


A person wearing a bright blue jacket, a black beanie, and a large grey backpack with red accents stands on a snowy ledge. They are looking out over a vast, hazy landscape of rolling hills and a distant body of water. The scene is captured in a soft, overcast light, typical of a winter day.

Traditional Teachings at **Cape Croker Park**

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED
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Cape Croker Park covers 520 acres of Niagara Escarpment on the Bruce Peninsula. Caley Patrick Nadjiwon Doran, an interpretive guide, stands at Jones Bluff, which is named for the last hereditary chief, Charles Kecedonce Jones. This photograph was taken on a separate hike from the cultural experiences described in this article.



Neyaashiinigiing translates as “that beautiful point of land that almost looks like an island but is only partially surrounded by water.” The poetry of Anishinaabemowin, the Anishinaabe or Ojibway language, is powerful and descriptive. Located northeast of Warton along the Niagara Escarpment and the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula, *Neyaashiinigiing* has been home to Anishinaabe people for millennia. Cape Croker Park is part of this traditional territory, and offers all peoples opportunities to learn through its Anishinaabe cultural experiences.



▲ The group at the front of the Park visitors' centre made introductions and held a tobacco ceremony.

Cape Croker Park has welcomed visitors to camp, hike, explore, and enjoy the lands, waters, and cultural activities since 1967. The Park consists of 520 acres of campground and wilderness bounded by high limestone cliffs, beaver meadows, and the clear waters of Sydney Bay, *Wiikwedoonse*. The Bruce Trail and the Niagara Escarpment meander through the Park. While the campground is open May to Thanksgiving, the Park itself is open year-round. In 2022, the Park introduced Anishinaabe Cultural Experiences to offer deeper cultural learning for guests and the *Neyaashiinigmiing* community.

Lenore Keeshig and Caley Patrick Nadjiwon Doran are

experienced naturalists, guides, and community members who bring great heart, caring, knowledge, and skills to their interpretive work. The Grey-Bruce Baha'i community and friends gathered in front of the Park visitors' centre on a sunny, January morning ready for a walk with nature and an Anishinaabe arts activity. The day began with introductions, including meeting this sacred land. Lenore gave each person a little tobacco, *asemaa*, to pray with and to offer to the land in gratitude. Tobacco is one of the four sacred medicines. Hold it in the left hand, closest to your heart.

Ancestral Trails

Caley and Lenore guided the group through maple forest,

over wetland boardwalks, up and down rocky slopes, following trails used by their ancestors. They stopped often to share land-based knowledge and stories. Participants learned about the medicinal uses of Balsam Fir, and smelled its wonderful citrus fragrance. They saw beaver lodges and a food cache, and heard stories of traditional uses of beaver meat and fur. They observed animal and bird tracks in the snow, and discussed wildlife behaviours. Caley spoke of his own experiences in walking on and learning from the land and the Elders, both powerful teachers. Lenore, as an Elder herself, brought wisdom and a gentleness to her guidance. Springdawn, Luke, age

► At the border. Caley, left, stands in Canada, while Lenore stands in *Neyaashiinigmiing*. The post between them is a historical boundary marker for treaty lines. The letters "IR" on the stake stand for "Indian Reserve."



▲ Lenore Keeshig explains that trees like this are culturally modified to give important directions on trails. They may indicate directions to trails, boundaries, even water springs.





▲ On the boardwalk. The group pauses near a beaver dam to search for signs of beavers.

14, and Charlie, age 8, all *Neyaashiinigmiing* community members and Caley's cousins, also joined the hike. Charlie carried an animal tracks book, and looked up coyote tracks when he spotted them in the snow. Luke acted as hike sweep, carried a radio for safety, and helped to keep the group together. When asked if he hoped to do guiding work in future, he said, "I already guide, fish, hunt, and trap with my Dad. I can catch fish, kill game, skin, and cook traditional foods. I really like being out in the bush!" Springdawn, a mother and mental health worker, brings her sons and her clients to

the forest as often as possible. She says, "Being out in nature is so important for health!"

Caley too, recognizes the value of land-based learning and connecting with nature. He explains, "After 25 years working in the hospitality and restaurant industry, I felt a pull on my heart to do something different with my career and life path. I had always sought the outdoors when I had time away from work. I casually started leading groups of friends and family on the trail. I started my own small business leading hikes in 2021. That led me to guiding Anishinaabe cultural experiences at Cape

Croker Park. Being outside in nature is naturally calming. It changes how your brain is working, and helps you to relax and find clarity. I find that being outdoors enhances my mental health and positivity. I love sharing the history of the land, the ecology, land-based learning, and how our ancestors were connected to the earth. My trail family grows with every group experience on the trail!"

Traditional Tales

Lenore is a captivating storyteller. She shared traditional tales of heroic figures like Nanabush. Her telling of "Nanabush and the

Giant Beaver" is available on YouTube but it is especially wonderful to hear it told in a maple forest below the Escarpment with a freshwater spring bubbling nearby. Lenore is a plant knowledge-keeper, and taught the uses of trees and plants for food and medicine along the path. She is also an artist and craftsperson, keeping traditional skills such as quill work, weaving, and foraging alive. Anishinaabe Cultural Experiences provide a place where she can pass these gifts along to visitors and community members.

Participants in these experiences learn a lot and are



▲ The beaver pond, lodge and breathing hole seen from the boardwalk. This area has been flooded by the beaver dam and the standing dead trees have been killed by high water levels.



▲ The group was shown the traditional craft of making toy horses from hand-split Red Osier Dogwood.



▲ Lenore, in the blue jacket, shows the group the seed heads of wild leeks or ramps. She demonstrated how to follow the flower stalk down to the bulb in the earth. Ramps are an important early spring food and tonic.

▼ The rare Walking Fern growing plentifully here on Niagara Escarpment dolostone. Walking Fern gets its name from the way it spreads by touching its leaf tips to the ground and taking root.

very appreciative. Niv Saberi of Port Elgin said, “As a Baha’i, I really value unity in diversity. It was great to get out on the land with our Anishinaabe guides, learn about people, place, and wildlife, and connect hearts together. I loved this adventure, and learned so much.”

Joan Godden of Port Elgin commented, “The interpretive hike at Cape Croker Park was a relaxed and friendly outing. Our knowledgeable guides reminded us of the need to offer our thanks for the blessings of Father Sky and Mother Earth. I particularly enjoyed the company, the sun, and the teachings by Lenore and Caley.”

Neyaashiinigmiing, including Cape Croker Park, is a beautiful and ancient land, peopled by the Anishinaabe. Caley elaborated, “Our Anishinaabe cultural experiences carry forward the Truth and Reconciliation conversation. We make a

difference by connecting visitors to the land and our culture. The process of Truth and Reconciliation is deeply important for the well-being of Indigenous peoples and all citizens of Canada. We must move forward together. The Anishinaabe are the traditional stewards of this land. Our program holds everyone accountable to diversity, equity and inclusion, and to Truth and Reconciliation commitments. Our program is elevating the voices of our diverse community. We want people to understand our collective connection to the land. We must care for Mother Earth to ensure the survival and enjoyment of future generations.” This is the Anishinaabe way. **NEV**

The last feature created by Sandra J. Howe for this magazine is “A Place For All: Sharing the Kimberley Forest,” Autumn 2023.





▲ Just another lovely Escarpment view, from Cape Croker Park across Sydney Bay to Jones Bluff.



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