

Applying Aapaitsitapiiysinni/Weasel People Life Ways to The Battle of Belly River Heritage Management Project

Author: **Issomaahka / Driving Along the Beach / Blair Many Fingers**
 Faculty Supervisor: **Dr. Kenneth Holyoke**
 City Supervisors: **Ross Kilgour and Megan Berry**
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Sikóóhkotoki Heritage Management: The Battle of Belly River

Background

The Battle of Belly River, fought on October 25, 1870, near present-day Lethbridge, Alberta, was the final major intertribal conflict between Indigenous nations in North American history. The battle involved the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Cree and Assiniboine.

The Cree and their allies launched a raid into Blackfoot territory, seeking to exploit the weakened state of the Blackfoot caused by a recent smallpox epidemic. However, they underestimated the Blackfoot's resilience and sense of collective unity.

Although outnumbered, the Blackfoot employed their warrior spirituality and knowledge of the land to secure a decisive victory. The battle was deadly, with many of the Cree perishing in the Belly River (the name changed to The Old Man River in 1915). The battle is a signifier of the devastating effects of colonial violence during a time when Indigenous people were suffering from the loss of buffalo, epidemics, and addiction.

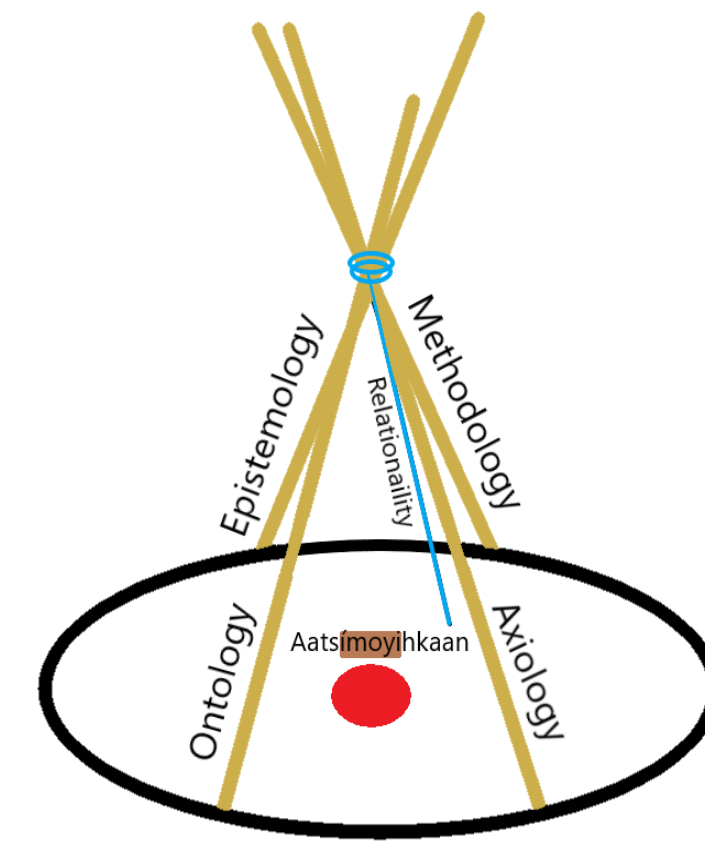


Figure 2.0 Weasel People Tipi Framework
 Inspired by A. Russell, L. Jorgensen, R. Many Grey Horses, and J. Eaglespeaker



Figure 2.1 Axiological Blackfoot Values based on the origin story of Katoyissa / Blood Clot, a superhero. Photo by Issomaahka

Methodology and Methods

Methodology of the Weasel People Tipi:

- ontological (reality), epistemological (knowledge) and axiological (values/ethics) paradigms.

Methods rooted in Blackfoot knowledge transfer:

- community-based visiting instead of interviewing,
- elder-driven adhering to Blackfoot protocols that create respectful relationship building,
- land-based site-specific storytelling,
- and using Blackfoot petroglyphs and pictographs with embedded cultural knowledge to stimulate conversation.

All of these methods are rooted in the current Blackfoot cultural practices:

Geographical Context

The Battle of Belly Rivers is federally designated as a National Historic Event and a Provincial Historic Site. The primary location of the battle is protected under the Provincial Historical Resources Act. The area protected as part of Bull Trail Park is just a tiny fraction of the entirety of the battle, and the events leading up to the battle transcend the boundaries of the current designation.

References

The Blackfoot Confederacy Nations of Alberta in association with Arrow Archaeology Limited. (2017). Traditional Knowledge and Use Assessment, City of Lethbridge: South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Compliance Initiative Environment and Historic Resources Strategy Final Report. In Lethbridge.ca. City of Lethbridge.
 Itsiipootsikimskai (Where the Water Comes Together As Friends, Confluence). (2023). Níksókowaawák as axiom: The indispensability of comprehensive relational animacy in Blackfoot Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing. *Society & Natural Resources*, 37(5), 769–790.
 Johnson, A. (2020). The last great (Inter-Tribal) Indian battle (By Lethbridge Historical Society; R. Stewart, Ed.). Lethbridge Historical Society.
 Kilgour, R., Berry, M., Cuéllar, A., & Stein, P. (2023). City of Lethbridge/Sikóóhkotok Heritage Mangement plan.
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Introduction

My MA research will focus on The Battle of Belly River Heritage Management Plan, which is a site-specific project that aims to bring Blackfoot paradigms (worldview) into the development of the project and is a recommendation from a much larger project, The City of Lethbridge/Sikóóhkotok HMP (2023) and Battle of Belly River Oral History Project.

Research Questions

To what extent, in a historical context did colonial violence influence the Blackfoot worldview and lifeways through interactions such as the whiskey/fur trade, near extinction of the buffalo, European war tactics, and the introduction of the horse and gun?

How is colonial violence perpetuated through historical contexts into modern policies, such as Heritage Management Plans and Provincial/Federal policies?

How can traditional Indigenous heritage management practices interweave with Western heritage management policy while mutually benefitting all stakeholders involved?

Sináákssiisti / Petroglyphs on Sandstone

Figure 1.0 below is a picture of Blackfoot petroglyphs at Aisinai'pi/Where the Pictures Are, depicting the evolution of Blackfoot warrior culture. Photos by Issomaahka/Driving Along the Beach



Figure 3.0 Api'soomaahka / Running Coyote William Singer III. Map painted for Red Crow Community College, 1993 in Itsiipootsikimskai (2023).

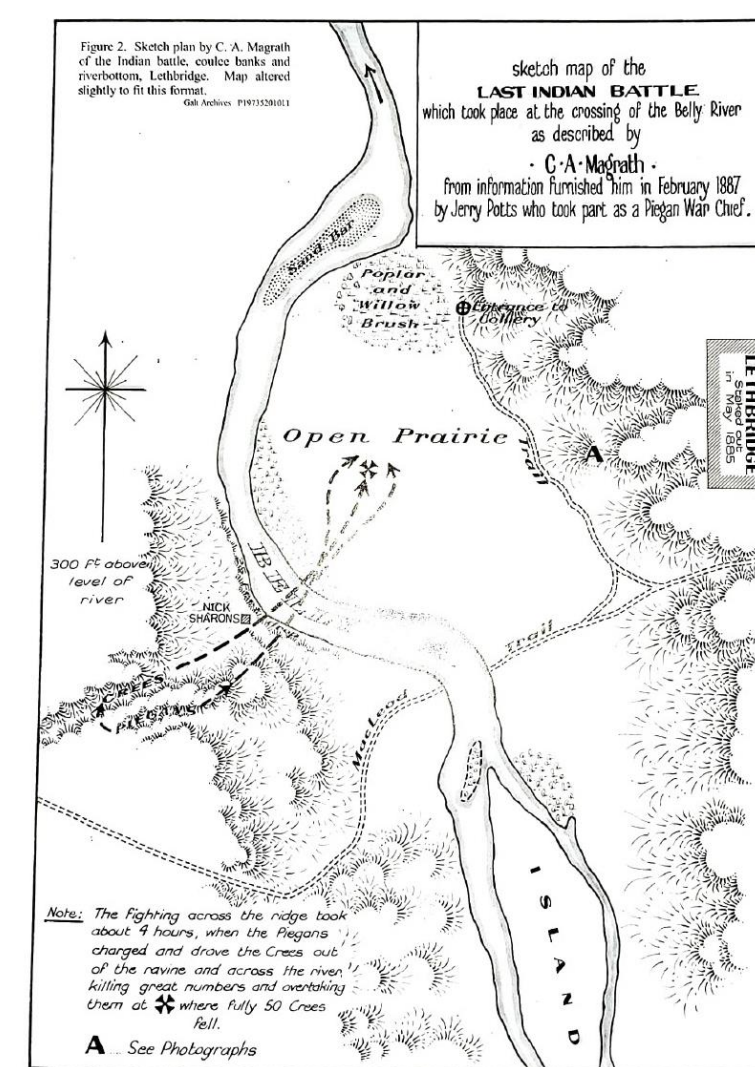


Figure 3.1 Sketch Map of C. A. Magrath of the Indian Battle, Belly River Valley in Johnson (2020).