

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Ellsworth Rock Gardens**

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number **via boat, 3 mi. n. from TR 122 boat landing, n. shore Kabetogama Lake, Voyageurs National Park (VOYA)**

not for publication

city or town **Ray**

vicinity

state **Minnesota**

code **MN** county **St. Louis** code **137** zip code **56669**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
5	4	buildings
0	0	sites
1	3	structures
7	2	objects
13	9	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/garden
RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/national park
WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD

roof ASPHALT

other STONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Summary

The Ellsworth Rock Gardens are situated on a remote peninsula that forms the northern shore of Kabetogama Lake in far northern Minnesota. Less than ten miles from the United States border with Canada, the gardens are part of Voyageurs National Park. Established in 1975, the 219,000 acre park preserves the character of the natural setting associated with the North American fur trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The mosaic of lakes and meandering waterways, southern boreal forest, and ancient volcanic rock formations are part of the Canadian Shield. Kabetogama Lake is in the south-central portion of the park; its southwestern shore supports a small resort community.

In 1942, Jack and Elsie Ellsworth acquired property on the northern shore of Kabetogama Lake for a recreational summer retreat. The gardens were built between 1944 and 1965. Initially the parcel consisted of a sixty foot high granite outcrop with a large grassy clearing and a lone cabin that remained from a turn-of-the-century lumber camp. A mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees surrounded the clearing and covered part of the granite hillside. The Ellsworths lived in the cabin while they began construction of their summer home (the "main cabin"), and then used the cabin as guest sleeping quarters. Mr. Ellsworth also built a small workshop in the clearing and privies for the main and guest cabins. The granite outcrop eventually became the foundation and canvas for Mr. Ellsworth's rock garden creation. The gardens encompass 7 of the thirty-one overall acres. Because the cleared gardens area is irregular and the forest around the clearing may include undocumented sculptures, the property boundary will encompass the entire parcel once owned by the Ellsworths. The site includes five contributing buildings, three ponds, one system of planting beds, one system of paths, and approximately 1,200 linear feet of dry stacked stone walls. At current count, there are 204 sculptures.

Although Mr. Ellsworth was not a trained artist or landscape architect, his gardens represent an intuitive response to the site and a refined use of natural materials to create a composition dedicated to expressing his views about the beauty of the northwoods environment. He used a limited palette of materials and exaggerated simple forms to establish a rhythm within the gardens. Rocks from on and possibly off-site were cut or crushed and placed to produce consistently undulating forms and varied textures.

Ellsworth first constructed 62 terraced flower beds on the outcrop, which he filled with more than 13,000 lilies of four varieties. He augmented the lilies with twenty-eight other flower varieties incorporating both annuals and perennials. Working with a hierarchy of local stone, Ellsworth crowned the meandering dry-stacked walls that surround the planting beds with a layer of crushed white quartz, creating a distinctive "frosting." The terraced beds were connected through pathways subtly indicated by stone gateways, stairways, stepping stones, simple bridges, grass paths and the use of a few painted stone signs including an "Up" sign at the east edge of the gardens.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ART

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1944-1965

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

JACK A. ELLSWORTH

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 31.25 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	15	501,270	5,371,300
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	15	501,690	5,371,300

3	15	501,700	5,371,630
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	15	501,280	5,371,640

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title **Mary Graves, Cultural Resource Specialist (with assistance from Marla McEnaney, Lisa Stone, and Eric MacDonald)**

organization **Voyageurs National Park**

date **May 2007**

street & number **3131 Highway 53
6000**

telephone **218-283-**

city or town **International Falls**

state **MN**

zip code **56649**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name		
street & number		telephone
city or town	state	zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number **7** Page **1**

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Ellsworth first constructed 62 terraced flower beds on the outcrop, which he filled with more than 13,000 lilies of four varieties. He augmented the lilies with twenty-eight other flower varieties incorporating both annuals and perennials. Working with a hierarchy of local stone, Ellsworth crowned the meandering dry-stacked walls that surround the planting beds with a layer of crushed white quartz, creating a distinctive "frosting." The terraced beds were connected through pathways subtly indicated by stone gateways, stairways, stepping stones, simple bridges, grass paths and the use of a few painted stone signs including an "Up" sign at the east edge of the gardens.

By 1961, Ellsworth had accented his garden landscape with statuary that he created out of native rock and concrete as well as carefully selected and placed rocks and boulders. He skillfully balanced both small rocks and large monoliths--some as a single stone balanced on point, others crafted into figures, multi-tiered tables, and other sophisticated artistic sculptures. He stenciled the Ellsworth signature on a number of rock tablets placed throughout the gardens. At the top of the gardens, he constructed two stylized tepees of wooden poles. One was covered with a painted canvas and had battery-powered lights fixed in the apex to light the interior. The other was uncovered and left unadorned except for a sheltered stone sculpture. Only the canvas covered tepee remains, the other is marked by a circle of stones on the ground.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, photographs indicated that Mr. Ellsworth's health was making it difficult for him to maintain the gardens. The once-meticulously mowed lawn was overgrown and some sculptural elements were missing. Mr. Ellsworth did not return to the gardens after 1965. He died in July 1974 and Elsie passed away a few years later. By 1976, photographs taken by the Minnesota Historical Society show that small details were missing, some sculptures had tipped, the dock was collapsed, and the house and other buildings were boarded up. Despite this unkempt appearance, the basic form of the gardens was still apparent. When the National Park Service acquired the property in 1978, the buildings were put up for sale and the main cabin was removed. Photographs of the gardens from 1979 show that sculptures were largely intact but the forest had essentially swallowed the gardens. For almost two decades, the gardens deteriorated. Yet it still received visitors during the summer months. Pressure from the local Kabetogama Lake community to have the gardens maintained resulted in a day-long vegetation removal effort by the National Park Service in 1996. Since 2000, the Park has obtained funding for and organized an annual "Garden Blitz" that brings contractors and volunteers to the site to clear nonhistoric vegetation, replant historic plant varieties, and repair buildings and sculptures. Planning for stabilizing and eventually rehabilitating the site for visitor use has also occurred during the "Blitz." These efforts have resulted in restoring historic spatial relationships between the forest, gardens, lawn, and lake, revitalizing bulbs and other remnant vegetation, and a complete inventory of sculpture and a record of sculpture repair.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Landscape Description

Historically, the gardens had the appearance of being carved out of the forested wilderness. This boundary between the gardens and forest is one of the primary features of the site. The forest provides a distinct, impenetrable wall, creating a dark, dense backdrop for views within the gardens. A few native spruce or pine trees were left within the gardens, but were "limbed-up" approximately 20 feet to create a vertical focal point, rather than a visual barrier. A solitary red pine, approximately 70 feet tall and with branches only at the top, functioned as a distinctive visual landmark at the top and back of the space. This tree was removed in 2004 because of its deteriorated condition. Other tall pines will be allowed to grow in this area to maintain the sense of verticality.

The irregular shape of the rock outcropping inspired the garden's organic form, and influenced its overall spatial organization. The topography of the site creates a series of flat planes: the lake, stepping up to the mown lawn surrounded by grassy meadow, followed by the uneven, steeply sloped rock outcropping, leading to the level summit area. The open meadow at the base of the outcropping provided a sense of arrival for visitors arriving from Ellsworth's dock on Kabetogama Lake, and provided a space for viewing the main features of the gardens. The forest that surrounded the outcropping and the meadow established a distinct vertical edge. This forest "wall" functioned as visual boundary and established a sense of enclosure to create an impression that the gardens had been carved out of nature. The inherent qualities of water, rock and forest remain unchanged.

The area between Kabetogama Lake and the rock outcropping consists of a relatively level open space. The western half was maintained by Ellsworth as lawn. The National Park Service continues mowing this area today. The eastern half of the clearing was fenced off from the cottage almost to the shore. During the Ellsworth's residence, this area was lawn. A path from the cabin crossed the mown meadow; passing through a wooden gate signed "Spring," ending at the southeast corner of the property where Ellsworth had installed a hand pump.

On and around the granite outcropping Ellsworth modified and capitalized on natural depressions in the rock surface to guide rainwater into a system of crevices and basins, creating three small ponds which he filled with cattails, other aquatic plants and sculptures. He also manipulated the native vegetation to direct views, create intimate-scale spaces, and frame small landscape "scenes." The garden's system of meandering paths linked these spaces, providing controlled views both in and out of the gardens. In some places the uneven topography and tall ornamental lilies that filled the terraced planting beds obscured views out of the gardens. This created intimate vignettes, many of which incorporated sculptural pieces as focal points. He enhanced views by controlling natural features, including "limbing" up trees, removing mosses from the rock to expose a highly polished granite surface, and possibly removing trees to open views of Kabetogama Lake.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Ellsworth's incorporation of textural and focal elements followed the same general hierarchical scheme suggested by the garden's spatial organization. He placed more elaborate plantings at the eastern base to define the garden's edge, and sculptural elements near the western base of the rock outcropping to establish an entry point into the main portion of the gardens. Sculptures were sometimes connected by and beds created by a system of dry stacked stone walls that spanned the full width of the outcrop to form terraces. Sculptures placed along the stairs and pathways marked the progression from the base of the rock to the summit, which features the teepees, ponds, and panoramic views of the gardens and lake. The sculptures, mostly composed of uncarved rocks arranged in compositions resembling animal figures, chairs, tables, and altar-like structures, reinforced the rugged character of the outcropping and, along with the meandering pathways, gave the overall landscape composition an organic quality. Garden hoses, stacks of lumber, and piles of stone gave the gardens a sense of intuitive and continual evolution. The gardens seemed to have grown spontaneously and incrementally from its site, rather than from to a predetermined plan.

The summit of the granite outcropping was the most elaborately articulated space. The largest pond, tee-pee, refined walls, large elaborate sculptures and numerous small-scale features established this space as the principal destination within the gardens. The focal point was an upright stone painted pink and decorated with smaller stones arranged in the shape of an arrowhead. This sculpture is almost entirely intact and in good condition.

At the peak of bloom each summer, crowds of people visited the gardens. In 1962, 5200 people came to see the work of Mr. Ellsworth, who was usually seen watering flower beds or mowing the extensive lawns with his reel mower. Approximately 32 herbaceous ornamental plant varieties grew in the gardens, including multiple shades of nicotiana, dahlias, marigolds, cosmos, phlox, nasturtiums, balsam, and bachelor buttons. The dominant plant was an orange Asiatic lily that grew to about 4 feet in height. These lilies filled beds throughout the gardens, creating a uniform color and texture. They also provided a structural element in the middle ground of views within and emphasized the vertical quality of the gardens. The base of the gardens was planted with roses and peonies. A snowball Viburnum hedge in front of the main cabin is another distinctive vegetation feature that remains on site. It was untrimmed, had large white flowers and a naturalistic appearance. The naturalistic use of vegetation was also evident at the ponds, where water-tolerant species were planted to soften the edge between the water and the rock and add vertical contrast to the water's horizontal surface. When in full bloom, the system of beds created striking blocks of color and texture, which accentuated the way in which the abstract forms of the beds intrinsically related to the irregular, uneven surfaces of the granite outcropping. Viewed from the summit, the gardens became a fantastic mosaic of brilliant colors and soft textures that contrasted with the cool, gray tones of the hard, native rock. Elsewhere in the gardens Ellsworth used vegetation to produce diverse

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

aesthetic effects. He planted roses and peonies in beds near the base of the granite outcropping, and used water-tolerant species in an around the three ponds to create a more naturalistic appearance.

Topography and vegetation are the primary means by which views into, out of, and within the gardens were created and controlled. When the gardens are viewed as a composition from the water and meadow, the forest formed the background, the tree and lily clumps, large sculpture, and rock walls form a middle ground, and the ponds, small sculptures and other site elements provide focus in the foreground. Most of the gardens were visible from the meadow, but once in the gardens, the uneven surface of the rock and the masses of lilies obscured broad views. This quality heightened visitor's expectations and provided a sense of arrival, with the summit as the primary destination once visitors moved through the gardens. The pond, teepee, fire pit and other small-scale features emphasized this space, and created a series of landscape "scenes" that can be viewed from several locations within the gardens. A striking view of Lake Kabetogama and the lower part of the gardens could be seen from the summit of the rock outcropping.

Sculpture

The gardens contain a system of approximately 204 sculptures which vary in size and complexity; some are single rocks featuring an unusual shape or color, others are several large rocks or boulders mortared together. There are a number of chairs, tables, and altar-like arrangements which can be organized into the following typology:

Figures: A series of multiple rocks, usually mortared together, that form abstract shapes that may be interpreted as representational. These sculptures often consist of one large stone with several stones attached.

Tables: There are numerous compositions that feature several horizontally oriented stones stacked with smaller legs to create multi-level tables. They resemble pagoda-like characters.

Monoliths: These vertically oriented sculptures are usually mortared in place as a singular feature. They are found throughout the gardens, but are dominant at the western edge of the summit.

Gateways: Usually found in tandem with stone walls, these sculptures are fixed in place to guide movement through the gardens. They are sometimes single rocks but are also a grouping of rocks graded by size and mortared together.

Spires: Found throughout the gardens, these are smaller elongated shapes mortared in a vertical orientation to larger boulders.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Contributing Buildings/Structures

The buildings historically associated with the property were the main cabin and privy, workshop, and the guest cabin and privy. Ellsworth's cabin, privy and workshop, built in 1944, were all frame structures covered with half-log siding. Half-log siding was also used to decorate the doors. The main cabin sat on a poured concrete T-shaped foundation. The primary wing measured 16'x26' (22'x14'), with a 10'x12' (8'x10') kitchen addition at the rear. The cabin was designed and meticulously constructed by Mr. Ellsworth. His skilled craftsmanship was displayed in the expertly joined corners of the half-log siding, uniquely designed windows, the hipped roof featured red roll composition roofing that was hand-cut, giving the building a "thatched roof" appearance. A fieldstone chimney projected at the front, as part of a windowed facade that faced the lake. It was capped with an intricate metal ornament. He accented the cabin by planting a row of snowball Viburnums in front, adding boot scrapers flanking the door, installing gutters that emptied into a rain barrel, and placing a row of flower pots on bright red stools on the east side of the house. Ellsworth carried his penchant for details to the workshop, guest cabin and even the interior of the privy. Near the privy he constructed a clothesline and hung a birdhouse and drinking cup from the decorative support post. A vegetable garden, which was supposedly maintained by Mrs. Ellsworth, was located to the west of the house. The cabin was removed around 1978. The contributing original foundation and chimney now support a picnic shelter constructed in 2001. The non-contributing shelter pays homage to the original cabin's rustic modernist architecture by incorporating the same hipped roof, rolled roofing, and heavy timbers. The small scale features once associated with the main cabin are no longer in evidence.

The workshop measures approximately 12'x10' and the main privy approximately 4'x6'. Both have poured concrete foundation, hipped roof with curved eaves, log slab siding, and asphalt roll roofing; neither has a chimney. The windows and door were replaced in 2004 and the original shutters are still in place. The building is in good condition. The Ellsworth's privy has a sheet steel venting stack. Two small windows and the door are missing. The workshop and privy sit on concrete foundations.

The guest privy, built in 1950, is a frame building with a fieldstone foundation, faux brick asphalt siding and roofing. It measures approximately 4'x4' and has a hipped roof. It has bracketed window hoods and a gabled hood with decorative brackets over the door. The guest cabin was the only structure remaining from the logging camp that preceded the rock garden. Its construction date is unknown, but it was moved to its final location ca 1944-1950. It was removed in 1999, after it was determined that it was deteriorated beyond repair. It had rock pier supports and a half-log door detail that matched the main house. Measuring approximately 22'x16,' it had a gable roof with a tin chimney at the center front. In 2001, the National Park Service constructed a multi-use building on the cabin footprint. Although its massing, construction materials, architectural detailing, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

fenestration evoke the former guest cabin, it is considered non-contributing. The door from the former cabin was used in the contemporary building.

Only one of the two teepees located at the top of the gardens is extant, though the rock circle that formed the base of the second is visible, and the poles remain on site. Both were built around 1961-1965. The remaining teepee measures 8' diameter by 20' high with a painted canvas cover over thirteen 3 to 4" wooden poles. . Wiring for a light within the teepee is still intact. Although very delicate in appearance, the log poles and overall structure of the teepee are in good condition. Much of the wall fabric around the lower sections of the structure has deteriorated or was removed but the material that remains provides evidence of how the it was cut, attached to the poles, and painted.

A heavy timber bridge near the house provided access across a drainage ditch and connected to stepping stones that led to the main privy. The bridge was decorated with hanging orange flower pots. At the point the treatment efforts at the gardens occurred, the bridge had almost completely deteriorated. A replica was built by a local craftsman and the NPS installed the new bridge in 2004. It is considered non-contributing.

Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth added numerous small features to the gardens that were built in a rustic style similar to the structures or were prefabricated. These included a heavy timber fence and gate, wooden and stone signs, birdbaths and houses, a sundial, and animal figurines. These features added color and character to the gardens. Water hoses, buckets and other gardening implements also figure prominently in historic photographs of the site. The stone signs remain and the sundial has been replaced. All other features have disappeared over time.

Several contemporary buildings, structures and objects are now located at the site to facilitate visitor access and wayfinding. A dock, wayside exhibits, comfort station, and equipment shed have been added by the National Park Service since it acquired the site. Small features that replicate historic items have also been installed, such as a sundial and a wood sign and post. They are all considered noncontributing.

Although the house is gone and other site details are missing, the property remains a coherent expression of Ellsworth's vision and an intact representation of his efforts. The gardens possess high integrity for location and setting, as their boundaries and surrounding natural environment have not changed. Over time, mortar on the sculpture has failed, causing the rocks to loosen. Portions of sculptures have fallen, or been pushed or removed by visitors. Although disarticulated pieces have been found and sculptures reassembled as part of the "Blitz" efforts, some sculptures have been lost forever. The bed patterns are still evident in plan, though some of the three-dimensional qualities that directed visitors have been lost. As a result, the level of design has deteriorated. With the exception of historic plantings, the gardens materials are intact. Through the volunteer and park activities, the quality of workmanship has been retained. Sculptures have been stabilized or repaired using the Ellsworth's mortar mix, and the application of new mortar has been consistent with his approach. Between the time Ellsworth left the site, and the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7

Ellsworth Rock Gardens
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

recent maintenance activities, the garden's character changed from a highly maintained and colorful showplace to a more private destination that possessed a feeling of mystery and discovery. With the removal of nonhistoric vegetation, the garden's sense of vibrancy has returned, though the level of detailed care it received during the historic period has not been replicated.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Summary

"I'm a complete snob where rocks are concerned. I won't talk to just any rock. Some rocks have a lot to say if you let them. But you have to let them...With a lot of rocks, it's better just to leave them alone where they are. But there are some rocks that won't leave you alone. They don't want to be where they are at all. They can't say what they want to say where they are. Or rather, they can't be what they want to be. And eventually they will tell you how and where they want to be if you listen."

From James Rose, *Gardens Make Me Laugh*

Ellsworth Rock Gardens is significant at the state level as a mid-twentieth century art environment. Its creator, Jack Ellsworth, used native elements of the northern Minnesota landscape—rocks, flowers, and trees—as his primary media to create a distinctive work of "visionary" art. "Visionary art ... refers to art produced by self-taught individuals, usually without formal training, whose works arise from an innate personal vision that revels foremost in the creative act itself."¹ Parallels can be drawn between the creators of Midwestern grottos and roadside attractions, the apocalyptic landscapes of the rural south, and urban sites such as Watts Towers in terms of Mr. Ellsworth's lack of formal training. However, when considering Ellsworth's refined composition of beds, walls, and sculptural elements, use of native materials, and incorporation of planar surfaces, varied textures, and flowing lines, it is also necessary to compare the gardens to landscape architecture of the post World War II period.² By reflecting these basic principles of modern landscape design, the gardens possess high artistic value. The property's historic character is evident today in the terraced planting beds, rock walls, and stone sculptures. Ellsworth Rock Gardens possess importance under criterion C as a unique overlap of "visionary" art and landscape architecture. The property's period of significance, 1944-1965, encompasses the time during which Mr. Ellsworth designed and built the gardens. This period begins more than 50 years ago and ends with the termination of his work at the site (41 years ago at the time this nomination was completed). This meets Criteria Consideration G.

Garden Chronology

1942 The Ellsworths purchased the property
1944 Jack and Elsie began building the cabin, privy and workshop

¹American Visionary Art Museum Mission Statement. <http://www.avam.org>.

² The National Register of Historic Places program defines landscape architecture as "the practical art of designing or arranging the land for human use and enjoyment." *National Register of Historic Places Bulletin 16A* (Washington, D.C. National Park Service), p. 41.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 Ellsworth Rock Garden St. Louis MN
Name of Property County and State

1946	Ellsworth began building garden
1950s	Photograph shows sculpture in the nasturtium bed
1962	Jack began creating stone sculptures on the outcropping
1965	Jack and Elsie stopped coming to site
1975	Voyageurs National Park established
1976	Main cabin removed
1996	First effort to remove nonhistoric vegetation from the site
2000	First Garden Blitz
2001	Picnic shelter built on foundation of main cabin
2003	Guest cabin removed
2004	Multi-purpose building constructed on footprint of guest cabin and wooden bridge reconstructed

Art

Considering his intuitive design process, it is possible that the notion of creating sculpture came to Ellsworth directly from the stockpile of castoff rock fragments left over from the rock he quarried for his terraced flowerbeds. He located, gathered, and crushed large quantities of gneiss, a very coarse-grained metamorphic rock, and used it as the top layer of the walls. Gneiss consists of a small amount of quartz, which provides the small chunky gray grains, and a large amount of feldspar, which gives the “frosting” its white color.³ Ellsworth spent years building and garnishing the many terraced garden beds, and in the process he left behind an ever-expanding inventory of altered stone shapes. Making them into sculptures was a matter of finding pleasing, suggestive shapes, modifying them slightly, and arranging them in the landscape. Ellsworth quickly developed a vocabulary of sculptural forms, ranging from archetypal architectural elements to enigmatic shapes. As described by artist Robert Amft:

Ellsworth accented his landscape with sculptures he created from existing rocks and boulders. Some of these were simple slender monoliths that stood on end in groups reminiscent of Stonehenge; others were made of two to three large stones combined with mortar to form Noguchi-like abstract pieces. There were also pagoda-like tables supported by stone tripods that demonstrate Ellsworth’s experience as a contractor—they are perfectly balanced and absolutely level, even though the landscape tilts in many directions.⁴

³ Electronic correspondence to Mary Graves, from Brian Klawiter, April 17, 2007. On file at Voyageurs National Park.

⁴ Robert Amft. “The Outsider Art of Fred Smith, Jack Ellsworth, and Tom Every.” *In’tuit*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Winter 1996, p. 6.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

He used mortar sparingly to join stone members, accentuating the illusion that his sculptural forms “appeared” with minimal intervention. In addition to 20-century Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), Ellsworth’s works bring to mind the creations of Noguchi’s mentor, Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1875-1957), whose minimally-shaped sculptures convey a fundamental reverence for stone and contemplation of nature. In many one-of-a-kind works, Ellsworth took amorphic rock shapes, barely suggestive of objects or animals—a raven, or a Saturn globe--and balanced them on larger stone masses. While Ellsworth was reputed to have stated “I just needed something to keep me busy,” perhaps something more elemental was at work.⁵ He was driven to play with the rules of the natural world. To quote Noguchi “... to fight gravity is a tour de force. The nature of stone is weight.”⁶ While some sculptures connect the garden to the outcrop, others seem to suggest figures barely touching the ground—a bird, a deer—composed of only enough rock shapes to complete the image. Ellsworth also diverged into a more literal, rustic northwoods vocabulary by installing two wood teepees (one enclosed with canvas), and a large upright stone with an appliquéd and painted arrowhead shape, all installed at the top of the outcrop.

Landscape Architecture

While it is unlikely that Ellsworth’s project was directly informed by Modern sculpture or principles of Modern landscape architecture, his work bears comparison with respect to his design sophistication. The elements of Modernism he employed, either consciously or not, are abstraction of nature and native materials, juxtaposition of texture and form, and skillful composition. Ellsworth Rock Gardens’ sculptures are for the most part highly abstract, simple, unornamented forms. The entire environment seems to draw inspiration from the surrounding natural environment. The result is a work of landscape art that seems skillfully and creatively integrated with its site. Like many works of landscape architecture, Ellsworth appears to simultaneously employed elements of art, engineering, and conservation. His gardens echo those of well-known American landscape architects Thomas Church (1902-1978) and James Rose (1913-1991); many of the sculptures mimic the well-placed stones in their residential gardens. Like Church, Ellsworth “abandoned the central axis in favor of multiplicity of viewpoints, simple planes, and flowing lines. Texture and color, space and form were manipulated in ways

⁵ Alan Burchell, an oral informant, said the garden began as simple flowerbeds at the base of the outcropping; Ellsworth himself is quoted saying he started the garden as a way to occupy his time. A comment from an interview in this article suggests Ellsworth may have begun the garden circa 1946. “Giant Rock Garden in the North Woods,” *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, July 30, 1961.

⁶ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World* (New York and Evanston, Harper Row, 1968).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

reminiscent of the cubist painters, while satisfying all practical criteria.”⁷ The Gardens’ beds and sculptures moved visitors through the gardens by directing their movement and focusing their attention. According to Jane Wooley, of the Dry Stone Conservancy, the dry-laid stone walls are equally as integral to the Garden [as the sculptures], especially in how they define pathways, drainage patterns and planting areas thus directing the visitors experience while showcasing the sculptures. To our knowledge there are no other comparable rockeries in the mid-west, central or western states, and certainly none that represent the life’s work of one individual. Additionally, the method of construction with the quartz “frosting” top, we have seen nowhere else in the world.⁸

Several characteristics contribute to the Ellsworth Rock Gardens’ significance as a unique design. These include the use and manipulation of the rock outcropping; the use of uniform terraced planting beds to create color, scale, and texture and direct circulation; the organic, meandering quality of the beds and pathways; numerous vertical focal points created by individual plantings, sculptures, and ponds; and the rugged texture of the rock. The tactile quality was carried through at a variety of scales throughout the garden, from the rock outcropping, through large compositions of rocks that create “scenes” to smaller stones that were added for their unusual shape and color. Evidence of Ellsworth’s love of the site is seen in his dedicated use of available materials and the fact that he committed at least twenty years of his life to realize his vision. The quality of construction, attention to plant cultivation and the collection of site ornaments contribute to the garden’s significance.

Art Environments

Like many examples of environmental design, the Ellsworth Rock Gardens include art objects, architectural elements, engineered structures, and vegetation features arranged in a manner that traverses the traditional categories of architecture, landscape architecture, and art. Landscape designers—whether “self-taught” or operating within an academic tradition—employ principles of art and science in an attempt to reshape and transform nature in order to satisfy aesthetic and utilitarian purposes.

Lisa Stone, a curator for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago who is an expert on art environments in the United States, employs a conception of art environments that focuses more on relevant qualities in the work than the artist’s background. Stone defines

⁷Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA and Robin Karson. 2000. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. New York: The McGraw Hill Company, 55.

⁸ Correspondence from Ms. Wooley to Voyageurs National Park, 2006. On file at Voyageurs National Park.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

an art environment as “an extended artistic creation of interrelated elements, as opposed to discrete works of art standing alone.”⁹ The art environment is “an artistic creation which occupies a specific place—an exterior landscape, an interior space, or both—whose content and meaning is derived from the spatial context or relationship of components to each other and to their location.”¹⁰ Stone argues that the makers of these environments understand the importance of site context to their work: “the artists were not merely decorating their yards haphazardly, but worked intentionally—and not naively, as was so often assumed—creating environments in which each part was integral to the whole.”¹¹ Stone’s approach differs from a more conventional view of folk artists and their environments, which dwells on the biographical characteristics of the artists and their alienation from mainstream culture. Ellsworth Rock Gardens fit with many of Stone’s parameters for art environments. It is expansive, even monumental, in scale, uses common, readily available materials in unconventional ways, incorporates recycled materials or cast-off items, employs unconventional, inventive construction techniques, and incorporates materials that are not customarily employed for art or architecture. Like other art environments, it evolved organically, rather than according to a detailed, preconceived plan and, consequently, never reached a complete, or finished, state. She makes a distinction between Ellsworth Rock Gardens and other idiosyncratic folk environments such as Wisconsin’s Fred Smith’s Concrete Park, the Dickeyville Grotto, and others highlighted in her book “Sacred Spaces and Other Places.” As Stone stated in electronic correspondence with Voyageurs National Park,

“...folk art generally refers to things that are a) not high style, an b) informed by community, ethnic, or family traditions, things that are passed down through traditional avenues, and importantly (as was written in an essay by Carl Magnuson in *Backyard Visionaries*), they “have precedence in the community.” We don’t know what Ellsworth was informed by, but we can make some educated guesses, but his work definitely doesn’t have precedence in the community. I would wager that he was not only informed by but was intentionally adapting the composition of the Olsen Rug Company Memorial Garden [non-extant], and I also think that as a Chicagoan who may have spent time at the Art Institute, he may have been aware of Modernist sculptors such as Isamu Noguchi and Constantin Brancusi, and other artists.”¹²

⁹ Lisa Stone, “The Preservation of Art Environments in the United States: Toward a Unified Approach.” (M. A. thesis, Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, June 1998).

¹⁰ Stone, p. 4.

¹¹ Stone, p. 20.

¹² Correspondence from Ms. Stone to Voyageurs National Park, August 1, 2005. On file at Voyageurs National Park.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

Jack Ellsworth worked in the construction trades, a trait that is manifest in the gardens' high level of craftsmanship. The garden he created reflected his own personal aesthetic and was a creative expression of his love of the northwoods. It also demonstrates his growth as an artist. Over the span of the garden's development, the sculptures evolved in complexity. As Ms. Wooley states "...the walls told a story of one man's journey from novice to experienced stone mason, of his self-discovery and experimentation with a variety of construction techniques, which is evidenced by the improvement of his work over time."¹³

In addition to constructing terraces, Ellsworth incorporated different types of rocks into the garden, used small rocks, stood rocks on end, and used rocks with distinctive shapes, colors, or evocative forms as focal points. He planted his garden with brightly-colored, hybrid perennials and annuals, arranged in regular patterns or solid masses. Ellsworth did not mimic patterns observed in nature, but instead integrated natural elements with the patterns that sprung from his mind.

Although we know very little about his aesthetic philosophy, Ellsworth's careful attention to site and setting produced a sophisticated, "minimalist" aesthetic, achieved through a sophisticated repetition of scale, shape and texture and balance between contrasting and complementary elements. It is clear that Ellsworth's work was guided by a set of personal, aesthetic principles, which he applied consistently at multiple scales, from small stone sculptural elements, to the composition of the landscape as a whole.

Ellsworth's sculptures are abstract, and fit into the garden setting in which he placed them. Comparisons with the work of sculptors like Brancusi and Noguchi do not imply that these modern artists directly influenced Ellsworth, but rather that his work possesses formal qualities that place it on par with high-style, academic art. His sculptures are comparable in quality to the abstract works produced by modern masters not only in terms of their form, but also in the manner of their execution. The stone and mortar assemblages are expertly composed and constructed. Ellsworth's table- and altar-form sculptures, for example, are perfectly level and balanced despite the uneven topography and undulating rock surface upon which they rest.

In terms of its formal and aesthetic qualities, very few examples are readily comparable to Ellsworth Rock Gardens. Perhaps the closest is Harvey Fite's "Opus 40" near Woodstock, New York. The upper Midwestern United States contains other significant environments created by self-taught artists, but none that derive so fully from their site and its natural setting. Ellsworth's design approach differs markedly from other well-known art environments. Ellsworth created no soaring towers, heavily encrusted architectural monuments, intricate constructions composed of myriad materials, or representational sculptures decorated with bright colors or shiny objects. Indeed, the

¹³ Correspondence from Ms. Wooley to Voyageurs National Park, 2006. On file at Voyageurs National Park.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

formal characteristics of Ellsworth's sculptures differ markedly from the structural elements created by many other self-taught artists. The overall aesthetic effect of Ellsworth's stone sculptures is more subdued, but elegant and no less powerful. Both of the other extant Minnesota rock gardens, Louis Wippich's "Molehill" in Sauk Rapids and John L. Christiansen's Rock Garden (a.k.a. Itasca Rock Garden) in Bancroft Township, prominently feature large, ornamented architectonic elements that at least vaguely evoke recognizable architectural forms and styles.¹⁴ Other environments feature elaborate, more-or-less figural, concrete sculptures. Although many environments contain sculptural elements built from stone and concrete, none feature so prominently the kinds of unadorned, abstract forms and stark, evocative compositions that constitute the majority of Ellsworth's work.

Ellsworth Rock Gardens is unique in the extent to which natural landforms, structural elements, art objects, and vegetative features are integrated into a single landscape composition. It is a deliberate artistic creation, not merely a whimsical ornament on the landscape; its aesthetic value and artistic merit derives from the unique, creative vision of its creator rather than from conformance with a recognized garden "style." The Gardens' aesthetic qualities make it a distinctive and important kind of art environment. In a 1979 memo, Voyageurs National Park's Assistant Chief Naturalist noted, "Ellsworth's rock sculptures are a singular interaction with the nature world. Most of his work is highly abstract, dependent on form, shape and texture of the rock and counter-playing these elements against the 'natural' landscape. Only a few sculptures appear to be representational."¹⁵

Ellsworth moved large rocks into position using only the ancient technique of the incline plane and lever. By 1960, Ellsworth estimated he had spent more than 14,500 hours creating the garden. Instead of the traditional materials associated with fine art, Jack Ellsworth used rock, earth, water, and plants as his primary creative media. His garden seems to bridge the related categories of landscape architecture and art. His application of concrete was highly individual expression.

Role of Ellsworth Rock Gardens in the Community

The Ellsworth Rock Gardens were visible from various vantage points within Kabetogama Lake, especially during mid-summer when it was in full bloom. The Ellsworths welcomed visits from community residents and sightseers; by the early 1960s people made regular excursions to tour the gardens. Although the Ellsworths never promoted the garden or charged admission fees, their garden became a local tourist attraction, known as "the show place of Lake Kabetogama." Hundreds of people visited

¹⁴ "Molehill" was constructed from 1932 to either 1956 or 1958. Itasca Rock Garden was built from 1920 through 1938.

¹⁵ Assistant Chief Naturalist to Superintendent, Voyageurs National Park, 28 August 1979.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

the garden each summer, while many others regularly took in the view from the lake. The garden was regularly photographed, with visitors posing next to his rock sculptures. The garden also gained local and regional acclaim from tourist brochures, as well as from magazine and newspaper articles published in nearby International Falls, and Minneapolis, some three-hundred miles distant. The garden was and continues to be a landmark. In 2005, visitation from mid-July through mid-September was 6,650, as high as the years when Mr. Ellsworth was working at the site and offering tours to visitors. The gardens are the most popular day use destination for park visitors; people are still fascinated by the sculptures and the scale of Ellsworth creation.



Figure 1. Constantin Brancusi, Bird in Space, 1923. From http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/viewone.asp?dep=21&viewmode=0&item=1996.403.7a b.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 2. Isamu Noguchi, *Landscape of Time*, 1975. From <http://www.noguchi.org/landscotime.htm>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 3. Ellsworth, sculpture # 15. Photograph courtesy of Voyageurs National Park.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 4. Ellsworth sculpture # 8. Photograph courtesy of Voyageurs National Park.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 5. Constantin Brancusi, Table of Silence (Targu Jiu), 1937-38. From <http://www.brancusi.ro/>.



Figure 6. Garden designed by James Rose, From *Gardens Make Me Laugh*.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

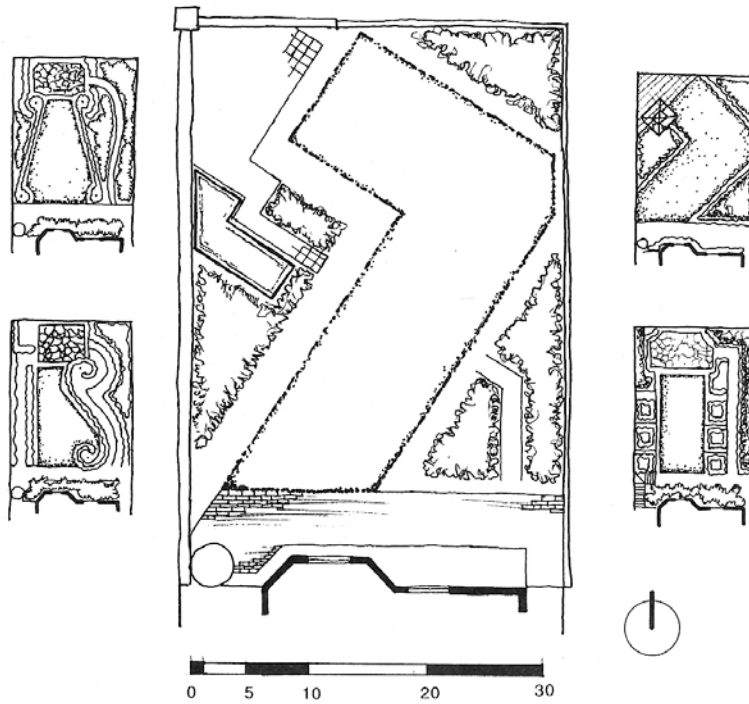


Figure 7. Thomas Church, plan for Sullivan Garden. From Pregill and Volkman.



Figure 8. Harvey Fite's Opus 40, Saugerties, New York. From <http://www.opus40.org>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 14 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 9. Harvey Fite's Opus 40, Saugerties, New York. From <http://www.opus40.org>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 15 Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State



Figure 10. Louis Wippich's Molehill, Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. From <http://www.mnmuseumofthems.org/Grotto/Molehill1.html>.



Figure 11. John L. Christiansen's Itasca Rock Garden, Albert Lea, Minnesota. From <http://www.mnmuseumofthems.org/Grotto/Christiansen.html>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

Ellsworth Rock Garden
Name of Property

St. Louis MN
County and State

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