The Land as Witness:
Nez Perce and Sahaptin Placenames from the Southern Columbia Plateau
(USA)

Phillip Cash Cash
Cayuse/Nez Perce
University of Arizona, Tucson
nú·nim wé·tes
“our land”

Cayuse
Umatilla
Walla Walla
Palouse
Nez Perce

Southern
Columbia
Plateau
Cháw mún ithlamáyta tún átaw!
Never loose what is sacred!
Purpose: To document the diversity of cultural landscapes & place(s) within our traditional territories

Placenames to date: 583, with 40 (unnamed) areas of cultural significance
Participatory Research
Motivations for Community-based Collaboration

*increase in knowledge & knowledge types*
(cultural, linguistic, ecological, etc.)

*empowerment*
(rights protection & land management)

*efficiency and effectiveness of research*
(data consolidation and archiving)
A vital part of the collaborative process is the generation and use of new knowledge.

Linguistic

Cultural/Ecological
Land Status

Land Tenure

- Lands ceded to the U.S. Federal government in the Treaty of 1865
- Lands adjudicated to be aboriginal use areas
- Lands owned (or held in trust for) Tribal Government or Members
- Fee lands on the current reservation not owned by Tribal Government or Members
- Lands described in the treaty reservation but excluded in the surveyed reservation
- Surveyed reservation lands removed from the reservation by acts of Congress
Travel Range
Summer Activities
Food Gathering
Traditional Fishing
Traditional Hunting
Grazing

Grazing Activities
“Being young, then I came into my true knowing there around 13 yrs old”
“Cultural Landscapes”

The concept of cultural landscape derives from the notion that:

1) the land exists in the mind of a people

2) the imagery or cognition of the land is shared and transferred over generations.
Myth Topographies

Some general characteristics of myth topographies:

1) help to identify the cosmology of a people
2) trace the origins of human emergence
3) give structure to the nature of time & place
4) physical embodiments of mythic beings
5) mythic beings “witness” the living
Nayshthlápa
“the swallowers place”
Myth Locales

Mythic action space

‘myth locales’

Place

Landscape

Time
Myth Locales defined

“Myth locales are defined as a mythic action space characterized by the topographic embodiment of superhuman agents and superhuman events across time and space.”
Knowledge Formation

hiyú·mteqelunwesp
“grizzly bear’s wallowing place”
Knowledge Formation

**Schematic Knowledge**
refers to an assessment of
preexistent, general level
representations and features
and their corresponding
relations

**Local Knowledge**
refers to an assessment of
localized representations
and features and their
corresponding relations from
a copresent vantage point,
one which allows
participants to revise and
update their immediate
perceptual and sensory

**hiyú·mteqelunwes-p**
“grizzly bear’s
callowing place”

**hiyú·mteqelunwes-pe**
“at the grizzly bear’s
callowing place”
Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The Wallowa Sample

- Flora & fauna based place names: 51%
- Landforms & hydroforms: 41%
- Placenames referring to people: 8%

*Perception* is a key to traditional ecological knowledge
Landscape Perception

Perspective A

Perspective B
Summary

Key areas to consider in documenting cultural landscapes & place:

- Conceptual
- Experiential
- Linguistic
- Historical
- Biodiversity
- Collaborative