

Winneboujou
(Brule River Myth)

Winneboujou, the giant blacksmith, sometimes spoken of as Hiawatha, was an all-powerful manitou. His forge was near the Eau Claire Lakes in northwestern Wisconsin. He used the highest flat-topped granite peak for his anvil. The region where he worked in the southwestern part of Bayfield County is that of the Smoky Mountains, a wild and rugged country.

There he shaped the miswabik, or native copper of the Brule River region, into various weapons and implements for his children, the Chippewa Indians. He was especially adept in shaping copper spear points and fishhooks required for the catching of the giant senesuggego, or speckled trout. This fish abounded in the clear spring waters of the Lake Superior section of the Brule.

Much of Winneboujou's forging was done by moonlight, and the ringing blows of his pewabik (iron) hammer were heard by the Indians as far down the Lake Superior waters as at the Sault Rapids. These booming noises still echo down the length of the Brule Valley and the waters of the St. Croix River.

On clear moonlight nights these ringing blows are plainly heard. The glow of his forge fire lights up the entire sky.

The sound of the giant smith's hammer was considered a blessing or lucky portent by the Chippewa and was dreaded by their ancient enemies, the Dakota or Sioux. An Indian, hearing the noise of Winneboujou's smithing, became possessed of strength and industry.

Winneboujou's summer home was on the Brule River near its source. It was necessary for him to keep an eye always on Ahmik, the Beaver, a rival manitou who might, if not watched, slip across the onegun (portage) to the St. Croix River and then, by way of the Mississippi, reach the gulf.