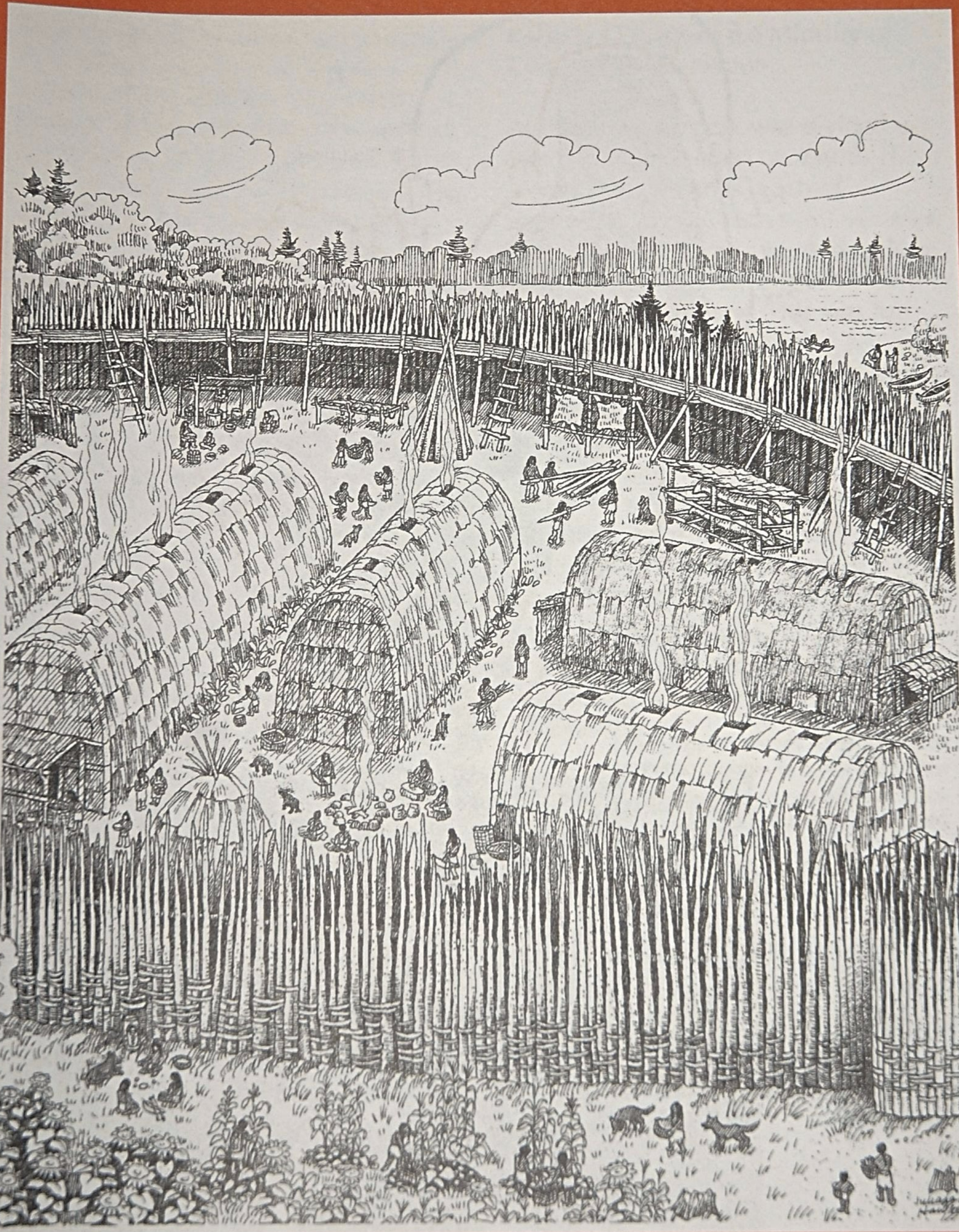
THE FRIENDS OF AWENDA PARK

The Wendat Trail

Awenda Provincial Park



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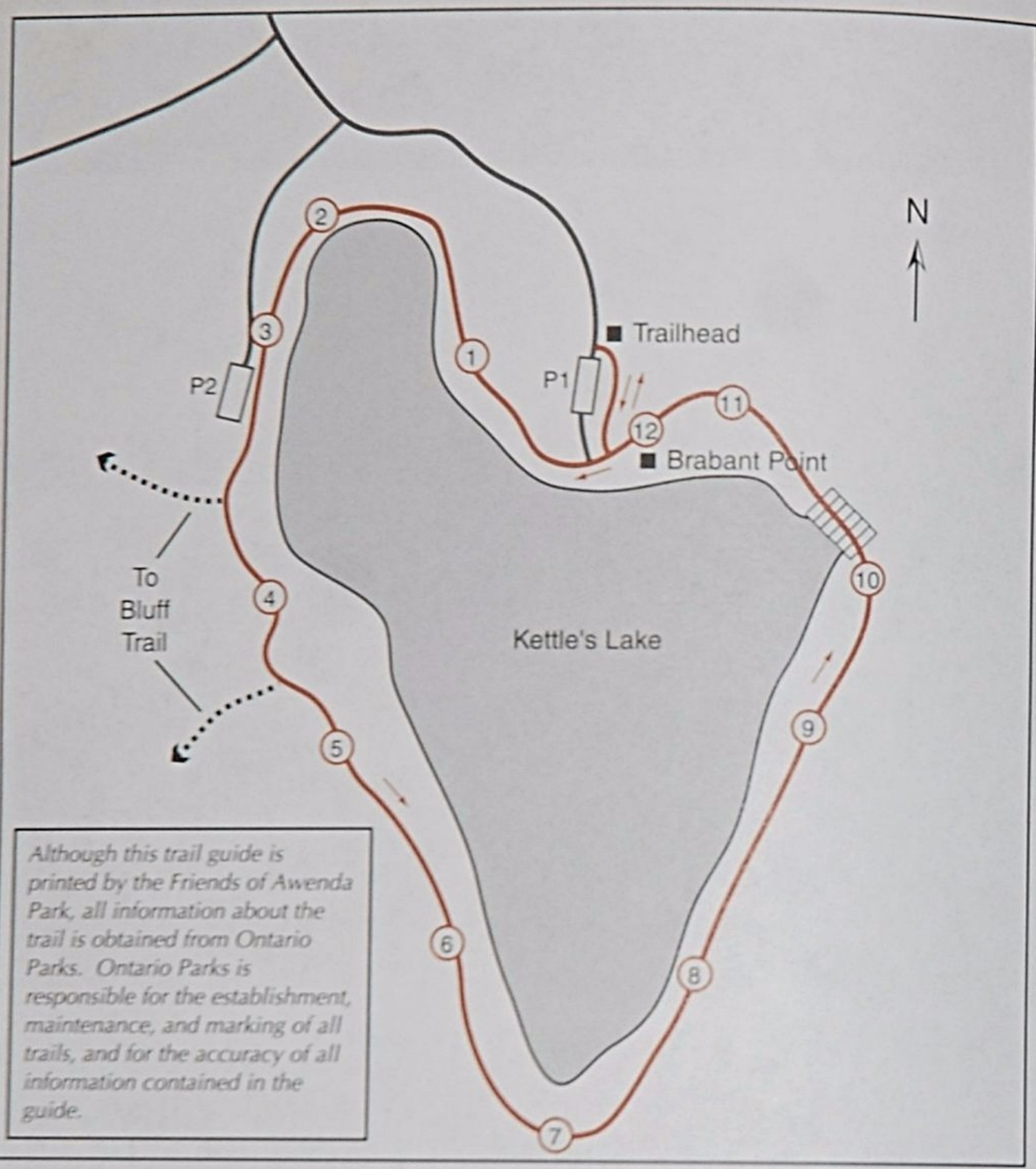

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The Wendat Trail is a five kilometre loop around Kettle's Lake that will take you approximately 1½ to 2 hours to walk. The trail begins at Parking Area 1 (closest to the boardwalk) adjacent to Kettle's Lake.

The Wendat Trail passes through a mixed hardwood forest where you will learn about the cultural history of Awenda Provincial Park. The numbers in this trail guide corrrespond with the numbered posts on the trail. The trail is easy walking but because of its length, you may wish to take some water or food with you.

Post 1 Digging Into the Past: The Science of Archaeology

What is Archaeology? Simply put, it is a 5-step process by which the material remains of the past become knowledge of the culture of human beings. The first step in this process is an archaeological survey, usually done over a large area on foot. Areas of interest to archaeologists are often brought to their attention by farmers or construction workers who come across artifacts (objects showing human workmanship or modification) by accident. During the second step, an excavation takes place on selected sites. The third step is to study and analyse the artifacts that were found during the dig. These enable the archaeologist to determine the livelihood of the people that were once here. The final steps are writing a report, followed by publication of the report as a reference for others.

Archaeologists have been active in Simcoe County since the turn of the century, but little work was done in the future Awenda Park until the 1960s. In 1949, Frank Ridley first investigated the area. Then in 1966, Michael Gwynne followed by Walter Kenyon (1968) from the Royal Ontario Museum took a closer look. An intense survey took place in 1972 and 1973 headed up by Roberta O'Brien of the Ministry of Culture and Recreation.

At this time, the park was divided up into rectangular areas on a grid. There were 47 survey units, each of approximately 150 acres (60 hectares) in size. Small test pits were dug along traverse lines searching for any hints of previous civilizations. This was followed by intensive testing of selected areas, particularly those which were to undergo Park development as well as those which yielded some artifacts. In the months that followed, 17 sites would be excavated and approximately 17,000 artifacts found. Two other sites and numerous artifacts were added with the addition of property around Farlain Lake. Further analysis of these artifacts showed that human occupation of the Awenda area occurred over an 11,000 year period.

Archaeologist Roberta O'Brien digging in Awenda Provincial Park, 1973

Post 2 Awenda's History is Nothing to Sneeze At

Although pollen grains may make some people sneeze, in Awenda Provincial Park they are the key to its past. Palynology is the study of pollen within the sediment laid down on lake bottoms. There have been numerous pollen studies done on cores of sediment taken from the bottom of Gignac and Kettle (formerly called Second) Lakes in the early 1970s. Scientists from the Royal Ontario Museum determined what plants grew here for the last 11,000 years by identifying and counting the pollen grains found in the layers of sediment.

Male pollen grains produced by these plants settled on the surface, but because these lakes were protected from the wind by higher ground, the pollen settled to the lake bottom. Each year a distinctive layer of sediment was laid down. By counting the number of layers the scientists were able to determine which plants grew in which year.

The results of their study show how the vegetation has changed here since the Wisconsin glacier retreated about 10,000 B.C. The forests then were composed of spruce and pine with tundra species such as arctic avens and sedges. By 8500 B.C. it had changed to jack pine, fir and birch forest with bracken fern, similar to our modern boreal forest. As the climate warmed between 7700 B.C. and 4500 B.C., a mixed forest of white pine, birch and oak developed. This forest was much like what you see here today. Between then and 1500 A.D. the climate was much warmer than today. The White Pine died out and hemlock became the dominant tree along with maple, beech

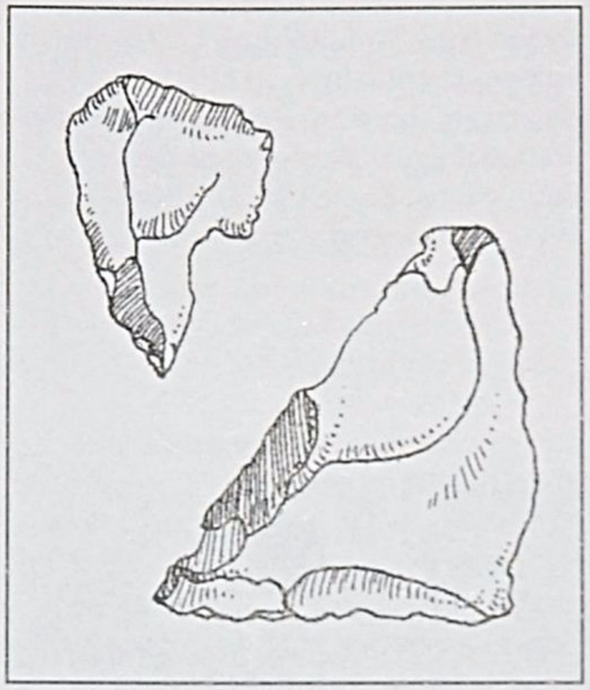
Core samples being taken from Second Lake now called Kettle's Lake

and oak. For a short period during this time it was even too warm for hemlock to grow leaving a deciduous forest. As the climate cooled, the hemlock returned and the forest changed to the mixed hardwood forest we see today.

The pollen analysis also showed two periods of agriculture in the area. The early one was 1450 to 1650 A.D. identified by pollen from corn, bracken fern and wormwood. This would correspond to the time when the Wendat people lived here. The second period was 1875–1960 when pioneer farmers settled here. Pollen from grasses, ragweed (the real allergy culprit!) and two European species (dock and plantain) were found at this level.

Post 3 The Hunters and Gatherers

Archaeological studies of the Park have shown that from 9000 to 1000 B.C. there was a pre-ceramic culture living here. These people were hunters and gatherers; their diet consisting of wild game and gathered nuts and berries.



A graver and scraper used for piercing and cleaning animal hides
(Elizabeth McDonald/Julianna Hawke)

They would hunt the animals with spears fashioned from stones and wood. They would cut up the meat and clean the hides to be used for clothing with stone scrapers. When the hides were dried they used gravers to pierce the skins and then sewed them together with sinew. A graver is a short, sharp spur on a scraper or flake that was used to perforate thin material. They also used rocks as hammers and anvils and for grinding against other stones.

Since they depended on local food supplies they were nomadic in nature, moving to where they could easily find food. This means that few artifacts would be left behind. The artifacts that the archaeologists found were very primitive and had little work done on them to produce a certain shape. Included in their findings were pieces of chipped stone made of grey Ordovician chert. They also uncovered flakes and cores, the part which remains when the flakes are broken off.

Post 4 Dwellers of the Peninsula

Who were the Wendat people? Wendat, which means "island dwellers" or "dwellers of the peninsula", was the name that the Huron called themselves. The Huron were a confederation of four Iroquoian speaking tribes: the bear, cord, deer and rock. About 21,000 of them occupied 360 square miles in the north half of Simcoe County. They lived in villages of varying sizes, 25 of which were scattered throughout the area by 1645.

The first written account of the Wendat was made by Samuel de Champlain in 1615, although Etienne Brûlé had encountered them five years prior to that. The French called them Hurons (meaning "bristly savages"), an adaptation of the word "hure" which referred to the hair or mane of a European wild boar. The reference was to the short, bristled haircut of the Huron men which resembled the boar's mane.

Wendat woman *(Ivan Kocsis)*

Trade was an important activity for the Wendat who traded with the Algonkians to the north and other Iroquoian tribes to the south and west.

The Wendat population decreased dramatically when approximately half of them died of smallpox, measles and influenza contracted from the French. Conflicts amongst themselves and raids by the New York Iroquois on Huron villages eventually lead to their dispersal. There are four major Wendat archaeological sites around the perimeter of Kettle's Lake. Thus the Wendat trail seems aptly named.

Post 5 Ihonitiria and Toanche

Archaeologists believe that at least two historic Wendat villages were located in the park. According to records kept by the Jesuits, they were called Ihonitiria and Toanche.

The Kettle's Lake area was an ideal spot for a small village such as these. First of all, there was a large supply of fresh water for drinking or cooking. Secondly, the area provided an abundant and accessible food supply. There were fish in the lake and large and small game in the forest. The soil was also suitable for growing crops. The third favourable characteristic was that the location provided an elevated defensive position against Iroquois attack. And finally there was a constant supply of firewood in the forests surrounding Kettle's Lake for warmth or cooking.

Wendat women cooking meat over an open fire *(Ivan Kocsis)*

Post 6 The Longhouse People

The Huron people lived in longhouses with their extended families. These were grouped into small hamlets, villages and even larger towns. The village itself was sometimes surrounded by palisades, a row of upright logs dug into the ground.

Each average longhouse sheltered about 15-20 families. They were shaped like barns with rounded roofs made of cedar or elm bark laid over a framework of poles. Cedar and elm grew nearby in the swampy area surrounding Kettle's Lake. At either end of the longhouse there was a door and families were housed down both sides of the building.

In the summer, the Wendat people slept on platforms against the wall and in the winter, they slept on mats and animal skins near fires on the floor of the dwelling. Furnishings in the longhouse were simple. They cooked in clay pots with open fires. They used wooden paddles and ladles, as well as bowls and baskets of bark and wood. The corn that they grew was stored in bark containers inside the longhouse.

Their tools were simple too, fashioned from wood, rock and animal bones. They included stone-bladed axes and knives, bone awls and scrapers, and wooden drills. Corn was ground with stone or wood mortars and pestles.

The interior of a Wendat longhouse *(Julianna Hawke)*

Post 7 Corn, Beans and Squash

The Wendat people were dependent on agriculture as 75% of their diet was corn, beans and squash. The remainder of what they ate was obtained by fishing, hunting or gathering.

This fairly level forested area where you are now standing was once a field where the Wendat grew crops. The forests of the Penetang peninsula were only a temporary obstacle to Wendat agriculture. They cleared extensive tracts of land around Kettle's Lake using a slash and burn technique. First they would girdle the trunk by cutting around it with a stone-bladed axe. Then they would strip the branches off and burn the tree from its base. Later crops were planted together in large mounds around the stumps. These fields lost fertility within 10 to 15 years so the village was forced to move to a new area. The Wendat men would clear land for fields before they settled there.

When the earth was warm enough in the spring to work, the women would prepare the soil with wooden hoes and digging sticks. They were responsible for sowing corn, bean and squash seeds, weeding the fields in the summer and harvesting the crops in the fall. The corn would be hung to dry from the rafters of the longhouse and then stored in bark and clay containers after the kernels were stripped from the cobs. In the winter months or when needed, the kernels could be ground into cornmeal for cooking.

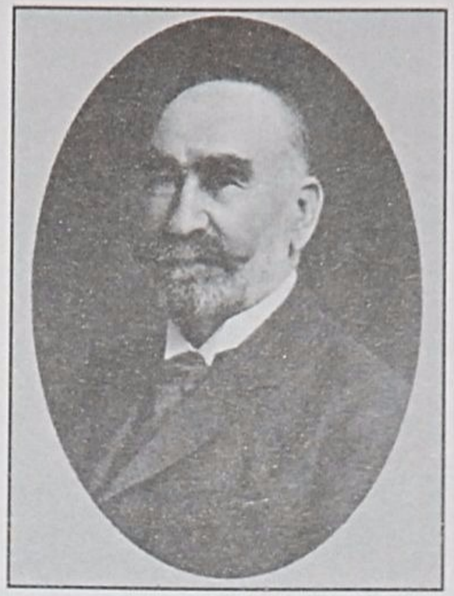
Wendat women grinding corn *(Ivan Kocsis)*

Post 8 Charles Beck: Lumber Magnate

The abandoned Wendat corn fields on sandy, upland soils provided ideal conditions for sun-loving trees to grow. By the late 1800s, Europeans discovered vast expanses of straight, tall White Pines with large diameters throughout Simcoe County.

For 25 years the forests of the peninsula rang with the sound of the axe and the buzz of the sawmill. Land which is now part of Awenda Provincial Park was held by four lumber companies at one time. Two of the most prominent of these were the Beck Lumber Co. and the McGibbon Lumber Co.

The Beck Lumber Co., owned by Charles (Karl Maximillian) Beck, selectively logged the area of mature White Pine and Red Oak circa 1890. This forest clearance allowed for the regeneration of sun-loving oaks. There are many large Red Oaks on the left side of the trail that probably date from this period 110 years ago.



Karl Maximillian (Charles) Beck
(Courtesy Centennial Museum)

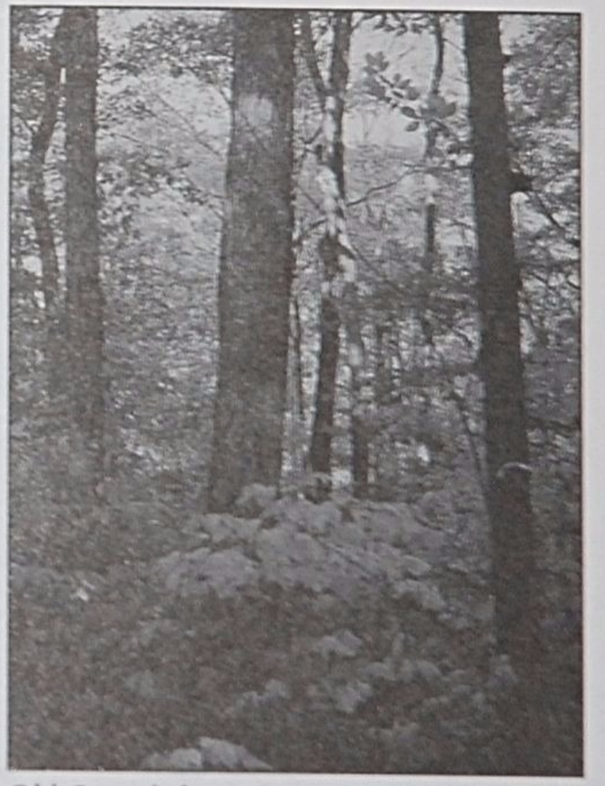
Charles Beck was born in Germany in 1838 and lived in the Penetang area with his wife and 9 children from 1865. In 1873, along with J.S. McMurray and T.R. Fuller, he built the "Red Mill". The Beck Lumber Co. was an integral part of the economy of Penetang. Employees were paid half of their wages in Beck Co. tokens. These tokens were good at two stores owned by Beck as well as others in Penetang. Today the old Beck General Store has been converted to house the Penetanguishene Centennial Museum.

Post 9 The Ancient Giants

Walk a short distance (30m) up this side trail and look to your left to see an excellent example of an old growth forest that stretches all the way to Gignac Lake. The giant maple trees growing here are over 220 years of age with some as old as 270+ years of age.

Compare these maples with the oak trees growing here. They both appear to be about the same height and diameter, so you might think that they would be the same age. But they're not! The oaks are only about 110 years old – half the age of the maples.

If the trees are all the same size, then how can you tell that this is an old growth forest? First of all, look up toward the tops of the trees. The crowns are very broad with sizeable light gaps in the canopy where mature trees have fallen. The trees are tall, have few branches at lower heights and are well spaced out. Now look at the forest floor. You'll notice a lot of dead, fallen timber and a substantial amount of leaf litter on the ground. The forest has several distinctive layers or strata from the herbaceous layer to the canopy 30+ metres above.These are signs that this old growth forest is at the climax stage of succession. Today we refer to this natural treasure as the Beck Forest after the company that preserved it.



Old Growth forest just off the Wendat Trail

Post 10 The Mighty White Pines

The majestic White Pine is the official tree emblem of Ontario. They can be recognized from the other pine species since they are the only pines in this area that have five needles per bundle (Red, Scots and Jack Pine have two). White Pine proved to be ideal for ship masts and provided an excellent source of softwood lumber. Thus most of it was harvested by lumber companies by the late 1800s. Today, White Pine grows more commonly on this side of Kettle's Lake where the climate and soil conditions are best for this tree species.

White Pine tree with needles inset
(Julianna Hawke)

Post 11 Cordwood and Conifers

In 1939, Horace J. Kettle obtained an "agreement" and in 1943, a "grant", for the north half of this lot for the sum of $5,501. Here he ran a cordwood extraction operation along with his son Harold. Together they harvested maple, ash, beech and oak well into the 1950s. The lake adjacent to this lot was named after the Kettle family.

The Conifer Plantation

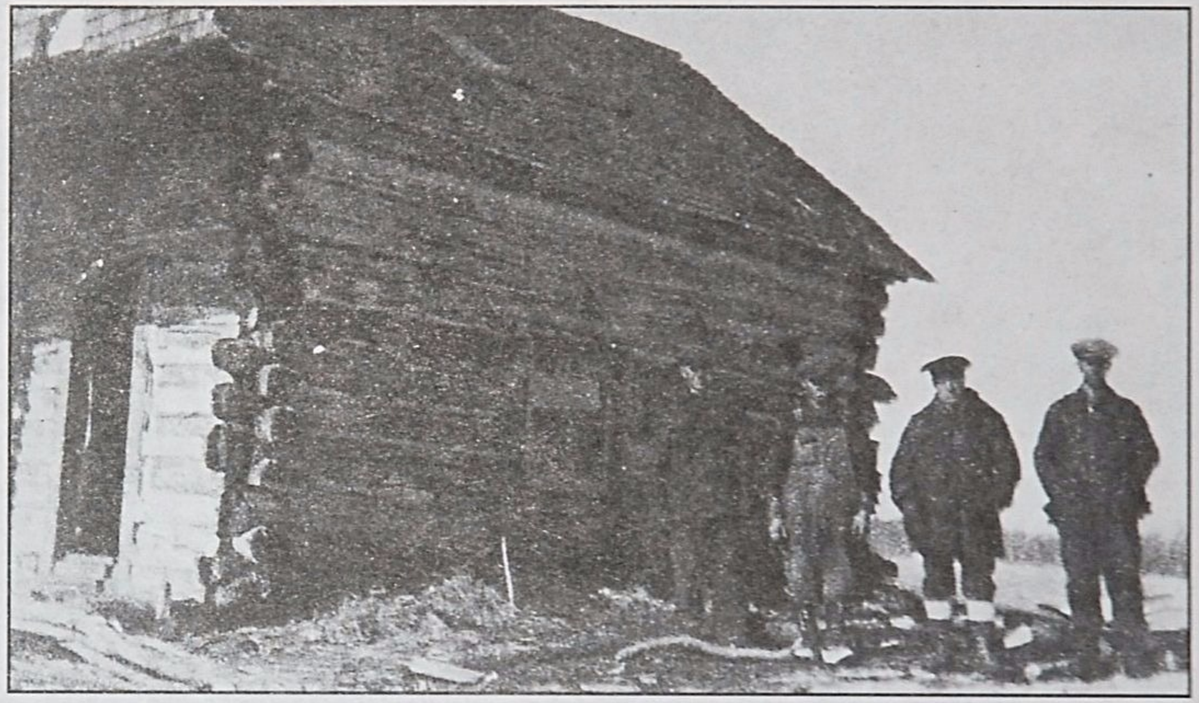
In the 1940s the Kettle's planted these rows of Scots Pine, Red Pine and Norway Spruce on part of their lot. This conifer plantation was one of the first examples of private silviculture for forestry purposes in the Penetanguishene area.

In 1963, the land was sold to the Ontario Government for future development as a Provincial Park.

Post 12 An Early Deserted Homestead

Before Horace Kettle bought this land, it was owned by Oliver Brabant who settled here in 1909. The structure in front of this post was probably a log barn. As you continue on the trail to a clearing ahead, you will see a large patch of Staghorn Sumac shrubs. This was once the location of the Brabant family homestead.

Brabant attempted to eke out an existence by farming. However, the soil was too sandy for a successful agricultural operation and he eventually sold the property to a lawyer, Mr. Grant, who then sold it to Horace Kettle.



Horace J. Kettle (left) and other cordwood workers circa 1940 in front of the log home originally built by Oliver Brabant

It is hoped that you have enjoyed your walk on the Wendat Trail and have learned about the people that played an important role in the history of Awenda Provincial Park. If you have any questions or comments about the trail, please feel free to talk to park staff. **Please help to support the Park education programs by depositing $1 in the drop tube for your trail guide.** If you do not wish to keep the guide a deposit box is provided for reusing brochures.

If you prefer a longer hike, the Bluff and Brûlé Trails link with the Wendat Trail and offer you an opportunity to explore other features within Awenda Provincial Park.

For more information on the life of the Wendat people, visit the Huronia Museum and Huron Ouendat Village at Little Lake Park in Midland.

Additional Awenda Trails

Beach Trail – This is a 4 km return trail that starts in the area behind 1st beach where the Nipissing Trail meets the Beach Parking area. This trail allows hikers to walk along Georgian Bay to each of the park's four beaches.

Beaver Pond Trail – This 1 km trail can be accessed from the Beach Trail, between Beach Areas 1 and 2, in the area of the viewing platform. It is a barrier free trail that takes hikers through a nature reserve zone portion of the park.

Bluff Trail – This is a 13 km circular trail which can be accessed from a number of locations throughout the park, including the Trail Centre.

Nipissing Trail – The Nipissing Bluff is the dominant glacial feature in the park. This 0.5 km trail and a 155 step staircase allow hikers to easily descend 32 metres down the face of the Nipissing Bluff. It connects with both the Bluff and Beach Trails.

Brûlé Trail – This is a 2 km trail which provides a link with the Robitaille Homestead Trail. Hikers can start this trail at the Trail Centre or at the campground road beside the additional day visitor parking area.

Robitaille Homestead Trail – This 3 km return trail starts at the additional day visitor parking area and takes hikers to an ancient dune system.

Cover Illustration:
Life in a Wendat Village
(Julianna Hawke)

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