
Landscapes' Lessons: Native American Cultural Geography in Nineteenth-Century Oregon and Washington

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Abstract: The depth and complexity of the cultural significance of physical geographic spaces to Native Americans is often underappreciated or misunderstood. For Pacific Northwest indigenous groups, landscapes contained lessons by which to live and histories of their people and their neighbors. The stories embedded in the landscapes not only augmented the oral tradition but were also crucial to the maintenance of socio-cultural values of native communities. The stories the landscape produced served as cultural reminders, but their efficacy depended upon continued contact with those locales. Knowing this helps us better understand the upheaval wrought by the US removal policy, which relocated Indians away from familiar landscapes and the lessons they imparted to remote and too often mute reservation lands.

Keywords: Indian Stories; Cultural Geography; Nineteenth Century; Indian Removal

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Fig. 1. The Home Guard—On the Columbia

The native peoples of Oregon and Washington were extensive readers well before contact with Euro-Americans. They read stories to their children and grandchildren, stories entertaining and frightening, which communicated proper values and behavior. They read to themselves and for the enrichment of others. They read the histories of their people and their neighbors. They read law. They read of the power of their God and of their, and the world's, creation. Like any important text, these stories were read over and over. Every facet of life, from natural occurrences and preternatural events to trade and human emotions, was relayed through texts and conveyed and augmented by each generation. Their lives abounded in texts, and they were literally surrounded by them. The texts resided—and still reside—in the landscapes upon which or in the shadow of which they lived and in the spaces and places they crossed, or didn't cross, inhabited, or avoided in their diurnal and seasonal movements.

What is underappreciated and often misunderstood by non-natives, today and in the past, is the depth and complexity of the cultural significance of landscapes in Native Americans' lives. Non-native readers may be surprised by the extensive roles landscapes and geological and topographical features played in the lives of indigenous groups. As historian Clifford Trafzer (1998) writes of the Columbia Plateau peoples' attachment to their land, "[T]he stories draw people into this

special place [the Columbian Plateau] of enchantment and beauty, a unique place where mountains, rivers, and winds tell their own stories. This place is blessed by the blood and bones of Plateau Indians, and every part of it elicits stories.” These landscape stories reinforced the oral traditions passed down to every generation and effectively transmit knowledge and values. Legends in the landscapes “are always easy to remember,” Yakama storyteller Virginia Beavert explains. “In fact, legends connected with landmarks are often more easily remembered and more widely known than other legends” (Trafzer 1998, 23; Beavert 1974, 179).¹ These landscapes did not merely augment the oral tradition; they were crucial to the maintenance of social and cultural values of native communities that relied on oral transmission of values and knowledge. The vivid stories or laws enlivened the landscapes and connected the present, future, and past (Trafzer 1998, 2).²

Studies that provide a more nuanced appreciation of the geographic influences of specific native peoples are few and far between³; of course, leaders of native communities have long strived to protect such geographic sites. In 2002, James Taylor Carson (2002, 783) challenged historians to “see the native landscape as both a cultural and a moral space, a place where mythical beings, ancestral spirits, daily life” intersected—an interactive place where “geopolitical concerns coexisted and interplayed.” This study takes up Carson’s challenge by analyzing the cultural geography of representative Pacific Northwest native peoples, primarily as it existed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Focusing on the bands and tribes of modern-day Oregon and Washington (or the “Northwest” for the purposes of this essay), it sheds light on those Natives’ relationships with their local environments and how physical geographic features and phenomena intervened continuously in their lives. The traditional lands were important to native peoples not solely because they were components of their spiritual world and the lands of their fathers and mothers. The physical features in their landscapes also provided invaluable cultural and social lessons, notably relaying culturally-specific and significant mores, laws, and taboos to younger generations. The cosmography and stories the landscape features reproduced served as cultural reminders, but their efficacy depended upon continued contact with those locales. A better grasp of this concept helps us to more fully understand the extreme disruption and upheaval wrought by removals after 1850, the coerced migrations of the Northwest Natives from those familiar landscapes, and the lessons they conveyed to the new, too often silent, landscapes of reservations.

For Northwest Natives in the pre-reservation era, the significance of stories grafted onto the terrain took several forms and served a number of purposes. In tune with widespread animistic beliefs, native peoples often perceived certain geographic sites as the homes of potentially harmful or deceitful spirits, laying await for unwary Natives. A wise person would avoid provoking these spirits and usually, if possible, avoid these sites. Several versions of the evil water spirit *Seatco*, for example, terrorized native communities from the Southern Oregon Coast to the Columbia River. Some sites were too spiritually powerful or sacred for humans to lay eyes on, let alone set foot on, such as the place where the Bridge of the Gods once spanned the Columbia River. Meanwhile, other sites were inhabited by benevolent spirits, some of which bestowed guardian spirits or spiritual power (*tamahnous*⁴) on the properly trained and spiritually readied. Spirit Mountain in the western Willamette Valley of Oregon, where Northern Kalapuyans sought spiritual assistance, is a clear example of these sites and is only one of numerous sites found in the Northwest. The significance of such sites is better known and, while equally important, such sites are only briefly addressed below. The primary focus here is the lessons grafted onto the features in the terrain that were central to the Native Americans' cultural resiliency. In the minds of community members, these lessons reinforced the proper kin relationships and obligations, the proper morality (more generally "laws") by which to live, the history of their people, and their stories of creation. Prior to the reservation period, Northwest native peoples did not rely solely on oral communication to maintain these vital traditions; after removal, especially for the communities denied access to their traditional spaces, they would often have to.

Oregon and Washington's native peoples, naturally, did not have the *same* connections to the geography as other groups in other parts of North America, but the significance of the landscape to them is representative of the complex interaction Native Americans had with their environment and geographic spaces. Evidence is scarce, since during the nineteenth century Euro-Americans often perceived their stories as, in Washington Territory Governor Isaac Steven's words, "trifling" or "incoherent tales" and did not bother to record them (Office of Indian Affairs 1855, 228). In other cases, missionaries operating in the Northwest suppressed the stories, which they perceived to be pagan influences. However, there are enough stories and fragments of others remaining to offer a sketch of the cultural geography of the region. Fortunately, native peoples have since recorded their stories in print and continue to do so, which significantly augments the available stories. When each story came into being is unknown—and perhaps unknowable—in Western terms, and how the stories changed—including the new

stories created after removal and grafted onto reservation landscapes—will have to be the subjects of additional studies. Nineteenth century ethnographers assumed a static indigenous culture, but readers should not make the same mistake, and they should not take the following stories as set in stone, so to speak.



Fig. 2. Major rivers, mountains, and landmarks in Oregon and Washington upon which indigenous peoples grafted stories and lessons. Reproduced from Ruby and Brown, *Indians of the Pacific Northwest*, 25. ©1988 University of Oklahoma Press

Landscapes and Sexual Morality

Rock formations, specific inlets, whirlpools in the river, or any number of other identifiable geographic features were heavily laden with lessons and stories conveying culturally-specific information and expectations to native inhabitants. Those formations located in or near villages and near or along routes to seasonal hunting/fishing, gathering, and trading sites served as reminders of human and pre-human actions that one should either emulate or avoid and were often intricately associated with creation stories and were often retold during gathering and trade times. Frequently, rock formations were literally individuals solidified as stone. When passing these formations, generations of Natives relayed the stories so frequently that the mere sight of the formation or site immediately recalled the lesson or story to the passerby.⁵ *Speel-ya*⁶ (Coyote), the great transformer who

ushered in the human world, often took center stage in these Northwestern stories, especially creation stories. Often his actions were farcical and self-deprecating—after all, he was also a trickster—but he taught the native peoples how they should behave, brought order, protected them during the transformation stage from the era of Animal People⁷ to that of humans, and ensured that the region's plants and animals would sustain them. What he set in motion were laws to follow.

Coyote, then, served as the central “law-giver” for many Oregon and Washington Natives when it came to social customs and behavior, and he often illustrated what they should *not* do through examples. All of his lessons were in the oral histories each band or tribe handed down,⁸ but a good number of lessons were also reinforced in the landscape. Speel-ya's Wall is one such place and lesson. This is what the Wishram Natives (Upper Chinookan) called a rocky ledge along the Columbia River Gorge near Mosier, Oregon. While on a long journey up the Columbia River during the transformation of the world, Coyote became famished, and it was here that Speel-ya stopped to find sustenance. However, after satiating his hunger, Coyote committed some unspeakable act (other recorded versions, e.g., a Clackamas one, do not mention the hunger and instead specify an obscene sexual act he committed). Once finished, Speel-ya built a wall to conceal the evidence of his actions (the Clackamas version has him buried under rocks during it), but “news” of his transgression kept breaking it down. He repeatedly rebuilt the wall, but to no avail, and he discovered he could not build a wall high and strong enough to prevent news of his behavior from breaching it and spreading. Finally giving up, Speel-ya remorsefully continued his journey, heading toward the Klickitat villages (that is, the pre-human antecedents of those people) to find shelter for the night. To his chagrin, at the first Klickitat house he heard its residents discussing the news of what he had done; ashamed, he continued eastwardly, only to find everyone talking about him at the Wishram villages as well, since “news” travelled faster than he could. For Natives along the Columbia, the sight of the remnants of Speel-ya's Wall recalled the moral lesson from Speel-ya's actions: avoid violating taboos because one can never hide the violation completely. News will find a way to get out (Kuykendall 1889, 69; Jacobs 1958, 95–96).⁹ Moreover, Speel-ya's Wall links the actions of individuals to the greater social-economic networks that connected individuals and families across linguistic lines and among the numerous villages along major rivers like the Columbia. The same network that sustained and ordered their lives would rapidly transmit indiscretions far and wide, as community members demonstrated in the shaming of Coyote.

For Chinookan speakers, the shared space and lesson also reflect the indigenous methods of controlling undesirable social behavior through chastisement via mockery and shaming. Similarly reflective was an Okanagan lesson against incest. For the Okanagan, a rock in the middle of the Fraser River, which is attached to the story of Coyote marrying his daughter (or niece), relays that law. Coyote, having fallen in love with his daughter/niece, hatched a plot that involved Coyote telling his daughter/niece to marry his good friend from “Upper Kutenai” should he die, Coyote’s subsequent fake death, and his return in the guise of his “friend.” Obeying Coyote, she married him, finding out later from mocking villagers that she had been deceived. As Boas recorded the story from James Teit, “Coyote’s daughter was ashamed. She ran out of lodge and jumped into the middle of the river. She was transformed into a rock, which retains the shape that she had when she fell into the water. ‘Henceforth women,’ Coyote decreed, ‘when ashamed, will commit suicide’” (Boas 1917, 72–74). Not only does the rock convey this message, but it also conveys the message that incest is shameful and taboo.

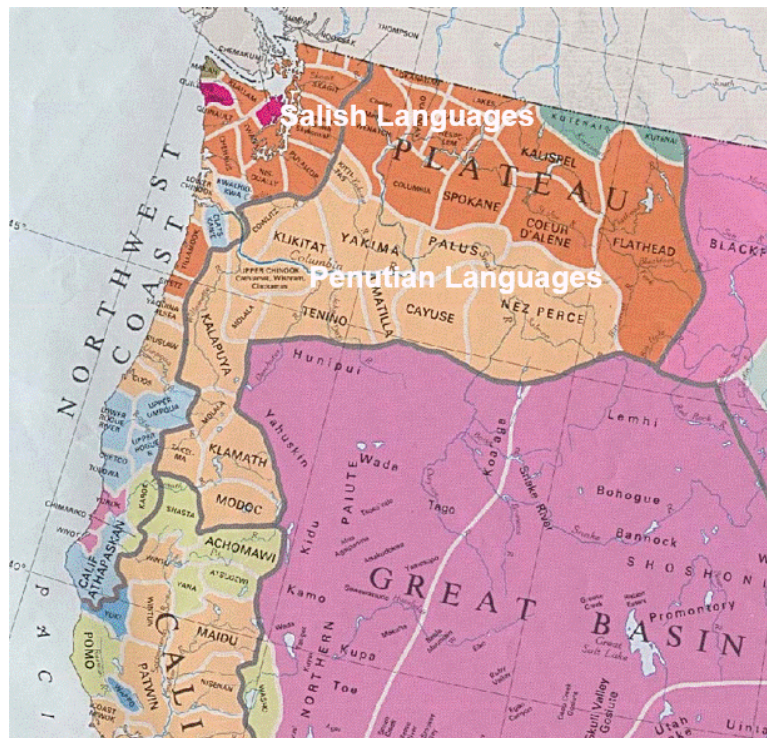


Fig. 3. Approximate Cultural, Linguistic, and Tribal or Band Boundaries c.1800. The two language stocks for this study are Penutian and Salishan, which each had numerous divisions and subdivisions, as well as different dialects for nearly each band. For example, the Sahaptin, Chinookan, and Kalapuyan languages are all Penutian but distinct languages. Each also has language groups, such as Northern or Central Kalapuyan and Lower and Upper Chinookan.

A number of lessons were gender specific and, not surprisingly, incorporated the typical stages of life—e.g., single adulthood, marriage, and widowhood. Virtually all members of society learned from the landscape. Wasco-Wishram (the Upper Chinookan speakers whose villages resided on the north and south side, respectively, of the Columbia River near The Dalles) women learned to live by the message of what whites labeled Eagle Rock, located near the modern-day Hood River, Oregon. During the transformation period, Coyote had transformed one of his “daughters” to stone, again to set an example to the emerging humans. Coyote’s daughter was “slim and bony, and neither handsome nor attractive,” but her fate was not due solely to her unattractive qualities that precluded marriage for her. She also violated sexual taboos that had eroded “her good name and reputation for chastity” (Kuykendall 1889, 69). The eternal presence of the old maid in rock form, physically looming over the Upper Chinookan villages, was to set an example for successive generations of women of what not to become and to warn them to uphold the strict Wishram taboos against pre-marital sex and adulterous relations (Spier and Sapir 1930, 214). Like many stories, there were layered lessons within this story. Coyote would have a number of “daughters” or other relations in these transformation-era stories, which, in addition to serving as a storytelling device, reflected and, for them, reinforced the social practice of forging fictive kinship bonds with people unrelated by blood.

Rocky Marital Relations

Depending on the different views people held, there were numerous marriage codes one should not violate. Rock formations often served as a medium to convey didactic stories, such as formations around Puget Sound and the Cascade Range for the northern Puget Sound Salish bands in the late nineteenth century. The landscape surrounding Puget Sound relayed warnings against marital abuse, specifically, women abusing and unnecessarily shaming their husbands (Castile 1985, 365). For the Natives who traversed the waters of the Sound frequently, these landmarks would be salient reminders of the proper spousal roles and the extent to which one should use shaming as a means of social control, so as to avoid destabilizing not only a marriage, but also the family and the band. Rock formations are certainly durable and prominent and allow for visibility and long-term transmissions of lessons, thus making them apt and convenient features on which to graft texts. However, the prevalence of lessons involving individuals being turned to stone may have a deeper meaning and offer an additional warning.

For peoples whose daily and seasonal activities and expansive kin networks could span large swaths of the Northwest, mobility was essential to physical and social existence. To be without kin (or without access to the protection/assistance of kin) left one vulnerable, while the inability to hunt, catch, or gather sustenance led to starvation. Immobilization, figuratively or literally, made an individual a nonentity and was among the worst possible fates. Not following the lessons embedded in these features could lead to such a fate. Furthermore, as James Axtell (1985) posits for the similarly structured Eastern Woodland societies and cultures, among the most highly regarded spirits were those identified with some of the most agile and mobile animals—ones who “enjoyed the greatest autonomy.” The high regard Oregon and Washington bands and tribes had for various guardian spirits, such as the wolf or hawk, and the central roles in creation that Coyote, Blue Jay, and the amphibious Beaver played seem to fit that pattern. For example, one Chinookan version of the creation of the Cayuse, a Plateau tribe that at times raided and at other times traded with the Chinookan villages west of the Cascade Mountains, reasoned that Coyote created the Cayuse from the legs of Beaver so that they would be fast runners (their adoption of the horse made them even more agile—and threatening to some). Mobility and agility afforded them power. Lacking autonomy and mobility, in turn, relegated a person closer to the status of a slave, and petrification effectively illustrates this concept (Axtell 1985, 16; Ruby and Brown 2005, 31n.13).

For the Chinookan and Sahaptin-speaking peoples of the Northwest, the Columbia River was central to their way of life and afforded mobility; and, as we have seen, the lands around it naturally provided an important canvas on which to imprint lessons. In addition to Eagle Rock, other Columbia River Valley rock formations tell stories dealing with infidelity and respect for deceased spouses. In the late 1920s, Clackamas elder Victoria Howard conveyed to ethnographer Melville Jacobs a version of the widespread Chinookan tale involving Coyote’s travels along the Columbia River as he prepared things for the coming of humans. While on his transforming journey, two women appeared to Coyote from across the river, teasing him with sexual advances. Every time he crossed the river to meet them, they disappeared, only to reappear on the other bank. Frustrated, Coyote consulted his three sisters¹⁰ for advice. They informed him that the two women were merely “šq’i’lawlaw,” or women who unfaithfully flirt with or tease men. Coyote responded: “No. You shall not be like that. You shall merely stand there. When they [humans] pass you they will say, ‘These are the šq’i’lawlaw.’” Now they became two rocks that stand there, warning married women against improper behavior toward other men (Jacobs 1958, 84).¹¹ In an ostracized fashion, they

could “merely stand there,” having lost autonomy and position in their community and kinship network.



Fig. 4. The Columbia River was a critical means of travel, trade, and communication as well as an important source of sustenance for the Natives residing near its shoreline, and well beyond. Its rocky shoreline provided an important canvas on which various peoples could embed stories, myths, and laws. Curtis may have posed this Chinook man but the landscapes around him were authentic.

Akin to the rock formation of the flirtatious wives, Widow Rock, located in the nearby Wishram Plateau lands, relayed the Yakama restrictions on widows' interactions with men. Yakama women who saw Widow Rock would recall a

didactic story from ancient times. The widowed woman met her fate because she violated taboos after her husband's death, specifically by looking at people (men); "She was especially attentive to the men," Yakama storyteller Virginia Beavert related. "[D]ispleased," Beavert continued, the Great Spirit "turned her into stone. She is there today looking at everybody. . . . When you go up to it, her eyes are upon you, and no matter where you stand on either side of her, the eyes are upon you. Even when you walk away she is looking at you" (Beavert 1974, 197). Whether it is the Yakama or Upper Chinookan warning, rock formations (e.g., Widow Rock for the Yakama or the aforementioned "Eagle" Rock for the Upper Chinookans) stalked women traversing the mid-Columbia River, offering a salient reminder of how they were expected to behave.

A Klickitat story about the creation of their rugged, red lava bed lands north of the Columbia and near the Wishram settlements served as a warning against infidelity. As recorded by Governor Stevens in the 1850s, in ancient times, a Klickitat man had grown tired of his wife and took up a mouse, which then became a woman, as a new wife. The old wife did not take kindly to this affront and threatened to kill both as a punishment for adultery (reflecting the seriousness with which they, like their Upper Chinookan neighbors, dealt with infidelity). Fearing for their lives, the man and his mouse-wife went into hiding. Assuming they hid in the ground, the old wife dug and dug into the earth trying to find them, tearing up the terrain and digging out passageways (lava tubes). She eventually saw them above her, standing on a mountain and mocking her. After scrambling up the mountain, she confronted her husband who begged for his life and for a return to their old living arrangements. The old wife acquiesced but only partly. While she spared her husband's life, the old wife did kill the mouse-woman to amend the shame the mouse-woman had brought upon her; according to the Klickitat informant, "it is her blood which has colored the stones at the lake." The old wife eventually killed the husband as well and lived out her days alone on the mountain. This lesson in the landscape also became an identifier. The Klickitat referred to the valley as *Hool-hool-ilse*, from their word for mouse (*hool-hool*), and their Yakama neighbors referred to Klickitat lands as "mouseland," or *Hoolhoolpam* (Office of Indian Affairs 1855, 229). Thus, both the hue and nature of the terrain as well as the toponym stress the value of fidelity and happy marital relations.

A Yakama story connected to the character and hues of the Toppenish Range on the Columbian Plateau also conveys instructions regarding marital relations. In the early twentieth century, Mrs. Skouken John related that the entire valley created by the ridges was once a single longhouse (i.e., not divided by ridges), and everything

was peaceful in the ancient world. But the shaman *Whe-amish* (or *Chi-nach*) divided the people by taking an additional wife: “The people on this Thappanish side of the valley were rather guilty, for they sided with him,” she explained. “They, as you see, retained their red color, but lost their white paint. Along the other side of the valley and across the Yakima River, the people retained their white paint but lost their red color. They were opposed to Chi-nach taking a new wife.” The colors red and white represent hostility and peace, respectively, and thereby Chi-nach’s faction was labeled the provokers of a civil war. Once the people divided, Mrs. Skouken John continued, “Everything went wrong, everything was quiet. . . . All people were changed into mountains and bluffs, some red, some white, just as you now see. Chi-nach has the worst color of them all, black.” His actions “wreck[ed] . . . the great civilization.” Trafzer (1998, 233–35, 233n.2) explains that the law ingrained in the polychromatic land was that taking two wives is acceptable, but more than that disrupts the household (longhouse). Like ancient ruins of a lost civilization, the rocky formations conveyed what could happen to all members of a community if individuals forsook their communal values.

Most of the Northwest’s indigenous societies practiced polygyny and, not surprisingly, they had stories dictating the boundaries of the institution, like the story above, or warning against jealousy. Women in polygamous marriages found reminders in the landscapes—and in the most prominent physical geographic features in the region—of how to properly behave (or how *not* to behave) toward other wives. The lessons and the rigidity of the landscape features containing them conveyed to women how immobility precluded them from one of their most productive roles in society, sustaining the family and the band through gathering activities.

For the Cowlitz bands in southwestern Washington, as former Cowlitz Chairman Roy Wilson relates, *Takhoma*, *Lawelatla*, and *Patu* served this purpose. Takhoma was “a great chief,” Wilson recalled, and Lawelatla and Patu were his two wives. “They were doing some things the Creator did not like,” he continues, and they would not heed his warnings. The Creator knew he must punish them for their disobedience, but “did not want to destroy them because they were such great people. They should remain as a lesson to everyone, forever. So, he changed them into great mountains. Today, we know Takhoma as Mount Rainer, Lawelatla as Mount St. Helens, and Patu as Mount Adams” (Thompson and Egesdal 2008, 133–34).¹² These mountains and others in the Cascade Range dominate the horizon,

bifurcate the region, and play roles in a number of different tales for many of the cultural groups on both sides of the Cascades in Washington and Oregon.

The Yakama story of *Pah-to* is another example of the mountains relaying laws to women in polygamous relationships; specifically, the story of *Pah-to* teaches women to not be jealous, as it leads only to hatred, retaliation, social insignificance, and possibly death. Intermarriage between men and women from the two sides of the Cascade Mountains was very common, and it's not surprising that the highest peaks of that range played central roles in their shared social lessons. In this story, *Pah-to* (Patu or Mt. Adams), *Wasco* (Mt. Hood), and *Wak-soom* (a mountain no longer in existence) were wives of the Sun, *Pos-twa-nit*. As the sun rose, it first shined on *Wak-soom*, which made *Pah-to* jealous. One night [i.e., when their husband, the sun, was away], *Pah-to* knocked down and killed *Wak-soom* in a jealous rage, taking all of her flora and fauna. Now when the Sun rose, *Pos-twa-nit* shined on *Pah-to* first. That, in turn, made *Wasco* jealous, who then killed *Pah-to* and tore her "to pieces." "I do not know how it happened," Yakama elder White Eagle narrated in the early twentieth century, "but *Pah-to*'s head was broken off and scattered from there to Fish Lake. To this day that is hard country to travel." *Wasco*, too, took everything of *Pah-to*'s; "Like *Wak-soom*, *Pah-to* was no longer a producer of life. Not growing foods, *Pah-to* had lost her usefulness to the world, was no longer of any importance." Akin to the fear of immobility, becoming barren or no longer productive was a fate few native women would want to face, and the story clearly conveys the value of being "useful to the world" and being a productive member of society.

The Creator witnessed what had transpired and, knowing the people were arriving soon, he took pity on them. "He restored *Pah-to* to life and brought back to her all the game, salmon, berries, and roots. These are still found there to this day." He replaced her head with the head of the "great White Eagle," and "*Pah-to* was now a powerful Law standing up towards the sky and was for the whole world. . . . Coming from the great Giver, the Law was immortal." The wise and powerful White Eagle would watch over all the people. In turn, Mt. Adams "holds a great spirit power" for the Yakama (Trafzer 1998, 277–79). Conveying part of the story of creation, this story grafted onto the prominent Cascade Mountains also dictated gender roles women should embrace and a stern warning of the Creator's displeasure toward jealousies. Moreover, the extensive kinship ties and commercial and political connections relied on smooth travelling between the regions; jealousies and selfishness figuratively made the road between them harder to travel.

While the distant Pah-to was, and still is, spiritually significant and conveyed lessons to members of the Yakama, Yakama women also found a cue on conducting themselves in plural marriages closer to home in the Black Bear and Grizzly stones near Wenatchee. Yakama storyteller Virginia Beavert relates that Grizzly was continually jealous of Black Bear, who was better at “performing the wifely duties” (e.g., gathering or dressing skins) and seemed to get preferential treatment from their husband. “They quarreled so much over their husband,” she continues, “that Spilyáy [Coyote] punished them by turning them into stone where they sit today, quarreling over their husband.” The stone features known to whites as Saddle Rock, “are actually a black bear and a grizzly bear sitting up there quarreling over their husband. The small rocks scattered around them are their children” (Beavert 1974, 180). Together, they remind women who see the formation to keep their jealousies and rivalries in check or suffer the fate of nigh endless stagnation.

Guidelines for Leaders

As seen above, Coyote is an integral figure in creation and in establishing laws by rewarding or punishing the Ancient People. Coyote was an agent of the Great Spirit, and his great achievements were not for his own glorification, or even for the glory of the Great Spirit, but instead for the benefit of the Natives who were about to appear; in this case, relaying specific morals via the landscapes. The extant stories seem to predominately target women, which is partly a result of patriarchal societies but also likely reflects the biases of the white male transcribers, but there were certainly landscape lessons intended for men, which convey the proper leadership attributes expected of religious, political, and war leaders (Trafzer 1998, 90n.4, 306n.8).

Goose Egg Mountain in Yakima County, Washington, is a place carrying messages for the Yakama and their leaders. Known to them as *Me-ow-wah*, in addition to providing their creation story of how the sustaining plants of the Columbia Plateau arrived, it relays standards for proper human behavior and ideal virtues, especially of leaders. In the time before the arrival of humans, Me-ow-wah was a chief highly regarded for his preference for peace, modesty in victory, and general wisdom and virtue. Hoping to ensure that there would be a legacy of his leadership, the Cowlitz, Okanagan, Wishram, and Spokane chiefs (that is, the forbearers of those tribes/bands) encouraged him to take a wife and thus pass his admirable qualities onto a son. Those chiefs sent some of their fairest women to seduce him into marriage, but Me-ow-wah withstood their advances and instead perceived their

efforts as the influence of malicious spirits bent on eroding the morality of the Yakama. Hearing that those chiefs were sending another set of even more beautiful women, Me-ow-wah consulted his father, Speel-ya, for advice. Speel-ya (Coyote) informed him that he should sacrifice himself and the women to set an example for the people, who were soon to emerge, and to appease the Great Spirit, who was offended by their behavior. Me-ow-wah assented. As planned, Coyote turned the group of women and Me-ow-wah into stone; the resulting mountain, standing for the ages, was simply called Me-ow-wah (Bagley 1982, 122–23).

The Yakama story of *Sho-pow-tan* and the *Tah-tah Kleah*, which is engrained in the landscape, emphasizes the importance of wisdom, intelligence, and patience in leaders. Unlike many of the previous stories, the story of Sho-pow-tan and the Tah-tah Kleah occurred in the time of humans, at Eagle Rock on the Naches River. Sho-pow-tan was a chief and the Tah-tah Kleah was a feared female monster that preyed on humans. Separated from his men after a hunting trip, Sho-pow-tan knew that the Tah-tah Kleah would be stalking him. So, as Yakama storyteller Tamwash related in 1919, “he went up to a hollow place in the *Tic-teah* [Eagle Rock]. You can see the trail where he traveled up the face of the rock, to the cave high up in the wall of Tic-teah. Grass is growing along that narrow trail. You can see it when you are out from the rock, where it winds up the cliff.” It was in that cave that Sho-pow-tan hatched his ruse to trick the monster. When the Tah-tah Kleah arrived as he predicted, Sho-pow-tan startled the monster as she entered cave by using a long stick to jostle a blood-filled deer stomach that he had placed at the entrance. Upon hearing the squeamish “Kloup! kloup! kloup!” sound, Tah-tah Kleah tumbled backwards and down the mountain to her death in the river. Had she caught him, Sho-pow-tan would have been killed, cooked, and eaten. “But Sho-pow-tan was brave, was wise” (Trafzer 1998, 117–18).

Friends and Family

Dealing with one’s family members and neighbors is a nigh universal dilemma, and Oregon and Washington Natives had landscape stories about that, too. The stories regarding taboos and morals noted above are also good examples of the lessons relating to marital relations. Other stories, however, focused more broadly on the value of relations among family members and neighbors. These were the Great Spirit’s laws, often transmitted via Coyote, on how one should treat others in their own and neighboring villages. For members of the Palouse tribe, the picturesque rolling hills named after them in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho evoked the story of Coyote and Turtle. The message behind the story and

embedded in the hills is one of unity. Coyote wanted to race but found only Turtle accepted the challenge, which brought laughter from the Animal People. Coyote nevertheless accepted the preposterous competitor; envisioning a challenging course for the race, he brought the rolling hills of the Palouse into existence. The race, he announced, would cover five hills. Going into the first hill, Coyote had a commanding lead, only to find as he began to ascend the second hill that Turtle had already crested it. Coyote ran faster and passed Turtle on the descent, but again upon looking up the third hill, he found Turtle rounding the peak. No matter how much faster Coyote ran, at every peak Turtle wound up ahead of him and ultimately crossed the finish first. Of course, Turtle did not outrun Coyote, but instead, by relying on his family members, one of whom he had stationed at each peak, Turtle was able to defeat Coyote. This story conveys the importance of capitalizing on one's wit and knowledge and, more importantly, the importance of family and community. The rolling hills, undoubtedly the most distinguishing physical feature of the picturesque Palouse region, serve as a constant visual reminder of communal values as the Palouse Natives traversed the region during their diurnal and seasonal peregrinations (Trafzer 1998, 6–7).¹³

The story “The *Qui-yiah*, Five Brothers,” as told by Simon Goudy, is a Yakama creation story regarding the formation of several lakes and a mountain that contained rules for brothers to follow that were also applicable to society generally. The Columbia Plateau, it relates, was once flooded with water. Five brothers went to investigate and the youngest brother realized that it was the Chief of the Beavers who had dammed the region and that to stop the flooding they must kill him. The youngest brother not only comprehended the problem, but he was also the only one who understood that a diminutive beaver, “small like a frog,” was the culprit, not the larger beavers that the older brothers assumed to be the chief. The youngest always had to tell them to wait, as they repeatedly targeted numerous beavers they misidentified as the Chief of the Beavers. They laughed when the youngest brother speared the smallest beaver, but, to their surprise, when speared the beaver “became so large that nothing could hold him,” and he yanked the youngest brother into the water. The Chief of the Beavers made his way to the Columbia River, knowing he would die unless he made it to the *nChe-wana* (“The Big River”). In his struggle, the Chief of the Beavers broke several of his dams, releasing the water. Now it was the youngest boy who worried, for he would die if the Chief of the Beavers dragged him to the *nChe-wana*, and he grasped at plants to hold him and the Chief of the Beavers in the rushing water; the first four broke, but that last held.

Once the water drained and the four brothers caught up to him, they killed the Chief and scattered his body parts, which brought forth the various peoples of the Columbia (like the Cayuse, as noted above). They then returned to the original, now drained, site. “This is what we wanted!” as Goudy told of the conversation among the brothers, “[w]e now have country fixed ready for the Indians. It is best for us to hide before the Indians grow up [i.e., humans appear].” They sought out a lake in which to hide, but the lakes the elder brothers chose were not deep enough; it was the youngest brother who found the appropriate lake (Lake Keechelus), which he sighted from the mountain named *Mo-kehl* (“animal built house,” that is, the Chief of the Beavers’ dam), located north of the Yakima River in Kittitas County, Washington. Aside from narrating the creation of the Plateau and some of its lakes and mountains, the story and those geographical features relay laws that emphasize the importance of councils, discussion, and collective decision-making as well as how younger members of society can contribute. It also calls on elders to take seriously the opinions of their younger family members. As Clifford Trafzer emphasizes, these are not mere stories for entertainment but instead are facts and truths for these Native American cultures and what bind communities (Trafzer 1998, 15, 54–61, 54n.2, 55n.3, 61n.10). If oral stories and histories were the glue of society, then the stories also engrained in the landscapes were like superglue that not only more strongly reinforced communal values but also bound together the people, the values and laws, and place.

The landscapes and stories were not static, however. Paiutes exiled to the Yakama and then Warm Springs Reservations after their uprising in the 1870s—at the latter they resided with the Wascos—brought with them a moralistic story on the treatment of others from their traditional lands near modern-day Reno, Nevada; this story found a new home in the oral traditions among mid-Columbia bands and, in some places, in the landscape of the Northwest. On Pyramid Lake northwest of Reno stands the “Stone Mother,” or *Kit-si-na-o* (“the one who weeps alone”), to remind Paiutes of the proper way to treat others, especially the less fortunate. *Kit-si-an-o* was the mother of a large number of healthy, strong children, whom she allowed to ridicule the frail, rather helpless child of *Skoolt-ka*. He was *Skoolt-ka*’s only child and she adored him to no end. *Skoolt-ka* was so troubled by her child’s tormentors that she was brought to fits of tears, and her crying caught the attention of her guardian spirit, the wolf. To determine the best response to this improper treatment of *Skoolt-ka*’s only child, her tamahnous (wolf) convened a council of wolves. It deliberated and decided the punishment was for *Kit-si-an-o* to lose all her children; subsequently, wolves devoured them all. Saddened, *Kit-si-an-o* retreated to the lakeside to weep over her tremendous loss, where the keeper of the

dead turned her into stone to serve as a reminder to the Paiutes of the proper way to treat weak members of their society—it also highlighted the importance of council and deliberation (Philips 1902, 114–23).

Although transplanted, Kit-si-an-o found new landscapes, at least among the Haida north of Puget Sound, which is indicative of the ways Native Americans acculturated new stories and applied them to old places. A late nineteenth century white Northwesterner J.A. Costello recorded the Haida's Kit-si-an-o story, noting that:

....in time she became incorporated with it [a rock on which Kit-si-an-o sat and wept] and to this day a traveler on the Prince of Wales Island who chances to call into American Bay will see this modern Niobe bent over and weeping bitterly. The Haida asks no questions as to the authenticity of these stories, the fact that they have been carved on wood and slate, and that the said rock is in existence is conclusive proof. (Costello 1895, 139)

Paul Kane, an artist who traveled in the Northwest during the 1840s, related a Nisqually story, akin to the Kit-si-an-o one imported to the Northwest, about a widow transformed into a rock along the Nisqually River shoreline. Unlike the Paiutes' Kit-si-an-o story, this lesson targeted siblings, reminding them to treat one another respectfully and to think about the effects of their ill-will toward each other. The widow had four sons, one from her first marriage and three from her second. The three younger brothers treated their elder half-brother poorly, despite his efforts at reconciliation. Unbeknownst to the three younger brothers, the older brother had tamahnous powers (that is, he had shamanistic power to heal and harm), and he finally resorted to using tamahnous against them. Harnessing his spiritual power, he sent them on a journey from which they never returned. Worried, the widow went looking for them and became depressed when she couldn't find them. Sitting on the shoreline of the Nisqually River "bemoaning their absence," she was turned to stone. Not attuned to the message, Kane did not see any resemblance in the rock as his Nisqually guides canoed him by it, but he added that "standing, however, as this rock does, entirely isolated, and without any other being visible for miles around, it has naturally become an object of special note to the Indians" (Kane 1859, 250–55).



Fig. 5. The basalt cliffs carved out by the Columbia River east of The Dalles as mid-19th-century Indians would have seen them. The Indian residence near the shore was likely an Upper Chinookan or Sahaptin summer encampment, at which they fished for salmon and traded, communicated, and interacted with a variety of Native peoples thanks to reserved rights contained in their 1855 treaty to access traditional sites.

The cliff faces on the mid-Columbia have significance for the oral traditions of the Chinookans that relay ideal behaviors for in-laws. For the Wasco, as Sitting Rock narrated to Lucullus Virgil McWhorter in 1921, a cave across the river from them tells of the importance of patience and obedience. A part of the longer narrative of the battle between Eagle and Chinook [or Chinook Wind], the story connected to this cave was Chinook abandoning his stepmother for not obeying his command. The two were canoeing home, when Chinook grew tired and fell asleep on her lap, but, before dozing off, he had instructed her to not awaken him no matter what she saw. Soon, seeing worms crawling from his mouth, ears, nose, and eyes, she was startled and dropped him from her lap, the worms disappearing as he awoke. Disappointed in her behavior, as Sitting Rock told it, Chinook abandoned the woman in “a cave in the cliff along the river. I can show you that cave up in the rocks, up in the side of the wall-rock. It is there today” (Trafzer 1998, 121–24, 237).¹⁴ Since the Columbia served as a central highway for the Northwest Natives,

the message connected to the cave was read often by the Wascos and surely shared with others who gathered with them along The Dalles of the river to fish and trade.

The “Laws” and Histories

Among the more important laws set forth by the Great Spirit through Coyote was that of reciprocity, and that is evident in the tales of Coyote’s transformation of the physical world for the coming of humans. The Great Spirit created the physical world to sustain native peoples, and they were expected to reciprocate through rituals and respect in their use of it; their physical surroundings conveyed reminders of that and of creation. For the Spokane and Coeur d’Alene tribes, the features of the Spokane River they shared were the result of Coyote’s quest for a wife. When the Spokanes (again, the pre-human ancestors of the Spokane) obliged his request by offering one of their women as his future wife, Coyote reciprocated by creating the rapids in the Spokane River, thereby making an excellent spot for them to fish. The Coeur d’Alenes, by rejecting Coyote’s request, received the opposite; Coyote created the Spokane Falls to prevent the fish from migrating upriver to Coeur d’Alene territory (Bagley 1982, 132–33). The Yakama, who had extensive connections with those groups through marriage and kinship, embedded that story into their own landscape. As Mrs. Skouken John related to McWhorter in 1917, when the Toppenish Creek band did not offer a wife to Coyote, he prevented salmon from going up that creek by transforming his daughter to stone, declaring “I am placing my daughter in the middle of the water so the salmon will not pass.” As Mrs. Skouken John emphasized, “Coyote did this and the daughter is still there,” reminding the Yakama to reciprocate. It is important to note that Coyote’s daughter does not only play a negative role; when Coyote created the Wenatchee Falls, the Klickitat Storyteller An-nee-shiat related, he strategically placed his daughter, “a big rock,” in the river and “[a]t this place salmon jump and she rules,” providing the Natives an excellent fishing site. Natives found the same lesson on reciprocity in the looming mountains. McWhorter recorded one such story from the Plateau about Pah-to and *Tahoma* (Mt. Rainer). Coyote had moved the two mountain chiefs to colder areas without berries or good salmon runs in retaliation for them not wanting to marry his daughter (Trafzer 1998, 97–106, 110–14, 274–76). They believed clear messages infiltrated the landscapes, highlighting the isolation and unproductiveness that came from a lack of reciprocity.

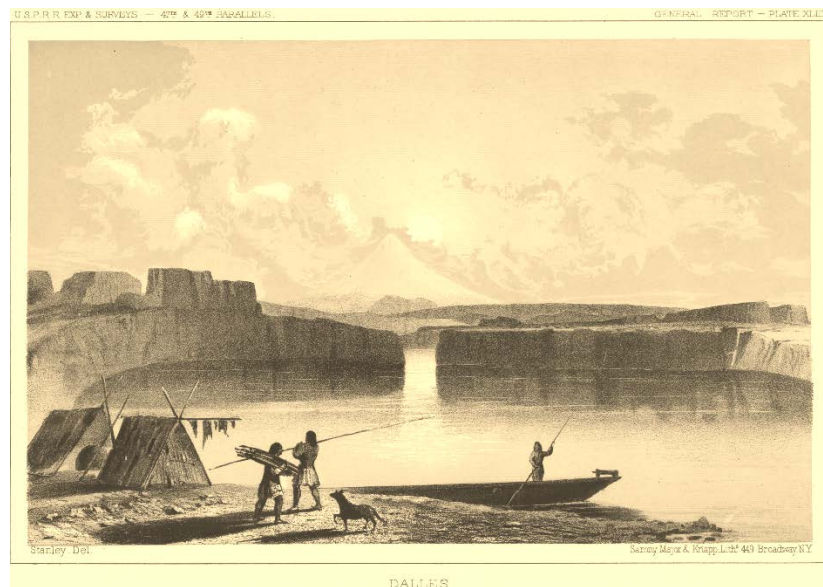
Landscapes did not have to be extant to convey meaning. Another Klickitat story on reciprocity is connected to a no-longer extant geographic feature. Narrating the origin of fire, this story is tied to the Bridge of the Gods, or the Tamahnous Bridge,

that once spanned the Columbia River at the Cascade Mountains. *Loowit*, a “witch-woman,” lived under the bridge in “the time of their remote grandfathers” (so, within the human-era) and she had the only fire available in the world. Seeing how pathetically cold the Klickitats on the right bank and Multnomah band on the left were, Loowit provided them with fire by setting it in the middle of the bridge that spanned between them. The Great Spirit, witnessing and pleased by the act of generosity, reciprocated by granting her one wish; she requested youth and beauty and the Great Spirit provided. That bridge, while it stood and where it was after its collapse, remained a sacred site—and not just to the Klickitats. As the Wasco member Ana-whoah (Black Bear) recalled in 1914, “Some of my ancestors, old people, saw and passed under that Bridge. . . . It was law, the rule, that when the canoes journeyed through the waterway, no Indian was to look up. None see the Bridge, must not look up at the rocks of the Bridge.” Clifford Trafzer explains that “the Bridge of the Gods was a sacred place, too powerful for people to study with their eyes. Such natural wonders, including mountains, rocks, and areas, are not to be violated by humans with their eyes or their feet. Some such sites today are sacred to native peoples but they are not supposed to touch, see, or walk upon such places.” This was one of numerous stories tied to the bridge and, while it was taboo for many Natives to look at where the bridge was, recollecting that geographical feature reinforced stories of creation and reciprocity for a number of Columbia River bands (Bagley 1982, 135–36; Trafzer 1998, 197–202, 201n.13). These creation stories are great examples of the interplay of the past and present, place and people, while explaining the origins of resources like fire and dictating proper social behavior.

Stories on reciprocity and other demands were not necessarily unchanging, as there were dynamic connections between Northwest Natives and the terrain around them. While Coyote did not seek glory by transforming the world and promulgating laws, he and the Great Spirit did demand respect. A (relatively) recently recorded lesson on gambling was written into the Klickitat landscape—recent because the story includes horses, which did not arrive among the Plateau peoples until c.1730s. Recorded on paper by Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens in 1854, it is about the creation of the prized valley within the Klickitat lands, the Tahk Prairie, which had been a lakebed during the time of the ancients or Animal People. According to Stevens’ Klickitat source, Coyote had drained the water to create a lush prairie—which he copiously planted with camas bulbs (an onion-like plant) and *wapatos* (an edible tuber), central plant staples of the Native American diet in much of the Northwest—and ordered the salmon to swim through the stream to sustain them. Negligent of their obligations to show

respect to Coyote though “fishing and the business of life,” the Klickitat instead spent all their time horseracing and gambling. Coyote, as a punishment, took away the salmon and placed two large stone blocks on the Prairie “beyond which they [the Klickitats] could not pass.” Apparently, the lesson represented by the stone pillars often went unheeded as there were plenty of horse races and gambling still occurring in the late nineteenth century (Office of Indian Affairs 1855, 229).¹⁵ This story likely emerged after contact with missionaries, since they did chastise Natives for such behavior and the message does mesh well with the “Protestant work ethic” missionaries attempted to instill in native peoples of the Northwest. Moreover, contests involving gambling—whether horse or foot races or various games—were a customary and accepted activity during inter-band gatherings. Indeed, for the Coast Salish bands of Puget Sound at least, the acquisition of a certain guardian spirit bestowed gambling prowess (Raibmon 2005, 106). Whether or not the impetus behind its creation was contact with Christian missionaries, it reflects how Natives imprinted new stories—or altered old ones—onto the landscape.

The landscape often spoke of the transformation era and creation, but it also included texts on regional histories. The Klickitat story above about the Bridge of the Gods is an example of a shared history between bands. It also exemplifies a dominant thread of that history: the rivalries and animosities among Chinookan-speaking bands and their upstream neighbors living along the Columbia River. The most notable conflict was between the Lower Chinookans (e.g., Chinook and Clatsop near the mouth) and the Upper Chinookans (Wasco-Wishram, among others, near the Cascades), the origin of which the Wishram recorded in the landscape. The Wishram on the north side and the Wasco on the south side of the Columbia occupied the most important fishing sites in the Northwest—the Cascades (the obstructed part of the river, not the mountains) and The Dalles. The fisheries there attracted Native Americans from as far away as modern-day British Columbia, California, and east of the Rockies during the fishing seasons (Stern 1998, 641–42), and occupying that site made the Wasco-Wishram central players in the pre-contact regional economy. That, of course, provoked envy and continual hostility from Lower Columbia River bands.



Figs. 6 & 7. As the Columbia River ran through the Cascade Mountains it produced several hydraulic effects that made the locale a prime site for fishing, especially for salmon and eels, to this day. First are the Celilo Falls (no longer extant after being inundated by 20th-century dam building), then the Cascades or rapids, and the narrowing of the river or “the Dalles.” This area became a hub of a trade network spanning from Canada to California and the Pacific to the Great Plains. The water carving into the basalt basin also resulted in numerous rock forms in the area that assimilated myths for the region’s people.

According to the Wishram story, the origin of their success and of the tensions was a large luminous stone at their settlements, another non-extant geological feature. The stone glowed brightly at night, allowing them more time to fish and to gather edible plants along the banks of the Columbia. It afforded them, as Yakima Reservation physician George Kuykendall recorded from Klickitat residents, “an abundance of fish and all the comforts of Indian living.” That is until the jealous neighboring bands conspired to level the playing field by attacking the Wishram and toppling the large spiritual stone into the river. After that, the Wishrams

fumbled around at night and their prosperity waned quickly. They did eventually retrieve the stone from the river bed and reset it, only to have the envious bands align again once their prosperity returned and permanently destroy it. The rivalry continued ever after, and the Wishram had to settle for what they could obtain during the daylight (Kuykendall 1889, 76). In this case, as with the Tamahnous Bridge, it is what was missing in the landscape that relayed a history lesson.

For the Wasco, a spurned marriage proposal involving Coyote's granddaughter helped to explain the animosities between the Lower and Upper Chinookan bands, a story written onto cliffs around the famous Multnomah Falls. As told by Ana-whoah (Wasco)—who first heard the story from her mother in the early nineteenth century and retold it to L. V. McWhorter in 1911—a Lower Chinookan boy, *Nihs-lah*, sought a wife and found a suitable mate in *Sko-lus*, a girl who lived near the Multnomah Falls. Nihs-lah had made the upriver journey without the consent of his parents and Sko-lus agreed to his proposal without the consent of hers, and she left with him to return to his people. Coyote, viewing Sko-lus as his granddaughter, followed the couple to ensure her safety. Upon learning of Nihs-lah's actions, his parents prohibited the marriage, and Sko-lus and Coyote sat for five days, hoping they would change their minds. Learning of his parents' hostility, Coyote returned to the falls with the girl and, in retaliation, turned Nihs-lah into a half-man, half-fish monster. Coyote commanded the man-fish (Nihs-lah) to haunt the waters of the Columbia near the Multnomah Falls and to rise up "about every two moons" when the Lower Columbia people come up the river and "...become mad. The wind will blow hard, the waters rising high will kill people. This will be well for we are enemies." Coyote was not finished with the transformations, Ana-whoah added. "Coyote placed the girl on the opposite side of the nChe-wana, and called her Sko-lus. She is there to this day, the tall cliff, the rim-rock above the river," serving as a reminder of the Lower Chinooks' past rejection of the Wasco maiden (Trafzer 1998, 156–57).

There were also histories of cooperation and peace among bands in the mid-Columbia region and bands elsewhere in the Northwest embedded into the terrain. According to a Klickitat creation story, a segment of a longer transformation myth, the Great Spirit had two sons who had ventured together to The Dalles. Seeing how beautiful the region was, the two began to squabble over who would inhabit it. To settle the dispute, the Great Spirit shot two arrows, ordering his sons to settle where their respective arrow fell. One fell between the Yakima and Columbia Rivers, and the son who settled there became the progenitor of the Klickitats; the other arrow landed in the Lower Willamette River Valley, and that son was the

ancestor of the Multnomah. Wanting to demarcate their territories to maintain peace, but also connect them, the Great Spirit built up the Cascade Mountains and created the aforementioned Bridge of the Gods (Tamahnous Bridge). Peace was maintained until the leaders of the Multnomah and Klickitat bands met Loowit, that one-time witch turned young and beautiful by the Great Spirit after introducing fire to the two peoples. While all the nearby chiefs sought the hand of the newly transformed beauty, she only found the Multnomah and Klickitat chiefs worthy suitors. However, she could not decide between the two chiefs and, in turn, the two chiefs and their bands went to war. Displeased, the Great Spirit destroyed the bridge between them and killed both chiefs and Loowit. However, as they were “beautiful in life,” the Great Spirit wanted them to be “beautiful in death.” Thus, as a message to both bands to end hostilities between them and to keep their beauty in the region, he transformed the Multnomah chief, the Klickitat Chief, and Loowit into what whites labeled, respectively, Mt. Hood, Mt. Rainer, and Mt. St. Helens (Bagley 1982, 135–36). Peace did remain among them, and Klickitat bands and individuals were common visitors in the Willamette Valley into the reservation-era—an era when US agents did their best to keep them on their reservations (George Curry to Maj. G. A. Raines 19 October 1855; Office of Indian Affairs 1856, 194–95).

Similarly, many smaller-scale rock features taught the lesson of peaceful relations to the inhabitants of the Chinookan-speaking Wasco villages and the Sahaptin-speaking Tenino (Wa’yam) villages. Roughly five miles apart, these villages marked the boundary between the two dominant language groups on the Columbia River. The story tells of a war that erupted between the two over a Wasco woman who faked her own death to leave her husband for a Tenino man, a war that made Coyote furious. Declaring as law that “a woman should never cause war,” Speel-ya transformed members of both villages, declaring “you people of Tenino become rocks, and you Wascoes be rocks.” As ethnographer Edward Sapir’s informant relayed to him, “both sides are standing there to this day, all rocks,” relaying Coyote’s demand of friendly relations between them (Sapir 1909, 242–43).



Fig. 8. Being among the highest peaks in the Northwest, Mt. Hood—like the other mountains in the Cascade Range—played a prominent role in the cultural geography of the regions native peoples.

A landscape myth from the Upper Chinookan village of Clowwewalla, at the falls of the Willamette River nearby modern-day Oregon City, metaphorically conveyed the economic bonds that tied Clowwewalla to the Kalapuyan peoples to the south. Inhabiting the area around the Willamette Falls, another important salmon fishing site in the Northwest, allowed the Clowwewalla to establish important economic and kinship ties with numerous peoples. Salmon was among the most important trade items. Their story of “The Skookum and the Wonder Boy” documents that economic relationship, specifically with the Santiam band of Kalapuya; parts of the story are written in both of their landscapes. Louis Labonte, whose maternal grandfather was the Clatsop Chief Caboway, recorded the story in c.1900; the story begins with an “evil spirit,” the *Skookum*, descending on the pre-human Clowwewalla village. All but the chief’s pregnant wife perished. Giving birth shortly afterward, she was determined to ensure her son was protected and took him to various tamahnous waters so he could hopefully acquire spiritual guidance, powers, and protection. He did, and, as a young warrior, he used his prowess and powers to destroy the Skookum and resurrect his father and the entire band. Unfortunately, his father did not recognize him and had no recollection of the events since the village’s demise and challenged Wonder Boy. After sustaining verbal and physical hostilities from his unwitting father, Wonder Boy fled to the

falls to grieve. His grieving was so doleful that torrents of tears fell from each eye, boring two holes into the basalt stone on the edge of the falls, which were still present during Labonte's lifetime. Wonder Boy turned himself into a salmon and sought solace in the waters of the Willamette. The mighty Willamette Falls, however, were too noisy, so the now "Salmon Boy" swam up stream. Finding the waters of the Molalla and other tributary rivers also too chaotic, he ventured further into Kalapuya territory, finding suitable waters in the Santiam River. There the Salmon Boy remained until Coyote chanced upon him during his transformation trek and changed him into a fish-shaped rock in the stream. Aside from being a memorial salmon paid tribute to as they swam up the Santiam River, this rock—along with the holes at the falls—directly connected the Clowwewalla Chinookan and Santiam Kalapuyan bands and reminded viewers of that important relationship that transcended language and cultural differences (Juntunen et al. 2005, 98–100; Lyman 1900, 169–70, 185–87).

Sites of Spiritual Presence

Some sites went beyond merely relaying tales and physically intervened in the lives of Natives as places that were homes to spirits, either malicious or beneficial/protective. Seatco, taking various forms according to the people telling the story, threatened many groups. On the southern Oregon Coast, Seatco haunted the shoreline and awaited wayward visitors. A rock formation along the beach tells the tale of the daughter of Chief Siskiyou from the interior—who had wandered to the beach with her dog and a basket of raccoon cubs during a potlatch—to remind the Natives of the dangerous place. Her father found her the next morning, transformed by Seatco into stone, along with her barking dog and raccoon cubs, the formation standing as a testament of Seatco's power. This version of the Seatco story may have had children as the target audience with a moral regarding listening to elders and/or a warning against isolating oneself during communal events. Among the Southern Coast Salish-speaking Nisqually of the Southern shore of Puget Sound, Seatco was more nebulous, lurking in "dark retreats," looking to steal children and kill unsuspecting travelers. He was distinct, however, from other malicious spirits inhabiting sites within Nisqually territory such as *Whe-atche*, who resided in the lake Nisquallies named after her (which Euro-Americans renamed Steilacoom Lake). For many of the Chinookan and Sahaptin peoples, the monster (called *Isti-plah* among the Yakama) resided at the Mouth of the Columbia River and swallowed people during the pre-human times; however, after five tries, Coyote was able to kill the monster and ordered the river to no longer swallow people.¹⁶ Apparently Coyote's control over the river did not extend to Euro-

Americans, since the mouth of the river swallowed a good number of them as they began arriving in the 1810s (Bergmann 2008, 40–41).¹⁷

The active volcano Mt. St. Helens, not surprisingly, was home to malicious spirits that controlled human-like cannibals. Mt. St. Helens, Southwestern Coast Salish-speaking Natives also claimed, contained a lake in the center that had fish with the heads of bears. Paul Kane, an artist “wandering among the Indians” in the 1840s, recorded that story and wrote that his native informants (who may have been Cowlitz) claimed two Natives had gone there and only one had returned, just barely, to confirm the legend (Kane 1859, 199). In the late 1830s, Samuel Parker of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions described the location of a malicious spirit on the northern bank of the Columbia River near where the Cowlitz River merged with it. While sharing the northern bank with Nihs-lah, this is a distinct water spirit down river from him. At the point of confluence of the two rivers “there are some dark recesses in the basaltic rocks,” as Parker recorded of his trip upriver, that Natives canoeing the river avoided. Parker’s unnamed “Indian chief” who accompanied him on his voyage had “warned Capt. L. not to approach those dark places; for they were the residence of bad spirits, who would destroy the ship and all on board.” In an effort to erode such indigenous beliefs, “Capt. L purposely passed near the place; and the Indian [probably petrified] was astonished that we escaped unhurt, and concluded there must have been some great ‘medicine’ in the ship which defended us” (Parker 1846, 248–49). While Parker and “Capt. L.” tried to repudiate this man’s spiritual beliefs, their effort only reinforced his belief in the great spiritual assistance Euro-Americans must have had. This episode illustrates how steadfast these beliefs were and how Northwest Natives had incorporated Euro-Americans into their physical and spiritual worlds.

Such geographic oddities and sites not only contained evil spirits but could also contain beneficial ones. For the Kalapuyans of the Northern Willamette Valley (that is, members of the Tualatin and Yamhill bands), Spirit Mountain was a sacred site on which shamans and warriors gained powerful guardian spirits after a successful spirit quest. For the Puyallup and Nisqually of Puget Sound, it was Tahoma (Mt. Rainer) as well as Medicine Creek. It was via spirits at those sites, for example, that shamans received their tamahnous power to heal and harm. Those sites, in turn, remained with the recipient for life; as Trafzer aptly noted, “The places where individuals received their power are often on their minds, particularly in times of crisis” (Carpenter 1968, 14; Trafzer 1998, 23).



Fig. 9. Spirit Mountain is the most important spiritual site for the Kalapuyan peoples of the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Fortunately, although termination of the mid-20th century dissolved the tribe and reservation for about thirty years, the Kalapuyans were able to remain near the mountain after removal in the 1850s. Although a lumber company now owns Spirit Mountain, members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde continue to visit and it continues to sustain them physically and spiritually.

The Northern Kalapuyans were fortunate to have convinced President James Buchanan to make permanent the temporary Grand Ronde Reservation—to which they and a number of tribes from across western Oregon were removed in the 1855—for it was located in their traditional locales and afforded them the ability to remain in the shadow of Spirit Mountain. Despite the Grand Ronde agents and missionaries' determined efforts to curtail spirit quests to the mountain, men continued to sneak away to the mountain. As visiting clergyman R.W. Summers recorded in the late 1870s, "Nothing had as yet shaken the Indians' faith in his [i.e., a shaman] power over life and death after he came down out of the mountain"

(Summers [1871–1878]). Living close to that sacred site kept that indigenous tradition alive and well. They could still read the texts layered onto it. Had the US government removed them elsewhere, their cultural loss would have been far more rapid and thorough. Their Grand Ronde co-residents like the Klamath and Umpqua of southern Oregon and Northern California were not so fortunate.

Removal from Lands and Lessons

Creation stories and moral lessons embedded in the physical geography informed and reminded generations of Northwest Natives of proper social and cultural behavior and record laws and histories. Removal to reservations after 1855 not only restricted their access to lands and means of subsistence but also removed them from those lessons *in* the landscapes. Understanding that helps to shed light on the urgent need of Pacific Northwest Natives in the mid-1850s to negotiate a reservation within their traditional lands and, when that failed, on the warfare beginning in 1855 and the refusal of a good number of bands and individuals to relocate to assigned reservations. During his conversations with McWhorter in the early twentieth century, Yakama elder White Eagle conveyed the importance of retaining access to lesson-laden landscapes, in which the Yakama embedded more stories during the treaty-era: “This is why we want Pah-to within our own reservation boundary. That mountain belongs to us. A witness to our treaty with Governor Stevens. White Eagle, ever points upward to the Great Maker who heard the promises of that treaty.” Both Takhoma (Tahoma) and Pah-to are sacred places for the Yakama, and Yakamas have maintained strong affinities with the mountains (Trafzer 1998, 274n.2).¹⁸

Oregon and Washington Natives were active participants during the 1850s treaty negotiations and some successfully secured *parts* of their important lands and the lessons they contained. The first US treaty efforts in Oregon in 1851 were a complete failure because Native residents of the Willamette Valley and along the Columbia River adamantly refused to relocate. Federal agents did negotiate eighteen treaties with the Willamette Valley (5) and Lower Columbia (13) bands (Anson Dart to Luke Lea 1851), but they could not convince a single band/village to remove to east of the mountains, which was a requirement of the Office of Indian Affairs. Largely because of that, the US Senate tabled all the treaties (Fisher 1996, 152; Beckham 2006, 105). Though ultimately unsuccessful efforts, these failed treaty talks demonstrate the Natives’ steadfast desire to retain connections to important lands. Leaders of the Santiam band of Kalapuya in the Central Willamette Valley were adamant about retaining the lands between the forks of the

Santiam River and rebuffed the 1851 commissioners' continual requests to relocate; they had deliberately redirected white settlers from that tract for years as a means of protecting it. In disbelief of their determination, the commissioners asked the translator if they understood that the US government was going to provide them with "equally good" land east of the Cascades. He confirmed that the message was not lost in translation, adding that "they don't seem to like its being pressed upon them." When asked again about relocating, Santiam headman Al-que-ma declared their "minds were made up" and that they would "rather be shot" than remove (Beckham 2006, 118–24; Office of Indian Affairs 1851, 205–06; Spaulding [1852–1854?]). Throughout the Valley, and "without exception," the 1851 commissioners found Natives "possessed of local attachments of the strongest kind" (Office of Indian Affairs 1851, 207–10, 217). Because there was "not the least prospect that a single band will leave their present homes," the 1851 commissioners had to accept treaties that violated the US goal of removing and consolidating bands and tribes on as few reservations as possible. Because of that, the Senate refused to ratify them (Dart to Luke Lea 1850; Dart to Luke Lea 1851; Office of Indian Affairs 1851, 214–15).

The next round of treaty-making came three years later, beginning in December 1854 and lasting throughout 1855, and US negotiators, like Washington Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens, found the same adamancy about retaining lands. Governor Stevens argued in 1854, and before treaty negotiations, that there was no point in removing the Southwestern Washington Natives since they would likely just return to "the[ir] old haunts" (Office of Indian Affairs 1855, 241). Governor Stevens and, eventually, his counterpart in Oregon, Joel Palmer, acceded to some Natives' demands to retain portions of their lands and convinced those relocated to now confederated reservations with treaty clauses reserving access to "usual and accustomed" places.¹⁹ Some members of the Puyallup and Nisqually bands of Lower Puget Sound used the war in 1855–56 as a means of negotiating for a reservation including some of their traditional lands and succeeded; through executive orders in 1857 and 1874, the US government conceded to more suitable reservations, increasing the amount of acreage tenfold (Isaac I. Stevens to George Manypenny 1856; Harmon 1998, 91; Ruby, Brown, and Collins 2010, 201, 214, 237). The Sahaptin bands that would become known as the Columbia River People refused to relocate whatsoever, interpreting access to "usual and accustomed" places as the right to remain permanently at those sites along the Columbia River that had sustained and defined their existences for untold generations (see Fisher 2010).

Certainly a number of factors were behind the Northwest Natives' steadfast efforts to retain certain parts of their lands in exchange for clear title in American legal terms: Natives understood that uncultivated land to the east was valued less and was not as productive; they believed the prices offered for the lands were not high enough; they wanted to ensure the guardianship of burial sites; some wanted to maintain the farms they had already cultivated or to continue laboring in American communities; numerous Native American negotiators expressed concerns about confederating with other bands, and so on. Surely, however, maintaining access to the lands containing innumerable stories and lesson augmented the economic, personal, and social arguments against removal.

Even when successful, and despite the treaty rights to access the "usual and accustomed" sites, assimilation demands, reservation life, and white settlement limited their access. Fences of whites blocked their trails and access to the rivers and closed off gathering lands—the sites of these stories; white homesteads and expanding towns appropriated evermore of the lesson-laden lands with each passing decade of the late nineteenth century (for more on this, see Bergmann forthcoming). Those restrictions and pressures and the often mute landscapes of the reservations attributed to the cultural loss and social disintegration that accompanied reservation life in the late nineteenth century. Natives did come to develop new attachments to the land, now as agriculturists (and as the reservation land came to hold the remains of their kin), only to face similar detachment with the arrival of allotment in the 1870s and 1880s. Removal was both physical and cultural, as native peoples lost more than just their lands in the process. Lost, too, were the stories maintaining the proper social practices and behavior, cultural attributes, and the histories of the regional indigenous societies written onto those lands.



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Maps and Illustrations

- Fig. 1: Gifford, Benjamin A, photographer. 1899. *The Home Guard—On the Columbia*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed 14 July 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95522798/>
- Fig. 2: Map originally published in *Indians of the Pacific Northwest*, by Robert Ruby and John Brown. Copyright © 1988 by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.
- Fig. 3: "Early Indian Tribes, Culture Areas, and Linguistic Stocks—Western U.S." Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries. The University of Texas at Austin. Accessed 30 June 2016. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/early_indian_west.jpg.

Fig. 4: Curtis, Edward S., photographer. 1910. *The Middle Columbia*. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 14, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002722473/>.

Fig. 5: “Scene on the Columbia River at The Dalles with Tipi in the Middle Distance.” [1860?]. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 14, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005680430/>.

Fig. 6: Gifford, Benjamin A., photographer. 1906. *Middle Cascades, Columbia River*. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 14, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007662709/>.

Fig. 7: Sarony, Major & Knapp Lith. [1855?]. *Dalles*. Image. *Major & Knapp, Liths. 449 Broadway, N.Y.* Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 14, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95513912/>.

Fig. 8: Detroit Photographic Co. 1901. *Mt. Hood from the Columbia River*. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 14, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2008678163/>.

Fig. 9: “Spirit Mountain, Grand Ronde Indian Reservation.” OrHi 019372. Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.

Endnotes

¹ Trafzer notes (p.36n.4) that the stories themselves are also sacred.

² As Trafzer aptly stated: the creative time associated with many stories “is at once past and present. . . . The creative time occurred at one point in time, but is very much related to the present and future.” This certainly applies to stories in the landscapes as well.

³ While understudied, these connections have been analyzed by a few scholars for specific groups, most notably ethnographer Keith H. Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996). Basso’s work introduced me to this fascinating subject and influenced my approach in researching Northwest Natives. See also Akers 1999. Eugene Hunn’s seminal study of the Plateau alludes to the cultural significance of sites, but leaves it at Plateau peoples “naming culturally significant places” without getting into details on why they were significant (Hunn 1990, 93–95).

⁴ There are multiple spellings and uses of the word “tamahnous.” This spelling is from Chinook Jargon, a pidgin language in the region.

⁵ Basso’s work contains a good example of this. Basso related one young Western Apache woman’s response to him pointing out a specific site as “I know that place. It stalks me every day” (Basso 1996, 57).

⁶ Coyote was important to most Northwest peoples and, naturally, each often has their own spelling of his name.

⁷ This was a pre-human epoch in which human-like animals, Coyote, Beaver, and Blue Jay being among the most important ones, inhabited the earth. When the name of an animal is capitalized, it is referring to one of these ancient peoples. For some bands, Blue Jay played the role of transformer and was more prominent than Coyote.

⁸ For more on analyzing these oral stories, Ramsey 1983, especially Chapter Three, and Kroeber 1981.

⁹ There are several extant versions of this story recorded in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; details of the story vary, but the message remains constant. In some cases, the varying details are due to the filtering of prudish whites—e.g., the Clackamas Chinookan story, narrated by Victoria Jacobs and recorded by an ethnographer in the early 20th century, refers to Coyote partaking in self-fellatio. Late 19th-century Victorians like Kuykendall, not surprisingly, did not record such licentious details (incomplete Wishram version).

¹⁰ Coyote's three sisters lived in Coyote's bowels, and when he sought their advice, which he did often, he defecated, and they appeared in the form of feces to interact with him. This was another detail Victorian-era recorders of Native American stories often glossed over.

¹¹ Stories of Coyote's journey up or down the Columbia River were common and central stories among Chinookan and Sahaptin peoples.

¹² Myron Eells recorded a similar story among the Puget Sound Natives (Castile 1985, 365).

¹³ While this Palouse story shares themes with the European turtle and hare tale, as Trafzer aptly reminds us, these "[s]tories are not juvenile literature or fairy tales that grow with the telling. They are facts and truths of Native American cultures and communities. They are at once history and literature, religion and law" (Trafzer 1998, 15).

¹⁴ This is a Wasco version of a common Chinookan story. L.V. McWhorter was a historian and neighbor and friend of the Yakama, among other Plateau peoples, who collected for posterity a number of tales in the early 1900s (Trafzer 1998, xi).

¹⁵ For a Wishram (Wishom) law on gambling written onto the landscape, see *Che-pos-To-cos*, "How Young Eagle Killed *Pah-he-nux'-twy*," in Trafzer 1998, 187–91.

¹⁶ For stories of Seatco and similar monsters, see: Beckham 1998, 15–16 (Southern Coast Seatco); Wickersham 1898, 348 (Nisqually Seatco) and 350 (Whe-athe); Thompson and Egesdal 2008, 135; Trafzer 1998, 146–48 (Isti-plah).

¹⁷ Nihs-lah, the man-fish noted above, also proved to haunt Euro-Americans near the Cascades (Trafzer 1998, 156–57).

¹⁸ The continued centrality of Pah-to to the Yakama is evidenced by the dominant presence of the mountain on the Yakama Nation's flag and seals. The same is true for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde flag and Spirit Mountain. Images of both can be found on the tribes' websites:

<http://www.yakamanation.org/> and <http://www.grandronde.org/>.

¹⁹ The treaty texts can be found in Kappler 1904: 661–64 (Medicine Creek), 665–69 (Willamette Valley), 694–98 (Walla Walla), 698–702 (Yakama), 714–19 (Middle Oregon). It is available on-line via Text Archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/texts>.