

# Two Views of the World

Sally Thompson Greiser  
T. Weber Greiser

**W**est of the Blackfoot Reservation and south of Glacier National Park, in Montana, lies an area of more than 100,000 acres known as “the Badger-Two Medicine,” after the two major drainages within its boundaries. Within the domain of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, these mountains are the site of proposed oil and gas exploration. Prior to 1896, the mountains were part of the Blackfoot Reservation and the aboriginal homeland of the Piegan, or Pikani, people who have continued to use the area into the present day. It remains the land of the mountain goat, the cougar, and the grizzly bear. From an environmental point of view, it is one of the most pristine areas of the Rocky Mountains.

Archeological and anthropological investigations of this area have taken various forms over the last decade. Such studies intimately involve two cultures, two views of the world. At this juncture in our history—when anthropologists and archeologists are accused of being holdovers from a colonial era—what is the archeologist’s role? To what end do we conduct our research? Is it for purely objective, scientific study of the past? Is it for “sound management” of cultural resources? And if sound management, what does that involve? Is there room for consideration of spiritual values as well as scientific? Are these values—spiritual and scientific—mutually exclusive? If so, which takes precedence? Please keep these questions in mind as we review the sequence of archeological and anthropological studies of the Badger-Two Medicine area. Following this review, we’ll consider the issues raised.

The first phase of compliance work involved archeological surveys of proposed well pads and associated

access roads, with consideration of National Register eligibility and potential adverse effects, for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Several small studies were sporadically conducted by cultural resource contractors over a four-year period, which resulted in a lack of cohesiveness and integration.

In this early phase, there was no attempt to understand use of the area from a Pikani perspective. The forest archeologist at that time contacted the Blackfoot Cultural Representative by mail and asked that he identify sacred sites on a map so that they could be avoided. He never responded. The Forest Service believed they had made a good faith effort to identify and protect sites important to the Blackfoot people. The cultural representative believed he had been asked to do the impossible. Following the surveys, the forest archeologist and the Blackfoot Cultural Representative visited one of the identified sites. The forest archeologist concluded the site was probably not a significant Blackfoot cultural site and instructed the Cultural Representative to relay that conclusion to Blackfoot traditionalists. Results of the various archeological studies, with limited input regarding specific locations by Blackfoot representatives, comprised the basis for consideration of



The key to understanding traditional cultural properties is culturally sensitive consultation with traditional knowledge holders. Here a Micronesian elder imparts traditions about his islands to a respectful listener. Photo by Patricia Luce Chapman.

potential adverse effects on archeological properties in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which was released in 1990.

The second phase of research was a review of the ethnographic literature with a primary goal “to acquire information necessary to understand the Blackfeet use

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of the Badger-Two Medicine area with particular emphasis on any religious/cultural use of the area” (Deaver 1988:1). This study, in addition to the archeological investigations, formed the basis of compliance to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Management Policy Act (FLMPA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). Excerpts from this study comprised the section in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (1990) which addressed effects of the proposed action on traditional Blackfoot use of the Badger-Two Medicine area.

The EIS was appealed on the basis that Traditional Cultural Practices, as defined in National Register Bulletin 38, were not considered. As a result, a third phase of anthropological investigations was initiated. The primary goal of this study was to conduct interviews with a cross-section of interested parties for information regarding traditional use of the area, with followup on-site investigations of identified locations.

It seems obvious from this vantage point that the process was backwards. The archeological studies would have benefited greatly from the context provided by the ethnographic literature review and the subsequent interviews with traditional Pikani practitioners. Without the two ethnographic studies the archeologists operated in a cultural vacuum. Fortunately, no one is to blame. Bulletin 38 was only a concept in the minds of Pat Parker and Tom King in 1983 when these studies were initiated.

Results of the Traditional Cultural Practices study are just now being compiled, and specifics are not yet public information. However, certain points are generally accepted by all parties and are already part of previous written documentation.

It is well established that high mountain peaks have traditionally been used for seeking visions, and continue to be used for this purpose. Napi, the incarnate Creator, told the first dreamer to seek a place several days away from other people; that is, a remote area. He gave instructions for a sweat lodge ritual as part of the quest. This activity requires the presence of particular rocks and pure water. The best location of a dream bed is one that requires great bravery, either due to its proximity to fierce predators, such as grizzlies, or because of the situation of the dream bed on a high, narrow ledge. The Badger-Two Medicine area offers many such locations.

Most involved parties agree that vision quests and other traditional activities such as ritual gathering of plants and paints, have been and continue to be sought in the Badger-Two Medicine area. It is also recognized that Sun Lodges have been erected on both Badger Creek and Two Medicine River, and that sweat lodges are regularly erected and used along both these rivers.

What is at issue is the relative value of these practices—or, rather, how adverse effects to these practices, compare to the perceived loss to the Nation if gas development is not undertaken. At this time we don’t know what decision will be made regarding potential impacts to Blackfoot traditional cultural beliefs, customs, and practices in the study area. However, we can

take this midstream opportunity to examine certain issues that anthropologists (including archeologists) are faced with in the conduct of such research.

1. Many voices are represented within a tribe. For the Blackfoot, there is the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the official voice of the people when dealing with the U.S. Government. There is also the traditional community—not always represented in official circles. Even within the traditional community there are factions. To whom is the professional responsible?

With regard to working with traditional people, there is a specific protocol for interaction, especially with regard to requests about sensitive matters. Among the Blackfoot, winter is the time for story-telling. The Lewis & Clark Forest is to be commended for considering such traditional practices in planning the ethnographic study. In fact, when springtime came two months early and significantly shortened the data collection phase of the research, the forest archeologist agreed to a one-year extension.

2. Language is critical. Many traditional practitioners are not comfortable or able to speak English. Even when they are fluent in English, they find it difficult to talk about sensitive issues or traditional beliefs in a language other than their native tongue. As anthropologists, we know how “language is culture”—and direct translations are not often possible. Even working with translators, some native speakers will remain uncomfortable with the ultimate disposition of the information once it is translated. What are the options for anthropologists in these contexts? What are the options for native speakers?
3. We believe that “once an oral culture, always an oral culture.” Our experience with indigenous peoples is that written communication is not favored, and with sensitive subject matter it is simply not an option. When figuring schedules and travel for such projects, we always factor in extra trips to personally review with the Tribe any written materials that we generate. In the past we tried sending reports for review, but never received any response. In some cases the material had not even been reviewed, in others, it had been reviewed and discussed, but the requested written response was never prepared. The people simply were not comfortable writing about sacred matters in some formal and finite way. We believe that accommodating this need for oral rather than written communication is part of the “good faith effort” required by law.

The request for written documentation of sacred sites is one factor that caused the forest archeologist’s request for map locations to fail. Beyond this limitation, however, is the much greater issue of intellectual property rights. At risk of understatement and over-abbreviation, we will attempt to simply state how this issue pertains to the Badger-Two Medicine study from the point of view of some Pikani Traditionalists.

These people are being asked to disclose the foundations of their religious and cultural beliefs in order to prove that the area in question is important enough to be protected from desecration. In so doing, they translate into a foreign tongue and worldview that which is most sacred to them. Potential “adverse effects” from such disclosure include loss of personal powers acquired through religious practices, and perhaps wider cultural devastation. To them, this is a no win situation. If they don’t tell, then there is no documentation of traditional cultural practices, and thus, nothing to protect. If they do tell, the mystery that sustains them is lessened if not lost.

4. Because the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), at this time, has no teeth, we are dealing with 1st Amendment issues within a regulatory framework of historic preservation. Historic preservation, by its nature, connotes the saving of tangible resources of the past. Within this framework, the professionals’ reports can fail to convey the vitality of the traditional culture. Some reports read as if the culture in question is part of the past—not the present and future.

We are not, at this time, recommending new legislative efforts, but we are certainly reminded of the magnitude of our potential impact to traditional cultures—especially when these studies may end up in litigation. If our research isn’t thorough, if our phrasing is not carefully construed, our carelessness may have dire consequences for native peoples.

5. Perhaps the most important distinction between the represented worldviews is in perception of life in either the particular or the whole. Forest Service archeologists ask for specific locations to be identified for protection. This task is often a difficult one for the traditionalist who sees the whole area as sacred—not just one location where they may have fasted. However, when asked a direct question they find it impolite not to respond, so they do their best to identify that which has been asked. Once identified, the archeologist usually wants to see something that can be recorded—that is, “show me an archeological site.” Because of our training, it is difficult to accept that an area has traditional value if it has not been, in some way, modified. The archeologist may continue to prod.

The traditionalist patiently responds with a parable about life. Somewhere in the parable is the story of being led by the dream, by the “Grandfathers”, to the places where the veil is thin. If the listener is of Celtic ancestry, perhaps there is some dim recognition in the holiday of Beltane, on April 30th, when the veil between our world and the spirit world gets very thin. But probably the listener has no common ground, and so returns to a request for more specific information, something more tangible. The traditionalist may suggest that the listener try

the sweat lodge... perhaps the “Grandfathers” can explain.

We are faced with political, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences of great magnitude as we attempt to address issues of traditional cultural importance to the indigenous peoples of this land. What is the responsibility of the Forest Service and other agency archeologists in situations such as this? What are our responsibilities as we attempt to translate the culture of another? The Ethics Guidelines of the American Anthropological Association provide a beginning for discussion of these issues, but only a beginning. We believe that anthropologists and archeologists who work with Native Americans directly or indirectly must expand the discussion of ethics with regard to our impact—our adverse effects—in our roles as “objective” observers. In some cases, our visitation to a site, in itself, may have negative consequences to the power of the place for a traditional practitioner. Furthermore, our persistent questioning of traditional people takes their energy away from their own people. What might be the impact of this exhaustion of traditional leaders?

#### ***How does your work touch on these issues?***

As we seek to justify ourselves as archeologists—as we look for an argument to counter the accusation that our work is merely a holdover of colonialism, we cannot refrain from asking, “What right have we to save somebody else’s past for our future if the process goes against the deepest concerns of the people in question? What if the tables were turned?”

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#### **References**

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Sally Thompson Greiser is a consultant on Indian land and water rights.

T. Weber Greiser is senior archeologist and program manager at Historical Research Associates.