

Potton : Yours to discover
Owl's Head



Engraving, W.H. Bartlett, 1840



Potton Heritage Association
PO Box 262, Mansonville, QC J0E 1X0
info@pottonheritage.org
www.pottonheritage.org

Walowadjo, "Mountain of the Owl"

Owl's Head Mountain, one in the Appalachian chain, is the majestic beacon of Potton. At 750 metres (2,460 feet), it is one of the highest elevations in the Townships. Owl's Head resulted from a volcanic eruption during the Cambrian period several million years ago. Its rocky flanks are basalt, with cliffs on its eastern face measuring 107 meters (351 feet) below Lake Memphremagog. The vertical drop on the longest ski trail at Owl's Head is 541 meters (1775 feet).

How did Owl's Head get its name? The truth is that no one knows for sure; however, it is commonly believed that Owl's Head was named to honour an Abenaki, Chief Owl, whose profile was said to resemble that of the mountain sacred to his people. When looking at the mountain from the north, some see the contour of a neck and facial profile of a reclined man, who faces east – toward the rising sun.

The word Abenaki comes from "*Wobanaki*", which means "*land or country to the East*" or "*where the dawn comes from*". Long before the first pioneer settled in Potton, Abenaki people hunted and fished this area, as well as the New England regions to the south. The Abenaki name for Owl's Head is "*Kokokas*", meaning "*owl*" or "*Walowadjo*", meaning "*mountain of the owl*."

Owls are solitary, nocturnal birds of prey with acute hearing and very keen eyesight. Although owl sounds are varied, "hoots" are the most common, often audible for miles. Perhaps it is the owl's implacable stare, disquieting call, and silent flight in darkness that make it a symbol for the occult, the supernatural and spiritualism. In some cultures, the owl is associated with intelligence and wisdom. In others, an owl's cry foretells loss and sorrow. Owls have even been considered an omen of death: "*quand le hibou chante, l'Indien meurt*" meaning "*when the owl calls, the Indian dies*."

In some Algonquin societies, which include the Abenaki, certain rites feature the presence of a "man-owl" perched in the ceremonial lodge. He faces west, symbolically showing the road to the land of the setting sun and kingdom of the dead - perhaps as a guide for the soul in passage to another world.

A Sacred Mountain and Ceremonial Rites

Whether it is called *Owl's Head*, *Kokokas* or *Walowadjo*, the mountain is revered by many and is sacred to the Abenakis, in particular. The Abenakis believe that a fierce warrior-serpent named *Anaconda* protects the mountain and lives in a cave deep in Lake Memphremagog. This legend persists, albeit altered for contemporary purposes: *Anaconda* has been re-named *Memphré*. The fierce warrior-serpent is portrayed as a somewhat friendlier monster, which many swear to have seen. If you are patient, quiet, and very alert – perhaps you will, too! Remember *Memphré* is reclusive and appears only rarely.

Near the top of Owl's Head is a natural chamber, accessible on foot, through an opening between rocks. Members and guests of Golden Rule Lodge No 5 of Stanstead of the Masonic Order meet here annually on the summer solstice. This chamber was inaugurated by Henry J. Martin, GM, on September 10, 1857

Acclaimed to be the only natural open air lodge that is known to exist, Masons from the world over have visited here. The Masonic emblem of a square and compass with the letter 'G' in the centre is inscribed on one wall. A double headed eagle, of symbolic meaning to Masons, is depicted on the chamber's eastern face.

The second open-air meeting of the Golden Rule Lodge No. 5 (GRQ), AF & AM, June 24, 1858 at the summit of Owl's Head Mountain. Initiate Alexander Murray is depicted in this painting by A. Sherriff-Scott, which adorns the Memorial Hall of the Masonic Temple in Montreal.



Painting of the Masonic Lodge on Owl's Head

The rugged timelessness of the mountain moves many to choose Owl's Head as a place for personal quest, simple relaxation or as the final resting place for a loved one.

At the top of the quad chairlift, a grey plaque is affixed to a rock face. The plaque commemorates the achievements and contributions to the world of skiing by Bob Richardson (1927-2004), born in Magog, Quebec.

Richardson was a talented alpine skier, member of Canada's National Team from 1948 to 1954, and a member of the 1952 Canadian Olympic Ski Team that competed in Oslo, Norway. In 1960, Richardson was invited by the Olympic Committee to evaluate Whistler Mountain as a possible Olympic site, becoming the first to ski Whistler from the top. He was Director of the Owl's Head Ski School from 1965 to his retirement in 1995.

It might well be said that Bob Richardson was "one" with Owl's Head. His ashes lie buried on the mountain he knew so well.

Owl's Head, a Recreational and Tourist Haven

Owl's Head Ski is the focal point of a four-season recreational, residential, and tourist area that includes Owl's Head Golf and Marina. Owl's Head Development Inc. is owned and operated by Fred Korman, his wife, Lillian and their daughter, Caroll. Owl's Head Ski opened officially on December 18, 1965 and quickly gained the reputation as a family oriented mountain, a reputation that endures. Owl's Head Development is a key contributor to the economy of Potton.

Fred Korman is one of six children born to Albert Korman Sr. and his wife, Philippine Weitzel. His parents immigrated from Germany in 1926. He trained as an electrician, eventually building his company, Fred Korman Inc., into a large enterprise – working locally and extensively in northern Quebec installing substations for the expansion of the Hydro Quebec network.

Fred Korman has long demonstrated interest and support of his community. He was the Mayor of this Municipality from 1965 to 1969 and the volunteer Fire Chief for Potton for several years. While each of the Korman family has contributed to the economic development of this Township; it is Fred Korman, with his dream and energy for a mountain called Owl's Head, who is the most well known.

An Inspiring and Festive Mountain

Such notable 19th century artists as William Henry Bartlett, Allan Edson, John Fraser, Cornelius Kreighoff and J.D. Woodward have immortalized Owl's Head. No matter what the season, the panorama from Owl's Head is unforgettable! Of little wonder then, that artist, poet, photographer and storyteller alike find inspiration in the exceptional beauty of our mountain.

In the 1880's, a luxurious hotel called The Mountain House graced the shores of Lake Memphremagog at the foot of Owl's Head. The hotel boasted 500 acres of woodland, gardens, trails, dairy, stables and vineyard. The amenities and activities offered at the Mountain House far surpassed those offered in 1880's Quebec. Only a few photographs remain to attest its elegant existence. The hotel burned in 1899 and was not rebuilt.

Each fall, when spirits soar in the brilliance of colour, the crispness and camaraderie of the season, Owl's Head sponsors Autumnfest – a celebration of music, dance, food, artists and artisans. Oktoberfest, an evening of German inspired food, entertainment and dance crowns the fall season.

Owl's Head Mountain is alluring in its regal majesty, peaceful vistas and recreational challenges. Your spirits will soar at the summit! Without a doubt, you will be captivated by the beauty of the Mountain of the Owl!

Research : Jean-Louis Bertrand, Sandra Jewett and Jacques Thouin

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Sources :

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