



# Time for Nature



## Aboriginal Youth Week

### Hands-on lessons at Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada

Georgian Bay Islands National Park of Canada has a long human history and a rich natural environment. During Aboriginal Youth Week, young people spend time in the islands, learning how cultural and natural values have come together.

Aboriginal Youth Week happens each September, coinciding with the annual Parks Canada archaeology excavation on Beausoleil Island. The largest island in the park, Beausoleil was long used as a stopping place along the water highways of the Great Lakes. Aboriginal people, fur traders, explorers and European settlers all passed this way.

Today the island is home to Camp Kitchikewana, the YMCA residential facility for campers, schools and community groups, and for events like Aboriginal Youth Week.

## Learning from our Elders

The concept for the week-long program came from the First Nations Elders during a visit to the park in 1999. After a tour from a Parks Canada archaeologist, the Elders realized the importance of sharing the rich cultural history of the island with the youth. They expressed a desire for the youth to be able to come to the site and witness the artefacts being unearthed and learn more about their history.

During Aboriginal Youth Week, young people come to Camp Kitchikewana to learn about the park's rich cultural and natural history through hands on activities, ceremonies led by the Elders and hikes around the island.

The youngsters learn how plants can be used for medicinal purposes, for example. They also study the park's ecology and wildlife. A presentation on the eastern foxsnake was "the best part of Aboriginal Youth Week," said one participant.



During Aboriginal Youth Week, participants have hands-on lessons in archaeology. © Métis Nation of Ontario, Scott Carpenter, 2004.



The eastern foxsnake is a species at risk that makes its home in Georgian Bay Islands National Park. © Métis Nation of Ontario, Scott Carpenter, 2004.



## Digging into the past

The youth also visit the archaeology site while archaeologists and Elders bring the past to life. And what a past it was! Up to a dozen distinct cultures – spanning over 10,000 years – left their mark on the island.

The remains of ancient pottery, tools and hunting implements found on Beausoleil indicate that early hunting and gathering cultures used the island as a summer camp. Here, they established fishing camps, crafted stone tools, made pottery and picked berries.



Elders are a guiding force, teaching lessons of harmony and respect for the land. © Métis Nation of Ontario, Scott Carpenter, 2004.

## Strengthening ties

Through programs like Aboriginal Youth Week, Parks Canada aims to strengthen links between the local community and the park.

Elders are a guiding force, bringing the lessons of harmony and respect for the land to a new generation. And there is little doubt, the more the Elders are involved, the more the youth will follow their footsteps.

The experience can make a huge difference in young lives. As the aunt of one participant tells it, her niece “came out of her shell. This camp did so much for my niece spiritually; I thank the creator she went.”

For more information visit [www.pc.gc.ca/gbi](http://www.pc.gc.ca/gbi)