

A Sacred Site: OISEAU ROCK

Joann McCann

Founder, Friends of Oiseau Rock

Oiseau Rock is a sheer rock face about 150 metres in height which rises straight out of the Ottawa River in Pontiac County, Quebec. It was a sacred site for Aboriginal Peoples who have left behind a remarkable legacy of ancient pictographs or rock art which may still be seen today. It continues to be part of the sacred landscape for the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan (at Golden Lake, Ontario) and of the Kitigan Zibi First Nation (Maniwaki, Quebec) who call the rock "Kinew Kishkaabikaan", meaning bird rock.

This large outcrop is situated across from the Atomic Energy of Canada Research Laboratory (AECL) at Chalk River, Ontario. This part of the river, originally called "La Rivière Creuse" or deep river reach, is very beautiful as the river narrows, the water deepens and the channel is flanked by the Laurentian Mountains. Towering green pines border the blue waters. The immediate area's only development on the River, besides the Laboratories, consists of a few cottages.

When one approaches the Rock from downstream, it cannot be seen since Oiseau Point bars the view. This makes the Rock's appearance even more spectacular as one revels in the unexpected: a massive mountain that rises straight out of the river and reaches a dizzying height, with dwarfish pines clinging to its rocks and crannies.

Oiseau Rock possesses many of the typical attributes of a sacred site: a vertical rock wall immediately beside the water. Here, the sky, land and water meet so the Manitous (spirits) can travel from this world to the next. Algonkian-speaking people believed that spirits dwell in creatures, people and animals, and even in the components of the land, such as rocks. Consequently, they painted images called pictographs on the rock face. It is believed that an image is a testimony to one's spiritual experience whereby a powerful healer documented his entrance into the rock seeking medicine.

The paintings were done with red ochre, a mineral that is found in many places across the Canadian Shield. Not far from Oiseau Rock, at Morrison's Island near Pembroke, Ontario, archaeologists found a site which is 5000 years old where ochre was sprinkled around the buried. For picture writing on rocks, ochre was possibly mixed with an agent such as water. The picture writer usually used his/her finger to apply the ochre to the rock. After this paint is applied to the rock surface, it lasts for a long time.

Figure 2.6 Oiseau Rock, ca. 1900



Source : Library and Archives Canada

The Friends of Oiseau Rock

Dedicated to bringing awareness and protection to the sacred cliff known as Oiseau Rock - the largest rock art site of the Canadian Shield in Quebec

[Introduction](#) • [Location](#) • [Access](#) • [Hiking](#) • [Experience Oiseau Rock](#)

Home
History
Conservation
Pictographs
Join Us / Links

Oiseau Rock on the Ottawa River in Pontiac County, Quebec

Introduction

Oiseau Rock, is a sheer rock face about 150 metres in height which rises straight out of the Ottawa River in Ontario. It was a sacred site for First Nations Peoples who have left behind a remarkable legacy of [ancient pictographs](#) which may still be seen today. It continues to be part of the sacred landscape for the Algonkians of Pikwakanagan First Nation near Golden Lake, Ontario and of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation (Maniwaki, Quebec) who call the rock "Migizi Kiishkaabikaan" meaning bird rock. In June 2001, they held ceremonies and drumming at the site, and will continue to visit what Dr. Daniel Arseneault, archaeologist calls this "natural monument."

Location

Oiseau Rock is a large outcrop of rock on the Ottawa River in Pontiac County, Quebec. It is situated across from the Atomic Energy of Canada Research Laboratory (AECL) at Chalk River, Ontario. This part of the river is very beautiful as the river narrows, the water deepens and the channel is flanked by the Laurentian Mountains. Towering green pines border the blue waters. The immediate area's only development on the River, besides the Laboratories, consists of a few cottages. The Rock is located approximately nine miles down river from Deep River, Ontario, 18 miles upriver from Pembroke, Ontario, and eight miles upstream from Fort William, Quebec.

Locals tend to pronounce it "Weeso Rock," corrupting the French word. When one approaches the Rock from down-river (the Petawawa end), the Rock cannot be seen since Oiseau Point bars the view. This makes the Rock's appearance even more spectacular as one revels in the unexpected: a massive mountain that rises straight out of the River and reaches a dizzying height, with dwarfish pines clinging to its rocks and crannies.



Access

No roads lead to the rock so all access is by boat. Boats can be launched at

No roads lead to the rock so all access is by boat. Boats can be launched at Pembroke, Petawawa and Deep River, Ontario, and at Fort William, Quebec. Boats may be anchored on the sandy beach on the eastern side of Oiseau Point. For further information about boating on the Ottawa River, contact the [Ottawa River Waterway](#). Other boat excursions can be arranged on our [Links](#) Page (see #5 Boating/Paddlesports).



Hiking

You park your boat at the beach and in the woods is the path that leads you to the top of the Rock. At the beach, there are picnic tables and garbage cans. During the summer, garbage is removed twice weekly by the Deep River Recreation Association (RRIA). [website: www.ottawariverkeeper.ca/rria.html] Outhouses have been provided by the Municipality of Sheenboro, Esher and Malakoff.

The hike to the top takes about 20 minutes but at one spot, it is steep and rocky and one needs to hold onto the rocks in order to to balance on the rock steps. At the top, the path forks into two: one leads to the lookout over the River and the Petawawa Plains, and the other takes you to the spring-fed lake. At the lookout, children should be supervised as there is no barrier and the ground is eroding there.

This lake is unnamed and it is a pretty spot. Go for a swim and have your lunch at the picnic table. Another lake is further back, and behind it is another high rock which affords a spectacular view, but there is no path leading from the first lake.



Experience this Sacred Landscape and Historical Site



Oiseau Rock speaks of a spirituality that is mysterious and foreign to people today. We do not know the meanings of all of the paintings but we do know that the place was and continues to be sacred to First Nations' peoples. Present-day First Nations' people leave offerings of prayer sticks, tobacco and cloth at rock art sites.

Take time to appreciate the beauty of the site surrounding the rock art. Feel the sun, listen to the wind and the sounds of the waves lapping on the rocks. Look above to the dizzying height of the Rock. First Nations' people would have climbed the rock to paint some of the pictographs. Look for eagles, turkey vultures and peregrine falcons which have been spotted flying above the Rock. Take time to see the pictographs. Give the Rock and this ancient place time to speak to you.

