



The Land Between

Cottage Country's Conservation Organization

www.thelandbetween.ca

WRITING BY WILLIAM ALLEN, SUBMITTED TO TLB
SKINK MAGAZINE- 2009



NORTH LIMESTONE ISLAND



North Limestone Island, District of Parry Sound

North Limestone Island is a remote, little-known treasure of natural diversity and important Aboriginal cultural history. The island lies 12 kilometres offshore in central Georgian Bay. It is seldom visited in modern times but this was not always the case. The windswept long narrow island, now a provincial bird sanctuary and nesting ground, is a limestone alvar with tiered limestone cobble beaches and a warmer microclimate and longer growing season than any other part of The Land Between. The sparse soil and lack of tree cover provide an environment for rare ground-hugging plants, lichen and a few shrubs. Along the midline of the island rests a sinuous spine of cobble formed by the action of ice in a post glacial lake of an earlier geological time. In this low lying ridge Aboriginal people of centuries ago removed cobblestones to a depth of over one metre, forming circular pits over which they built low lying round lodges supported by the inner sides of the pits. The people gathered in the early summer for the collection of bird eggs and again in the fall for the communal fishery. Now, amid the surviving house pits, fragments of ancient stone tools and pottery fragments are all that remain of that occupation of long ago. Because of the mass of poison ivy covering much of the island, modern visitors at this location at N45° 25', W80° 32' are hesitant to venture far from the shoreline but the ancient house pits are easily visible during a virtual visit using a home computer and Google Earth 5.0 software.

In 1623 Gabriel Sagard, a Recollet missionary, travelled to some islands, widely believed to include North Limestone Island. The people put up a lodge in the Algonquian fashion near several households already established there for the purpose of fishing, fish drying in the continuous winds, and boiling of the larger fish to skim off oil. Sagard reported that when a number of lodges were occupied there was a perpetual round of feasts. In the same region, in 1641, two Jesuit missionaries, Fathers Claude Pijart and Charles Raymbault, attended a gathering of 2000 Anishinaabeg who had assembled at the time of the fall fish harvest to celebrate a Feast of the Dead, a ceremony to honour those who had passed away recently. North Limestone Island, almost unchanged from those earlier fish economy times, is indeed a treasure.