

# Love Thy Neighbour: Repatriating Precarious Blackfoot Sites

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## Introduction

This paper explores the question of responsibility for the care of significant Blackfoot (*Siksikáítapiiksi*) sites particularly in the province of present-day Alberta.<sup>i</sup> Traditional Blackfoot territory is described and events that eroded *Siksikáítapiiksi* access to, and thus relationship with, all the land in their territory is related. We give examples of significant Blackfoot sites and recount the forces that have destroyed many of them, including the pressures that urban and industrial development place on the remaining sites. This chapter outlines current attempts to include Blackfoot perspectives in the provincial mandate to preserve and protect heritage sites. The notion of repatriation, which is commonly understood to mean the return of ceremonial objects, is offered as a model for authentic participation of Blackfoot in protecting and preserving these sites. Repatriation, as an idea and a practice, acknowledges the *Siksikáítapiiksi* view that places are animate beings with whom humans live in relationship. Like any interdependent relationship, the one between people and the places that sustain them is nurtured through unimpeded access, continued use and ceremonies of renewal such as visiting and exchanging of gifts.



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### Figure 1: Map of traditional Blackfoot territory.

This map reproduced with permission from the Glenbow Museum website, "*Niitsitapiisini: Our Way of Life,*" [http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher\\_toolkit/english/culture/territory.html](http://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/teacher_toolkit/english/culture/territory.html) (Accessed May 2008).

*Nitáówahsinnaan* or Blackfoot territory extends north to *Apatohsoo omáhkataan* ("north big river" which was re-named the North Saskatchewan) and south to *Ponokáásisahtaan* ("elk river" which was re-named the Yellowstone). The people lived from the eastern slopes of the *Mistákistsi* (the backbone of the world which was re-named the Rocky Mountains) to the reaches of present-day Saskatchewan,<sup>i</sup> *Ómahksspatsiko* (the Sand Hills), where people go after death (Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2001) and *Awai'skiimmiiko* (re-named the Cypress Hills), where the people hunted and gathered resources such as lodge poles, pine needles and berries.

*Nitáówahsinnoon* covered over half of present-day Alberta, most of Montana and parts of Saskatchewan. And while the *Niitsítapiiksi* (in this context, the Blackfoot) shared the land with all other *ksahkomitapiiksi* or earth beings (plants, rocks, and animals), they shared the cosmos with the *spomitapíiksi* or above beings (spiritual beings, celestial beings, and birds), and the *soyíítapiiksi* or under-water beings (fish, amphibians, reptiles, water birds and mammals) (Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2001). Many of the stories and ceremonies of Blackfoot-speaking peoples originate in the sky, and many ceremonies revolve around bundles, which contain parts of animals and plants from all of the realms.<sup>ii</sup> These bundles and their contents stand in for the extended network of animate, inspirited kin from all the realms. The bundles serve to remind human beings that their survival depends upon alliances formed with other beings in times past, social contracts still in force. The origins of these kinship ties and the ongoing web of reciprocities and interdependent responsibilities they evoke are recalled through song and stories (Ingold, 2000). Through ceremonies and ritual, as well as through more mundane practices of visiting and feeding, these alliances are continually renewed (Heavy Head, 2005).

The ceremonies of renewal were not simple rituals of faith slavishly adhered to by a primitive, animistic people. The ability of *Siksikáítapiiksi* to live well in *kitáóowahsinnoon*<sup>iii</sup> depended on deep, extensive, intimate knowledge about all realms of the environment. This knowledge was both ancient and timeless, acquired by living and attending to *kitáóowahsinnoon*, with all of one's senses and aspects of being. This knowledge also came to people through *papáítapiiksi* or dream beings, and through vision quests. Knowledge gained in all these ways was transferred from generation to generation through everyday activities, as well as, through ceremonies.

At present, it would be true to say that *Siksikáítapiiksi* do not have the extensive geographical and ecological knowledge of their territory they possessed a generation or two ago. People may wonder why is this so? If the land was important to the *Siksikáítapiiksi* why did they allow these relationships to deteriorate and the knowledge to lapse?

## **A Story**

We want to tell you a story; it is an old story, one you may have heard before but like most important stories it bears repeating. Just as the bundles have to be opened each year always in the same way, just as the Sundance is held each summer at the same place and in the same way, these stories must be told so that the memories are continually renewed. Repeating these stories is also necessary because not all indigenous people and even fewer non-Indigenous people know this story. The citizens of Alberta, including all those being represented in the bundles—*ksahkomitapiiksi* or earth beings (plants, rocks, animals), *spomitapíiksi* or above beings (spiritual beings, celestial beings, birds) and *soyíítapiiksi* or under-water beings (fish, amphibians, reptiles, water birds and mammals)—are living with effects of these events. This story is important for everyone living in present-day Alberta. This story needs to be told, even if it offends, although it is not intended to do so. It is too important to forget.

This story begins about one hundred years ago, maybe longer. A series of historical traumas in the nineteenth century—disease, famine and massacre—made it very difficult, if not impossible, for *Siksikáítapiiksi* means of knowledge transfer to remain intact. Successive waves of smallpox spread through intertribal trade even prior to actual contact with the Europeans. Oral accounts

estimate that one quarter to one third of the people perished with each outbreak and that over one half of the people died in the 1837 epidemic alone.<sup>i</sup> At the confluence of *Náápi Otsíí'tahtaan* (Oldman River) and *Iisskstaáí'tahtaan* (St. Mary's River) near present-day Lethbridge so many Káínai perished that the site is called *Akáíí'nisskoo* or Many Dead.<sup>ii</sup> When smallpox killed everyone inside a tipi, the flap was sewn shut, and this warned those who approached of the contagious death within. At Many Dead, the sewn-shut death lodges are now all gone. What remains is a series of tipi rings, a circle of stones used to hold the tipi and its liners in place. But the stone rings for the death lodges are different. A tipi has a doorway facing east, marked by a break in the circle of stones. In a death lodge, the entrance was closed, the stone circle complete. Complete circles of stone, without a doorway facing east, are evidence of these *ii'noiysis* or death lodges. Such circles can be found all over Southern Alberta, including near the walking trails of Lethbridge. They memorialize not only the massive death but also the effects of the epidemics on the people.

Epidemic and famine can sound innocuous, as if there were no perpetrator, as if the near decimation of a people is the inevitable result of natural events, perhaps even fated. This was especially true for the *Niitsítapiiksi*, where historical and ethnographic accounts written by *Náápiikoaiksi* almost normalize famine, as if it were a natural part of life for a “primitive nomadic” people, “subsisting” on a single, unpredictable food source, the “migrating” buffalo herds. So when the bison, whose numbers were estimated to be anywhere from thirty to seventy million prior to European contact, were deliberately and violently decimated within a few short decades, the resulting famine was naturalized.<sup>iii</sup> Sayings such as the buffalo “vanished” or “disappeared” are part of everyday English discourse. These euphemisms are taken-for-granted in curriculum, textbooks, trade books and popular culture and go unnoticed. Better to say the buffalo “vanished,” as if by magic, than to admit they were massacred without regard for the effect on all the prairie peoples: *Siksikáítapiiksi* (Blackfoot), *Asinaa* (Cree), *Atsíina* (Gros Ventre), and *Issapó* (Crow). While loss of the buffalo was devastating for the people, the ecosystem and landscape of the entire Great Plains was irrevocably altered: the wolves, vultures, and grizzly bear lost their source of food and abandoned the prairies; the grasslands were no longer grazed, as only the buffalo could graze them; the people no longer set fire to the grass to force new growth and attract the herds.

The decimation of the bison had a domino effect. By the 1870s, the only remaining bison herds were the few in *kitáóowahsinnoon* (the land which nourishes us). *Siksikáítapiiksi* soon found themselves under great pressure to protect the land and the bison from the other First Nations who were starving because there were no more bison in their territories: *Asinaa* (Cree), *Niitsísinaa* (Assiniboine), *Atsíina* (Gros Ventre), *Issapó* (Crow) and *Kai'spa* (Lakota/Dakota or “parted hair”). Thus *Siksikáítapiiksi* had to fight with former allies such as the *Asinaa* (Cree). While other First Nations wanted access to the last remaining bison herds, the settler governments—the new Dominion of Canada in Alberta and the United States government in Montana—wanted the land and dominion over it.

The slaughter of the bison was not the only massacre perpetrated. The events of 23 January 1870 live on in the collective memory of the *Siksikáítapiiksi*. That cold winter day, the men of Heavy Runner's camp had gone hunting. At dawn, the United States Calvary, under the command of Major Eugene Baker, attacked the camp and slaughtered over 300 unarmed women, children and

old men.<sup>iv</sup> The survivors fled north and took refuge on the Canadian side of the 49th parallel, *isskskáakssin*. The *Aamsskáápipikáni* (South Peigan or Montana Blackfoot) of Heavy Runner's camp joined their northern relatives at just below the confluence of the *Náápi Otsíthaatan* (Oldman River) and the *Iisktaitahtaan* (St. Mary's River), near present-day Lethbridge.

It is at that place the *Asinaa* (Cree) found the *Siksikáítapiiksi* (Blackfoot) camped in the autumn of 1870. The *Asinaa* (Cree) had headed west to Blackfoot territory seeking both revenge for previous wrongs and access to the remaining bison. Even with advantage of surprise, attacking at early dawn, hundreds of Cree were killed. The combined numbers of *Akáínaa* (Bloods), *Aapátóhsipikáni* (North Peigan), and *Aamsskáápipikáni* (South Peigan or Blackfoot) allowed the *Siksikáítapiiksi* to overwhelm their attackers.

There is a plaque, in the river bottom of present-day Lethbridge, which commemorates this “last big battle” between the *Siksikáítapiiksi* (Blackfoot) and the *Asinaa* (Cree). The battle scene in Lethbridge and the “Baker Massacre” on the Bear (Marias River in Montana) are both sites of historical trauma, yet, the massacre in Montana remains unmarked: no cairn, no plaque. This dark period is marked in the memory of the *Siksikáítapiiksi*, commemorated in the stories told and re-told.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, *Siksikáítapiiksi* (Blackfoot) protected their territory and resources fiercely. In spite of continuous attempts to encroach on their territory, *Siksikáítapiiksi* kept fur traders and missionaries at bay as long as they could. American traders eventually won access to *kitáóowahsinnoon* and the *Siksikáítapiiksi*, in part by escalating the exchange of whisky for furs and bison hides, angering the Hudson Bay Company who believed their charter gave them a monopoly on trade with the Blackfoot. In 1873, the newly formed civilian police force, the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) marched west, supposedly to suppress the illegal whisky trade. The people's stories say otherwise. The late Dan Weasel Moccasin recounted how NWMP soldiers would ride into *Siksikáítapiiksi* camps with booze hidden in their saddlebags. The men would approach Blackfoot women and point to their saddlebags, initiating a different kind of trade than the one they were there to halt.

All of these forces—disease, starvation, warfare and whisky—were in play by 1877 when Red Crow and Crowfoot and other leaders made treaty with the Dominion of Canada, a young British colony concerned about the expansion of American interests north of the 49th parallel. One result of Treaty 7 was that the *Káínaa*, *Piikáni* and *Siksiká* were eventually confined to separate tracts of land within *kitáóowahsinnoon*. Called “reserves,” the pieces of land “set aside” were miniscule in comparison to the size of the traditional territory. *Siksikáítapiiksi* do not believe the true spirit and intent of the treaty discussions and agreements were honoured (Treaty 7 Elders & Tribal Council with Hildebrandt, First Rider, & Carter, 1996). The size of the reserves is only one of many outstanding issues from the original treaty.<sup>v</sup> Through the treaty process, First Nations across the prairies were exiled to small tracts of land within their homelands. The people and their knowledge were incarcerated within the boundaries of the reserves, separated from *kitáóowahsinnoon*. Indian agents and the NWMP restricted people's movements across those boundaries. Like the Berlin Wall, reserve borders changed everyone's consciousness about what constituted traditional territories. It also severed the relationships amongst the *Siksikáítapiiksi* themselves (*Káínaa*, *Piikáni*, and *Siksiká*) and between each group and *kitáóowahsinnoon*. The

reserve boundaries also changed the relationships between the *Niitsítapiiksi* (Blackfoot) and the *Náápiikoaiksi* (settler peoples). Shortly after the signing of Treaty 7, the churches built and operated residential schools with funding from the Canadian government.<sup>vi</sup> In these schools, children lived for years at a time, separated from their families, their communities and their language. The experience of these schools further severed the people from their memory of the land that once sustained them and gave them identity as *Niitsítapiiksi*. Throughout all of this consciousness of Blackfoot territory became colonized: the “rez” became the homeland, while *Náápiikoaiksi* occupied all of the remaining *kitáóowahsinnoon*.

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<sup>i</sup> The 1837 smallpox outbreak was recorded in a Blackfoot winter count (Raczka, 1979). We recommend J. C. Ewers (1958) historical and ethnographic introduction to the Blackfoot, which includes the devastation caused by smallpox.

<sup>ii</sup> Prior to the establishment of the trading forts, this site was called “Many Berries.” Over time with the deaths from smallpox and liquor, the name took on a double meaning: “many berries” and “many deaths.”

<sup>iii</sup> The written literature on the buffalo, particularly on the Blackfoot and the buffalo, is extensive. We refer the reader to Jack W. Brink (2008) *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal buffalo hunting of the northern plains* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press) for an extensive review of the literature on bison and bison hunting primarily from a Western archaeological perspective. Chapter 9 in particular summarizes the historical record on the demise of the bison in the nineteenth century.

<sup>iv</sup> While official reports of the massacre give 173 as the number dead, Darryl Kipp, Director of the Blackfoot Immersion for Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, states that oral accounts place the number of dead at over 300.

<sup>v</sup> The first (printed) treaty, between *Siksikáitapiiksi* and *Náápiikoaiksi*, was the *Lame Bull Treaty 1855* negotiated and signed at a council held mouth of the *Ootahkoaisatan* (Yellow River named by William Clark, the Judith River) in present-day Montana. See Ewers, 1958 and [www.trailtribes.org](http://www.trailtribes.org).

<sup>vi</sup> St. Joseph’s (Dunbow near Calgary, 1884); St. John’s Boarding School (now called Old Sun’s at *Siksikáí*, 1894), St. Paul’s Anglican Mission and St. Mary’s Immaculate Conception (both located on *Káínaa*). (See Glenbow Archives available at [www.glenbow.org](http://www.glenbow.org)).





[Click image to enlarge.](#)

**Figure 2:** St. Joseph's Industrial School, commonly known as Dunbow. High River area, circa 1890s. Courtesy Glenbow Archives, NA-2172-7.

Like refugees exiled to a foreign country, *Siksikáítapiiksi*'s memories of *kitáóowahsinnoon* lives in the stories they tell. But when *Siksikáítapiiksi* visit *kitáóowahsinnoon*—the land gifted to them by *Ihstsipáítapiiyo'pa*, the Source—when people visit the places where the stories happened, that visiting makes both the place and the stories come alive. For *Siksikáítapiiksi*, the land is an animate being, a relation, and when treated as such, offers gifts in return. When the people visit *kitáóowahsinnoon*, whether the places are “on reserve” or “off reserve,” old stories, songs, and ceremonies are recalled, new ones given.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

**Figure 3:** Pupils and staff, St. Paul's School, Blood Reserve, 1924. Photographer Atterton's Photo Studios, Cardston, AB. Glenbow Archives, NA-1811-34.

## ***A Storied and Sacred Place***

It would be easy to assume from this story that *Náápiikoaiksi* had the power to erase the people's memory and that little or no knowledge of the land could survive their exercising this power. But this is not so. Stories, along with songs and ceremonies, have kept the knowledge alive, even when memory of actual places has faded. It could be said that all places within *kitáóowahsinnoon* are significant to the *Siksikáítapiiksi*. Some mark events and places of significance: vision quests, burials, effigies (human and animal), offerings, rock cairns, battles and other events. Some were places of sustenance: buffalo jumps and pounds, root and berry picking spots, campsites, tipi rings, trails, and river crossings. Others are sites of creation (Sun and Moon and coming of light): the antics of creator and trickster, *Náápi*; and, the heroic deeds of *Katoyís* who rid the world of harmful beings (Bullchild, 2005). Other places are the origin of the bundles and spiritual societies. Others are sites of mortality and portals to the world of

*Siksikáítapiiksi*'s ancestors and *papáítapiiksi* (dream beings). In Blackfoot, it is said about such places, "There is a holy presence there;" and in English, *kitáóowahsinnoon* has been called a "sacred landscape" (Reeves, 1993; Vest, 2005).

It is also a storied landscape. People received the laws or values at places such as *Aakíipiskan* (Women's Buffalo Jump near Cayley, Alberta), where the people not only hunted buffalo but where Náápi initiated the first marriage between men and women, and *Óóhkotok* (near present-day Okotoks, Alberta) where Náápi was taught the importance gift giving and the consequences of going back on your word or your gift. Many stories are written directly on the land such as at *Aisinai'pi* (Writing-on-Stone, Alberta) where petroglyphs and pictographs cover the sandstone cliffs. Ceremonial sites—marked by rock cairns and constellations accompanied by paintings, carvings and offerings (often called "medicine wheels")—are found throughout central and southern Alberta.

For *Siksikáítapiiksi*, these places are not simply *piles of rocks, cliffs, or glacial erratics*; they are places imbued with meaning and history. These places are the equivalent of *books, encyclopedias, libraries, archives, crypts, monuments, historical markers, and grottos*; they are destinations for pilgrims; places of sacrifice, revelation and apparition; and sources of knowledge and wisdom. For *Siksikáítapiiksi*, these places are repositories for the knowledge left by the ancestors. *Kitáóowahsinnoon*—and the ancestors and other holy presences who inhabit this landscape—is an animate being with powers of its own. *Siksikáítapiiksi* have played their part in keeping the memory and knowledge these animate beings bear alive the continual enactment of the songs, ceremonies and stories. In this way, much knowledge has survived the onslaught of colonialism.

## ***Precarious Places***

At one time, prior to the dark story told above, there were thousands of these sites throughout *kitáóowahsinnoon*. With notable exceptions, like the bison, many of these sites were demolished. Agriculture, theft, dams, and science have all contributed to the destruction. Rock formations—such as tipi rings, cairns, and other markers—were razed as the prairies were "settled" and grasslands ploughed under for crops. Settlers used what were to them "just rocks" to build fences and water reservoirs, and to secure creek banks from erosion. They used stones to build irrigation canals and to dam rivers, which in turn flooded the land, destroying even more places (Wilson, 2004). Grave robbers and collectors disturbed many significant sites; they vandalized and looted burial sites, pilfering "artifacts" such as arrowheads and tools, carting away the bones of the dead as well as their possessions (Reeves & Kennedy, 1993). Offering cairns (including "medicine wheels") were excavated: their contents, including spiritual offerings such as *iinískimm* and pipes, were removed (Calder, 1977; Reeves, 1993) for analysis.<sup>i</sup>

The Province of Alberta curtailed unregulated excavation and wanton destruction of archaeological and historic sites when it legislated the *Historical Resources Act* (Government of Alberta, 2000a). This legislation enabled the province to act in the public interest to designate and protect historic sites and since its passing significant sites have been better protected than in the past. For example, noted spiritual and offering sites such as Sundial and Majorville were fenced off and interpretive signs displayed. Interpretive centres were erected at Head-Smashed-

In-Buffalo Jump and Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park. Pothunters and vandals are liable for fines of up to \$50,000. While Alberta *Historical Resources Act* (Government of Alberta, 2000a) is progressive legislation, the department mandated to enforce the regulations pursuant to the *Act*, for example the Archaeological and Palaeontological Research Permit Regulation (Government of Alberta, 2002), has been chronically under-resourced. Thus, while somewhat thwarted, illegal possession and trade of objects removed from sacred sites still continues.

After more than a century of continuous pressure, some sites remain mostly undisturbed. But these, too, are vulnerable. Alberta's main source of wealth is oil and gas;<sup>ii</sup> and this non-renewable resource threatens other non-renewable resources, such as these sites.

The Majorville rock cairn sits atop a simple hill in the middle of the prairie surrounded by a fence and a government plaque. It is an embattled, precarious site surrounded by a major drilling program, 35 square miles of seismic activity with 128 shallow gas wells drilled and cased in 2005 alone and a similar number of wells planned for 2006. (Chambers, 2006, p. 33)

Jack Ives,<sup>iii</sup> former Provincial Archeologist and senior manager at the Historical Resources Management Branch, stated in June 2005:

[There is] a rising tide of development everywhere in...localities...[such as] Majorville...especially as more shallow gas is being exploited and that increases the well spacing, the density of drills that people make...and they are making these plays,<sup>iv</sup> the dispositions that they get from the Department of Energy...there is a force of development activity that would truly detract from the landscape as we know it and understand it now...so you can appreciate the pressure that these sites are under... (Blood & Chambers, 2006)

The Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield in southeastern Alberta is 2,690 square kilometres of unplowed grassland, one of the largest extant blocks of unaltered dry-mixed grass prairie remaining in Canada (Finnamore, 1996). This area is home to over one thousand known species of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Fourteen of these species are "at risk," such as Sprague's Pipit (a bird), and others are endangered, such as the swift fox and burrowing owl (Russ, 2005; Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2008; Williamson, 2007). As well, CFB Suffield is home to many sites of significance to *Siksikáítapiiksi*. In an archaeological survey completed prior to the Alberta Energy Company developing oil and gas resources on the base, archaeologists (Brumley & Dau, 1985) located 3,712 cultural features, including 2486 stone circles, 1071 stone cairns, 104 stone alignments, five effigies, four medicine wheels, and one bison kill site. This survey was of only 206.37 square miles of the entire CFB Suffield reserve. The numbers in the survey indicate the density of Blackfoot sites in the southern Alberta landscape. Because this land was mostly uncultivated, these sites remained relatively intact (although some of the cairns were excavated and others vandalized).

In 1992, the Department of National Defense and Environment Canada set aside 458 square kilometres of particularly unique and fragile areas of CFB Suffield for protection. The lands set aside included the Middle Sand Hills, some mixed grassland, and the riparian zone along the South Saskatchewan River (Environment Canada, 2003; Finnamore, 1996). On 19 June 2003, an Order in Council officially established the CFB Suffield National Wildlife Area placing the



protected lands under the purview of the Minister of Defense. Three years later, EnCana Corporation requested to drill inside this protected area. North America's biggest independent oil and gas company, EnCana recorded an annual profit \$6.4 billion dollars (Canadian) for 2006, the largest in Canadian corporate history (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007).<sup>v</sup> During this period, the Calgary-based EnCana with over seventeen million acres in land holdings in North America, including the Palliser block in southeast Alberta (Welner, 2003, p. 2), sought permits from the federal government to drill 1,275 shallow gas wells and construct 220 kilometres of pipelines inside the Suffield National Wildlife Area (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2008; Williamson, 2007). The company already operated approximately 1,150 wells in the area. An environmental assessment conducted by the Canadian military in 2005 found that EnCana is failing to meet even the most basic environmental standards at its existing wells in the fragile National Wildlife Area (Williamson, 2007).<sup>vi</sup>

By the middle of the first decade in the new millennium, the environmental effects of oil and gas development had become increasingly visible to the average Albertan. The very oil and gas development that brought unprecedented wealth to the province threatened significant sites, plants, animals and water. As oil prices reached record highs, Alberta experienced a modern-day gold rush. The Alberta government estimated that over 134,000 new jobs were created between 2004 and 2008. In 2004 alone, almost 11,000 people migrated to Alberta from other provinces. This unprecedented population growth fueled a housing boom. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) forecasted that new home construction would continue to boom.

Alberta will have one of the fastest growing economies among the provinces over the next two years due to rising levels of capital spending in the oil and gas sector and higher government expenditures. Positive economic fundamentals and strong net migration will continue to fuel demand for residential construction. Housing starts are expected to reach 45,000 units in 2006 and 41,000 in 2007. (CMHC, 2006)

Urban sprawl on the prairies is a continual threat to Blackfoot sites; a housing boom only exacerbates the threat. A continuous circle of construction circumscribes the outer edge of southern Alberta cities such as Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Developers buy up both cultivated and uncultivated grassland to construct suburban neighbourhoods: backhoes and bulldozers continually expose important archeological sites. *Historic sites*, according to the legislation, are places with *historic resources*, that is,

any work of nature or of humans that is primarily of value for its palaeontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic, cultural, natural, scientific or esthetic interest including, but not limited to, a palaeontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic or natural site, structure or object. (Government of Alberta, 2000a, Section 1(e))

When development proposals conflict with historic resources, the Heritage Resources Management Branch requires an impact assessment. It is "historic resources professionals," as they are called in the legislation, or what indigenous archeologist Joe Watkins (2000) calls "cultural resources managers" who makes this assessment. "Compliance" archaeologists (Watkins, 2000, p. xi) rank order uncovered sites by level of significance, and recommend action accordingly. Highly significant historic resources are further protected through the Provincial

Designation Program, which restricts developments that are likely to be detrimental to the resource (Government of Alberta, 2000a, Part V). Sites deemed most significant are protected, and materials preserved in some way; most sites do not receive such treatment. In the past, the significance of exposed sites to the *Siksikáítapiiksi* has rarely deterred either construction or destruction. A case in point was the construction of the Oldman River dam and the land it flooded (Glenn, 1999).

The *First Nations Consultation Guidelines on Land Management and Resource Development* (Government of Alberta, 2005) requires applicants to Alberta Energy, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to assess if, and how, a proposed project may impact First Nations' rights and traditional use of the land. If necessary the applicants must submit to the department a First Nations Consultation Plan for approval. The goal of the First Nations Consultation procedures is to develop strategies to avoid or mitigate the potential adverse impacts on First Nations *Rights and Traditional Uses* wherever possible (Government of Alberta, 2005, p. 4).

The existence of remaining *Siksikáítapiiksi* sites is precarious (Chambers, 2006). And this invites the question: what can be done? What is the responsibility of *Siksikáítapiiksi* to, and for, these sites? The revised *Historical Resources Act* (Government of Alberta, 2000a) gives the province of Alberta the power and responsibility to designate significant sites—on provincial crown land—as worthy of preservation and protection. This mandates covers all land with *kitáóowahsinnoon*, not designated as Indian reserve or federal crown lands. Ives (Blood & Chambers, 2006) believes that the civil servants within Historic Resources Management—the branch charged with enforcing the Act—are deeply committed to preserving and protecting these places. However, he admits that in the decades since the original *Historical Resources Act* was passed in 1972 the department “managed” these sites primarily from a Western rather than a First Nations’ perspective.

Neither good science nor good intentions are enough to protect places from rapidly encroaching development. While the Historic Resources Management Branch, with a limited budget, is trying to protect the sites, Alberta Energy, a powerful sister department, is issuing licenses for oil and gas development to proceed. While the *First Nations Consultation Policy* (Government of Alberta, 2005) now mandates proponents of oil and gas licenses to consult with First Nations prior to beginning development projects, it is not clear what resources are available to First Nations to engage in this consultation in a meaningful way. As well, licenses for oil and gas development generate revenue for provincial coffers, revenue that pales in comparison to the potential cash to be generated from the extractive activities being licensed: for example, seismic exploration and drilling (Ives, personal communication, June 9, 2005).

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*i Siksikáítapiiksi* view the dismantling of offerings, unless absolutely necessary, as *desecration* rather than *science*. While in the past archaeologists routinely “excavated” offering sites, more recent collaboration between contemporary archaeologists and the Blackfoot have resulted in more sensitivity to when to “dig” and “collect” and when not to. As well many important things from the past (e.g. human remains) are revealed through erosion and what is best done with such

things ought be decided collaboratively between *Siksikáitapiiksi* and those legally mandated to address such matters.

[ii](#) “In 2005-2006, Alberta non-renewable energy royalty revenue amounted to \$14.347 billion. According to Third Quarter Update for 2006-2007 projections, it is anticipated that non-renewable resource revenue will total \$11.745 billion in 2006-2007.” (Government of Alberta, 2008, Retrieved from <http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca/Oil/771.asp>)

[iii](#) At the time of this writing, John (Jack) Ives is Professor of Northern Plains Archaeology, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta. Ives (personal communication, 08 January 2009) has not published descriptions of the intensity of drilling activity and the number of impact assessment permits issued specifically. In the interview used in the video, Ives was speaking as a “regulator,” a manager at Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, formerly Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, rather than as an academic.

[iv](#) “Play” is oil patch lingo for **big** development. We thank Dr. Constance Blomgren, a member of an environmental coalition in Southern Alberta, for clarifying the meaning of this term.

[v](#) The company’s profits fell in 2007 for a net decrease of \$2.157 billion (Anderson, 2008).

[vi](#) The Suffield Review Panel website provides background on the site, the proposed project, and documents submitted to the review panel during the hearings in October 2008, while the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (2008) website for the review panel (reference # 05-07-15620) makes available all documents related to the hearings.

### ***Áahkpohto’op: Bringing home (Repatriation)***

As settler states, such as Canada, dispossessed indigenous peoples of their land, Sissons (2005) argues that these governments also assumed ownership of the people themselves. Rather than *citizens of Canada*, Indigenous people *belonged to Canada*—“our native people.” By extension, their families, belongings and remaining resources, including land and water, also became state property, as did the children. People’s everyday and sacred things became “artefacts” housed in public buildings; they were now “historic resources” owned, preserved and interpreted by the state.<sup>i</sup> *Kitáóowahsinnoon*, with the exception of the reserves, belonged to the Crown or private landowners. Settler governments removed *Niitsítapiiksi*’s children from their families, as families and by extension their children were collective possessions of the state, and sent the children to residential schools, and adopted them “out” to unknown persons in faraway communities.

It might appear that the *Siksikáitapiiksi* response to this dispossession is to refuse to face the future until the wrongs of the past have been re-dressed. But this is not the case. While the past must be taught, remembered and understood, the direction being faced is the future.

The appropriation, transformation, and reappropriation of indigeneity—whether it be of objects, identity, children, land or sovereignty....[is] directed toward the future. ...Nowhere in the

indigenous world are cultural reappropriations regarded as returns to the past; rather, they are always reimaginings of the future. (Sissons, 2005, p. 11)

*Siksikáítapiiksi* imagine a future where they have repatriated all that from which they have been dispossessed. Repatriation, the root of which is that the Latin *patria*, literally means to “return to the fatherland.” *Repatriation* became a common English word amongst *Siksikáítapiiksi* after the United States first implemented the 1978 *Indian Child Welfare Act* (ICWA) (Holt, 2001; Jones, 1995). This legislation sought to return back to tribal authority jurisdiction for large numbers of Native American children apprehended and adopted out of their community. Since the United States government passed the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA) in 1990, the word *repatriation* has been associated with returning certain cultural items to their original communities (Fine-Dare, 2002). Following the passage of ICWA and NAGPRA, *Káínaa* (Blood Tribe) actively pursued the return of children and ceremonial items removed to the United States, where a third of *Siksikáítapiiksi* live on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Since NAGPRA, *Káínaa* have successfully repatriated close to ten *ninámskaahkóyinnimaanistsi* medicine-pipe bundles; about fourteen *moo’pi’stáánnissti* (beaver bundles); and several *mootókiiksi* (Buffalo Women) headdresses, *kana’tsomiiitaiksi* (Brave Dogs) and *ka’koyiiksi* (Pigeon Dove Society) bundles. Because the bundles are living beings, people care for them and speak of them, as if they were children. So there is a certain ironic resonance between the repatriation of the bundles and the children. And the people know that many bundles are still missing, most in the possession of private collectors not bound by NAGPRA. And the people know that many of the children are still missing, too. While many *Siksikáítapiiksi* adopted out were found many more are still not located living their lives without knowing who they are, who their relations are, or where they come from.

*Siksikáítapiiksi*’s efforts to repatriate cultural items and children from the United States influenced their negotiations with the government of Alberta. In 2000, the province passed the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act*, which allowed First Nations to apply for repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects from the Glenbow Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum (Government of Alberta, 2000b). Under this new law, museums have given long-term loans of several bundles to their original communities. Negotiations for the return of other bundles are ongoing.

Archeologists have been dedicated to “saving things whose purpose was fulfilled primarily in the past” (Watkins, 2000, p. 7). It could be said that the “historical resources professionals,” as defined in the Alberta legislation referred to above, have the same mission. While *Siksikáítapiiksi* share an interest in preserving and protecting places and things whose origins are in the past, they do not hold that the purpose of these places and things remains in the past. One of the aims of repatriation—of sacred material, for example—is to bring things home, to put them back into circulation, to allow them to fulfill their purpose of helping people. Exiled to the museums and university storehouses, scientists with technology preserve and protect “artefacts.”<sup>ii</sup> Once returned home, and placed in the care of their relations, sacred *Siksikáítapiiksi* “artefacts” are returned to the use for which they were intended. At home, the bundles are once again (animate) kin relations who participate in ceremony, offer protection and answer prayers. Through the ceremonies, the bundles care for and protect the people, as the people care for and protect them.

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**i** Much of *Siksikáítapiiksi* material culture remains outside of the purview of the state, living as high-end commodities within exclusive, private collections and the sometimes underground market economy of art dealing peopled with brokers, dealers and buyers.

**ii** As mentioned, not all “artefacts” become state property, protected by science. Traded amongst private collectors, bundles and other *Siksikáítapiiksi* materials are auctioned to the highest bidder.

## ***Repatriation as Model for Siksikáítapiiksi’s Responsibility to Kitáóowahsinnoon***

Repatriation may be a way for *Siksikáítapiiksi* to fulfill their responsibilities to and for, and to live out their on-going relations with, *kitáóowahsinnoon*. Unlike the bundles, *kitáóowahsinnoon* cannot be brought home; it is home. Even though *Siksikáítapiiksi* were separated from *kitáóowahsinnoon* the songs, ceremonies and stories obligate them to the ongoing care of these places. Repatriation, as an idea and a practice, acknowledges that like any reciprocal, interdependent relationship, the one between people and the places which sustain them must be nurtured through unimpeded access, continued exchange of knowledge, and ceremonies of renewal such as visiting and exchanging of gifts. Below are examples of how we imagine repatriation of precarious places might work.

### **Knowledge exchange: Taking *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge seriously.**

Archaeologists are guided by certain theories and test their theories according to certain parameters, using pre-established criteria. Certain plains archeologists (see for example, the essays in Kooyman & Kelley, 2004; Yellowhorn, 2002) consider the First Nations’ perspective, as recorded in ethnographic data, valuable in interpreting their findings. For the most part, what *Siksikáítapiiksi* know and understand about *kitáóowahsinnoon* is taken into consideration when it supports existing archaeological theory and it can be verified by “scientific data” (Gerry Conaty, personal communication 09 January 2009). Most Western academics consider what *Siksikáítapiiksi* know about a place to say more about the people than about the place. Generally archeologists, both academics and compliance archeologists, consider *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge about specific places within this territory, often recounted as stories, as just that: stories, myths and legends. And if contemporary *Siksikáítapiiksi* stories about a place differ from historical and ethnographic accounts, the printed and historical record is assumed more reliable (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). In other words, *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge of place may contribute to anthropological theories about culture or scientific interpretations of place but it does not stand alone as legitimate or useful knowledge about a place, what is found there and what it means.

The dichotomies between universal knowledge and particular knowledge, and between truth and culture, are visually represented at sites such as *Óóhkokotok* (Náápi’s rock). Here a gigantic “glacial erratic” reminds *Siksikáítapiiksi* of a well-known *Náápi* story. The province erected a plaque: on the left is the geological explanation of this formation, a straightforward account the simplicity of which does not dilute the sheer force of the truth claims being made. This is a



glacial erratic that arrived on a sheet of ice. On the right side is one version of one *Siksikáítapiiksi* story of *Óóhkotok*. This story is printed in italics, a Western typographic convention for distinguishing *fictional* story from *factual* text, *oral* account from *scientific* explanation. Many older historic sites are marked in a similar way; the design and discourse of the site interpretations silently point out for the public, which story is universal and true, and which is particular and cultural, which is to be believed and which is not, which informs and which entertains.

At newer facilities, such as the one at Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park officially opened June 20, 2007, *Siksikáítapiiksi* were consulted and more actively involved in the interpretation of the meaning and significance of the site. As a consequence, the perspective of *Siksikáítapiiksi* is better integrated into the design of the interpretive centre and the displays, as well as the content of images, texts and objects. In other words, *Siksikáítapiiksi* stories share the interpretive stage as knowledge, as part of the official interpretation of the place for the public. Many of that public is *Siksikáítapiiksi*. Repatriation means actively seeking ways for *Siksikáítapiiksi* and *Náápiikoaiksi* to share knowledge about places in *kitáóowahsinnoon* so both may work together to ensure these precarious sites, and all who inhabit them and who are nourished by them, survive.

*Siksikáítapiiksi* participation in official interpretation of significant sites is one matter. Employing indigenous knowledge in the effort to rescue sites vulnerable to impact from oil and gas development, water diversion and use, and logging (called *forestry management*) is another. As part of the Government of Alberta's "cross-ministry" First Nations Consultation Initiative, the Historic Resources Management Branch has instituted an "Aboriginal Consultation" section.<sup>i</sup> This initiative led to the establishment of a Blackfoot Elders Committee, which advises the Branch on matters related to *Siksikáítapiiksi* sites. The "Blackfoot perspective" on these (remaining) sites is a valuable commodity at present (Blood & Chambers, 2006). The goal of this committee is for elders to advise the government on locations that are highly significant to *Siksikáítapiiksi* communities, as well as on how to best protect such sites. Mechanisms for decision-making that enable meaningful *Siksikáítapiiksi* participation in protection, preservation and use may ensure that fragile ecological areas are better protected, that *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge and history are better preserved, and that the Alberta public is better informed. *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge provides a more complex interpretation of sites for an increasingly sophisticated Alberta public. Access to *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge also increases the legitimacy of advocates within government who are anxious to preserve and protect heritage sites from the tsunami of development and the industrialization of the landscape, as well as, from: casual and professional collectors who relentlessly strip sites of the significant items left there; uninformed users, such as rock climbers, who harm and disrespect certain sites perhaps unintentionally; determined vandals, such as graffiti artists, who spray paint sacred stones covered in petroglyphs (van Rassel, 2006) or simple natural erosion. For the Heritage Resource Management Branch, education of the uninformed (and they agree that sometimes this includes government and industry) is critical to protecting and preserving important sites.

*Siksikáítapiiksi* agree that education is an important tool in saving places from the forces that threaten them. Siksiká First Nation opened its own interpretive centre at Blackfoot Crossing where both *Siksikáítapiiksi* and *Náápiikoaiksi*, as well as all visitors, have the opportunity to experience how *Siksiká* interpret that place, what it meant in the past, and what it means for the

future. Red Crow Community College has instituted the first Káínai Studies Program, offering programs, certificates and university transfer credits for courses in Káínai and Indigenous studies, as well as courses in psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and political science from a Káínai perspective, introducing Káínai concepts in the Blackfoot language. Learning from place is key to *Siksikáítapiiksi* identity and processes of knowledge formation, and this has become inherent to the Káínai Studies curriculum. Káínai students enrolled in technical programs to prepare them for wage employment, such as in oil and gas, are required to take a course from Káínai Studies, often a course that takes students onto the land, out to the sites where they have the opportunity to experience these places and what they have to teach.[ii](#)

### **Visiting places (áakssissawáato'op) as repatriation.**

As an extension of this mandate to repatriate knowledge about place and to make learning from place part of the curriculum, in 2005 and 2006, Red Crow Community College collaborated with the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge to teach a two-course equivalent summer institute, *Connecting with Kitáóowahsinnoon*. One of these senior undergraduate courses was a special topics seminar entitled: *Blackfoot Oral Tradition, Knowledge, and Pedagogy*; the other was a “study tour” entitled: *Visiting Significant Sites in Kitáóowahsinnoon*. Held throughout the month of June, students attended seminars two or three days a week and then for the other two days they, along with their instructors and often one or two elders or other experts, boarded a yellow school bus and travelled to over fifteen different sites in the Alberta portion of *kitáóowahsinnoon*.

It soon became clear that the metaphor of a “study tour,” of taking a trip with several short stops for the purposes of viewing something like a museum gallery, was not appropriate for what was happening on the visits to these places, for what needed to happen at the sites. For students to learn *about* these places and *from* them, they needed to *visit* the sites rather than *tour* them (Chambers, 2006). As well as being a highly valued social activity, *áakssissawáato'op*, or visiting a place, is a primary means of knowledge exchange for *Niitsítapiiksi*. A visit holds an expectation that one will spend time, be amicable and relaxed, stay awhile, be a guest, converse, and probably eat a meal and drink a cup of tea. And the sites visited during the Institute seemed to have a similar expectation; each place called for more than a lecture by an expert, more than a story by an elder. The sites seemed to invite people to make offerings—of tobacco and raw kidney—to sing their clan songs, bring food, set up lawn chairs, visit with each other, and explore or maybe simply sit in solitude. Thus, after the first three or four site visits, the instructors abandoned the model of the museum tour and embraced the *Niitsítapiiksi* notion of visiting (*áakssissawáato'op*) the sites. In *kiipátapiiwahssinnoon* (our way of life), visiting includes the practices of *offering*, *feeding*, and *narration* (Heavy Head, 2005). Thus, as the Institute proceeded the approach to learning from the places changed: arrivals at a place were marked by making offerings to the site; *kaaáhsinnooniksi* (those with transferred rights) and archaeologists were invited to narrate some of what they knew about that place; and, food was shared with each other (and the site.) At each site, old stories were recounted and old songs were sung but new stories were told as well, and events took place that would become the fabric of future stories. All these stories are a living repatriation of these sites, bringing the places and the knowledge they hold alive, keeping them alive through the stories.

*Áakssissawáato'op*, a relaxed extended visit at the sites, rewarded all visitors richly. Videotaped interviews suggested that all the participants—the instructors, invited guests, and students, even the bus driver and camera operator—became learners. Those interviewed said that more than the course readings, assignments or seminars it was visiting the sites as a group that impacted their learning the most. The participants learned that many of these places were complicated and contested sites of historical trauma (famine, massacre, epidemic), as well as places, of spiritual and communal renewal. Slowly, it dawned upon their consciousness how colonized, and thus limited, their understanding of *kitáóowahsinnoon* had been.

Frank Weasel Head visited some of the sites for the first time when he was an “elder” for the class. He had grown up with the stories about these places, and as a ceremonialist he knew intellectually, and understood symbolically, the connections among the songs, the stories, the ceremonies and the land. And while Frank knew the stories—he’d heard them and he could recount them—he’d never been to some of the sites. And that was never a problem for Frank until he actually visited the sites. He describes his realization this way:

Before I went to these sites, they were just stories, just stories; it was almost as if they never happened. But when I actually went to the sites, like *óóhkotok*...I thought ‘ahhh’ that is what they mean. (Blood & Chambers, 2006)

It is easy to romanticize *Niitsítapiiksi*’s relationship to the land. Leroy Little Bear (Blood & Chambers, 2006) points out that Blackfoot relationship to the land has almost become rhetoric. Such a simplistic formula as *Niitsítapiiksi equals ecological* infantilizes and Disneyfies the vast knowledge *Niitsítapiiksi* hold collectively and individually about the land; such stereotypes reduce a complex cosmology to simplistic schemata and colour-coded “medicine wheels” mapping the “four directions.” Frank Weasel Head’s experience suggests that while stories keep aspects of knowledge current and alive, actually going to the sites, being there and experiencing each place with all of one’s senses, brings about a deeper, embodied understanding. Being at a place, hearing the stories, participants experienced the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the *Siksikáítapiiksi* as part of “the phenomenology of landscape” (Tilley, 1994). People took in the knowledge of each place like the food they ate; they embodied what they learned. For *Siksikáítapiiksi*, to know is to embody what one knows (Heavy Head, 2005).

## **Repatriation as a process rather than an event.**

And just as important stories and ceremonies bear repeating, so does visiting. If education about the sites is a key way of protecting and preserving them, deeply learning *about* and *from* places means returning to these places again and again. Each visit is an opportunity to learn something new, something else, or perhaps to remember what was forgotten from previous visits. And some of what happened at the sites during the Institute came from things that that were not known, unanticipated. At first it was not clear how to best prepare students to learn from the sites, how to “manage” or “organize” the experience of the site visits so that on each trip student learning would be “maximized.” One of us, Cynthia Chambers, assumed that the other, Narcisse Blood, would find the “best elder” to narrate “THE correct” story about each site. Cynthia Chambers had a lot to learn, and one important thing was that knowledge about the sites is not contained within a single story or song, a single storyteller or singer.

While exile has eroded some of what *Siksikáítapiiksi* know about the land and specific sites in *kitáóowahsinnoon*, that knowledge may not be as precarious as the sites themselves. Storytellers, as well as, ceremonialists have done much to keep the knowledge alive, even in the absence of access to the land itself. And in spite of all the historical traumas, many people continue to visit the sites and to participate in ceremonies of renewal at these places. For example, from the early 1980s until mid 1990s, Carolla Calf Robe (Blood & Chambers, 2006) visited Sundial Butte (Carpenter, 1995) annually to make offerings, to thank *Ihstsipáítapiiyo’pa* –the Source–for a good year and to ask for another good year and blessings for her children and grandchildren. In 1994, a car accident confined Carolla Calf Robe to a wheelchair. Since the accident she had not been able to reach the top of Sundial to make an offering. Then, one time, she accompanied clients from the St. Paul Treatment Centre to the site and a group of the young men carried her to the top of Sundial Butte in her wheelchair. There, at the cairn, Carolla made her offering and she was reconciled to fact that she may never go this site again. After her last journey to the top of Sundial Butte, Carolla Calf Robe’s life changed: she received the strength she needed to endure her infirmity and to go on living in spite of it.

Leaving offerings, especially at designated sites on reserves, is a practice that has never subsided. Fewer people are aware that *Siksikáítapiiksi* continue to make offerings, to bring their pipes around, to give names, to sing songs, at sites all over *kitáóowahsinnoon*. Repatriation means learning from these places and to learn from them we must return to them again and again, with all our relations.

**i** This initiative requires all provincial departments to develop “targets” for including First Nations’ perspectives in policy, planning and programs.

**ii** At present enrolment is almost exclusively Káínai although all qualified students are eligible to enroll in these programs. Another form of repatriation of knowledge would be for *Náápiikoaiksi* to enroll in Káínai Studies at Red Crow, as a matter of course; for it not to be an anomaly for non-Káínai to be interested in the invaluable historical, political and ecological knowledge available in this program.

### **Conclusion: Are the Three Ps Enough?**

The Alberta government has implemented policies to involve *Siksikáítapiiksi* in preserving and protecting significant sites in *kitáóowahsinnoon*. The Aboriginal Consultation section of the Heritage Resources Management Branch consults the Blackfoot Elders Committee:**i** (1) to locate important but currently unprotected sites, (2) to ascertain *Siksikáítapiiksi* knowledge about specific sites in an effort to better preserve them, and (3) to ascertain *Siksikáítapiiksi* perspective on the sites to better protect them from the actions of other government departments, industry, and the visiting public.

Preservation, protection and perspective: is that enough? *Siksikáítapiiksi* participation in the ongoing care of *kitáóowahsinnoon* is at the behest of current policy initiatives and caring civil servants; it is not enshrined in law or treaty or at least the way Treaty 7 is currently interpreted by the government (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). The province of Alberta has jurisdiction over these sites.

Given this, perhaps *Siksikáítapiiksi* must continue to repatriate *kitáóowahsinnoon* to ensure authentic participation in the preservation, protection and use of these sites. *Siksikáítapiiksi* perspective cannot be given or transferred; it must be experienced and learned in the act of being at these places, visiting them. Repatriation is a form of resistance, a way of taking back much of what once belonged to the people, a way of turning trauma into healing (Thompson & Todd, 2003). Frank Weasel Head (personal communication, June 28, 2006) believes the return of the bundles does more to heal a community than any government action or program.<sup>ii</sup> For *Siksikáítapiiksi* repatriating these sites means preserving and protecting them by using them in the way they were intended: visiting the sites, making offerings, feeding the sites, and performing ceremonies at them. Like Carolla Calf Robe and her pilgrimage to Sun Dial and the late Rufus Good Striker and his vision quest at *Óóhkotok*, like the students from the Summer Institute taking their families to these sites, and like Ramona Big Head, a teacher from the Institute who brought 30 Káínaa High School students to visit these sites, many for the first time. Just as *Siksikáítapiiksi* brought the bundles home so they could be cared for, and in turn, care for the people; to visit these sites and care for them, in the Blackfoot way, means these places will, in turn, care for the people, not only the Blackfoot but all people, all beings who are nourished by these places. Like the bundles, the prayers and the ceremonies, these sites are meant to help and care for everyone and everything, not just human beings.

This is the *Siksikáítapiiksi* belief. In the prayers, *Siksikáítapiiksi* invoke *Ihstsipáítapiiyo'pa*, the Source, to bring understanding and wisdom to everyone, to call for blessings and safekeeping for everyone, and to understand that the land is here to nurture all beings. With each passing day, the urgency of these prayers grows. The decimation of the bison is a cautionary tale. Andy Blackwater (personal communication, January 16, 2006), another *kááahsinnoon*, says that today *Siksikáítapiiksi* and *Náápiikoaksi* live together on *kitáóowahsinnoon*; today our tipis, whether we are indigenous or newcomer, today our tipis are held down by the same peg. Neither is going anywhere. The knowledge and the will needed to protect and save these places no longer belongs to one people or one tradition. Therefore, *Siksikáítapiiksi* and *Náápiikoaksi* are called to love thy neighbour, to work together, to ensure *kitáóowahsinnoon* continues to nourish us all. These precious places in their precarious state call for all Albertans to re-imagine the future together.

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## **Glossary**

*Aakípiisskan* – Women’s Buffalo Jump, Cayley, Alberta

*áakssissawáato’op* – visiting a place

*Aamsskáápipikáni* – South Peigan or Blackfeet (Montana)

*Aapátohsipikáni* – North Peigan (Alberta)

*Aapátohsoo omáhkataan* – North Saskatchewan River (“big north river”)

*Áísínai’pi* – Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park (“it is pictured”)

*Akáí’nissskoo* – Many Dead

*Asinaa* – Cree

*Atsíina* – Gros Ventre

*Awai’skimmii’ko* – Cypress Hills

*ii’noiyis* – death lodge

*iinísskimm* – buffalo stone

*Iisskstaáí’tahtaan* – St. Mary’s River

*Issapó* – Crow

*isskskáakssin* – the border between Canada and the United States of America

*Ihstsipáítapiyo’pa* – the Source

*kaaáhsinnoon* – a person with ceremonial rights that have been transferred to them according to Blackfoot protocol (“spiritual grandparent”)

*kaaáhsinnooniksi* – persons with ceremonial rights that have been transferred to them according to Blackfoot protocol (“spiritual grandparents”)

*Káínaa* – Blood tribe (“many leaders”); also called *Akáínaa*

*Kai’spa* – Lakota and Dakota (“parted-hair”)

*Katoyís* – Blood Clot, a hero who rid the land of harmful beings

*kiipátapiiwahssinoon* – our way of life

*kitáóowahsinnoon* – that which sustains or nourishes us (see endnote iv)

*ksahkomitapiksi* – earth beings (plants, rocks, and animals)

*Mistákistsi* – Rocky Mountains (“backbone of the world”)

*Náápi* – creator and trickster (“Old Man”)

*Náápi Otsí’ tahtaan* – Oldman River

*náápiikoiksi* – settlers and immigrants of European descent (“white people”)

*niitsítapiiksi* – historically, always meant Blackfoot people specifically; however, in contemporary times, it is also a generic term for aboriginal people when tribal identity is unknown or ambiguous (“human beings in human form”)

*ninámskaahkóyinnimaanistsi* – medicine-pipe bundles

*nitáówahsinnaan* – Blackfoot territory (Grammatically this form is first person plural exclusive, that is the speaker is excluding the addressee).

*Ómahkskispatsiko* – Sand Hills

*Óóhkotok* – Náápi’s rock

*Papáítapiksi* – dream beings

*Piikáni* – North Peigan

*Ponokáásisahtaan* – Yellowstone River or Red Deer River (“elk river”)

*Siksiká* – Blackfoot (from *Siksika* First Nation)

*Siksikáítapiiksi* – Blackfoot Confederacy

*soyúítapiksi* – under-water beings (water birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles)

*spomitapíiksi* – above beings (spiritual beings, celestial bodies, and birds)