

## **An Historical Perspective**

### **N'Daki-Menan "Our Land"**

The waters of Lake Temagami were clear and quiet as the families of the Deepwater People enjoyed the fine summer weather and the people contemplated the up coming hunting season. The railroad had started to creep its way into the deep north of their hunting territories and the families sensed that their lifestyles were about to change. The solitary life of living within their tribal territories, living in harmony with the environment that was given to them by the Creator G`shemanado was about to take an ominous turn.

The people knew that they must meet with the other family groups within n'Dakimenan to consider the steps that they must take to protect their inherent rights and tribal territories in the near future. The days of hunting and gathering were starting to be displaced by guiding the newcomers to the lands on fishing and hunting expeditions; tourist camps and cottages were being built on the tribal territories in increasing numbers that required cooks, cleaning personnel and guides. The lifestyle of the Deepwater People was starting to take a drastic change, alienating the generations that were to follow from what they had always known.

The families of the Deepwater People had received some disturbing news from their neighbours to the south. A representative of the Dominion government was meeting with all of the nations to the south of them to negotiate a treaty that would share the land base. Understanding that sharing of the land granted to them by Creator was not an unusual practice amongst aboriginal society, they thought why not find out what this was all about.

The time of the great meeting in Garden River was about to take place, but for some reason the spokesperson of the Deepwater People did not show at the meeting. A man by the name of Peter Nebane`gwune claimed he was there as the representative of the Deepwater People and accepted 25 dollars as part of the treaty process. Peter was only one family representative of the fourteen families that lived upon the tribal territories called n'Dakimenan, but he was not there as the official representative of the Deepwater People.

Throughout the late 1800's the leadership of the Deepwater People began to question why they were left out of the signing of the Robinson Huron treaty. They began to write letters to the government of Canada representatives asking for a resolution to the outstanding treaty relationship. In 1884, a reserve was surveyed at the Austin Bay site that the Deepwater People were requesting, but the provincial crown did not allow it to become a reserve because there was too much valuable timber upon it.

Throughout the early 1900's the Deepwater People were starting to feel the pressure of living upon their tribal territories with all the new development that was taking place. The logging industry was expanding into their reach and moving up from the Ottawa valley. The Chief of the Deepwater People continued to write numerous letters to Canada asking why they were left out of the Robinson Huron treaty and did not receive the same benefits and protections as did the other nations to the south of the height of land.

The leadership of the Deepwater People continued throughout the 1930's, 40's and into the 70's questioning why the government had failed to act on their requests. They continued to pressure the Federal government to live up to its "fiduciary obligations" and create a reserve for the

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Deepwater People who were being displaced from their tribal territories. The tribal families were beginning to settle on Bear Island and were still being harassed by government officials as well as the game wardens.

The missionaries of the various churches began to Christianize the people and the governments continued to ignore and further suppress the rights of the Deepwater People. The introduction of education in a "formal" setting was beginning to take place during the summer months and the people began to lose the connection with the land. Soon most of the families began to live on Bear Island, and the lifestyle of the Deepwater People changed forever.

In the 1970's a young chief began to look into the history of the Deepwater People and began to question the unfulfilled fiduciary obligations of the crown. With a lot of discussion and interviews with the elders he began to see the impact of the government of Canada's failure to act on the requests of the Deepwater People. Historic attempts to establish a reserve and receive annuities as part of the Robinson Huron Treaty were totally ignored by the Federal and Provincial governments.

The opportunity to follow the legal steps of adherence to the Robinson Huron Treaty had been offered by the leadership of the Deepwater People for almost one hundred years. With no positive responses from the Federal or Provincial governments, the Deepwater People decided to take a stand. The people would assert their rights to the unsundered tribal territories and seek aboriginal title to nDakimenan. The aboriginal title to the unsundered lands of the Deepwater People was eventually placed before the courts in 1973.

With the vast amount of research documentation and other credible evidence that was available the Deepwater People proceeded to take the governments to court to have the unsundered rights to their tribal territories respected. Following a lengthy court process and subsequent appeals to higher courts the final ruling of adherence to a treaty that the Deepwater People were requesting to be part of for over one hundred years was upheld in August of 1991. The Supreme Court of Canada ruling on the basic land interest of aboriginal society can be viewed as one of the most controversial and unjust rulings that a justice system can make in the modern era.

Tribal history of the Deepwater People encourages us to honour the vision of our forefather's and fulfill the responsibility of protecting our motherland now and into the future. Welcome to n'Dakimenan where we offer you a forum to share your vision with us and help to restore the "inherent rights" of our nation. The people of the deepwater have the ability to make our ancestors proud and guarantee the security of the generations yet to come. Some are dead; some are living, but most are not yet born.

"Stories are wonderful things and they are dangerous. Stories assert tremendous control over our lives, informing who are and how we treat one another as friends, family and citizens" "The truth about stories is that's all we are"

A quote by Tom King

MEEGWETCH!