

# Northern Aboriginal Events as Tourist Attractions: Traditional Cree Gatherings in Northern Quebec

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**Abstract:** In the past twenty years, following a period of rapid modernization, most of the nine Cree communities of northern Quebec have begun returning to their former village sites for local summer festivals lasting a week or more. These “traditional gatherings” serve multiple purposes for local residents, allowing elders and middle-aged residents to return to places where they grew up or raised their children, fostering a greater sense of community and allowing participants to reconnect with their cultural heritage through traditional activities and foods. A few tourists also spend time at the gatherings, although the events have not become major attractions for reasons ranging from distance to lack of awareness and marketing. This article considers the viability and challenges of developing Cree gatherings as tourist attractions based on preliminary research conducted at two such gatherings in 2007, and on interviews and conversations with regional and local tourism officials. The article concludes that the gatherings do hold potential for tourism development, but that many factors must first be considered, including how increased numbers of visitors could affect the original community-based purposes of these events. More research is needed to fully understand how residents feel about the benefits and impacts of attracting more visitors to the gatherings, which were created to fulfill community cultural, historical, social, and recreational needs.

## Introduction

As northern Indigenous communities adapt to rapid social and economic change, some have turned to cultural and nature-based tourism as a tool of both economic development and cultural preservation (Notzke, 1999; Colton, 2005). While not a perfect and complete solution for the many challenges facing these communities, tourism does offer some advantages over other forms of development. For example, traditional land-based activities valued for economic, social, and cultural reasons can often be incorporated into

tourism projects. Hosting infrastructure can benefit local communities, important in locations where visitors may be few and far between. Perhaps most importantly, tourism offers a mechanism by which Aboriginal culture can be preserved and practised, shared with outsiders, and defended against the encroachment of ideas and values from outside. Tourism can also lead to new problems, however, from an influx of outsiders who may not always respect and share local values, to problems inherent in the “commoditization” of culture, which may pose special danger to cultures that value sharing and generosity over exchange of money (Natcher, 2009).

In short, tourism offers both great potential and significant challenges to northern Indigenous communities. These issues have been discussed in several important articles about Aboriginal tourism (Notzke, 1999; Colton, 2005; Stewart et al., 2005) and books about tourism in peripheral regions, including the North (Brown and Hall, 2000; Hall and Johnston, 2005). Despite some excellent case studies, however (e.g., Smith, 1989; Müller and Pettersson, 2006), Stewart et al. (2005: 389–390) conclude in their overview of polar tourism research that “the field is characterized by a scattered research community,” that “we really know very little about the phenomenon of tourism in polar regions,” and that “the knowledge base available is quite variable ... with extensive detail on certain elements and sparse data on others.” This article seeks to expand our knowledge of northern Aboriginal tourism using an example from the Cree (Eeyou or Eenuou, depending on the dialect<sup>1</sup>) communities of the James Bay region of northern Quebec, known by the Cree as “Eeyou Istchee.”

Like many northern Indigenous peoples (Southcott and Walker, 2009), the Cree of Quebec have experienced significant change in the past few decades. The construction of major hydroelectric projects and other forms of large-scale resource development have brought extensive environmental and other changes to the Cree homeland (Niezen, 2009). The groundbreaking land claim settlement known as the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) (Anon., n.d.), along with subsequent funding agreements, have brought considerable wealth to the Cree as well as significant levels of self-government (Gagnon and Rocher, 2002). Despite this, the Cree have not necessarily achieved the level of community economic development once envisioned by their leaders, and also struggle with social, cultural, health, and other challenges (Morantz, 2002; Niezen, 2009; Tanner, 2009). These challenges were a primary motivation for Cree leaders to sign recent “New Relationship Agreements” with Quebec (Anon., 2002) and Canada (Anon., 2008) geared toward job creation, training, and community economic development. Among the areas identified in these agreements for potential

economic development in the Cree communities was tourism, with additional funding for the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA).

At the same time, Cree communities have sought new ways to reinforce “traditional cultural values” and deal with the stresses of rapid social and cultural change. In the 1960s and 1970s, prior to and just after the JBNQA, several Cree communities were displaced from traditional village sites for environmental, economic, or other reasons (Morantz, 2002). In the past two decades, residents of these communities have developed the practice of returning to their former village sites for a period of a week or more during the summer. These “traditional gatherings” are mainly intended to support community goals such as cultural heritage preservation, recreation, socializing, and personal health (Adelson, 2001). They also offer the sorts of social interactions, foods, and cultural experiences sought by cultural tourists, especially those interested in Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1996; Notzke, 1999). Revenue from tourism could help offset the considerable costs of mounting the gatherings, and provide income and employment for residents.

At the same time, attracting a large number of tourists could mean that a major goal of the gatherings—to provide local residents with a reprieve in the summer months—might be defeated. The gatherings have yet to become sites of extensive contact between residents and tourists, and despite the production and sale of some craft items to outsiders, there has been little “commoditization” of Cree culture as a result. Yet there is the potential for such change if tourism becomes a more significant industry in the region, and if the gatherings begin to host greater numbers of outside visitors. This article explores the tension between the potential economic benefits of developing traditional gatherings as tourism attractions and the desire of many local residents to protect the core values and current practices of the gatherings. Cree gatherings offer a valuable opportunity to study the potential effects of tourism on northern Aboriginal cultural events. Their complex, multifaceted roles as sites of cultural renewal and reformation, individual and community healing, socialization and enculturation, and recreation and leisure provide ample material for discussion and debate about cultural tourism and its impacts on northern Indigenous communities.

### **Tourism in Eeyou Istchee: An Overview**

The past few decades have seen the Cree communities evolve from settlements of teepees and cabins clustered around fur-trading posts to twenty-first century northern communities complete with paved roads, modern houses, administration offices, recreation complexes, well-equipped schools, and a

small but growing number of local businesses. The JBNQA, signed in 1975, established Cree governance structures; education and health care systems; and a host of other laws, policies, and programs designed to provide the Cree people with a large measure of autonomy while allowing the Province of Quebec to develop the region's hydroelectric and other resources (Salisbury, 1986; Niezen, 2009). The agreement also protected "traditional subsistence activities" such as hunting and trapping, reflecting what was then a major concern of Cree leaders and advisors: the threat to Cree cultural heritage and their rights to continued use of land and wildlife resources as resource development took hold in the region. The JBNQA also established the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA), a Cree entity whose mission is to "a) provide marketing, booking and promotion services for Cree outfitting operations; b) provide business, management, accounting and professional services for Cree outfitters; [and] c) conduct feasibility studies related to establishment or siting of individual outfitting facilities or a network of outfitting facilities" (Anon. n.d., Sec. 28.6).

Faced with the task of establishing eight modern communities (and later a ninth<sup>2</sup>), Cree leaders did not place tourism development as their top priority during the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, however, the population grew rapidly and the number of Cree who made their living working in the communities or outside the region increased steadily. Today such employment is by far the major source of income for the Cree, with income and subsistence resources from hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering playing a much smaller (but not insubstantial) role in the regional economy (Salisbury, 1986; Niezen, 2009). Yet despite substantial wage income in the communities, most revenue comes from transfer payments, not private business.

The lack of local economic development was a key factor leading to the Agreement Concerning a New Relationship Between le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec, or the "New Relationship Agreement" for short (Anon., 2002). This agreement, which opened the door to further resource development in the region, also emphasized job creation, training, and the sharing of benefits from natural resource extraction (Moses, 2002). One industry specifically identified in the New Relationship Agreement was tourism, which until that point was an unfulfilled promise of the JBNQA. Despite a well-established guiding and outfitting industry for sport hunting and fishing, non-consumptive tourism businesses owned and run by Cree operators remained few in number and small in size. COTA, established by the JBNQA but never fully operationalized, received additional funding under the New Relationship Agreement and was given a clear mandate

to help the Cree communities develop their tourism economies. A board of directors was established representing all nine communities, and an executive director and other staff hired (McGinley, 2006). Since then, COTA has been working to develop the tourism sector in Eeyou Istchee through marketing, training, networking, and other operations.

Tourism is attractive to Cree leaders for a variety of reasons. It brings revenue directly to the communities in the form of travellers wanting to experience the northern environment, especially as interpreted by Cree guides. Hotels, restaurants, and other businesses benefit directly, as do services that cater indirectly to tourists, such as grocery stores and craft shops (although most local crafts are still sold to other Cree). A few tourism entrepreneurs make money guiding groups through the bush or hosting them at wilderness camps and “cultural villages” (Fig. 1). Perhaps most importantly, tourism can permit Cree hosts to do what some prefer to be doing anyway, spending time in “the bush” engaging in traditional activities. Finally, as pointed out by one local official, tourism helps the Cree to teach outsiders about their way of life, possibly building support for political goals such as fending off fur-trapping bans or fighting the next threat to their territorial, political, or cultural sovereignty (Gilpin, 2006).



Figure 1. A “cultural village” near the community of Waswanipi. Traditional dwellings are used for local cultural education, feasts, and other community activities, and occasionally for visitors.

## Traditional Gatherings in the Cree Communities

Over the past two decades, a number of summer gatherings have emerged or been redefined as sites of cultural renewal, healing, and heritage preservation among the Cree (Adelson, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Tanner, 2009). Eight of the nine communities now hold gatherings of some sort, including the coastal villages of Wemindji (Nashababichju, or Old Factory Visit), Chisasibi (Mamoweedow), Whapmagoostui (Traditional Gathering), and Waskaganish (Smokey Hill), and the inland communities of Nemaska (Old Nemaska Days), Mistissini (Maamuuteusiitaa), Waswanipi (Chiiwetau), and Oujé-Bougoumou (Swampy Place Gathering). In cases like Smokey Hill, a fish camp near Waskaganish, the sites are traditional gathering areas with long and continuous histories of use. In most cases, however, the gatherings are located at former Hudson Bay Company posts where families gathered together in the summer months to trade food and furs; socialize; hold marriages and other ceremonies; and otherwise renew social, economic, cultural, and family bonds.

While the gatherings vary somewhat in length, activities, and primary purposes, their general characteristics are similar. A few residents (usually paid workers) prepare the sites in advance while families make their own preparations including purchasing food and goods, stocking and repairing cabins, and obtaining materials needed for crafts and other activities. The gatherings reflect modern economic realities, including the fact that communities now have considerable money to pay for such events, which can cost over \$100,000 to operate each year (Niskamoon, 2011). Individual families also need money to build cabins and stock them with furnishings, appliances, generators, and food, with no return other than the value of the gathering itself (as opposed to hunting camps designed largely for subsistence activities).

While most gatherings last one to two weeks, individuals and families may spend a weekend, or a week or more at the sites depending on work schedules and other factors. While there are some planned cultural activities, like friendly competitions and evening entertainment, much time is spent relaxing, eating, doing chores, playing, and sharing stories and recollections. Residents of all ages take part, some more actively than others, and the extended family group is more clearly defined than in modern Cree villages. Adelson, reporting on the Whapmagoostui traditional gathering, states that the “opportunity to be amongst extended families, whether learning from them or simply relaxing with them, [is] viewed as being more significant than any of the planned [cultural] activities” (2001: 298). According to Adelson, for some Cree the gatherings are also a chance to heal the wounds of their

own lives, whether personal (such as alcohol and drug use), familial (such as abuse), or community (such as the lasting effects of residential schools, loss of language, or rapid social change). In addition to being healing spaces, Adelson also sees the gatherings as important for “negotiating and constructing a new sense of [participants] as Aboriginal Canadians” (2001: 298). In cultural and political terms, the gatherings have become a popular way to remember the past and solidify notions of identity and heritage in a modern and rapidly changing world.

While the vast majority of participants at each gathering are Cree from the organizing community, the events do attract a small number of *mandowin* (visitors; singular *mandow*) who visit for periods of a day or two, up to two weeks. This includes Cree from other communities as well as a few non-Cree, mainly Canadians and Americans, many of whom have friends in the community, had worked there in the past, or otherwise have some previous connection. Nemaska and Waswanipi, the two communities described below, have taken steps to develop tourism working with COTA as well as through band-owned economic development corporations.<sup>3</sup> Both communities have tourism websites with information on lodging, restaurants, and activities that tourists can engage in. Both websites describe visits to former village sites (Old Nemaska and Waswanipi Post) as tourist attractions. Neither gathering, however, is described fully in terms of what visitors might expect regarding activities, lodging, meals, transportation, and so on (Ettenger, 2007). Travel to the gatherings is generally arranged through local tourism offices, although there are no established packages and each trip requires considerable planning on the part of the visitor as well as the local tourism coordinator. In other words, the gatherings as tourism experiences have not yet been fully developed by their respective communities (Ettenger, 2008a). The research described in this article was designed to use the experiences of American university students with no prior experience in the Cree communities to evaluate two sample gatherings as potential tourism sites, and to provide this information to the communities to help them in their tourism development efforts.

## Research Methods

The author has worked in the region on various consulting projects for the Cree government since the mid-1990s. He was encouraged to visit some community gatherings, and bring his students, by local and regional tourism officials in 2007, following his report on his previous year’s university field course on tourism in Cree communities. Two gatherings, Old Nemaska Days and Chiiwetau, were selected mainly for logistical reasons: they took

place around the same time, were both accessible by road, and provided two different experiences to compare and contrast. The gatherings were considered appropriate tourism events for students to experience, and our timing would help the communities by utilizing facilities that were already in place. With over 200 people at Old Nemaska Days during its peak, and over 500 at Chiiwetau, a handful of American students with their professor would not place an undue burden on transportation, accommodations, or other services.

Our main goal was to evaluate the feasibility of promoting traditional Cree gatherings as tourist attractions and the impacts this might have on the gatherings and local residents. The main research questions were:

1. How prepared are communities to host visitors at their gatherings?
2. How willing are local residents to accept tourists at the gatherings?
3. What would be the likely impacts of increased numbers of visitors?
4. How would outsiders view the gatherings in terms of authenticity and attractiveness?

The primary methods used were ethnographic in nature, mainly participant observation and unstructured interviews. Along with the instructor, five undergraduate students (all female) participated in the course. Old Nemaska Days was visited for a period of four days and three nights, and Chiiwetau for three days and two nights. While not long periods, they were enough to experience many of the activities that the gatherings have to offer and to draw some preliminary conclusions. This is also roughly the average amount of time outsiders spend at the gatherings, according to local officials.

At the gatherings we spoke with local residents about their experiences with and attitudes toward visitors, and their feelings toward increased numbers of guests. Interviews were also conducted with local officials including those responsible for tourism as well as those who organize the gatherings. At the request of these officials we limited our activities to what would be acceptable behaviour for any tourist: to engage in conversations, answer questions about who we were and what we were doing, and ask informal questions regarding residents' feelings about tourism and visitors.<sup>5</sup> We also participated in a variety of activities and social events such as group games; craft workshops; traditional activities such as net fishing and food preparation; eating traditional foods; attending musical performances, pageants, and other entertainment; visiting historical and cultural sites; and observing a traditional "walking out ceremony" where a young boy

was initiated into Cree society. Activities were primarily for local residents, although visitors were able to participate in most. While no fees were charged for most of the activities, payment structures were in place for some services, such as transportation and meals.<sup>6</sup>

Conclusions about the potential for tourism development of the gatherings are based mainly on the experiences of students, who were essentially acting as tourists and experiencing things that many other first-time visitors would. Undergraduate anthropology students are not necessarily typical tourists, for reasons including their pre-existing knowledge about the Cree and about tourism. Yet most other visitors we met had at least some experience living or working in the Cree communities, or a professional or social connection with one or more residents. Few were there as first-time visitors or had planned their trip through the tourism office. At Old Nemaska, for example, the only non-Cree we met were a preacher who had lived at the old post more than 40 years ago; two nurses who worked for the Cree Board of Health and Social Services; a psychologist who had worked as a counsellor in the Cree communities for a number of years; and a group of three travellers spending a night at the gathering before going north to join Cree friends at a fishing camp. Compared to these other visitors, the reactions of five young American women who had never been to the Cree communities before might be more typical of first-time tourists. In other articles (Ettenger, 2008b, 2009) I describe the methods of the field course and explore the value of ethnographic research methods and field courses for tourism education and research. Others who describe similar ethnographic field courses include Croy and Hall (2003), Diamante and Wallace (2004), Ruhanen (2005), and Wallace (2004).

### *Old Nemaska Days*

Nemaska is several hundred kilometres north of Montreal and Quebec, connected by a notorious gravel road, called the Route du Nord, to the town of Chibougamou and points south. A large Hydro-Québec work camp and electricity substation are nearby, along with an airport that mainly serves non-Cree workers. Other than power lines, the region surrounding Nemaska was largely spared the environmental impacts of the first phase of the James Bay hydroelectric project. Projects built since the signing of the New Relationship Agreement, however, have had a major impact on the surrounding landscape, damming and diverting the Rupert River south of Nemaska, constructing new generating stations on the Eastmain River to the north, and building new roads and other infrastructure throughout Nemaska territory. There is also extensive mineral prospecting taking place in the area,

and the community itself has been affected by an influx of revenue related to the hydro projects and other development.

The former site of Nemaska, prior to construction of a new village in the late 1970s, was on Lake Nemaska (also spelled Nemiscau), along the Rupert River about halfway between the fur-trading posts of Rupert House on the coast and Mistassini Post inland. Nemaska means “place to fish” in Cree, and the site was an important summer gathering place in part for this reason. Fur trading posts were established in this area by the 1600s, with the final one being a Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) post that operated from the early 1900s until the late 1960s (Francis and Morantz, 1983; Morantz, 2002). When this post closed, and with the expectation that the village and surrounding area were to be flooded by a planned hydroelectric project, the people of Nemaska Post moved to neighbouring Cree communities where they had family connections. In the late 1970s, following the signing of the JBNQA, a new village was created on the shores of Champion Lake, about eighty kilometres (fifty miles) northeast of the old village. Families from Old Nemaska who had been relocated throughout the region returned to the new village, which today is also the home of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and the Cree Regional Authority, making it the de facto capital of the Cree Nation.

Not long after settlement of the new village, some residents began to return to the old post using an access road built along power lines that carry electricity from hydroelectric stations on the La Grande River. Within a few years some small cabins had been built or rebuilt, mostly clustered around a handful of buildings that remained from the old village. In the late 1980s the first “Old Nemaska Days,” a gathering of residents at the old village site, was held. According to one of the event’s founders, Isaac Meskino, the main purpose was to allow residents to revisit their former home, get away from the stress of modern community life, and enjoy traditional activities and foods. While the first few years featured activities such as games and workshops, in more recent years the gatherings have become less structured and more about family, friends, and relaxation (Meskino, 2007). More than 300 people, or about half the community’s residents, take part each year, visiting the site for at least part of the two-week gathering. A small number of outsiders also visit, although tourism is not a major part of the gathering.

Getting to Old Nemaska is challenging. From the new community of Nemaska one must drive for half an hour or so on the Route du Nord, then take a rough access road another thirty minutes or more to a boat launch where dozens of pickup trucks are parked. We were driven to this area by a “roadrunner” paid by the band to transport local residents and visitors from

the community to the gathering. Once at the dock, we waited several hours for a large, open “boat taxi” to pick us up with our gear and transport us to Old Nemaska, nearly an hour’s ride away. Summer weather in this region can be cold, rainy, and windy (as it was that day), or hot and dry, making it imperative that visitors come prepared for all conditions. It is generally left up to travellers to bring what they need for such an adventure, including life vests and raingear. There is little information available on community tourism websites to help one plan a trip to the gatherings; had we not asked we might have even tried to drive our RV camper down the rough access road, which could have been disastrous.

Old Nemaska is on a low hill next to Nemaska Lake (Fig. 2). Boats, a few cabins, and fishnets on drying racks line the beach, with a wooden dock for larger boats at one end. Up a climb from the beach one finds a few small buildings, including a kitchen and dining hall, with an open area for a large tent where various competitions and activities are held. Small cabins and tent frames line several grassy lanes that traverse the settlement parallel to the lakeshore. Most activity takes place near the cabins and in the central area where cultural activities and games are held; elders tend to stay in a more secluded and wooded area at the rear of the settlement. Families often have their own areas for food preparation and other activities, like washing clothes or making crafts.



Figure 2. Old Nemaska Days takes place at the old post on the shores of Nemaska Lake. The site requires road and boat travel to reach, which may make it prohibitive for some travellers.

As visitors, we were told to find a place to pitch our tents, but given no direction beyond that. We picked a spot away from most of the activity of the gathering, where we would not be invading the privacy of other families. This was where the old HBC post was located—highly visible but also exposed to strong winds coming off the lake, which explained why few other families were camped in the area. We were generally left to our own devices, free to wander around and speak with participants, but not actively invited to most of the activities, with the exception of movie night. In Cree communities visitors are often expected to take the initiative in figuring out where to go and what to do. Autonomy is valued, and it may be considered rude to tell someone, even a newcomer, how to conduct themselves. Of course, from the average tourist's perspective, this lack of information and guidance can be challenging if not frustrating. Below, I go into more detail on what we did during our visit and what students thought of the gathering as a potential tourist attraction.

### *Chiiwetau*

The community of Waswanipi lies along a paved highway in the southern part of the James Bay territory, making it one of the most accessible of all the Cree villages. The village is close to several towns with mostly non-Cree residents, including Chapais, Miquelon, and Lebel-sur-Quévillon, that developed as a result of the region's logging and mining industries. It is also connected by a well-travelled east-west roadway to the major towns of Amos, Val d'Or, and Chibougamau. The region has undergone extensive forestry development since the 1960s and is home to several large mines. The surrounding population is largely French-speaking with strong Québécois identity, and the economy is natural resource based.

Old Waswanipi Post, much like Old Nemaska, was an important summer gathering place for Cree families in this part of the territory, and eventually became the site of a fur trading post as well. Like Old Nemaska, the village was abandoned in the 1960s when the HBC post closed. While there is some disagreement about the reasons for closing the post, there is little argument about the outcome: a dispersal of the population to nearby mining and logging towns, "where the men moved around looking for casual labour and the women and children stayed in squatter settlements devoid of any amenities and services" (Morantz, 2002: 200). According to a funding proposal by the Waswanipi First Nation for their 2008 gathering, reasons for moving included new economic opportunities in mining and forestry, but also the threat of flooding from the planned Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert hydroelectric project (Happyjack, 2008).

The old village sits on a gentle hill on an island at the outlet of Waswanipi Lake, about thirty kilometres (twenty miles) west of the modern community of Waswanipi. From the new village, the site (Fig. 3) can be reached by driving about half an hour on forestry roads followed by a ten-minute boat ride, or by a longer boat trip directly from Waswanipi via the Waswanipi River.<sup>4</sup> The area around the old post is still used by some Waswanipi residents for fishing and other activities, and a local outfitter has cabins across the river from the site of the old village. Non-Cree residents of nearby towns also use Waswanipi Lake for fishing, and sport hunters use the surrounding forests for pursuing moose and other game.

Chiiwetau (“Going Back Home”) is an annual event, held in July, where residents of Waswanipi return to their former village for two weeks. The gathering is described as an event where “people gather to remember and reflect on the past and share memories with family and friends on this historical site. It is a time to make new memories and to celebrate and honour our culture, our values and traditions” (Happyjack, 2008). Some 500 people from Waswanipi take part in the gathering each year, according to local organizers, representing about half the community’s population. A few outside visitors also take part, often coming from outside the region. During our three-day stay we met few other visitors, most of them having previously established connections with the community. There were also two staff from the Waswanipi Model Forestry Program and two college students conducting an environmental education program for local children. A fishing derby open to outsiders and with generous prizes was held during part of the gathering and attracted a large number of non-Cree from nearby communities; none stayed at the gathering.

The main focus of activity at the gathering is a large canopy tent near the centre of the site where most evening activities (e.g., music, dances, games, pageants) take place. Nearby are several other key areas: a communal kitchen tent with bench tables for dining; a teepee where sturgeon and other fish caught in the lake are smoked over an open fire; a small building that houses the Wawanipi Cree Culture Department, which organizes the gathering; and a large plywood cabin for visitors. Spreading out from the central area are two main rows of cabins that line wide, grassy paths following former roads in the village. Bordering the site is a low hill to the east, the waterfront to the west, and another hill near the old fur trading post to the south. Craft demonstrations, family cabins selling food, and outhouses (wooden and plastic) are found throughout the site. Numerous small boats with outboard motors are pulled up onto a grassy shoreline (Fig. 3); many residents spend time fishing on the nearby lake or river. The boats are also used to transport

people and goods back and forth to a parking area at the end of the logging road and to a sandy swimming beach about a ten-minute ride away.



Figure 3. Chiiwetau takes place at Old Waswanipi Post, on an island at the outlet of Waswanipi Lake. Like most other Cree gatherings, getting to the site involves both road and boat transport. Advantages to the site from a tourism perspective include a beautiful natural setting with fishing and other activities nearby.

### **Traditional Gatherings as Tourist Attractions: Potential and Challenges**

The main question we asked about the gatherings we attended, and the one that communities and COTA are most interested in the answer to, is “could they be further developed and marketed as tourist attractions?” As visitors, we assessed their likely attractiveness to tourists as well as the ease with which tourists could reach them, the challenges of hosting additional visitors, and some of the problems that might be encountered by both visitors and communities. In this section I describe the potential and challenges to developing the gatherings as tourist attractions; the following section describes the impacts this might have on the gatherings and local residents.

In her assessment of Indigenous tourism potential, Smith (1996) identifies four main attractions that would likely draw tourists: habitat, heritage, history, and handicrafts. Individually or collectively, she argues, these features of Indigenous communities are what many cultural tourists are seeking, and offer the potential for community economic development that reflects local values and interests. Traditional Cree gatherings offer

each of these to varying degrees: they are set in places of natural beauty, mostly along lakes, rivers, or the ocean; they feature elements of traditional Cree heritage, such as foods and family ceremonies; they pay homage to the history of fur trading and summer gatherings in the region; and they feature traditional craft demonstrations and sales. These elements are not always present in obvious ways, however, and the gatherings are not packaged for tourist consumption. Handicrafts, for example, may be difficult to obtain due to limited supply and to demand from other buyers.<sup>7</sup> But for the traveller seeking an “authentic” cultural experience in a northern community, the gatherings offer an opportunity to experience modern Aboriginal culture as it pays tribute to its own past.

Logistically, the gatherings are designed to support visitors, since all of the participants are temporary residents. There is a hosting infrastructure in place that includes dwellings, firewood, drinking water, waste facilities, and food and other needed items. There is labour to help with cooking, camp maintenance, transportation, and other needs (although not all services are available to visitors). The significant costs associated with holding gatherings, often over \$100,000, are generally borne by the community through cultural, recreation, youth, tourism, and other local offices. Some gatherings also receive considerable support from outside sources, including the Niskamoon Corporation, a not-for-profit body established to administer funds from several compensation agreements (Niskamoon, 2011). This means the gatherings are to some extent subsidized for tourists, allowing them to spend money on other things such as crafts.

The gatherings are clearly designed for local residents, however, and tourists may find themselves with little to do, or fending for themselves where they are unfamiliar with customs, language, and norms of behaviour. Typical living conditions at the gatherings might not meet the standards of travellers used to more luxurious accommodations and consistent quality of goods and services. Others might be put off by the fact that most Cree are living in modern cabins and using technologies such as generators to run appliances like refrigerators, televisions, radios, and DVD players. Some gatherings are also difficult to reach, entailing hours of driving from cities like Montreal and Ottawa followed by travel on rough gravel or dirt roads to boat launch areas and boat rides of up to an hour to reach gathering sites. All of these challenges, as well as complex social and cultural issues discussed below, raise the question of whether the gatherings could become popular tourist sites or will remain venues for special interest tourists like small festivals elsewhere (O’Sullivan and Jackson, 2002; McKercher, et al., 2006).

The field course students, under my supervision, prepared a report for COTA and the Cree communities on their experiences during the gatherings and other parts of the trip (Ettenger, 2007). Two students prepared report sections describing the gatherings and what they offer to travellers, as well as problems encountered. For the most part, the gatherings were described as positive experiences offering a number of attractions to visitors, most notably traditional foods, cultural activities, and the ability to observe and interact with local residents and learn about their way of life. Hands-on participation in activities such as craft making and food preparation was deemed as a highlight at both gatherings; however, not all students were able to participate, and not all activities were open to outsiders (see below). Traditional foods were in limited supply, in part because local elders and others are given priority for such foods, and in part because there is simply not enough for the hundreds of participants. In addition, the average Cree diet has become much like that of the wider society, so even at a “traditional gathering” it is not uncommon to see homemade signs advertising hamburgers, tacos, and “pizzaggetti” sold by local families from their cabins. Tourists who believe they will be fed a constant diet of smoked sturgeon, bannock, and moose meat might be surprised at the typical fare served at the gathering, and disappointed to learn that they sometimes need to fend for themselves. Detailed information on what to expect at the gatherings is currently lacking, especially on the Internet, although the local tourism coordinator in Waswanipi did provide us with considerable information and assistance. At the height of the gatherings there may be few officials in town to provide such help, creating an information vacuum detrimental to attracting visitors and getting them to the gatherings.

Other factors that might limit tourism at the gatherings, or give visitors a negative experience, include the absence of dedicated accommodations for visitors; the lack of showers or indoor plumbing; the high level of noise and activity at certain times, including at night; and the lack of structured activities for tourists. All of these were encountered during our own visits, with varying effects on our group. Some students welcomed the authentic nature of the gatherings, knowing they were having essentially the same experiences that local residents expected and enjoyed. Others were frustrated with the lack of services or uncomfortable with sleeping, dining, or hygiene facilities. Understanding their reactions and using their experiences to inform our report was an important aspect of the field course. Most visitors are not there to assess the gatherings as tourism experiences, though, but to enjoy them while learning about Cree culture. Unless they are familiar with conditions common to travel in the North, like rough roads, lack of services,

limited accommodations, expensive food and other goods, and modest levels of hospitality training, visitors might become disenchanting.

Despite these issues, most of the students had positive experiences at the gatherings. They felt welcomed by their hosts, although this depended on the specific community and on their own ability to overcome shyness and cultural and linguistic uncertainty. At Old Nemaska Days, students were initially put off by one local official's comment that we should not bother participants with too many questions, leading them to think that they should not even engage in normal conversation. Over the course of the next three days, however, students became more at ease. As one student wrote for our final team report:

As we walked around the gathering everyone was very friendly and spent time talking to us. Most people were out on their porches or in front of their cabins so it was easy to talk to people and we felt a real sense of community. The children were particularly curious about us and tagged along as we walked around. (Kasia Park, cited in Ettenger, 2007)

Students were even more relaxed at Chiiwetau, which has had more experience with visitors and is somewhat better equipped to provide them with services and activities.

Right away we found that people were very friendly and accommodating. We were treated to a complimentary lunch at the kitchen. When we inquired about the best place to go swimming, many people were more than happy to tell us about the beach, which was a short boat ride away, as well as a nice swimming area near the docks. ... As we approached the swimming area, we had a number of curious and friendly children and teenagers follow us and join us for the swim. (Katherine Karlen, cited in Ettenger, 2007)

As both of these passages make clear, children and youth often act as informal ambassadors for their communities, helping to break the ice with visitors and making them feel welcome.

While the gatherings incorporate many aspects of modern life, there is still an element of cultural dissonance for many visitors. The first language of many residents is Cree, and tourists might be reluctant to strike up conversations in English before knowing how fluent their counterpart is. The high level of autonomy often given to guests in Cree and other northern

communities sometimes means visitors are left to their own devices; for new visitors like my students it was almost essential to have someone willing to engage them in conversations and activities. At Old Nemaska a young woman we met while waiting for a boat ride to the gathering offered food and engaged in conversation (in English) with the students. At Chiiwetau we had a guide in the person of the local tourism coordinator, Julie Ann Cooper, who helped us get to the gathering, found us an open cabin, and gave a tour complete with introductions. We were welcome to participate in activities ranging from woodworking to a public game night under a large pavilion tent. We were also invited to meals in a common dining area that served volunteers and other visitors, which made our stay both easier and more social.

One question students had at the gatherings, and that many cultural tourists might share, is whether the gatherings represent “traditional” Cree culture, modern Cree society, or both. Some visitors might be surprised, for example, by participants’ use of modern technologies. For those whose version of an “authentic Cree experience” does not include movie nights with the latest James Bond film; snack tents selling candy, chips, and soda; the drone of power generators; public address systems playing country and gospel tunes throughout the day; or teenagers dressed like rappers hanging out in front of your cabin, modern Cree gatherings are a paradox. Tourists often have strong ideas about what is “authentic” or “traditional” Aboriginal culture, and are disappointed when communities and events do not live up to these expectations. Zorrilla (2000) notes that this is one of the dilemmas facing Aboriginal communities in Canada as they attempt to develop their tourism industries; some cultural tourists “are out of touch with reality and in a way provoke the development and flourishing [sic] of staging ancient traditions as if they were still alive and well” (Zorrilla, 2000: 5). In my own experiences, I have come across tourists who were disappointed to learn that the Cree do not still live in teepees and spend their lives tracking moose or trapping beaver while wearing caribou-skin coats. Obvious symbols of modernization, especially at a “traditional gathering,” may challenge outsiders’ sensibilities, while to most Cree they are simply conveniences and not contradictions.

Some cultural tourists, fortunately, have more sophisticated notions of authenticity and are looking for experiences that go beyond staged re-enactments of culture designed to satisfy outsiders. If authenticity means experiencing modern Cree life as it is actually lived, engaging in social and cultural interactions that reflect contemporary Cree values and ideals, and taking part in an important local activity rather than one created especially

for outsiders, then the gatherings are indeed “authentic” and would likely be attractive to many cultural tourists. They are modern Cree events with historical overtones, not historical re-enactments, staged cultural festivals, or commercial tourist attractions. At the gatherings we visited, none of what we experienced was designed specifically for tourist consumption, but rather served community needs. Even when we arranged specific experiences, like a boat trip to an ancient rock art site on Nemaska Lake, local residents were also interested in these activities, and several actually joined us on the trip.

Other cultural events we were able to attend, like an Elder’s Pageant at Chiiwetau and a tea and bannock making competition at Old Nemaska Days (Fig. 4), were clearly intended for a local audience. For travellers seeking this kind of “backstage authenticity” (MacCannell, 1999) as opposed to staged or constructed authenticity (MacCannell, 1973; Chhabra et al., 2003; Martin, 2009), the gatherings may be more satisfying than other more “traditional” (but staged) Cree tourism experiences such as bush travel and camping. They might also be more appealing than the staged cultural re-enactments found in other Indigenous festivals around the globe (e.g., Müller and Pettersson, 2006). Finally, visitors looking for the kind of “existential authenticity” described by Wang (1999) and others, with opportunities for meaningful social interactions and personal enrichment, may appreciate the intimate, relaxed, and open settings of the gatherings.



Figure 4. Spectators at a tea and bannock making competition at Old Nemaska Days. Like many activities at the gatherings, this contest, which involves rapidly building a fire, boiling water, and baking traditional bread, is open for outsiders to observe but not to participate in.

## Potential Impacts of Increased Tourism at the Gatherings

While the Cree communities, like many northern places, would welcome additional revenue from tourism, one must consider the likely impacts that additional visitors would bring. Traditional Cree gatherings are local events, developed by and for local residents, and not dependent on tourism revenue. Therefore, additional visitors would have to bring tangible economic benefits to the communities and not create undue negative impacts or interfere with local activities to win acceptance by most residents. To gauge the feelings of residents and officials about tourists and their desire for or tolerance of more visitors, we spoke informally with a number of attendees. We also observed their reactions to us as we engaged in activities at the two gatherings, and considered things said indirectly to us about visitors, such as one official's remarks about a group of university students, who attended Old Nemaska the year before, "bothering people" with their unruly behaviour.

Other than this oblique comment, no other residents or officials we spoke with expressed hostility, resentment, or other negative feelings toward visitors. Most said they welcomed outsiders to the gatherings, and many felt the sites could handle additional visitors. When asked how many more visitors could come to Chiiwetau, one man joked, "As many as they want, as long as they don't sink the island!" Local officials felt that additional visitors could be managed through a combination of spatial distribution (e.g., developing more tent sites) and temporal distribution (such as careful scheduling of travel and activities). A few residents and officials did express reservations about having too many visitors, concerned that they might place excessive demands on infrastructure or interfere with residents' enjoyment of the gatherings. As to how many visitors is too many, that would depend on a number of factors, from practical considerations to more subjective concerns such as when a homegrown festival that celebrates Cree culture and local history becomes a spectacle designed to satisfy curious onlookers.

From a logistical perspective, the overall number of attendees is probably more important than how many visitors are non-Cree. Some growth can be accommodated by gradual enlargement of gathering areas and construction of new cabins and tent sites (something that takes place nearly every year). A large or rapid growth in the number of visitors might be hard to accommodate, however. There are already few open cabins or extra tent sites available at any given time. We were fortunate to find a good tent site at Old Nemaska, but this was partly due to the fact that it was the first week of the gathering, when fewer local residents attend. At Chiiwetau we were offered a cabin built for the Waswanipi Model Forest Program, a sustainable forestry project whose staff often attend the gathering. (A larger cabin designated for

visitors appeared closed while we were there.) Other than these cabins there were few places where visitors could stay unless they brought their own tents. And there were few available cleared tent sites other than in the centre of high-traffic and noisy areas.

Other facilities that could be taxed by high numbers of visitors include the communal kitchens and cafeterias at both sites; these are generally busy places and there is little extra room for diners during meal hours. There are a limited number of outhouses and (at Chiiwetau) portable toilets, and these appeared to be already near the limits of their capacity. There were no showers or running water at either gathering as of 2007, although there were plans to drill a well at Old Waswanipi Post for indoor bathrooms. Other areas and activities that were limited in availability and capacity were craft-making workshops, swimming and bathing areas, and picnic areas. Local goods such as traditional foods (including smoked fish), as well as handmade crafts, were also in limited supply. Too many visitors would place a drain on these highly valued items, which are often preserved for elders, family members, and important Cree visitors. Similarly, while we enjoyed making traditional crafts at small woodworking and basket-making areas, we later heard an elder comment to local youth that they too should have been participating. We wondered whether our own presence at the workshops dissuaded local teenagers due to their shyness, because they saw the craft areas as “tourist activities,” or simply because they found them to be too crowded.

Another danger of having additional tourists at the gatherings is that Cree might eventually feel they are on display at their own events. Currently, with only a few outsiders present, local residents can go about their business and, unless conducting workshops or demonstrations, not feel they are being gawked at or scrutinized. If visitors increase, it might be difficult to ever escape the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990) that many over-visited Indigenous communities face (e.g., Smith, 1989). In terms of social interactions, outsiders can change the gatherings from places of social renewal to staged tourism events. These impacts should be further explored through additional research and community dialogue. Still, given the small numbers of tourists that currently attend the gatherings, and the constraints already described that may limit their numbers in the future, visitors are not likely to modify the gatherings significantly by their presence any time soon.

It is certainly possible that having more visitors at the gatherings will change the nature of the “social economy” (in the sense the term is used by Natcher 2009) generally reinforced there, including values of sharing and reciprocity. The gatherings developed as responses to rapid change in Cree society, and embody a rejection of certain aspects of modern life and

a return to core values of the past (Adelson, 2001). The gatherings were not created to generate economic development, and while they cost considerable money to arrange and operate, the systems of exchange they engender are more reciprocal and egalitarian than most aspects of modern Cree life. The gatherings are in some respects an homage to days past, when people shared food and other resources with one another as a mechanism of both social cohesion and risk reduction in an environment where food scarcity and even starvation were not unknown. Many elders still speak of the days when meat and other foods were shared within and outside the family with only the expectation that the favour would be returned sometime down the road. This kind of sharing is encouraged today at the traditional gatherings, even with outsiders, who clearly will never be in a position to contribute a caribou or moose to the community larder.

Perhaps because of this emphasis on sharing, we were not charged for many goods and services we received at the gatherings, despite our hosts' knowledge that we were there as tourists and expected to pay for what we received. When we insisted on paying for a service, such as private boat travel, there was often reluctance on the part of the provider to set a price, or else the prices suggested were too low to even cover expenses. In short, the norms of the tourism economy, by which operators make their living and cover expenses through adequate pricing, do not apply for the most part during the gatherings. This is quite different than in the communities, where motels, lodges, restaurants, and private crafters all expect to be paid a fair (and usually set) price for goods and services.<sup>8</sup> The issue of payment is complex, but might be resolved through alternative means such as paying for things in the village before or after attending the gathering. The point is that the danger of commodification (Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007) of the gatherings is apparently felt to some degree by local residents, and one response is not to charge visitors for goods and services. Whether this is sustainable from a tourism management perspective is a question that cannot be answered here, and will depend on factors including how many visitors the gatherings receive, what other sources of funding there are, and how local residents feel about the situation.

Most potential impacts described above would not preclude additional tourism development at the gatherings, and could be mitigated through planning and management procedures and visitor rules and codes of conduct (Mason, 1997; Wolfe-Keddie, 1993). Highly-visited Pueblo communities in the American Southwest have developed effective ways of limiting where, when, and what tourists can see and do, while also ensuring economic benefits to community members (Sweet, 2004). Some measures are as simple

as not advertising events and maintaining secrecy about certain rituals; others include firm restrictions on behaviour including prohibition or control of photography, cell phones, and other devices. Like Anglos visiting the Pueblos described by Sweet, we experienced activities during our visits to Old Nemaska and Chiiwetau that were “open and announced” (like evening entertainment) and others that were “open but unannounced” (such as walking out ceremonies), suggesting that communities had set their own limits on tourist engagement. Closed activities, a third category described by Sweet, are generally conducted out of sight of tourists; healing ceremonies and sweat lodges reported by authors like Adelson (2000a, 2000b) at the gatherings would be good examples. A separate category might include events that are open to tourists but further segregated into permissible and prohibited activities. At Chiiwetau, for example, we were encouraged to participate in a woodcarving workshop but only allowed to make small paddles and other secular objects, not the traditional drums that some Cree were making (Fig. 5). Other northern communities faced with impacts of tourism have found similar ways to protect important activities and achieve some level of privacy from the tourist gaze (e.g., Smith, 1989).



Figure 5. Hoops for traditional drums being manufactured at the Chiiwetau gathering. While visitors are allowed to make crafts, they are generally not permitted to create or purchase drums, which have strong spiritual meaning and traditional hunting significance to the Cree.

While some tourist activities and behaviours might be managed to reduce their impacts on the gatherings, others could be more difficult to measure and ameliorate. Numerous authors have discussed the profound traumas suffered by Indigenous peoples as a result of the residential school system in Canada and the U.S. (e.g., Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999; Regan, 2010). Likewise, scholars and residents have discussed negative outcomes of rapid and forced social, cultural, and religious change in Canadian Aboriginal communities (Niezen, 2000; Kirmayer and Valaskakis, 2009). For authors such as Adelson (2000a, 2000b, 2001) and Tanner (2009), modern Cree gatherings developed in part as a response to these traumas and represent sites of healing through reconnection with the past and increased emphasis on family and social values, cultural traditions, and Indigenous spirituality. Unlike some northern Indigenous festivals (e.g., Müller and Pettersson, 2006), Cree gatherings may be as important to communities for social healing and community cohesiveness as they are in terms of cultural heritage and leisure. It must then be asked whether non-Cree tourists in any number could significantly impinge upon this function of the gatherings. After all, it was largely Europeans, Euro-Canadians, and Euro-Americans who were responsible for many of the ills that have afflicted Aboriginal communities, from alcohol and drugs, to imposed religious and educational systems, to the impacts of extractive resource development. Adelson (2001: 299) notes that the gatherings represent a “symbolic opposition” from modern villages and other evidence of the “colonial history” experienced by the Cree and other Aboriginal peoples. If the gatherings are an escape from this history, then tourists could be an unwelcome reminder of this difficult and painful past.

## **Conclusions**

For communities who host them, Indigenous cultural festivals and related events can mean much more than simply showcasing aspects of their heritage; they can also meet important local goals. The Mongolian Naadam festival, for example, is “considered to be a valuable way of reaffirming Mongolian identity and culture for the native audience, some of whom travel great distances to attend. At the same time, the Naadam holiday is a traditional time for families and friends to meet and socialise” (Schofield and Thompson, 2007: 332). Problems can arise, however, when such events are marketed as tourist attractions and when visitors begin to overwhelm either the infrastructure or the meanings that local residents attach to the event. As Quinn (2006: 301) states, “The difficulty stems from the fact that while festivals have an overt outward orientation and premise their very

existence on interaction and the exchange of flows (of people, information, ideas, money, cultural expressions, etc.) they simultaneously constitute arenas within which local knowledge, local ways of living and local creative expressions are reproduced. Enabling the latter to flourish without being overwhelmed by the former is a challenge.”

The linkage of tourism with traditional Cree gatherings has positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the gatherings represent a mobilization of local resources for a short period of intense cultural activity, and as such seem naturally designed to support visitors. There is already an established hosting infrastructure: dwellings are in place; firewood, boughs, and other supplies collected; and food and other items from the community transported. There is ample labour to help with cooking and other chores, and people are being moved from place to place by a combination of road and water travel. As the gatherings typically involve hundreds of local residents over a period of one to two weeks, a few (or even a few dozen) more might not be a substantial burden for communities. Sharing the costs of goods and services between several local agencies and outside funding sources means that tourism operators do not have to shoulder the entire burden of organizing such events for visitors. Any social impacts of having curious outsiders asking questions or participating in activities are ameliorated by the fact that there are dozens of local residents around, so the feeling is still one of a local rather than a touristic event.

There may still be negative impacts of tourism, however, depending on factors such as the number of visitors, lengths of stay, ages and genders, their backgrounds and attitudes toward their hosts, language issues, dietary or other special needs, and so on. A large number of new visitors, or even a few culturally insensitive or demanding tourists (not uncommon in mass tourism settings), could easily detract from the experience of the gatherings for local residents and even for other visitors. And there are cultural, social, and spiritual sides of the gatherings to consider. If they are largely seen by local residents as a “return to the past,” for example, having outsiders who do not share the community’s language, culture, and history could be distracting and even destructive to local goals. If there are elements of healing at the gathering, such as cleansing sweats for substance abusers or healing circles for survivors of residential schools, outsiders could likewise pose a challenge. Even on a more informal level, the presence of outsiders can change the nature of communication and interactions, just as would having a stranger show up at a family reunion.

Questions remain regarding whether tourism represents a potential risk to local cultural practices at Cree gatherings, and how negative impacts

can best be controlled or mitigated. For example, is it possible to segregate visitors from residents spatially or temporally to protect valued cultural knowledge, ceremonies, or other experiences? Should communities make collective decisions regarding which knowledge and activities can be shared with outsiders, and which must be preserved for local residents or other Cree? And can communities find ways to protect strong cultural values like sharing food with guests while also using tourism to provide income for local residents and help support community development goals? These and other questions need to be addressed if tourism development of the gatherings is to be done in a sustainable, culturally appropriate way.

It seems clear that the gatherings could be further developed as cultural heritage tourism attractions where non-Natives can learn about Cree culture and history in an authentic setting. At the same time, measures should be taken to ensure that an influx of visitors does not change the essential purpose of the gatherings, which is to reinforce ideals of community cohesion and connection with past lifeways, places, and practices. Additional research is needed to understand how residents in different communities feel about the benefits and impacts of attracting more visitors to the gatherings, which were created mainly to meet local cultural, social, and recreational needs. If community values and needs can be respected, there is considerable potential for the traditional gatherings to become sites of cultural exchange, fostering an appreciation of diversity among hosts and guests while furthering Cree goals with respect to identity, social cohesion, cultural survival, and recovery from a painful colonial history.

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## Notes

1. I will generally use the term Cree rather than Eeyou (coastal dialect) or Eenou (inland dialect) to include both groups; while the latter terms are more acceptable politically, the term “Cree” is still widely used in the literature and popular media, as well as locally when speaking English.
2. The eight original Cree communities identified in the JBNQA were (alphabetically) Chisasibi, Eastmain, Mistissini, Nemaska, Waskaganish, Waswanipi, Wemindji, and Whapmagoostui. The community of Oujé-Bougoumou was established later following additional negotiations with Quebec and Canada.
3. Canadian First Nations cannot by law engage in profit-making businesses; thus, many establish corporations that either own and control or serve as incubators for local and regional businesses.
4. The entire region surrounding Waswanipi has been heavily logged by private (non-Cree) companies, one of the outcomes of which is a network of dirt and gravel roads by which many local residents reach hunting camps and other areas.
5. While there are more formal measures for assessing social impacts of festivals (e.g., Rollins and Delamere, 2007), we were discouraged from using such techniques during our visits due to local officials’ concerns that such methods would be seen as intrusive by local residents.
6. The lack of an effective system to charge visitors for goods and services, or consistency in actually collecting fees, is both a reflection of traditional Cree hospitality and a challenge for local tourism officials.
7. When we asked about crafts at Chiiwetau, for example, we were told that a buyer from southern Ontario had been there earlier in the week and purchased nearly everything available.
8. On another level it might be argued that commodification has already reached Cree society, with a powerful cash economy that impacts nearly all aspects of life in the communities, including such things as the distribution of traditional foods. The Cree gatherings are already an example of accommodation to and selective use of modern technologies, communication, foods, and other cultural features. At most there might be slight additional pressure to develop certain facilities and services that outsiders find desirable, such as sanitary bathrooms, running water, and electricity. Some communities, including Waswanipi, are already considering such amenities for their own residents’ comfort. The justification of such improvements on the basis of tourist demand might actually be seen as a benefit by community residents and officials, especially if tourism eventually helps pay the costs.

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