

Faith, Identity, and Stone: The Wawa Runestone (C1le-3) and its Place in the Historical Landscape of Northern Ontario

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Introduction

In early June 2025, CBC News released a report detailing the existence of a historical runic inscription near Wawa, Ontario. The inscription panel, at approximately 1.25 m. by 1.5 m. (4 by 5 feet) is near a second panel, situated 3 m. (9 feet) to the right, which depicts a Scandinavian style boat, possibly a longship, containing 16 humanlike characters, and 14 “x” shaped marks in two groups: one to the lower left, and the other to the upper right of the craft.

The discovery was first reported to the landowner in 2017, and the Ontario Centre for Archaeological Research and Education (OCARE) was subsequently notified in 2018 by a local historian, Johanna Rowe. The publication of its existence was delayed due to landowner negotiations, site visit opportunities, volunteer-based research efforts, and work interruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This preliminary article presents the archaeological findings of the Wawa Runestone Project, led by OCARE, and situates this site within the broader historical and cultural landscape of northern Ontario.

Background and Discovery

During the initial notification in 2018 of the runestone’s existence, Rowe indicated that the inscription was first encountered in 2017 by Avelino Pablo Cruz, an agricultural crew supervisor who reported the find to the landowner, stating that he noticed it during a break from work on a section of bedrock which had been recently exposed by an uprooted wind-thrown tree. Rowe’s message to OCARE led to the involvement of a network of specialists including Dr. Henrik Williams (Professor of Runology, Uppsala University), Loraine Jensen (American Association for Runic Studies), and Zeinab Azadbakht (Timmins and Sault Ste. Marie Resident Geologist for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), as well as Ryan Primrose and David Gadzala (professional archaeologists and directors of OCARE).

Site Description

The Wawa Runestone site is located east of Lake Superior, approximately 3 km. south of the town of Wawa and 1.9 km. from the Magpie River (Figure 1). The bedrock containing the

inscription is a slightly schistose non-calcareous bedrock outcrop lying 286 m. above sea level, approximately 2 m. above the surrounding sandy plain.

The site features two eastward facing panel sections, the southerly panel with a flatter page-like presentation, and the northerly panel with a more rounded, spatially limited carving surface. A rougher, unmodified section of rock creates a natural division between the two panels (Figure 2). The southerly panel (left when observing both simultaneously) is a rectilinear panel featuring a textual inscription measuring 170 cm. in height and 136 cm. in width, containing 255 runic characters organised into 15 lines (Figure 3). According to Dr. Williams, this is a Swedish-language inscription of the Lord's Prayer using the runic script, slightly modified from Johannes Bureus' 1611 version of the prayer (Williams 2025). A natural crack in the bedrock presents as the rightmost edge of the panel, while what appears to be a lightly carved vertical line forms the left edge, creating a "page-like" appearance. The well-spaced and carefully aligned typography suggests a degree of planning and preparation prior to carving. Tree ring dating of the uprooted jack pine, once obscuring part of the carving, indicates a minimum age of 35 years, suggesting that the carvings predate 1990. While the most recent forest fire affected the area in the mid-1920s, the tree's age as well as the history of tree clearing and harvesting on the property suggest the uprooted tree was part of more recent growth. Contact with A. P. Cruz in 2025 confirmed that the entire inscription panel was covered in 10-15 cm. of densely rooted soil.

For additional details on the inscription and its translation, see Williams (2025).

The rightmost panel, located 3 m. north of the first and measuring 95 cm. in height and 78 cm. in width, depicts a Scandinavian-style longship carrying 16 figures represented by dots and lines, flanked by two clusters of "x" markings, one to the bottom left and another to the top right of the boat (Figure 4). The circular marks used to create the dots on both the inscription and the boat panels are similar and with the uniformity, smooth sides, and curved bottom typical of a metal ½-inch cylindrical rotary drill bit.

Archaeological Fieldwork

Since the runestone's initial identification, a phased and multidisciplinary approach has been established to investigate the integrity, extent, and cultural context of the carved features, culminating in multiple seasons of focused investigation between 2019 and 2023. The work has remained minimally-invasive whenever possible and has attempted to follow best practices in archaeological documentation and heritage management.

2018 Field Season

Archaeological field investigations at the Wawa Runestone site first commenced in 2018 (Figures 5 to 8). This preliminary evaluation involved photographic documentation, basic site mapping, and limited clearing of soil from the edges of the visible carving to expose more of the inscription. These limited but focused efforts confirmed that the carvings extended beneath the soils covering the rock surface.

2019 Field Season

During the summer of 2019, OCARE conducted a focused archaeological test pit survey and metal detector survey in the immediate vicinity of the runestone panels, in areas thought likely to yield artifacts related to the carver(s), or to any potential later visitors. The survey work was first carried out in the immediate vicinity of the inscription panel, and later extended to the areas around the boat panel, to the forested areas west of the carvings, and to the broader sandy plain extending east from the panels. Additional visual inspections of the bedrock surface nearby were conducted in search of related carvings or other anthropogenic modifications. The survey work encountered an absence of cultural material in the surrounding soils, and the visual inspection of the outcrop failed to locate additional carvings on the bedrock.

At this time, the removal of additional soil from the edge of the inscription panel exposed an additional line of text.

In October of 2019, two international specialists, Dr. Henrik Williams, Professor of Runology from the University of Uppsala, and Loraine Jensen, then President of the American Association for Runic Studies, visited the site alongside OCARE directors Ryan Primrose and David Gadzala, as well as local historian Johanna Rowe, CAHP, and participating archaeologist Michael O'Connor. Dr. Williams conducted an analysis and subsequent transliteration of the characters under a tarp using directed light to enhance visibility and detail of the runic characters (Figure 9). His preliminary assessment validated the carving as an intentional and coherent runic inscription, and determined it to be a modern Swedish-language version of the Lord's Prayer (Williams 2025).

2020 Field Season

The 2020 field season was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although background research, including the review of archival maps and primary source documents, land title investigations, and additional investigations, continued remotely.

2021 Field Season

Field activities resumed in June 2021, with a broadened scope that included expanded test pitting, soil profiling, rock sampling, and limited metal detection.

Systematic sub-surface test pitting was extended across the entire forested area atop the outcrop, with particular attention to areas adjacent to the prayer panel. Controlled removal of overburden around the perimeter of the inscription further exposed the full extent of the carved panel by revealing a fissure or thinly carved line in the rock appearing to form the left margin of the text.

In addition to the archaeological survey work at the inscription, an informal metal detection survey was carried out over the test pitting area at approximately 2-m. intervals, with closer intervals when targets were located. With the exception of a modern aluminum soda can and another item interpreted as a rusted fold-over tab button or tag (Figure 10), both of which were recovered from the surrounding sand plain within approximately 25 metres of the runestone, this metal detecting survey did not identify any metallic artifacts in direct association with the carvings. Similarly, the sub-surface test pitting did not locate any cultural materials.

The soil stratigraphy revealed localized disturbance in the immediate vicinity of the runestone, where soils covering the edges of the inscription panel consisted of approximately 20 cm. of mottled sand and organic material over bedrock. The test pit survey further documented thin (0-10-cm.) organic soil over rocky sand and bedrock in the shallower, apparently undisturbed forested areas, as well as undisturbed to moderately “plough”-disturbed podzols in the surrounding sand plain. These “plough” disturbed areas are consistent with land preparation activities for historical logging (e.g. scarification) and agriculture (e.g. ploughing or other soil-disturbing machinery).

Aerial drone photography and photogrammetric modelling of the site were also undertaken in 2021 to facilitate accurate spatial documentation, generate a digital terrain model of the site and environs, and support ongoing heritage management planning.

2023 Field Season

In May of 2023, OCARE undertook a systematic test pit survey of the entire area within a 50 m. radius of the outcrop (Figure 11). Test pits were excavated at regular 5-m. intervals in both the bedrock areas and the sand plain. This survey resulted in no cultural materials being located, yet provided valuable comparative data on soil formation processes, especially regarding historic disturbance patterns. While the surrounding plain exhibited evidence of soil modification consistent with past logging operations or agricultural land preparation, the forested bedrock outcrop retained more intact stratigraphy, indicating that the runestone

area had likely been protected from significant anthropogenic interferences since the beginning of local logging activities in the early 20th century.

Throughout this phase, close attention was given to inspecting natural fissures and depressions in the bedrock for possible cultural materials (Figure 12). No artifacts were recovered from these cracks, nor were any additional carvings identified on other exposed bedrock surfaces.

Three soil samples directly overlying the bedrock were taken immediately adjacent the runestone for future analysis.

Site Stewardship and Collaborative Engagement

Protective measures have been in place throughout the project. Following each site visit, the carved panels were covered with tarpaulins to mitigate weathering and prevent vegetative growth. These efforts have helped preserve the features pending the final design and construction of a permanent protective shelter. The site was also registered as an archaeological site with the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, thus affording it protection under the Ontario Heritage Act, and has been given the Borden designation ClIe-3.

Community engagement has remained a central pillar of the project. The fieldwork has involved repeated consultations with the landowner; representatives of the Town of Wawa; the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; and Michipicoten First Nation. Their insights have been invaluable in developing an inclusive interpretation of the site and in determining appropriate conservation strategies. The ongoing dialogue has also supported future access planning and collaborative stewardship initiatives.

Historical Context

General History of the Wawa Area

The Wawa region has a deep Indigenous history spanning over 10,000 years, and in historical post-contact times has been associated with the Michipicoten First Nation and the various French, North West Company, Hudson's Bay Company, and independent fur trading posts operating at the mouth of the Michipicoten River. Near the end of the 19th century, the area was frequented by construction crews for the Canadian Pacific Railway, who may have used the original fur trade era portage towards Wawa Lake as their tote road to transport construction materials to the railhead. Around the turn of the century, mineral discoveries around Wawa Lake attracted many prospectors to the area, who prospected the remaining unclaimed land. These early prospecting activities were soon followed by loggers, especially in the areas containing valuable pine trees.



Brief History of Scandinavian People in the Northeastern Lake Superior Region

Norse

The Norse, often called Vikings in contemporary North American discourse, are not known to have accessed the inland portions of the North American continent. To date, no irrefutable or conclusive archaeological discoveries (artifacts, runestones, or otherwise) have been made which could securely locate Scandinavian peoples in the Wawa region prior to the 17th century fur trade. While a number of reports which were determined to be hoaxes or intentional misrepresentations (e.g. Kensington Runestone), or which were instead true Norse artifacts with misrepresented provenance or cultural contexts (e.g. Beardmore Sword, Maine Penny) have been publicised to date, none of these sites are Norse in origin.

French- or North West Company-era Voyageurs (1670s-1821)

Voyageur contracts from the late 17th to the early 19th centuries occasionally list voyageurs of non French, Indigenous, or British origin, including European voyageurs from Germany, Spain, and Ireland, as well as both white and Black Americans from the United States, some of whom may have transported trade goods to/past Michipicoten. However, the 36,000+ archival voyageur contracts held by the Centre du Patrimoine of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface do not explicitly identify any voyageurs with Scandinavian origins participating in the North American fur trade, and based on available research compiled by D. Gadzala, we are not aware of any other Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish visitors to the north shore of Lake Superior at this time.

Hudson's Bay Company (1810s-1840s)

In 1814, the Hudson's Bay Company enlisted a number of Scandinavian prisoners of war into their ranks as labourers, specifically "twenty Norwegians, two Danes, one Swede, and two Scandinavians of unspecified nationality," (Burley 1993:135). Scandinavians were chosen as their home region "was isolated and underdeveloped [...] Its people were poor, practised occupational diversity, and were accustomed to conditions that made them seem as suited for life in the fur trade as the population of the Orkneys, which, had at one time, in fact belonged to Norway," (Burley 1993:136). This initial group was employed in the area between Lake Winnipeg and York Factory, and established several posts including Norway House in Manitoba. After their service was completed in 1817, only two opted to renew their contracts and remain in the area (Burley 1993). One of these, Erland Erlandson, was a Dane who remained in HBC service until 1852, and is the only known member who can be definitively tied to the Michipicoten area. In 1831, "when descending the Michipicoten River his canoe upset, two of his crew were drowned and the dispatches lost," (Fleming 1940:437). Furthermore, in 1841-2, Erlandson was appointed clerk at Michipicoten, before being

transferred to Long Lake in 1842 (Fleming 1940). However, Erlandson's activities at the post were not significantly documented.

Hudson's Bay Company (1853-1859)

In 1853, the HBC again decided to conduct an extensive recruitment campaign in Scandinavia in order to attract a suitable, inexpensive labour force (Burley 1993). Over the course of the 1850s, dozens of Norwegians and Swedes were hired to work in the district. Most of these Scandinavian recruits were hired as common labourers, with some of the "superior men" selected to "learn English and serve as leaders of the rest," (Burley 1993:159). At the Michipicoten Post, several Scandinavians are mentioned in the post journals, including "Larsen"¹, Jorgen Evansen, Neils Haakinson, and Ole Halsteenson, the last of whom may have been the crew leader as he was literate, English-speaking, and later transferred to Long Lake to be a clerk or writer (Jones 2015:142). The Scandinavian newcomers in the district soon raised numerous issues regarding their contracts, wages, rations, and duties. As a result, Scandinavians were considered by HBC leadership to be difficult to work with, not only because of their language and "mode of life", but as they had a "disposition to combine together in order to resist the authority of their masters," (Burley 1993:162). In 1859, to alleviate some of these perceived problems, the HBC abandoned its Scandinavian recruitment campaign and sent most of them home (Burley 1993). Some of the current members of Michipicoten First Nation have indicated mixed kinship ties with Scandinavians, potentially including some of those working at the HBC post (personal communication with MFN Elder, 2024).

Canadian Pacific Railway Construction Crews (1880s)

During the mid-1880s, the Canadian Pacific Railway was constructed across Ontario's northlands. In 1884, a 60-mile supply road was completed between Michipicoten and the railhead near Dog Lake Station on the railway, allowing the construction crews to transport goods inland from Lake Superior (Lavallée 1977). While unconfirmed, it is likely that the tote road initially followed and later improved an existing portage used by the HBC, and likely was originally created by local First Nations people. The tote road was eventually used as a motor road in the early 20th century, and sections were redeveloped as part of Highway 17 by 1960 (Bradford 2015).

The CPR construction crews may also have maintained a camp on Wawa Lake, as in 1898, a "row of log cabins was also here, but they have been used as firewood by the prospectors who have made this point their camp," (Willmott 1898:194). That the buildings were used as firewood would suggest that they were old and abandoned but not yet in a state of

¹ Two individuals with the surname "Larsen" are found in extant HBC employment contracts: Peder Elias, and Reier, both listed as labourers in 1858, and both of whom have their places of origin recorded as "Norway Lister & Mandel Christiansand". The remaining individuals at the post were not found in the existing HBC contract records, which overwhelmingly identify "Norway" as the place of origin of Scandinavian recruits.

decomposition, thus possibly being the remains of the CPR construction camp from 15 years prior. While the construction crews likely contained individuals of Scandinavian origin, additional details are not readily available regarding the individuals forming the CPR construction crews.

Prospecting/Logging Camps (1898-1940s)

Around the turn of the 20th century, the Wawa area became an important locus of prospecting activity, with several important mineral deposits discovered in the area around Wawa Lake. The lands around the runestone were prospected, although geological maps spanning the late 1800s and early 1900s do not indicate the presence of any bedrock outcrops, instead listing the area as sand-covered. The prospecting activities around the Wawa Runestone site must not have been fruitful, as no mining claims were developed nearby, the nearest being claim J.L.131 located over 500 metres to the south.

Following the rapid growth of the Wawa area, local logging became necessary to supply the settlers and mines with timber. While Scandinavians (including Finlanders) formed nearly 25% of all bush-camp workers in the 1920s (Bradwin 1972:249), and were undoubtedly working in the prospecting and logging camps in the Wawa area, the preliminary background research did not identify any prospecting or logging camps in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Landowners (1955-present)

A land title search was carried out using the Ontario Land Registry Access portal in an effort to determine the sequence of land ownership for the property and to identify any potential Scandinavian landowners. The resulting search indicated that this land was first granted under Crown Grant A7747 (Parcel 276, Michipicoten Division) to the Algoma Steel Corporation in January of 1955. Portions were expropriated by the Ontario Department of Highways in 1958, likely for the construction of local sections of Highway 17. Additional portions of the property were severed following land transfers to Great Lakes Power Limited and the Corporation of the Township of Michipicoten in 1990, followed by the 1990 and 1995 purchases by the current landowner. No known landowners are registered prior to the initial Crown Grant in 1955, and no Scandinavian names have been registered to this plot of land.

Discussion

Based on the available epigraphic, linguistic, archaeological, and historical evidence, the above-listed groups were considered as potential creators for the Wawa Runestone. As no artifactual evidence was recovered which could support any conclusion, it is felt that the linguistic and transliteration efforts by Dr. Williams should be relied upon at this time. Given that the runestone contains a slightly modified version of the Lord's Prayer ultimately derived from Johannes Bureus' version published in *Runa ABC* in 1611, the Wawa Runestone cannot



predate the 17th century. As such, Norse origins for the Wawa Runestone are entirely discounted.

While it is possible that Scandinavians were participating in the Great Lakes fur trade between the late 17th and the early 19th century, the absence of historical records identifying these individuals suggests they had a minor (if any) role. Based on this overall lack of evidence, it is considered unlikely that the Wawa Runestone was created by Scandinavian people during the early fur trade period.

Next, one of the area's first Scandinavian visitors, Erland Erlandson was present in the Michipicoten area in 1831 and 1841-42. While it is possible that the Wawa Runestone was carved by Erland Erlandson, he was variably recorded as a Dane or Norwegian, and was unlikely to have been a Swedish speaker. If the prayer was indeed carved by a modern Swedish speaker with a degree of runic knowledge, as suggested in Dr. William's report, it is unlikely to be Erlandson. Additionally, this is considered further unlikely as Erlandson was the sole Scandinavian on site, and was only present for part of the 1841-1842 trading season, meaning he may not have had the free time required to locate and carve the stone.

Based on the available evidence collected to date, the most likely scenario is that the Wawa Runestone was carved in the mid-late 1850s by Scandinavian workers posted at the Michipicoten HBC Post. This is primarily based on historical records, especially post records and journals located in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, which provide a brief glimpse into the lives of the people living and working at the post. The documents portray the group of Scandinavians employed at the Michipicoten HBC post during the 1850s as a closely-knit group of workers, as they often worked and ate together, and that these men may not have always gotten along with the Posts' non-Scandinavian employees². The journals also frequently record their attendance at "Divine Service" or Mass held at the post, suggesting a degree of religiosity amongst these Scandinavians³. Furthermore, the men employed at the post would have had detailed first-hand knowledge of the local terrain and landscape⁴. As this probably included the lands along the portage between the Michipicoten River and

² The Michipicoten Post journals frequently place the men together in work groups, and also note that they ate meals together. See, for example, the entries for 15 and 17 May, 1858 (AO, F471-2-0-84 (Michipicoten Post Journal 1858)). Jones (2015) also notes frequent discord between the Scandinavians and others, exemplified by the New Year celebration in 1859 which was "marked by a number of brawls, mostly among the Norwegians and Swedes who were fairly recent arrivals to the posts and the Indians," (2015:149).

³ See, for example, the 14 July, 1858 entry which documents the regular attendance of the Europeans at the post, including the Scandinavian employees: "I may here notice that Old Schellin is a regular attendant at Prayers on Sundays -- so is Captn Lamphier + his Wife, + the Europeans are also attentive."

⁴ The records frequently identify the post's Scandinavian staff at tasks occurring in the forested areas surrounding the post, such as transporting supplies, cutting and hauling firewood (e.g. entries for 11 and 14 January 1858, AO, F471-2-0-84 (Michipicoten Post Journal 1858)), and making roads (e.g. entry for 25 January 1858, AO, F471-2-0-84 (Michipicoten Post Journal 1858)).

Wawa Lake, which passed within several hundred metres of the site, these men would have been familiar with the Runestone site. Furthermore, the post's employees not only had access to masonry tools such as chisels and drill bits, as a mason was employed at the post, but the Scandinavians themselves were probably familiar with stone work as in "mid-May, two Swedish employees partially built a chimney for the new Mens' House at Michipicoten," (Jones 2015:151). Lastly, provided with a rest day on Sundays, the HBC staff may have had sufficient leisure time to carry out such an activity.

Alternatively, the Wawa Runestone may have been carved by other bush crews unknown. This is considered less likely due to lack of historical details suggesting the presence of railway construction, prospecting, or logging camps in the immediate vicinity of the site, as well as due to the great effort required to create this type of site while conducting short term and highly mobile prospecting, logging, or railway construction activities.

It is also unlikely that the Wawa Runestone was carved by historical Swedish-speaking landowners, as none were identified in the land tenure records.

Finally, it remains possible that the Wawa Runestone was carved as an intentional or unintentional deception by someone using a modified version of Bureus' Lord's Prayer. This is felt to be unlikely as a degree of runic and Swedish knowledge is implied by the modified version, as no Scandinavians landowners or historical bush camps are known to have been located nearby, and especially due to the lack of any historical publicization of this find.

A more modern deception (i.e. a hoax) is considered possible, and this served as the null hypothesis by OCARE from the outset. Based on Dr. Williams' analysis, this hypothesis was later rejected. A modern hoax seems less likely due to the tree's age (~35 years, or predating 1990), the presence of 10-15 cm. of densely rooted soil covering the inscription, and the degree of wear or chemical erosion visually apparent on the carving's surface. Furthermore, the landowner's initial hesitance to involve archaeologists for perceived issues regarding site ownership and access, and their apparent disinterest in developing or profiting from the site, suggests the current landowner is unaffiliated with the carvers of the Wawa Runestone.

Interpretation

Due to the limited historical and archaeological evidence recovered to date, the creators of the Wawa Runestone currently remain unknown. The historical information detailed above allows for several interpretations of the runestone, the strongest possibility being that the Wawa Runestone was carved by one or more Scandinavians working at the Michipicoten HBC post in the 1850s. One possible interpretation is that the runestone was created by a single Swedish-speaking individual who carved the stone as part of a solitary religious act, not intended to become a future place of congregation or worship, but as an act of reverence to God. Alternatively, it is possible that the runestone was carved as part of a group activity

by the post's Scandinavian employees, and may even have functioned as a site of communal worship which was regularly visited by a congregation of the Post's Swedes and Norwegians, possibly during weekly worship.

In this second scenario, the carving of the runestone would have reinforced the communal identity of these Scandinavian employees. These were some of the only Scandinavians for hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres, and they were likely drawing from a communal past rooted in Norse history and culture, choosing to perform their act of religious devotion in their own language, using the runic script developed by their Norse ancestors (Panel 1), paired with a scene they all may have encountered in their own rock art back home (Panel 2). This is completely in line with the ideals of Romantic Nationalism and pan-Scandinavianism, both of which were prominent in mid-19th century Scandinavia, and drew upon cultural and historical symbols and narratives to inspire national pride. According to Hemstad, “[t]he pan-Scandinavian movement envisaged ‘Scandinavia’ as a transnational cultural community based on a shared ancient past, similar culture and kindred languages – and with a prosperous joint future, if standing together,” (2023:159). Similarly, Scandinavian Romantic Nationalist “poets and artists used their art to celebrate aspects of their nations by providing an imagined conflation of national, historical and geographical belonging,” (Stougaard-Nielsen 2020:170). Accordingly, “runes had an obvious appeal to poets and illustrators, who were gripped by the wave of national Romanticism that swept Scandinavia.” (Rix 2005:598)

Both interpretations may explain the lack of artifacts recovered from the site during the archaeological work between 2018 and 2023. The distinction between the sacred and profane is common to many in the context of religiosity, with behaviours in sacred places operating in accordance to different sets of expectations and rules, in contrast to those in non-religious settings. For example, littering is discouraged in modern places of worship, and attention may have been paid to avoid discarding rubbish or other items at this sacred place.

Terminal-use activities at the Wawa Runestone

The initial investigations from 2018 suggest the inscription panel was mostly or entirely covered with soil as Rowe had, in her preliminary work, cleared additional characters widening the initial exposure. Furthermore, according to A. P. Cruz, the initial treefall had only exposed a hand-sized portion of the bedrock, revealing several runes. Cruz and a colleague further removed 10-15 cm. of root-laden soil from the bedrock, which exposed much (but not all) of the inscription. During the 2019 archaeological investigations, the top leftmost and bottom portions of the inscribed panel were still covered with approximately 10 cm. of soil, which was cleared for Dr. Williams visit. During the test pit survey work, mottled soils were also observed in the immediate vicinity of the panels, caused by past soil

disruption. The mottled soils overlying the runestone (as opposed to the thinner organic soils over bedrock in the other parts of the forested bedrock outcrop) suggest that the carvings were deliberately re-covered.

The reburial, or “closure” of the Wawa Runestone may have been related to the termination of Scandinavian employment by the HBC around 1859, where the members of the congregation may have purposefully covered the inscription with local soils to mark the end of their time in the area, and to terminate the site’s use as a place of gathering and worship. This same action is also easily understood in the single-carver scenario, where after the act of reverence/devotion (i.e. the carving) was completed, the runestone was covered to complete the act. In both scenarios, it is suspected that this intentional site burial may have been intended to hide the carvings, protect them, or ritually “dismantle” or decommission the site.

Future Directions

To date, OCARE has secured a leasehold agreement for the Wawa Runestone, permitting the protection and interpretation of the site. Planned developments include:

- A protective structure over the runestone to protect it from the elements and potential vandalism;
- A boardwalk or other structure around the runestone to prevent damage from trampling, complete with the relevant educational and historical signage;
- Continued archaeological testing and monitoring;
- Educational outreach in partnership with Michipicoten First Nation and the Town of Wawa.

Through these efforts, the Wawa Runestone Project aims to preserve this unique heritage resource while enriching public understanding of Northern Ontario’s diverse past.

Figures



Figure 1. Approximate location of the Wawa Runestone site (Clle-3) in the northeast Lake Superior area.

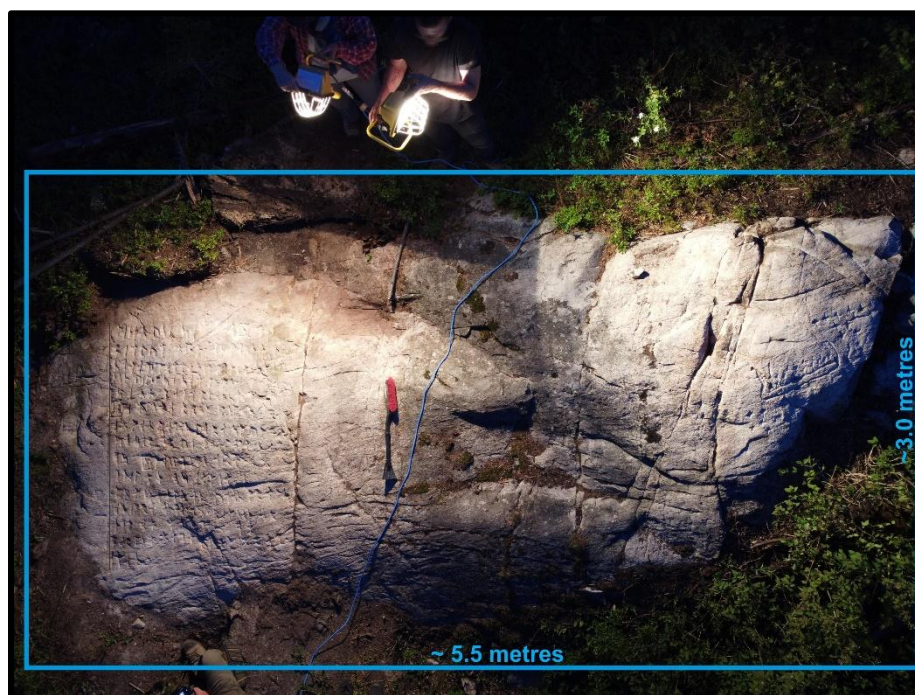


Figure 2. Low elevation drone imagery showing both Panel 1 (left) and Panel 2 (right) at the Wawa Runestone. For scale, the snow brush near the middle of the image is 63 cm. in length.



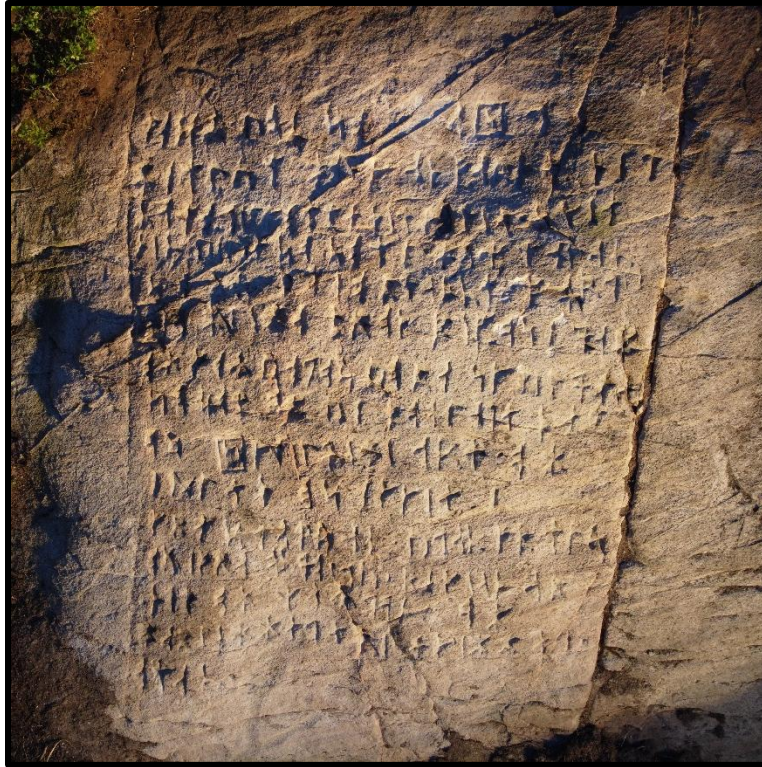


Figure 3. Closer view of Panel 1, the inscription panel, containing a Swedish-language runic inscription of the Lord's Prayer.



Figure 4. Panel 2, the boat panel, featuring a Scandinavian-style boat with 16 individuals, surrounded by 14 "x" marks.





Figure 5. Upper edge of the exposed inscription at the time of J. Rowe's initial site visit in July 2018. Note that the first several lines of text remain obscured by the intact soil and vegetation. Photograph courtesy of J. Rowe.



Figure 6. Left edge of the exposed inscription at the time of J. Rowe's initial site visit in July 2018. Note that the first few runic characters in each line remain obscured by the intact soil and vegetation, as well as portions of the final two lines of text. Photograph courtesy of J. Rowe.





Figure 7. The Wawa Runestone at the time of OCARE's involvement in 2018.



Figure 8. Image showing the upturned roots of a wind-thrown tree which uncovered Panel 2.



Figure 9. Dr. Henrik Williams conducting an examination of the Wawa Runestone under a tarp using directed light.



Figure 10. Image showing the obverse (left) and reverse (right) sides of a metal object identified during the metal detection work around the runestone.





Figure 11. Photograph of archaeological test pits excavated at 5-m. intervals in the sandy plain around the runestone.



Figure 12. Photograph showing the screening of soils contained within the cracks and fissures in the bedrock during the archaeological test pit survey.

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