

Interpretive Presentation Script

Indigenous History of Southern Purcell Mountain Range BC: Thanking The Land

Jaiden R. Hourie

Mount Royal University

ETOL3720: Expedition I

Ian Sherrington

August 17, 2023

Introduction

-Good [morning/afternoon/evening], everyone. Thank you for joining me as we embark on a journey to uncover the rich and profound Indigenous history that is interwoven within the stunning landscape of the Purcell Mountain Range in Southern British Columbia. This presentation aims to shed light on the enduring connection between the Indigenous peoples and the land, their traditions, and the significance of this range in their lives.

-Before we begin it is important to first acknowledge the land on which we stand.

Acknowledgement of The Land

-We acknowledge and honor that we gather on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Ktunaxa (Tun-AH-kha or Tun-AH-hah) Nation, who have stewarded these lands, including the Purcell Mountain Range, for countless generations. We recognize the deep and enduring connection that the Ktunaxa people have with this land, their cultural practices, and their spiritual beliefs. We also acknowledge the Indigenous peoples from neighboring nations, including the Secwepemc (suh-Wep-muhc) and Interior Salish, who have shared in the intricate tapestry of this region's history.

-We pay our respects to the Elders, both past and present, and extend our gratitude for the opportunity to live, learn, and work on these lands. As we enjoy the natural beauty and resources of the Purcell Mountain Range, let us reflect upon the wisdom and knowledge that Indigenous communities have gathered from this land for generations. May we engage with humility, respect, and a commitment to understanding the stories and traditions that shape this place.

-In the spirit of reconciliation and understanding, let us continue to strive for a harmonious relationship with the land and its original stewards, as we work together to ensure its preservation and sustainable future for generations to come.

Location and Geographical Features

-For more than 10,000 years, the Ktunaxa people have lived on the lands that border the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers, as well as the Arrow Lakes (Ktunaxa Nation, n.d.); the territory covers an area of around 70,000 km² (Walker, 2018).

-The “Upper” and “Lower” divisions of the Ktunaxa were traditionally split, with each group inhabiting the eastern and western halves of their plateau area; their traditional land and culture were centered on the Kootenay River (Walker, 2018).

Oral Traditions and Storytelling

-An integral part of Indigenous culture is passing down knowledge through generations through oral storytelling. Oral traditions, stories, and songs that have been passed down through the years

are a priceless source of knowledge regarding the environment, survival techniques, and spiritual beliefs.

-This makes what we are doing today incredibly special as we have an opportunity to partake in this tradition. I would like to begin by sharing to you, and prefacing our conversation today, with a part of the Ktunaxa's oral history, which shares that the Earth was described as an "island surrounded by water, covered by the dome of the sky" (Walker, 2018).

-I want us to remember that idea as we learn more about the Ktunaxa people.

Relationship To The Land

-Indigenous peoples' cultural, spiritual, and historical ties to the land are foundational to their relationship to it. This relationship comprises significant beliefs, customs, and ways of living that have been handed down through the generations, going much beyond simply using the land for subsistence.

-Every living thing, including plants, animals, and humans, is a component of a broader ecosystem. Indigenous peoples emphasize the significance of preserving harmony and balance because they are aware of their place in this system.

-Indigenous groups have frequently taken on the role of land stewards, using the land's resources sustainably so that subsequent generations can also prosper.

-This approach prioritizes the longevity and health of the land as opposed to resource extraction for financial gain.

-One of the most important themes is understanding the idea of 'land as teacher.' Indigenous teachings frequently highlight the land as a source of knowledge and understanding.

-The interaction between people and their environment in this connection is complex and is based on reciprocity, respect, and an awareness of the importance of the land itself.

-Indigenous cultures often view the land as sacred, believing that the land is not just a physical space but also a spiritual entity with its own life force.

Traditional Land Use

-The Purcell Mountains provided numerous resources to the Indigenous peoples; Elk, deer, and other smaller game were hunted. People also fished in the area's rivers and lakes, gathered plants for food and medicine (more on the medicines later!), and used the mountains as a route for trade and communication (Ktunaxa Nation, n.d.).

-We see some gendered positions in their history as well, men took part in hunting, fishing, and, on occasion, horse care. In addition to caring for children, women also had to gather roots, prepare food and skins, and make clothing (Walker, 2018).

European Contact and Colonial History

- As most are aware, the arrival of European settlers had major impacts on Indigenous communities and they found their ways of life to be significantly disrupted; facing incredible challenges, including displacement, cultural assimilation, and loss of land.
- This was a point I waited to share, but I know we all probably know the name Kootenay, now you know it is the anglicized form of the name Ktunaxa.
- David Thompson is one of the most prominent names in research for this land; he was an explorer who founded Kootenae House, a trading post, close to where Invermere is today (Kudelik, 2016). In the late 1800s, as European settlement grew, the Ktunaxa were pushed onto smaller land fragments, which were overseen by the federal government under the *Indian Act*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, epidemics brought by Europeans nearly destroyed the Ktunaxa population (Ktunaxa Nation, n.d.).

Resilience and Reclamation: Call To Action

- Indigenous groups in the area are still working hard to protect their history and relationships to the Purcell Mountain Range. Initiatives for cultural revitalization, participation in land management and conservation, and engagement with non-Indigenous groups are only a few examples of the efforts being made.
- I encourage you all to engage respectfully with Indigenous histories and cultures.
- Indigenous history of the Purcell Mountain Range is a story of enduring relationships between various Indigenous nations and the land. This history is characterized by spiritual connections, resource utilization, and cultural practices that have persisted through challenges. Recognizing and respecting this history is essential for fostering understanding, reconciliation, and sustainable land stewardship in the present and future.
- Let us embrace the opportunity to learn, appreciate, and collaborate in preserving the rich tapestry of the Purcell Mountains' Indigenous history

Offering and Prayer

- I would now like to thank the land and offer you a chance to participate in an element of the culture.
- It is important to preface this by saying that you are welcome to engage in a way that feels comfortable to you, and understand that this is a nature based spirituality of which all are welcome to join. We honour the land in a non-religious way, you may think of, or speak to, any form of higher power that you desire.
- I am now going to walk us through a traditional offering ceremony and prayer.
- You will each have a bit of tobacco in your hands, this is to thank the for directions.

When I say “we offer” you may put a pinch from your hand and offer it to the earth. As I say each prayer you are welcome to close your eyes and listen to my words, take them as you wish.
-We will start with the east as that is where the sun rises.

Great Spirit who comes out of the East,

To your symbol colour Red, the hue of revelation;

To your animal symbol the Eagle, strong and nurturing;

We are thankful for the light of the rising sun.

Let there be light on the path we walk.

Let us remember always to be thankful that You give the gift of a new day

We offer

Spirit of Creation, we turn to the south,

To your symbol colour Gold for the morning star.

To your symbol the Mouse Spirit that enlightens our intellect and
brings light on our path to live responsibly;

We are thankful for sending us warm and soothing winds from the South
to comfort us and caress us when we are tired and cold.

Unfold us as your gentle breezes unfold the leaves on the trees.

And as You give to all the earth your warm moving wind,
give to us warmth and remember to be grateful.

To your lessons calling us to balance of Mind in the Spirit of humility

We offer

Great Life-giving Spirit, we face the West,

the direction of sundown.

To your symbol colour Black, still and quiet.

To your animal symbol the Buffalo;

Let us remember every day that the moment will come
when our sun will go down.

To your lessons calling us to balance our emotions in the spirit of
Gentleness and Honesty;

To invoke your spirit of introspection, seeing within;

Give us your strength and the courage to endure,

We offer

Great Spirit of Love,

come to us with the power of the North

To your animal symbol the bear

Make us courageous when the cold winds fall upon us.

Give us strength and endurance for everything that is harsh, everything that hurts,
everything that makes us squint.

To your symbol colour white of clarity and brightness.

To your lessons calling us to balance of our Body in the spirit of a
good sense of humor;

To invoke your spirit of innocence, trust and love;

Help us to open our eyes to the sacredness of every living thing,

We offer

Give of all Life,

we pray to you from the Earth.

Help us to be thankful for the gift of the earth

and never to walk hurtfully on the world.

Bless us with eyes to love what comes from Mother Earth

and teach us how to use well your gifts.

To the **East** I pray to the Eagle Spirit to take care of the newborns and to give me patience.

I set down tobacco;

To the **South** I pray to the Mouse Spirit to take care of the youth and to give me kindness.

I set down sage;

To the **West** I pray to the Buffalo Spirit to take care of the adults and to give me tolerance.

I set down sweet grass;

To the **North** I pray to the Bear Spirit to take care of the Elders and to give me love.

I set down cedar.

All my relations, hiy hiy.

References

Ktunaxa Nation.(n.d.). *Who We Are*. Retrieved August 3, 2023, from

<https://www.ktunaxa.org/who-we-are/>

Kudelik, G. (2016). *Purcell Mountains*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 4, 2023, from

[https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/purcell-mountains#:~:text=to%20Kootenay%20Lake,-History,and%2C%20in%201859%2C%20)

[purcell-mountains#:~:text=to%20Kootenay%20Lake,-History,and%2C%20in%201859%2C%20](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/purcell-mountains#:~:text=to%20Kootenay%20Lake,-History,and%2C%20in%201859%2C%20)

[Dr.](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/purcell-mountains#:~:text=to%20Kootenay%20Lake,-History,and%2C%20in%201859%2C%20)

Walker, D. (2018). *Ktunaxa (Kootenay)*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 5, 2023, from

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/kootenay>

