

Algonquin Outfitters' Brent Store

Canoe trip outfitting in northern Algonquin Park

It's worth the drive to Brent! Since 1982, Algonquin Outfitters has been operating the Brent Store, in the historic village (ghost town?) of Brent. Located on Cedar Lake, the Brent access point (#27) offers quick access to some of the less travelled canoe areas in northern Algonquin Park.

Outfitting, canoe rentals and supplies for camping trips are all available at Brent. Advance reservations (minimum three weeks) are highly recommended for any rental or outfitting package.

Four reasons to visit Brent

1) *Less people.* As the Highway 60 corridor becomes busier every year, Brent offers a taste of what canoe travel in Algonquin used to be. Far from the mainstream of park activity, access point quotas are rarely filled there. Even in peak season, many of our customers report seeing few, if any, other canoe parties on northern interior lakes like Catfish, Burntroot or Carl Wilson.

2) *A great variety of canoe trip possibilities.* Cedar Lake is the hub for several outstanding routes, including the Petawawa River (up or downstream), the Nipissing River, routes to Kiosk and Carl Wilson Lake and several shorter routes starting off the Brent road.

3) *A resupply point for longer canoe trips.* Brent makes an ideal restocking point for trips starting at Highway 60 or west side access points. Call us well in advance of your trip to arrange food outfitting drop-offs.

4) *Great fishing.* Not only does Brent allow easy access to some excellent trout and bass fishing lakes, but also the chance to fish for species found nowhere else in the park. Walleye are found in Cedar Lake and the Petawawa River downstream of Cedar. Further downstream, below Lake Travers, muskellunge lurk.

There is a catch...

There are some good reasons the Brent base enjoys its unique reputation. The main reason is the relative inaccessibility. Brent is at the end of a 40 km (25 mile) gravel road. The Brent Road starts off Highway 17, the main route through the Ottawa valley north of Algonquin Park. Years ago, the CNR offered passenger rail service to Brent on a daily basis but rail service was rerouted and the tracks were pulled out in 1997. Since planes are not permitted to land on Cedar Lake, the road is the only way to get there. The unusual nature and interesting geological features of the Brent Road deserve their own section and are described later.

A brief history of the Brent Store

An exact early history of the Brent area is hard to uncover. We do know that an early explorer of the upper Ottawa and Algonquin areas, Alexander Sherriff, camped on the shores of Cedar Lake near Brent in 1829. Lumbermen first arrived in the Brent area in the 1850's, over a pioneer road from the town of Deux Rivieres, on the Ottawa River. They were seeking the huge white pine needed by the British sea fleet. A railway was built and the small town of Brent evolved from the lumbering and railway communities. By the early 1900's, the town had a population of 400, a school with 40 students and a church.

Sometime in that era a small store was opened by one of the lumbermen, Sandy Geeghan. In the early 1930's the store was purchased by Gerry McGaughy, a former lumber camp cook and clerk. Along with his wife, Mary, Gerry operated the Brent store for almost 50 years, until he passed away in January 1981. Beneath his gruff exterior resided a heart of gold and Gerry became one of the great characters of Algonquin Park. Many canoe trippers of that time have stories of being rescued from adverse conditions by arriving at Gerry's door. Over the years, on his many trips through Cedar Lake, Bill Swift Sr. visited Gerry and Mary many times and a close relationship developed. Swifty was very pleased to learn that Gerry's desire was for Algonquin Outfitters to take over the operation of the Brent Store. By 1980 lumbering had long ceased in the immediate area and railway activity had diminished to the point where only two permanent residents remained in Brent. After some negotiations with the Ministry of Natural Resources, we were able to open a canoe trip outfitting base and store to serve canoeists, summer residents and roadside campers.

From Gerry to Jake...

Over the years, Gerry accumulated many artifacts from the early days of the Brent community. Among these are many logging implements and even a switch from the Brent school. Even the grounds surrounding the store have an unusual role in local lore.

They are the burial grounds of the many McGaughy dogs; including the famous "Judy," remembered by many canoeists for her steady diet of peanuts in the shell, and her enormous girth.

With these items and the considerable historical interest of the Brent Store in mind, we knew that a unique individual would be required to run the store, supervise the outfitting operations, carry on the traditions and be a curator of sorts. We found such a person in Jake Pigeon, who is almost as much a part of Algonquin Park history as Gerry McGaughy was.

Jake, a teacher from Penetanguishene, Ontario (now retired), is the son of Lorne and Mary Pigeon. Mary was born at the old lumber camp on Brule Lake and Lorne came from the village of Madawaska, just east of the park. Lorne became a park ranger and Jake spent several summers at Brent in his youth. Much of the year, the family lived on Cache Lake, where Mary was the teacher for the children of park staff. In the days when such things were permitted, the Pigeon family had one of the most remote cottages in Algonquin Park. Located on an island on McIntosh Lake, the cottage was burned down by careless campers many years ago, but modern day canoeists may still be able to locate the stone chimney.

During his many years in the park, Jake acquired a reputation as one of the finest fishing guides ever to wet a line in an Algonquin lake or stream. He has also guided whitewater trips on remote rivers in Quebec and Labrador. Proving that he can cope with the utmost adversity, Jake was Bill Swift's partner in the 70 mile General Clinton marathon canoe race. After spending the summer of 1981 preparing and organizing the store to become an outfitting base, Jake presided over the opening in 1982 and has been the Brent base manager ever since.

Accommodation at Brent

When you drive to Brent, you leave behind many conveniences. The first thing you'll come across is the MNR roadside campground. This is a rustic campground, with vault toilets, no running water and no hookups. There are some beautiful beaches and the view of Cedar Lake has to be seen to be believed. Visitors should remember that while canned goods and glass containers are permitted in the campground, the can and bottle ban applies as soon you leave the campground for interior trips, including camping on Cedar Lake. Algonquin Outfitters operates a communal bunkhouse for our customers at the Brent Store. The campground, bunkhouse and the historic Brent Ranger cabin are the only accommodations available at Brent. There are no restaurants and the closest motels are in Deux Rivieres or Mattawa. Flush toilets and showers are almost nonexistent at Brent.

Algonquin Outfitters - Brent version

Our base is about one kilometre past the old railway crossing. Customers familiar with the wide variety of services and products available at our Dwight and Opeongo bases will find things a little different when they get to Brent. In the store, Jake stocks fresh foods and groceries like milk, frozen meat and breads for trippers and campground users along with a representative selection of freeze dried and dehydrated food. The outfitting department offers the same types of equipment as our other bases, but not in the same quantity. Fish tackle appropriate to the area is available.

We have purposely limited the amount of equipment available at Brent in order to help preserve some of the unique qualities of the base. Both complete and partial outfitting are available, but advance reservations should be made through our main base at Dwight (705-635-2243) at least three weeks ahead of your arrival date. There is no postal service to Brent and, believe it or not, no telephone other than a satellite phone reserved for emergency use! Because of the popularity of complete outfitting at Brent and the more limited selection of canoes and equipment, we cannot guarantee specific equipment items (like certain canoe models) during July and August. If you have a reservation, for example, you will get a canoe, but you may not get a Swift Kipawa. Petawawa River trippers should note that ABS whitewater canoes are not available at Brent. We do have a good selection of these canoes at the Dwight base.

If your trip is spur-of-the-moment you can always take a chance and just show up. This practice is not recommended on holiday weekends!.

The Brent Road

As mentioned earlier, the main reason for the under-utilization of the Brent area is its only means of access, the Brent Road. The road starts near the town of Deux Rivieres, off Highway 17, about 94 km (58 miles) southeast of Mattawa and 111 km (69 miles) northwest of Pembroke. The turnoff is marked, so look for signs.

Even though major improvements have been made in recent years, the 40 km (25 mile) road is gravel the entire distance. The winding (and often washboard) Brent Road is probably not the most suitable destination for large RV's or boat trailers. The first section, outside Algonquin Park, is usually well maintained by logging companies (and well used, so watch out for trucks). The park

gate and permit station is 16 km (10 miles) along, as well as the turn off for the Wendigo Lake access point. Whether you are going to Brent, Wendigo or the North River access 10 km (6 miles) further, you should stop here and get your camping permit and fishing licence. Save yourself a return trip - there is no permit station beyond here! A little ways past the North River access is the famous Brent Crater. Created 450 million years ago by one of the largest meteorites to ever impact the earth, the crater is a spectacular geological feature. A special viewing tower has been erected to help you grasp the enormity of the crater. This stretch of the road can be quite rough, so take your time. Most people take between one and two hours to drive from the highway to Brent. Although the road can be rough, it can be an enjoyable experience if you take your time and enjoy the sights along the way. Plan on stopping for a picnic lunch, a swim in one of the small lakes along the way or to check out the crater view.

Brent Store hours of operation:

The store opens in late April, on the first day of trout season, ice conditions permitting, and closes for the season on the Monday of Canadian Thanksgiving weekend. Daily hours are 8am - noon, 3pm - 7pm. Please note that after Labour Day, there may be only one staff member on duty. If they are called away, they will leave a note on door as to their whereabouts and/or time of return.

Outfitting Rates

Please refer to the rates for Opeongo and Brent published in our newsletter and web site. Not all items on the list are available there.

The Brent Ranger Cabin

Over the last few years, Algonquin park staff, the Friends of Algonquin Park and a few groups of dedicated volunteers (like the Brent Historical Enhancement Program) have worked hard to make a unique accommodation opportunity available in Algonquin Park. Thirteen rustic ranger cabins have been restored, upgraded and made available for public use, by reservation. Only three are accessible by road; the rest must be reached by canoe or on foot. One of the largest and most scenically located cabins is located in Brent, managed and maintained by Jake Pigeon and the Brent store staff.

In its heyday, Brent was a busy little community, with railway, logging and park-related activities going on throughout the year. Built in 1932, the Brent cabin was the Deputy Chief Ranger's headquarters, used primarily by park staff engaged in forest and fire protection in the Brent area. Constructed of red and white pine logs, the building was extensively renovated in 1994, with financial support from Algonquin Outfitters. The cabin has a large common room, a kitchen and four bedrooms equipped with bunks, allowing the building to sleep up to 12 people. A covered front porch offers a terrific view of the lake. The cabin is equipped with propane lights, fridge and stove and has an airtight wood stove in the main room.

To reserve the Brent Cabin, call the Ontario Parks reservation line at 1-888-668-7275. The basic rental rate in 2000 was \$75/night or \$500/week for up to six people. Extra charges apply for additional people and more than three vehicles. The Brent cabin is very popular and reservations should be made well in advance. For more information on all the Ranger Cabins, visit the park web site at www.algonquinpark.on.ca or call the park's general information line at 705-633-5572.

**For reservations or more
information, contact:**

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