

Douglas A. Birk, Archaeologist/Historian, dies at age 73.

Douglas A Birk, passed away Wednesday, March 8, 2017 in Pine River, MN. Doug was preceded in death by his parents Delbert and Esther Birk. He is survived by his soulmate Lynda Weiss, his brother Delbert (Linda) Birk of Eagle, CO and numerous nieces and nephews.

Doug was born April 26th, 1943 in Evanston, IL. When Doug was seven, his parents moved to Pine River, where they bought the Camp-Show-Me resort on Norway Lake. Doug grew up on the shores of Norway Lake and manifested an interest in archaeology at an early age. As a sixth-grader, he learned about Lt. Zebulon Pikes' 1805-1806 Mississippi River expedition. The thought that Pike, on his return from Leech Lake, may have portaged or crossed nearby his family's property was a thrilling one.

While still in high school he started exploring the nearby area and was fascinated as he discovered evidence of Pre-European Indian villages, old logging camps, and evidence of old logging railroads. Despite his parent's contention that one could not make a living practicing archaeology, Doug was determined to try. He started his postsecondary schooling at Brainerd Junior College and then transferred to the University of Minnesota where he earned a Degree in Anthropology. In the summer of 1966 he attended a field school at Mille Lacs Kathio State Park. Under the tutelage of State Archeologist Eldon Johnson, Doug learned the hands-on craft of archaeology along with its rigorous methodology. After graduation, Doug was drafted into the Army and served three tours of duty in Vietnam. Upon leaving the army, Doug, with a recommendation from Eldon Johnson, got a job with the Minnesota Historical Society and gained valuable experience practicing archaeology all over the state. He also went back to school earning his Master's Degree in Anthropology. In 1982 he left the Historical Society and co-founded the Institute of Minnesota Archaeology (IMA).

Much of Doug's work centered on the European Colonial period in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. He was an expert on fur trade history and early European exploration. He was heavily involved with the history and archaeology of Grand Portage and is believed to be the first archaeologist in the state to do an underwater excavation using a grid system. It was his research that showed that the Minnesota Historical Society's (MHS) historic, North West Company Fur Post, was built and run by John Sayers. He discovered, excavated, and helped establish The Little Elk Heritage Preserve in Little Falls, MN. He was an active member and supporter of the Pine River Heritage Group North, and a fundamental force in saving the Pine River Depot. Doug was a prolific researcher and writer. His research and fieldwork have provided significant and valuable insight on the history of Minnesota. Doug served as Chair of the IMA and vice president of the state's professional forum, the Council for Minnesota Archaeology. He is the author of numerous articles and studies on Minnesota's past and in 1986 was selected by the Humanities Commission as Minnesota's Independent Scholar of the Year.

He was a friend, colleague, and mentor to many. He believed history should be as correct and as factual as research would allow. Everybody loved his smiles and stories. He has enriched our lives and we love him as he loved us. He will be missed.

In lieu of the flowers, donations in Doug's name to the following organizations would be appreciated; Heritage Group North, Cass County Historical Society, Crow Wing County Historical Society or Morrison County Historical Society.

Services will be held 11 AM, Monday, March 13, Kline Funeral Home, Pine River. Visitation will be Sunday from 5 to 7 PM at Kline Funeral Home, Pine River and one hour prior to the service. Burial will be in Pine Ridge Cemetery, Pine River. Arrangements are with Kline Funeral Home, Pine River.