

WAWA'S PREHISTORY LONG

-by Donald Pugh

If all the earth's existence were divided into 365 days, the existence of man in Wawa would occupy but a fraction of a second. Ten months of Wawa's history would precede life itself. The landscape then must have been bleak, a surging terrain of steaming volcanoes, and liquid magma, barren of all life. In this molten cauldron, valuable veins of minerals were deposited in vast folded mountains whose rugged remnants survive to this day.

The month of November marked the arrival of continental Paleozoic seas, abounding with marine life. Our region became a lonely island isolated by frothing seas. As life evolved, Wawa was a haven for massive carnivorous reptiles. By the second week in December, fearsome flying reptiles and heavy horned dinosaurs fought in lush tropical jungle.

Man appeared at 11:57 p.m. on the last day of the year, accompanied by four massive pleistocene glaciers. For one million years these giant rasps scoured and ground the land down to the weathered, polished, rounded hills of earth's very infancy.

Ten thousand years ago, the Magpie and Michipicoten Rivers were giant spillways, rushing icy green melt waters from a two mile cliff of ice to the newly created Lake Superior basin. The turbid waters of Superior swelled to undulate Wawa. Small sandy terraces such as along Magpie Street, and clay deposits mark temporary banks during the retreat of this glacial lake.

As the glaciers retreated, Palaeo Indians followed the movement of plant and wildlife northward. By 5,000 B.C. the Shield Archaic Indians called Wawa home, burying their dead with their knives, lances, awls, chisels, bracelets and pendants fashioned skillfully from the native copper of Lake Superior's shores.

The appearance of pottery by 1000 B.C. introduced a new cohesive Woodland culture. Possessing versatile birch bark canoes and tepees, these intrepid hunters from Superior, traded for Mexican Conch shells 1,500 miles away.

The Algonkian Ojibway culture

whose name means "people with puckered seam mocassins" emerged around 1,000 A.D. Disappearing into the interior boreal forest in winter to hunt moose with bows and arrows, these small mobile families may have passed their summers camped on the rocky shores of Wawa Lake in search for pike, whitefish and sturgeon. By the arrival of Jesuit Etienne Brule in 1623, these Ojibways were leaving gifts at Agawa Bay's pictographs while on their way to Georgian Bay for the annual Council of Three Fires. Today, with a 5,000 year heritage, the Ojibways are Wawa's inhabitants, while we are but tenants in the loom of history.
