

INDIAN TRAIL RESORT.. A HISTORY

As a result of the Allotment Act of 1881, the federal government granted some eighty acres of land to an Anishinaabe (Chippewa) Indian man named Chiz-ui-aw. It was at about that time when Chiz-ui-aw built his sturdy sixteen by twenty foot log cabin – now part of the main lodge at Indian Trail Resort – near Lake Pokegama, also referred to as Slim Lake by some of the early map makers of that era. This was long before the famed Chippewa Flowage had been created.

About a quarter of a mile to the northeast of Chiz-ui-aw's cabin, up on the high ground, lived an Indian man who some referred to as "Injun Jim." He had a farm and lived in a slightly more sizeable cabin, overlooking the old Trading Post just a quarter mile to the north. Nestled between Lake Pokegama and the big bend of the West Fork of the Chippewa River, the Trading Post (originally an ancient Indian village called Pa-qua-uah-wong) was one of the area's earlier settlements. By the time Chiz-ui-aw had built his cabin, it was beginning to become a hub of activity as logging gained momentum in the area.

By the 1920s, logging had stripped Wisconsin's northwoods of much of its timber, and farming had become more popular. Many of the old stopping places that the loggers used to stay at began to cater more to fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts. These places evolved into some of the area's first resorts.

In 1923, a dam was constructed on the Chippewa River about five miles downstream from the Trading Post. The huge reservoir that resulted -- the Chippewa Flowage -- flooded not only over ten-thousand acres of land, but also most of the old Trading Post as well as many people's homes. Although Chiz-ui-aw's cabin was built up on high enough ground to be spared, the prospect of such a monumental change about to affect his surroundings must have been hard for him to accept.

However, Chiz-ui-aw never did live to see it because, not too long before the Flowage had been formed, Chiz-ui-aw drowned out in front of his cabin. Perhaps he was out trapping, hunting, or fishing at the time. Or perhaps he was just out paddling around to survey his home waters, taking in all of its peaceful splendor before "progress" would change it all forever.

It must be said that the resulting Chippewa Flowage is no less serene; it's just different than it was back in Chiz-ui-aw's time. In fact, because many decades have allowed a beautiful second growth to reforest what the loggers had taken away more than a century ago, today the Chippewa Flowage stands as one of the most scenic and pristine bodies of water in the country. This largely unspoiled wilderness has but slight development and is loaded with all types of fish and game: offering excellent crappie and walleye fishing, great bass fishing, and some of the finest musky fishing in the world. While sitting right here in the heart of Chiz-ui-aw's cabin as I am writing this history, I can't help but think of him and hope ... "that even Chiz-ui-aw would approve of how we have caretaken this land."

Before Chiz-ui-aw's descendants inherited this land, his cabin was left abandoned for a time. It has been said that some visitors to the cabin at that time witnessed movements that they believed were made by Chiz-ui-aw's ghost. Whether these were just stories concocted by past visitors or they contained elements of truth, one thing is for sure... the legend of Chiz-ui-aw lives on and he is frequently the topic of conversation in the "Little Red Bar".

After changing hands a few times, the property was purchased by Elmer & Gertrude Schiebel and turned into a resort in 1937. In order to access the place, Schiebel hired some local **INDIANS** to drag more than a mile long **TRAIL** through the woods from Helsing Road to his new **RESORT**... hence the name **INDIAN TRAIL RESORT**. Schiebel built a large porch onto the lake side of Chiz-ui-aw's cabin. This not only expanded his living quarters, but also served as the perfect spot to establish a tavern during the summer months. Schiebel also built three two-bedroom cabins, complete with large screened-in porches.

There was no electricity here until the late 1940s. The small generating plant they had could only satisfy the resort's most basic electrical needs. There was also an ice house on the premises. During the winter, blocks of ice were cut from the frozen flowage out in front of the resort. To cut the ice: a three-foot diameter saw blade was attached to the rear axle of an old truck and, after driving it slowly, a long cut could be made in the ice. Once blocks of ice were cut out of the lake, they were stored in the ice house and covered up with sawdust so they could keep through the summer. The cabins all had wood stoves, so keeping a ready supply of wood was also one of the many daily resort chores.

In 1944, Don and Mary Hendee bought Indian Trail Resort. Don, who worked in the Freeman Shoe Factory in Beloit, Wisconsin, was in poor health so he decided to move up to the serenity of the northwoods to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. It was during the fall of 1945 that Don and his brother, Arnold, built the "Little Red Bar." They did so by tunneling underneath both the porch that (up until that time) served as the tavern and Chiz-ui-aw's original cabin. A local Indian named Clyde Miller dug most of it out with a horse and a plow blade and the rest was done by **HAND**, with shovels! Thick log beams were installed to support both the porch and Chiz-ui-aw's cabin and the Red Bar's walls were constructed with large stones, cemented together by a man named Al Loomis. After Loomis and company constructed a large walkout pipestone patio overlooking the Flowage, the project was completed... and the Little Red Bar was born. The old porch tavern then became a dining room. Around 1946, the Hendees built their fourth rental cottage, a 2-bedroom Log Cabin, and after electricity came to the resort, they converted the old ice house into a laundry house.

During the fall of 1949, Don Hendee and regulars Chick DeBrot and John Bennett began to notice a familiar boat spending an inordinate amount of time fishing across the lake, near where the old Trading Post used to be. The same boat kept fishing the same area, every day, several times a day, during the first three weeks of October. The weather was exceptionally warm during most of that period; however, on October 20th, the weather made a turn for the worse. Never-the-less, even though it was cold, windy, and nasty, just like clockwork, that same boat was again out there fishing. But this time they decided to take a break and stop in at the Little Red Bar. In walked Louie Spray with his two fishing companions, George Quentmeyer and Ted Haag. After warming up, the trio went back out there and resumed fishing.

Spray was fishing near Graveyard Point when Hendee, DeBrot, and Bennett heard a commotion and a bunch of hollering over there. A couple of gunshots alerted them to the fact that Spray had just taken a decent musky out there. The next time Spray came by, he confided in Hendee and asked, "Did you hear some shooting out there the other day? Well, I got the big one there." That **BIG ONE** happened to be the world record muskie of 69 pounds 11 ounces!

In 1952, Ed and Elsie Hornewer and Axel and Grace Christensen purchased the resort. In 1953, they built a three-bedroom cabin. The roads were so poor that the lumber they needed to build that cabin with had to be both hauled and floated in by boat. During the late 1950s, the Christensens' interest in the resort was bought up by Ray and Evelyn Hornewer, and then later by Jim Schoettle. During those years, the living quarters in the main lodge was greatly expanded when a second floor was added; thereby, totally encapsulating Chiz-ui-aw's cabin within the main lodge building. Also, the ice house and a nearby tool shed were joined together and made into one long building called the "Bunkhouse," offering room for up to 11 men to lodge.

From 1963 to 1968, Howie and Wanda Hornewer owned Indian Trail Resort. They added one last rental unit in 1964, a large modern mobile home. They also cleared out some land on the hill up above the cabins and opened a small trailer court, which now has twenty-three trailers.

While time may have a way of marching on, the gang at the "Trails" makes sure that the old days (and Chiz-ui-aw) are not forgotten. Over forty years ago, Jackie Hollen, one of the resort's Indian guides, began honoring Chiz-ui-aw by tossing him offerings of candy or even pennies off the dock... in hopes that Chiz-ui-aw would reciprocate by allowing him a good day's fishing. Yes, scores of superstitious fishermen have since continued the tradition and often seek Chiz-ui-aw's guidance.

Late in 1967, Lee Wilmsen bought Indian Trail and operated it for the next four seasons. He built a large two-car garage on the premises in 1970 and expanded the trailer as more of his regular guests requested spots. In 1972, he sold the resort to his sister Pat and her husband Ron Dettloff and moved two blocks down the road and started up Lee's Smokehouse. Ron and Pat ran the resort together until 1984, when they divorced amicably, and their son, John, bought into the resort.

The Little Red Bar is often the social center and the place where the fishermen can either plan their next day's strategy or just swap stories. Here, they still fight fish that were caught or lost more than fifty years ago. John, a dedicated musky fisherman, is often quick to share a story or two with his patrons. However, sometimes the stories are put on hold for a while, like when a happy guest comes in with another great catch or maybe when a mysterious (but familiar) visitor makes a surprise appearance. Such an event occurred back in 1984, when, in mid-story, John was interrupted by a mysterious wind that, even from the wrong direction, still managed to blow the heavy log door of the bar open... and then bang it shut. The place became as silent as a cemetery for a few moments until John offered a quick explanation to the bewildered fishermen. "That was just Chiz-ui-aw; he wanted to come in and visit."

In 1986, Pat built a beautiful log home overlooking the resort's spacious beach and, in 1988, began renting out its lower level as the resort's deluxe Beachfront Cottage and seventh rental "cottage". In 1988, John married Paulette and--along with Pat--ran the resort together for the next 10 years. A new kitchen was one of the first orders of business for the two and, upon remodeling it in 1989, it was discovered that Chiz-ui-aw's original cabin lay hidden beneath its walls and was still completely intact. In 1999, John and Paulette divorced.

In July of 2002, John and Brenda were married at the site of the old Indian mission church; St. Anthony's, located on Church Island across the lake from the resort. Because they both possess the same deep love for the Flowage and are committed to their ongoing restoration of this historic resort, the pair will perpetuate the "special magic" that can only be found at Indian Trail Resort. Late in 2007, John and Brenda bought out the remaining portion of the original resort including Pat's house, the Beachfront Cottage. Pat is now retired and is currently living in Hayward.

This year, in 2017, Indian Trail Resort proudly begins its 81st year in business and the 50th year for our family. John and Brenda are here to welcome you into the Indian Trail Resort family and share their love of the outdoors, the night skies, the call of the loon, and ensure the making of memories to last a lifetime!