

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation with S. Trimble and P. Fortna, *Remembering Our Relations: Dënesųłné Oral Histories of Wood Buffalo National Park*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2023. 307 pages. ISBN: 9781773854113. \$34.99 paperback.

Parks are often places we visit to help clear our minds, and to get away from the routines and pressures of everyday life. Yet, for many Indigenous folks, visiting a park activates a different set of affective dimensions. For those whose families and kin were ripped from the land and forced from traditional territories, visiting a park is often a traumatic and painful experience, rife with difficult memories and connections lost. In this thoughtful collection of oral history, the memories of the K'ai Tailé Dënesųłné/Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation's relationship to Wood Buffalo National Park are recorded in emotional detail. Working with Sabina Trimble and Peter Fortna of Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, the book stands as a testament to the legacy of elders who passed these histories down to their community members, and to the work of contemporary knowledge holders and leaders in creating an archival memorial to their pain, loss and hopes for the future.

Offering the personal recollections and histories of several leaders and elders, the text begins with a dedication to those who worked so hard to see these pages come to light, and to those who will benefit from access to the thoughts and memories of those who came before. Suggesting ways forward that will in time bring the Dënesųłné back to the land and the land back to the people, the histories present flashes of insight into not just the operations of the local, provincial and national governments involved in the creation and operation of the park, but into the governance structures and legal traditions that guide Indigenous Peoples' relations to the land and other beings who depend on it. The different accounts work together to demonstrate how the community managed the area for generations before its occupation by settler-colonists, but also how that governance supported the ecosystems, economies and society of the Dënesųłné Peoples for millennia.

In the first section of the book the authors bring together oral and archival evidence to explore how the Park's creation abrogated governmental responsibilities to Dënesųłné Peoples as promised by Treaty 8. In the context of the Treaty, the formation of the Wood Bison National Park became an obvious attack on Dënesųłné survival. The effort of Parks Canada to ensure the survival of wood bison was deliberately composed as at odds with the use and stewardship of these other-than-human kin by their Dënesųłné relations. Instead, the process was routed through the technocratic language of conservation biology in an act of bureaucratic indemnification focused on relieving the government of its responsibility to negotiate under the terms of the Treaty. This made Parks Canada an agent of settler-colonial domination and dispossession, with a legacy that has been hard to shake.

Chapter one establishes the deep historical connection between the Dënesųłné Peoples and the land, waters and kin who dwell in these places by presenting oral histories and traditional ecological knowledge gained over millennia. Chapter two works to frame the dispossession of the land in the context of Treaty 8, which promised to ensure the continued livelihood and prosperity of the Indigenous Peoples of the territory in partnership with settlers. However, "Dene oral histories tell us that community members did not consent to the creation, expansion or management

of the Park in their territories, and that many people did not even know about it” (2023, 30) and this is the focus of Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Using oral histories juxtaposed against the deliberately shaped archival and documentary records of the government, the authors show how the evidence can be manipulated to disempower those who depend most on the land and waters while presenting techno-scientific management as the only possibility by obscuring the depth and breadth of Indigenous knowledge. Showing explicitly how Parks Canada enforced deprivation and refused to negotiate in good faith, these chapters establish the reasons why today the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation demands that Parks Canada, and the Federal Government, move beyond mere rhetoric towards genuine restitution and reparative action. This legacy is the focus of the closing chapter, which shows how the justice-oriented approach taken by the authors means to guide us towards what might be described as reconciliation.

What becomes clear through the testimonies and oral histories of the folks who experienced the creation of Wood Bison National Park as a form of colonial elimination, is the ways in which the collective political authority of the Dēnesųłné was undermined by the focus of the Parks and Indian Agencies on individuals. By treating Indigenous hunters, fishers and foragers as poachers and trespassers, individuals became subject to laws and policies geared towards the genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. An incarcerated poachers’ children became vulnerable to the watchful eyes of Indian agents and Residential School officials. This led to the further enforcement of colonial policies, decimating families and communities while depriving people of their access to lands and waters that contained and supported their relations since time immemorial.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site designated in 1983 to ensure the protection of the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the bison as a threatened species, Wood Bison National Park holds a special place in the global consciousness. This international attention is something the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is keenly aware of, particularly the attention paid to the well-being of species threatened by the development of the Alberta oil sands and the resulting impacts. The book is meant to speak directly to these interests, placing the Dēnesųłné experience at the center of a justice-oriented approach to ecosystems management which makes clear they have been the stewards of these lands, waters and the species who live there for thousands of years. But further, the book demonstrates that it is Dēnesųłné direct involvement in these systems that sustains and supports their well-being, while simultaneously allowing the culture and community to survive through that labor. As a testament to the dedication and endurance of the Dēnesųłné People, the book is a powerful declaration of sovereignty, and a reminder of the power of community, a book created by, and for, the Dene.

Ian Puppe  
Department of Native Studies  
Brandon University