



# Ellsworth Rock Gardens Self-Guided Tour



**J**ack Ellsworth built the Ellsworth Rock Gardens between 1944 and 1966. Jack, a building contractor from

Chicago, and his wife Elsie spent summers on Lake Kabetogama, transforming the 60-foot high granite outcrop into an enchanting formal garden.

The Ellsworth Rock Gardens are an outstanding and unique example of an “outsider” or vernacular art environment. Although Mr. Ellsworth was not a formally trained artist, the gardens represent his unique creative expression and attitudes toward beauty and nature.

Today visitors arrive at the gardens west of the original Ellsworth dock. Follow the stepping stones to the Ellsworth signpost to begin your tour.



# The Tour

## (1) Signpost

The gardens and sculptures are part of a grand composition that covered an extensive area that included structural features in the meadow. Mr. Ellsworth became ill in 1965 and never returned to the gardens. Structures fell into disrepair and some were removed. The workshop is original. The signpost has been reconstructed from historic photographs.



(1) Historic landing with view of signpost and house.



Historic view of Rock Gardens



(1) Workshop

## (2) Wayside Exhibit

This is the view of the rock gardens that greeted visitors decades ago. Ellsworth started his creation with the terraced flower beds. By 1961 he had accented the gardens landscape with statuary. The flat rock to your right is the base for a sundial that once graced the meadow.



Arrowhead (6)

### (3) Table and Chair

Some Ellsworth sculptures are literal, such as this table and chair. Others express the eye of an artist. Some push the limits of gravity. All reflect an intuitive skill with stone and a creative, playful spirit.

### (4) Story Stone

Ellsworth frequently used stone piers or columns to indicate gateways. As you pass under the large basswood trees and through the stone gateway, the Ellsworth “story stone” will be visible on your left. Take your time climbing the steep incline up the hill. Notice the subtle use of mortared stone steps, natural rock outcrops, sculptures and painted arrows to guide your way to the top.

### (5) Stone Circle

From the top of the hill, there were grand views of Lake Kabetogama, the meadow, and the gardens below. Standing at



the ring of rocks at the top of the stairs, you can still see a glimpse of Lake Kabetogama through the trees. The ring of rocks once supported a teepee-like structure.

The crisp rock walls topped with a crushed granite frosting are now weathered and muted with age. Lilies that once provided the most dramatic color at the peak of summer, are starting to return as overgrowth is removed.

The view to the meadow has not changed dramatically. The fence that once crossed the meadow will someday be replaced. A gate once provided access to a path that went to a natural spring.

### (6) Arrowhead

The top of the hill is an area rich in sculpture. Many sculptures are missing fine details lost through time and vandalism. Resist the urge to pick up rocks and place them

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### (7) Pond

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### (8) Teepee

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View from Stone Circle (5)



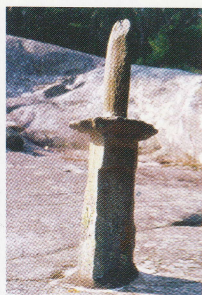
View of Granite Rock Base from Balanced Rock(10)



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Table & Chair (3)



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### (9) Mythical Animal

The view in front of you once had the feel of a public garden with manicured lawn, neatly trimmed trees, elegant statuary, stone benches, and colorful flowers.

### (10) Balanced Rock

Ellsworth was very aware of the beauty and texture of the polished granite surface under your feet. It not only provided a foundation for the gardens and a source of materials, but was a visually striking feature. **SLOPE VERY SLIPPERY WHEN WET**

### (11) Stone Bridge

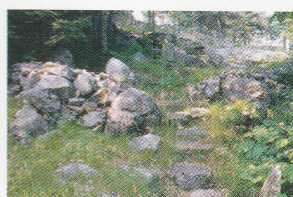
The path crosses a stone bridge near the picnic shelter and proceeds past the Ellsworth's privy to the meteorite. As you cross the stone bridge, the garden on your left is filled with monarda or bee balm in July and August. It is about 200 feet to the meteorite from the stone bridge.



teepee (8)



View from  
Mythical Animal (9)



View of the Pond (7)



View of the Pond (7)



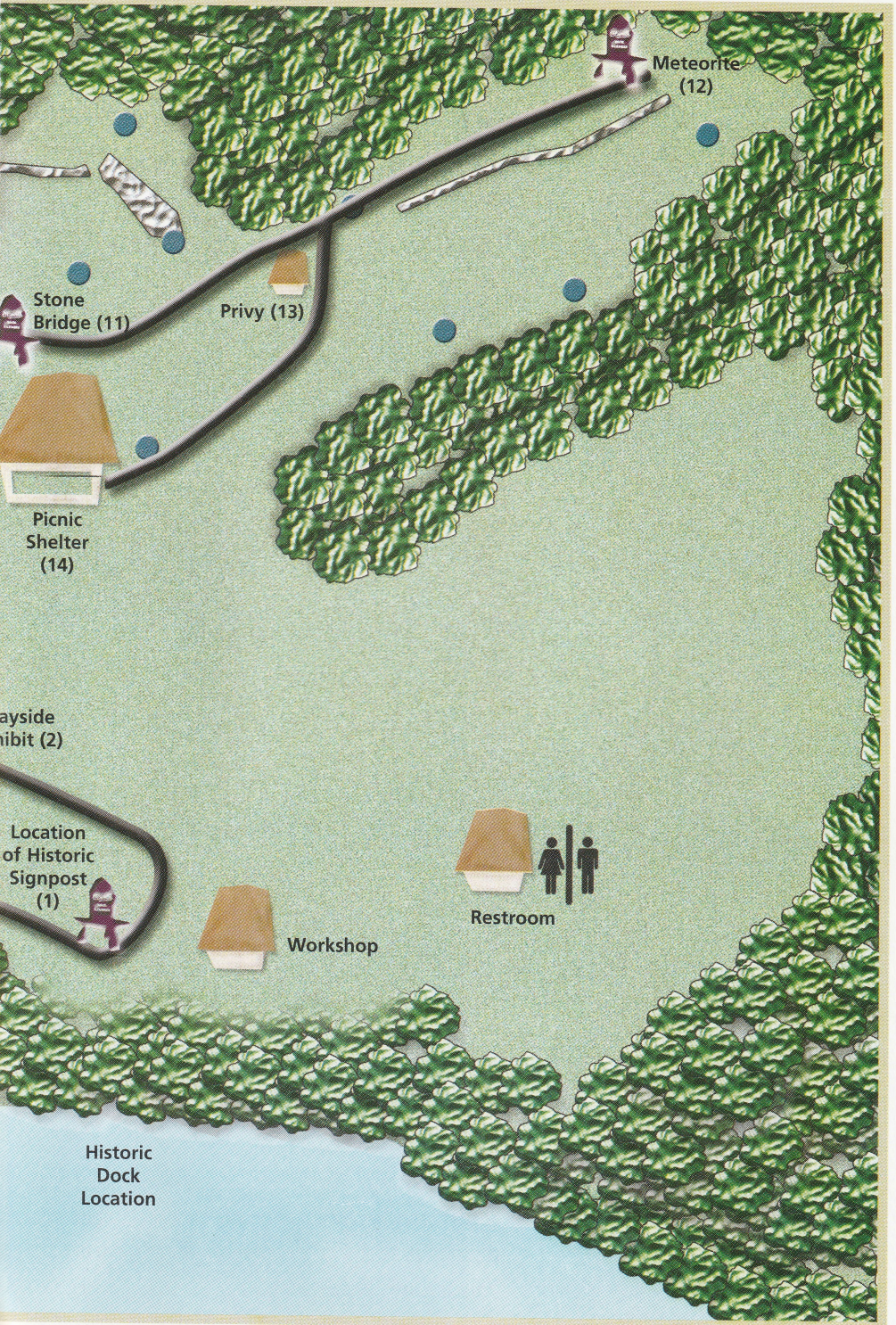
Path to Story Stone (4)



Meteorite (12)



Balanced Rock



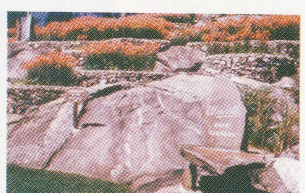
(10)



Ellsworth Home  
Current location of  
Picnic Shelter (14)



Mythical Animal (9)



Signature Stone (15)

## (12) Meteorite

The meteorite was one of the most frequently photographed areas of the Ellsworth Rock Gardens. Is it really a meteorite? How can you tell? Notice the stone bench to the right of the meteorite and the simple sculptures above.

## (13) Privy

At the Ellsworth privy, follow the stone steps across the bridge to the picnic shelter.

## (14) Picnic Shelter

The picnic shelter sits on the foundation of the Ellsworth summer home. The fireplace and hydrangea bushes along the front are original to the home. Ellsworth's workmanship was evident in the expertly joined corners of the half-log siding, unique windows, handcut shingles, and metal ornament on the chimney.



## (15) Signature Stone

At the base of the terraced gardens, you have a wonderful view of the hillside you have just explored. Contemplate the time, work and vision that went into creating and maintaining the gardens. What was his intent? How was he inspired?

Please respect Ellsworth's creation by viewing the sculptures and flowers from the path.

Rehabilitation of the Ellsworth Rock Gardens is ongoing. Donations for continued care of the gardens are accepted at the Lake Kabetogama Visitor Center. The National Park Service collects stories, historic photographs, and film footage about the gardens.



Call 218-283-6600 for more information.



### Photos courtesy of:

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