

2026 Governor's Award for Historic Preservation



Isle Royale Archaeology

Awardees: Isle Royale National Park; Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; and Grand Portage National Monument

Collaborative Stewardship of Archaeological Resources, Isle Royale

For no less than five thousand years, people have made the water journey to Isle Royale, known as Minong to regional Anishinaabe cultures. Their time on the island and related activities left imprints on the rugged, wild environment. Isle Royale National Park was established in 1931. The archipelago is a continued place of significance to the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and its status as a Traditional Cultural Place celebrates the tribe's lasting connections to Minong.

Since 2012, the cultural resource program at Isle Royale has conducted archaeological survey work along the island's Nipissing beach, a relict Lake Superior shoreline approximately five thousand years old. The Relict Shoreline Survey project has enriched our understanding of Minong's human past, identifying new archaeological resources and placing them into the wider context of archaeology in the Lake Superior Basin.

Among the successes of the project are the long-term connections forged between project research and the regional Ojibwe community. For the past several years the National Park has hosted a tribal culture camp, or Agaaming Aki, where Ojibwe youth immerse themselves in the island wilderness. The curriculum provides opportunities for young tribal members to engage with history and ecology in a field-based setting. Participants tour an extensive pre-contact mining district where they can appreciate the scale and significance of the activities that occurred here. Strong, collaborative partnerships such as this help us all better understand and respect the people who came before us.

