

NATURAL HISTORY:

Like much of Wisconsin, the Lake Owen area was covered by ice between about 28,500 BCE and 15,000 BCE. The retreating glacier left a treeless tundra which became the home of the Woolly Mammoth. Four thousand years later, around 11,000 BCE, this area was a Spruce Forest and the home of the now extinct American Mastodon. The earth continued to warm and the climax forest became 80% Red Pine, White Pine, and Hemlock, with the remainder being mixed hardwoods. The forest you see today, mostly mixed hardwoods, is the result of logging.

HUMAN HISTORY:

A modern archaeological survey of Wisconsin's three most northern counties discovered over 50 sites where ancient human artifacts were found, 23 of these sites were on the north shore of Lake Owen from the present boat landing around to near the Lake Owen campgrounds. The oldest artifacts in the Lake Owen area date to 2830 BCE. From that time to about 120 AD, Native Americans were seasonal visitors to Lake Owen. They arrived in Spring, hunted beavers and birds, gathered buds and root plants, and fished with nets, copper hooks and spears, spearing spawning white fish and smallmouth bass from dugout canoes. When they departed in the Summer for areas on the shore of Lake Superior, they submerged their dugout canoes with rocks until they were retrieved the following Spring. From 120 AD to 610 AD, there was a permanent, year-round camp on Lake Owen. The natives used birch bark canoes and gathered Goosefoot (common name Wild Spinach), wild rice, hazel nuts, acorns, wild leeks, and cattails for food. The native's diet included beaver, which they trapped, otter and ducks. Fish was the staple of their diet, but they also hunted large game, deer, bear, moose, elk, and caribou, with bow and arrow. After 610 AD, Native use of the Lake Owen Peninsula was more sporadic. DNA found on pottery shards at Lake Owen excavation sites allowed scientists to identify what the occupants were eating.

ARRIVAL OF THE OJIBWA PEOPLE:

The Ojibwa were originally part of the Algonquin people. They were displaced by wars with the Iroquois and by European settlers, emigrated from east to west along the St. Lawrence seaway, and settled along the shore of Lake Superior, where their diet consisted of wild rice, bear, deer, elk, moose, and maple sugar. The Ojibwa were masterful builders of lightweight canoes, and Lake Owen, which is long and narrow, was an integral part of a major trade route connecting Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. The trade route, north to south, utilized the Bad River, the White River, Lake Owen, the Turtle Portage, the Namekagon River, and the Saint Croix River.

The Ojibwa erected birchbark wigwams in widely dispersed settlements centered around Chequamegon Bay and the Apostle Islands. Their rivals, the Lakota (a/k/a Sioux) lived southwest of the Chequamegon Bay area. In 1841, the Ojibwa defeated the Lakota in a major battle near present day Stillwater, Minnesota. A large group of Lakota warriors launched a counter offensive in the Fall of 1842, but they were defeated by a much smaller group of Ojibway warriors under the command of Chief Buffalo. The battle was fought on the west side of the Brule River, near the current site of Brule, Wisconsin. The Ojibway battle plan was to lure the Lakota onto difficult terrain, where they had to put down their weapons and use their hands to climb a hill, and then attack the unarmed Lakota at the most opportune time. The plan worked well. The death toll was 101 Lakota and 19 Ojibwa.

LUMBER BARONS:

The lumber barons built small gauge railroads in the Lake Owen area in the 1880s to haul out timber. By the time of the Great Depression, the northern Wisconsin forest was logged flat save less than a dozen small patches and a few acres of virgin forest, two of which are on the Lake Owen Peninsula. These two patches of virgin Hemlock were not logged because the sawmill would have to shut down to retool their saw blades for Hemlock and they could make more money by sawing all the red and white pine. In 1935, the National Forest took over ownership of the land around Lake Owen.

LAKE OWEN HARDWOODS STATE NATURAL AREA:

This area was designated a State Natural Area in 2007 because of its current undisturbed wild character. The route of the North Country Trail goes through this area from just north of the picnic grounds to the Porcupine Lake Wilderness, a distance of about five miles. This area has two high quality stands of old-growth virgin Hemlock trees and a large tract of unfragmented pine and hardwood forest near the Lake Owen shore. Hemlock is reproducing under paper birch that sprang up after a fire. The hardwoods are dominated by sugar maple. You will also see red oak, scattered white pine, smaller amounts of paper birch, big-toothed aspen, and red maple. Several small seepage lakes and ponds are associated with communities of Black Ash. There is swamp, muskeg/open bog, emergent and floating leaved aquatics, and red maple-cinnamon fern swamp with iris swales. Mature, rich sugar maple-basswood forest is scattered throughout. Shaded wet and dry cliffs support a remnant red pine community and two rare plant species. Common ground-layer species include sweet cicely, big-leaved aster, Pennsylvania sedge, Canada mayflower, sessile-leaved bellwort, downy Solomon's seal, and shining clubmoss.

Wolf, moose, bobcat, and cougar have returned after an absence of more than 50 years. In 1995, Elk were reintroduced in the Clam Lake area less than 20 miles to the southeast of Lake Owen. Over 400 elk now live in Wisconsin.

MELLAND POND

The shallow waters of the pond warm much faster than deep Lake Owen. It was named after the Christ Melland family whose made this their favorite place to swim. The pond is a home to beavers now and then.