

## North Shore Copper Mines

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November 2003

Copper in the Lake Superior region was first mined by the Eastern Archaic people from 500 B. C. to around 1,500 B. C. These people were also known as the "old copper culture." Some of their pits and diggings on Isle Royale cover more than a square mile. Copper from this region passed through trade networks and has been found in places as far away as Montana, Georgia, and New York. For reasons unclear today the use of the metal by these ancient people ceased at the end of this period.

It did not take long before this important metal was noted by new arrivals from Europe. Jacques Cartier mentioned copper deposits somewhere up the St. Lawrence seaway as early as 1530. This was only 38 years after the arrival of Christopher Columbus! By the 1630's there were written accounts of native copper mines published in Europe. Sieur Des Grosseilliers observed the copper mines on Isle Royale in 1659. The presence of copper was in the back of everyone's mind from then on.

When the border between Canada and the United States was negotiated it was the possibility of copper deposits that caused the boundary to end up where it is today. Even after the north shore became part of the U. S. there was still an obstacle to mining exploration. The land still belonged to the Ojibwa tribe and they would allow no encroachment into their territory. In 1854 the Ojibwa ceded the land north of Lake Superior to the government at the treaty of La Pointe.

By 1857 a land office was established at Buchanan (Knife River) in Duluth Township to accommodate the expected rush of miners. The anticipated rush didn't happen and only a scattering of new mining companies actually began exploration. R. B. Carlton, an early settler at Fond du Lac, was an enthusiastic promoter who tried to interest new copper mining ventures. He formed the Carlton Land, Mineral, & Mining Company, which had mining claims along the French River. In 1863 one ton of copper had been shipped from the mines at French River. Both the French River Mining Company and the North Shore Mining Company also worked in this area. John Parry mined at Knife River from 1854 to 1856.

Another mine active in 1867 was located on the Sextus Anderson homestead on Knife River. During the summer of 1886 the Duluth & Iron Range Railway built the Lake Division track between Two Harbors and Duluth. They had to buy the right of way land from R. B. Carlton Land, Mineral, & Mining Co. and the French River Mining Co. since both companies were still in existence. E. P. Follet mined along Knife River in 1899 and for a while ran three shifts in his underground mine. Within two years all of the ore, probably a small quantity, had been removed and the mine closed.

Ed Hillyard mined at Knife River in 1900 and another shaft was sunk next to the church in the town. This shaft proved to be a dismal failure as no trace of copper was found. Farther up the shore the Walker Copper & Mining Co. sank a shaft near a small vein in 1893. The last major exploration was in 1928 when a Canadian company drilled 15 diamond drill holes and sank a shaft in section 26 Township 52 North - Range 12 West.

The sum total of all this exploration resulted in only a small amount of copper being recovered, which was perhaps not more than a few tons altogether. Could there really be a large copper deposit hidden somewhere yet undiscovered? Most certainly, and where you have copper you also have the possibility of gold, silver, or a number of other valuable metals. Good luck prospecting.