

An Ecological Dilemma

T. M. Sibbald and Katie A. Ireton

Abstract

Six small dump sites were found inside Pinery Provincial Park with surface debris dating back to the 1940's and 1950's. This indicates a possible connection with the first permanent London Scout camp which was held in the same region between 1933 and 1947. Excavation of the sites would be an interesting opportunity for Scouts to learn some history, while removal of the dumps' contents from the rare oak savannah is ecologically sensible. However, the excavation requires an archeological licence which is not feasible due to a lack of prior experience. The opportunity is not believed to be of sufficient interest to the archeological community to warrant the excavation effort and the professional cost is prohibitive to a cleanup effort.

Background

Between 1933 and 1947, London's first Scout camp was held on land that is now part of Pinery Provincial Park. Each summer, Scouts would enjoy a ten day session at camp, practising basic survival skills. These included orienteering, boat craft, signalling, cooking and outdoor camping. The Scouts would be accompanied by a camp quartermaster, a director and adult leaders, who organized and directed camp activities.

During these years, camping practices for garbage included the phrase bash, burn and bury. One camp log entry (Corfield, 1967) from 1933 states that they should get an incinerator to burn garbage before burying it. Last year, six small dump sites, approximately eight feet in diameter, were found inside the park boundaries. They are located along an old access road in the oak savannah region of the park.

The oak savannah is a globally rare ecosystem (Pinery Provincial Park, 2000), 99.97% of which has already been destroyed or altered. It is a transition ecosystem, between prairie grasslands and oak forests, maintained through monitored forest fires. Currently, Pinery Provincial Park hosts a significant amount of the world's oak savannah habitat and programs are in place to maintain the region's integrity. Removal of the garbage from the oak savannah agrees with the objectives of maintaining ecological integrity.

Six small dump sites were found inside Pinery Provincial Park with surface debris dating back to the 1940's and 1950's. This indicates a possible connection with the first permanent London Scout camp which was held in the same region between 1933 and 1947. Excavation of the sites would be an interesting opportunity for Scouts to learn some history, while removal of the contents of each dump from the rare oak savannah is ecologically sensible. However, the excavation requires an archaeological licence which is not feasible due to a lack of prior excavation expe-

rience. The opportunity is not believed to be of sufficient interest to the archaeological community to warrant the excavation effort and the professional cost is prohibitive to a cleanup effort.

Discussion

An investigation of the history of London's first permanent Scout camp led to the discovery of the old camp site inside Pinery Provincial Park (Figure 1). This site features an old well head and the layout is consistent with a map drawn in Jack Geary's diary in 1934. Numerous people who attended the camp recounted various access routes. A survey of the area indicated that there are three old roads and it is likely that all of them were used over the fifteen years the camp was held.



Figure 1. Dumpsite inside Pinery Provincial Park

Two of the access routes pass through the oak savannah at the north end of the park and it was along one of these routes that six pits were located. The pits are round, eight to ten feet in diameter, with a depression of three to seven feet on the surface. Surface debris includes broken bottles, shards of china and rusted cans. The latter features an older style of fabrication with flat seams and simple edge construction. The age of the surface debris appears to correspond to the final years of the camp.

A detailed investigation of the remains of the Scout camp is a large task because of the area involved. In view of this it was thought that the garbage pits would provide an interesting starting point. However, an archaeological licence is required for which one must have past experience in archaeological excavations. This requirement is to ensure that the significance and archaeological integrity of any items removed from the ground are maintained.

The supposed archaeological significance of the items within the dumps is questionable. Surface debris includes broken pieces of old bottles, pots and china. A piece of the china was found during a preliminary visit to the park and was matched with an entire twelve piece place setting in pristine condition at a London auction

house. Other artifacts were matched with items in better condition at the Woodstock nostalgia show.

The dumps are over fifty years old and one may argue that the effect on the environment will be minimal because the majority of the leaching will already have occurred. This is not consistent with the recovery of a can containing nearly a quart of rubbery orange paint. The decay of metal objects will undoubtedly continue to have a negative impact on the environment. Contaminants still exist making it ecologically sensible to remove the dumps' contents from the rare oak savannah region.

The cost of an archaeological excavation is estimated in excess of twenty thousand dollars. An alternative, with an estimated cost between five and ten thousand dollars, is to have several test sites excavated in order to determine their archaeological significance. Assuming that the sites are of no archaeological significance, as believed, then an inexpensive clean up could be done. However, should the sites prove to be significant then immediate excavation would need to proceed, in spite of the cost, to protect the archaeological integrity of the artifacts.

An alternative proposal was made to excavate the sites using volunteers with an interest in Scouting history. A Scout troop had expressed an interest in being involved and other youth had proposed a low cost video log of all artifacts (Figure 2). The cost to the park would have been economical because of the non-profit interests of those involved. This approach met its demise as the requirements for an archaeological licence, specifically excavation experience, could not be fulfilled.

Conclusions

The Pinery Provincial Park issue is an unusual problem. There are two key aspects to the problem; economics and the balance between archaeological and ecological significance. With regards to economics the cost implied by the possibility of archaeological significance is excessive if the end result is little more than an ecological clean up. The balance between archaeological significance and ecological importance does not presently appear to have a forum. The Ontario Heritage Act clearly favours the protection of archaeologically significant artifacts over any ecological interests.

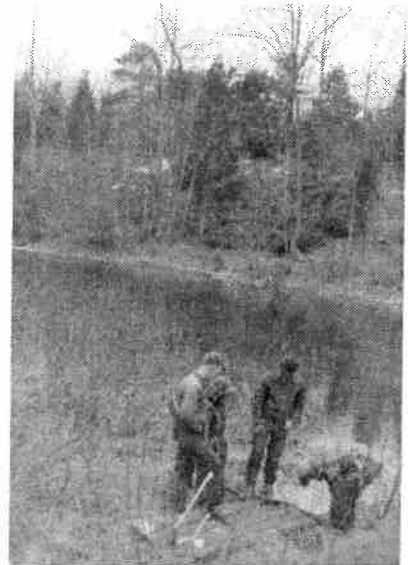


Figure 2. Scouts Group

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Terry Crabe, Pinery Provincial Park Warden, for his many valuable insights into the history and geography of the region. We would also like to thank Bob Westland for the pictures shown here of the Boy Scouts at the camp.

References

- Corfield, W.E., 1967. *Keen For Adventure*. Boy Scouts of Canada - London District Council, London, Ontario.
- Pinery Provincial Park, 2000. *Pinery 2000 Program and Facilities: A Trail for All Seasons*. Ontario Parks, Pinery Provincial Park. Ontario.