

THE BONNECHERE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

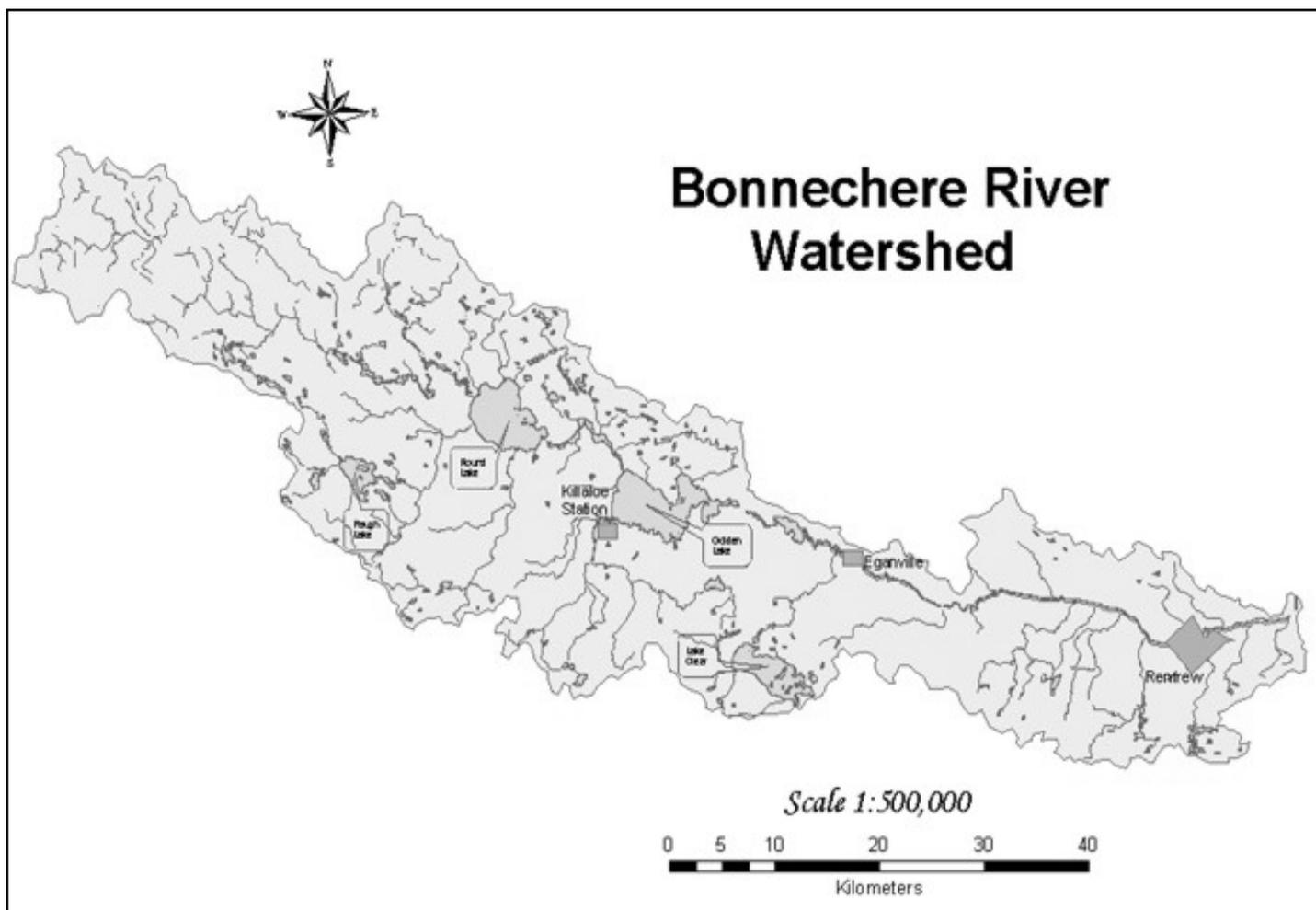
In August 1994, a number of avocational, academic, museum, consulting and government archaeologists joined with writer/historian Rory MacKay, representatives from the Ontario Archaeological Society, the Algonquins' of Golden Lake First Nation and Ontario Parks staff to discuss their interests in the region's cultural heritage. Five days of think tank sessions on the history and archaeology of the Bonnechere proved to be an excellent forum for the rich exchange of information, ideas and theories about cultural resource protection. From this was born, the Bonnechere Cultural Heritage Project, whose team efforts have provided public archaeology programs at Basin Depot, Lafleur Homestead, Egan Farm and the mouth of the Bonnechere at Round Lake. While not every archaeological site or project is suitable for public visitation and/or participation, the discipline of archaeology as a whole benefits from the public's exposure to the science of archaeology. This presentation will review: 1) the importance of partnering; 2) findings of the digs to date; and, 3) the role of the public in archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

"On our way up the stream, we repeatedly found it almost entirely blocked up with square timber, sometimes for miles together." (Alexander Murray, Geological Survey of Canada, 1853)

Rising from the gentle waters of McKaskill and North Branch Lakes in Algonquin Provincial Park, the Bonnechere River meanders for approximately 145 km in a southeast direction where it enters the Ottawa River. The Bonnechere River follows the route of a prehistoric river flowing through a valley created when the land dropped down between two fault lines. This feature, known as a graben, is evident throughout the Ottawa Valley. Ten thousand years ago sand deposits lined much of the shoreline. Gradually magnificent forests of red and white pine grew throughout the watershed, producing magnificent stands ready for harvest as square timber. At the height of the Canadian square timber era, 13% of the square timber going to the docks at Québec City made its way down the gentle waters of the Bonnechere River.

Figure 1. *The Bonnechere River Watershed (OMNR, 2003).*



BACKGROUND

In August 1994, a number of avocational, academic, museum, consulting and government archaeologists, plus historian and educator, Rory MacKay, joined representatives from the Ontario Archaeological Society and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagon to discuss cultural heritage in this region. The five-day, intensive think tank session on the history and archaeology of the Bonnechere River featured an exchange of information, ideas and theories of mutual benefit to all attending. Of particular significance to park managers was the commitment by group members to work for and support the identification and conservation of significant cultural heritage resources of the Bonnechere River.

The *Bonnechere Cultural Heritage Project* was created from these discussions. Initial goals developed by a working group include:

- to conduct a comprehensive inventory of heritage sites along the Bonnechere River from Round Lake upstream to the headwaters;

- to compile and create a comprehensive database of published and unpublished materials relating to the cultural heritage of the Bonnechere watershed;
- to assist with the establishment of the Bonnechere Cultural Resource Centre as a key repository for Bonnechere River information and artifacts; and,
- to develop educational and interpretative programs about the human heritage of the Bonnechere, highlighting the importance of cultural resource recognition and protection.

Fieldwork to date has been limited to the sections of the river protected by Algonquin, Bonnechere River and Bonnechere Provincial Parks approximately 46 km in length. Historically this section of the river was referred to as the 'Little Bonnechere River' which is the name used by most researchers and historians in their writings.

RESULTS

In reviewing the ambitious goals of the working group, I am pleased to highlight the progress to date but must apologize for being brief. The accomplishments of group are not only impressive but quite lengthy. So while I will be able to report on the scope of work, I will be unable to expand greatly on the extent of the individual research activities. It must be also noted that research efforts to date have only focused on the 'Little Bonnechere River' portion of the waterway.

Accomplishments to date include:

- Ongoing efforts to inventory features along the Little Bonnechere River have added to the original 13 known sites, to a point that there are over 70 known features along this stretch of river.
- An extensive collection of documents (10 transfer cases), photos, maps and publications have now found a home at Bonnechere Provincial Park in addition to extensive material housed in the Algonquin Provincial Park archives. Friends organizations from both Algonquin and Bonnechere have purchased a 'text works database' program for consistent documentation and retrieval of photos, images and documents. Although data entry will take years, researchers are already finding the system user friendly.
- The Davenport Centre at Bonnechere Provincial Park has been constructed and features an archive room providing storage for one of the biggest collections of Depot Farm artifacts circa 1850 – 1900 in Canada.
- Public archaeology programs have been conducted since 1996 primarily at Basin Depot and at the Lafleur Homestead. Supportive educational tools that have been developed include publication of: *Spirits of the Little Bonnechere – A History of Exploration, Logging and Settlement 1800 to 1920* by Roderick MacKay; *Discover the Spirits of the Little Bonnechere – A Cultural Heritage Activity Book for Youth* by the Friends of Bonnechere Parks; *Walks of the Little Bonnechere River* by Mark Stabb and Roderick MacKay and *Visiting the Spirits – Exploring the Hidden Heritage of the Little Bonnechere River*, an interactive CD by the Friends of Bonnechere Parks.
- The group hosted the *Cultural Heritage Tourism in Ontario* conference in 1999.

CONCLUSIONS

In a very short period of time, a tremendous amount of insight and knowledge has been gained from the research. The public archaeology programs have been overwhelmingly popular. Adaptations of these programs are now being used in other provincial parks and cultural heritage assessment work is being conducted on a more regular basis in parks throughout the province. As a model, the *Bonnechere Cultural Heritage Project* has not only raised awareness of the value of cultural heritage but it has introduced new visitors to our parks.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). 2003. *The Bonnechere River Watershed*. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources: Pembroke, Ontario.
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