

**NIITSITAPII HERITAGE EDUCATION: A POOMIIKAPII APPROACH**

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## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The University of Lethbridge acknowledges and deeply appreciates the Siksikaitsitapii peoples' connection to their traditional territory. We, as people living and benefiting from Blackfoot Confederacy traditional territory, honour the traditions of people who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We recognize the diverse population of Aboriginal peoples who attend the University of Lethbridge and the contributions these Aboriginal peoples have made in shaping and strengthening the University community in the past, present, and in the future.

## **DEDICATION**

For all Niitsitapii who have come before me, and for all of those who are to come after.

## **ABSTRACT**

This is a critical study of the current heritage management practices in southern Alberta, especially as they relate to Niitsitapii (Blackfoot) heritage sites. Two sites in particular, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi, are used as case studies for this research. Both of these sites have provincial, federal, and global designations resulting in layers of colonial policy focussed on how to best manage the heritage sites. Current heritage management directives and policies are discussed and dissected in order to understand the cultural values they represent and protect. These are compared and contrasted to Niitsitapii cultural values at the core of Niitsitapiisinni (our way of life). Opinions from the Niitsitapii communities of Kainai and Piikani were gathered and analyzed. From the responses / engagement received, themes began to emerge highlighting what is of importance, and value, for Niitsitapii people when it comes to managing Niitsitapii heritage. The document ends with discussing and presenting best practices that would benefit and support Indigenous led heritage management policy making.

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strong within us; we are proud, fierce, tenacious, and we will never stop protecting our way of life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Land Acknowledgement.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Executive Summary.....	1
1.2 Objective.....	3
1.3 Relevance.....	8
1.4 Indigenous Heritage by Indigenous People.....	13
1.5 Context.....	19
1.6 Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi.....	21
1.7 Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.....	24
1.8 Methodology.....	26
1.9 Chapter Summaries.....	30
Chapter 2: Re-Righting Cultural Knowledge.....	32
2.1 The Value of Knowledge.....	35
2.2 Niitsitapii Earth Science – Aisinai’pi.....	37
2.3 Niitsitapii Earth Science – Piskaan.....	42
2.4 Niitsitapii Cultural Heritage Management.....	46
2.5 Tempus Nullius.....	50
2.6 Archaeology of Blackfoot Children.....	53
2.7 Pookaiksi Lithic Assemblage.....	54
2.8 Kid Knapping.....	60
2.9 Conclusion.....	64
Chapter 3: Values of Heritage.....	67
3.1 Historical Policy and Legislation.....	68
3.2 Niitsitapii Education.....	73
3.3 Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretation .....	79

3.4 Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi Interpretation.....	89
3.5 Heritage Policy and Legislation.....	97
3.6 Conclusions.....	99
Chapter 4: Niitsitapii Voices.....	101
4.1 Results.....	107
4.2 Aatsimoyikaaan – Need for Spiritual Connection.....	111
4.3 Niitsitapiisinni – Need to Practice and Honor Niitsitapii Values.....	116
4.4 Issues with Policy.....	120
4.5 Issues with Management Practices.....	124
4.6 Issues with Relationship Building / Interpersonal Conflict.....	130
4.7 Conflicts.....	133
4.8 Issues with Employment.....	136
4.9 Conclusions.....	140
Chapter 5: Beginnings.....	144
5.1 Reflections.....	146
5.2 Best Practices.....	151
5.3 Key Outcomes of Collaboration.....	154
5.4 Heritage Sovereignty in Practice.....	155
References Cited.....	160

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Interpretive Panel at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Center.....	48
Figure 2: Miniature Projectiles.....	55
Figure 3: Miniature Shaft Straightener.....	55
Figure 4: Miniature End Scraper.....	59
Figure 5: Miniature Grinder.....	60
Figure 6: Miniature Pot Sherd.....	63
Figure 7: Buffalo Jump Replica on Main Level.....	80
Figure 8: Looking Down on Level 5 of the Interpretive Center.....	81
Figure 9: Looking Down on Level 4 of the Interpretive Center.....	82
Figure 10: Interpretive Panel on the 4 <sup>th</sup> Level.....	83
Figure 11: Looking Down on Level 3 of the Interpretive Center.....	84
Figure 12: Looking at Level 2 of the Interpretive Center.....	85
Figure 13: Looking at the Mian Level of the Interpretive Center.....	86
Figure 14: Display of an Archaeological Excavation.....	87
Figure 15: Two Panels on the Main Level of the Interpretive Center.....	87
Figure 16: View of the Visitor Center Standing at the Entrance.....	91
Figure 17: Round Interpretive Display in the Foreground.....	91
Figure 18: View of the Theatre Space Located in the Center if the Building.....	92
Figure 19: Interpretive Display in Foreground is Designed to Represent a Drum.....	92
Figure 20: Interpretive Panel Located in the Campground Describing Glaciology.....	94
Figure 21: Interpretive Panel Located in the Campground Describing the Ecosystem....	95
Figure 22: Interpretive Panel Located in the Campground Describing Rock Art.....	95
Figure 23: Indicating the Cultural Groups Respondents Identified with.....	108
Figure 24: Age Groups Represented by Respondents to the Survey.....	109
Figure 25: Roasting Pit Exhibit Housed at the Royal Alberta Museum.....	127

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Executive Summary**

Annakoak Ikkinainiahkii. Nimoh'to'to Akainai, nimoh'to'tsitapiiksi Akaipookaiksi. I am from the Kainai Nation and part of the Manychildren clan. I was raised on the Blood Reserve and have lived the majority of my adult life there. I have been fortunate to be raised immersed in culture and ceremony. Since a very young age I have been exposed to teachings from Elders using traditional teaching methods. Story telling has always been a huge part of my teaching and learning, influencing what I have decided to devote my career to.

An important aspect of teaching and learning in the Niitsitapii culture is the strictness of the exchange of knowledge. If receiving information or knowledge, that person is expected to give the Elder / teacher their undivided attention. If you do not seem to be listening, or are not seen to be acting / responding correctly, you are directed as how to correct yourself, sometimes bluntly and harshly. This document and information provided is written within those cultural parameters. The intent is not to alienate or shut out readers. Rather, the topic of Blackfoot heritage is such a passionate topic to the Blackfoot community, and myself, that it always deserves a sense of strictness to it. It is after all, a whole people's identity and history.

The main objective of this research is to highlight the voices and opinions of the Niitsitapii community in regard to the management of Niitsitapii cultural heritage sites. The purpose and intent of the research conducted is to get heritage management practitioners to critically think about ways to embody and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action. It has been my experience that people are inspired by these documents and wholeheartedly support them, but they can also be so worried about doing something wrong, or unsure how to move forward, that it sometimes hinders progress. This in itself is an injustice and one that this research addresses.

When receiving teachings from Elders in the community, it is also made clear that the learning and teaching is in a sense ceremonial. Therefore, Blackfoot research and research methodologies are ceremonial. This research has been carried out in the spirit of these teachings and methodological approaches. Offerings were made at various times throughout this research study, prayers were incorporated when appropriate (ex. at the start of meetings), and honorariums / gifts were provided to everyone involved in this journey. Incorporating ceremony is also very fitting considering the sacred and significant nature of the sites being discussed.

Ceremony revolves around relationships and the renewal of those relationships. When conducting research as ceremony, relationships are crucial to the process. Due to my past work experience at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi (WOS / A) and Head-Smashed-In (HSI) Buffalo Jump I had already developed relations with many people who worked within these cultural sites. Engaging these people in my research allowed me to renew these relationships that were developed years ago.

Through one-on-one conversations with selected individuals and survey responses from the general Blackfoot community, candid discussions were had about Blackfoot heritage and the ways it is currently being managed at HSI and WOS / A. This research found that the common opinion was that the two sites are not currently being properly

managed according to the cultural and spiritual values of the Blackfoot people. Instead, they are being guided by policies that carry with them a long colonial legacy.

Based off the findings of this research, it is recommended that in order to align with and support UNDRIP and TRC, current policy and policy making practices need to be reformed. Heritage management policies need to begin with the cultural values of the heritage in which they are managing. The proposed alternative requires placing cultural values at the core / foundation of Heritage Management policies allows the document to be written in a way that supports and encourages the cultural values. A specific Blackfoot example is used throughout this document however, the same approach can be taken if working with any Indigenous heritage. What is proposed is a framework for approaching Indigenous Heritage Management, whether it be through cultural heritage sites, museums, archives, galleries, libraries, etc.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVE**

In this thesis I will be addressing and analyzing the heritage management practices of two Blackfoot cultural sites in southern Alberta, those of Head-Smashed-In (HSI) Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi (WOS / A) Provincial Park, with an emphasis on heritage education. Each site is managed by the Government of Alberta and each of the heritage education practices focus on the interpretation of the Blackfoot site history and use. My guiding principle is that having First Nations groups, the Blackfoot in particular, in charge of their own heritage management and heritage education policies is an important step towards self-determination. I intend to demonstrate how Blackfoot self-determination is not simply practicing what UNESCO deems to be a basic human right,

something afforded to all Canadian citizens, it is a crucial Aboriginal right; additional rights which can only be held, and exercised, by First Nations peoples (Crane Bear 2015).

The main objective of my research is to answer the question of, how is Blackfoot heritage currently being managed and taught at Cultural Heritage Sites in southern Alberta? In order to explore this question, I will critically examine the history of heritage management policy approaches at the two sites mentioned above (WOS / A and HSI), and will analyze this history in terms of what it reveals about colonial legacies. I will critically examine the way recent approaches to heritage management, such as those put forth by UNESCO, though well intended, leave gaps in terms of Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous understandings of heritage as living practices and processes. Finally, I will explore how heritage education, when done properly and collaboratively, can amount to true and meaningful reconciliation.

Using my research findings, I will identify best practices and develop applications that can be used for the future creation of heritage management and education policies that honor and reflect traditional Blackfoot values. Specifically, I intend to address why and how the ultimate understanding that one can achieve of a cultural site is understanding the spiritual component; more specifically, the spiritual connection the Niitsitapii people witness, connect to, and attribute to the natural world.

I am especially interested in how the cultural sites management documents affect, or do not affect, the interpretation of the cultural sites from a Blackfoot perspective. What information do Blackfoot interpreters feel is most important for tourists / visitors to the site to know about Blackfoot people / culture? What information, if any, do Blackfoot

interpreters not agree with? Is there any information that Blackfoot interpreters feel is not appropriate to share? Do they ever feel a pressure to act, or perform, a certain way?

I am interested in comparing and contrasting what interpretive information and actions are mandated / supported in the site management documents and what is being practiced / communicated by the frontline staff. I think it would also be interesting to look at Niitsitapii perceptions of the management efforts; do they agree that effective management is currently taking place? I feel it is also worthy to document the perceptions of the Blackfoot staff in relation to the information that is being provided to visitors of the site; do they agree that the information being provided is accurate and appropriate?

My research will be addressing #79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada Calls to Action which states: We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to: ii) Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history. This integration, ideally, should bring people and groups of differing cultural backgrounds into equal participation in institutions.

This specific TRC Call to Action, #79, acknowledges the Canadian Governments long history of oppressive policies in regard to the First Nations population. The acts that affected all Indigenous peoples of Canada, and the Blackfoot people specifically, were the Royal Proclamation Act (1763), the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), the British North America (BNA) Act (1867), the Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869), and the Indian Act

(1876). Treaty 7 (1877) is a piece of legislation that affects almost exclusively the Blackfoot people of southern Alberta (Tsu’Tina and Stoney Nakoda also being signatories of the treaty). “These acts (which the colonizer wrote solely) dictated who could and could not be considered an ‘Indian’, and what an Indian could and could not do; they dictated where we could travel, who we could marry, what we could consume, what level of education we could attain, what religion we could practice, and what cultural practices we could and could not do” (Prete 2019:30).

I am a member of the Kainai nation and part of the Akaipookaiksi (Many Children clan). I grew up on the Blood Reserve and was fortunate enough to hear the Blackfoot language being spoken in my home. I was also raised with the oral traditions of my people and taught ceremonial etiquette. I consider myself to be privileged in that I grew up knowing and interacting with several influential Elders from my community.

The passion for my current work stems from my early experiences in the Canadian school system. I noticed that the information I was reading in books had a huge disconnect from the traditional teachings I was receiving at home. When I would bring up these discrepancies with my parents, they would highlight the fact that the books I was reading were largely written by white men who would not, or could not, have a full understanding of what it meant to be Niitsitapii. Even as a child I realized this was problematic as it meant that all who read the same information were being grossly misinformed about my ancestors and our history. This misinformation dictated how non-First Nations peoples came to understand my people which ultimately affected their attitudes and opinions towards us.

This experience and realization are what influenced me to enroll in the archaeology and geography program at the University of Lethbridge back in 2008. I felt, and largely still feel, an overwhelming responsibility to re-write my peoples history and vocalize our truths. This is a task that many Indigenous researchers have identified and are working toward rectifying, including Prete (2019:43) who states that “beadworking, as a research paradigm, has taught me to resist the research that has come before me at the hands of non-Indigenous researchers”.

This concept of resisting colonial research is something that I was introduced to as a child and is something that I carry with me to this day. Throughout my post-secondary experience, I found it compelling that the majority of researchers, and as a result their students, typically treated archaeological knowledge and traditional knowledge as mutually exclusive, or, that the traditional knowledge was a trivial footnote or interesting aside to the fact based “hard science” of archaeology and anthropology. It has been my experience that the two are complimentary to each other and, as researchers, we need both accounts to create as complete of an understanding as possible.

I took this strategy with me as I exited university and began my work with the Government of Alberta at the WOS / A cultural site. While conducting the rock art tours for the general public and school groups I delivered the archaeological and geographical knowledge in a way that highlighted, emphasised and supported the Blackfoot culture and oral traditions which were front and center of my presentations. Countless times I had visitors approach me after tours to express their interest in the cultural information, their disbelief in how much they did not know or were misinformed about, and their gratitude and appreciation for hearing the information from a first-person perspective. These

experiences solidified my belief that the current heritage education practices need to experience drastic reform but done so through an Indigenous perspective and framework.

### **1.3 RELEVANCE**

The topic of reconciliation in Canada is arguably most poignant, can make the greatest impression, where heritage and education converge. As a result, archaeology, as a branch of anthropology, can be understood to be the most influential in terms of what cultural information is communicated to the general public. Professional archaeologists from the Royal Alberta Museum and the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women are often involved in training the seasonal staff at both Head-Smashed-In and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi.

The lens, or the way in which First Nations cultures, and specifically Blackfoot culture, have been understood and interpreted within the professions of anthropology and archaeology is largely affected by the history of Canadian governmental policy. In 1884, the federal government banned the potlatch ceremonies on the west coast with other ceremonies, such as the Sundance, to follow in the coming years. In May of 1885, the process that led to the system of the Indian Passes was set in motion and was enforced in some areas until the mid-1930's (Barron 1988). This restrictive system sought to control and restrict the movement of First Nations peoples and that the pass system was a violation of what had been promised in the treaties and that lacked legal justification seemed not to be matters of concern to those who administered the scheme (Barron 1988:30).

Restricting the movements of First Nations groups who were traditionally nomadic strained the people's relationship to the land because the policy greatly hindered the people's ability to travel to their sacred cultural sites. Amendments to the Indian Act made in 1914 made it illegal for any Indian to appear in their regalia off-reserve (Prete 2019:31), another hinderance to practicing ceremony. The Indian Act was slowly and deliberately diminishing Indigenous Peoples' ability to act as sovereign nations (Prete 2019:33).

In 1969, the government had tabled a White Paper on Native Policy in Canada intended to address the entrenched economic and social problems in Canada's Native communities (Devine 2010:221). The "Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969" or now infamous 'White Paper', sought to abolish the Indian Act and remove all legal distinctions between 'Indians' and other Canadians in the name of equality (Kulchyski 2011:41). The state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities, is a human right. However, this received stark and swift opposition from First Nations groups all across Canada including the Indian Association of Alberta (I.A.A). The I.A.A responded with the issue of the Red Paper which was a political assertion and resistance to the White Paper and the assimilation that it proposed. The White Paper advocated individual "self-sufficiency," while the Red Paper emphasized treaties, rather than individualism, as a source of Indian "self-sufficiency." (Crane Bear 2015:iii).

In the intensive struggle to prevent implementation of the white paper the term 'Citizen's Plus' was deployed to emphasize that Indigenous peoples in Canada were Canadian citizens, had the human and citizenship rights of Canadian citizens, but were

also the bearers of something else, an un-named ‘plus’, that had to be acknowledged; the ‘plus’ would come to be known as Aboriginal rights (Kulchyski 2011:43). The Red Paper is the first indigenous-produced document that articulates a model of “self-governance” that reflects an indigenous perspective (Crane Bear 2015:20). By 1970, Indigenous peoples everywhere were politically ignored and economically dispossessed, geographically dislocated and socially degraded, targeted by assimilation policies designed to dissolve their cultural cohesion and absorb their constituents into the statist ‘mainstream’ or, in many cases, simply consigned to die off, slowly but surely, in conditions of enforced destitution (Churchill 2011:529).

The conditions of enforced destitution were never felt more than in the Canadian residential school system. Although the last residential school in Canada did not close until 1996, the system had been in decline since the 1970s (Parrott 2015). There was a growing willingness of survivors to speak publicly of their suffering and to press for reparation. It was not until the 1990s that churches and other organizations issued formal apologies for their involvement in the residential school system, including, the Anglican (August 6, 1993), Presbyterian (June 5, 1994), and United churches of Canada (October 27, 1998) as well, in 2004 the RCMP apologized for their role in removing children from their families to attend schools (Parrott 2015).

The fact that many First Nations groups, the Blackfoot in particular, still practice their traditional ceremonies and customs and that these practices continue to live and be passed onto the next generation is a huge testament to the people’s resiliency; their capacity to recover from difficulties in the face of a system that was created to destroy their every being. Despite all of the amendments made in the Indian Act that were a

means to assimilate First Nations groups into a way of life that valued European culture and history, “First Nations Peoples still continue to retain pride in our identities as Indigenous People” (Prete 2019:34).

Watson (2011:508) explains that due to Indigenous advocacies since the 1970s there was an intention within the United Nations for the creation of a document that was to empower Indigenous peoples to be self-determining in relationship to traditional lands but instead, under the pressure of the states, the document known as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) shifted to a generalist human rights approach, and its focus shifted away from the concerns of Indigenous peoples’ survival as peoples – and with that, the possibility of reliving the genocidal impact of state assimilationist policies and practices. Churchill (2011:540) has identified that the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination [had] been the most strident and persistently declared demand voiced by First Nations groups in Canada since 1990. Despite this, the Declaration continues the exclusionary practices that define the Indigenous as being domesticated subjects contained by the international identity and power assumed by the colonising state (Watson 2011:511).

The UNDRIP passed the General Assembly on 13 September 2007 with 144 member states voting for the declaration, and only four member states voting against: the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia – the four largest settler states in the Anglosphere (Lightfoot 2012:102). All four emphasised the incompatibility with their domestic laws and their commitment to the equality of all of their citizens and that the declaration would not be legally binding on them (Churchill 2011; Kulchyski 2011; Lightfoot 2012; MacDonald and Wood 2016).

The year following the signing of UNDRIP, in 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a formal apology to survivors of the Canadian Residential School System after continued pressure from Aboriginal communities for acknowledgment and compensation (Parrott 2015). It was an interesting and emotionally confusing time for the people of Canada. Among the Aboriginal communities across Canada, there was a mix of gratitude and relief for the simple acknowledgment of the pain and suffering endured in the community; for others there was the bitter taste of resentment and distrust for the very government that caused the intergenerational pain and suffering within the communities.

For the non-Aboriginal communities there was a mix of shock and disbelief that Canada could have such a sinister history. Some people exhibited intergenerational guilt and shame, while others denied vehemently that such experiences could be true. The official apology created a ripple effect in the making of Canadian Indigenous policy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was officially launched in 2008 as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) which was agreed to in 2005 by the Liberal government, churches, the Assembly of First Nations and plaintiffs (Parrott 2015). In 2015 the TRC issued the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (CTA). This is an 11page document which lists a total of 94 calls to action which are intended to redress the legacy of residential schools, arguably one of the grossest human rights violations in Canadian history, and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.

In December 2020, the government of Canada introduced legislation to implement the UNDRIP document; most recently, on June 21, 2021, Bill C-15, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* received Royal Assent and on June

21, 2023 the Canadian Government has released the UN Declaration Act Action Plan (Government of Canada 2021; 2023). This legislation is intended to provide a road map for the Government and Indigenous peoples to work toward full implementation of the declaration. The Government of Canada is beginning to understand that the implementation of the declaration is a key building block to fully recognizing, respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of Canadas Indigenous peoples.

On the Canadian Government website, it is stated that “the purpose of this Bill is to affirm the Declaration as a universal, international, human rights instrument with application in Canadian law and provide a framework for the Government of Canada’s implementation of the Declaration” (Government of Canada 2021). The statement is also made that, “among the main goals of the Declaration is to facilitate the exercise of Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination”. My intention for this thesis is to highlight how the implementation of Indigenous led heritage management and education policies within Canadas cultural sites is just one of many examples of how Indigenous peoples can practice and assert self-determination.

#### **1.4 INDIGENOUS HERITAGE BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

Since the first governmental policies in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a Euro-Canadian notion of superiority in regard to the First Nation people and their culture. Scholars truly believed that because they received formal training from an educational institution they were equipped to understand and interpret cultural traits better than the people who practiced this culture. My personal experience with the field of archaeology and as a Government of Alberta employee have proven the unfortunate truth that this

willful blindness is still prevalent in the profession of archaeology and anthropology even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the process of completing my undergrad degree I was enrolled in a theory course that discussed the practice of Indigenous archaeology. A classmate from a nearby small town made the comment that they did not understand why archaeologists should collaborate with First Nations Elders since, “we are the ones who have gone to school for 4 years to learn methods and get a degree”. They continued with, “I don’t see the benefit of working with them because all I have heard is horror stories of drunk Indians”. I share this disturbing encounter to emphasise the dangers and impact cultural biases can have on the interpretation and understanding of First Nations cultures.

This individual class mate of mine shared their desire to work within a museum setting once completing their degree. Imagine my horror hearing this and realizing that if this individual found employment within a museum, they would be considered a cultural “specialist” and be seen as an “authority” over culture and one who is sought after to provide information to the interpretation programs of cultural sites managed under the Government of Alberta. These cultural sites would then provide the information to the general public through interpretation programs, possibly inspiring a member of the general public to pursue a similar career, thus creating a positive feedback loop. It is important to note that Indigenous populations are completely left out of the loop described above, or if they are included, it is sometimes only as a minor information resource role.

Historically, Euro-Canadian relationships with Indigenous peoples have largely been extractive, whether discussing natural resources or intellectual property.

Interestingly enough, anthropologists and archaeologists envision these disciplines to be agents of social activism and have tackled the problem of human rights through the lens of their own disciplines (Silberman 2012:245). This has played out among museum anthropologists of the early twentieth century who felt that Aboriginal cultures were beginning to disappear and it was their duty to collect items of cultural heritage for the enjoyment of all humanity (Conaty 2015:46). The veracity of museum interpretation was rarely challenged, and those who did so were rarely heeded (Conaty 2015:49). The controversy over *The Spirit Sings*, a 1988 Glenbow Museum exhibition, had not only revealed Canada's history of shameful Aboriginal policies to the world, but had also exposed the profound gulf that existed between the largely non-Native administrators, curators, designers, and educators, and the Indigenous peoples whose heritage they presumed to interpret for the rest of the world (Devine 2010:218).

This top-down policy approach enforced by the Canadian government, and the circumstances they have created, have not gone unnoticed or uncontested. Karen Aird, an Indigenous Cultural Heritage Strategist for Treaty 8 Tribal Association, vocalizes experiencing the “frustration over the inequalities and lack of inclusion of Indigenous cultural heritage and a critical need to make systemic change” (IHC 2019). It was in 2016 that Aird and three other women formed a national, non-profit entity, the Indigenous Heritage Circle (IHC). The IHC is an Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led organization dedicated to the advancement of cultural heritage priorities that are of importance to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada. Parks Canada invited the IHC to organize and report on national engagement sessions in 2020 to explore issues of both exclusive and shared interest to the IHC and Parks Canada (Indigenous Heritage

Circle 2020:6). Parks Canada saw these engagement sessions as a response to the TRC Call to Action #79 mentioned above.

Although Indigenous led policy reform is not common in southern Alberta, it is occurring in other contexts. The IHC website devotes a page to ‘Policy and Advocacy’ and provides examples of various Indigenous led policies in Canada. One of them, ‘Our Way: Yukon Nations Heritage Law’ is an act that recognizes and affirms the inherent right of the First Nation to manage its heritage and culture. This document has heritage defined as “the way of life and worldview inherited from previous generations and is evident in both tangible and intangible elements. Heritage lives in the complex and dynamic relationships of interdependence between land, spirit and living things, transmitted from generation to generation, interweaving land, places, names, stories, families and events” (2019:16).

The document continues to explain, “our cultural identity derives from the land. Upholding our responsibilities to the land is central to our identity. This reciprocal relationship has been sustained by our ancestors. It is our responsibility and legacy to pass this heritage on to our children and grandchildren” (2019:19). The First Nations’ understanding of a dynamic *living heritage* – rooted in the land, in the places and names and stories and families, in traditional ways of knowing, speaking, and experiencing the spiritual. Heritage is what we live; it is our understanding of our relatedness to our environment and each other.

Another document on the IHC Policy and Advocacy page is the Royal BC Museum and Haida Gwaii Museum Indigenous Repatriation Handbook (2019). The document begins with a message from the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture and the

Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation who state “We are guided in this work by our government’s commitment to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action”. The handbook responds to Indigenous communities’ requests to develop a resource to support them in their own journey. The result was this ground-breaking handbook which is the first repatriation guide in the world that was developed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people.

The creators envision that this handbook will continue to evolve and transform as newer practices, policies and processes are developed (2019:2). The document has a portion on ‘Organizing a Successful Repatriation’ which has sections that outline steps and considerations around preliminary research, building an organizational structure, developing a mandate, vision and guiding principles as well as setting timelines and budgets. Perhaps the most interesting, and in my opinion most important, section discusses Spiritual and emotional considerations. The document states, “it’s easy to get caught up in the logistics of the repatriation process, but it’s very important to take care of your spiritual and mental wellbeing as well” (2019:23).

The spiritual component is integral to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, yet spiritual considerations are rarely, if ever, acknowledged or addressed in non-Indigenous led policy directives. Indigenous peoples have been fighting for cultural recognition and the right to self-determination for generations. Although I have laid out a long history of contentious relations, it is important to stay optimistic about this endeavour. Political climates are changing on a large scale and we are seeing governments around the world willing to listen and work collaboratively with Indigenous groups.

The 2020 Indigenous Heritage gatherings, three in total, involved more than 40 Elders, cultural practitioners and thought leaders in the field of Indigenous Heritage (2020:6). One of the recommendations outlined in the document suggests that parks Canada review training practices for employees to address the TRC's Calls for Action concerning education about Canadian colonial legal history, UNDRIP, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Indigenous-Crown relations (2020:25). Although open for interpretation, I feel this recommendation has a lot of potential in terms of developing a heritage management policy that is designed around, and honors, Indigenous pedagogy, especially as it relates to the way cultural information is taught. Such a policy could ideally be adopted by cultural sites that employ interpretation on either of the local, provincial, federal and/or world stage.

Within Canada, there are 970 National Historical Sites, 171 of these are administered by Parks Canada. As well, there are a total of 20 UNESCO World Heritage Sites listed in Canada, 6 of these are located in the province of Alberta. The Alberta provincial Government boasts 359 places recognized as Provincial Historic Resources. I have had the privilege of working at two sites that have all three designations, Writing-on-Stone / Aisinia'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. These are only two of the many important Blackfoot named places which have spiritual significance to the Blackfoot people.

All of these cultural sites, which offer cultural interpretation, have heritage management policies that were created by non-First Nations people. This means that the cultural information is gathered, packaged and delivered from a colonial lens that does not accurately reflect how First Nations peoples come to know and understand themselves

and / or their culture. In order for Canada to accomplish true and meaningful reconciliation First Nations people must be given the opportunity to tell their cultural history from their perspective and speak their truths.

I refer to ‘truth’ as a plural since there is not one exclusive Indigenous and / or Blackfoot cultural perspective. The Blackfoot Confederacy consists of 4 separate tribes, three of which are located in Canada with one tribe situated south of the United States border in Montana. The tribes located in Canada are Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai. In the United States the tribe is called the Blackfeet but the Blackfoot people know them as Amskapii Piikani, meaning southern Piikani. Each of these tribes are further broken down into clan systems which consists of extended family. De la Cadena and Starn (2007:2) highlight that it is “equally evident that Indigenous peoples are highly heterogeneous in their views and agenda and if most talk about ‘diversity’ and Indigenous people concentrates on culture and language, the variety of their sometimes conflicting economic and political viewpoints prove just as pronounced”.

## **1.5 CONTEXT**

To complete my research objective, I will focus on the heritage management and education practices at two of the most popular Blackfoot sites in southern Alberta, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi. Research will focus on these areas since I have been fortunate enough to receive traditional cultural knowledge of these two sites from various Elders in the Blackfoot communities of Kainai and Piikani. I also have personal experience working at both of these sites as a previous Government of Alberta employee and understand how the heritage policies are executed.

Policy directives have a direct effect on how the Blackfoot culture is communicated to the general public. Heritage, together with education, can become the basis for the construction of meanings and learning (Susemihl 2013:71). I understand a First Nations, or more specifically a Niitsitapii, focused heritage education policy to be directly related to the following UNDRIP articles. Article 12 (1) which states Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. Article 14 (1), Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Article 15 (1), Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information. As well as Article 31 (1) which states, Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

The official implementation of the UNDRIP document, and especially the aforementioned articles, has a lot of potential in terms of affecting the heritage management and education practices at UNESCO designated sites. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump (HSI) was designated a National Historic Site in 1968, a Provincial Historic Resource in 1979, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981. Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi (WOS / A) became a Provincial Park in 1957, it was designated a Provincial Historic Resource in 1981 and a National Historical Site in 2005. During my employment with the park, I was part of the team that worked towards a successful UNESCO World Heritage Site designation in 2019. At both cultural sites, my work was referred to as interpretation and my assignment was to educate visitors about the history of the sites in the context of the Niitsitapii culture.

## **1.6 WRITING-ON-STONE / AISINAI'PI**

Researchers who have devoted their time to understanding the Blackfoot people and culture cannot deny or segregate the spiritual component of the cultural landscape that is Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi. The Blackfoot people call the hoodoo landforms matapiiksi, which means “people”, or “beings”. The southern horizon is dominated by the geological formations known as the Sweetgrass Hills in present day northern Montana. This is a mistranslation of the Blackfoot name for these formations which is Katoyis, meaning “Blood Clot” (a warrior / hero in Blackfoot oral traditions) or “Sweet Pine” (a plant used for traditional prayer and which grows in abundance on the hills).

Blackfoot Elders state that the landscape has always exuded a strong spiritual presence since time immemorial. This, in combination with the harsh landscape and environment, made Aisinai'pi a prominent place for Niitsitapii people seeking strength

and power from the spirit world. This would often happen in the form of visions quests, consulting with the rock art images, and performing other ceremonies on the landscape (Weasel Moccasin 2019). The ceremonial / spiritual connection the Blackfoot people had with Aisinai'pi was threatened and strained during the late 1800's with the creation and implementation of restrictive policies such as the Pass System.

WOS / A was established as a provincial park in 1955 at which time anyone was able to enter the park and walk up to the cliff face to inspect the rock art. Unfortunately, this led to the vandalism of the images found on the main rock art cliff face also known as DgOv-2. Unawareness and a lack of understanding of the importance of the site was identified as the true problem leading to the graffiti. WOS / A Parks Management decided to establish the archaeological preserve in order to restrict access to the cliff face and reduce graffiti. It was at this time, in 1975, that the park undertook an inventory of the rock art images and initiated the interpretation component (Keyser 1977:15). Again, the information that was provided was from a scientific archaeological emphasis with very little attention afforded to the cultural and spiritual importance of the site and the socio-cultural component. From a Blackfoot perspective, even though interpretation was provided there was still an incomprehension and a lack of understanding of the importance of the site on a spiritual level.

This spiritual disconnect is in part due to the fact that the first 'scientific' articles on Writing-on-Stone were written based on photographs of the site, rather than actual visits (Opp 2011:249). During the popular Rock Art Tours provided by the WOS / A Interpretive staff, non-Blackfoot interpreters focus on the archaeological research that has been done and the conclusions / hypothesis that have been put forth by past

archaeologists. Opp (2011:248) points out that early government publications stressed the ‘mystery’ of origins surrounding the rock art, reporting that amateur archaeologists had claimed that the inscriptions could even be Egyptian.

In order to address this spiritual disconnect, I began creating the Traditional Access Protocols while employed at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi. This document outlined the types of traditional ceremonies and practices that Blackfoot people may want to travel to WOS / A to practice. Besides having a description of the different ceremonies / activities, the document also included the importance and / or significance of the ceremonies / activities, possible and appropriate areas for the ceremonies / activities to take place, supplies and / or supports required for the ceremonies / activities to be successful, as well as any safety considerations and concerns and how to mitigate them (Weasel Moccasin 2019).

My approach in creating the Traditional Access Protocols was very much from that of an Indigenous perspective. I made it clear in the document that Blackfoot heritage is something that is dynamic and very much alive. Blackfoot heritage involves the practice of ceremony and the engagement of the various spirits in and around us. This is a stark contrast to the Euro-Canadian notion of ‘the-world-as-exhibition’ which involves the representation of reality as an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst: an observing gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition’s careful order (Mitchell 1989:223).

To the best of my knowledge, the Traditional Access Protocols document was the first of its kind yet it is an imperative component for every Heritage Management Plan in Federal and Provincial Park locations in Canada. In order for traditional practices to

continue, the traditional knowledge needs to be transferred to the next generation. The only way to ensure that this can happen is for government bodies / organizations to shift their understanding of heritage as something that is practiced and create space and opportunities for Elders to be present at all times to assist with the transfer of knowledge. Healing from the impact of colonization and genocide means strengthening our personal and cultural voice, thus we affirm who we are as First Nations people (Bastein 2004:30). Including and practicing ceremonial and traditional teachings into heritage education policies is an act of resiliency and reconciliation.

### **1.7 HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP**

The cultural site known to the world as the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump archaeological site DkPj-1 is known as Iistipah'skikikinikots Piskan to the Blackfoot people. The deepest cultural layer at this site occurs nearly 10 metres below the current surface and date to 5,800 B.P. (Brink 2008). The site itself consists of the jump, an associated campsite below, and the gathering basin with drive lanes (Reeves 1978). The hills, which extend a distance of 50 miles, are erosional remnants of a tertiary peneplain (Brink 2008; Reeves 1978). Communal hunting, aside from providing critical supplies of food, also served a great number of social purposes in Plain's culture (Brink 2008:9).

The very criteria for defining Head-Smashed-In as a heritage site was its archaeological significance (Opp 2011:255). This area has one of the deepest, oldest and best-preserved bison jump sites in North America (Brink 2008). Two archeologists who excavated the site in the 1980s, Jack Brink and Bob Dawe, created the program matrix to assist the HSI interpretive team with telling the history of the site. The program matrix is very scientific and puts more emphasis on the technical activities of planning, performing,

and processing the hunt. Heritage officials anticipated that “concerns would be raised over statements in the evolving ‘interpretive matrix’ which suggested that the Piika’ni were ‘relatively recent immigrants’ to the area” (Opp 2011:259). This is in direct conflict with the Blackfoot belief that the people were created from the soil of their territory and thus have always occupied this space on the planet.

The interpretive panels in the Interpretive Center mention the spiritual component of the site but, as Chew (2016:682) notes, the overall narrative of the HSIBJ interpretive center, is that “knowledge about the culture and cosmology of the Plains peoples is only truly accessible through archaeology”. In fact, the spiritual component is arguably one of the most important aspects of the entire buffalo jump process for the Niitsitapii people. A vision quest site is located south of the cliff, and yet it is not typically mentioned in the interpretation process. Also, rock art sites with identical imagery flank the north and south sides of the drive lanes and require a greater understanding of the site on a spiritual level. Despite Blackfoot Elders insistence otherwise, the rock art is not afforded much importance but it is noted that their locations suggest a relationship with the bison drive (Brink 2008:143).

Here we see another opposition, or contrast, between Niitsitapii understanding of heritage and Euro-Canadian understanding of heritage. Euro-Canadian understanding and interpretation of the site emphasises the economics of the hunt and discusses the activity in isolation; it is compartmentalised. For the Niitsitapii people truly understanding the site and interpreting it properly can only be achieved when the site is considered a total social fact and discussed in relation to other cultural sites. HSI must be discussed and interpreted in relation to the larger landscape, the many significant site activities within

the larger radius, not just specifically site oriented around the cliff. Place is fundamentally different than space, as it encapsulates space, time and experience (Amundsen-Meyer 2015:125).

I argue that First Nations people's ability to control the heritage management and education of their own cultures and histories is at the core of self-determination. Ownership and control are inevitably linked with education and empowerment since the owner determines what and how heritage is being protected and what stories are being told (Susemihl 2013:55). Current literature, through its focus on the victimization process and by using the notion of self-hate as a rationale for the deterioration and destruction of Aboriginal communities, is, in final analysis, blaming the victim instead of looking at the hate-filled acts of genocide (Bastien 2004:155). To avoid being locked in vicious circles of victimization First Nations peoples must be in charge of their own education policies and rewrite their own narrative.

## **1.8 METHODOLOGY**

I will be implementing the traditional Blackfoot values to help guide my research methods for this project. These values include aatsimoyikaan (spirituality), isspommaanitapiiysinni (being helpful to others), aoahkannaistokawa (everything comes in pairs; duality/balance), kimmapiipitsinni (kindness to others), kakoysin (be aware of your environment), ihkanaitapstsiwa (everything that is given to a person to do what they want with), aksistoiyipaitapiiysinni (being able to take on tasks independently), ihpipototsp (using the gifts you have been given to help others), innakotsiiyinii (respect for others), pommotsiiysinni (to transfer something to others), and Niitsitapiiysinni (to be Blackfoot).

In the 2003 article *A Meaningful Disturbance of the Earth*, Dowdall and Parrish outline Principles of Collaboration (108-111) which include inclusivity (where goals and methods of both Indigenous people and archaeologists are given equal attention), reciprocity (defined as accountability to each other over the long term), mutual respect (treating each other's work as having legitimate social value and in assisting each other in meeting respective goals), and finally, process and product (ensure that the final product reflects the views, intentions and interests of all participants and that the collaborative process is never circumvented for a deadline). These Principles of Collaboration will be at the core of my research methodology and will guide me through the process.

I feel that these Principles of Collaboration reflect my personal value system and will be second nature to adopt and implement largely due to my upbringing as a member of the Kainai Nation. The beadworking research paradigm developed by Prete (2019) mentioned earlier describes beadworking as an act of resistance, as an act of knowledge transmission and as an act of resiliency. I will be adopting this research paradigm that Prete (2019) has developed and will demonstrate how the concepts of resiliency, knowledge transmission, and resistance can be supported and encouraged through heritage management policies.

Following Prete's paradigm, knowledge transmission occurred when interviews were conducted that did not follow traditional rigid research formats. Instead, these "interviews" followed a more relaxed conversation style with participants. Participants included Elders from the Kainai and Piikani community who have been working with Head-Smashed-In and / or Writing-on-Stone / Aisni'ai'pi as cultural advisors. Interviews / conversations were also conducted to capture the experiences, perspectives and opinions

of past and present Blackfoot employees of each site. Participants captured an equal representation from each cultural site as well as each Blackfoot community (Kainai and Piikani).

Since my thesis is critical of the top-down process of implementing policy. I wanted to ensure that my methodology and research were not be following the same trajectory. Although the voices and opinions of Elders is very valuable, they could be interpreted as an elitist perspective since Elders hold knowledge that is not common within the community. Another aspect I am cognisant of is that I will be actively seeking out certain Elders I know to hold traditional knowledge and this could be interpreted as trying to alter, or influence, my findings. For this reason, I will be using surveys to gather the opinions of the general public, both Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot.

Whereas my aforementioned conversations will be collected from approximately 10 people and provide qualitative data, the survey, while having qualitative components, will largely provide a quantitative aspect from members of the community. The surveys were distributed either in person or through the software Qualtrics. In the spirit of Prete's paradigm resistance was practiced when recruitment of the survey participants occurred with COVID precautions put in place following all Provincial guidelines and restrictions. Some of the places the community was engaged and the survey distributed included the Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society (Lethbridge), the Piikani Travel Center (Brocket), Chief Shot Both Sides Building (Standoff), as well as personal and business contacts.

Children were only invited to take part in the survey if their parent/guardian was also present and gave verbal consent. The minimum age for children involvement was 10 years old as this is the age children in the Alberta curriculum begin to learn about

Indigenous / Blackfoot groups and often visit one, or both, of these cultural sites.

Participants for the survey were informed of the limited opportunity to withdraw from the study. Once their survey responses were submitted, they forfeited their ability to withdraw from the study. Since the surveys were anonymous, there was no way that I could be sure which responses belonged to a specific individual after submission.

Documents that I will be examining in relation to the interviews and surveys include site policies that directly address the heritage management, and education, objectives for each cultural site and will conduct a critical analysis of the power relations that are present within the documents. These will include, but are not limited to, Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi Heritage Management Plan, WOS / A Traditional Access Protocols, the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Programme Matrix and the Provincial Historic Resources Act. I am interested in documenting the main objective(s) of the documents, the narrative that is being supported by these documents, and the language that is being used when discussing Niitsitapii people, culture and customs.

Elders commonly stress the notion that all decisions and / or actions must take into consideration the next seven generations to come. In the spirit of this teaching, and following Prete's paradigm, resiliency will be represented by looking at how my research can impact future policy making in a positive way. Once I have compiled my findings, I will outline avenues for implementation of an Indigenous heritage management approach. The recommendations and information put forth will ensure that the heritage education policies are developed, and implemented, in a way that allows Prete's beadworking paradigm to showcase how heritage management policies can become an act of

resistance, an act of knowledge transmission and as an act of resiliency for First Nations peoples.

## **1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

This first chapter has laid out the objectives and methods of this thesis research and the questions that will be explored. Background information and a brief history of the two cultural sites has been provided as well as the justification for choosing to embark on this research. The following chapter will focus on the Niitsitapii culture and people pre-contact to situate the reader in a cultural context and provide a better understanding of the Niitsitapii world view. This chapter will also take an in-depth look at the Blackfoot history of WOS / A and HSI, including the oral traditions and histories that have been told to me and that are shared in the community. Readers will come to understand the cultural sites from a poomiikapii approach, a more holistic view of how the sites were understood and the various ways they were used by the Niitsitapii people. I use ‘holistic’ in the philosophical sense meaning the comprehension of the parts of knowledge are intimately connected and explicable only by reference to the whole.

The focus of Chapter 3 will take a temporal shift to the contact period. This chapter will highlight how the new interactions and relations with Euro-Canadian government, and the policies enforced by the government body, have affected Niitsitapii way of life. I will also provide a critical analysis of the heritage management policies at WOS / A and HSI and how these policies affected the way Niitsitapii came to interact with the land and how they used these cultural sites. The life-history of these sites will include and explore the usage shift from Blackfoot cultural and ceremonial sites to Government tourist attractions that generate revenue.

The contents of chapter 4 are a summation and analyzation of the interviews and survey results that were conduct through the summer of 2021 and into the Spring of 2022. Indigenous methods employed through this study include ceremony, relationships, and a Blackfoot beadworking paradigm. This section will outline and highlight the ways in which these methods were carried out during engagements. The conversations that were had capture the first-hand accounts of Blackfoot people who have visited these sites as well as the Blackfoot people who have worked at these sites. Five specific themes and areas of importance have been determined by the participants based off conversation content, some of these containing sub-themes. The chapter explores the shared perceptions of the management practices at these sites and their efficacy as it relates to Niitsitapii cultural values.

The final chapter, chapter 5, provides a reflection on the research that has been carried out and the lessons learned through the process. Reflecting on the ways in which relationships have been created and maintained, or not, lead to developing proposals for best practice that should be followed when cultural sites are developing heritage management and education policies. The policy making procedure is analyzed in order to identify key outcomes that would benefit from a collaborative process with Indigenous peoples that aligns with Indigenous heritage values, and explore what heritage sovereignty would look like in practice.

## CHAPTER 2: RE-RIGHTING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

This chapter focusses on the Niitsitapii oral traditions and accounts of history pre-contact, especially as it relates to Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. The oral traditions and histories of the landscape that have been told to me and that are shared in the community will be discussed and highlighted. These accounts will be compared and contrasted with Western sciences archaeological and historical accounts. Historically, traditional knowledge and western (or scientific) knowledge has been treated as if mutually exclusive or incompatible. Instead, this chapter will emphasize how these differing accounts are not only compatible but complimentary and can even offer a more holistic understanding of the past. This will be highlighted in this chapter by discussing the various ways the cultural sites of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi were used and valued by the Niitsitapii people.

Since Niitsitapii people (also referred to as the Blackfoot Confederacy) came into contact with the European population, the people, culture and customs have been interpreted from a colonial lens. These interpretations were largely influenced by colonial values and understandings and do not accurately reflect the true meaning and intent behind the Blackfoot people's actions. This remains problematic for the Niitsitapii people today as these historical views and understandings directly influence how the non-Indigenous population interacts with the Blackfoot communities in a contemporary context.

Racism is an extreme form of ignorance, ideally meaning that education, and expanding one's knowledge, can stymie the progression of prejudice. I would like to believe that educating all citizens on traditional Blackfoot values and worldviews will

promote healthier and more positive interactions between Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot people. The intention of this paper is to present Niitsitapii pedagogy in a way that broadens awareness and understanding of the Blackfoot communities' values. It is my hope that the information and pedagogical shift will be delivered in a way that is not only enjoyable but inviting, to you the reader, and inspires you to think of ways this information can impact and influence policy making.

Focussing on oral traditions shared by Elders from the Kainai and Piikani communities, as well as using the work of present-day Blackfoot scholars, I intend to assist with expanding and deepening your understandings of a Blackfoot worldview. By the end of the paper, you will have better knowledge of Niitsitapii spiritual understandings and the way that this permeates the Niitsitapii worldview. Of particular interest to myself is assisting you in understanding how Niitsitapii spiritual understandings and worldview directly inform the way in which the people care for and manage kitawahsinnooni (our territory).

This topic will be discussed in relation to two of the many places which have spiritual significance to the Blackfoot people: Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo Jump. There was, and still is, a value that Niitsitapii have placed on these sites which include spiritual value as well as a subsistence value (Manychief, personal communication, 2022). These sites will be the focal point of discussion as they are both involved in the southern Alberta tourism industry, and as such, both of these sites are marketed and advertised on the world stage. Having this level of prominence has resulted in each site being under different levels of government policy and expectations on managing the cultural heritage they promote.

Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi (WOS / A) became a Provincial Park in 1957, it was designated a Provincial Historic Resource in 1981 and a National Historic Site in 2005. In 2019, WOS / A received a successful UNESCO World Heritage Site designation under criterion iii, to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared. It was argued that the place is special and significant because of all the rock art found there. Niitsitapii maintain that the landscape is what is special and significant and that is why the rock art is located there. Elders state that the landscape has always exuded a strong spiritual presence since it came into being. This, in combination with the harsh landscape and environment, made Aisinai'pi a prominent place for Blackfoot people seeking strength and power from the spirit world. This would often happen in the form of vision quests, consulting with the rock art images, and performing other ceremonies on the landscape (Manychief, personal communication, 2022).

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump (HSI) was designated a National Historic Site in 1968, and a Provincial Historic Resource in 1979. In 1981, HSI became a UNESCO World Heritage Site under criterion vi, to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. This area has one of the deepest, oldest and best-preserved bison jump sites in North America (Brink 2008). Archaeologists describe the site itself as consisting of the jump, an associated campsite below, and the gathering basin with drive lanes (Reeves 1978). However, Blackfoot Elders stress that the spiritual component is arguably one of the most important aspects of the entire buffalo jump process for the Niitsitapii people. A vision quest site is located north of the cliff, as well as rock art sites,

with identical imagery, which flank the north and south sides of the drive lanes. Despite Blackfoot Elders insistence otherwise, the rock art is not afforded much importance but it is noted that “their locations suggest a relationship with the bison drive” (Brink 2008:143). I will argue that understanding this “relationship with the bison drive” requires a greater understanding of the site on a spiritual level.

## **2.1 THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE**

Niitsitapii society is rooted in and governed by their value system. These values include: aatsimoyikaan (spirituality), isspommaanitapiisinni (being helpful to others), aoahkannaistokawa (everything comes in pairs; duality/balance), kimmapiipitsinni (kindness to others), kakoysin (be aware of your environment), ihkanaitapstsiwa (everything that is given to a person to do what they want with), aksistoiyipaittapiisinni (being able to take on tasks independently), ihpipototsp (using the gifts you have been given to help others), innakotsiiyinii (respect for others), pommotsiiysinni (to transfer something to others), and Niitsitapiisinni (to be a 'real person'; or in essence, to practice this value system).

I would argue that aatsimoyikaan (spirituality) is a core value that has historically been given little to no attention or reverence from western culture. However, within Niitsitapii worldview “prayerful words and the relationships among them give a visual image of the constant movement of energy. Any and all movement of breath has influence. It is life’s source” (Bastien 2004:131). When we begin to think of, and understand, spirit and spirituality as another way of describing energy, it leads to a better understanding of Niitsitapii spiritual connection to land.

To begin the process of broadening ones understanding I believe it is important to start with the concept, or the notion, of time. Western society views time as a straight line, a forward progression that we all travel. An alternative view to this is thinking of time, and the movement of time, as that of a spiral or a coil. In essence this is exactly what is happening when we look out into the cosmos. When envisioning our travel around Naato'si (the Sun), the majority of people see the planets rotating around the sun on a flat plane, however, Naato'si is not stationary, it is also moving and travelling through space. Instead, envision that as the Sun moves and the planets rotate around it, the trail they leave behind is that of a spiral.

Naahsinooniks (our grandparents/ancestors) have always said our ceremonies and songs bring us closer to our ancestors. What they are saying is, because our culture and traditions have been practiced on this land for thousands of years, all of these experiences have been imprinted on this coil of time. "In aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time" (Little Bear 2000:77). When we conduct a ceremony today, sing our songs, speak our language, and visit our sacred cultural sites in essence we are collapsing that coil of time and allowing all these moments to touch, interact, and influence one another. This is also how 'spirit' can come to interact and influence the people.

When Niitsitapii speak about 'spirit', essentially, they are speaking about energy. Naahsinooniks (our grandparents/ancestors) were so in tune with this energy—with their spirituality—that they were able to tune into the different energy frequencies of

ksaahkomi (the earth) and interpret that knowledge. According to Little Bear (2000:78), within Aboriginal societies, and Blackfoot society specifically, “there is no animate/inanimate dichotomy. Everything is more or less animate”. What Little Bear is saying is that everything has spirit, everything has energy. In the Blackfoot language the closest word that comes to explain ‘energy’ literally translates into ‘breath of creator’ (Weasel Moccasin, personal communication, 2022). When Napi decided to create maatapiiksi (people) he gathered red clay and molded it into the shape of a human, then he breathed life into them. By giving them breath, Napi gave them energy, gave them life.

## **2.2 NIITSITAPII EARTH SCIENCE – AISINAI’PI**

In the traditional worldview, the Blackfoot people and kitawahsinnooni (our territory) did not experience four seasons. We have the cold months (October-April—seven months out of the year) and the warm months (May-September—five months out of the year). During the cold months, the amount of light during the day is decreased meaning a lot of the people’s time is spent in their tipis at night. It is during this time that the Elders would sit with the young people from camp and spend hours on end recounting the history of the people.

Mii iskohtsik (a long time ago), before the creation of maatapiiksi (people) this land was covered by water. Napi was floating along in the water and decided something needed to be done. He called out to all the animals, “Ispoomokiit! (Help me!)” Animals swam and flew to Napi’s aid seeing what it was they could help him with. Napi explained his intention to make land for the animals, and himself, to rest. He asked each of the animals to dive down into the water and bring up some earth from the bottom. Each of the animals tried—loon, beaver, muskrat—but all were unsuccessful. Finally, it was the otters

turn to dive down. Napi and the other animals waited for some sign of otter but there was nothing to be seen. After waiting for quite some time, Napi and the other animals feared otter had drowned. Just then they could see otters body rising to the surface and break through the water. Otter lay there motionless. Napi scooped otter out of the water and held him in his arms. As he did, he noticed that otter's hand was clenched shut. When Napi opened his hand, there was a clump of wet earth. Napi took this clump of earth and created the land.

For most non-Indigenous people this recollection of events can be described as 'folklore' or 'myth'. However, this event, in a very general sense, is also explained scientifically in the discipline of geology. The area of Blackfoot territory was in fact under water at one time, covered by what scholars refer to as the Bear's Paw Sea. Evidence of this can be seen today by those who spend time in the City of Lethbridge river bottom; one has to simply look to the tops of the coulee outcrops to see meters of sand deposited by said sea. This is also the process that allowed for the creation of the hoodoos and sandstone cliffs at WOS / A. Over millions of years of geological processes, the land rose up and the sea water drained out into the oceans.

Many of the Niitsitapii oral traditions explain the geological process that change the landscape of ksaahkomi (earth). Another example is the story of Kaatoyis (Blood Clot) which is not only the name of an individual but also the name of the geological features known today as the Sweetgrass Hills. This is actually a mistranslation of the Blackfoot name for these hills which sit in present day northern Montana and dominate the southern horizon if the Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi viewscape. The word Kaatoyis is a Blackfoot word that can encompass multiple meanings, it depends on the context the

speaker uses it in. Although Kaatoyis is the word to call a blood clot, it is also the word used to describe the plant Sweet Pine. Sweet Pine is used by specific members of the Blackfoot community to pray with; the pine needles are burned on a coal and the smoke is wafted around a person for spiritual protection. Sweet Pine, not sweetgrass, grows in abundance on the hills which is one reason for the Blackfoot name of Kaatoyis.

As mentioned, one of the many meanings of the term Kaatoyis is that of the name of a warrior who lived long ago. There was once an old couple whose son-in-law was a very wicked and abusive person to them. He treated them as slaves and kept them in starving conditions. One day, the son-in-law killed a buffalo and ordered the old man (his father-in-law) to butcher the carcass. The old man did so, knowing that he would get little to nothing for his efforts. As he was butchering the animal, he noticed it was a bison cow who was in the early stages of pregnancy. The old man took the blood clot from the womb and slipped it into his quiver bag without his son-in-law knowing. When the old man was finished with the task of butchering and allowed to return to his tipi, he gave the blood clot to his wife. He instructed her to boil it in some water and make a stew. When the old woman placed the blood clot into the boiling water, they heard a baby crying. They quickly realized it was coming from the blood clot and the old woman scooped it out of the water. The blood clot spoke to the old couple and informed them that his name was Kaatoyis. Kaatoyis instructed them to wrap him up like an infant and tie him to the first pole south of the tipi door; they were instructed to sing a song, then untie him and repeat the process all the way around to the last pole north of the entrance. As the old couple underwent this process, Kaatoyis grew each time he was tied to a new pole; he

was transformed from an infant into a grown man by the time he was untied from the last pole.

Kaatoyis proceeded to rid the old couple of their wicked son-in-law and vowed to travel niisitapiwahsinnooni (original peoples territory / Blackfoot territory) and rid the land of bad influence. It is during one of Kaatoyis' epic battles that he is mortally wounded and begins to walk to the south west to his resting place. As he is travelling that direction, some of his blood drops and becomes the land features Kaatoyis, also known as the Sweetgrass Hills, south of Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi. As mentioned before, these features dominate the southern horizon of the Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi viewscape so one might think that these are mountains, however, these are volcanic intrusions.

Millions of years ago there was a fissure, a crack, in the earths crust allowing magma from earths core to travel towards the surface. The magma did not break through the surface, instead the magma pooled up just below and pushed the earth upwards; think of the same process as the formation of a blister on your foot. The magma was trapped so it cooled and began to solidify. Over time, the top layer of sandstone eroded away exposing the much harder, more weather resistant, volcanic rock features that we see today. What I find especially interesting about understanding the geological processes involved, is that if we think of magma as the blood of ksaahkomi (the earth), this process describes the clotting of that blood; this feature IS Kaatoyis; it IS a blood clot.

Another distinctive geological feature of the Aisinai'pi landscape is that of the hoodoo formations that reside in the river bottom. These features are referred to as maatapiiksi (the people/the beings) by the Blackfoot people. The story of how these features came into being begins with the people camping long ago. One night, they saw a

star streak across the sky. The people ask the Elders in the camp what the event meant for the people. After consulting amongst themselves it was decided that what the people had seen was a bad spirit entering the territory. They were told the spirits name was Paahsimasiina (fake / false man) and everyone needed to steer clear of him. It was some days later that the children were playing away from camp when they noticed a person approaching. The children ran back to the camp sounding the alarm: “Someone is coming! Someone is coming!” The people were on alert and expecting someone to enter the camp, but when the person introduced themselves as Paahsimasiina the people were especially cautious. The people had tried their best to convince the bad spirit to leave without making him feel insulted. Paahsimasiina decided that he liked the people and he was going to stay with them for awhile. After some time, Paahsimasiina started to teach the people bad habits. What was especially concerning to the Elders was that young parents were not taking proper care of their children; in essence, the children were being neglected. These children became unruly and started causing problems in the community. Finally, the Elders told the people that they needed to revert to the traditional value system and practice Niitsitapii parenting techniques. Those who refused to listen to the Elders were forced to leave the community. They travelled to the east and were never heard of again. It is said that those people were turned into the hoodoo formations as their punishment, which is why they are referred to as maatapiiksi (the people/the beings).

Although this oral tradition has been told for thousands of years, I can see its relevance today. The bad spirit Paahsimasiina can easily be thought of as alcohol, or drugs such as opioids, entering into the community and affecting the people in a negative way. Those of our people who are lost to addictions—following Paahsimasiina’s bad

teachings—have neglected their children who in turn have grown to be unruly and cause issues in the community, or have been taken into the foster care system and disconnected from family and culture. This is why it is important for Niitsitapii to visit these sacred cultural sites and continue to tell these stories; our people can continue to gather lessons from these recollections. The story and lesson become even more impactful when being told amongst the very landscape it focusses on. Land-based cultural transmission has always been at the core of Niitsitapii land management and education practices. It is for this reason that access to the site for Niitsitapii people is of utmost importance for these oral traditions, and traditional practices, to continue.

### **2.3 NIITISTAPII EARTH SCIENCE – PISKAAN**

Mii iskohtsik (a long time ago), our people were very pitiful. The people did not know how to hunt the buffalo at this time so they were struggling with having enough to eat and being able to protect themselves from the elements. Maakoyii (the wolf) took pity on the people and vowed to help them survive. The people studied maakoyii and learned how to use iiniiksi (bisons) survival instincts to manipulate the movement of the herds. They watched the way in which maakoyiiksi (the wolves) worked together as a pack and circled the animals. This experience influenced the way the people went on to hunt iinii (bison) and the techniques they used for the piskaan (buffalo jump). Once the people were able to hone these hunting techniques, they were able to not only get enough food for all the people, they were able to use the iiniiksi (bisons) to make their clothes, tools, and homes. In order to honor what maakoyii (the wolf) had done for the people, Niitsitapii vowed to never eat an animal that had claws; they would only consume animals with hooves.

The people were now able to sustain themselves and provide a better standard of living than they had before. Just like maakoyii (the wolf), the people understood how important it was to work together as a group, as a community. This meant that during the hunting process every member of society had a job, or a task, to complete—men, women, children and Elders. The buffalo runners consisted of a few individuals from camp; one person, usually a young boy, wears a calf hide and crawls amongst the iinii (bison), another two-three people, usually adults, would be wearing wolf hides and would be crawling behind the bison herd. Together they drive them in the direction of the cliff.

The people would have spent days before the actual hunt preparing the drive lanes and creating what archaeologists refer to as cairns: a pile of rocks with some brush placed in the center. These features are referred to as aakiiksi (women) in the Blackfoot language. Using this word tells me that this is where the women would have been situated during the process. It is often that the hunting process is thought of, and discussed, by present-day archaeologists / anthropologists as a man's duty; women and children have become invisible in this story when it is not told by Niitsitapii.

There is still a widespread imbalance in the representation of men and women both in the archaeological past as well as the profession (Hamilton et al. 2007). Feminist theory has been considered a necessary, and unavoidable, progression in archaeology, however, it is not without its critics. The critiques to feminism I will focus on are voiced from indigenous women (Suzack et al. 2010). Indigenous activists have argued that the first wave of feminism was largely made up of white middle-class women resulting in a colonial feminism; minority groups did not feel accurately represented by this form of pedagogy. From a Niitsitapii standpoint, I would argue that Indigenous women are not

focused on elevating their own status in society, rather Indigenous women are concerned about elevating all members of their community: women, men, and children. This totality of inclusion should be applied to the profession of archaeology. Doing so would assist researchers with developing a better understanding of the processes and structures involved in Niitsitapii society.

Once all of the animals had made it over the cliff and it was made certain they were all dead all of the people in the community would come together and begin the frenzy of butchering and processing all of the animals. The people would have 2 days tops before the meat started to spoil. It is also important to remember that the people are not the only predators on the plains. There are other animals that would be more than happy to capitalize on the hunt, such as grizzly bears, wolves, coyotes, as well as various birds and raptors.

Immediately the iinii (bison) would be gutted and their organs feasted on, especially those high in nutrients such as kidney and liver. Once the carcass had been hollowed out it was brought to an area where the hide was removed from the animal. From there, the hide was brought to a group of people who began scraping the underside and removing any remaining tissue. Again, these jobs would have been done by men and women of all ages as well as children, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Once the hide is removed from the animal the carcass is cut into quarter sections and brought to the butchering area. This is where the people began separating the meat away from the bone and cutting it into long thin strips. These strips were placed onto racks and left to dry out in the sun and wind. Again, the people have to be vigilant of animals wanting to share in the spoils of the hunt. Young boys around the ages of 3-6

years would already have their own bow and arrow sets and would be stationed at the meat drying racks. They would be given the responsibility of chasing away birds and any other little animals who get too close to the food, in doing so, they are exhibiting the value of aksistoiyipaittapiisinni (being able to take on tasks independently). Every member had a role to play because Niitsitapii societal structure was very disciplined and revolved around the value system.

Wilfred Yellow Wings (personal communication, 2022), an Elder from the Piikanii community, stressed the ceremonial importance of conducting a hunt. Wilfred made several references to the vision quest site that is located just north of the piskaan (buffalo jump). It was suggested that before a hunt, an individual would take their place on the hill and sit for four days and nights without food and water. The intention of this process is for the individual to take on this suffering for the betterment of the people; this is done by denying oneself of the basic human needs—food, water, shelter. At the end of the four days and nights the individual has situated themselves where they have one foot here in the physical world and the other foot in the spirit world. This individual will receive ‘gifts’ from a spirit helper who will always be available for the individual to call on from that day forth.

Another important ceremony that is required to take place before anything with the hunt is undertaken is that of the iiniskim (buffalo stone). This ceremony is integral to the hunting process as the ceremony calls the spirit of iinii (bison) to the people. Mii iskohtsik (a long time ago), iinii (bison) had left and the people began to really suffer. A woman from one of the camps went down to the river to collect firewood one day and was contemplating the situation of the people. The woman began praying and asking for

pity. Suddenly, the woman realized she could hear singing, it was very faint but there was no mistaking it was singing. The woman began walking around trying to find the source of the song. Finally, the woman found a rock that was in the shape of iinii (a bison) and she picked it up. When she did, the rock began to talk to her. It told her that it heard her prayers and was taking pity on her and the people. The woman was told to take the iiniskim back to the camp and was given instruction on how to perform a ceremony. The people were told that that night a bison bull would walk into the camp but people were not allowed to kill it. If the people were able to stay in their tipis and leave the bull alone, they would be awarded with an abundance of iinii. The woman relayed the instructions to the people and they all agreed to follow the direction they were given. The woman performed the ceremony just as the iiniskim had taught her to and just like it said, that night a huge bison bull walked into the center of the camp. The people were extremely hungry and had not seen a bison in a very long time. Although it was difficult, the people kept their word and stayed in their tipis allowing the bison bull to walk away from the camp with his life. The next day, just as they were promised a huge bison herd was near the camp and the people were able to acquire enough food for themselves to survive. Since that day, every buffalo hunt had begun with this ceremony; the ceremony in which the spirit of the buffalo was summoned to the people.

## **2.4 NIITSITAPII CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT**

Niitsitapii heritage is something that is dynamic and very much alive; it involves the practice of ceremony and the engagement of the various spirits in and around us. This is a stark contrast to the Euro-Canadian notion of ‘the-world-as-exhibition’ which involves the representation of a cultural reality as an exhibit set up for an observer in its

midst: an observing gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition's careful order (Mitchell 1989:223). This perspective and the act of placing literal barriers around culture and cultural items is prevalent in Eurocentric, non-Indigenous, heritage management practices. I would argue that traditionally, archaeology as a profession has also created barriers for people to access the past. Rappaport (1998:1) highlights the way in which Western historiography has 'severed the Indians from their past' and in the process 'thus justifies the European invasion'. Employing this type of epistemology has undoubtedly affected the ways in which archaeology is practiced.

In archaeology there is a focus and an emphasis on vertical provenance. This is often at the expense of connecting sites on a horizontal plane. This is the case for HSI which boasts having one of the deepest archaeological records. At one point, excavations reached a depth of 10 meters just below the cliff site. Although this is an impressive depth, it does very little in terms of connecting the site, and each stratigraphical layer, with surrounding cultural / sacred sites. There is more emphasis placed on vertical connection (excavating into the ground) and not as much emphasis on horizontal connections (how does site use relate to surrounding sites).

What I personally find of more interest is learning the stories of the land and the ways in which our land marks, cultural sites, and sacred sites connect with each other. The Napi stories are a perfect example of how oral traditions are used to map the landscape and link significant cultural landforms. I recall growing up and hearing the Napi stories as short 10-15 minute tales. It was not until I was older that I learned it was one long, almost seemingly endless, story. Napi and the Gophers leads into Napi and the

Bobcat. The same can be said for the tales of Katoyis; he travelled the land ridding it of bad spirits and entities until he laid at his final resting place.

Determining the use of a site on a vertical axis and emphasizing time and occupation is interesting but ultimately of little importance to Blackfoot people; temporal information has historically been used against our people's core belief that we have always been here. Archaeological sites, and the interpretation of those sites, has always had the narrative spun in a way that supports migrations theories. This is seen at one of the interpretive panels at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump which claims the 'Blackfoot people migrated into this area' (Figure 1). Although Blackfoot oral tradition assert that we have always occupied this land, archaeologists are not comfortable ascribing us our own heritage. The history recited usually ignores not only the contribution of Niitsitapiiaakiiksi (Niitsitapii women) but Niitsitapiipookaiksi (Niitsitapii children) as well.

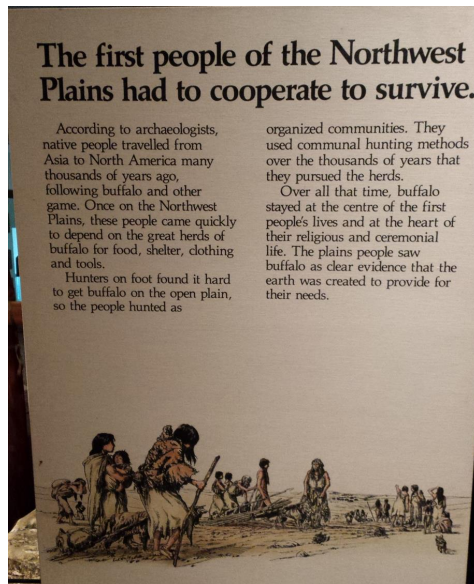


Figure 1: Interpretive Panel at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump  
Interpretive Center

Although Elders retain knowledge of the land and can explain land use through oral traditions, there are still some archaeologists who feel that because they attained a degree, they are the expert and should have final say in what history is written down. As a Niitsitapii archaeologist, I have always been frustrated by a double standard that exists in the profession. Oral traditions and histories are not treated with the same weight as archaeological interpretations and theories. Examples of this can be found in the HSI programme matrix, which will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. The programme matrix states the first conclusive evidence of the use of HSI is dated to 5,700 years ago and makes mention that “it is impossible to identify the ethnic affiliation of the hunters” (Alberta Culture 1985:13).

None of the Blackfoot stories or knowledge shared with researchers was added to the programme matrix document. These were not seen to hold any credible weight when it came to educating the public about the use of the site. Here is the crux of the double standard mentioned above, one of the constraints acknowledged in the programme matrix is identified as “studies required to provide data or requires the acceptance of relevant theories and assumptions” (Alberta Culture 1985:8).

Although not all scientific theories shared in the interpretive programme could not be proven without a doubt, it was still seen as more credible than the Niitsitapii oral traditions and histories that aligned with scientific knowledge. By ignoring the traditional knowledge shared by Blackfoot Elders, there is a total disregard for the spiritual components of the site which is information that cannot be ‘excavated’ using western methodologies that focus on tangible items. The following chapter will discuss how these

actions of writing history, and whose voice is represented in history, are related to power imbalances between Euro-Canadian policies and Niitsitapiisinni (Our way of life).

## **2.5 TEMPUS NULLIUS**

Historically, Indigenous peoples' oral traditions and histories regarding landscapes and geology, have not been heavily regarded. Yellowhorn (2002) states that archaeologists reiterate early explorers' claim of Terra Nullius and see in ancient America a chaotic vestige of an undiscovered time they call the archaeological record. "They conceptualize it as if it were tempus nullius, the time of no one, or more accurately, unclaimed by anyone" (Yellowhorn 2002: 215). Many archaeologists would caution about making direct links between current First Nations groups, such as the Blackfoot, and groups in the past, such as those who used the Head-Smashed-In buffalo jump (HSI) 5,800 B.P. However, I feel quite confident in making this claim due to the teachings of Blackfoot Elders which Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn has incorporated into his Ph.D. dissertation.

Yellowhorn discusses a Blackfoot oral legend called the Miohpookoiksi, Lost Children, which focuses on a group of young boys who became the Pleiades constellation. According to Yellowhorn's research the appearance of the group of stars in the sky signaled the beginning of the bison hunting season. The story begins with a group of Blackfoot who are preparing for the first big hunt of the spring season. The winter was especially hard on the people and many of their clothes were worn and tattered. A group of boys began discussing their desire for new clothes made of calf hide. Calf skin is especially supple and is highly sought after for children's clothes. To ensure their chances

of acquiring the new clothes the boys decided that they would show the adults how hard they were willing to work for them.

Their people came together and were successful in herding a group of bison over a cliff. The boys began to work hard and diligently among the adults processing the animals and preparing the meat. The number of bison that was acquired was less than what the people had expected. The adults decided that clothing the youngest children in the group, the infants and toddlers, would be their priority. The few calf skins they had were sewn into clothing for the young ones. Once the group of boys realized they were not going to get the new clothes they worked so hard for they were very upset.

They got together to discuss how they would exact their revenge on the community for failing them. One of the boys, known to have strong powers for his age, suggested they leave their parents and live among Nato'si (the Sun) and Ko'ko'mii'kiisom (the Moon). The rest of the boys agreed to this idea and the group ascended on their journey. Once they entered into the sky world, they met Ko'ko'mii'kiisom whose maternal instincts caused her to pity the boys.

The boys told her of how hard they worked and the lack of recognition they got from their parents and the rest of the adults in their group. They asked her to help them make their parents realize the mistake they had made. She brought their request to Nato'si who decided that he would shine extra bright and bring a heat wave that would drink up all the water on Ksaahkomi (earth). This heat wave lasted for some time and the people suffered, but they were not the only ones.

The dogs who lived with the people also began to suffer from the lack of water everywhere. The dogs came together and decided that they needed to plea to Ko'ko'mii'kiisom to have mercy on their pups who did not deserve to suffer because of the decisions of humans. The dogs howled at the moon until she spoke to her husband. Together they decided that the humans had suffered enough and the drought would end. The boys decided that they would continue living among the sky where they could be a Constant memory to their people.

During the fall/winter season the Miohpokoiksi, Lost Children, appear in the sky. However, once spring comes to the prairies, when the bison begin calving, the Miohpokoiksi leave the sky just as they left the people all that time ago. Yellowhorn believes that it was the appearance of the Pleiades constellation, Miohpokoiksi to the Blackfoot people, which signalled the beginning of the fall hunting season. Once this signal could be seen in the sky the dispersed groups of Blackfoot would come together in great numbers to successfully perform a hunt using a buffalo jump.

Using archaeoastronomy Yellowhorn was able to determine that the appearance of the Pleiades constellation coincides with the use of bison jumps on the northwestern Plains. Yellowhorn's research is the perfect example of how listening to oral traditions can enrich our understanding of the archaeological record. Not only does this account provide a great example of the holistic relationships that exist in the Blackfoot worlds — relationships transcend earthly boundaries and connect our people to the celestial bodies as well — his account is also important since it focusses on and highlights an important aspect missing in euro-Canadian practices of heritage management, children!

## 2.6 ARCHAEOLOGY OF BLACKFOOT CHILDREN

If a study of Siksikaipookaiksi (Blackfoot children) archaeological assemblage is to be accomplished archaeologists must broaden their perspective on what may constitute as a child related artifact. A strong case for child related artifacts were found at the Head-Smashed-In archaeological site (DkPj-1). I am extremely grateful that my employment experience allowed me to have the opportunity of meeting and visiting various Elders from the Piikani and Kainai nations. All of whom helped me to develop a deeper and more intimate understanding of the past activities that took place on the landscape.

The deepest cultural layer at this site occurs nearly 10 metres below the current surface and date to 5,800 B.P. (Brink 2008). The bison jump is argued to be the first of its kind and has the longest continued use. Other pre-contact sites in the vicinity include tipi rings, buried camps, rock alignments, cairns, eagle trapping pits, vision-quest structures, pictographs, and burials (Reeves 1978:153).

The site itself consists of the jump, an associated campsite below, and the gathering basin with drive lanes (Reeves 1978). The site has always been known to the Niitsitapii people, the knowledge of its history surviving in their oral traditions. It became known to European people as they started to first settle in the area around 1874 (Reeves 1978). The hills, which extend a distance of 50 miles, are erosional remnants of a tertiary peneplain (Brink 2008; Reeves 1978). They are composed of nonmarine shales, siltstones, and sandstone and rise to a level of some 2,000 feet. According to Brian Reeves (1978), the campsite area is situated on a flat, glacial bench, approximately 60 feet below the kill area. Campsite debris extends over a distance of some 3,200 feet by up to 1000 feet in

width (Reeves 1978:154). Although campsite debris varies considerably in depth and concentration, it is generally thickest near the kill.

Communal hunting, aside from providing critical supplies of food, also served a great number of social purposes in Plains culture (Brink 2008:9). The main purpose I will be focusing on is the socialization of the children in the community who would be expected to contribute to and participate in the processing activities. Child participation in processing animals was expressed in the oral tradition of the Lost Children and is also evident in the HSI lithic assemblage which includes projectiles, an arrow straightener, an end scraper, and a grinding tool. A pot sherd found at the site will also be discussed. Bob Dawe (1997:303) describes the sites lithic assemblage as containing “a component of relatively poorly made, often very small, and not readily classifiable specimens”.

## **2.7 POOKAIKSI LITHIC ASSEMBLAGE**

The assortment of projectiles excavated from the campsite / processing area show obvious signs of use wear. A select few can be seen in Figure 2. In his article *Tiny Arrowheads: Toys in the Toolkit*, Dawe (1997) evaluates workmanship and neck widths as means for distinguishing toys from adult arrowheads. According to his studies the neck width of the miniature projectiles is on average 5mm smaller than adult projectiles. A miniature arrow-shaft straightener (Figure 3) was also found at the site, an important yet often overlooked piece of the whole assemblage. For Dawe it is quite obvious that these specimens were toys used and possibly made by children.



Figure 2: Miniature Projectiles



Figure 3: Miniature Shaft Straightener

Many scholars attribute the size of the projectile points to a ritualistic use since the small and poorly made projectile points have a questionable functional utility in an adult hunting context (Dawe 1997:305). However, in the context of a child being socialized into a functioning member of society these projectiles served as an important and valuable teaching tool. Childhood is the training ground, the time when skills and belief systems are learned, personality formed, and attitudes and values inculcated (Kamp 2001:2).

Researchers, much like the early explorers, have marvelled at the ability of Plains tribes to use cliffs to procure huge amounts of bison at any given time; it was considered average to procure one hundred bison in a single event (Brink 2008:3). This is not a skill that is magically bestowed upon an individual once they reach a certain age. Rather, the skill to hunt and utilize the environment is something that is taught and honed over time (Manychief 2015, personal communication). It is these cultural practices and environmental factors that play a role in the definition of social identities (Ruttle 2010).

From a young age, males were given a bow and arrow set to begin familiarizing them with the tool (Manychief 2015, personal communication; Weasel Moccasin 2015, personal communication). Children who possess this type of toy assemblage are encouraged to play games intended to improve their accuracy. One game consisted of a hoop made from a willow branch that would be rolled in front of the players. As the hoop moves in front of the child, they will attempt to pierce the hoop with their weapon. The circumference of the circle will decrease as the skill increases. Butterflies were also used as target practice because their erratic movements are similar to the evasive movements of an enemy in battle. A Lakota elder, interviewed in the 1930's, stated that by "the age of

ten or eleven I had a six-shooter and a quiver full of arrows to defend my nation” (Wilson 1998:277).

The use of a buffalo jump and the practice of hunting is considered an androcentric activity despite the fact that many descendent and professional communities refer to the activity as a communal event. This means that all members of the community assisted with the necessary preparations. Men, women, children and Elders all had their own duties to carry out to ensure the success of the hunt. Elders and children would have watched the stampeding animals approach the cliff from the safety of the camp while the men and women worked the drive lanes above. Once the animals had all been successfully killed, the Elders and children would meet up with the men and women below the cliff and all would begin the butchering and processing.

The people would work hard to cut the meat into long thin strips that could be dried for more efficient storage. In order to dry the meat, the people would hang the strips on racks to be dehydrated by a combination of the sun and wind, and sometimes smoked by a near-by fire as well. As mentioned before, the people would not have been the only predators on the land at the time. Wolves, coyotes, bears, and cougars would have frequented the area and are often still spotted visiting HSI today. It is important to remember that birds would have also been competing for the spoils of the hunt including, but not limited to, eagles, various species of hawks, magpies, crows, and ravens. Young boys would have been stationed at these drying racks and had the important job of using their bows and arrows to chase away any animals trying to steal the meat that was intended to help the people get through the harsh, long winter.

Due to Western societies androcentric nature, mainstream archaeology views projectiles and the practice of knapping as male activities. Although young boys' toys are typically made by an older male relative (be it a cousin, uncle, father, or grandfather) it is not unlikely that a female could also be an experienced knapper. Among the Blackfoot people, gender roles existed but they were not strictly enforced. If a young girl did not get enjoyment from playing with dolls but would rather shoot arrows with her male kin, she would be taught knapping and accuracy alongside her male counterparts (Manychief 2015, personal communication).

It seems plausible that the practice of women knapping may have been more common than previously believed. End-scrapers are used for the processing of hides which, ethnographic evidence has taught us, is generally work carried out by women. Due to their work experience these women should have, at the very least, basic knowledge of appropriate raw materials and tool sharpening. The Blackfoot have a term *ninnamosskitsipahp*, which roughly translates to “manly-hearted-woman”. These women exert their independence and do not shy away from tasks that may otherwise be considered male duties. For these reasons it is logical to assume that Blackfoot females would have some knowledge of knapping lithics.

A miniature end scraper (Figure 4) was found during excavations at the Head-Smashed-In archaeological site. Admittedly, an end scraper measuring 1cm x 1cm would be very small even in the hands of a child. Brookshaw (2009) points out that miniature objects, such as this lithic, are sometimes labelled ‘ritual’ simply because they have no obvious use. However, this end scraper tested positive for signs of use wear. This causes one to conclude that the end scraper found at DkPj-1 was made as an accessory to a doll

much like the countless accessories associated with the Barbie doll. This evokes the image of a young girl playing with her doll and manipulating its actions to mimic adult women who are processing hides. This is not only an example of the child practicing aksistoiyipaittapiisinni (being able to take on tasks independently), but also an example of the adult females practicing pommotsiisinni (to transfer something to others).

Evidence suggests that scraping hides was not the only processing action being mimicked and/or performed by young girls. A grinder measuring approximately 5cm (Figure 5), the perfect size to be held in a child's hand, was found among the Head-Smashed-In assemblage. This artifact would have been used for the making of mookaakin (pemmican) which is a mixture of dried bison meat, grease, and saskatoon berries. Ethnographic work done by Beverly Hungry Wolf (1980: 200) supports the idea that these miniature items were made for children: "When Grandmothers were little girls their toys and play things were miniature replicas of the things their moms worked with – small tipis and camping outfits, dolls and little cradleboards, and miniature tools for tanning and cooking food".



Figure 4: Miniature End Scraper



Figure 5: Miniature Grinder

## **2.8 KID KNAPPING**

Earlier, I discussed the androcentric attitude associated with the practice of knapping. Now I wish to draw attention to the adultcentrism towards this same practice. Games and playing can be understood as cultural practices that both reflect the values and achievements of culture and provide opportunities for children to practice and acquire culturally valued attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge (Guberman et al 1998). Children's knowledge and know-how is a product of their own understanding, as well as an interaction in the social life (Hogberg 2008:127). With this understanding, it would stand to reason that children who were immersed in a culture that readily made use of stone tools would mimic adult actions of knapping as a form of play.

In the article *Playing with Flint: Tracing a Child's Imitation of Adult Work in a Lithic Assemblage*, Anders Hogberg (2008) uses a replication study to identify a child's play area in a Scandinavian Neolithic axe production site. Hogberg (2008:116) reasoned that in order to discover a child's playful imitation of adult work archaeologically he must look for it occurring together with adult work.

To help in determining what the product of a child's flint knapping may look like Mikkel Sorensen conducted an experiment (Sternke and Sorensen 2007). Sorensen, an archaeologist who specializes in lithic technology, gave knapping demonstrations to a 6-year-old boy for a week. During this time Sorensen did not instruct the boy, the boy simply observed and imitated Sorensen's work. The result of this small behavioral replication study shows that the boy in his knapping was able to imitate form and shape, but not the technology (Sternke and Sorensen 2007).

Using flake analysis, raw material utilization, and site distribution analysis Hogberg determined there were two different productions at a knapping area in South Sweden. One raw material present at the site was a high-quality flint and the other was a low-quality morainic flint which often exhibits cracks, fissures and irregularities (Hogberg 2008:123). Flakes from the high-quality flint were concentrated in one area while flakes from the low-quality flint were scattered indicating that the person who knapped these flakes had been moving around (Hogberg 2008:124). A similar study regarding apprentice flint knapping was carried out by Grimm (2000). They also determined that novice knappers exhibit limited control, do not have access to good quality raw materials and tend to work in locations that are peripheral with respect to adult work spaces (Grimm 2000:54).

Fitting together the flakes left behind allowed Hogberg to produce a reconstructed history of the lithic. Hogberg's interpretation of what took place at the site is that an adult was knapping an axe while a child watched and, in their knapping, imitated but did not copy the adult's work (2008:126). This is identical to the findings by Sorensen and also seems to be a plausible explanation for some of the miniature projectiles found at Head-Smashed-In. In regards to knapping sites, future archaeological excavations at HSI could benefit greatly from applying *chaine operative*, as a methodological tool. *Chaine operative* involves analyzing the social acts and technical processes involved in the step-by-step production of a tool or item.

The last artifact associated with the Head-Smashed-In archaeological site that will be discussed is a pot sherd which is decorated in a child-like manner (Figure 6). When thinking of Plains archaeology, pottery usually does not immediately come to mind. However, research on Plains pottery has been taking place since the mid 1900's (Ewers 1945; Kehoe 1959; Metcalf 1959; Neuman 1963). Analysis on the rim sherd has determined that it has come from a pinch pot, formed by pinching clay into shape. The sherd was thin sectioned in order to study the mineralogy and although the source of the clay could not be determined the analysis did detect a relatively high amount of temper derived from ground up granite-gneiss. This is consistent with Ethridge wear which has been attributed as a Blackfoot style (Kehoe 1959; Macdonald 2014).



Figure 6: Miniature Pot Sherd

The sherd is the only “juvenile” vessel found at the Head-Smashed-In site. This was the solitary ceramic found in cultural feature #6 which was comprised of a concentration of fire broken rock and bison bone. The feature was exposed by sod stripping during the construction of the access road connecting the overflow parking lot to the main parking lot. Cultural feature #6 was not dated so the age of the artifact is unknown. However, the feature matrix was limited to the top 20 cm of the surface of the campsite giving an estimation of at least several hundred years.

The miniature lithic evidence found at HSI proves that children were productive members not just within a household but within the larger community. Written sources also describe children participating in European economics. The Macleod Gazette, Alberta’s longest running newspaper, has an entry for August 24, 1883 stating that an Indian girl trapped 83 rabbits and sold them for 13 cents each (\$10.79 total) and with the money earned she bought her father a \$10 overcoat. The concept of children processing food, making handicrafts, and participating in trade is not a phenomenon of the past but continues today in many cultures all over the world. Bugarin (2006) states that the biases

that disregard ethnographically documented contributions of children result in a dismissal of questions and interpretations that highlight child activity in the past.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

Historically, Niitsitapii culture has been misinterpreted and poorly understood by western society despite having a relationship for approximately 250 years. This paper presents Niitsitapii pedagogy in the hopes of broadening awareness and understanding of the Blackfoot value system. One of the most important values for the Blackfoot people is that of spirituality. Using information gathered by Elders in the Blackfoot communities, as well as scholarly work from Blackfoot individuals, I have highlighted the Niitsitapii worldview that all things are permeated with spirit. Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump were two of many sacred cultural sites that were used as examples to help broaden your understanding of how Niitsitapii come to understand and interpret the landscape. Historically, western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge has been treated as if mutually exclusive. It was my intention to have this paper highlight quite the opposite: this knowledge is complimentary and supportive of one another.

These two sites were also used to show how the Niitsitapii worldview directly affects the way in which the people use, interact, and relate to ksaahkomi (earth). A very important aspect of the way in which the people interact and relate to the landscape is that of energy. If energy permeates all things on this planet, then all things have spirit. This spiritual relationship is not currently supported under existing colonial policy as it denies Niitsitapii people the ability to continue traditional use practices and restricts their ability to be culturally self-sustaining.

From a Niitsitapii perspective, the importance of both HSI and WOS / A is directly related to their connection to spiritual / ceremonial activities. For future Niitsitapii generations to maintain, and sustain, spiritual connections to these places it is imperative that the educational and management policies reflect and honor the spiritual connections and activities associated with these sites.

Every Heritage Management Plan in Federal and Provincial Park locations in Canada needs to have policies that advocate for traditional practices to continue. The traditional knowledge needs to be transferred to the next generation and the only way to ensure that this can happen is for government bodies / organizations to shift their understanding of heritage as something that is practiced and create space and opportunities for Elders to be present at all times to assist with the transfer of knowledge. As Cornthassel (2008) highlighted, including and practicing ceremonial and traditional teachings into heritage management and education policies is sustainable self-determination, but not only that, it is an act of resiliency. Healing from the impact of colonization and genocide means strengthening our personal and cultural voice, thus we affirm who we are as First Nations people (Bastien 2004:30).

Both Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump have been host to ceremonial activities since coming under the management of Government bodies. These have included sweat lodges and vision quests which, with some safety planning, are viewed as low-risk activities. However, in order to fully honor and connect to these sites, Niitsitapii need to use them in the same way they had been used for thousands of years before.

Niitsitapii who have the right to do so (either by being given a dream or achieving an accomplishment) should be able to travel to Aisinai'pi and leave their rock art in the sandstone. This is currently restricted under existing policy which would consider this vandalism meaning the artist would be subject to a \$50,000.00 fine or one year in jail. Likewise, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, as an archaeological site, is protected under the Historical Resources Act. This restricts the site from ever being used again at the risk of destroying the archaeological record that exists.

The following chapter looks at the long history of policy that affects not just the Niitsitapii people but other Indigenous peoples in Canada. The policies that will be discussed will include strategic federal initiatives, such as the Gradual Civilization Act and the Indian Act, as well as localized approaches to site management of WOS / A and HSI. As mentioned before, the events of the past very much influence the experiences of individuals in the present. I will explore the ways in which these 'protective' policies are in fact detrimental to the continuation of Indigenous lifeways.

### **CHAPTER 3: VALUES OF HERITAGE**

This chapter focusses on the long history of colonial policy in Canada and the implications these policy directives have had on Canada's Indigenous people, the Blackfoot people in particular. This analysis begins with federal policies and follows the ways in which these policies became increasingly aggressive towards the goal of 'assimilating the Indian' and interrupted traditional education practices. The goals and objectives of the policies, as well as the language that was used within them, has left a long-standing colonial legacy. I will not be focusing in detail the effects these directives have had on individuals and their way of life, to do so would be outside the scope of this project. Instead, I will explore how these federal policy directives have undoubtedly affected the approaches to heritage management and heritage policy in Alberta, as seen through the examples of Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

This chapter will analyze the layers of Heritage Management policies of each site from the international UNESCO level, to the local site level. Since the focus of this thesis is heritage education practices, it would also be beneficial to look at the historical policies related to formal education. Arguably, the history of policy, as it relates to Indigenous people in Canada, is one of systemic oppression. Legislation, such as the Indian Act, restricted Indigenous peoples access to sacred cultural sites affecting relationality to place on an individual and community level. Because the people were being restricted from using the sites in culturally appropriate ways, the concept of terra nullius was invoked to justify the "need" for management / protection of these sites.

The interpretive documents used to train interpretive staff will also be critically analyzed for patterns of long-standing colonial policy making and implementation which places Western cultural values at the core; not the cultural values of Indigenous people, or Niitsitapii people for that matter.

### **3.1 HISTORICAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION**

This section will outline the ways in which historical policies, especially at a federal level, have continued reverberations into contemporary policy making and implementing at the local level (such as management practices of WOS / A and HSI). The Royal Proclamation Act (1763), which is a foundational document for the Indigenous rights movement, refers to the Dominions interactions with First Nations peoples as that of a nation-to-nation relationship. In doing so, the document acknowledges First Nations people's sovereignty in relation to the British crown and the colony. First Nations peoples, Blackfoot in particular, continue to assert their sovereignty as there seems to be a continuous need to remind non-Indigenous governing bodies of its existence.

Examples of this can be seen with the management of historical sites like Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. Members of the Kainai and Piikani communities have asserted that the people have an inherent right to make management decisions regarding these, and other, sacred historical sites. Each site has a group of Elders who are met with on a semi-regular basis in order to discuss and provide guidance on matters of site management. It has always been my experience that the Elders are called upon by management staff when they feel it is necessary, it is not the community (or Elders group) who decide when meetings are held and what the topic of

discussion should be. Although it is seen to be best practice to consult with the nations, it is clear that ultimately the tribes do not have any authority in site management decisions.

Later on, the Gradual Civilization Act (1857) was an attempt to eradicate First Nations sovereignty by assimilating the people into the European society. In order for the people of First Nations ancestry to enjoy rights afforded to the euro-Canadian population they were required to relinquish their status as a First Nations person. In doing so, the individual could own their own land, vote in federal elections, and attend post-secondary institutions. I would argue that the trope of the civilized savage continues into today, and this is manifested in the field of heritage. For example, there seems to be a common idea that conflicts of heritage management could be avoided if only there was effort put into “training of Aboriginal museum professionals” (Devine 2010:223). This is to say that some heritage management professionals believe if they could get Indigenous people to understand that their tactics are the best option for object care—assimilate to their beliefs—Indigenous people would learn to be appreciative of that care and thus no conflict would occur. These “objective opinions” on who can take proper care of cultural items ignores the “fact that research conceived and carried out within the social and intellectual context of colonialism is fundamentally biased” (Devine 2010:225).

I recently had the opportunity to see Dr. Leroy Little Bear present at the Canadian Museums Association: Moved to Action conference. He very succinctly explained how a person’s metaphysics (their being, their concept of space and time, their notions of identity and change) is their interpretive template and the reality they perceive is a product of that template. As a result, that interpretive template becomes the foundation for science, methodology, and academy. I understood this to mean that the way in which

education is practiced, and more specifically how heritage education is communicated, is directly related to education policy directives, which in turn is calibrated to the Euro-Western value system.

Only ten years after the Gradual Civilization Act came the British North American Act (1867) also referred to as the Constitution Act. This legislation united the Canadian territories with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia into a single country called Canada. This document is significant because there was a shift in relationship / responsibility for First Nations relations from the crown to the flag. This document is also significant because it honored, and reaffirmed, the Royal Proclamation Acts reference to relations with First Nations groups as a nation-to-nation relationship. Despite this affirmation, section 91(24) of the Constitution also states that education for Natives is a federal responsibility, not the responsibility of the Indigenous communities themselves. The messaging, or rather the narrative, of Indigenous people's history that was being taught prior to the TRC Calls to Action was "indicative of the prevailing approaches to research, which privileged Euro-Canadian scholarship and ignored community-based priorities and expertise" (Devine 2010:231). I would argue that this is still the case when considering examples of heritage policy in Alberta, such as the Head-Smashed-In Programme Matrix. This is a document designed for training site interpreters and written by the site archaeologists. Further discussion on this document will take place later in the chapter.

Following the British North American Act, the government wrote several policies over the years that affected how Indigenous children were educated" (Prete 2018:27). An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians is most commonly referred to, and known, as the Indian Act (1876). Since its inception there have been many

amendments to the Indian Act, one of these amendments (1886) “made it compulsory for all Indigenous students to attend schools, and individuals who prevented their children from attending residential school would be imprisoned or fined” (Prete 2018:28). Another amendment (1951) gave the federal government complete power over Indigenous formal education.

When studying the history of Canada’s colonial policy making and implementation, one can begin to see patterns; consider the coil of time mentioned in the previous chapter. Treaty 7 (1877) is a historical document that is fraught with misunderstanding and clash of cultural values. The treaty process is largely understood by the Canadian government as the ceding of traditional territory; relinquishing any and all rights to land and traditional land use. This is not how it is viewed in the Niitsitapii communities and not how it was understood at the time of the “signing”. I parenthesize this word because for as long as I can remember I have been told by Elders in the community that our people did not know how to write at the time and so did not know how to sign a document. They were instructed to touch the pen while government officials held the pen and marked an ‘x’ by their name.

I was taught by my community that we did not see the treaty agreement as giving up our right to own land. In Niitsitapiisinni (our way of life) a person could not own land so how could we give away something we did not own? Niitsitapii understanding of the Treaty process was that we were agreeing to share the resources of the land. It is stressed that ‘resources’ is restricted to that which is on the surface of ksaahkomi (earth), not the minerals and ‘resources’ extracted from below the surface such as in drilling and / or mining. Another teaching in our community is that the Government attended the signing

with the Treaty document already printed, then continued to engage in negotiations, and agreed to promises they never intended to keep, promises that were not included in the Treaty text.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between this historical event and that of the Head-Smashed-In and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi Heritage Management Plan (HMP). As an employee of HSI I recall on multiple occasions, hearing older members of the community speak about annual pow wows that were held at the Interpretive Center. One interview participant mentioned taking part in the powwow and the joy he felt having the opportunity to celebrate and share the culture, songs, and dances with tourists (Manychief, personal communication, 2022). Piikani Elder Wilfred Yellow Wings (personal communication, 2022), recalls being present for conversations regarding the HMP and promises being made to host an annual pow wow as a way to celebrate and honor the Blackfoot communities and culture. This annual celebration is no longer held at the site and has not been hosted for over ten years now. Again, promises were made which have not been honored or carried through.

When asked about the Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi HMP, one of my interview participants mentioned having their “eyes open to the fact that a lot of these plans and policies were written by people that are not Blackfoot, then consult on them when they are already written. That is not real consultation” (Berry, personal communication, 2021). The same participant continued to discuss their experience with policy making being one that attempts to force Blackfoot values into a structure that is colonial, “and the laws do not support traditional policies and traditional practices and traditional uses” (Berry, personal communication, 2021).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007. At that time, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States voted against the document stating they could not support declaration because of concerns over provisions on self-determination, land and resources rights and, among others, language giving Indigenous people a right to veto over national legislation and State management of resources. It was not until 2010 that Canada formally endorsed UNDRIP. Endorsement was seen as a significant step towards strengthening relations with Aboriginal peoples, but it was maintained that that was an aspirational document that was not legally binding. Most recently, on June 21, 2021, Canadas National Indigenous Peoples Day, UNDRIP received Royal Assent and immediately came into force. Two years later on June 21, 2023 the UN Declaration Act Action Plan was released. This was the first substantive step towards ensuring federal laws reflects the standards set out in UNDRIP. The last section of this paper will discuss this legislation in greater detail.

### **3.2 NIITSITAPII EDUCATION**

Prete (2018:26) stated that “colonization brought not only many economic, political, and social changes to the Indigenous Peoples, but also a change in the way that Indigenous Peoples were educated”. The colonial education system that was put in place oppressed the children’s connection with Niitsitapii culture and way of life. “Indigenous students were uprooted and disconnected from their traditional ways of life to become indoctrinated and assimilated into the European paradigm” (Prete 2018:30). In addition to the government’s assimilation by education agenda the government forcefully removed Indigenous children and relocated them to live with White families; this traumatic

moment in history is also known as the '60s scoop (Johnston 1983). “The government’s new strategy to educate Indigenous students was assimilation through integration” (Prete 2018:30).

This section will highlight the Niitsitapii education paradigm and the ways in which it differs from the Euro-Canadian paradigm. I would argue the difference occurs because of the value systems each paradigm is rooted in. Research done into the experiences of Indigenous students in the European school system (Prete 2018; Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991) has shown that Indigenous students often have a difficult time adjusting to the academic environment. This is largely due to the fact that the European education system is one that is very foreign and, similar to Western forms of heritage protection/education, where experience is very disconnected from the content being learned about. In the classroom, students are expected to sit sedentary and learn by reading information from a text book. In a colonial society, this highlights the value of obedience. In contrast, traditional Niitsitapii education is immersive and land-based learning as well as inter-generational. “Knowing your relatives [human and non-human] is fundamental to the reality of any Niitsitapii and presents the basis of our identity. Relatives shape and form the children’s identities through nurturing, strengthening, and renewing their reciprocal and essential responsibilities” (Bastien 2004:55).

In Niitsitapii communities, the entire family system is responsible for educating and socializing pookaiksi (children). In the Blackfoot language the word Ninsta means ‘my older female relative’ and describes aunts, sisters and cousins; likewise, the word Niisa means ‘my older male relative’ and includes uncles, brothers and cousins. Aunts and uncles are considered parents, and cousins are siblings. “Prior to European contact,

children learned the ways of Siksikaitsitapi by participating in the familial and tribal structures and processes” (Bastien 2004:69).

While employed at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi I provided school programming in the fall and spring and public programming in the summer. One of the programs I really enjoyed teaching was focussed on traditional games. I began the program by explaining that many of the traditional games played by Niitsitapii pookaiksi (children) socialized them into society and / or instilled survival skills. I would briefly discuss, as I did in chapter two, that the use of dolls and miniature cultural items were used to teach young girls in the art of hide processing (hide scraper), and socialize them into societal customs (miniature tipis and ceremonial items).

I would then inform the children in the program that by the age of three, young boys had their own bow and arrow set. I explained the ‘hoop and arrow’ game which required the group of children playing the game to choose one person to roll the hoop. The remaining players stand in a straight-line shoulder-to-shoulder. The hoop is rolled in front of the line of children and as it passes, each child tries to pierce the hoop. As the children’s accuracy increases the diameter of the hoop decreases. Sinew can also be used to create a dreamcatcher like pattern in the center of the hoop and a point system established. I explained how this game is intended to hone the children’s hand-eye coordination which are necessary skills for hunting and warfare as well as beading and sewing. The children in the program were then invited to play the game and were given dowels (to be used as arrows) while I rolled the hoop in front of them. This game instills the value of aksistoiyipaittapiisinni (being able to take on tasks independently).

Another game played in the program is referred to as ‘the running and screaming game’. This game requires all the children to line up shoulder-to-shoulder. They take a deep breath then begin to run while screaming at the top of their lungs. The person who can get the furthest distance on one breath of air is the winner. The program participants were informed that this game builds up the children’s lung capacity and is a form of endurance training. Because Niitsitapii children played away from camp, they often were the first ones to see visitors approaching the camp. They had an important responsibility to run back and sound the alarm to alert everyone to the approaching strangers. Being able to run and scream for long distances could be the difference between life and death if the enemy was approaching. Again, the children in the program were invited to play a few rounds of this game. This game can be associated with the values *isspommaanitapiiysinni* (being helpful to others) and *ihpipototsp* (using the gifts you have been given to help others).

The final game played in the program required the group of children to stand in a circle and choose two to stand in the center. One child is the ‘hunter’ and the other child is the ‘omahpsisiiksina’ (rattlesnake) and is given a rattle to hold, both children are blind folded. Each child is given a few spins and placed at different areas in the circle. The ‘rattlesnake’ gives their rattle a little shake then moves around; the ‘hunter’ must listen for the sound and attempt to catch the other participant. The children in the circle cannot give direction to the children in the center, only to warn them when they have reached the edge of the circle; they hold the perimeter. Whereas the ‘hoop and arrow’ game is intended to sharpen the use of sight, this game is intended to hone a person’s sense of hearing. This game instills the value of *Kakoysin* (being aware of your surroundings).

Extended family would be responsible for teaching these games to the children and sometimes even helping them play. This familial connection extended into non-human relations as well. “The animals are helpers because they possess a powerful source of knowledge and wisdom. Their behaviour, if observed carefully, will reveal many secrets of balance and harmony” (Bastien 2004:93). This lesson, and Niitsitapii value, of *aoahkannaistokawa* (everything comes in pairs; duality/balance), is crucial for land / heritage management and heritage education practices. Despite this being a crucial Niitsitapii value, it is not mentioned in either of the Heritage Management documents for *Head-Smashed-In* or *Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi*.

Since both sites, HSI and WOS / A, are UNESCO designated, it is worth taking a brief look at the historical policy and paradigm shifts of this global institutional structure. The International Union for Conservation of Nature was founded in 1948 and focussed on natural sites. In 1965, the International Council on Monuments and Sites was created to protect monuments, items of culture. It was not until the 1972 World Heritage Convention that an effort was made to combine the parallel streams of cultural and natural heritage protection, “bridging the accustomed divide between culture and nature” (Brumann and Gfeller 2022:147). 1992 saw the introduction of the World Heritage Framework for Cultural Landscapes (Fowler 2002). This framework had three landscape categories: designed, organically evolved, and associative. This document highlights the paradigm shift in acknowledging human interaction with the natural environment. Often, however, these designations focussed on cultural aspects without fully representing, or understanding, the interconnectedness of cultural heritage and the landscape.

As conversations revolved around associative cultural landscapes, there was also a rise in understanding relativity to space as well as the concept of intangible values. These concepts were brought to the forefront with the Nara Document of 1994 which “also marked the final stages of the move from belief in universal international absolutes, toward acceptance of conservation judgements as necessarily relative and contextual” (Stovel 2008:9). Theoretically, this would have brought with it a significant change to conservation theory and practice. However, the policy directives of HSI and WOS / A did not reflect this newest development in UNESCO. It was not until 2012 that WOS / A developed their Interpretive Guide to reflect the cultural relativity of the site and the intangible values associated with it.

Despite these broadened understandings of cultural heritage value, more than a decade after the UNESCO convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 there is still a failure of the organization to recognize intangible heritage (Ortiz and Madariaga 2021). This is detrimental to sites like Head-Smashed-In and Writing-On-Stone / Aisinai’pi since their designations are directly associated with intangible cultural heritage: Writing-on-Stone / Asinai’pi designated under criterion iii) to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a **cultural tradition** or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; Head-Smashed-In designated under criterion vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or **living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs**, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. The following sections will discuss the Heritage Management Plan documents of these sites in further detail, and provide a critical analysis of the policy directives and the colonial legacies that continue to exist in these structures.

### **3.3 HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP INTERPRETATION**

The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump visitor center presents five main themes: The Ecology of the Northwestern Plains; Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump: A 6000 Year Record of Cultural Development and Adaptation in the Northwestern Plains; The Dynamics of Buffalo Jumping at Head-Smashed-In; The Buffalo Jump in Historical Perspective; Uncovering the Past: the Sciences” (Alberta Culture 1985:ii). Each of these themes are represented / exhibited on one of the seven floors of the building of the interpretive center.

The building was designed to be experienced in a specific way with the Information Staff and the Interpretive Guides being trained to lead groups through that planned narrative. When visitors arrive their first stop should ideally be the Visitor Center desk just off to the left. However, more often than not, people’s attention is drawn to the right where a large open space gives way to a two-story cliff face with three bison perched on the edge; caught in the moment just before their hoofs leave the earth and they plummet to their demise (Fig. 7). Eventually, people find their way back to the Visitor Center desk where they are provided a map of the building and encouraged to take the elevators or stairs to the theatre on the second floor. There they can watch a 20-minute video that portrays how the jump was used. Once the film is complete, visitors are instructed to exit the theater and proceed to the elevators or stairs to the top level where they can exit the building and walk to the cliff face itself. After coming back into the building, visitors begin to make their way back down the building stopping at the exhibits on each floor.



Figure 7: Buffalo Jump Replica on the Main Level of the Head-Smashed-In Interpretive Center.

The exhibits were designed to represent a temporal timeline with the earliest stage being the first exhibit on the top floor which focuses on the Ecology of the Northwestern Plains (Fig. 8). The text panels associated with this content focus on the natural components of the landscape, including the vegetation and geological history of the site, from a very scientific narrative. This space also contains an audio-visual component which has a Piikani Elder speak about the different seasons on the prairies while an animation is played out on television screen. When working at the site I encouraged Interpretive Guides to tell oral traditions such as Napi stories in this space as these are the stories used in the Niitsitapii communities to explain why the world is the way it is.



Figure 8: Looking Down on Level 5 of the Interpretive Center

Descending to the next level visitors enter the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump: A 6000 Year Record of Cultural Development and Adaptation in the Northwestern Plains section (Fig. 9). The text in this section is again very academic and obviously from a colonial perspective. One panel in particular mentions the Blackfoot people migrated to this area from the Bering Strait (Fig. 10). The text of this panel reflects the ‘heritage as exhibition’ ideology; the writer describes the culture as if an object they are observing on display, instead of describing the culture as a living, thriving, experience. Furthermore, the colonial undertone of the text perpetuates the narrative of survival, scarcity, and hardship. This is in stark contrast to the narrative of my ancestors / community which highlights wellbeing, abundance, and prosperity.



Figure 9: Looking Down on Level 4 of the Interpretive Center

I find it worth mentioning that another inaccuracy is the way in which the peoples dress is depicted. Women in these depictions have hide dresses with bare arms. This is not appropriate in the Blackfoot culture as it is considered modest to have your arms covered down to the elbow. In this space I encouraged guides to focus on the miniature tipi and share cultural lessons on the structure including how to prepare the hide, how the tipi might be decorated and what do some of the symbols mean, and a how the tipis were constructed and cared for.

## The first people of the Northwest Plains had to cooperate to survive.

According to archaeologists, native people travelled from Asia to North America many thousands of years ago, following buffalo and other game. Once on the Northwest Plains, these people came quickly to depend on the great herds of buffalo for food, shelter, clothing and tools.

Hunters on foot found it hard to get buffalo on the open plain, so the people hunted as

organized communities. They used communal hunting methods over the thousands of years that they pursued the herds.

Over all that time, buffalo stayed at the centre of the first people's lives and at the heart of their religious and ceremonial life. The plains people saw buffalo as clear evidence that the earth was created to provide for their needs.



Figure 10. Interpretive Panel on the 4<sup>th</sup> Level of the HSI Interpretive Center

The third floor of the building is dedicated to the art of the buffalo jump and titled *The Dynamics of Buffalo Jumping at Head-Smashed-In* (Fig. 11). The central focus of this space is a diorama of the surrounding landscape which is used as a way of explaining the hunt activities through a bird's eye view. Display cases along the edges of the walls hold cultural tools and items important for the success of the hunt. An important detail that is not emphasized in the interpretive panels is the participation of the entire community, including the children; there is no mention of the types of jobs they would be involved in. This is the level in which the three bison seen when entering the building are

perched at the edge of the cliff face; visitors are able to approach a guard rail and stand some distance from the rear of the bison.



Figure 11: Looking Down on Level 3 of the Interpretive Center

Interpretive Guides always felt the most difficulty with the second-floor content which focusses on the Buffalo Jump in Historical Perspective (Fig. 12). The content revolves around the contact period: contact with early traders, imposed policy, changing practice, and the eventual near extinction of the bison. It was always interesting to me to see different people's reactions to this information. Some people would be overcome with intergenerational guilt and would approach myself, or the other guides, in tears apologizing for colonial actions of the past. I encouraged guides to be empathetic and remind the visitor that there is nothing we can do to change the past, we can only learn from it and strive to do, and be, better. Some people would get quite defensive and argue

it was the native people's lifestyle that caused the collapse of the bison populations. We would explain that prior to European contact, the Blackfoot people hunted bison for millennia in a way that was sustainable. These are a few examples of why the Interpretive Guides found this level, and this topic, to be the most difficult; they often felt they had to be on the defensive, feeling the need for a type of self-preservation or protection against the burden of the visitor's emotional baggage.



Figure 12: Looking at Level 2 of the Interpretive Center

The final level, on ground floor, focusses on Uncovering the Past: The Sciences (Fig. 13). This section is very heavily focussed on the archaeological methods, techniques and interpretations that were employed at the site. It is made clear in the programme matrix document that the archaeological excavations and the post-excavation archaeological procedures are treated “as an integral part of the interpretation program”

(Alberta Culture 1985:6). The Programme Matrix states, “while the first four themes are designed to tell the public what we know about Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, the final theme is designed to tell us how we have come to know these things” (Alberta Culture 1985:16) (Fig. 14). This statement is made as if the science of archaeology is the authority to speak for the past, not the Blackfoot Elders who had given detailed accounts of the hunting, butchering, and processing activities. On this entire floor, there is only two small panels that acknowledge the contribution of Niitsitapii Elders (Fig. 15).



Figure 13: Looking at the Main Level of the Interpretive Center. Researchers' Daughter is Playing with one of the Interactive Displays.



Figure 14: Display of an Archaeological Excavation Situated Under the Cliff with Three Bison

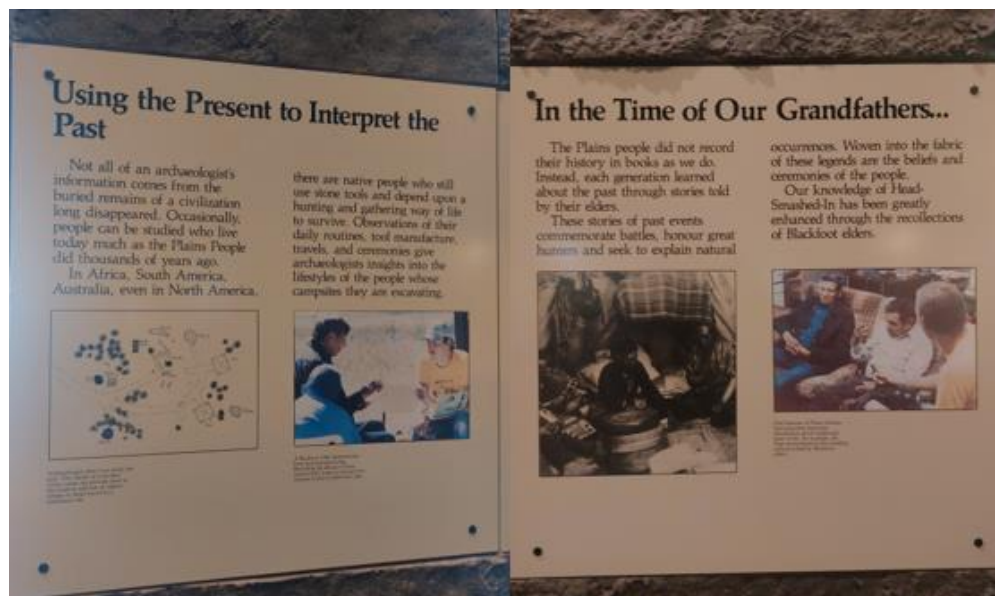


Figure 15: Two Panels on the Main Level of the Interpretive Center Adjacent to the Excavation Display in Figure 8.

It should be noted that although this particular interpretive pattern was encouraged as the ideal experience, there were multiple reasons this could not be done for groups. During my employment at HSI I experienced days where there were five guided tours happening simultaneously with anywhere from 20-50 visitors per group. When this occurs, not all groups can start at the same place and staggering start times for the same start place can cause chartered tours to fall hours behind their planned schedule. In these cases, it was important for the interpretive team to be adaptive and for individuals of the team to be dependable for their co-workers at the same time being able to depend their co-workers to rotate in a timely manner. These are the same crucial skills that were used by our ancestors as they operated the jump itself.

These correlations, and messaging, is not present in the programme matrix, a document which determines what information is communicated to the public through programming. “Themes presented in the interpretation matrix are most relevant to the social studies program in grades 5 and 6, with significant elements applicable to the programs offered in grades 3, 4 and 7 as well” (Alberta Culture 1985:10). The historical thesis of the programme matrix is to communicate that “for thousands of years up to the contact period Indians of the northwestern plains developed a cultural system based upon the exploitation of the great herds of buffalo” (Alberta Culture 1985:14). This thesis statement is far removed from the understanding Niitsitapii have regarding their relationship with iinii (buffalo / bison). Niitsitapii do not see their interaction with iinii as an exploitive one like the HSI programme matrix suggests, instead, it is understood as a reciprocal, and even familial, relationship.

The programme document discusses and outlines the variety of vegetation that can be found in the area. The pages of descriptions do not mention the importance of the plants to Niitsitapii people's life on the plains, nor is there mention of the traditional uses of the plants. During my employment at HSI, this was the type of information that visitors were interested in and what the interpreters were encouraged to learn about and share during tours. Plants were not just discussed by interpreters as a form of nutritional value. They were also discussed as in terms of their medicinal value and ceremonial use.

It is clear from the language used in the document, as well as the way in which ideas are presented, that the document does not align with Niitsitapii values. Instead, "the document is prepared in accordance with the standard formats established by Alberta Culture, and forms part of the Department's standard procedures for the planning and development of Provincial Historic Sites" (Alberta Culture 1985:1). "It defines the interpretation goals and objectives for site development and the interpretive programme" as it aligns with the mandate of the Government of Alberta (Alberta Culture 1985:ii). It is very important to note that the document was written almost four decades ago and has not undergone any updates.

### **3.4 WRITING-ON-STONE / AISINAI'PI INTERPRETATION**

The Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park / Aisinai'pi National Historic Site of Canada Interpretive Guide was written in June of 2012. This document is intended to be used as a training manual for interpreters and was written in collaboration with members of the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society, a group of Elders from the Kainai nation. Written almost thirty years after the HSI programme matrix, the Interpretive Guide is a great example of how integrating Western "scientific" viewpoints and

traditional Blackfoot knowledge can provide visitors a wholistic understanding of a cultural landscape. “This approach also recognizes the connections between Blackfoot and Western scientific perspectives and encourages their integration in Visitor Services programming” (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2012:2).

When entering the park boundaries visitors have the option of turning into the Visitor Center (Fig. 16) or continuing straight down into the river bottom to access the campground area. The interpretive panels in the Visitor Center were designed with input from the Niitsitapii community as well as the local ranching community (Fig. 17). Representation of Blackfoot cultural values and customs are integrated into the content and space including a central theatre area designed to represent a tipi (Fig. 18), interpretive panels shaped like travois, and interpretive tables shaped like drums, all with multiple engaging elements for visitors to interact with (Fig. 19). The Visitor Center is also the location for visitors to get information on, and participate in programming and access to Rock Art Tours.



Figure 16: View of the Visitor Center Standing at the Entrance of the Building



Figure17: Round Interpretive Display in the Foreground Displays Information on Rock Art, While the Display Case in the Background Features Information and Artifacts of the North West Mounted Police



Figure 18: View of the Theatre Space Located in the Center of the Building



Figure 19: Interpretive Display in Foreground is Designed to Represent a Drum and has a Rotating Face. Interpretive Panels in the Background, Surrounding the Theatre, are Shaped like Travois

When purchasing tickets, visitors are instructed to meet outside near the shuttle bus where they will be met by a guide (for inclement weather they are instructed to meet inside the Visitor Center). At the start of the program, an interpretive guide meets the tour group and gives them a brief overview of what to expect during the tour and checking that everyone is dressed appropriately (proper footwear) and everyone has enough water (I have personally experienced temperatures of +40 degrees Celsius at the cliff face). The tour group is boarded onto a 24-passenger bus and driven into the restricted area.

Once the group reaches the starting point of the tour, the group is instructed to exit the bus and wait as a group along the side of the vehicle. Once everyone is congregated the Interpretive Guide does a safety review specific to the elements: the trail can reach extreme temperatures, it is important to drink water consistently; there are rattlesnakes in the area, stay on the trail, and behind the guide, at all times; the cultural material is fragile, do not touch the sandstone or any of the rock art images at any time.

When I conducted tours for Niitsitapii groups, the rule of not touching the rock art was admittedly a difficult one for me to enforce. The reason being, for myself personally, when I see those carvings and paintings, even if it is the hundredth time I have seen it, I feel such a strong spiritual connection to it, it is almost instinctive to reach out and physically connect with it. I know many of my people feel the same way when they visit this site and look at the images left behind. So, although I voiced the ‘rule’ of not touching the sandstone and rock art, I did not strictly enforce it when sharing Niitsitapii heritage with members of the Niitsitapii community.

Tour groups typically spend anywhere from 1.5 – 2 hours on the trails looking at rock art and learning about the Blackfoot culture and history, history of the park and local

ranching culture, as well as the archaeological history and heritage protection efforts. At the end of the tour, the group is boarded back onto the bus and driven to the Visitor Center. From there, majority of the visitors enter the river bottom to spend time having a picnic, playing in the river at the natural sand beach, getting refreshments at the camp store, or returning to their campground to spend a night or two. The campground also displays interpretive panels that provide some cultural information but largely focusses on natural and geographical information (Fig. 20, Fig. 21, Fig. 22).

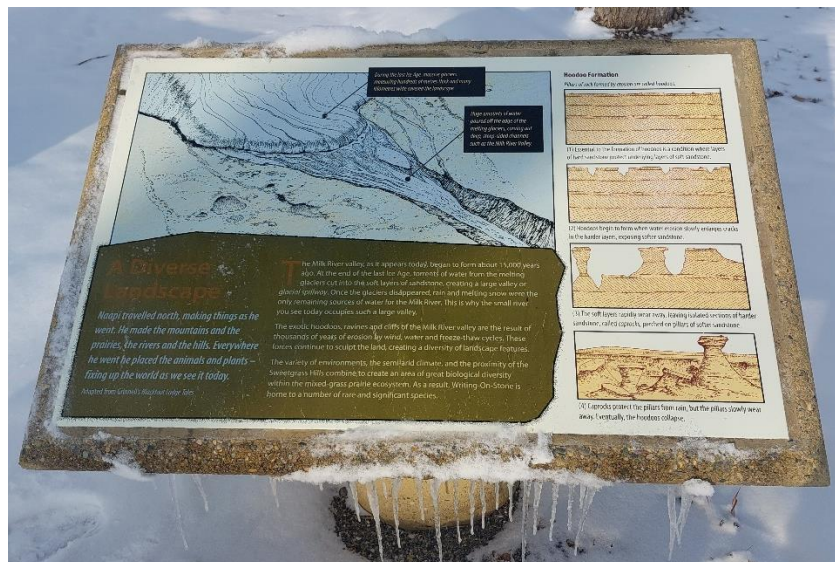


Figure 20: Interpretive Panel Located in the Campground Describing Glaciology



Figure 21: Interpretive Panel Located in the Campground Describing the Ecosystem



Figure 22: Interpretive Panels Located in the Campground Describing the Rock Art Images and Providing some Cultural Knowledge

Although at first glance the policies and training material developed for WOS / A seems inclusive and supportive of a Blackfoot cultural presence, management tends to fall short on actualizing that into employment for Blackfoot people. This is despite the Heritage Appreciation Strategy document stating “Native staff for both programming and Visitor Center operation should be high priority” (2004:23). Non-Blackfoot staff have voiced their discomfort with speaking about cultural teachings although the interpretive information provided is content shared by Blackfoot Elders. One individual stated, “I can be passionate about Blackfoot culture, I can learn a lot about it from Elders or books, but I do not want to overstep or misrepresent the culture, or have my own inculturation skew things (Tolly, personal communication, 2021).

Immediately the Interpretive Guide document stresses the sacredness of the landscape including “the natural environment, cultural features, human experiences, and spiritual perceptions” (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2012:4). However, there are also actions taken to exploit the site for another Euro-Western value, that of monetary gain. This is even evident in the Heritage Appreciation Strategy, which states, “high-end and specialty programs such as Rock Art tours, guided hikes, in-park school programs and outreach programs should have a fee” (Robertson Weir Ltd. 2004:24). It is interesting to note that the acknowledgments section of this document lists out individuals who contributed to the creation of the document and who provided the author with information, none of whom are members of the Blackfoot communities, not one Elder is listed.

### 3.5 HERITAGE POLICY AND LEGISLATION

In the time that this research has started, there have been interesting developments in regard to federal legislation focussed on Indigenous heritage. UNDRIP received Royal Assent by the Canadian Government (2021) — a step closer to making the document legally binding — the Canadian Museum Association released *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums* (2022) — developed as a response to TRC CTA #67 — and most recently, the Canadian Government has released the UN Declaration Act Action Plan (2023) — the act is intended to provide a roadmap for working together to implement UNDRIP.

There are various examples of UNDRIP and TRC influencing Indigenous led reform in other parts of the world and Canada. Canadian examples were provided in Chapter 1, including, *Our Way: Yukon Nations Heritage Law* and the Royal BC Museum and Haida Gwaii Museum Indigenous Repatriation Handbook. Examples can be found outside Canada as well including the Whanau Ora in New Zealand (Whanau Ora Commissions Agency 2023) which expresses the right and need for Maori to be involved in collaborative and consultative processes at all stages.

Slowly, but surely, there is a recalibrating of heritage management policies to align with the Indigenous community's cultural values; descendent communities are being placed at the center of the discussions. However, there seems to be a delay in the context of HSI and WOS / A where the Alberta and Canadian Government's heritage approach is mainly concerned with the "visitor experience"; "visitor" being someone who is not enmeshed in the culture of the place. This reveals that management is catering an

experience with a certain demographic in mind, and it is not the Niitsitapii / Indigenous people.

While employed at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi I began thinking about traditional site use and realized it was not being supported by existing policy, especially as it came to engraving on the sandstone. I posed the question to management staff at the time, what would we (WOS /A) do if someone came to the site and said they wanted to make rock art? Would that be allowed? Management had confessed this was not something they had thought of before and instructed me to develop protocols that could be used to guide staff on how to best receive requests for traditional site use. I found it a true privilege to be able to work on the Traditional Access Protocols. At the time, management was developing the UNESCO nomination and felt this type of document would add value to the process.

I designed the document as an educational tool and stated that the practices outlined in the documents were inherent rights; parks staff were encouraged not to view the interaction as “giving permission”, instead, WOS / A should do everything possible to accommodate and encourage these practices. “Besides sweat lodges, bundle openings, vision quests, and collecting plants, the document also addresses possible requests for making rock formations/effigies and making new rock art” (Weasel Moccasin 2017:24).

I see this as the epitome of my argument regarding heritage as exhibition versus heritage as practice. In the current legislation and management practices there is a concerted effort to protect and preserve the existing rock art that is there. Experiments have been done on different forms of preserving the rock art from diverting rainwater to applying a sealant to the sandstone (Brink 2007). Visitors are encouraged to attend tours

to see the images but are prohibited from touching the cliff face as it will increase erosion; heritage as exhibition.

The Traditional Access Protocols argues Niitsitapii heritage is living and offers another vision of heritage which is that sacred places, like WOS / A, should be safeguarded so that they can be part of the life of descendent communities. What I have been arguing since the inception of the protocols is that current management practices focus on preservation of rock art, when a shift needs to be made to preservation of the **act** of making rock art; heritage as practice.

Although management staff seemed supportive at the time of creation, support for implementing the document seems to have waned since I left the organization. One of the simpler aspects of the protocols document was a step-by-step process for providing Niitsitapii people access to the archaeological preserve for the purpose of leaving offerings. My role at WOS / A became known in the community so I had people approach me at ceremony or while on errands and share with me that they had visited WOS /A but were denied access to the archaeological preserve. After the third instance of this happening, I sent an email to parks management staff expressing my concern that Niitsitapii were being denied access. The response I received was very bureaucratic and made it clear that they did not share my concerns. It is also interesting to note that the Traditional Access Protocols was not included in the UNESCO nomination dossier.

### **3.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Parallels and patterns can be seen when looking at the history of colonial education practices among the Niitsitapii people and the history of heritage protection /

education policies at heritage sites of cultural significance. Through this chapter I have shown that current heritage management plans for cultural heritage sites like Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi are written from the Euro-Canadian values system. When Indigenous values are applied to the structures in place, it often results in conflict. Depending on the individuals employed in these management positions, the Heritage of these sites can be, and have been, easily used as another form of systematic oppression.

The Royal Alberta Museum (2022) website states “Presently, the Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation, 2004, provides for repatriation to the nations of the Blackfoot confederacy in Alberta. We do not yet have a process for repatriating Cree, Nakota, and Saulteaux sacred objects in the museum’s collections. Museum staff have been engaging in conversations with First Nation representatives, Treaty Organizations, Elders and knowledge holders about what such a process might look like within their cultural context and how we might work together to return these belongings to their communities.” It is clear from this statement that there is the understanding that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach does not work for Indigenous policy. The current political climate is perfect for a reform to Indigenous policy making in Canada. The following chapter will explore and highlight some of the opinions and perspectives from the Niitsitapii community in regard to how these sacred sites are being managed and how the Niitsitapii culture is being communicated to the public.

## CHAPTER 4: NIITSITAPII VOICES

Currently, within a Canadian context, there are several publications which focus on concepts of Indigenous heritage (e.g., Devine 2010; IHC 2020; Susemihl 2013), especially as it relates to repatriation (e.g., Canadian Museum of Civilization 2011; Conaty 2015; Royal BC Museum 2019; Noble 2002). However, finding publications which discuss Indigenous people's experiences with heritage management are difficult to come by. What are some of the common experiences had by Indigenous heritage management practitioners? This question needs to be analyzed and dissected to better understand the mechanisms behind managerial decision making and action taking. Only by understanding how the system works can one then propose and implement effective change in practices. Since I have always been passionate about the history of kaahsinooniksi (my ancestors) embarking on this as a research question was not only worthy, it was necessary.

Between the summer of 2021 and Spring 2022, I conducted interviews and distributed surveys amongst the Kainai and Piikanie communities. The intent was to focus on Niitsitapii perspectives regarding how Writing-on-Stone / Aisinaipi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump manage and formulate their heritage education programs. I am interested in capturing the first-hand experiences of Blackfoot people as employees within the system, as well as those who have interacted with these spaces as visitors. What are their perceptions of cultural accuracy in terms of the information provided to the general public? I was especially interested in whether the Blackfoot employees ever felt that the messaging being delivered, or the decisions made by management, conflicted

with their cultural teachings. If these conflicts did occur, in which ways were they addressed and which solutions, if any, were proposed?

Due to the nature of the project and research question, I knew it was important to establish a foundation on traditional Blackfoot values to help guide my research methods for this project. These values include *aatsimoyikaan* (spirituality)—an offering was made before any participants were approached for involvement. The purpose of the offering was to ask for guidance to complete the project, to allow things to take place as they may, as well as to have the strength and stamina to overcome any obstacles that may occur. *Isspommaanitapiisinni* (being helpful to others)— this research is being conducted for the benefit of these cultural sites first and foremost; as powerful entities they deserve the best care and treatment. This document is also intended to inform heritage management practices, regardless of whether practitioners are Indigenous or not, especially as it relates to the TRC and UNDRIP directives to revisit Indigenous (more specifically Niitsitapii) cultural sites heritage management policies and update them to align with, and better reflect, Indigenous (Niitsitapii) cultural values. *Aoahkannaistokawa* (everything comes in pairs; duality/balance)—a concerted effort was made to have equal representation of each site, an equal representation from tribal members (Kainai and Piikani), and an equal representation of genders. *Kimmapiipitsinni* (kindness to others)—all of my interactions were carried out in a positive atmosphere. When interacting with participants I was sure to be as accommodating as possible when it came to their needs. *Kakoysin* (be aware of your environment)—research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic amongst constantly changing restrictions and levels of risk (this will be discussed in greater detail below) requiring me to be ever vigilant about my interactions. *Ihkanaitapstsiwa*

(everything that is given to a person to do what they want with)—this value was practiced by all participants who decided to sit with me. They shared their experiences, feeling, and opinions with me so that I may present their voices in this thesis. Aksistoiyipaittapiisinni (being able to take on tasks independently)—being the sole researcher for my thesis project, meeting research quotas and deadlines were my sole responsibility. I was accountable to not only myself but to the Niitsitapii community as well, and understood that the completion of the project was dependent on my ability to take on, and complete, these tasks independently. Ihpipototsp (using the gifts you have been given to help others)—my knowledge of Niitsitapiisinni and my knowledge of heritage management practices (at these two sites specifically) allows me to be a bridge between these two worlds. I can be a conduit for the voices of the Niitsitapii community as it relates to managing cultural / sacred sites. Innakotsiiyini (respect for others)—although this thesis is critical of the colonial structures involved in current heritage management practices, these issues are addressed as structural issues. Even when conflict is met in the workplace around these topics / issues, it is imperative that all people involved conduct themselves, and treat others, with respect and dignity. Pommotsiiyisinni (to transfer something to others)—this thesis document is a transference of my decade of knowledge and experiences within the heritage management system. Niitsitapiisinni (to be Blackfoot)—this thesis research is deeply rooted in Niitsitapii values and worldview; the cultural sites discussed, the participants of the study, the researcher of the study, the language of the document, are all Niitsitapii. This has affected the questions being asked and the ways in which the answers have been spoken. Although this work is very culturally focussed, the concepts and ideas behind the research can easily be applied to any Indigenous group's efforts towards heritage management. The current form of heritage management practices

for the sites examined here relates to colonial policies and legacies intended to force Indigenous values within non-Indigenous structures. What I am proposing is that heritage management practices need to begin with Indigenous values as the foundation, the core, and then the policy built in a way that supports and encourages them.

My intention was to conduct interviews that did not follow the traditionally rigid research formats. Archibald et al (2019:5) point out that research was a critical tool of colonization in which Indigenous story-taking and story-making was a vital part. Colonial western research “was used to define, destroy, and deter the valuing of Indigenous knowledge, people, and practices” (Archibald et al 2019:5). Indigenous people are “beginning to articulate our own research paradigms and to demand that research conducted in our communities follows our code of conduct and honors our systems of knowledge and worldviews” (Wilson 2008:8). Research conversations did not follow the traditional rigid format of “interviews”, rather they followed an open, dialogic, and subject-led approach which encouraged a more relaxed conversation style with participants. Part of the importance of using a Niitsitapii research paradigm “is that we can use methods and forms of expression that we judge to be valid for ourselves” (Wilson 2008:14). Taking a *poomiikapii* (holistic) approach to the study of heritage management “involves using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land / environment, and wider society” (Archibald et al 2019:4).

Participants included Elders from the Kainai and Piikani community’s who have worked with Head-Smashed-In and / or Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi in some capacity as cultural advisors. Ceremonial methods were incorporated by the important Niitsitapii

custom of providing an honorarium payment when sitting with Elders. I had hoped to sit down with 5-10 Elders with the intention of balancing perspectives from each community. Conversations (interviews) were also conducted to capture the experiences, insights and opinions of past and present Blackfoot employees of each site. This aspect of the research reflects the knowledge transmission component of Prete's (2019) beadworking paradigm. For these conversations, there was the intention of getting an equal representation from each cultural site.

An important aspect of Niitsitapiisinni, and therefore the research methods, is relationships. I wanted to ensure that participants felt trusting enough of me to share their experiences candidly. The way in which I ensured this for them is allowing participants to choose to stay anonymous and instead be identified by a pseudonym. Interestingly, there were a few individuals who choose to protect their identity as they honestly felt their comments could, and would, jeopardize their current or future employment. Another form of protection I offered to participants was making the decision to attribute any negative comments to 'anonymous', regardless of whether the participant agreed to be identified or not.

In total, eleven people were kind enough to share their time and experiences with me. The conversations I had with participants occurred virtually through zoom as well as in-person visits, when possible and safe to do so. A portion of my interviews focussed on the Elders / Knowledge keepers who have provided consultation / direction to site management over the years. The Elder population has been especially vulnerable during this time of pandemic, so it was very important to me that my research, and the pursuit of my research, was not compromising their health in any way. This is where the resiliency

aspect of Prete's (2019) beadworking paradigm was crucial. Initial contact with participants occurred over the phone where they were informed of the purpose of the study and given an invitation to take part. They were then provided the options for having the conversation, which were virtually through zoom, in-person, or over the phone. The same approach and execution occurred when inviting participants who had work experience at these two cultural sites.

Indigenous storywork seeks to rectify the damage done by colonial research and reclaim Indigenous peoples "ability to story-walk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach" (Archibald et al 2019:7). Understanding that this research is being done by a Niitsitapii, for the Niitsitapii, speaking with Niitsitapii is a testimony to a statement made by Smith (2012:29) who says "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, In our own ways, for our own purposes". In many Indigenous communities, there is a "powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying" (Smith 2019:29-30).

A survey was also distributed amongst the Kainai and Piikani communities with both qualitative and quantitative components. Using the Qualtrics software system, a survey was created that had multiple choice questions that allowed participants the opportunity to leave additional comments and elaborate on their responses. Invitation to participate in the survey occurred through word of mouth and advertising posters in the Kainai and Piikani communities. Qualtrics also allowed for the creation of a QR code, which was included on the posters, to connect participants to the survey. Areas where advertisement posters were displayed included the Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society (Lethbridge), the Piikani Travel Center (Brocket), Chief Shot Both Sides Building

(Standoff), as well as personal and business contacts. I did not expect to receive any more than 200 survey responses but hoped for a minimum of 50 responses to be completed.

Although I came close to achieving my goal of a minimum of 50 responses, a total of 42 responses were completed and included in the analysis. It is important to keep in mind that this research was carried out through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fluctuating COVID measures and restrictions enforced by the Provincial Government not only drastically affected the amount of people visiting these cultural sites, but it also affected the amount of people interacting with the spaces where I advertised the study. Promotion of the study and invitation to take part in the research focussed on the Blackfoot communities of Kainai and Piikani. Across the nation, Indigenous communities were disproportionately vulnerable to the health effects of the respiratory virus that has plagued the planet. The Niitsitapii community were no exception. Resistance, part of Prete's (2019) beadworking paradigm, was crucial during this time.

#### **4.1 RESULTS**

Sixty surveys were collected by the Qualtrics survey system since June 1, 2021 when access to my research survey began. Of the sixty surveys collected, four were submitted after June 1, 2022. In order to align with the ethics research approvals, which expired on May 30, 2022, these survey responses will not be included in the data analysis. Of the remaining 56 responses, 14 are incomplete. Responses were determined incomplete if they had answered less than half of the survey questions. This still left me with 70% of the responses to be used for analysis.

Of the 42 respondents, 29 claimed to be of Blackfoot ancestry (69%), 4 claimed Indigenous ancestry (9.5%), and 9 claimed non-Indigenous ancestry (21.5%) (Fig. 23). Most of the respondents belonged to the 31-50 age group (24 out of 42 respondents making up 57%), with the 18-30 age group (9 out of 42 respondents making up 21.5%) and the 51-65 age group (6 out of 42 respondents making up 15%) being the next largest age groups represented, respectively (Fig. 24).

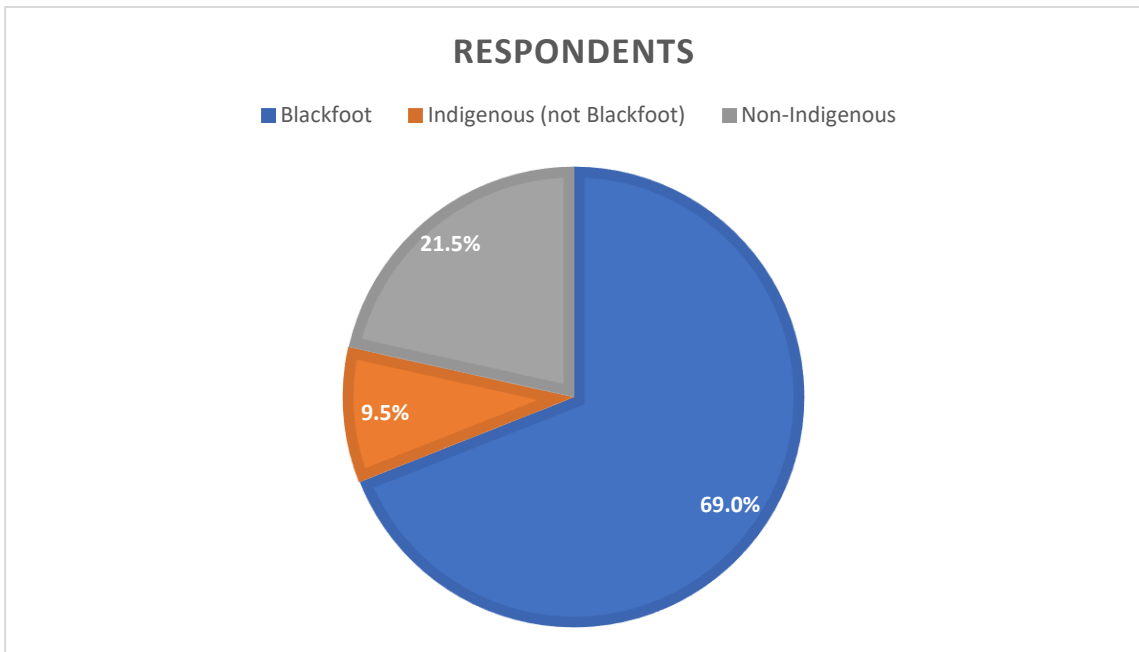


Figure 23: Indicating the Cultural Groups Respondents Identified with

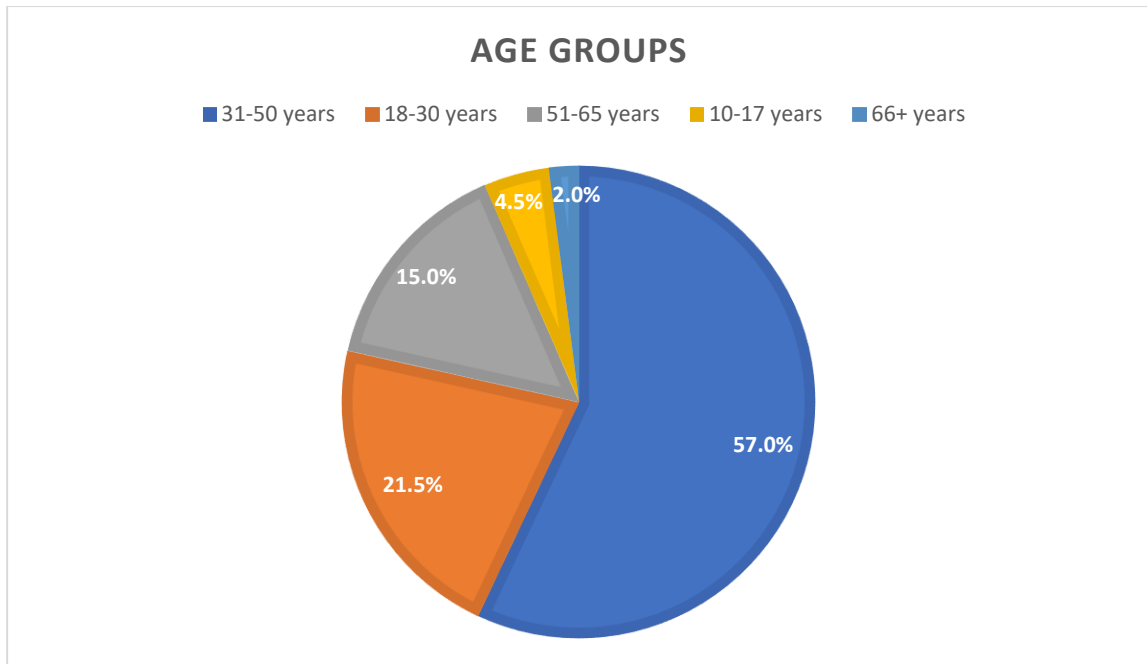


Figure 24: Age Groups Represented by Respondents to the Survey

When it comes to visitation, 35 of the 42 respondents (83%) had visited Head-Smashed-In before, with the majority being in the last two years (19 out of 35 respondents 54%). Of these 35 respondents, 33 said they believed HSI to be a place of heritage (94%), while the remaining 2 respondents (6%) said they did not know. Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi was identified as a place of visitation by 37 of 42 respondents (88%) with the majority visiting the site within the past year (59%). All 37 of the visitors felt that the site was a place of heritage (100%).

Conversations were had with a total of eleven participants, six were female and five were male. Five of the participants are part of the Kainai Nation and four of the participants are from the Piikani Nation; the additional two participants are non-Indigenous and both have been working at Blackfoot heritage sites for over ten years. In reviewing the transcript’s, themes began to develop and within those, sub themes also

emerged. What is important about this process, is keeping in mind that although a quote is credited to an individual, it is not representative of that individual, rather, each quote is a shared experience had by multiple individuals.

The five main themes include spirituality, values, issues, conflictions, and suggestions / opportunities. The theme of “issues” is by far the largest and contains sub-themes such as issues with policy, issues with management practices, issues with relationship building, and issues with employment. Conflictions is a topic that has two interesting sub-themes; inter-personal conflicts—conflicts with co-workers or other people, and internal conflicts—conflicts with the self and one’s conscience.

In working with the testimonies, my role has required me to operate as a mediator, or an interpreter if you will, between the statements made by participants and you the reader. One thing that has become very clear in working with the data is that many of these themes can (and do) overlap, and all are inter-related. For example, issues with management decisions are a direct result of enforcing policy, leading to issues with policy. Practicing unpopular management decisions can negatively affect relationship building which can then have an impact on employment success. For the sake of this chapter, Issues with relationship building and inter-personal conflicts will be discussed together. Suggestions and Opportunities will be presented and discussed in the final chapter.

Each of the themes will be presented below in a way that reflects traditional Niitsitapii teachings. Niitsitapii ways of knowing is a scientific way of knowing. As I have mentioned previously, when seeking wisdom and / or guidance, Niitsitapii sit with another person and are told stories of experience. The individual takes this information

and ponders over the messages. Each of these themes / sub-themes sections will begin with excerpts from the interview participants—these are their individual accounts woven together to illustrate a collective experience. The excerpts are their personal wisdom gifted to us to learn from.

#### **4.2 AATSIMOYIKAAN – NEED FOR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION**

Excerpts from participants interviews related to spiritual connection and practices:

A lot of it had to do with spirituality for these people that were directed to these places through the dreams or vision quests, when they got there, they paid homage they made reverence, made offerings, made prayers they fasted and they went there to seek answers. And so, in that sense, these two places became strong spiritual places. – Manychief, A

My dad would tell me, he said, there'll be some writing sometimes and then when they go back there, they change or else they disappear. And there's a lot of stories about that, different things, and I heard those from my mom and dad. – First Charger

In terms of spiritual significance (WOS / A), like spiritual heritage, the spiritually significant importance for Indigenous people, is almost unsurpassed by anything that we have in Blackfoot territory. – Yellowhorn

And there was a lot of roles in there that everybody played. Everything from children, women, young men, grown men and so when we started using Piskaan we started doing sweats, amulets, to give you protection. That's what kept you safe. There were crazy dog members there and they would shake their rattles. There's always the physical, the emotional, the mental. So, throughout the generations that we used these piskaan everything had to be right. There were mishaps that happened at times, and of course it was always a big loss but those things did happen. And it was always going back to people saying things of the sort like, "Tsaa, he didn't smudge this morning, that's why that happened". "Tsaa, he didn't go to that sweat last night. He was supposed to be in there". So, the spiritual end of it has a lot to do with these places their purposes. – Manychief, A

I got a copy of the Blackfoot prayer; I made that available for people who didn't know how to say it. I just left that by our smudge box. It became a thing for a lot of people who usually wouldn't do that, or those who come into work and realize they never got a chance to smudge at home because they were too busy. – 626

I've also gone to Writing-on-Stone just as a visitor. I went there a number of times to make offerings. The staff was always very pleasant with me and they were very

accommodating. I was allowed to go into restricted areas to make tobacco offerings and to do a smudge. – Manychief, A

Working at WOS / A, I really loved being able to hear and see the interviews with Elders. It made me really emotional. And being outside and being able to actually be there. You could really feel the power of it. This place deserves to be respected because there's a lot of sacred sites and the different cultural uses we had for that area. – Cross Child

Having replicas and plastic (of rock art images), going to an indoor from outdoor walk through, it doesn't have the spirit of it. That was where it was missing. But when you go through the landscape you feel the experience, all these sites they got spirits there. – First Charger

I felt I had an opportunity to connect to the landscape when I worked at HSI. Some of the ways I would do that would be to go up to the jump site and just watch the sunrise. - Manychief, C

One of my favorite things to do was just walk around and sing my clan song. It was like a sad feeling in the building like, the spirits were lonely. I felt like it brought a happier feeling to the building for the day. – 626

I understand the sacredness of this site and the importance of the function of this site. You take away that tourism aspect, you take away the attendance, and revenue, it's still a sacred site, always will be. And that's what I appreciate. - 1921

At Writing-on-Stone, Buffalo Jump, at all of our cultural sites, there needs to be that renewal of energy, where the spirits can feel that power again, feel alive through us, performing our ceremonies, or even just being there. – 626

So just the sites themselves have gone through all those changes. And then just like the people, our generations have gone through all the changes regarding these sites, it used to be at one time, a young man would go to these sites and sleep there for a vision quest, to seek whatever answers or to gain whatever powers, it was a brave thing to do. It was part of your lifecycle as a young man, or as a young warrior, even women went out. But now today you don't hear of that. Our people don't have that mindset anymore. That's how all this has changed. – Manychief, A

Niitsitapii, our tourism product is the landscapes and you know, people come from all over the world to see the landscapes and see Alberta but when they want to see 'Indigenous' they seek out what's authentic. My main message is 'authenticity' because of the sacredness, but also because of our community connections. – 1921

Just knowing your traditions, having a better understanding of your own people, gives you a better understanding of yourself. – Manychief, C

Knowing the knowledge, coming traditionally from your parents, your grandparents, as opposed to reading it in a book...that's not passed on, it's got no spirituality. - Manychief, A

This site is never going to go away. Our history is always going to be there. –  
1921

Conversations with participants emphasized the spiritual importance and connection to the landscapes of Head-Smashed-In and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi. I will remind you of the coil of time discussed in chapter two; spiritual and ceremonial practices being conducted on the same places on the landscape are the thread that connect us to the ancestors of the past, as well as the generations of the future. Participants intrinsically understood the centuries of Niitsitapii presence on the landscape as our source of energy, our source of knowledge, our source of health and wellbeing in all its forms (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual).

For all people, the year of 2020 was an astounding time. Personally, I have never experienced more uncertainty, anxiety, and helplessness about the situation around me. Although Governments around the world were mandating everyone stay in doors and isolate, for many Indigenous communities the answer was to spend time outdoors and return to the land. Unfortunately, this instinctive feeling was not supported by policies regarding access to heritage sites. As was the case with Head-Smashed-In during this time, if people wanted to visit this sacred site to ease their anxiety, or leave an offering, they were denied access. In response to the COVID pandemic, HSI management closed the interpretive center and all outdoor trails from March 2020 until June 2021.

When asked to comment on what makes HSI a meaningful heritage site, the majority of survey respondents referred to the long history and connection, to the Blackfoot people and culture in particular, and to southern Alberta in general. Three respondents specifically mentioned the archaeological significance of the site and the artifacts that have been recovered.

For some of the respondents, spirituality and connection to ancestors and land is what makes Head-Smashed-In a significant historical site. One respondent said the site “has powerful images and items that give off spirit and strength of Niitsitapiiksi”. When asked how spiritual practices were accommodated at HSI respondents mentioned the opportunity and space for smudging as well as a place for ceremony to occur.

Ceremonial practices, Blackfoot people, and Blackfoot culture were spoken of in both a past and present tense with one respondent stating “the site promotes Blackfoot culture and history” and “it shows people how we live on traditional Blackfoot land and shows how culture has adapted and is alive today”. These sentiments were echoed by Elders who were interviewed, one of whom stated, “We have names to identify these places, and we have stories and songs that are tied in with these places. That’s why we have to have the knowledge, the cultural knowledge about these places, because they’re prominent landmarks” (Manychief 2021; personal communication).

Access to culture and cultural practices is an important component for Niitsitapii people wanting to pursue employment at these sites. One employee of the Buffalo Jump stated, “I seen potential and how special it was because not many people can go to their job site every morning and then smudge and connect with ancestors, and so I feel really lucky in that sense” (1921, personal communication, 2021). Another person with experience at HSI (Yellowhorn, personal communication, 2021), mentioned their family not being involved in the Sundance and that being an area she held little knowledge. Employment at the Interpretive Center provided her an avenue, and opportunity, to expand her knowledge around the purpose, significance, and oral traditions about the ceremony.

This same participant also has work experience at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi and echoes a similar sentiment: “Working at Writing-on-Stone, some of my favorite things about working there was learning more about the spiritual significance of the area, learning about the histories, learning about Katoyis and seeing things like the Thunderbird, the rock art, and really being able to share information with my family. That was really great.” (Yellowhorn, personal communication, 2021).

When survey respondents were asked how spiritual practices were accommodated at WOS / A, again, the majority of respondents made mention of taking the opportunity to smudge or pray while visiting. Another common response made mention of the landscape and the opportunity it provides for solace. Having Elders present on site was something people felt was important and lacking at this site in particular. One participant spoke of being involved in a bundle opening ceremony at WOS / A during the early 2000’s (First Charger, personal communication, 2021), however this is discussed as a one-time occurrence rather than a re-curing or consistent event.

It is apparent that the spiritual significance of these sites, and the continued ceremonial use of these sites, is very important and necessary to the Niitsitapii community. In 2016, while employed at Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi, I took it upon myself to develop Cultural Access Protocols (Weasel Moccasin 2019) for parks management. These protocols outlined step-by-step processes for various traditional land uses, everything from harvesting plants and minerals to accommodating requests to make rock art. Although Parks management was supportive of the development of the protocols, I was constantly reminded that they would have no legal binding; as you may recall, this is a similar response given by the four largest colonial nations about UNDRIP.

In order for Indigenous-led heritage policies to be successful, it is imperative that they are supported by various levels of policy. In order for true structural change to take place, governments at all levels must work towards creating policy directives that are in sync. Otherwise, you run the risk of having Indigenous-led policy becoming a token rather than a useful tool.

#### **4.3 NIITSITAPIIYSINNI – NEED TO PRACTICE AND HONOR NIITSITAPII VALUES**

Excerpts from participant interviews related to values:

There was a value put on these places: spiritual value; there were other values as subsistence, place where you can go and find food. There was geology, the different rock types, what could they be used for. There was the plant and vegetation difference between the two places. – Manychief, A

My mom, dad and I went to see those writings. I remember seeing the writing there and my dad was telling a story of what those were. It was quite fascinating, just like turning a page in a book, he was telling the story of those symbols. – First Charger

If you don't know the stories of the place, if you don't know the plants, if you don't know the animals, if you don't know the significance, then you don't really understand the whole heritage value and whole heritage of the place. It is this unbelievable matrix that is almost undefinable. – Berry

So that's the importance of knowing the cultural aspects of these places. It's Blackfoot country, if you're a Blackfoot Indian you need to know these things! How else are you going to know what belongs to you? The future generations need to know. This is Blackfoot country. These are the places that exist. These are the stories behind them. – Manychief, A

We were pretty low down in the numbers (Niitsitapii). We almost got wiped out. Some of these people their names you'll never hear them again. Whole families perished. No survivors. Their names will never be in the books again. But our lineage is still in there. We're still from those people. We still have the stories, we still have the songs, we still have the language and we have the knowledge of their existence. That's my job. I have to pass that on too. When we say Blackfoot country you need to know these places. - Manychief, A

We have a practical side where we learn things that are not in books, the world becomes our teacher. That's the way it's supposed to be. This is where you get wisdom. – Little Leaf, C

We have names to identify these places. And we have stories and songs that are tied in with these places. That's why we have to have the knowledge, the cultural knowledge about these places, because they're prominent landmarks. – Manychief, A

When asked if participant felt if the interpretive practices at HSI supported and honored traditional Blackfoot values: In some senses yes, in some no. It's a daily struggle – 1921

When you manage a site, you manage it for its values, and statements of significance. So, when WOS / A was World Heritage listed, it was originally listed for criteria three, four, five, and one of the outstanding universal values for the UNESCO. And it only got accepted for three. They were so focused on the rock art, that they missed this entire huge cultural landscape. I think that the rock art speaks to these values, but I don't think it's the core; the core is the place itself. And if you're not looking at it holistically, then your site is not going to be protected. – Berry

The whole structure changed. And so, the folks at the RAM, sure they have archaeological expertise and they understand that, but they don't understand how we operate, the Indigenous worldview. But yet they're making decisions for us. – 1921

I feel the values were being practiced at HSI to an extent but not completely. – Manychief, C

I haven't been to Writing-on-Stone in a couple years, but I know that for a couple years they haven't had Indigenous interpreters. So, it's hard to say what's being said there, but at the time that I was working there, I do believe, given that the interpreters were all Indigenous, we were all Blackfoot, that the proper portrayal and proper information was being given to the visitors. – Yellowhorn

They (Government of Alberta / Royal Alberta Museum) want our artifacts, they got our roasting pit, they got to have an archeological dig this past summer. So, they're achieving their goals but they're not understanding the operation. – 1921

I would say what was being shared with the visitors (at HSI) aligned with what I know to be Blackfoot values because the majority of the seasonal hires, I felt, had a good understanding of our culture and how to explain it to people. – Manychief, C

A lot of people don't realize it's a big responsibility to learn and to retain because you're going to have to teach. You are a student now, you become a teacher. Now you have to teach. That information has to be carried on. – Manychief, A

From the excerpts above, it is clear that conversation participants have a larger, more holistic and encompassing, understanding of these two cultural sites. Participants discussed the importance of respectful and reciprocal relationships with all relations, human and non-human. They stressed the importance of ‘knowing’; the importance of interacting with the land in order to learn from and understand broader relationships within the universe. There is also mention of the colonial legacy that exists in current policy which leads to a shortfall in fully recognizing and understanding what ‘Indigenous ways of knowing’ translates into in terms of heritage management practices of Niitsitapii culture.

Data from the survey indicated that thirty-one of the respondents that visited HSI said they learned something about the Blackfoot culture (88%) while 2 respondents (6%) said they did not learn anything and another 2 respondents (6%) said they did not know if they learned anything about the Blackfoot people and / or culture. Thirty-three of the respondents that visited WOS / A felt they learned something new about the Blackfoot people and culture when they visited the site (89%), while 4 did not feel they learned anything (11%).

Of these 35 respondents who identified as visiting HSI before, 26 were of Blackfoot descent (74%). When asked if the educational messages reflected the Blackfoot value system, 19 answered ‘yes’ (73%), 5 answered ‘no’ (19%), and 2 answered ‘I don’t know’ (8%). One of the previous employees mentioned, “I received a tour about four or more years ago now, and the information is relatively the same from when I worked there (2007-2009) and the information being shared is still kind of honoring the Blackfoot ways of knowing” (Yellowhorn, personal communication, 2021).

Survey respondents who felt the information they received reflected a Blackfoot worldview make mention of the oral traditions and histories that were shared with them during their visits. Respondents made clear that the source of this Blackfoot perspective came directly from the Blackfoot guides who interacted with them at the site. One survey response stated, “the information from the guides was from a Blackfoot world view. The content of the interpretive displays is very colonial”. This is something that I have also drawn attention to in previous chapters. It is evident to members of the Niitsitapii community that the interpretive displays at Head-Smashed-In privilege Euro-Western accounts and understandings of the Niitsitapii culture and people.

Of these 37 respondents who identified as visiting WOS / A before, 26 were of Blackfoot descent (70%). When asked if the educational messages reflected the Blackfoot value system, 17 answered ‘yes’ (65%), 6 answered ‘no’ (23%), and 3 answered ‘I don’t know’ (12%). The educational messaging, which focusses on stewardship as a concept, is directly related to the heritage management plans of the site. One of the overarching purposes and objectives listed in the WOS / A Heritage Management Plan is ‘Cultural and Nature-based Visitor Experience’, which states: “facilitation of visitor and Indigenous experiences that demonstrate a deep respect for the landscape and cultural values, encouraging appropriate activities that help reinforce a sense of stewardship, and acknowledge the global significance of the site” (2023:4). This concept of ‘global significance’ can be an issue if it precedes the significance of these sites to the Niitsitapii people and interferes with traditional land uses (Wylie 2005; Meskell 2015).

When survey respondents were asked if they felt a Blackfoot worldview was being represented at WOS / A, two respondents mentioned having experiences which

were similar, in that information received focussed more on the science of archaeology leaving them both wishing they had learned more about the cultural importance of the site instead. Similar to the HSI example above, survey respondents who felt information received reflected a Blackfoot worldview attributed this to interaction with a Blackfoot guide. Interestingly enough, when respondents were asked what they wished to see for the information to reflect a Blackfoot worldview, they stated they would like to see more Blackfoot guides represented at the site. This is because Niitsitapiisiyini focusses on relationships and relationality. “The concrete relationships of Niitsitapii are to the land, animals, time, stars, sun, and to each other, but hundreds of years of Europeanizing history have colonized these relationships and they have become abstractions. Detachment and disassociation are evident in the dispiritualization of these concepts and relationships (Bastien 2004:31).

#### **4.4 ISSUES WITH POLICY**

Excerpts from participant interviews related to issues with policy and management practices:

Policies were put in place by the provincial government so no agricultural means could be sold on reserve. Places like Writing-on-Stone need to have more information about that. And then more access for Indigenous peoples to cross the river. Going to see the rock art on the other side, and better policies in place for Elders. At Writing-on-Stone the information is really good, but it seems like cash is key there. And that’s what’s more important, and it bothers me that the place is definitely run by Europeans versus by Indigenous people. – Yellowhorn

The (HSI) interpretive matrix, I think should be a living document. It’s like a ‘policy’ manual. You revisit it every once in a while, and you make amendments. But no, government said “that’s it. That’s the story you stick to it”. – 1921

I did not feel I could suggest improvements to (HSI) management because the site manager at the time seemed like he was always busy, and never really had the time to sit down and like genuinely hear you out. I just didn’t feel there was ever a time or space to share that kind of suggestions to the managers or the higher

people. If I did have an opportunity to suggest improvements, I think they (management) would probably make it sound like it's a good idea and yes, we will consider it, and that sounds very valuable, and whatever they might say, but I think it would be too much red tape – 626

I remember telling them, there is no disrespect in what I'm saying, don't think that I'm getting mad at you, or saying that you're not doing a good job, but, in these situations it's really delicate, and you always have to make sure that you're operating in a way of respect, and doing things in a good way. And I remember when I told the manager, he was, "Yep, yep, uh-huh, yeah", and I just felt like, you know, they're just saying this to my face, but nothing's really going to be done. – Cross Child

In terms of Writing-on-Stone, I think that security is a big issue, especially in terms of the rock art. There's still a lot of vandalism and damage done directly to the rock art. – Yellowhorn

At Head-Smashed-In, it was very much 'do this job or I will fire you'. There was no room to make suggestions, there is no room to make real change. – Yellowhorn

I think that they (WOS / A) definitely need to relook at their policies in terms of dealing with Blackfoot and what they allow Blackfoot people to actually view, and where we're allowed to go within the park. – Yellowhorn

The (HSI) matrix is basically somebody trying to explain our life by looking through a window and trying to explain on the other side of the window, the items that are here in our life. – Little Leaf

One of the most frustrating things, a barrier of working with the Blackfoot, is that you're regulated by the government. A lot of times, the Elders tell you something different than what the government wants you to do. And I felt like that was a huge barrier of working with the Elders because they should be the final say, it shouldn't be the government, that gives the final approval. So, I found that that was super frustrating that their traditional knowledge was overlooked a lot of times when wanting to implement it. – Berry

HSI "belongs" to the Alberta government, and I don't feel as if that heritage is really honored, or recognized the way that it should be. They think that they're doing right by us, by hiring Blackfoot people, not by having Blackfoot people create these policies and manage these areas, you know, so there's a lot there – Yellowhorn

We're not even allowed to call them Elder advisory or give it a real structure. We can just call it Elder group because I think the management finds it a threat that if they had more clout, they would start to rock the boat. And they (Elders) come here more at our convenience not their convenience. – 1921

I don't know if the COVID policies of the government for these sacred sites actually support Indigenous engagement with these places. Because Indigenous groups are sensitive populations. And I don't know if I would take my Elders to a

place that's open to anyone across Canada, across the world, to do a ceremony when there's a potential for them to get sick. I think that first and foremost, those policies should be there to protect the elders that are using this site for traditional use. But I don't know if there's even COVID protocols in place to support that. – Berry

As these excerpts can attest to, Indigenous peoples around the globe have been screaming out that heritage policies that do not include traditional ways of knowing do not work for them / us. In Canada, we have seen this progression from cultural awareness through cultural sensitivity and are currently struggling to achieve and grasp onto the concept of Cultural Safety (Koptie 2009). Cultural awareness is understood as the beginning step towards understanding that there is a difference while cultural sensitivity alerts people to the legitimacy of difference. Cultural safety is an outcome that “enables safe services to be defined by those that receive the service” (Koptie 2009).

The current system and way of doing things needs to be rethought and redeveloped. There are current and recent examples of Indigenous led policy reform, especially as it relates to heritage management. The Indigenous Heritage Circle website (2019) features four examples of Indigenous lead policy and advocacy. These include the Royal BC Museum and Haida Gwaii Museum Indigenous Repatriation Handbook (2019), Our Way: Yukon First Nations Heritage Law, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Act (August, 2018), and the Canadian Museums of Civilization Repatriation Policy (2011).

It has been my experience, that although there may be interest and support to develop Indigenous-led policy, it is not supported at all levels of government. A good example is the Traditional Access protocols mentioned in the previous chapter, which were developed for Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi. Although the creation of the document was supported by site management staff, they were also quick to point out that it was an

aspirational document that was not supported by current provincial policy / law. The section of the document which addressed the making of new rock art at the site of Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi was in direct conflict with the Provincial Historic Resources Act. Pursuant to section 52(1) of this act, "A person who contravenes this Act or the regulations, the conditions of a permit, or a direction of the Minister under this Act is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$50 000 or to imprisonment for a term of not more than one year or to both fine and imprisonment" (Government of Alberta 2022:24).

Indigenous sovereignty, especially as it relates to self-determination and cultural heritage, is recognized by UNDRIP articles 3, 4, 11, 13 and 31. In order to ensure that the UNESCO "organizations policies, planning, programming and implementation uphold UNDRIP", the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples was created (2018:4). This document includes sections on applying UNDRIP to the organizations mandated areas, and mechanisms for mainstreaming the UNESCO policy on engaging with Indigenous Peoples.

Mechanisms for mainstreaming identified are programme coordination, information sharing, and resource mobilization (United Nations, 2018). These areas are directly related to what IHC admits is one of the challenges and barriers facing Indigenous cultural heritage, that "Canadians and visitors from other countries are being misinformed about the histories of places and events because Indigenous experts and perspectives have been missing in each step of the way, from research to interpretation" (IHC 2019).

There is no opportunity for Indigenous cultures to rejuvenate and flourish when being governed under oppressive policies that carry a colonial legacy. I attended a UNESCO Roundtable discussion in Edmonton in the Fall of 2022. I had the opportunity to hear Danika Littlechild speak about her experience working with the Canadian Government. Danika is of Cree descent and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University. She is also the past co-chair of the Indigenous Circle of Experts – Pathways to Canada Target 1.

For those not familiar with the Canada Target 1 Challenge, it is an “investment by the federal government in projects that can add to Canada’s protected and conserved areas across the country” (Government of Canada 2021). The challenge is that by 2025 the Canadian Government will have conserved 25% of Canada’s land, and 25% of its oceans. Among other things, the project is said to advance Indigenous-led conservation and reconciliation (Government of Canada 2021). This was the focus of Danika’s talk at the roundtable discussion. She spoke of her experience in working with the project and said something that I felt was pivotal to my current research. She had said Indigenous people are no longer satisfied with having a seat at the table, we want a whole new table!

#### **4.5 ISSUES WITH MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

Excerpts from participant interviews related to management practices:

Our landscapes are so changed now we actually have to create this hybrid system of Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge, to manage these incredibly volatile systems. Because if we can’t figure out how to manage our environmental systems, we can’t preserve heritage. And, you know, there’s a lot of intangible things about heritage, but heritage is very tangible. The way that we educate about heritage and about culture is going to have to change because if you can’t preserve the tangible aspects of heritage, we’re not going to have those elements anymore.  
-Berry

Site management (HSI) has such a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Blackfoot communities that it hinders their ability to make proper heritage management decisions and practices. – 1921

I really hope that whoever takes over the site (WOS / A) and manages it into the future has a good enough relationship with the Blackfoot Elders and the knowledge holders, that they will know how to manage that site appropriately and just not manage it to one value. Because a lot will be lost if they do. – Berry

Management, when I was there (HSI), felt real closed off and set in their ways, like, “it’s worked for us this way for so long, why change it”, you know? – Manychief, C

When you think about it, Parks policies are colonial, and the laws do not support traditional policies and traditional practices and traditional uses. – Berry

Laws, education, and how we view heritage are all intrinsically linked together. And until we start chiseling away at these laws and begin to support these ways of managing and these ways of knowing, then it’s just going to be barrier after barrier. It is because of super colonial systems, like the Historic Resource Act, which does not support Indigenous cultures and does not support Indigenous knowledge. It’s there to support industry, and it’s there to actually take away power from the nations rather than give them power to protect their resources. – Berry

Sometimes, you know, I would have conflicting information (about heritage management practices) there wasn’t always a consensus, like, either from management or Indigenous leaders. – Tolly

Something that’s being hugely overlooked right now in heritage management is what about these plants that are so important to bundles? What if these plants cannot be accessed in 20 years because our environment has changed. What’s going to happen to ceremony? What’s going to happen to the education that happens during the ceremony to the next generation, just within Blackfoot communities? – Berry

I have reservations about working at WOS / A again because of the people who run it. Because if that place isn’t given the respect it deserves, then I don’t know if I would feel safe. – Cross Child

What I had found compelling is people’s reference to the impact of decisions on wider beings (plants and animals) but also the spiritual repercussions of decision making. Bastien (2004:36) expresses the importance that “we learn about the connections with our relatives with whom we co-habit the land. It is the way we come to know our relatives and alliances, and this is how we learn our reciprocal responsibilities and how to maintain

balance”. Spiritual concerns were something that conversation participants felt management staff of the two cultural sites could not understand because they are not Blackfoot. As a consequence, they could not properly manage the sites accordingly. This was especially true when discussing traditional uses and considering ceremonial obligations.

Little Leaf, a Blackfoot Interpreter for HSI since 2008, explained the spiritual repercussions involved with finding, and removing, items from the past. As part of the Blackfoot culture, when an individual comes across an artifact from the past, or remains, an offering is given and the item is left alone, it is shown respect. This creates opposing thoughts and attitudes when it come to archaeological practices.

A perfect example of this is the roasting pit that was excavated from HSI in 2016 and which now sits in the Royal Alberta Museum. When reported in the news (CBC News, October 6, 2016) it was described as “perfectly intact with a prepared meal sealed inside”. The lead archaeologist claimed, “someone prepared this meal and they didn’t go back and open it up and eat it”. This is the narrative that is now associated with the museum exhibit in Edmonton’s Royal Alberta Museum. I had the opportunity to visit the roasting pit exhibit in 2019 during the time I was employed at Head-Smashed-In.

As an employee (and an archaeologist) I heard of the excavation that took place and the interpretation associated with the remains. Based on my cultural and educational knowledge, I was not expecting to see the remains that were on exhibit (Fig.25). My first inclination was, “this is a garbage pit”. If this were an untouched meal, as reported by CBC, then there would be one piece with articulated skeletal remains (ex. A hind quarter with leg bones all intact, or a side of ribs with back strap leaving vertebrae and ribs

intact). Visible remains on display include portions of a sacrum (pelvis), various vertebrae (piece of spine), mandibles (jaw bones), phalanges (hoofs), and articulated canine paws. Anyone who has spent their life hunting, butchering and processing would be quick to tell you that none of these pieces have any good meat on them, none of them are considered a “feast” by any means.



Figure 25: Roasting Pit Exhibit Housed at the Royal Alberta Museum (2019), Excavated from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in 2016

Another issue with this interpretation is insinuating that Blackfoot people consumed canines which is not the case! This relates directly to our bison hunting oral

traditions shared in Chapter 2, which state the wolves are the ones who taught us how to hunt the buffalo. Because of this gift of knowledge, we vowed to never eat any animal that has claws, only cloven-hoofed animals. A more likely interpretation for the contents of the roasting pit is that the meal that was roasted was in fact consumed. After the meal was taken out, the hole in the ground was being used as a garbage pit; scrap pieces of no use were discarded in this hole.

The canine remains are likely the result of a wolf coming to share the spoils of the hunt and getting too close to the people resulting in its death. We know from oral traditions that wolf hides were integral to the success of buffalo hunting and being able to manipulate the movements of the herd. Instead of dying in vain, the hide could be used. When removing the hide of the canine animal, the lower limbs were severed (as is typically the case when harvesting hides) and thrown into the roasting / garbage pit along with the other scrap pieces. This would explain why these are the only remains which are articulated.

On the day that the roasting pit was removed from the landscape of HSI Little Leaf voiced his concern with the archaeologists on site, to which they replied, “anything and everything we find on this province belongs to the government” (Little Leaf, personal conversation, 2022). Chambers and Blood (2009:262) highlight that the Province of Alberta curtailed unregulated excavation and wanton destruction of archeological and historic sites when it legislated the *Historical Resources Act*”. This is a great example of how issues with policy directly leads to issues with management practices.

Aoahkannaistokawa (Balance) is an important Niitsitapii value missing from current HSI and WOS / A Heritage Management Plans. Balance is referred to in the WOS

/ A management plan which states they “will continue to improve its management practices to ensure the protection of the outstanding universal values, while accommodating new visitors and implementing appropriate improvements to provide outstanding visitor experiences” (Government of Alberta 2023:16). This highlights how the heritage management approach places emphasis on communicating a vision that is relevant and intelligible to ‘the public’, as one of the primary concerns is ‘visitor experience’— and the visitor being considered is not Niitsitapii. As one conversation participant stated, labeling sacred sites “a cultural heritage site is a title put there to attract non-natives” (626, personal communication, 2021).

A perfect example of this disconnect and alienation of Indigenous peoples is the inability to pick plants in Federal and Provincial Parks, making collection and harvesting of foods and medicines illegal. Current heritage management practices focus on eradicating human interaction with the natural world as much as possible so as not to harm the environment. However, this enforcement is counterintuitive to Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. The very policies put in place to protect the land are the very policies that threaten Indigenous cultural connections to the land. Again, we see this dichotomy between a Euro-western notions of heritage and an Indigenous understanding; one is focussed on preserving / protecting tangible things, while the other is focussed on preserving / protecting the action of practicing.

Euro-western heritage management practices are sterile and stagnant, Indigenous heritage practices are dynamic and immersive. Our cultural way of life and “the responsibilities that make up the identity of Niitsitapii that have been central to child-rearing and educational practices in precolonial times” has been replaced by the

colonizers' education systems and no longer focuses on renewal and balance but instead the idea of development" (Bastien 2004:38). One participant mentioned visiting the site as a child and returning as an adult to see how much development occurred with the creation of a campsite (First Charger, personal communication, 2021). One of the internal confictions that will be discussed later in the chapter revolves around the fact that the sacred cultural sites of HSI and WOS / A are operated as tourist attractions first and foremost. Revenue and visitor numbers are a large focus for management staff.

Both HSI and WOS / A have the same designations (Provincial Historical Resource, National Historic Resource, UNESCO) due to the rich archaeological records they each have. "Heritage protection approaches led by archaeological theory and methods based on Eurocentric values can eclipse Indigenous systems of knowledges by erasing or mischaracterizing Indigenous values and relationships with the past and the land" (Aird and Fox 2020:7). When sacred cultural sites are not managed according to cultural values but instead focus on colonial values, conflicts will occur.

#### **4.6 ISSUES WITH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING / INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT**

Excerpts from participant interviews related to barriers in relationship building:

That home feeling is not there, that welcoming. Internally, what I've noticed is there's a 'Us and Them' – 1921

A school group came from Kainai (visiting WOS / A), and they had an Elder with them, and it was my pleasure to accompany them. But again, filling that role where I'm kind of like, policing, and you know, wearing a uniform that's very akin to law enforcement. – Tolly

In terms of learning about Blackfoot history, and learning about Blackfoot spirituality, and the importance and the significance of Head-Smashed-In to myself, to the Blackfoot people, that was something that I gained. But that was

overshadowed by the politics and the pettiness and all the lateral violence that you really couldn't get anything out of it. – Yellowhorn

Writing-on-Stone is probably the most magical place on earth, but the work environment is probably the most toxic place on earth. I really felt like when I was working there that I was always miss stepping, because I wasn't conforming to Parks culture. – Berry

On a daily basis. I find myself educating the non-Indigenous employees here on what it's like, where I go after five o'clock, what my experiences are in the community. Just letting them know some of the issues, some of the political views, letting them know the importance of our identity and our foundation. It's important that they understand who we are because if you don't understand who you're dealing with, you can't really move forward. – 1921

Management needs to have more involvement with the community. Even if they just held a barbecue and invited people to be there. This could even help them with recruitment. – First Charger

One of the main things is actually having a relationship. I have witnessed that to have a functional relationship, there has to be establishing trust and mutual respect, that things that are shared will be valued. – Tolly

There is no focus on specific areas, like for example, women and children. At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, the way things were, I remember the hushes amongst the interpreters at the time, "Oh, we can't change things we're not allowed to change things management likes it this way". – Yellowhorn

I think it's important that we capture a lot of knowledge and the leader of this place needs to go to an Elders meeting or the extended home care in the Bloods, go make yourself known. You work at a sacred Blackfoot site, you should be out there. Everybody should know you. – 1921

Some of my managers were not really willing to learn the proper way to pronounce a Blackfoot word, or just the small remarks. – Manychief, C

Work can be put into relationship building and then it can be wiped out by some inappropriate interactions or missteps. And I've seen this with not just the Blackfoot community, but also some of the neighbors in the surrounding community of the park. The consistency in the respectful relationships wasn't always there. – Tolly

There is just an unwillingness to participate, or to learn, or to have an open mind. You know, I think because you're working here (HSI) and it's a big part of who we were, who we are. It's incumbent on them to learn the language at least a greeting you know, at least! But it doesn't happen. – 1921

Almost all of the participants I spoke with mentioned feeling alienated and / or

belittled by non-Indigenous staff while working at these cultural sites. All of the incidents

that were discussed had a similar thread, all were a direct result of unconscious bias. There was a general frustration held by participants in feeling that non-Indigenous staff did not invest enough time, effort, or resources into becoming truly knowledgeable about the culture and familiar with (and within) the Niitsitapii communities. This lack of knowledge is what has led to inaccurate information being communicated in cultural programming. Majority of the incidents discussed also involved non-Niitsitapii individuals who, despite being told otherwise, exhibited such confidence when reciting inaccurate information, or pronouncing a Blackfoot word with the wrong intonations thus changing the meaning of the word completely.

An important aspect of hiring Blackfoot interpreters is ensuring the Niitsitapii voice is heard. While employed at Head-Smashed-In, one of the Blackfoot interpretive guides came to me very upset one day because of an interaction they had with a guest and another non-Blackfoot employee. The guide was standing at the front info desk when a guest approached them and asked about the tools used by the Blackfoot during the butchering process. The older, non-Blackfoot, staff member just happened to be standing there and felt compelled to answer the question explaining to the visitor that the Blackfoot would not have “sophisticated” cutting tools like steel knives making their lives, and the butchering process, very hard. This individual’s position at the jump was strictly administrative, they had no interpretive training, and no right to dominate the interaction with the visitor and give them inaccurate information. The guide who experienced this said they felt as if they had been erased in that moment; to have an individual approach you and ask about your culture, and before you can even open your mouth to respond, a

non-Blackfoot person speaks inaccurately on your behalf, not allowing you a chance to speak for yourself or your people.

A similar situation occurred for a previous employee of WOS / A during their employment in 2017. One of the interview participants mentioned staying in accommodations at WOS / A and being placed with a non-native woman who was starting her second year at the park. As the participant explains, “it almost felt like she thought she had this seniority over me, even with Blackfoot information. She was like, ‘no, this is how it is because this is who told me previous’, but there’s more to it, it’s not just cut and dry. But you know, a non-Indigenous person is never truly going to understand that because we come from two different backgrounds and ways of thinking, that ultimately is what it boils down to (Cross Child, personal communication, 2021).

Inter-personal conflicts sometimes occurred when attempts were made by Blackfoot staff to address the inaccuracies and / or inappropriate behaviours experienced. Issues were addressed with varying results but in all cases where the Niitsitapii staff felt a resolution was not met, they mentioned beginning to feel internal conflict on whether to continue employment at these sites or not.

#### **4.7 CONFLICTIONS**

Excerpts related to moments of internal conflict:

I think that there was always a bone of contention that the Blackfoot interpreters have with Writing-on-Stone because with us, you know people paid the dollars, they get the Indian to show them around. So, there’s definitely bitterness that’s attached to how both of these sites are handled. – Yellowhorn

I feel like it (HSI) did support and honor Blackfoot values but also like in more of a lucrative way, how would you say that more of like, putting on a show. – 626

So, they (Provincial Government) are capitalizing on our way of life, creating revenue, creating jobs. – 1921

My last year working at Writing-on-Stone, in 2015, I realized we were dancing clowns; token Indians made to tell the Indian story through the Indian mouth, kind of thing. – Yellowhorn

Their primary goal is getting people in the door and revenue. Whereas me as community guy, connection to the community is more important. Our connection to the Siksikaitapii communities is more important than revenue and turnstile. – 1921

Does WOS / A support and honor Blackfoot values? I want to say yes and no. You can see all that they have done like in terms with like working with the tribe and the Elders. But they have also ignored cultural direction around some management decisions. It really made me feel uncomfortable. I felt there was a cultural barrier. – Cross Child

It's kind of tough because it's a park, it's a tourist attraction, there's people that sleep right down by the river, and that was always kind of taboo for us. So that place is so sacred, and to see tourists down there, and garbage, when the occasional person doesn't pick up after themselves, or seeing graffiti on the hoodoos. Just because you see something as sacred, other people don't see it that way. – Cross Child

There's just always that conflicting thing in my mind, I want to do it for the right reasons, but it might be seen as the wrong reasons. I want to go and I want to tell the stories I know; I want to tell the truth that I know. But there's also that other side of the coin, where now I'm sharing these family stories, or I'm sharing my personal stories, and it's putting a value on it, there's that other side of the coin that I don't like. – 626

One of the main themes that has emerged from the research conducted is that of 'conflict'. What is interesting about this as a theme is that the conflictions being discussed are not strictly between individuals of different cultural groups. Almost all individuals who participated in the interviews have discussed internal conflict. Largely, these feelings stem from Niitsitapii who are in a position where they feel they have to present or perform a certain way for their position.

One of the conversation participants shared an experience they had which left them questioning their employment. They explain that while employed at HSI, they liked to play around on the drum with co-workers. "One day, a visitor walked by and started

listening to me and I felt like I was almost playing into that. Then one of my supervisors, I don't know how she intended it to come off, but she said, "Oh, that'd be cool if you could give tours singing with your drum", and I kind of felt like, oh, like a sellout, no thanks!" (626, personal communication, 2021).

The conversation participant recalled this interaction with very strong emotions adding, "growing up, my dad would sing when he was happy, he would drum when he was having a good time, and that's what it was for. I was having a good time, but for someone to want to put a value on that?! After that happening, I didn't really want to do it in that space anymore, like I didn't feel comfortable doing it" (626, personal communication). This one anecdote provided by one participant is a great example of the complex emotions that arise when Indigenous people work in heritage management.

When Indigenous people working in heritage management have these types of experiences there is a flood of emotions to work through. Predominantly, there is anger and frustration at the fact you have to endure that experience, anger and frustration towards the individual projecting that experience on you, and sometimes anger and frustration at oneself for the way they may have responded. Some individuals may also experience regret and / or remorse for sharing certain information with site visitors. Participants spoke of a struggle with balancing educating the public and being tokenized for knowledge.

Interestingly enough, this internal conflict was not just experienced by Niitsitapii staff. A non-Blackfoot employee of Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi confided, "the longer I worked there, and the more I learned about the Niitsitapii, and how significant that place has been for 1000s of years, I felt a lot of personal conflict about being the one to share

the story of the Blackfoot people, and the significance of Aisinai'pi. And just being a literal gatekeeper did not sit well with me. I loved doing the job, I loved talking about the rock art, the history, and I mean, the cultural significance were messages that I loved talking about, but I felt as though maybe I was not the ideal messenger” (Tolly, personal communication, 2021). Here is yet another testament to the importance of employing Indigenous people in the heritage management field.

#### **4.8 ISSUES WITH EMPLOYMENT**

Excerpts from participants interviews related to employment barriers:

That relationship is not there (between place and people). It needs to be there. It needs to be this place as a resource. I think that that's something that needs to happen, that we need to be more connected. -1921

There are not enough Blackfoot people at the site (WOS / A). There's not enough true open recruitment for Blackfoot people. There are not enough concessions, cultural concessions made to keep and retain Blackfoot people at that site. – Berry

It was hard when you tried to talk about the protocols and yet you're bound by policy, that, doesn't really apply in some situations. It's a living place, and it's not so cut and dry. And I think there needs to be someone there that runs it who should understand that. – Cross Child

Since the time I was there (WOS / A), I don't recall there ever being a permanent Blackfoot staff member, like long term permanent. (For seasonal employment) I think there was a little gap, but most of the time, yes. – Tolly

WOS / A management had the attitude of, we want to pursue employment of Blackfoot people, because we want to check that box, so we look like a really amazing, diverse cultural site. But it was always on their terms. – Berry

I think it's hard for people to be there because of the spirits. And it's also isolated there, we are used to being around people. It's not affordable for them to drive back and forth from the reserve to go to work. – First Charger

What are the cultural barriers for being at this place (WOS / A)? You know, like, do Blackfoot staff want to stay overnight? If they don't, is there any way that you can do a shuttle every day and start their shifts an hour later, and shorten their shifts an hour earlier to get them out to site so that they don't have to stay in a culturally, spiritually powerful, significant place that for some people might be quite overwhelming. It is as if management is saying, 'you can work for us, but

only if you fit into this little mould'. You cannot say that you're supporting Indigenous inclusion in a site, if it's all on your terms. – Berry

I'm not saying that the rest of the building is a lie (HSI) or, you know, it's just seems so romanticized with the culture that it's like if they almost make it seem like you know we shouldn't even exist anymore. – 626

Sometimes I feel that there was a genuine Native perspective that was given. Other times it seemed like the native presenter was given a script to read. I've experienced both. For the native presenters, I find sometimes that they are a little inhibited and not totally willing to share completely the knowledge that they have. Of course, there are fears of ridicule. There are fears of discriminatory remarks. – Manychief, A

(Being an Interpretive Guide) is a good way to educate the mass public on us. Because if it isn't us doing it, who is it going to be? People who don't know the inside, it will be outsiders looking in, but we need insiders, looking out. – 626

Sometimes, you know, non native people are not that well informed. And they don't have the answers for all questions. And sometimes, they don't give the proper presentation. Especially when it's based on native people's ideology. They don't have that; they can't express that. – Manychief, A

I want to do the right thing; I want to help in reconciliation. I want to do what I can do. But I also need to recognize my own limitations, that there are things that are just not my role and not my position. – Tolly

Going to the top of the cliff and to the end, there was a sign that said that we ate bear, which is not true at all! I think there needs to be a review and revival of the information that's being offered in, and on, the plaques. Information coming from the interpreters, the tour guides is more up to date information, but reading those plaques like from what the 80s? So, I think there needs to be some reviewing and revival with those. – 626

I think the window is now, now that truth and reconciliation has really come to the forefront. I should be able to feel comfortable and you know, come forward and say something but for some reason or another I feel that my job is on the line if I speak up and so I kind of hold, like I get tentative. – 1921

The employment strategies used by each of these cultural sites is an interesting topic to look into. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump was identified as having archaeological value resulting in the site being managed by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. Writing-on-Stone was identified as having outdoor recreational value resulting in the site being managed by the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas. Interpretive Guide job descriptions for each site were evaluated as part of this

study. The job descriptions for each site are similar; interpretive guides are expected to lead public and school programs, promote messages of cultural stewardship, and assist in the planning and delivery of special events.

The HSI website has a page devoted to employment opportunities. The job description lists the job title as Blackfoot Guide located at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site. What is interesting is that the employer is listed as the Pincher Creek & District Historical Society (PCDHS). Under this ministry, HSI tenures out a contract to PCDHS and pays them to manage the Blackfoot Guides. The HSI Head of Education can direct and supervise these staff but cannot manage them as they are staff of the Pincher Creek & District Historical Society, not HSI. Within this structure, the salary for the seasonal Guide position is minimum wage, \$15.50 - \$18.00 / hr, with the expectation to work most weekends. This raises interesting questions around operations budget. What are the benefits of this site deciding to pay a third party to manage staff? How much of the salary budget for Blackfoot hires is being paid to this third party? Is this the reason hiring wages are as low as they are? Is it fair to be paying Blackfoot staff minimum wage when the site is generating revenue by way of showcasing the Blackfoot culture?

Alternatively, for Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi, Interpretive Guides are Government of Alberta Employees. The rate of pay is much higher, \$29.42 / hr, plus an incentive in lieu of benefits and premiums if having to work weekends and evenings. One of the qualifications listed for this position is enrollment or completion of a post-secondary education, while for HSI only a high school diploma is listed. This educational requirement can create a barrier for Niitsitapii interested in filling this role. Again, we see

the privileging of Euro-western knowledge and ways of knowing at the expense of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing.

At Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi, employment of Blackfoot descendants has been written into the Heritage Appreciation Plan (2004) as well as the Draft Heritage Management Plan (HMP) (2018:54) where it is stated, “employing Indigenous individuals at Writing-on-Stone has such a broad range of benefits that it is considered a high priority”. Despite this high priority, the park also admits that “recruitment of Indigenous employees remains challenging and placements are variable year-to-year” (2018:53).

The HMP identifies six benefits to Indigenous employment, which include: challenging, well-paid positions for Indigenous individuals; career-building experience for Indigenous individuals; authentic Indigenous voice(s) to inform and educate visitors; Indigenous perspectives on-site to inform park operations, communications, and programming; relationship building and cultural-bridging opportunities; and a venue for Indigenous Peoples to dispel myths and misinformation about their culture (2018:53). There is no mention of long-term career opportunities or ability to move upward into supervisory and / or management positions.

One employee of WOS / A voiced their frustration with this lack of opportunity they witnessed during their year and a half employment. “There was never a permanent position for a Blackfoot person. You have all of these amazing Blackfoot people that are coming to the site, and you are giving them four months of employment, and then you’re cutting them loose, and saying, ‘oh, we don’t have anything for you for the winter’. And

then hoping that they come back the next year” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2021).

Among the HMP’s suggested strategies for increasing Indigenous employment there is mention of identifying and reducing physical, social, and financial barriers (2018:54). I am curious to know who would be identifying these barriers? Potential, or current, Indigenous employees, or Parks Management staff? One aspect participants of interviews identified, which Parks Management is not considering, is the spiritual barriers that also exist for Niitsitapii wanting to interact with the site. With that, we see ourselves coming back around full circle, coiling back if you will, to the first theme of this chapter, the need for spiritual connections.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

Research for this thesis took place during the COVID-19 pandemic during the summer of 2021 until the spring of 2022. Doing so brought interesting challenges which tested my adaptability as a researcher. Pandemic regulations and restrictions were in constant flux. Regardless of this, quantitative and qualitative data was gathered through conversations and surveys. Eleven individuals from the Kainai and Piikanie communities shared their experiences as Niitsitapii working in the cultural heritage sites of Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. In addition to this, forty-two survey responses were received providing the perspective of Niitsitapii visitors to the sites.

From the testimonies provided five themes / topics were highlighted as of importance to the participants of the research. It is important to remember that the quotes

and experiences discussed through this section are not about the individuals who had these experiences, rather the focus is on the shared experiences had by many individuals. Taking a step back, one realizes that if many individuals had similar experiences over the decades of operation, then the themes being discussed are not about inter-personal issues, they are highlighting issues within the current structure of heritage management. Although these themes were discussed separately in this thesis, they are all interrelated and interdependent.

The first topic of importance that was discussed at length was that of spirituality and the need for spiritual connection to the sacred cultural sites. Participants emphasized the importance of continued ceremonial use of these sites and drew attention to the value of having these spiritual needs being supported by policy directives. Closely related to this was the topic of cultural values needing to be better represented at these sites. Currently, the Heritage Management Plans of these sites do not reflect the values of the Niitsitapii culture. When those values are not reflected, those values are not being managed properly (or at all). This results in these cultural values being at risk and leads to the largest theme in these results, the theme of issues.

Many of the participants drew attention to the issue of existing policy and the colonial legacy that still exists within the structure. Indigenous people do not feel represented when policy making follows status quo of “consultation” — a practice that was described as receiving Indigenous communities input very late in the process. As mentioned before, the Niitsitapii Values have been guiding this research process with the methods employed in this study being developed with the Niitsitapii cultural values as the foundation. This is exactly what needs to occur in the policy making process. When

Indigenous peoples do not feel Indigenous culture is represented in policy, it directly leads to issues with management practices, which is the enforcement of that policy. Participants described several situations where they did not feel that management decisions and / or practices reflected, or represented, the Niitsitapii values they held true.

What is unfortunate, is that multiple participants had experiences where they brought these cultural disconnects to the attention of management staff only to have their concerns fall on deaf ears. This creates the potential for issues with relationship building to occur. Conflicts with non-Indigenous staff were often seen to be the result of cultural misunderstandings and the inability of that staff member to fully grasp Niitsitapii concepts of heritage and heritage management. When these inter-personal conflicts were not seen to have a resolution, they often led to the Blackfoot employees then having internal conflict; participants struggled with whether employment within such a structure should continue. Considering this chain of events, it is not surprising to find that failing to fill employment positions and having adequate representation from the Niitsitapii community is identified as a challenge.

More research needs to be done into the experiences of Indigenous heritage practitioners managing their own heritage. Each one of these themes / topics discussed above reveal intriguing questions around the topic of current heritage management practices and the need for Indigenous-led policy making. I see the potential for each one of these topics / themes to be a thesis focus on their own. Just as multiple participants and documents identified the importance of employing Indigenous people at these sites, it is also important to have Indigenous heritage practitioners and researchers. Indigenous people need to be in charge of the research concerning their culture so that the

information that is being shared is appropriate and accurate. Indigenous communities deserve the right to practice and be involved in the process of the basic human right of self-determination.

## CHAPTER 5: BEGINNINGS

Throughout this thesis we have used a Niitsitapii cultural lens to explore the notion of Indigenous Heritage Management as it relates to two specific sites, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi Provincial Park. Both are sacred cultural sites to the Niitsitapii people and both are being managed by different ministries of the Government of Alberta. Head-Smashed-In was recognized to have value based on the archaeological record which resulted in the site being overseen by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. Writing-on-Stone was recognized to have value in the recreational opportunities the landscape could provide resulting in the site being overseen by the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas. Each site has received National Historic Resource, Provincial Historic Resource, and UNESCO World Heritage designations. Although this recognition instills a sense of pride for many Niitsitapii people, it also brings with it multiple complex layers of policy directives that carry a colonial legacy.

This colonial legacy has been recognized by the Canadian Government as well and acknowledged in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (CTA). Specifically, #79 of the TRC report which states: “We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to: ii) Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada’s national heritage and history”. This thesis research is a response to that call.

Indigenous methodologies were employed for this study and largely focussed on the concept of ‘research as ceremony’ and relationships (Little Bear 2000; Wilson 2008). Ceremony is largely about honoring and renewing the relations we have with both human and non-human beings. I had personal work experience at both of these cultural heritage sites and this research allowed me to strengthen and renew the relations I developed with these places. One way this was done was by making offerings to these places at various times throughout this research journey. This research also allowed me to renew the relationships I had with the people who had work experience at these sites. The visits and conversations that were had, the story telling that took place, were very soul enriching and I always left feeling positive.

Story Telling, a traditional form of teaching, and guiding, others in the Blackfoot culture, was a central focus of the thesis research. This also highlighted Prete’s (2019) beadworking paradigm and the concept of knowledge transmission. Members of the Kainai and Piikanii communities shared their life experiences and acquired knowledge of what it is like to be Niitsitapii and interact with these sites, both as a visitor and as an employee. Knowledge, and a way of knowing, was established through the telling of oral traditions—stories that have been passed down for generations—other times it was with the telling of oral histories—stories that have occurred within the teller’s lifetime, either witnessed by them or experienced by them.

I have shown throughout this thesis that current heritage management and education practices are rooted in Euro-centric thought and values. Following Prete’s beadworking paradigm and the concept of resistance, this research has resisted that understanding of heritage. Current processes create an exclusionary management practice

that emphasizes the ‘protection’, or ‘exhibition’, of a space. In the public sphere, this is typically at the expense of Indigenous communities being able to practice, and experience, their heritage in ancestral places. In the professional sphere, this can interfere with an Indigenous person’s pursuit of a career in heritage management. Current practices with a colonial legacy lead to questions of ‘authority’, ‘authorized knowledge’, and ‘authorized access’, as well as, who has the right to propose management policies, and who manages heritage sites.

Ideally, the integration referred to in CTA #79 should bring people and groups of differing cultural backgrounds into equal participation in institutions, especially when it comes to developing policy for heritage management and education practices. The Indigenous Heritage Engagement Sessions: Report from the Indigenous Heritage Circle of Parks Canada (2020:18) mentions, “‘cultural heritage’ for Parks Canada is about the past, while for Indigenous People “heritage” is dynamic. It responds to conditions and it can be reinvigorating”. It is for this reason that continued contact and traditional use of sacred cultural sites, like HSI and WOS / A, continues by Indigenous people. This reflects the third concept in Prete’s (2019) beadworking paradigm, that of resiliency. Indigenous peoples are resilient, guaranteeing this connection and interaction with the landscape will continue into the future and this is why it is important to revisit heritage management policies and the policy making process.

## **5.1 REFLECTIONS**

The journey through this thesis was a long and arduous process, as I am sure it is for most, if not all, M.A students. In the Blackfoot culture Elders talk of people being tested, moments where hardships or hurdles are put in front of you, a test of your

character and what you can endure. This was very true for my academic process. I started this program in the midst of a global pandemic, at the same time, I had a three-year-old and a 9-month-old I also had to care for and nurture and who were also competing for my time and attention. I have had close personal relationships fall apart, been displaced from my home with my two young children, held a full-time job, and committed to attending and completing ceremonial obligations.

In addition to all of this, starting this thesis research at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic created an interesting set of challenges. Mandates and regulations were constantly changing meaning I had to be fluid and adaptive in the way I conducted my research. I was not able to engage with people in the way I would have liked. If I were to undertake this research again, outside pandemic regulations, I would like to have site visits with conversation participants as well as conducting group discussions around heritage management and education practices.

Delving into this topic it is very clear that the situations and the relationships involved are extremely complex. On one hand, many Niitsitapii are very proud to be able to say that five out of the six UNESCO world heritage sites in Alberta are on Blackfoot territory. However, on the other hand, each of these sites operate outside the control of the Niitsitapii people. Revenue is being generated from the Blackfoot culture and resources and yet very little makes it into the Blackfoot communities.

One of the more frustrating insights I received during this research project is realizing how little is written about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the heritage management profession. Needless to say, more research needs to be done in this area. The objective of this thesis was to shine a light on problematic areas in the heritage

management field in order to elicit change in response to the TRC Calls to Action. This resulted in many positive themes and topics not being discussed and / or focussed on. For example, there were many accounts of comradery in the work place. The strongest, and most frequent accounts, occurred between the Blackfoot staff, however accounts with non-Indigenous staff were also recounted.

These experiences were great reminders of the importance of having non-Indigenous allies when undertaking the efforts to apply UNDRIP and TRC to the heritage management field. This thesis argues that Indigenous people deserve to be behind the wheel, driving the machine that is heritage management, it does not say that non-Indigenous people cannot be passengers on that journey. I myself have had multiple positive relationships over the years with non-Indigenous heritage management practitioners. The individuals who have truly understood Niitsitapiisinni have been involved in the Niitsitapii community outside their work hours, they have attended ceremonies throughout the year, and they understand the importance of stepping back / aside and playing a supportive role in heritage management.

Prete's (2019) beadworking paradigm was apparent where there were also inspiring and entertaining stories related to resistance within the Euro-centric structure that is the provincial government. Sometimes these acts were subtle other times they were obvious, sometimes they were done with the awareness of management staff, other times they were done covertly. Resiliency, another concept of the beadworking paradigm, is another theme / topic that shone through in participant conversations. Although barriers and conflicts were discussed, participants also spoke of a responsibility to continue

addressing them and educating non-Indigenous people. This reflects the final concept of Prete's beadworking paradigm which is knowledge transmission.

Another topic I find especially interesting and would also be a whole research project on its own, is dissecting and analyzing the conflict that occurs in the heritage management field. It would be dangerous to assume these conflicts only occur between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups / people. As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, De la Cadena and Starn (2007:2) highlight that Indigenous peoples are highly heterogeneous in their views and agenda. Indigenous communities, regardless of size, are not 'one' unified stakeholder and do not necessarily have the same interests.

I have experienced these conflicts and contentious interactions with other Indigenous people, and specifically with Blackfoot people from my own community. The current colonial structures in place in the heritage management field are not designed to navigate the added layer of complexities that is Indigenous communities. Within Indigenous communities there is another layer of questioning of 'authority', 'authorized knowledge', and 'authorized access' as it pertains to sharing and seeking traditional knowledge. I have not failed to appreciate these interactions I have found myself within. I have been told countless times from our Elders that our people were fierce protectors. In all of the cases where I faced contention, I truly believe that the people were acting, thinking, feeling, from a place of protection. The irony is, so am I; a person from the same community, the same culture. Imagine that, opposing views both taking the stance of heritage protection.

My endeavour to work with my own cultural heritage has been a very emotionally taxing one. Having resistance and conflict find its way into all aspects of my research was

not something I was anticipating. This is an interesting phenomenon considering my only intentions has always been practicing and promoting heritage management from a Blackfoot perspective. It begs the questions, what is so threatening about Indigenous rooted heritage management practices?

Times when I felt so beaten down and had absolutely no energy to write, I reminded myself of the offering that was made at the beginning of my academic process. By incorporating ceremony, it ensured the process was completed because I committed to a spiritual responsibility of completing it. I strongly believe that the policy making process needs to reflect this and begin incorporating ceremony from the beginning. As I have shown throughout this document, ceremony is such an integral part of Niitsitapiisinni that it makes sense to have it as a natural part of the process of making policy.

There were many moments through this journey when things did not look positive and I was not sure how things would work out. In these moments, I had to relinquish any control I had (or thought I had) and trust in creator. I had to trust that I did all the right things I could and things would happen (or not happen) as they are meant to. This is also an important concept in policy making as it can be a long and arduous process. As Dowdall and Parish (2003) advocate, the process should not be rushed, or circumvented, for a deadline. For non-Indigenous government employees, the process also should be about relinquishing control and realizing, that is okay.

As a process, reconciliation is also a long and arduous one. An uncomfortable step on this journey for many non-Indigenous people is to first learn and understand the truth. Relationships can come under strain during this process as this is when emotions can be

their highest; when hard truths about the past are being communicated. This is unavoidable in the process which brings to mind a saying my good friend has, which is, “we will burn that bridge when we get there”. This may sound extreme. However, it has been my life experience that just because a bridge has been burned, does not mean a new one cannot be built; this is the renewal of relationships.

Relationships, relationality, and ceremony are important concepts intertwined throughout this research. Moving this work forward into the future heavily relies on the concept of relationships, especially respectful and reciprocal ones. The future of Indigenous Heritage Management would see ceremony, and therefore relationships, incorporated into the making, implementing, and re-making of policy. Relationships are the building blocks to collaboration, and collaboration is crucial for the proposed heritage management policy reform. Ideally, the future of Indigenous heritage management will see relationships and collaboration occur that allow for the proposed framework to be incorporated and ingrained into the policy making process.

## **5.2 BEST PRACTICES**

When working with Indigenous peoples it is imperative that governing bodies give the communities space and support to develop heritage management plans that revolve around the communities’ value system. Participants of the IHC engagement sessions “emphasized that Indigenous People have the right to identify, maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of Indigenous Heritage” (2020:19). The right for self-determination is a basic human right affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Vienna

Declaration and Programme of Action. It is also the focus of Article 3 of UNDRIP which states: “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.

One of the long-standing colonial legacies that I argue still exists in policy making today is acting as a paternal steward for Indigenous peoples. One of the interview participants expressed, “my eyes have really been opened to the fact that a lot of these plans and these policies, were written by people that are not Blackfoot. And then when they said that they were going to consult on them, they were already written! So, that’s not really consultation (Berry, personal communication, 2023). Best Practice moving forward is having Indigenous communities decide what the community wants / needs.

It is obvious from looking at documents pertaining to heritage at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-On-Stone / Aisinai’pi that they were created in disconnect from the Blackfoot community. The first page of the HSI programme matrix has a list of acknowledgements of people who assisted in providing information to the creation of the document. This list almost entirely refers to non-Blackfoot ‘experts’ with little to no mention of the Elders who provided rich oral accounts of the activities. In the most recent Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai’pi Heritage Management Plan, one objective highlighted was to “identify and protect the park’s cultural resources for the purposes of scientific study, traditional use, and visitor education and enjoyment” (2023:25).

The strategies outlined to achieve the above objective are listed as: “Work with Alberta Culture to determine long-term strategies and best practices for the protection of historic resources; Update Historic Resources Baseline Assessments for the park, to

provide a comprehensive historic resource site inventory; Develop management intent statements for rock art, archaeological, historic sites and site complexes of high interpretive significance” (2023:25). If the intent is to identify and protect cultural resources for the purposes of traditional use, it is interesting to note that the Niitsitapii community is not involved in the strategies listed.

These two examples show that although consultation occurred when creating these documents, it was still a very top-down process. Non-Indigenous scholars and government employees decided when to approach people in the Niitsitapii communities and who to approach. Non-Indigenous people decided what was important to ask and record. Once they had received information, it was the non-Indigenous people who decided what information made it into the document. This is very much an extractive relationship that has been developed.

As mentioned in previous chapters, relationships are crucial for Niitsitapiisinni, as it is for many, if not all, Indigenous communities. Applying Indigenous methodologies to the policy making process would require management and employees of these cultural sites to start is by creating and fostering relationships with the community. I am not referring to having good relations or “knowing” a handful of people and Elders who have worked at / with the site before. To create genuine and enriching relationships with the community would require them to actually spend time in the community. Attend events / functions, volunteer at events / functions / fundraisers, shop in our communities, bring your families, attend ceremonies. Attempting to interact with and be a part of the community will help with understanding what the community wants / needs when they communicate it.

I am not arguing that non-Indigenous management staff need to get out of the way, or be alienated from the process. In fact, they still play a very vital role in this process, that of support and navigator. When communities identify a need / want it is important that they receive support in having their voice heard, acknowledged, and respected in the process. If there is a barrier in place it is not enough to be made aware of its existence, communities need to be assisted in navigating around (or even dismantling) the barrier. This is where the true potential of allyship lies in the policy making process.

### **5.3 KEY OUTCOMES OF COLLABORATION**

When Indigenous communities are leading the heritage management policy making process, sacred cultural sites can be managed to the values at the core of the Indigenous culture. Cultural values need to be the foundation, the core, of all management directives from finance, to land management, to visitor services, employment directives, research and monitoring, to tourism and recreation. One of the more apparent outcomes of having Indigenous communities at the helm of decision making is the assurance of accurate and appropriate messaging being shared with visitors to the site. Again, practicing the right to self-determination and controlling their own historical narrative. For Indigenous people who are trying to reconnect to culture, this also reduces a barrier of accessing accurate information.

One of the more interesting topics discussed by participants was that of barriers. This was a concept that many of them struggled with because there was an acknowledgement of the need for barriers when it came to protecting sacred sites. However, where these barriers existed, who was enforcing them, and who was being affected by them were the core of the issues. Positive outcomes of successful

collaboration in policy making would see reduced barriers for traditional land use since Indigenous communities would be the ones who decide the parameters, and ideally would be the ones who are enforcing them.

When barriers for traditional land use are reduced, it allows for the opportunity to incorporate ceremonial practices into site operations. This is an aspect that was very important to the participants of this thesis study. “When people visit the places where the stories happened, that visiting makes both the place and the stories come alive” (Chambers and Blood 2009:260). This is the strongest testament to heritage as a living concept. In order to remember our ancestors of the past, we must carry our ways with us into the future.

#### **5.4 HERITAGE SOVEREIGNTY IN PRACTICE**

Participants of this study were not specifically asked what heritage sovereignty looks like to them, but it was apparent in the conversations I had that they had a notion of what that should look like. The following are excerpts from conversation participants:

Both of these places, there could be something's changed to make things better, more accommodating to not just the general public, but to Native people in particular. So, it would be nice if they had some kind of liaison there, 24/7 to speak up for the native people. – Manychief, A

I thought that they (HSI) should have a set time, either weekly or monthly, to have just natives, just Blackfoot visiting. I think, for the building and for the spirit, there should be a designated time, because I feel like the spirits need that, the people need that connection – 626

They need to see this place (HSI) as an opportunity to use it as a tool for reconciliation. It's an opportunity to turn some heads and let these Napikoaiksi know, this is what our community is like, this is some of the problems we have. These are the realities. We use this organization to create that opportunity to share perceptions – 1921

If they're not called a cultural heritage site, I think they should have the traditional Blackfoot name for it. So, I think for a Blackfoot person, we should have those

Blackfoot names appointed to those areas, those sites, those places, because I feel like the way they're naming them now is just more ways they are trying to disconnect us from our land from our places that we're familiar with. – 626

I think they can improve the way that they interpret the information, make it more interactive. It would be better to give people a hands-on experience. – Manychief, C

The WOS / A Heritage Management Plan needs to be a community based, community driven education program that's not based on articles that were written in 1978, 1990s. Nothing has really been written on that site since 2000. - Berry

We should be embracing the schools, you know Saipoyii, and Tatsikipapoa'p, Napis, and we should be going off site with some of our stuff and make ourselves available and we need to be a resource for those children. – 1921

If we can intervene (opioid crisis) or somehow focus on the kids and give them a better outlook and a better identity. This place could play a huge role in tackling that, in being a part of the solution in terms of identity and pride and learning about your ancestors and culture. – 1921

I'm just hoping that one day that there will be an actual Indigenous person that is allowed to manage these sites, and do right by them. - Yellowhorn

One of the more obvious outcomes of heritage management sovereignty would be Niitsitapii representation in management positions. Participants felt it was important that there be a Niitsitapii person who held a permanent management position and who would be able to effectively speak for and create change; not just a token position. In addition to this, a popular opinion was to have specific dates / times for only Niitsitapii to access the sites. A redeveloped heritage management plan could see this as one of the objectives under the Niitsitapii value of Niitsitapiiysinni. Another objective that could be listed under this value is using traditional Blackfoot names for sites. Participants felt that using the language made for a stronger connection to place by virtue of invoking the presence of ancestors and spirits connected to these landscapes.

Participants of the study stressed the need for the value of Aatsimoyikaan, spirituality, to be built into the heritage management plan as well as site strategic planning. Management staff of these sites need to recognize and acknowledge the huge

responsibility they have not only to these sites, but to the Niitsitapii community. A redeveloped heritage management plan could see these heritage sites sponsoring / hosting ceremonies at least once a year (ideally more often). This would see these sites as the location for these ceremonies, site operations covering all costs involved, and if needed, providing transportation to and from the community in order to accommodate as many community members as possible.

Another concept that most participants were eager for, or excited about the possibility of, is bringing the content to the people. This is a very important lesson I learned during my years of social work. In order to be accessible to people in the community, you have to meet them where they are at. There are many reasons that Niitsitapii people have not, and will not, visit these sacred cultural sites. For some people it is a question of access; not having transportation, or not knowing how to get to the site, not having financial means to devote a whole day. For other people, it is feeling so disconnected from the site there is no interest to visit; the government presence, buildings and observation by staff can be intimidating.

A redeveloped heritage management plan could see community relations as an objective under the Niitsitapii value of Pommotsiisinni, to transfer something to others. There could be devoted staff whose job is to provide information and programming off site, bringing content and activities into the communities. Placing a special focus on primary schools on the reserves, ensures that Niitsitapii children feel a connection and responsibility to these, and all, sacred cultural sites. This also ensures and promotes a strong continuation of the oral traditions and inter-generational knowledge in the school system, something that historically was not acceptable or supported.

The concept and the journey of Truth and Reconciliation is not one that is undertaken solely by non-Indigenous Canadians. Many Indigenous people are also discovering their own truths and having to reconcile what has happened in the past, and how that has shaped their present. For Indigenous individuals, working through the TRC process and undertaking healing, is both a personal and communal process. It is very important that these communities have safe spaces where they can experience and work through their own process of truth and reconciliation. What better place for them to do this than at their ancestral sacred cultural sites.

Considering Indigenous heritage is a living concept, it is important that any Indigenous rooted heritage management policy and directives be a living document. Often, policy directives get treated as if they have been written in stone, or become archival relics. The Head-Smashed-In Interpretation Programme was written in 1985, almost 40 years ago! Unless otherwise instructed by a descendant community, any heritage management documents should be revisited every 5 years. This allows the community to reevaluate their priorities and adapt the ways in which they respond to them.

Although the Writing-on-Stone / Aisinai'pi Heritage Management Plan is still repeating the same top-down consultation practices, it at least has been re-written in 2023. The benefit to having this most recent version of the document is that it now better reflects, and can operate in sync with, the UNDRIP and TRC directives and initiatives. In fact, the WOS / A Management Plan states that “the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is honored” (Government of Alberta, 2023:8).

One of the biggest barriers facing Indigenous led-policy is the inability to have the methodological approaches enforced due to the lack of supportive policy. The proposition to create new rock art at WOS / A is an example of that. However, synchronizing Indigenous-led policy change at all levels of government is ultimately what is going to result in the success of Indigenous policy. The successful practice of Indigenous-led policy directly relates to the practice of sovereignty and self-determination.

The history of Indigenous Heritage Management has been a dark and bumpy tunnel, but trust that there is light at the end of that tunnel. Just in the past few years alone, UNDRIP received Royal Assent by the Canadian Government in 2021, announced on National Indigenous Peoples Day. The *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums* document was released in 2022 as a response to TRC CTA #67, part of which calls for a national review of museum policies and best practice. Most recently, in 2023 the Canadian Government has released the UN Declaration Act Action Plan with the objective of ensuring federal laws are consistent with the UN Declaration.

We are reminded time and time again, reconciliation is a journey, it is not a destination. It is not as if the future holds a miraculous date where we as a society have accomplished reconciliation, or arrived at this destination, and we have achieved a utopian society. Instead, reconciliation is a lifelong attempt to better oneself, to better one's relationships, and to better one's understanding of those things. A journey that every generation must embark on. This thesis is intended to urge and encourage us to continue moving Indigenous Heritage Management forward in a good way.

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