

The Kirkwood Cruiser

This Ranger boat is named in honour of Alexander Kirkwood. As documented by historians of Algonquin Park, Alexander Kirkwood was a clerk in the office of the Ontario Department of Crown Lands in the late 1800s, a man who Audrey Saunders notes “. . . never set eyes on the Park area.” However, Kirkwood had a vision that was well ahead of his time, conserving the vast resources of the area we now call Algonquin Park. In her wonderful book *Algonquin Story*, Saunders notes that Kirkwood’s vision was “. . . for the preservation and maintenance of the natural forest” and to protect the headwaters of the major rivers that have their source in the Algonquin highlands.

Conservation was Kirkwood’s vision and it remains ours today. This is true for all of us who love and care for this “place like no other” (as Roderick MacKay so aptly describes in his excellent history of Algonquin Park). Conservation is certainly a central mission of the Rangers who cruise the park facilitating the public’s enjoyment of the natural wonders and raw beauty of the area by maintaining the campsites and portage trails on which we all depend. Given this, I couldn’t think of a better name for this Jon boat than a tribute to a founder of the park who knew it needed to be protected and cherished.

Interestingly, the chosen name **Kirkwood Cruiser** is also a tribute to Alexander’s great grandson, Russ, whom I knew as VE3RKB, his amateur radio call sign. It was Russ who first told me about a lake named in honour of his great grandfather, Alexander Kirkwood. Russ, then in his late 80s, explained that he often went to Algonquin Park, but he had never been to Kirkwood Lake. He and his family did little interior tripping. So, on an October weekend in 2017, a good friend of mine, Bill Ramore (a past Camp Outlook counsellor and guide who had spent many summers in Algonquin in the 1970s), decided to visit Kirkwood Lake, and then I could describe it to Russ.

It was a delightful fall weekend and a beautiful lake, but I’ll leave it to you to explore the waterfall at the end of the portage into the lake, the steep cliff overlooking the lake on the central island, as well as the surrounding magnificent hardwood hills. Suffice it to say that I was eager to return home to tell Russ all about the little lake named in honour of his great grandfather. Unfortunately, I returned home to find that Russ had been admitted to hospital and died a few days later never hearing about the lake. Participating in the naming of this boat marks the end of my story that I had hoped to tell Russ. This boat naming, however, does let me add a further honour to the Kirkwood name.

The **Kirkwood Cruiser** will be very small part of the history of this park now, but it is a part bearing a very important name in the greater Algonquin story. It is a name that honours a visionary conservationist, his great grandson and all of the Rangers whose work continues a legacy of conservation and canoe camaraderie. May we all contribute to this legacy with everything we do in the park and in our support of the Friends of Algonquin Park!

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