

# Minnesota Archaeological Society

## Fall 2006 Newsletter

### **MAS Fall Lecture: November 14, 2006 (see inside!)**

**Well-known archaeologist and long-time friend to MAS, Doug Birk, will speak on discoveries along the old Grand Portage.**

### **MAS Winter Lecture: February 20, 2007 (tentative)**

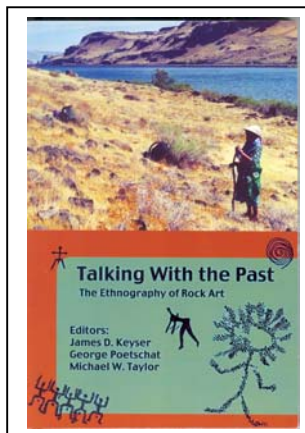
**Minnesota Historical Society archaeologist Douglas George will present results of recent investigations at Fort Ridgely in Nicollet County. He'll talk about excavations and geophysical survey that shed new light on PreContact occupation of the Minnesota River Valley as well as the mid-19th century military presence at the Fort, which figured prominently in the Dakota Conflict of 1863.**

**Watch for more details in our Winter Newsletter.**

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**Jim Keyser, a friend to many Minnesotans for his work in area archaeology and rock art studies has a new book out:**  
*Talking With the Past: The Ethnography of Rock Art.*

Many of us have heard Jim's presentations on regional archaeology at the Midwest Archaeology Conference, the SAA and other popular research gatherings. His many books have become a critical source for both professional and avocationalists alike who care a great deal about what is found but also about interpretation and protection.



*Talking With the Past* contains over a dozen essays by such noted rock art specialists as Linea Lindstrom and Johannes Loubser—both well-known to us Midwesterners, as well as nationally and internationally known specialists David S. Whitley and Jean Clottes.

Though not yet available on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, this title by the Oregon Archaeological Society (Pubn. 16) is available through the OAS by calling (503) 727-3507, by writing to them at The Oregon Archaeological Society, PO Box 13293, Portland OR 97213, or by visiting their website at <http://www.oregonarchaeological.org/store.htm> where many of Jim's other excellent titles are featured. \$30 PB + S/H, \$40 HB + S/H.

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**Send your MAS news and notices to the Editor:**

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## **MAS Fall Lecture: November 14, 2006**

### **Shadows in the Mist: Archaeology Along the Old Grand Portage**

**An illustrated presentation by  
DOUGLAS BIRK**

**The North American fur trade relied on water routes for transportation and supply. At the height of the Montreal trade, goods were shipped thousands of miles from the wharves of London to remote areas of North America with a minimal use of land transport. A major gateway on the mainline route between Lake Superior and the Northwest was the Grand Portage, an 8.5-mile carrying place now managed as a park unit of the National Park Service.**

**Archaeologists recently opened a new phase of research to explore past use of the Grand Portage and to determine how that use developed or changed over time. Prior investigations at Grand Portage Bay and the Pigeon River landing (Fort Charlotte) reveal the shifting nature of activities at the east and west ends of the portage. A goal of the present research is to better define the early systems, practices, and facilities used in crossing the portage itself. The research assumes that the intervals between *posés* (resting points) varied with “pheric distance,” a measure of the time and energy needed to cross the intervening spaces. The initial results of the survey have refined early expectations of the archaeological record while allowing the fieldwork to become increasingly intuitive.**

#### **Biography**

**Douglas Birk is an archaeologist/historian who worked with the Minnesota Historical Society (1970-1981) before co-founding the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology in 1982. He serves on several boards including the Friends of Grand Portage and the Review Board of the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office.**

**Birk grew up on an ancient portage near Pine River and in the early 1960s began assembling information on portages and canoe routes throughout Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. Some of his portage work appears in the volume, *Voices From the Rapids: An Underwater Search for Fur Trade Artifacts, 1960-1973* (MHS Press, 1975) and the article, *When Rivers Were Roads: Deciphering the Role of Canoe Portages in the Western Lake Superior Fur Trade*.**

**NOTE TO MEMBERS: Copies of selected back issues of *The Minnesota Archaeologist* will be available for purchase before and after the lecture.**

## News and Notes From Around the Region

### **FORT SNELLING FOR SALE: HISTORY ON THE BLUFF** Officials seek a buyer — and a vision — for a storied spring

Pioneer Press, September 25, 2006



It's one of the oldest historical sites in Minnesota. But that doesn't mean folks are lining up to own it.

A decade after the federal government closed the U.S. Bureau of Mines Twin Cities Research Center, the 27.3-acre parcel between the Mississippi River and the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport could get a new owner. The government wants to unload the land, once part of historic Fort Snelling. But it's being selective about who should get it. So far, only nonfederal government agencies, Indian tribes or colleges or universities need apply. If none steps forward, the land could wind up in private hands.

"So far, (interest) has been really silent," said Kim Berns, project manager for the National Park Service, which recently completed a draft environmental impact statement for the property. The Park Service will hold open houses today and Tuesday at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center to get feedback on the document. "We want to hear substantive comments," Berns said. "Where did we go wrong in our analysis, if we did? Did we not consider an impact? Is there a group out there we should talk to?"

In the impact statement, the Park Service envisions several uses for the land — an open space or park, an interpretive or history center, and a training center or office park. The draft environmental impact statement does not identify a preference. "It's a piece of hidden property that no one knows about ... attached to one of the most important historical sites in the state," said John Anfinson, an historian for the Park Service.

Set on a bluff near the Minneapolis city limits, the site was important to early settlers. In 1820, soldiers at what would be Fort Snelling began getting their water from a spring, called Camp Coldwater Spring, that still flows from the property's limestone cliffs. In addition, one of the region's earliest settlements was located there. In recent years, several Indian tribes also have contended the area and spring are important to their cultural history, but the Park Service hasn't established those ties directly to the spring. A spokesman for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community declined comment recently on the tribe's interest in the property. But several years ago, it suggested an American Indian interpretive center in one of the buildings and that the entire parcel be protected as historic property. In a letter to the Park Service earlier this year, the tribe and the Prairie Island Indian Community expressed interest. "The Communities conditionally support a mix of cultural, educational, and recreational uses of the Fort Snelling Properties," their statement said.

As many as 250 people worked at the Bureau of Mines campus until the federal government closed it in 1996 as part of a national restructuring effort. Scientists there researched an array of health and safety concerns for mine workers. James Olson, a former deputy research director for the local bureau who helped close the center, called it an idyllic place to work. "It was a good home for us," Olson said. "It was a nice, quiet campus for a research center." Afterward, the property attracted some interest. "But when you got into the final deal ... people would always draw back," Olson said.

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(continued) Six years ago, the Metropolitan Airports Commission voted to buy the land for \$6 million but backed off after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001. Most of the land would have been preserved for open space, wildlife habitat and other scenic and recreational purposes. Whatever happens to it, Olson said there likely won't be any new uses for the property's 11 buildings. "The buildings have been let go for quite some time, and I just don't think it's feasible that anyone would rehab those things," Olson said. Berns agreed the buildings are deteriorating rapidly, adding it would cost almost \$2 million to raze them. The property, which carries three types of airport zoning restrictions, has not been appraised recently, she added. "They realize they're not getting something for free," said Anfinson, speculating on the lack of interest so far. "That's the main thing holding parties back."

After the Park Service gets its responses, it plans to go ahead with the environmental impact statement, which will take at least another year. "Then, the Department of the Interior will make a decision on what alternative and who it goes to or what happens to the property," Berns said. While the buildings are in disrepair, Camp Coldwater Spring is going stronger than it has in decades, according to Olson. Although not considered drinkable, the water emerges from the base of a limestone springhouse, settles into a small pond, and then flows under a road to a wetland and into the Mississippi River. "It's certainly been quite active lately," Olson said of the spring. "It seems to have been getting more flow in the last several years."

**What:** Open house for comments and questions about Camp Coldwater Spring

**When:** 1 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 9 p.m. today and Tuesday

**Where:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Bloomington.

For information call (651) 290-4160. Written comments must be postmarked by Oct. 24.

**Minnesota Archaeological Society** 

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Fort Snelling History Center  
St. Paul MN 55111**