

ABORIGINAL WORLD VIEWS

Aboriginal versus Western World Views

Why is it important to recognize the differences between Aboriginal and Western world views?

Commemoration is based on what is valued. To recognize the values within Aboriginal cultural landscapes and to commemorate these places, identification and evaluation must focus on Aboriginal world views, rather than on the world views of the non-indigenous cultures derived from the Western scientific tradition. The orientations of these two broad cultures differ radically. The Aboriginal world view is rooted in identification with the land. Western experience is rooted in objectification and rationalism. (*Johnson and Ruttan, 1992; Stevenson, 1996: 288-89; Federal Archaeology Office, 1998a*)

Aboriginal peoples in Canada, like indigenous peoples worldwide, approach history not primarily through the Western constructs of causal relationship, record, and time sequence, but through cosmology, narrative, and place. Recent examples of the integration of oral tradition and multi-disciplinary science reflect the sophisticated research approaches now applied to complex historical issues.

Widespread mapping projects in the Northwest Territories, Labrador, northern Quebec, northern Ontario, and Yukon have documented traditional harvesting areas through oral evidence and place identification. Individual hunters, trappers, fishers, and berry pickers actively participated in identifying lands that they have used and species that they have hunted in their lifetimes. The impressive degree of consistency among independently prepared maps and the striking extent to which maps from different communities fitted together have persuaded scholars of their reliability. (*Slim and Thompson, 1995: 52-53*)

Dene oral traditions tell of the dispersal of their ancestors from their homeland long ago following a volcanic eruption. Subsequently they became separate linguistic groups. In one recent study, evidences developed from archaeology (such as dendro-chronology and radiocarbon dating techniques), environmental sciences (especially geology), and recent linguistic theory have been connected with traditional narratives of the Hare, Mountain, Chipewyan, Yellowknife and Slavey peoples to create a cohesive story out of the multiple clues. The analysis convincingly locates the volcanism both geographically, in the White River volcano, Alaska, and chronologically, in A.D.720. (*Moodie, Catchpole and Abel,1992*) It thus supports the validity of both oral tradition and science.



The Ramparts, Mackenzie River, Northwest Territories

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The validity of Aboriginal oral history has been an issue for both indigenous peoples and academics, one which the [Dene Cultural Institute](#) has long been addressing. Traditional knowledge points to the qualities for which Aboriginal peoples value the land. Scholarly analysis based on the methodologies of archaeology, history, ethnography, and related disciplines can contribute to the identification of values, but does not play the lead role that it has played in cultural resource management practice.



Salmon drying on racks on beach of Yukon River, Trondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Site, Yukon.Parkcs

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