

Chair's Remarks for 2021

by Chris Dobson

It was 13 1/2 months ago in April of 2020 that we began as an all-volunteer organization for the first time in 65 years. I'm pleased to report things have gone smoothly since then. Our biology intern program in the park ran successfully last year and is off to a good start this year in spite of the fact that one of our interns broke her wrist in May and won't be joining us until July. The artist cabin is tentatively reopening, and the bursary program has been awarded to two outstanding students. Our grant to Lakehead University to investigate invasive species in the park is well underway with the second year just beginning.

Will Stoltz, our science chair, has done an outstanding job of putting together a science committee to monitor and produce an annual report on the state of the park. He will be talking about this a little later together with a review of our Lakehead activities.

Our communications chair Louisa Marcwski has taken on the pandemic and defeated it with an imaginative event portaging canoes in our own streets to defeat the gloom and doom of COVID-19, at the same time raising money for the foundation. She has also done a wonderful job of keeping our social media up-to-date and interesting while working on plans to make our internet presence an important part of our future.

Finally, Taylor Staten our treasurer, has worked to overhaul our finances to make them efficient, easy to understand, and making sure that we're getting value for your money.

Our secretary Rob O'Connor has kept track of all the comings and goings plus organized social zoom meetings and over all has done a great job in keeping meetings organized.

So, in summary, I believe that the foundation is in good shape. Its finances are sound and it has a clear path forward towards its continuing goal of helping to protect the park for future generations.

Biology Interns

by Katie Tripp

The 2021 Quetico Foundation Research team got off to a rough start when returning member Kelsey Atatise broke her wrist just prior to starting work. Originally, it was hoped Kelsey could join the team later but delays in her recovery meant she was unable to. This left Team Leader Katie Tripp as the sole member of the team for the summer but along with the field assistance of Quetico Provincial Park staff (including Keeley Sweitzer, Destinee Lafonde, Jack Davidson, Michael Davidson and Brian Jackson), most of the planned projects were completed.

Most of the summer was spent working on the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas and moving songbird meters around the park. In addition to this work, other projects completed this summer include collecting depth and water clarity information from lake trout lakes so that each individual lake trout population's risk from climate change can be assessed; sampling lakes for the presence of invasive Spiny Water Flea and monitoring trends in salamanders in the park. We also assisted the Lakehead University Quetico Foundation Research Partnership students in data collection for their thesis.



Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

The major focus of work in the early part of this season was collecting data to contribute to the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Every 20 years since 1981, a survey of the distribution and relative abundance of Ontario's bird populations is conducted which is known as the Breeding Bird Atlas. The surveys occur over a five-year period with the current survey happening from 2021 to 2025.

One concern of previous surveys is a lack of data from less accessible wilderness parks so there has been an effort to collect more data from Quetico for this survey. Bird songs were recorded using song meters and much of the time from May to July was spent moving the meters to cover 25 sites within each of 4 different 10km x10km squares (total of 100 sites). The recordings will be analyzed over the winter by experienced birders to determine the species found at each site.

The placement of the meters is different in Quetico than most other places as all sites are accessed via canoe. This involved several canoe trips in the park to move meters to their different sites while following the time restrictions of the breeding season and the duration of time needed for each meter at each site (minimum 5 days).

Lake Trout Vulnerability Assessments

Lake trout prefer cold water and tend to live in the coldest and deepest parts of lakes. As climate change pushes forward, the habitat for lake trout in lakes will change as they get warmer. But not all lakes are created equal and different lakes will be impacted differently to a warming climate and warmer water. Smaller lakes with only a small section of deep water will warm more quickly than a larger bowl of deep water.

To estimate the rate in which these lakes will warm, a few data points are collected. The main one is the maximum depth of the lake as well as an estimate on the contour lines of depth. This leads to estimate the volume of water in the lake and can be used to estimate how quick the lake will warm. Data on mineral content and water clarity is also collected.

Collecting this data for dozens of lakes is an ongoing project.

Spiny water flea impacts on fish: Year 1

by Michael Rennie, Associate Professor Lakehead University; Canada Research Chair in Freshwater Ecology and Fisheries



We are now into our second year of work in Quetico Provincial Park to investigate the impact of spiny water flea (or *Bythotrephes* to us scientists). Thanks to generous funding from the Quetico Foundation, we initiated our first full year of field work in Quetico, with some different approaches than originally planned and modifications due to COVID, but were highly successful in gathering critical information to answer our research questions. Much of the field work this summer was focused on collecting ageing structures for walleye from lakes that will help us to answer questions about the potential negative impacts of *Bythotrephes* on early growth rates of Walleye, being led by MSc student Danielle Gartshore.

We also welcomed a new member to the research team, Ben Wood, a graduate of Dalhousie University who will be using data collected this summer and next, in conjunction with data from the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to evaluate how mercury concentrations in both walleye and lake herring or cisco are affected by the establishment of *Bythotrephes*.

With a great deal of planning, several lakes were sampled over the past year, including Batchewaung, Pickerel, French, Saganagons, Kawnipi, and Robinson. Both Danielle and Ben have been hard at work in the lab since, preparing ageing structures for age determination and analyzing fish tissues for mercury.

This research into fish growth and mercury concentrations is important for a couple of reasons. First, slower early growth rates mean that walleye (which spawn in the spring) may not get large enough in their first year to survive over the winter- which may mean ultimately fewer walleye in the lake. Second, fish mercury concentrations are important to keep in mind when consuming fish from the Park, and if invasive spiny water flea have impacts on fish mercury concentrations, this will be critical for considering planning and consumption limits for fish in the park if the spread of this invader continues to increase.

Looking forward to summer of 2022, field work will be planned in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry and Environment, Conservation and Parks to fill in data gaps for answering questions related to fish mercury concentrations. Results from Danielle's research will begin to be summarized in the coming year, so stay tuned for what we anticipate will be some insightful and interesting results in next summer's newsletter!



Shan Walshe Bursary

Here's a letter from this year's winner of the Shan Walshe Bursary, **Kelly Bringham**.

Dear Selection Committee,

This fall I will be attending University of Guelph, as I have accepted my offer of admission. While just beginning my post-secondary education, I look forward to completing my Bachelor of Science specializing in Environmental Sciences. This is a four-year program, and I couldn't be more excited to attend and learn more about our environment. I knew I was interested in environmental sciences as my career path because of how much I love the outdoors. I grew up living on a lake where I developed my love for hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing and so much more at a very young age, much like Shan Walshe. Some of my favourite memories of these activities took place in Quetico Provincial Park.

I've always loved animals and being close to nature, which is why I chose to do volunteer work at Quetico Park.

Myself, along with all of the 2019-2020 Outers, devoted an 8-hour work day into improving the park's safety as well as its aesthetics. I participated in the Outers program as a Brigade Leader as well as staffed trips in my grade 12 year. This allowed me to experience the park to the fullest and take in everything it has to offer. I really enjoyed my experience as an outer which made me even more certain about what field of study I wanted to pursue in the future.

Throughout my years of high school I've had many volunteer and job placements, as well as actively participating in extracurricular activities. I was a dedicated member of the XC running, basketball, volleyball and badminton teams. Due to my strong interests in sports I've volunteered as a scorekeeper, tournament referee, at the Atikokan Ski Club and at the Atikokan Municipal Arena and Swimming Pool. I currently work as an NLS certified lifeguard and as an assistant coach with the Atikokan Swim Team. For the past two years I've worked at the Atikokan Centennial Museum as a

summer student, where I've studied the history of Quetico park and given tours of our paddling gallery.

I take great pride in academic excellence and I work hard to achieve the best grades I can, all while working part time after school in order to pay for my horses and save money for my education next fall. I've been an honour roll student consistently from grades 9-12 in all university level courses. I have also obtained my Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) in the Environmental pathway. I've volunteered as a tutor to help younger high school students in their grade 11 physics class, the same one where I received a 95% as my final grade. I look forward to starting this new chapter of my life and obtaining my undergraduate degree at Guelph University. Thank you for your consideration!

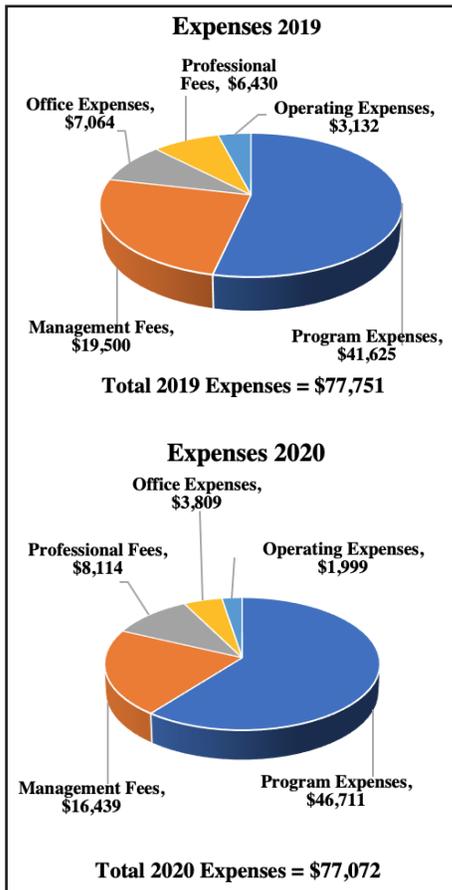




Dear Quetico Foundation Supporters *by Trevor Gibb*

Thank you very much for your continued caring and support for the protection and of our special park through Quetico Foundation programs such as the research field team and research grants for Lakehead University as well as the many other things that the foundation does to build awareness of and advocate for Ontario's oldest wilderness park.

This past year at Quetico started off with a bang. In February of 2021, the park was officially recognised as an international dark sky park by the IDA (<https://www.darksky.org/quetico-provincial-park-awarded-international-dark-sky-park-designation>). We now join our neighbours across the border, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyagers National Park who also have dark sky designations, to become an enormous and contiguous area of protected lands making efforts to recognise and preserve naturally dark night skies. Dark skies free of light pollution are an important part of the natural environment and the wilderness canoeing experience for park visitors.



Receiving dark sky park designation was a high point and it was followed by a low point as the province endured another wave of Corona Virus and our provincial parks were closed for overnight stays until Mid June. Once Quetico re-opened, Canadian backcountry paddlers began visiting the park right away, but our American friends would have to wait until Aug 9th for border restrictions to change.

Throughout the paddling season, NW Ontario has been very dry, unusually dry, and the park had numerous forest fire starts throughout the summer. Throughout the paddling season there was a closure area in the southwest portion of the park to keep visitors away from a cluster of fires. As the dry season continued, some fires grew and eventually led to the closure of the entire backcountry of Quetico on August 17th. Fire is a part of the natural cycle here in Quetico and although an often stark landscape is left in

the wake of a fire, it is in the long-term, important for maintaining the ecological integrity of the park.

Despite the various challenges that this year brought us, I am pleased to report that the Quetico Foundation research team continued to do its work, assisting the park biologist in conducting field research and monitoring in the park. This year the primary focus was on supporting data collection for the Breeding Bird Atlas. We would not be able to continue our research and monitoring activities at the same level with out the ongoing support of the Quetico Foundation.

I am also excited to share that a special educational display which interprets red pine fire history in Quetico was completed this year thanks to support from both the Quetico Foundation and the Friends of Quetico. It shares with the visiting public the results of fire research that foundation research team has been supporting in recent years. I have included a photo of this new display. I hope you get a chance to see it in person if you are ever visiting the Heritage Pavilion at Dawson Trail Campground.

Take care everyone and if you are ever visiting Quetico, please pop in to say hi at the park headquarters in Atikokan.

Artist in Residence Update

It was another different year for the program with the pandemic continuing to effect travel at the border and within Canada. This year 2 artists in residence were successfully scheduled for the month of August for 2 week residencies at the park.

Unfortunately, circumstance made it so that both artists cancelled their residencies just before arriving. One artist cancelled due to a family emergency and another cancelled because of the fire and smoke situation at the park in late August. We are hoping to offer the artist in residence program for all of the peak season in 2022 after another unusual year this year.

William Sargent "Sarge" August 28th 2021, RIP

It is with great sadness that I have to report the passing of William Sargent, known by all as "Sarge". For many years Sarge had fought the good fight against illnesses related to his diabetes until they finally got the better of him on Wednesday, August the 18th, 2021.

He was the Executive Director of the Quetico Foundation from 1997 to 2005 and since then has remained as Trustee Emeritus. During his time as Executive Director, he achieved the highest level of fund raising ever recorded for the Foundation. Under his watch, the Foundation prospered and was highly effective.

He will be greatly missed by all his friends and all the friends of Quetico.

Chris Dobson, Chair, Quetico Foundation

John B. Ridley Research Library 2021

David C. Toop

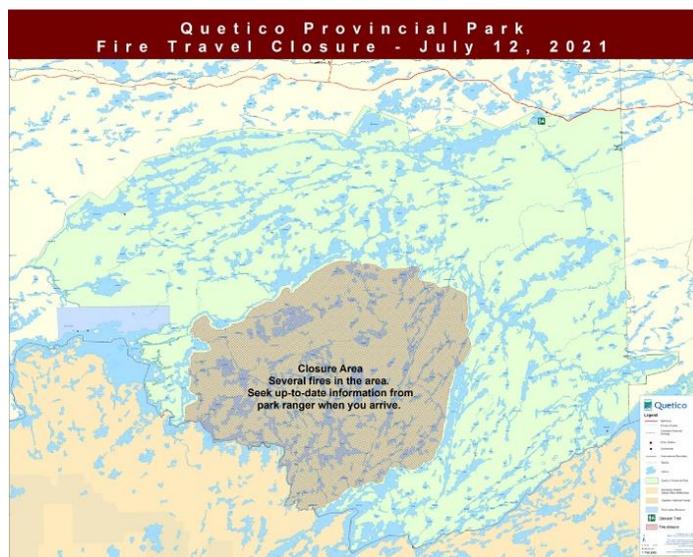
This year was a memorable one for Quetico Park. We entered the season with Province-wide Covid restrictions in place. Day use was allowed, while the opening of the Dawson Trail campground was delayed by several weeks. Many of our guests are American, and the USA border did not open until well into August. This was too late and too restrictive to open our remote entry stations this season. From June onward, forest fires caused the closure of the southern part of the backcountry, and by late August, the entire backcountry. The Ridley Library opened again to park visitors, many of whom were in awe of our collection of local and indigenous archives.

Jill, our Librarian was on maternity leave. I was asked to fill in for the season in a role that required a rare set of skills and duties, from Library Science, to archiving, electronic media, communications and natural sciences.

The first big challenge this year was a computer refresh. Upon arrival I found that the existing library computer, long overdue for an update, was on life support. After some inquiries we found that the aging Windows 7 model had fallen off the radar. No-one in IT realized it existed, explaining why no refresh had come or was planned. We were able to obtain a desktop that had been previously used in a different office. To this we then proceeded to add RAM and physical memory, then went through a lengthy task of installing proprietary software and bringing data forward. Most of our work is done directly on the computer rather than from a network. Being in a remote location, we lack ready access to components or support workers. With effort we got the system up and running with all our database transferred forward, which should keep us going well into the future.

August's forest fires left a heavy cloud of smoke over much of the Dawson Trail area. The fires were timely. Much of the park was long overdue for a burn. The last fire season of a similar magnitude was ninety years ago. This fire season has allowed the renewal of the red and white pine ecosystems during a period of low visitation to the park. I was kept busy keeping the fire maps updated for arriving visitors.

2021 marked the 20th Anniversary of Side Lake Fen Conservation Reserve, a rare string fen wetland found near Turtle River – White Otter Provincial Park. Side Lake is within Quetico's umbrella. The Reserve was due for its ten-year status review. I visited the fen on four occasions this summer documenting some of its rare and unusual plants, as well as making expeditions into some adjacent wetlands. I encountered and documented seven species of orchids at Side Lake and three more orchid species in adjacent areas.



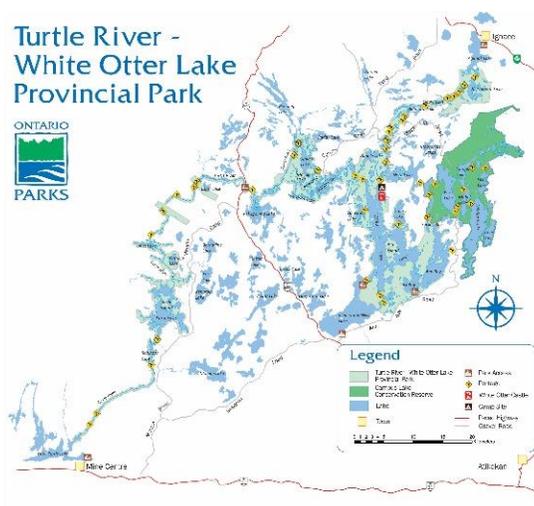
Fire closure map

Two of the normally pink orchids had also come in rare white flowered phases. Five species of carnivorous plants were also documented. The fen yielded one remarkable discovery after another. The summary report on the area will ensure that Side Lake's conservation status is justified for another decade. Quetico Park is home to orchids too, and I documented five species found on Dawson Trail hiking trails for Quetico's inaturalist project, while adding over 400 general flora and fauna sightings encompassing over 250 species.



Just a few of our amazing orchids

In August, with all or part of the backcountry closed, we started directing canoeists to nearby Turtle River – White Otter Lake Provincial Park (TRWO), a nearby backcountry park within Quetico's umbrella. White Otter Castle, the showpiece of the Park is under renovations, as is the interpretive display. I researched the portages, access and amenities of TRWO to create a current map for the area. The initial intent of the map was for the new interpretive display kiosk at White Otter Castle, the park's iconic cultural attraction. Copies of the maps were soon in-demand for canoeists looking for an alternative travel to Quetico's backcountry closures. In addition, for the display I created a winter use map for snowmobile access. Added to this were updates Quetico's trail maps to represent current status.



Restoration work at White Otter Castle will include this new interpretive signage for the kiosk



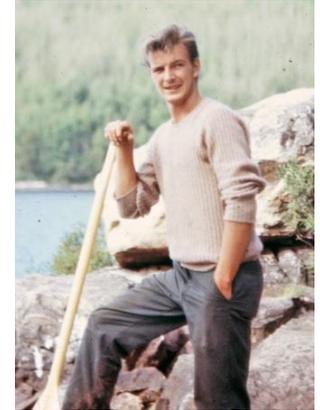
Dark Sky Program

In 2020 Quetico was designated an International Dark Sky Park. It is not enough to achieve the status. We needed to include this in the park programming. This included new brochures and social media engagement. We obtained a telescope which was used to launch a dark-sky Discovery interpretive program. The program was unique to Quetico in the Ontario Parks system and was popular with park guests of all ages. We are looking forward to building on this program in coming years.

The Library was contacted this spring by a park old timer, Bob Sullivan. Over the summer I compiled a collection of sixty short stories. These covered his recollections of working on Portage Crew from 1964 to 1969 and forestry Camp 111 from 1969-1973.

Bob was hired again in 1975 to scout out protected areas, leading to the creation of Turtle River – White Otter Lake Provincial Park.

In the library we often get visitors who have a history with the Park and have fond memories of living near, working at or exploring Quetico. It has been a pleasure to add my name to the lives who have been touched by this amazing wilderness Park.



Bob Sullivan shared his stories



David Toop at home in the John B. Ridley Research Library



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