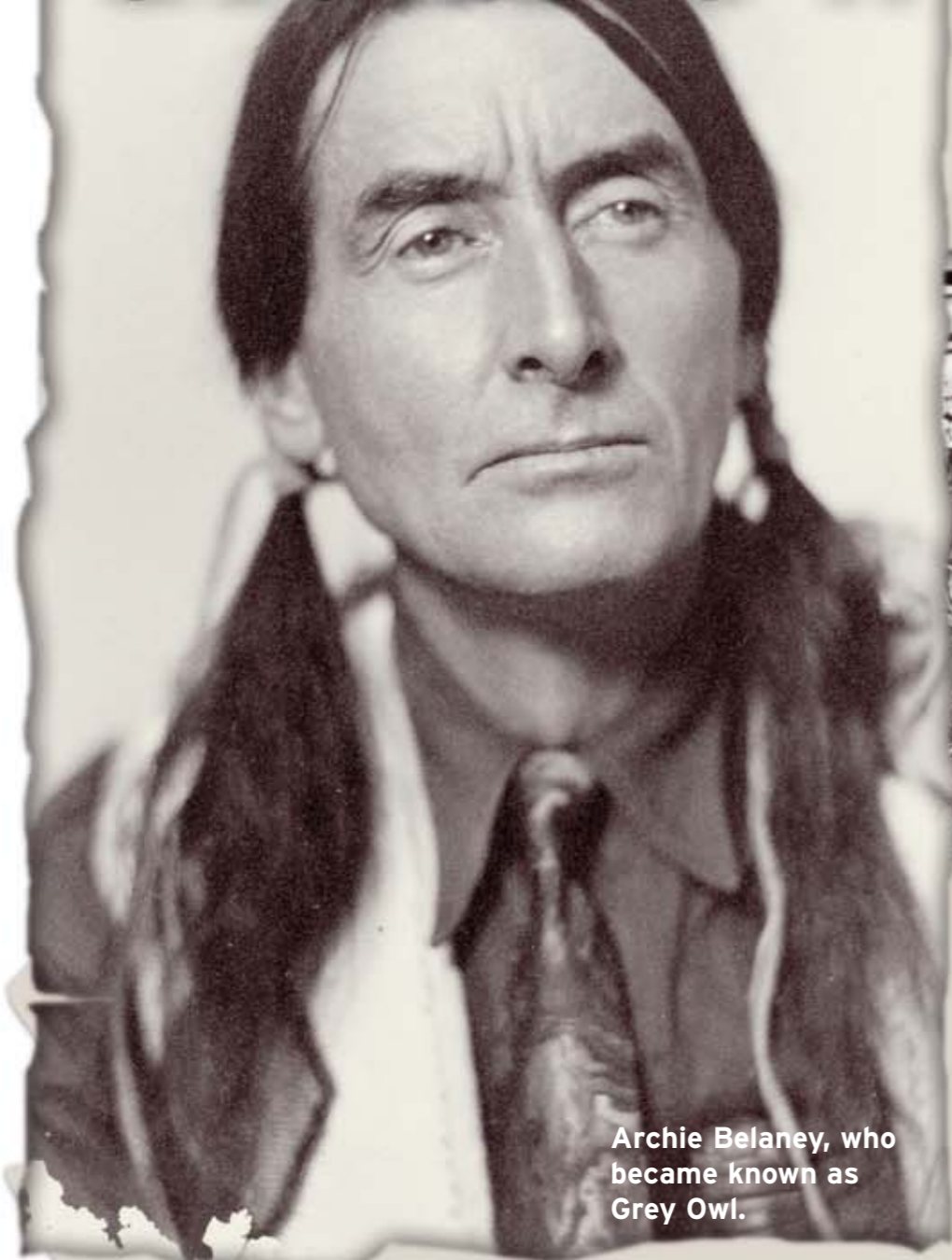


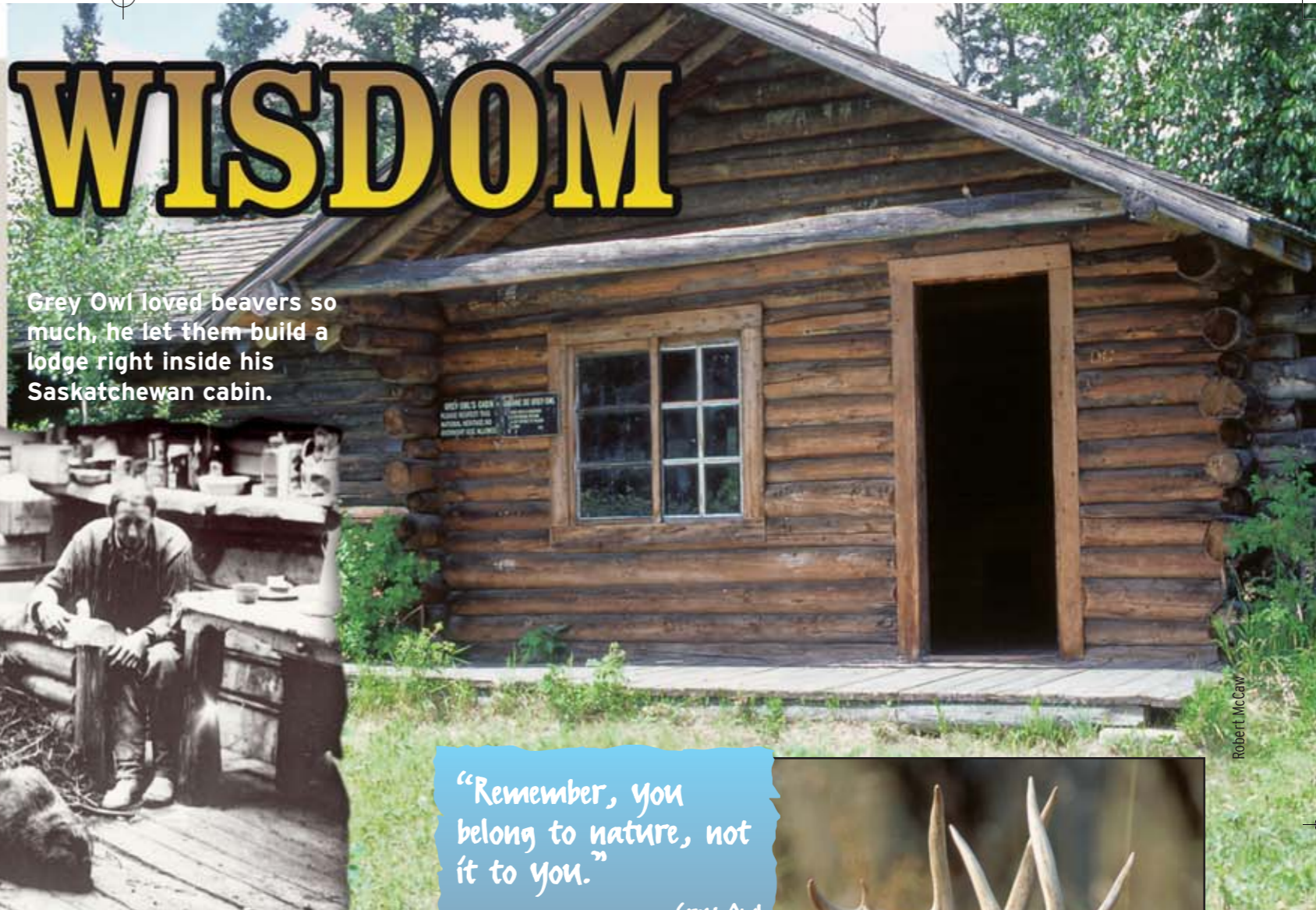
GREY OWL'S WISDOM



Archie Belaney, who became known as Grey Owl.



Grey Owl loved beavers so much, he let them build a lodge right inside his Saskatchewan cabin.



Robert McCaw

“Remember, you belong to nature, not it to you.”
-Grey Owl



Robert McCaw

SITTING SPELLBOUND, THE CHILDREN LISTENED TO THE MAN WITH BLACK HAIR WEARING A FRINGED DEERSKIN JACKET, BUCKSKIN TROUSERS AND MOCCASINS, HIS LONG BLACK HAIR IN TRAILING BRAIDS.

“My little brothers and sisters, I am Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin, He-Who-Flies-By-Night, Grey Owl. I come in peace. I come to speak to you of the mountains and the great forests and the rocks and the pure waters of our beautiful land, and of the men and animals who have lived here for many moons.” The man described his life as an Ojibwa in northern Ontario, ending his story by cupping his hands around his mouth to imitate the sound of a hooting owl.

From 1935 to 1937, Grey Owl spoke to more than 200 audiences in England, Scotland, Canada and the United States. He loved telling children stories about animals they had only seen in picture books. He spoke of the deer, moose, bear, loon, otter and eagle. His audiences, fascinated by the tall, handsome Aboriginal man, never suspected he was born to a very different life.

In fact, he was born Archibald Belaney, in Hastings, England, in 1888. Raised in a strict English household by two unmarried aunts, Archie studied classical music and became an accomplished pianist. He earned school prizes in French and English. But something else was call-

GREY OWL'S WISDOM

ing to Archie; he read everything he could find about North American native peoples, nature and wildlife. He explored the English countryside, watching and learning about the creatures he came across. By age 11 he was allowed to keep a collection of wild pets in the house's attic.

Aware of his lifelong desire to explore the Canadian wilderness, Archie's aunts gave their

But the beaver population was declining due to over-trapping, so Grey Owl decided to commit himself to helping save beavers, which he called "the little people," from extinction.



Robert McCaw

Grey Owl and Anahereo adopted a pair of orphaned beaver kittens they called McGinnis and McGinty, the two Macs. When those animals disappeared, the couple took a female orphan into their household. They named her Jelly Roll because she grew so fat and bossy. Later, they also adopted a male and named him Rawhide.

Anahereo encouraged Grey Owl to write about his experiences with the beavers. Over the next several years he wrote at least six books and 25 articles. A film crew made a documentary about Grey Owl, Anahereo, Jelly Roll and Rawhide. The film, called *The Beaver People*, became a huge success, and the nature-loving Grey Owl was now a

best-selling author and international celebrity.

In 1931, he, Anahereo, Jelly Roll and Rawhide moved to Ajawaan Lake

"I come to tell you that the animals of the forest are your friends."

-Grey Owl



Photodisc



Robert McCaw

Moose (left), otters (below left) and deer (p. 15) were some of Grey Owl's other favourite animals.



Lori Punshon

GREY OWL'S RESTING PLACE


The three-kilometre hike through the remote forest to Ajawaan Lake in Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park is inspiring. Pine trees kiss the sky, forming walls of greenery along a spacious wooded path. Wild strawberries and raspberries grow among blankets of moss. A single bright orange prairie lily says "hello" amidst the surrounding green. With each step, Grey Owl's spirit surrounds hikers more closely.

His log cabin sits exactly as you imagine it on the lake's glistening shore. Inside is a bed frame made of logs, an old wood stove and a writing desk under a window facing out to the lake. The famous beaver lodge rises up through the floor beside his desk; it is truly remarkable. Outside, directly behind the cabin, is where Grey Owl, Anahereo and their daughter Shirley Dawn are buried. The spot could not be more perfect. Nearby, a monument reads:

"I hope you understand me, I am not particularly anxious to be known at all; but my place is back in the woods, there is my home and there I stay. But in this country of Canada, to which I am intensely loyal, and whose natural heritage I am trying to interpret so that it may be better understood and appreciated, here, at least, I want to be known for what I am." Grey Owl 1934.

in Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan. Here, Grey Owl found his beaver paradise. The cabin, called Beaver Lodge, was built directly beside the lake. It had a dirt floor on one side with a hole so the beavers could swim directly into the lake from the cabin. The first winter, Jelly Roll and Rawhide even built part of their lodge right in the cabin!

Grey Owl spoke to anyone, from schoolchildren to famous politicians, about the importance of wilderness and animals. In 1937, dressed in buckskin and a headdress, Grey Owl spoke at Buckingham Palace, winning over the Royal Family with his message that we must care for nature and wildlife. He was a powerful spokesperson for the traditional Aboriginal way of life.

Returning to Canada exhausted, Grey Owl became ill and died of pneumonia on April 13, 1938, at the age of 49. Shortly after his death, the true (British) identity of this gifted, supposedly Ojibwa man was revealed. At first, people were shocked, but soon realized that Grey Owl's writings and conservation work would be Archibald Belaney's lasting gift to the world. Archie chose to fulfil a childhood fantasy, becoming a legend in the process. Only years later did people realize that he was a true naturalist ahead of his time. 

Lori Punshon lives in Regina, Saskatchewan. She and her family have a holiday retreat just outside Prince Albert National Park. In the summer of 2004, they made the journey to Grey Owl's cabin.