

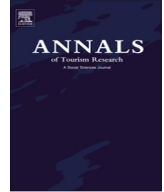


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# The Banff Indian Days tourism festivals



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### ABSTRACT

The Banff Indian Days tourism festivals, which occurred annually from 1910 to 1972, reinforced temporalized and exoticized images of local Indigenous peoples and informed the production of “Indigenicity.” While attention is directed to prevailing discourse, this research is also concerned with how Nakoda participants responded to this discourse through their participation in local tourism economies. As well as facilitating a process where Nakoda peoples returned to important locations within Banff National Park, the Indian Days offered unique socio-economic, political and cultural opportunities. Through interpreting the discursive production of Indigenous identities, it is revealed how some community members refused colonial structures and defied limiting definitions of their cultural practices. The festivals are established as key spaces of exchange that fostered identity-making possibilities.

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### Introduction

Beginning in the 1880s, Indigenous peoples were increasingly refused access to the protected areas that were appropriated in the formation of Rocky Mountains Park (the precursor to Banff).<sup>1</sup> The exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the lands and resources that were fundamental to their cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> In 1885, a small tract of land was designated as the Banff Hot Springs Reserve on the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Two years later the area was significantly expanded to 674 square kilometers and Rocky Mountains Park was formed as Canada's first national park. Corresponding with the National Parks Act of 1930, the park was renamed Banff and its boundaries were established comprising 6697 square kilometers in what is currently the province of Alberta.

subsistence practices had significant impacts in their communities. As early as 1894, the Banff Indian Days tourism festivals provided an opportunity for local Indigenous peoples to regain access to the region.<sup>2</sup> This article examines discourses that informed the production of “Indigeneity” which partly emerged through the development of tourism economies in the Banff-Bow Valley, Alberta, from 1910 to 1972. The participation of Nakoda peoples in the Banff Indian Days festivals are the focal point of this analysis. Along with offering unique socio-economic, political and cultural opportunities, the Indian Days facilitated a process where Nakoda peoples returned to important sites within the park boundaries and reasserted their cultural links to these landscapes.

While the discourses that were circulated during this period are part of this research, it is also concerned with how Nakoda peoples responded to the expectations that were created in the production of “Indigeneity” through their engagement in the tourism industry. Of particular relevance is how some Nakoda peoples pushed the limits of what was possible by playing with the very boundaries that constrained their lives. By focusing on the discursive production of Indigenous subjectivities, this article demonstrates how some community members refused colonial structures and defied limiting definitions of their cultural practices and identities. Privileging oral accounts with Nakoda peoples, but also drawing from archival documents collected from newspapers, photographs and tourism materials as primary evidence, this article centers on how Nakoda peoples formed critical spaces of interaction as well as fostered identity-making possibilities through the Banff Indian Days.

## Methods/Methodology

This article is based on six years of collaborative ethnographic research with Nakoda communities in Morley, Alberta. I worked with Nakoda Elders, band councils and community members to follow established protocol and collectively define the research objectives, including community perspectives of reciprocity, for this project. I also volunteered with youth programs in the community from 2006 to 2009. To foster a research process that was collaborative in orientation and held Indigenous perspectives at its core, Indigenous methodologies (IM) guided this study. This is a partnership approach that involves researchers and participants in all aspects of the research process (Kovach, 2009). IM and other participatory community-based approaches highlight inequitable power relationships and leading scholars acknowledge the strength of this approach (Alfred, 2005; Bishop, 2005). Key tenants of IM emphasize fostering a research process that is collaborative in orientation and one that holds Indigenous perspectives, as well as ways of knowing, at the centre of the project (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This process also helped ensure that the community’s interests were recognized and access to sensitive material was appropriately guarded (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Primary information reviewed for this study includes: (1) transcripts of personal interviews conducted with 12 Nakoda First Nation community members between April 2006 and November 2008. Knowledgeable community members and Elders were identified and recruited based on the suggestion of leadership. All interviews were conducted in Morley and were transcribed verbatim; (2) tourism materials from 1910–1972 in the form of CPR posters; (3) photographs of the Banff Indian Days and related events from the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies and the Glenbow Museum and Archives; and, (4) newspapers, including the *Banff Crag and Canyon* (published weekly throughout this time period) and the *Calgary Herald* (published daily from Monday to Saturday in the month of July). The newspapers were reviewed from 1910 to 1972 and were searched for information on the Banff Indian Days and other tourism-related articles. Although all weekly issues of the *Banff Crag and Canyon* were reviewed throughout each year, the daily issues of the *Calgary Herald* were

<sup>2</sup> Currently in Canada, “Indigenous” has become a more useful term to collectively refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. For this reason, throughout this article I have chosen the term “Indigenous” when describing general Canadian contexts. As Alfred (2005) recognizes, the term represents an experience that is shaped by a politicized colonial past and present. However, it is critical to invoke an individual nation’s own self-appellation whenever possible and I do this throughout by referring to Nakoda peoples. Attention to such terminological specificity prevents a homogenization of distinct cultures and recognizes the heterogeneity and diversity of Indigenous languages and cultural groups in Canada. I place the term in quotations marks at times to indicate both the efforts of tourism producers to homogenize diverse Indigenous groups, but also to refer to the expectations of tourists in Banff regarding local Indigenous communities.

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