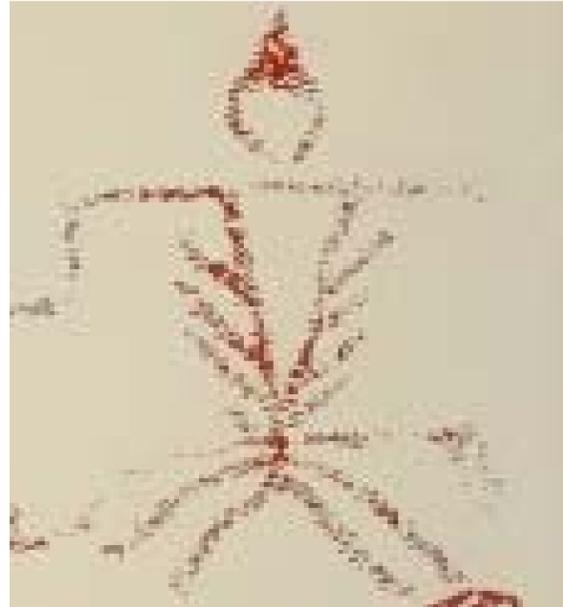


Ancestors, Archaeology and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past into the Future Manoomin (Wild Rice)

The Food that Grows on Water

The Anishinabek tell how they traveled long, long ago to Michigan. They were told by the Creator that they would “find the food that grows on water.” This “food that grows on water” is Wild Rice and is one of the most important foods to the Anishinabek. When they reached Michigan, they found Wild Rice in hundreds of lakes, rivers and streams. To the right is an ancient rock painting of the Wild Rice Spirit was found on Painted Rock Island in Canada, just north of Minnesota. The name of the Wild Rice Sprit is *Manoominikeshii*.



(Image from *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes* by S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd, 1962)

Wild Rice and Archaeology



Archaeologists found evidence of Wild Rice at two of the sites they dug in Ottawa County, Michigan. The Anishinabek who lived at the sites harvested and cleaned the Wild Rice. They stored the Wild Rice in underground cache pits. In the winter and spring, they could go to the cache pit and open it up when they needed fresh Wild Rice.

Wild Rice Harvesting

In late summer, the Anishinabek camped along the lakes and rivers where Wild Rice grew. While they waited for it to ripen, they prayed to *Manoominikeshii* and prepared a feast. When the Wild Rice was ready to be harvested, they traveled by canoe (*jiimaan*) to the areas where the Wild Rice grew. They gently pulled the tops of the rice plants over the canoe (*jiimaan*) and knocked the grains with wooden sticks into the bottom of the canoe (*jiimaan*) shown in the picture to the right.



(Image from Newberry Digital Collections for the Classroom http://dcc.newberry.org/collections/indians_in_the_archives)

Wild Rice Today

The Anishinabek word *Manoomin* means “good berry”. Wild Rice is the seed of a grass. It grows in shallow, calm water. In the past, dams, logging, and pollution killed many beds of Wild Rice beds in Michigan. Today, with healthier lakes and rivers, the Anishinabek are planting Wild Rice, so they can continue to harvest it like their grandparents and ancestors did.

