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SPOTLIGHT

PEOPLE & PLACES
IN OUR DESTINATIONS

Cathedral Pines BY TED SCHAAER / PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE SHUTT



Standing Tall Head to a grove of white pines and see what northern Wisconsin's woodlands looked like centuries ago.

VISITORS TO NORTHERN WISCONSIN MARVEL at the mixed hard- and softwood forests that dominate the landscape. Few realize, however, that almost all of the trees, some 75 feet tall, are relative newcomers. The natural forest was, in fact, clear cut in the 19th and early 20th century.

A primary logging target was the towering white pine (*Pinus strobus*), the largest pine species east of the Mississippi. Its huge logs could be floated to sawmills on rivers in the decades before railroads and highways, and they yielded excellent lumber for things like paneling, door frames and window sashes.

Fortunately, it is still possible to get a glimpse of the original woodland in the Nicolet National Forest—2.5 hours northwest of Green Bay—where a 16-acre grove of old growth timber called **Cathedral Pines** (dnr.wi.gov) still stands. About 40 percent of the forest's trees are

white pine, while the remaining trees are mainly super-canopy red pines and hemlocks. The average height of the majestic white pines, which can grow to be more than 250 years old, is 125 feet, and their massive trunks can extend out to 37 inches in diameter.

"We think the oldest trees in Cathedral Pines started growing around 1735," says U.S. Forestry Biological Science Technician Nicole Shutt, who works at the nearby Lakewood District Ranger Station.

The site was preserved thanks to Lucy Holt, wife of the president of a lumber company that once owned the land. Around 1900, she took her children to the grove, remarking that it reminded her of a cathedral, and persuaded her husband to spare it. In 1968, the couple's descendants sold the land to the U.S. Forestry Service so it could be enjoyed by the public.

While the logging industry has long since moved on, these white pines are still being used to make homes: Along the grove's eastern edge is a blue heron rookery. These wading birds stand four feet tall, possess seven-foot wingspans, and have built an estimated 135 nests in the crowns of the giant trees.

The herons, like the landscape's explorers, who walked the winding, needle-strewn trails beneath the giant trees centuries ago—know a good thing when they see it. **M**