

**NOMINATION FOR THE JOHN L. COTTER AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ARCHEOLOGY**

Nominee:

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Type of Nomination: Project: The Bois Forte Ojibwe Study, Voyageurs National Park, 1979-2011

Introduction

Jeffrey J. Richner's work on the Bois Forte Ojibwe Study in Voyageurs National Park embodies the spirit of the John L. Cotter Award for Excellence in National Park Service Archeology. Mr. Richner's archeological and ethnohistorical study of Bois Forte archeology has been a career long endeavor of immense value to both the park and to the Native American people who are historically and traditionally associated with the lands now encompassed within the park. His work is an outstanding example of National Park Service (NPS) efforts to reconnect an underserved community with their heritage and culturally significant places managed by the NPS

Project Summary

The Bois Forte Ojibwe study of Voyageurs National Park was begun by Mr. Richner as early as 1979 when he became interested in the Ojibwe archeology of Voyageurs National Park during field investigations. He conducted archeological work in the park regularly between 1979 and 2001 and during his visits developed an extensive knowledge and understanding of the archeological resources of the Ojibwe people in the area of the park. His interests also led him to conduct research on Ojibwe lifeways, ancestry, and geneology through discussions with tribal members and historical research of archival photographs and documents. These years of work and study resulted in a definitive archeological and ethnohistorical synthesis of the historic use of the area of the park by members of the Bois Forte Band of Minnesota Chippewa Indians (Ojibwe). This synthesis was published in 2002 in the report, *People of the Thick Fir Woods: Two Hundred Years of Bois Forte Chippewa Occupation of the Voyageurs National Park Area*. His work to understand and document the Ojibwe use of Voyageurs did not end, however, with the completion of that report.

Beginning in 2004 and continuing through 2006, Mr. Richner conducted work in the park in part to implement some of the recommendations from the 2002 report. This latter part of the project focused on the A.D. 1736 through 1941 time period, but emphasized events from 1880 to 1930. This time period is generally neglected in archeological and historical studies of the region despite an abundance of archeological and documentary evidence. His research ultimately documented that over 150 individuals in four distinct bands, each led by a traditional chief, maintained their primary residence in the park into the early 1900s, while maintaining close relationships to other bands in the area. Mr. Richner's research revealed that although there was considerable movement among these groups through this period, the Bois Forte retained seasonal and in some cases year-round occupation of the park's lakes for decades after Bois Forte lands were formally ceded to the U.S. Government through treaties.

Understanding the importance of the information about the archeology and history of the park to the descendant

communities of Ojibwe that remain in the area, in 2004 Mr. Richner began working closely with tribal members to visit the sites, share knowledge about the sites, and develop plans for future study and preservation of these traditional places. Between 2004 and 2011, he brought tribal descendants to the sites to discuss their memories of the area and to inform younger tribal members about the past.

Project Details and Award Applicability

Mr. Richner's research has combined archeological information with ethnohistorical data gleaned from a large number of documentary sources to illuminate a period of the park's history that has typically been neglected by archeologists and historians alike. Basic archeological data were gathered during frequent but intermittently conducted archeological investigations necessitated at various times by park development projects. His archeological fieldwork added appreciably to the historical record and to date he has recorded about 50 sites related to Bois Forte use of the lands now within the park. Between 2004 and 2006, he and his crew began detailed mapping and analysis of the material culture found on these sites. He combined this archeological work with an exhaustive search of materials including census, homestead, allotment, annuity records, treaties, fur trade records, oral histories, diaries, Indian agency accounts, unpublished manuscripts, maps, and hundreds of photographs. He has skillfully and insightfully analyzed the confusing, oftentimes difficult to decipher records, in an effort to capture every important detail and has pursued an extremely convoluted path of information to reconstruct the story of Bois Forte. It is a superb example of multidisciplinary work and reflects Mr. Richner's exemplary skills as an archeologist. His use of a wide variety of historic sources, published and unpublished, in combination with archeological data from field inventories and evaluative testing efforts led to the discovery that there were specific residential bands of Bois Forte who lived within or very near the current boundaries of the park.

The sites associated with the Bois Forte include earthen embankments remaining from log cabins, rock rings representing burials, and surface artifacts such as metal and glass bottles. Mr. Richner has been using both traditional and more modern archeological techniques such as GPS to record the sites, many of which are heavily overgrown and impacted by uprooted trees. He is exploring alternatives for recording details of metal artifacts that will eventually disappear from sites but cannot reasonably all be collected and curated.

Mr. Richner has been able to associate a number of archeological sites with specific Bois Forte individuals or families. He completed a detailed analysis of band configuration, membership and residence for the four bands formerly residing in the park and other areas off the reservation. This work has met with much interest and appreciation from tribal officials and tribal

members. Between 2004 and 2011 Mr. Richner has led five boat tours for elders of the Bois Forte Band that approximately 80 people attended. He took elders to the sites he is studying and provided information on what had been found at the sites and how the information helped determine the age of the site, the activities that may have taken place there, and in some instances, the names of individuals who once lived there. He encouraged dialogue about people, places and issues during these trips as well. For many, it was an opportunity to see the place they had heard about from relatives, revisit a place they knew as a child, or for a few, a chance to visit the grave of a grandparent. The trips have kindled an interest on the part of tribal elders to revisit their former lands within the park and appreciate the largely forgotten heritage of individual families during the late historic period that is emphasized in Mr. Richner's research. Unexpectedly, it has resulted in Bois Forte friends and family becoming reacquainted, and in recent years, the inclusion of the next generation in the boat tours. Mr. Richner has taken particular pride in working with the kids on the tours to help them understand the archeology of the sites and the role that the park plays in preserving them.

These tours were very well received and resulted in development of a broader and deeper relationship between Richner, band members and the park. The trips seem to provide a release for embedded psychological pain over not so long-ago estrangement from what is still considered homeland. The experience has made some families feel more comfortable about visiting the park on their own. Mr. Richner's work has also resulted in improved communication and relations between the Bois Forte tribal government and park management and will prove invaluable in the development of consultation agreements with tribes. Information sharing among these partners is expected to enhance the on-going historical archeological research at the park and the reconnection of band members to sites in their historic homeland. His work with tribal members has resulted in better protection of burials, avoidance of resources during park development and operations, and identification of visitor use conflicts with resources.

Mr. Richner is also working with park rangers to establish a routine protection program for historic Ojibwe sites that are particularly vulnerable to looting when spring water levels are low and few visitors are on the lakes. He has conducted condition assessments on hundreds of sites in the park, including the Ojibwe sites, and has ensured that all the site information collected during those visits and over his years of work at the park has been entered in park databases. Materials he has collected have always been properly accounted for and curated. His work has helped the park achieve several goals related to archeology, ethnography, and visitor understanding of the park's important cultural resources.

Mr. Richner has multiplied the benefits of this project by engaging a wide range of participants and audiences. To enhance his fieldwork and share information, Mr. Richner contacted several researchers working on similar projects in other areas

of the Midwest and encouraged them to participate as volunteers on the crew. This has resulted in valuable professional connections and expanded the research potential of the project. He has also invited non-professionals to be a part of his crew, including park staff or others who have expressed an interest in the work. He corresponds with members of the Bois Forte Band who are researching family history and is working with the tribal historian and staff at the Bois Forte Heritage Center. His work has been made available to a broad audience through a variety of methods, including special visits with the Ojibwe Tribe, presentations at professional meetings, public presentations at the park and other locations, and through "Historic Bois Forte Occupation in Voyageurs National Park," a feature on the Midwest Archeological Center's internet site (<http://www.nps.gov/mwac/voya/index.htm>). This site provides an outline of the Ojibwe people, the Bois Forte Band's occupation of the park area, project methods, an example of the investigative results, and a slide show of historic photographs. In addition, he has provided the park with a poster version of this program that can be used for interpretive programs. He has worked with park maintenance staff on designing methods for protection of archeological resources at developed sites in the park and always took the time to explain the archeological history of the sites to staff charged with protecting them. He has been a mentor and an inspiration to the cultural resources staff at Voyageurs. The park staff in general has a great respect for the vast knowledge Mr. Richner retains about resources and they appreciate opportunities to accompany him on fieldwork.

Mr. Richner's work has been met with complimentary reviews from knowledgeable historians and archeologists. Dr. W. Raymond Wood, a noted ethnohistorian and anthropologist at the University of Missouri (emeritus), commented that Mr. Richner's study constitutes "the essence of ethnohistory," based on "exemplary" use of data sources. The Chippewa historian, Bruce White, commented, "Not many other people have done this kind of work on Indian people in Minnesota: a close study of a particular community in a particular place based on historical and archeological evidence and using historical photographs too. This is a model of what should be done." And Matthew Thomas, former tribal archeologist of the Fond du Lac Chippewa, noted that "the genealogical research together with the site histories and archeological record is a model approach for any Indian community or settlement...The Bois Forte people have a great piece of research and should be very pleased. In fact they are probably wanting more!"

Mr. Richner has shared his great knowledge of the Ojibwe archeology and the fascinating work on these sites with multiple student employees and interns. Two interns were hired through the National Council for Preservation Education internship program to assist with the Ojibwe study. Fieldwork undertaken by one intern focused on site survey methods and recording sites in what was often a difficult environment. The other intern located thousands of historic photographs in various

library collections across the United States and assisted with collection of other historic data. Many other students who have worked at the Midwest Archeological Center have assisted on various aspects of the years of field and historical research as well. Mr. Richner has nurtured many aspiring archeologists through instruction and by example as a part of this project.

In addition to the reports that document his work, his wonderful public presentations, and important Tribal communications, the work conducted between 2004 and 2006 has resulted in a Multiple Property National Register nomination that includes many of the Bois Forte sites. In addition to the reports already mentioned, Mr. Richner has written about the Bois Forte archeology in the park in several other documents. A brief bibliography of important reports is listed below:

- *People of the Thick Fir Woods: Two Hundred Years of Bois Forte Chippewa Occupation of the Voyageurs National Park Area*, Special Report No. 3. National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2002
- *From Things Left Behind: A Study of Selected Fur Trade Sites and Artifacts, Voyageurs National Park and Environs, 2001-2002*, Technical Report No. 84. National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2004. (This was a collaboration of Mr. Richner and coauthor Douglas Birk, Senior Archaeologist/Historian at the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology).
- Historical and Archeological Evidence for Bois Forte Ojibwe Outside Reservation Allotments at Voyageurs National Park: A Case Study of the Big Sky Man's Outside Reservation Allotment 245 and Site 21S1156. Paper presented at the Midwest Archeological Conference, Dayton, Ohio, 2005
- Expressions of the Past: Archeological Research at Voyageurs National Park. Technical Report No. 104. National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2008

His work is also highlighted in “People of the Thick Fir Woods” (News Close Up, Common Ground, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2003) and “Historic Bois Forte Occupation in Voyageurs National Park,” Midwest Archeological Center’s internet page at

<http://www.nps.gov/mwac/voya/index.htm>.

Other products in progress or anticipated include:

- Strength of the Woods: An Ethnohistory and Archeological Study of the Bois Forte Ojibwe’s Historic Use of the Voyageurs National Park Area – this is a 300+ page synthesis and analysis of records Mr. Richner amassed while researching Bois Forte history, including census, annuity, allotment records, and Office/Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent records
- The Bois Forte Heritage Center has asked the park and Mr. Richner to assist with developing exhibits about Bois Forte

history in the park.

- Creation of a computer database of over 1,000 Ojibwe photographs found in large number of repositories that will be made available to people of Bois Forte heritage and other researchers.
- Creation of a database of annuity and census records that will provide greater access to people of Bois Forte heritage and other researchers.
- This project has resulted in park planning for a visitor destination in Voyageurs dedicated to Bois Forte history. Ojibwe history is now incorporated into park interpretive materials including the recently published Ojibwe Tales.

Summary Statement

Through his personal interest and exceptional research abilities, Jeffrey J. Richner is skillfully and sensitively illuminating a much-neglected portion of the archeological record of Voyageurs National Park, as well as the history of present-day Native American people with strong traditional and historic ties to the land that now constitutes the park. By incorporating information about named families and individuals, Mr. Richner is putting a rare "personal face" on the archeological record.

Mr. Richner directly participated in all of the research conducted at Voyageurs since 1979, and has done so in an exemplary manner. He has nurtured volunteers, students, and park staff who participated in field research, and has consistently maintained high expectations and standards for the work he has done. He has worked closely with maintenance personnel and others to develop protective measures for the park's archeological resources. His outstanding work at Voyageurs has generated substantial respect for and interest in archeological resources on the part of the park's staff, thus enhancing the long-term management and preservation of those resources.

Mr. Richner's professional conduct and accomplishments reflect the highest standards of excellence in the archeological program of the NPS. In addition to being a top-notch archeological professional, Mr. Richner also exemplifies the best in park archeology, creating enthusiasm and support within parks, tribes, and communities for archeological research and preservation. His work draws and inspires great interest; he is always available to any park, tribe, or archeological colleagues who ask for his help, and he always gives generously of himself and his professional knowledge. He has materially advanced park archeology, public archeology, and archeological knowledge in the Midwest in countless ways.



Jeff Richner working with field crew members to record an archeological site at Voyageurs National Park



Jeff Richner helping to distribute lunches on one of the tours of the park with Ojibwe ancestors and tribal members.



Jeff Richner visiting one of the sites at the park with law enforcement rangers to discuss how to protect the sites from looting.