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National Park Service

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Ellsworth first constructed 62 terraced flower beds on the outcrop, which he filled with more than 13,000 lilies of four varieties. He augmented the lilies with twenty-eight other flower varieties incorporating both annuals and perennials. Working with a hierarchy of local stone, Ellsworth crowned the meandering dry-stacked walls that surround the planting beds with a layer of crushed white quartz, creating a distinctive "frosting." The terraced beds were connected through pathways subtly indicated by stone gateways, stairways, stepping stones, simple bridges, grass paths and the use of a few painted stone signs including an "Up" sign at the east edge of the gardens.

By 1961, Ellsworth had accented his garden landscape with statuary that he created out of native rock and concrete as well as carefully selected and placed rocks and boulders. He skillfully balanced both small rocks and large monoliths--some as a single stone balanced on point, others crafted into figures, multi-tiered tables, and other sophisticated artistic sculptures. He stenciled the Ellsworth signature on a number of rock tablets placed throughout the gardens. At the top of the gardens, he constructed two stylized tepees of wooden poles. One was covered with a painted canvas and had battery-powered lights fixed in the apex to light the interior. The other was uncovered and left unadorned except for a sheltered stone sculpture. Only the canvas covered tepee remains, the other is marked by a circle of stones on the ground.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, photographs indicated that Mr. Ellsworth's health was making it difficult for him to maintain the gardens. The once-meticulously mowed lawn was overgrown and some sculptural elements were missing. Mr. Ellsworth did not return to the gardens after 1965. He died in July 1974 and Elsie passed away a few years later. By 1976, photographs taken by the Minnesota Historical Society show that small details were missing, some sculptures had tipped, the dock was collapsed, and the house and other buildings were boarded up. Despite this unkempt appearance, the basic form of the gardens was still apparent. When the National Park Service acquired the property in 1978, the buildings were put up for sale and the main cabin was removed. Photographs of the gardens from 1979 show that sculptures were largely intact but the forest had essentially swallowed the gardens. For almost two decades, the gardens deteriorated. Yet it still received visitors during the summer months. Pressure from the local Kabetogama Lake community to have the gardens maintained resulted in a day-long vegetation removal effort by the National Park Service in 1996. Since 2000, the Park has obtained funding for and organized an annual "Garden Blitz" that brings contractors and volunteers to the site to clear nonhistoric vegetation, replant historic plant varieties, and repair buildings and sculptures. Planning for stabilizing and eventually rehabilitating the site for visitor use has also occurred during the "Blitz." These efforts have resulted in restoring historic spatial relationships between the forest, gardens, lawn, and lake, revitalizing bulbs and other remnant vegetation, and a complete inventory of sculpture and a record of sculpture repair.

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Landscape Description

Historically, the gardens had the appearance of being carved out of the forested wilderness. This boundary between the gardens and forest is one of the primary features of the site. The forest provides a distinct, impenetrable wall, creating a dark, dense backdrop for views within the gardens. A few native spruce or pine trees were left within the gardens, but were "limbed-up" approximately 20 feet to create a vertical focal point, rather than a visual barrier. A solitary red pine, approximately 70 feet tall and with branches only at the top, functioned as a distinctive visual landmark at the top and back of the space. This tree was removed in 2004 because of its deteriorated condition. Other tall pines will be allowed to grow in this area to maintain the sense of verticality.

The irregular shape of the rock outcropping inspired the garden's organic form, and influenced its overall spatial organization. The topography of the site creates a series of flat planes: the lake, stepping up to the mown lawn surrounded by grassy meadow, followed by the uneven, steeply sloped rock outcropping, leading to the level summit area. The open meadow at the base of the outcropping provided a sense of arrival for visitors arriving from Ellsworth's dock on Kabetogama Lake, and provided a space for viewing the main features of the gardens. The forest that surrounded the outcropping and the meadow established a distinct vertical edge. This forest "wall" functioned as visual boundary and established a sense of enclosure to create an impression that the gardens had been carved out of nature. The inherent qualities of water, rock and forest remain unchanged.

The area between Kabetogama Lake and the rock outcropping consists of a relatively level open space. The western half was maintained by Ellsworth as lawn. The National Park Service continues mowing this area today. The eastern half of the clearing was fenced off from the cottage almost to the shore. During the Ellsworth's residence, this area was lawn. A path from the cabin crossed the mown meadow; passing through a wooden gate signed "Spring," ending at the southeast corner of the property where Ellsworth had installed a hand pump.

On and around the granite outcropping Ellsworth modified and capitalized on natural depressions in the rock surface to guide rainwater into a system of crevices and basins, creating three small ponds which he filled with cattails, other aquatic plants and sculptures. He also manipulated the native vegetation to direct views, create intimate-scale spaces, and frame small landscape "scenes." The garden's system of meandering paths linked these spaces, providing controlled views both in and out of the gardens. In some places the uneven topography and tall ornamental lilies that filled the terraced planting beds obscured views out of the gardens. This created intimate vignettes, many of which incorporated sculptural pieces as focal points. He enhanced views by controlling natural features, including "limbing" up trees, removing mosses from the rock to expose a highly polished granite surface, and possibly removing trees to open views of Kabetogama Lake.

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Ellsworth's incorporation of textural and focal elements followed the same general hierarchical scheme suggested by the garden's spatial organization. He placed more elaborate plantings at the eastern base to define the garden's edge, and sculptural elements near the western base of the rock outcropping to establish an entry point into the main portion of the gardens. Sculptures were sometimes connected by and beds created by a system of dry stacked stone walls that spanned the full width of the outcrop to form terraces. Sculptures placed along the stairs and pathways marked the progression from the base of the rock to the summit, which features the teepees, ponds, and panoramic views of the gardens and lake. The sculptures, mostly composed of uncarved rocks arranged in compositions resembling animal figures, chairs, tables, and altar-like structures, reinforced the rugged character of the outcropping and, along with the meandering pathways, gave the overall landscape composition an organic quality. Garden hoses, stacks of lumber, and piles of stone gave the gardens a sense of intuitive and continual evolution. The gardens seemed to have grown spontaneously and incrementally from its site, rather than from to a predetermined plan.

The summit of the granite outcropping was the most elaborately articulated space. The largest pond, tee-pee, refined walls, large elaborate sculptures and numerous small-scale features established this space as the principal destination within the gardens. The focal point was an upright stone painted pink and decorated with smaller stones arranged in the shape of an arrowhead. This sculpture is almost entirely intact and in good condition.

At the peak of bloom each summer, crowds of people visited the gardens. In 1962, 5200 people came to see the work of Mr. Ellsworth, who was usually seen watering flower beds or mowing the extensive lawns with his reel mower. Approximately 32 herbaceous ornamental plant varieties grew in the gardens, including multiple shades of nicotiana, dahlias, marigolds, cosmos, phlox, nasturtiums, balsam, and bachelor buttons. The dominant plant was an orange Asiatic lily that grew to about 4 feet in height. These lilies filled beds throughout the gardens, creating a uniform color and texture. They also provided a structural element in the middle ground of views within and emphasized the vertical quality of the gardens. The base of the gardens was planted with roses and peonies. A snowball Viburnum hedge in front of the main cabin is another distinctive vegetation feature that remains on site. It was untrimmed, had large white flowers and a naturalistic appearance. The naturalistic use of vegetation was also evident at the ponds, where water-tolerant species were planted to soften the edge between the water and the rock and add vertical contrast to the water's horizontal surface. When in full bloom, the system of beds created striking blocks of color and texture, which accentuated the way in which the abstract forms of the beds intrinsically related to the irregular, uneven surfaces of the granite outcropping. Viewed from the summit, the gardens became a fantastic mosaic of brilliant colors and soft textures that contrasted with the cool, gray tones of the hard, native rock. Elsewhere in the gardens Ellsworth used vegetation to produce diverse

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aesthetic effects. He planted roses and peonies in beds near the base of the granite outcropping, and used water-tolerant species in an around the three ponds to create a more naturalistic appearance.

Topography and vegetation are the primary means by which views into, out of, and within the gardens were created and controlled. When the gardens are viewed as a composition from the water and meadow, the forest formed the background, the tree and lily clumps, large sculpture, and rock walls form a middle ground, and the ponds, small sculptures and other site elements provide focus in the foreground. Most of the gardens were visible from the meadow, but once in the gardens, the uneven surface of the rock and the masses of lilies obscured broad views. This quality heightened visitor's expectations and provided a sense of arrival, with the summit as the primary destination once visitors moved through the gardens. The pond, teepee, fire pit and other small-scale features emphasized this space, and created a series of landscape "scenes" that can be viewed from several locations within the gardens. A striking view of Lake Kabetogama and the lower part of the gardens could be seen from the summit of the rock outcropping.

### Sculpture

The gardens contain a system of approximately 204 sculptures which vary in size and complexity; some are single rocks featuring an unusual shape or color, others are several large rocks or boulders mortared together. There are a number of chairs, tables, and altar-like arrangements which can be organized into the following typology:

**Figures:** A series of multiple rocks, usually mortared together, that form abstract shapes that may be interpreted as representational. These sculptures often consist of one large stone with several stones attached.

**Tables:** There are numerous compositions that feature several horizontally oriented stones stacked with smaller legs to create multi-level tables. They resemble pagoda-like characters.

**Monoliths:** These vertically oriented sculptures are usually mortared in place as a singular feature. They are found throughout the gardens, but are dominant at the western edge of the summit.

**Gateways:** Usually found in tandem with stone walls, these sculptures are fixed in place to guide movement through the gardens. They are sometimes single rocks but are also a grouping of rocks graded by size and mortared together.

**Spires:** Found throughout the gardens, these are smaller elongated shapes mortared in a vertical orientation to larger boulders.

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**Contributing Buildings/Structures**

The buildings historically associated with the property were the main cabin and privy, workshop, and the guest cabin and privy. Ellsworth's cabin, privy and workshop, built in 1944, were all frame structures covered with half-log siding. Half-log siding was also used to decorate the doors. The main cabin sat on a poured concrete T-shaped foundation. The primary wing measured 16'x26' (22'x14'), with a 10'x12' (8'x10') kitchen addition at the rear. The cabin was designed and meticulously constructed by Mr. Ellsworth. His skilled craftsmanship was displayed in the expertly joined corners of the half-log siding, uniquely designed windows, the hipped roof featured red roll composition roofing that was hand-cut, giving the building a "thatched roof" appearance. A fieldstone chimney projected at the front, as part of a windowed facade that faced the lake. It was capped with an intricate metal ornament. He accented the cabin by planting a row of snowball Viburnums in front, adding boot scrapers flanking the door, installing gutters that emptied into a rain barrel, and placing a row of flower pots on bright red stools on the east side of the house. Ellsworth carried his penchant for details to the workshop, guest cabin and even the interior of the privy. Near the privy he constructed a clothesline and hung a birdhouse and drinking cup from the decorative support post. A vegetable garden, which was supposedly maintained by Mrs. Ellsworth, was located to the west of the house. The cabin was removed around 1978. The contributing original foundation and chimney now support a picnic shelter constructed in 2001. The non-contributing shelter pays homage to the original cabin's rustic modernist architecture by incorporating the same hipped roof, rolled roofing, and heavy timbers. The small scale features once associated with the main cabin are no longer in evidence.

The workshop measures approximately 12'x10' and the main privy approximately 4'x6'. Both have poured concrete foundation, hipped roof with curved eaves, log slab siding, and asphalt roll roofing; neither has a chimney. The windows and door were replaced in 2004 and the original shutters are still in place. The building is in good condition. The Ellsworth's privy has a sheet steel venting stack. Two small windows and the door are missing. The workshop and privy sit on concrete foundations.

The guest privy, built in 1950, is a frame building with a fieldstone foundation, faux brick asphalt siding and roofing. It measures approximately 4'x4' and has a hipped roof. It has bracketed window hoods and a gabled hood with decorative brackets over the door. The guest cabin was the only structure remaining from the logging camp that preceded the rock garden. Its construction date is unknown, but it was moved to its final location ca 1944-1950. It was removed in 1999, after it was determined that it was deteriorated beyond repair. It had rock pier supports and a half-log door detail that matched the main house. Measuring approximately 22'x16,' it had a gable roof with a tin chimney at the center front. In 2001, the National Park Service constructed a multi-use building on the cabin footprint. Although its massing, construction materials, architectural detailing, and

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fenestration evoke the former guest cabin, it is considered non-contributing. The door from the former cabin was used in the contemporary building.

Only one of the two teepees located at the top of the gardens is extant, though the rock circle that formed the base of the second is visible, and the poles remain on site. Both were built around 1961-1965. The remaining teepee measures 8' diameter by 20' high with a painted canvas cover over thirteen 3 to 4" wooden poles. . Wiring for a light within the teepee is still intact. Although very delicate in appearance, the log poles and overall structure of the teepee are in good condition. Much of the wall fabric around the lower sections of the structure has deteriorated or was removed but the material that remains provides evidence of how the it was cut, attached to the poles, and painted.

A heavy timber bridge near the house provided access across a drainage ditch and connected to stepping stones that led to the main privy. The bridge was decorated with hanging orange flower pots. At the point the treatment efforts at the gardens occurred, the bridge had almost completely deteriorated. A replica was built by a local craftsman and the NPS installed the new bridge in 2004. It is considered non-contributing.

Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth added numerous small features to the gardens that were built in a rustic style similar to the structures or were prefabricated. These included a heavy timber fence and gate, wooden and stone signs, birdbaths and houses, a sundial, and animal figurines. These features added color and character to the gardens. Water hoses, buckets and other gardening implements also figure prominently in historic photographs of the site. The stone signs remain and the sundial has been replaced. All other features have disappeared over time.

Several contemporary buildings, structures and objects are now located at the site to facilitate visitor access and wayfinding. A dock, wayside exhibits, comfort station, and equipment shed have been added by the National Park Service since it acquired the site. Small features that replicate historic items have also been installed, such as a sundial and a wood sign and post. They are all considered noncontributing.

Although the house is gone and other site details are missing, the property remains a coherent expression of Ellsworth's vision and an intact representation of his efforts. The gardens possess high integrity for location and setting, as their boundaries and surrounding natural environment have not changed. Over time, mortar on the sculpture has failed, causing the rocks to loosen. Portions of sculptures have fallen, or been pushed or removed by visitors. Although disarticulated pieces have been found and sculptures reassembled as part of the "Blitz" efforts, some sculptures have been lost forever. The bed patterns are still evident in plan, though some of the three-dimensional qualities that directed visitors have been lost. As a result, the level of design has deteriorated. With the exception of historic plantings, the gardens materials are intact. Through the volunteer and park activities, the quality of workmanship has been retained. Sculptures have been stabilized or repaired using the Ellsworth's mortar mix, and the application of new mortar has been consistent with his approach. Between the time Ellsworth left the site, and the

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recent maintenance activities, the garden's character changed from a highly maintained and colorful showplace to a more private destination that possessed a feeling of mystery and discovery. With the removal of nonhistoric vegetation, the garden's sense of vibrancy has returned, though the level of detailed care it received during the historic period has not been replicated.