

Outside
Evaluator
#2008009

Evaluation of 2008 Annual David Thompson Bicentennial Conference/Encampment
June 19-21, 2008 Twin Rivers Canyon Resort Moyie Springs, Idaho

Prepared by *Name and
Address*

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As the Idaho Humanities Council's evaluator of the David Thompson Conference and Encampment, I was pleased to be a full-time participant in all the events held during the three days of the event. Since I served as chair of the IHC Evaluation Committee for several years, I know you'll be pleased to learn that the IHC name and logo were prominently displayed on all the materials I received and on the signs at the teachers' workshop and the encampment. In addition, the Council was singled out and thanked at the beginnings of both the workshop and the encampment (and that was done by people who didn't know I was the IHC evaluator and who might have been trying to impress me).

(1) The project was the third annual bicentennial David Thompson conference/encampment, hosted by the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho on tribal land—the Twin Rivers Canyon Resort—where the Kootenai and Moyie Rivers converge. The two-day encampment was preceded on June 19 by a day-long teachers' workshop held at the Kootenai River Inn in Bonners Ferry. The focus of the workshop was to provide teachers with ideas and materials for teaching about David Thompson and the historic fur trade. The encampment itself focused on learning the traditional skills of the Kootenai people.

(2) The audience for the teachers' workshop was composed of teachers from western Montana and northern Idaho. Though the planning committee intended to include teachers from Washington, unavoidable delays in sending out information meant that the 30 available spots were filled by the time Washington teachers applied. The average age for the attendees was about 40, with two-thirds women and one-third men. They teach at all levels—from kindergarten through college—and a wide range of subjects, including history, band, social sciences, English, art, accounting, home economics, music, and, of course, all the subjects at the elementary level.

These same 30 people plus 43 others comprised the audience for the encampment. The additional people included several tribal elders in their 70s and 80s as well as some children from second grade through high school.

Though the goal of the encampment was to "educate non-tribal members about this rich culture, while it also serves as a way for tribal members, particularly children, to learn more about their own traditional culture," only two families—one tribal, one not—were in attendance. (The exception was the family of Loretta Stevens, chair of the planning committee: as she said, her whole "famn damily" was there, helping in all ways by teaching, playing stick game, drumming, and generally supporting the entire event.)

(3) The format of the project was marvelously varied. I know the IHC grant was meant to fund the two-day encampment, but the teachers' workshop on June 19 provided a perfect "anticipatory set" for the encampment. For example, at the beginning, all of us teachers were asked to introduce ourselves as well as to assume a historic character out of the Northwest fur trade, whom we were supposed to research during the day. Scholar-in-Residence Jack Nisbet then provided a slide show and lecture about "David Thompson at School and Among the Kootenai," during which he suggested many teaching strategies for various levels to acquaint students with David Thompson. Next, Tim Ryan and Rebecca Timmons discussed their displays of material from traveling education trunks about the fur trade. It was during this time we learned of Tim's expertise in teaching and preserving tribal ancestral ways of life as he showed us the artifacts he had built with the traditional use of cordage, hides, bark and plants. Tom Sandberg then presented a slide showing how he researched "David Thompson's Twenty Days in Idaho in 1808," including Thompson's camps near the site of the encampment along the Moyie and Kootenai Rivers. Rebecca Timmons followed by discussing fur trade accounts and how to incorporate them into lessons for elementary and secondary classrooms, using primary and secondary sources and stressing how to interpret them and question their validity. Finally, we observed a short film, "David Thompson and the Kootenai Falls Portage," made by George Sibley. (This led me to take a side trip to the falls to see first-hand just how challenging that portage was—and to discover how difficult it was to film the re-enactment of it!)

The workshop, then, set the stage for the historical, literary, critical, archeological, and cultural anthropological learning we were to encounter at the encampment. We were set for an adventure in all these humanities disciplines plus language and linguistics.

The encampment proper began on the evening of June 19 with a dinner at the camp site followed by a teepee raising contest, led by Kootenai tribal members, during which we participants raced to raise five teepees with the poles, twine, covers, and door flaps provided for us. Thus began my lessons in humility and the power of teamwork. The teepees stayed up for the encampment and were inhabited by some of the participants.

Also on site was an encampment of ten members (nine men and one woman) of the Friends of the Spokane House (FOSH), who joined in all our activities and demonstrated their fire-building, muzzle-loaders, and authentic clothing and camp equipment and had lively interchanges with all those present, including the scholars.

Following the teepee raising (I was in the group who won the Creativity Award for figuring out how to get the door cover placed high on the tent), the FOSH group gave us a step-by-step fire-building demonstration and Jack Nisbet lectured about Thompson among the Kootenais. He stressed the role of Thompson's Kootenai guide, whom Thompson inexplicably insisted on calling "Ugly Head," a fact that still galls the Kootenai. The guide probably had curly hair, but "Ugly Head" is an insulting nickname, and Nisbet seeks to find an authentic translation for his Kootenai name. The elders present at the encampment are now working with Nisbet to solve the problem. Nisbet gave us an important lesson about the importance of language and diplomacy.

Friday, June 20, began with more learning of Kootenai traditional skills, taught by the Kootenai scholars and the FOSH. The same skills were taught on June 21, with sessions running concurrently, enabling the participants to take part in drying meat, making

moccasins, learning the Kootenai language, constructing a fish trap, making a cedar bark bag, practicing fire-starting, learning how muzzle-loaders work, and fur trading with the FOSH using Kootenai sign language.

Each workshop was hands-on, with the scholars demonstrating each skill, then PATIENTLY guiding us through our own creations of fires, moccasins, dried meat, fish traps, and cedar bark bags. Friday evening's lunch was elk stew, and dinner featured bison stir fry. All the meals were catered by the Kootenai River Inn and consisted of authentic native foods as much as possible (some of us missed having dessert and craved chocolate, by the way).

On Saturday, June 21, the workshops teaching tribal skills were repeated so that all the participants could learn all the skills. The session on Kootenai sign language involved all the participants at once, including the FOSH members, who "traded" with five of us women who volunteered to act as tribal fur trappers, seeking horses, tobacco, and needles for sewing. Our teacher and coach, Francis Auld, led us in this (often hilarious) activity and commented on our skills-acquisition (or lack thereof) as well as adding commentary about the history and evolution of the sign language.

Saturday's lunch was baked salmon, and dinner was young duck and wild rice soup. The evening meal was followed by a performance by the Chief Cliff drumming group. Again Loretta Stevens' family, members of the group, provided support for the project. The original plan to have a fashion show and dancing fell through when the groups scheduled to perform backed out. The drummers agreed to replace them; they played and sang traditional and modern songs and answered questions from the audience about the drum, the drumsticks, the songs, and the heritage and selection of the players.

(4) The general response of the audience seemed very positive. I overheard many of the participants comment on how wonderful the sessions were, how much they were learning, and what fun they were having. People were very attentive to the scholars and completely engaged in their learning of native skills. One small criticism I have of the project is that while we were given evaluation sheets for the encampment, no one ever collected them. The sheets asked the participants to rank the teachers (just the teachers' workshop and educational credit opportunities), meals (lunch and dinner), classes (by specific skill), and evening events (teepee raising and Nisbet's presentation). The questionnaire also asked for comments: What did you like the best? What would you improve? Did you enjoy the encampment? Other comments?

(5) The principal presenters were all excellent. At the teachers' workshop, the suggestions for lesson planning and use of the traveling trunks were helpful. All the presenters of the skills workshops were outstanding in their knowledge and patience in teaching us. I felt honored to be taught by them: meat drying from Louise Andrew Michele, moccasin making from Diane Auld, Kootenai language from Vernon Finley, fish trap construction from Louis Caye, Jr., Kootenai sign language from Francis Auld, and cedar bark basket making from Tim Ryan.

(6) The intellectual quality of the program differed from what one might encounter in a lecture or book discussion. If I consider that "intellect" includes the capacity for knowledge and the use of thought and reasoning, then I'd say the intellectual quality was superior. Consider that most of us participants had minds in the *tabula rasa* state when it

came to receiving knowledge of teepee raising, meat drying, cedar bark basket making, etc. We also had no prior knowledge of the sounds of the Kootenai language and knew nothing about Kootenai sign language. Therefore, we had to bring all our rational thinking and reasoning to learning the skills. (In contrast and in addition to our intellect, we also brought feelings to bear: frustration, impatience, and pride played a part in our learning, too.) We probably felt more at ease when we were learning by hearing of the history of David Thompson's travels in the region and his dealings with the Kootenai, since we had knowledge to build on. All in all, the intellectual quality ranked high.

(7) About the desirability of IHC's funding similar projects, I'd say: It is a model project. In every aspect, it met the Council's mission: "to deepen understanding of human experience by connecting people with ideas." We got the ideas and we got the experience, and I do mean we "got" them—we lived through them and understood them.

To improve this project would have required greater cooperation among the school districts in disseminating information about the teachers' workshop and the gathering so that more schools might have been represented. Nobody seems to know how to solve that problem! And to have more applicants would have meant to turn more people away, so there's a dilemma. I've already mentioned the failure to collect the evaluations; however, I understand from Loretta Stevens that some participants have e-mailed their responses to her. Perhaps the planning committee could send out the evaluation questionnaires on-line and ask for responses that way.

Another suggestion would be to notify the participants more in advance that they need to bring a knife or scissors (or whatever tools required) and lawn chairs. I didn't receive enough notice, so I left home without any of the above. I know the planners already know they needed to allow time for breaks during the teachers' workshop. The less structured format of the gathering allowed for breaks throughout.

When Tim Ryan and Jack Nisbet put together an impromptu walk to study and gather native flora, only a few people joined them since they then had to abandon another skills session. That walk could be another repeated session for another gathering, allowing more people to participate and learn the role of local plants in the diet and artifacts of the tribal people.

Knowing that one goal of the project was to include families and provide activities directed at children, I hope the planners can find a way to appeal to, notify, and include more families in their next gathering (should they choose to use this format again).

Given these few recommendations, I wish to reiterate my commendations for the project. All the conference planners did an outstanding job of planning, organizing, and overseeing the project. They gathered an impressive, varied, and inclusive group of sponsors and in-kind donations for the event. The Idaho Humanities Council should be proud that it was a member of that group.