

■ **PETAWAWA:** History of the river celebrated by the Algonquin First Nation

# Cultural significance

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**PETAWAWA** – The Algonquins of Ontario joined the rafters and kayakers over the weekend in celebrating the pristine and historic Petawawa River.

The role the river has played in the lineage of the Algonquin people was the centrepiece of festivities Saturday at the sixth annual Hell or High Water.

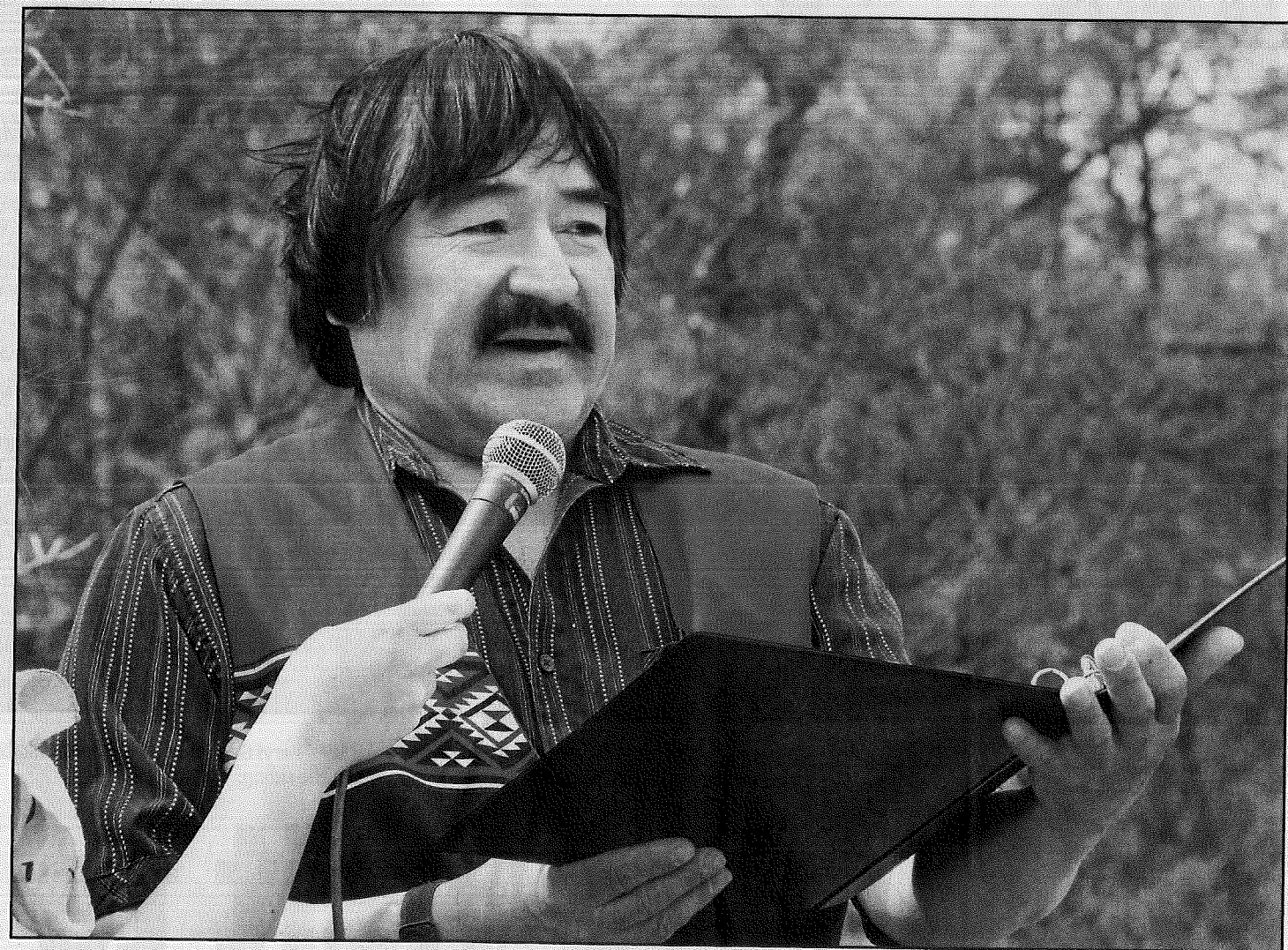
On the rocks hovering over the rapids known as 'Lovers,' members from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation demonstrated their enduring link with the river with a traditional drumming ceremony.

Running through the heart of Algonquin territory, the Petawawa's thundering rapids have been a source of spiritual and inspirational strength to these First Nations peoples since time immemorial, Kirby Whiteduck, chief of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, told an audience of spectators.

"There are few rivers in the Algonquin territory that are as vast, undeveloped or unaltered as the mighty Petawawa," said Whiteduck. "The river and its adjacent lands protect the ancestral integrity of the Algonquin people."

The shores of the Petawawa River, its many lakes and its tributary, the Barron River, preserve hundreds of archeological sites which demonstrate Algonquin ancestral use and occupation of the region, he said, noting they include sacred burial grounds and pictograph sites. It is also the home to many wildlife animal and fish species that have provided sustenance to the Algonquin people.

The chief pointed out that early European explorers and surveyors made journals describing their encounters with the Algonquin people on the Petawawa. He added the Algonquins made several seasonal movements throughout this region establish-



SEAN CHASE/DAILY OBSERVER

**Chief Kirby Whiteduck delivers an impassioned speech on the cultural and spiritual significance of the Petawawa River during a shoreline ceremony Saturday. The Algonquins of Ontario joined kayakers in celebrating the mighty river during the annual Hell or High Water festival.**

ing trails that were later used by the pioneers and settlers noting that the portages used by kayakers and recreational canoeists were "carved out by our Algonquin ancestors."

"The Petawawa River system holds important cultural heritage resources and memories of the Algonquins which have spanned the many thousands of years," Whiteduck said. "For a millennium, the thunder-

ing Petawawa has provided the Algonquin people with sustenance, transportation, medicines and spiritual strength. More recently, it has provided the same to our neighbours who have also come to appreciate its power and stunning natural beauty."

He pledged that the Algonquin people will continue to be a leading voice to protect the Petawawa. While he alluded to development

of the river as a green energy project, such as the proposed power generating station at Railroad Rapids, he did not name the controversial project.

"The Petawawa is a critical part of our Algonquin past, present and future," Whiteduck said. "To us, the river is alive. It has its own spirit and it contributes to the life of Mother Earth. It deserves respect and protection."

To demonstrate their connec-

tion with the river, the Algonquins also staged a water ceremony earlier in the day and hosted an information booth highlighting the heritage of the Petawawa. Ethan Huner, a professional naturalist, conducted a two-kilometre walking tour where he recounting the natural and cultural features of the river.

Sean Chase is a Daily Observer multimedia journalist