabush figure – Conway's *spirit creature* – there are no clearly representational images at the site. The lines that are there are often described as “tally marks” on the assumption that something is being counted.

Immortal? A bit over the top given their almost-gone status and the fact that we have no idea what the markings are saying or counting - if it was anything at all! The number of days of fasting? The number of visits to the site? The number of visitors to the site on a given occasion?

There are certainly other sites that provide the visitor with more to appreciate and contemplate – the Artery Lake site on the Bloodvein River, for example, has some stunning pictographs. It may be that I am comparing two different traditions – separated by time or by geography, if not by culture.

An article in the Jan-Feb. 2010 issue of the Ontario Archaeological Society's Arch Notes had this passage on the Rock Lake site. Its particular contribution to rock art research is a consideration of the shimmer factor as a tool to drawing more meaning from the site and its images! See here for the issue and article - <http://www.ontarioarchaeology.on.ca/Resources/ArchNotes/anns15-1.pdf>

Allen and O'Regan also made an afternoon visit to two sets of rock paintings along the base of another waterside bluff at Rock Lake, near the East Gate in the south of Algonquin Provincial Park. Again, with flat water and sunny conditions, reflected light shimmer was a notable visual feature over the rock paintings in both localities.

Accessible only from the lake, a sheer rock face that drops vertically into deep water forms the panel for the easternmost set of paintings (Figures 2-2 and 2-3). Three vertical and parallel red ochre strikes about 30 cm long are painted near the center of the panel at about 1.5 m above the lake's surface, the approximate head height of a standing adult. About 2 m to the north and lower on the panel, a little less than 1 m above the lake's surface, is a red painted figure about 30 cm high with splayed limbs, large pointed ears, and a tail. The figure may represent Nanabush, a significant ancestor in Algonquin traditions who sometimes took the form of a hare and is featured in rock paintings elsewhere in Ontario (Devereux 2008:21). At the time of the visit, the reflected light shimmered particularly along the bottom of the panel covering this figure, but shimmer was also discernible over the higher three strikes and especially in a small horizontal crevice in the rock adjacent to them.

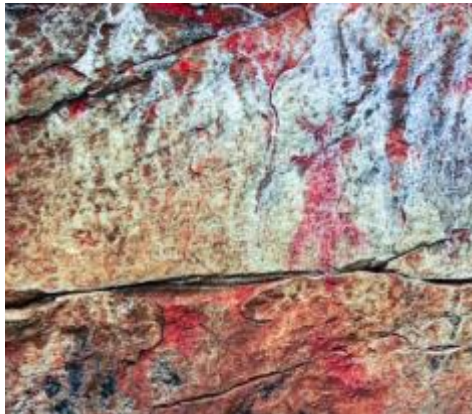
The second group of rock paintings is situated near the western end of the same bluff. A group of six weathered red ochre lines about 30 cm in length accompanied by two smaller dashes fan out over a small vertical panel just above current lake level and just before the cliff face breaks to a landing of fallen rocks. A further eight red strikes are located on a panel adjacent to and about 1.5 m above the first. Reflected light shimmer was noted over all the markings but was particularly bright along the rock at the water's edge and over the lower panel.

These two sets of markings are the only rock paintings recorded on Rock Lake and are only accessible by boat. It is possible to land on fallen rocks next to the second group of rock paintings, but the lower of these is just beyond the dry landing. Shimmer was not observed anywhere else along the cliff face.

**Allen is the same person whose article on the "vision pits" was mentioned in connection with Jeff's Map above.**

Like Conway, the above researchers note the two separate panels at the site.

1. An eastern set of pictographs on a sheer vertical rock face – three vertical and parallel lines about 30 cm long; 2 m to the north a figure thought to be Nanabush given the large pointy ears – it also has a tail and splayed limbs. See the image below



2. A set of rock paintings near the western end of the same steep cliff face – six lines (30 cm long) plus 2 smaller ones; eight more line next to and above the others mentioned



what Conway labels Panel IIA in his book – Discovering Rock Art

