Pacific Northwest Canadian Studies Consortium

Columbia River Treaty, Summer Field Course

June 17-24, 2015

"Coyote Leading the Salmon" by Rich Beyer, on the bank of the Columbia River, Wenatchee, Washington

Front Row: John Kawula, Bill Layman, Morna McEachern;

Back row: Deanna Leigh, Tuti Baker, Margaret Willson, Ken Pratt

Photo by Bridget Thompson

Coyote Revisits the Columbia

The great river he once knew (wild, majestic, compelling) – transformed;

reduced to a series of placid, controlled, "false" lakes.

The ones he led upstream long ago (abundant, free-roaming, life-giving) – exiled;

imprisoned by repetitive, towering, sterile concrete walls.

The people who proudly honored him (vibrant, spiritual, whole) – obscured;

marginalized by the disregard of foreign politics and economies.

The richly named riverine landscape (iconic, memorable, storied) – muted;

erased by immense, suffocating tombs of water.

The fabled dog, himself (wise, intrepid, capable) – disoriented;

stunned by the unimaginable cruelty of an alien trickster.

Ken Pratt, field course participant (July 2015)

Introduction, Morna McEachern, field course organizer.

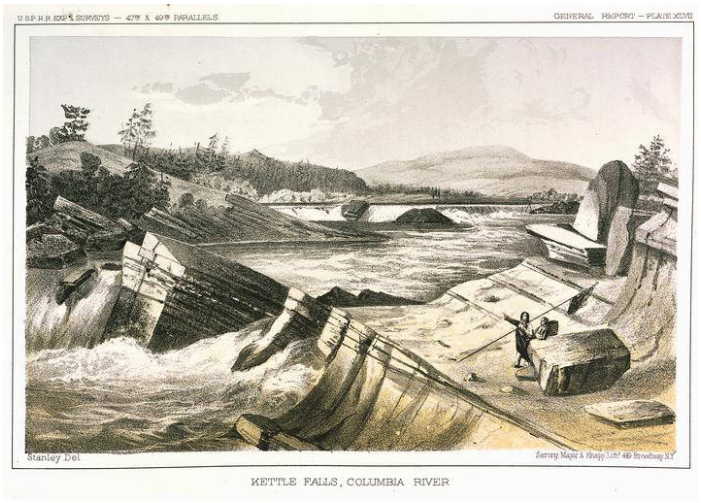
After the PNWCSC board decided to make the Columbia River Treaty renegotiation the focus of this summer's field course, I made one phone call to Gary Wilson at University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), which set this whole trip into motion…connection after connection. As it happened, along with the amazing people and places we were honoured to meet, I had to say, "No, but thank you", to many invitations and exhortations to meet people and to go to significant places along the Columbia River.

Before organizing this trip, I knew very little about the river, that there was a treaty…well, I had heard about it a few years ago at a presentation by Bill Layman. So, I set to work to create a field course that would be important to the participants. What I did not know was how important our presence was to the people we met. Our hosts were grateful that a group of educators was willing to drive along the river and place ourselves in their important places as learners and listeners; to be guests and listen at a fish hatchery, at the Okanagan Nation Alliance's community center, En'owkin House, at University of British Columbia, Okanagan (UBCO), at a pillar of the Revelstoke community's home for dinner, at a sacred Salmon Ceremony at Kettle Falls, and finally in Wenatchee and the Rocky Reach Dam with Bill Layman, who shared his dedication to the last 10,000 years' history of the Columbia River.

The renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty has become an exceptional event that has engendered the formation of new alliances: indigenous peoples, inter-faith pastoral groups, environmental advocates, artists, outdoor recreationists, academics and many others. These groups are working separately and together to exhort both the United States and Canadian governments to add protecting and restoring ecosystems to the original purpose of the treaty: hydroelectric power and flood control. It is an exciting, holistic and seminal political event.

When I requested that the participants send a short 'paragraph' about the field course, here is what they sent. I was humbled by the eloquence and had tears streaming down my face upon reading several of the responses…including the poem above.

Kettle Falls, WA. June 2015



Colleville man and woman with fish net and basket at Kettle Falls, WA, 1853. University of Washington collections 564:Ea-790

Mary 'Tuti' Baker, University of Hawaii, Indigenous Politics and Future Studies

The **Columbia River Field Course,** hosted by the Pacific Northwest Canadian Studies Consortium was enlightening and uplifting. This trip was a valuable opportunity for me to observe Indigenous communities engage in political activity. Traveling from Seattle, into the Okanagan (Penticton and UBCO), then the Canadian Rockies (Revelstoke), crossing the border at Castlegar, then on to the Salmon Ceremony at Kettle Falls and a final stop in Wenatchee and the Rocky Reach Dam, allowed us to "walk" the land we were learning about and to learn from people directly involved in bringing the salmon back to the upper reaches of the Columbia River.

There are other issues in the renegotiation of the treaty but for my field of study I was particularly interested in the ways that the various tribes, bands and nations engaged with each other and with the Federal and Provincial governments. The Okanagan and other nations are working in coalition with environmental groups to lobby both governments to include salmon habitat in the treaty negotiations. The Okanagan nation was also engaged in actions that do not depend on the Treaty negotiations. They operate a state-of-the-art fish hatchery in Penticton, which as one of our hosts, Jeanne Armstrong, emphasizes, embraces the wisdom of the ancestors and the new knowledge of contemporary science to bring the salmon back to the Okanagan.

The Salmon Ceremony at Kettle Falls was a very moving reminder of the strength of the native people along the Columbia River; the call to the salmon to return is also a call to the people to persevere. It was a great honor to experience this moving expression of resilience.

John Kawula: University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Government Documents and Maps Librarian

It was a great pleasure to have the opportunity to revisit, reminisce, and in some cases re-evaluate many places and things I had previously experienced and studied about the upper Columbia River basin of BC, Washington, and Idaho.

Some of my memorable thoughts and observances in no particular order or thematic significance:

- Viewing several documentary films on the River Basin with the added bonus of the film makers' commentaries.
- Observing a real un-staged Salmon ceremony
- Reflections on the undergraduate courses I took over 40 years ago in Canadian history, geography, and politics and the term paper I wrote for one of those classes on the Columbia River treaty (at least what little I can remember of it).
- Hearing observations and discussions of the current treaty re-evaluations - especially the economist who discussed potential trade-offs of different situations and the hydrologist who said the micro-climates of the upper basin would have a profound effect on the downriver hydrology but the treaty would be based on macro-climate models that would likely ignore this point.
- The really neat fish ladder construction and museum at the Rocky Reach Dam
- Traveling some of the highways and visiting some of the towns I had been through as a teenager (Penticton; New Denver) and revised notions of others (Trail - not as polluted as I had originally thought) New towns to explore later (Rossland - looked really neat; Revelstoke - not as touristy as I thought it would be).
- Discussions regarding the minor agricultural areas of the basin - especially the Creston area including sturgeon river population.

Deanna Leigh, Western Washington University, Huxley College of the Environment

This story begins, rather oddly, not on a Pacific Northwest River in the heat of summer, but on a humble Minnesota lake in blustery October. Moreover, this story begins with death. Two and a half years ago, my aunt and uncle, experienced backcountry paddlers, were overwhelmed in an early winter storm in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. It was two days before their bodies were found, floating in the frigid waters, and with that discovery came an eternity of unanswered questions

surrounding their deaths. In the aftermath of grief that followed, my parents gave me a simple beaded bracelet that had been strung together out of paper by some blessed child in Africa. They had received it at a benefit for one of my aunt and uncle's favorite charities, and thus I thought of them whenever I wore it.

As it happened, I wore this bracelet on the day we attended the salmon ceremony at Kettle Falls. This ceremony is also rooted in death, and speaks of grief and loss: a loss not of two specific people, but of an entire way of life for entire tribes of people. Since before my aunt and uncle were even born, this ancient fishing site has been devoid of salmon, a credit to the construction of the Grand Coulee dam. Thus, tribes gather from Washington, British Columbia, even Idaho and Montana, each year and prayerfully ask the salmon to return.

The ceremony itself was quite weighty, the most memorable part involved all of the participants selecting stones from the riverbank and together raising them up into the air and striking them together, over and over again. The stones provided an intermediary voice between humans and fish, in a sense enabling us to speak to them in a common language. I found myself selecting two large round rocks and joining over one-hundred mineral voices, clack-clack-clacking, calling together. After our collective voice was raised, we each threw our stones into the water as prayers, beckoning to the salmon. This was absolutely powerful, and tears slid down my cheeks as my prayers settled to the river bottom alongside those of my sisters and brothers.

We left the ceremony in the early afternoon and drove downriver through the beautiful channeled scablands all the way to Grand Coulee Dam. Here we encountered the industrial beast that was the first of many shackles imposed upon the Columbia River. What a shocking contrast this was to the spirit at Kettle Falls. I can only say that I have never felt more strongly opposed to this sort of large-scale industrialization than I did that day. We spent some time in the visitor center, the focus of which was on this "great feat of man." My personal take home message for the day was, "We can build these behemoths and call them equal to the pyramids, but Lord knows it's quite impossible to manage fish passage."

Wanting to continue the spirit of Kettle Falls, we trekked down the hill from the visitor center, carrying rocks as close to the river as possible. This proved quite difficult, as the pool below the dam was fenced off well away from the water and even guarded by the Bureau of Reclamation. We must have been 40 yards away, but we clacked our rocks together in spite of it and called the salmon once more. We had to fling these prayers as hard as we could, launching them towards the water. It was still a far stretch, and most of our stones fell short; only one of Morna's bouncing down to make a satisfactory 'splunk.' No matter, our prayers will make their call when the water flows higher.

The funniest part of this venture was that when I desperately heaved my first prayer, I suddenly felt that bracelet slipping from my wrist. I tried to stop, but my momentum had reached its peak and I could only gawk as the bracelet slapped into the rock at the moment I released it, and everything exploded in this bizarre trajectory. The beads went soaring past the rock, the one prayer now joined by many voices, and these too were tribal, having traveled across two continents to reach their destiny. I prayed as I watched. Obviously, the bracelet was of some importance to me, but I am not sorry to have parted from it in this way. Nay, it is quite fitting and perhaps my aunt and uncle, having met with death in the waters, are more capable of praying for the suffering of the waters because of it, and at that moment I knew their prayers had been joined to my own.

Morna McEachern, PNWCSC Program Manager, Univ. of Washington, Seattle University, Social Work

On the last day of our eight-day journey along the Columbia River, Bill Layman asked us for one word about our experiences. He started with me and I said, without any preparation, riverbank. I had the image of a Sini'xt elder smiling broadly when I had said, the day before at the Salmon Ceremony in Kettle Falls, that the river bank was what kept coming to me as the connection…it's where he had helped re-bury some very old bones that emerged due to dam flooding…they had been buried on the bank, but were now exposed at times, underwater at times, and needed proper care. It's where the salmon are cooked over smoky fires, where the Salmon Ceremonies, Ceremonies of Tears, take place to call the salmon home—they have not been able to get back since 1940, when the Grand Coulee Dam opened and blocked their way upriver; it's where the salmon give their lives to sustain the humans, animals and plants; it's where the children were running freely before stripping and jumping into the river on the hot summer day; it's where we drove and drove, sometimes along the natural bank, more often along the flooded 'lakes'…one ironically called Banks Lake; it's where we watched the new moon set over the mountains as we enjoyed a Solstice fire with new friends in Revelstoke. It's from whence we threw our stones into the Columbia River after clicking them together to call the salmon back. In our eight days, we met wonderful people, received many gifts of story, knowledge, food, camaraderie, ceremony and it was on the river bank that we placed ourselves: stood, drove, picnicked and met the river: its power, wonder, sorrow, life, beauty, people.

Kenneth Pratt, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anthropology and History: Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act, Anchorage, Alaska

The most enduring lesson I learned from the Columbia River Treaty field trip involves a matter of lost identity. That is, in my view it is a misnomer to refer to today's Columbia as a "river": its former rapids, multiple channels and natural patterns of behavior are gone (so is any readily discernable current). Now firmly under human control and appearing as a more or less uniform series of large, flat-water, man-made lakes, the "Columbia Reservoir System" would be a more fitting descriptor for what today occupies the old watercourse.

This "lake-effect," so to speak, may be responsible for creating what struck me as fractionated, localized attitudes toward the Columbia from many of the individuals with whom we met. To clarify, comments and concerns tended to focus on selected parts of the watershed rather than the watershed as a whole; and questions of a systemic nature generally could not be answered. Maybe this is how it has always been on the local stage–but the extensive dam system arguably encourages less holistic perspectives, if only by making the original river all the more difficult to imagine. Thus, it was not possible for me to see "the Columbia" anywhere in the 130-mile long expanse of "Lake Roosevelt."

First Nation/Native perspectives regarding the Columbia were the most holistic in evidence, thanks (I believe) to a common focus on anadromous fish, historical indigenous activities in the watershed and kinship linkages between groups across the Columbia Basin. But associated cultural remains and the most celebrated natural sites at which indigenous peoples once gathered (e.g., Celilo Falls, Kettle Falls) have been, like salmon and steelhead, largely eliminated from the landscape. The circumstances testify

to an overwhelming loss in the realm of cultural heritage, yet that loss oddly constitutes the strongest argument against my proclaimed demise of the Columbia River.

The Columbia dam system has also resulted in a more complicated watershed management regime. A larger number of parties with competing management roles and agendas surely must increase the difficulty of achieving common grounds on many water-related issues. In historical context though, the damming of the Columbia is similar to water diversion and impoundment actions in the Colorado River Basin, the Owens Valley of California, etc. In nearly all such cases, culturally important rivers have been sacrificed to support large-scale economic development projects in places they would not otherwise be possible, and can only be sustained through strict control of the water.

Rachelanne Subido, Seattle University, Social Work

My favorite part of the trip was hearing from the first national elders and watching a film that was created regarding the tribe and their relationship to water. Particularly during the showing of the film, it was very impactful to see the reactions and nonverbal cues of those in the room while the film was being shown. It was amazing to see how the Columbia River Treaty has affected the first national people and their cultural traditions and way of life in general. Although I was only able to attend a portion of the trip, I am glad that I was able to gain knowledge regarding the treaty and strengthen my knowledge base pertaining to working with first national and native peoples.

Bridget Thompson, Independent scholar and field course driver

I am a rock, a tiger-striped, amber, ancient, burnt sienna rock from the Columbia River. A rock tumbled and formed in the living water since time began. A tawny, burnt umber, stippled rock, a rock that remembers willow traps, Kettle falls, shingle creek, Indian hemp and the rise and fall of flanking mountains.

I am a rock, a cool, smooth weight in your palm that draws you deeper and deeper into hidden places, forgotten eddies and sparkling pools, a faceted swirl of gravity pulling you down into a shifting stream. As you plummet, your shimmering heartbeat merges with the changing light.

I am a rock flung far over the dam wall to splash back into the lost sound of rushing currents, white water and clacking pebbles. I am flung, and plunk into a still reservoir, into breathless water stifled by dams, contained and stemmed, lack-lustre.

I am a rock, a song calling the salmon back home

Margaret Willson, University of Washington, Anthropology

> The trip to Canada was great…We were looking specifically at the Columbia River Treaty, which was done between the US and Canada in 1964 and now, after fifty years, is up for renewal. The first time around, they considered nothing except hydroelectric power and flood control. The result is dams (Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee, among others) that salmon cannot get through, which displaced

people both First Nation/Native Americans and others (People went to town and came back to find their houses burned with a bulldozer smashing the remains)--some pretty disturbing accounts. Also---this was both outrageous and so chilling to me--during this process, the Canadians actually drew up plans for diverting the entire river to the Fraser River, so none of it would flow into the States at all. This is so horrifying as to be almost unimaginable.

The renewal of the treaty involves billions upon billions of dollars in terms of water, irrigation and power, but this time native peoples, salmon, habitat, farmers--all kinds of groups—are getting involved. They all have very strong opinions--as we learned on this trip--so it will be a tense mess.

We drove up to Revelstoke, BC and then returned along the Columbia, visiting groups along the way, with each telling us about their perspectives on the river and the treaty. This way we learned about the issues through also experiencing the river itself and the places along its banks---and some truly breathtaking countryside. First Nation groups invited us to visit their hatchery and to hear talks from chiefs, elders, lawyers and others on their concerns; we were invited to join a Salmon Ceremony held at Kettle Falls (there aren't any falls there any more for those of you who do not know this; they are under the river after the dams were built) with a number of Washington tribes and British Columbia First Nations bands. We ended at Wenatchee--which was, I admit, transformed for me by this trip. I have never liked Wenatchee, a sprawl of a town, but after being told tales of the creation of the land around it, and then being shown the sacred sites that are the result of those creation stories, the land was transformed--and I will always now see the salmon dancing along the high ridge when I go through the area.

And then--just a couple of days after we left, a huge fire that has burned more than 24 homes there and so much land. A very strange feeling.