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MICHIPICOTEN'S FORMER CARIBOU HERDS

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Today's most southerly caribou herds are located on the Slate Islands, near Thunder Bay. During the 1930's, a herd of 100 caribou flourished and propagated on Caribou Island, a tiny speck of bleak, low, scrub covered land, fifty miles south of Pukaskwa. Thriving on the grey lichen and mosses, luxuriantly covering the island's brown sandstone, these caribou were seldom disturbed by humanity. The closest settlements, a solitary lighthouse and small fishing station, occupied only during the warmer summer months, were located on a smaller island south of Caribou Island, one of the most isolated spots of Lake Superior. Treacherous shoals, extending three miles from Caribou's shores made the island dangerous to approach, except in a small boat in calm weather. Indeed the island has been thought responsible for the tragic disappearance of the 1620 ton British built ship, the Bannockburn, lost with all hands in November, 1902. In 1934 Caribou Island's animals were donated by Charles Osborn, owner of the island, to the Ontario Department of Games and Fisheries, for release in the Pukaskwa area.

Although Caribou had largely been killed off or forced to migrate northward from Michipicoten by the 1920's, it's apparent that large numbers were once located in the Wawa area. Dr. A. P. Coleman, Canada's famous geologist who surveyed Lake Superior's shore in 1899, saw many of these creatures near Michipicoten and Pic. Joseph Cozens, Wawa's townsite surveyor of September, 1897, also reported, at a later date, to have located an unusually large pair of caribou horns from a beast reported shot near Wawa in 1906. John Holdsworth, a well known veteran Algoma prospector, stated that caribou were plentiful throughout Algoma, but particularly in the Agawa region, prior to the completion of the Algoma Central Railway in 1914. He added: "But caribou do not like white people and when whites began to appear during the railroad construction, the animals moved north. The caribou will tolerate the Indian, but has no use for the white".

The last remembered herd of caribou near Wawa grazed peacefully in Tremblay Flats, along the Magpie River. The unmolested herd not only survived, but increased rapidly in numbers during the early 1900's. Unfortunately a meat shortage in Michipicoten's gold camps led to a hunting expedition in 1906. Hunters shot down and killed every one of the caribou herd. From that time to the present, caribou have never been reported near Michipicoten.