The Lore of the Lake: A Call for the (Re)-envisioning the Legends and Myths from Kitchi Gami (Lake Superior)

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Introduction

Imagine a place where the earth is an island shared with tricksters, creatures, giants and other such *manitous* such as grandmother moon Nokomis and Windigo (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998). Long before the first Europeans set eyes on the *Kitchi Gami* (Lake Superior), the *Animikeek* (thunderbirds) would come to hatch their young atop the *Anamikiewakchu* or the "Thunder Mountain" (Thunder Cape and Mount McKay), and travel in storm clouds over the region. Down in the depths of Kitchi Gami, *Mishipiszheu,* the great guardian of the underwater realm ruled over all the waters of this great lake (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998). The two worlds intersect on the earthly plane that is Turtle Island (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998). It is here on the back of the ancient turtle that giants like *Nanaboozho* (the trickster/Manitou) wandered, changing the landscapes at their whims. One of most famous legend of *Nanaboozho* pertains to his current resting place, best known today as the Sleeping Giant (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998). If one takes the time to gaze upon the landscape to really see these formations, then it is not hard to see how this land could have been created by these mythical beings. Understanding how we make sense of our landscapes and seascapes is a fundamental component of integrating, and in some cases, re-integrating individuals, especially those alienated from their lands through colonization (Carr, 2004).

Creation stories and legends are important components of visitor interpretation and educational strategies in protected areas located around *Kitchi Gami*, and as such situate much of our discussion in this article. These legends and lore are part of the current understanding of *Kitchi Gami*, and will, with time, become fundamental components of the interpretation strategies of the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area (LSNMCA). This is particularly important as some sites like *Nanaboozho* are undergoing a renewal of sorts, for the resting form of *Nanaboozho* now figures prominently in the city of Thunder Bay's tourism promotion (see *Win 7 Days with the Giant* at http://www.visitthunderbay.com/contests/7days/). Potential visitors are enticed to click on a hyperlink from the main page to find out more about this Anishnabee legend (City of Thunder Bay, 2009a). Unfortunately, the story provided, in a nutshell, boils down to "two white men sought to obtain the whereabouts [of the source of local silver] in order to make themselves fabulously rich. After filling [a] Sioux scout with liquor they persuaded him to show them the way to the mine." The spirits took offence, drowned the white men and, for revealing the secrets of the Anishnabee silver, turned the Sioux scout into the Sleeping Giant. Although readers are provided with an explanatory note at the end that they should recognize that "there are numerous versions of the legend of the Sleeping Giant and one is not necessarily more valid than another," (City of Thunder Bay, 2009b). The fact that this particular depiction of *Nanaboozho* is the only one provided on the website provides a certain level of perceived credibility, authenticity, and factuality to it.

While the analysis of this "legend" is not the aim of this chapter, it is important to understand that this particular depiction of *Nanaboozho* contains various stereotypes of indigenous peoples that can be considered by some as offensive. This "legend" also demonstrates that even current tourism efforts at promotion in the region often unintentionally perpetuate centuries of misconceptions. To understand how such depictions are created and to avoid such occurrences from happening, it is necessary that we acknowledge the role of colonization in Canada, and in Ontario more specifically, and realize that new interpretative material must not just rely on past "published" works, but undertake consultation and a process of "ground truthing" with the original inhabitants of the area covered by the LSNMCA. Before this can be accomplished however, we can consult the available literature on the subject on the lore of the lake. What this literature review revealed is that very little regarding Anishnabee lore is available either in Fort William, Red Rock, or Plays Plat First Nations, or the city of Thunder Bay. A review of websites of nearby provincial parks and national parks did little to enhance our understanding. These stories, compiled from a number of sources are only starting points. We have used regionally available materials, however, while we have been sensitive, the very nature of the source material used – many of them based on nineteenth century narratives – must be augmented by the LSNMCA through consultation with aboriginal communities. The LSNMCA provides the opportunity to properly consult and engage First Nations on the various depictions of these legends.

Before we proceed any further, it is crucial that we discuss the rational for using particular names and also the spelling of these. They include in alphabetical order: *Animikeek, Anishnabee*, *Kitchi Gami*, *Mishipiszheu*, and *Nanaboozho*. The term *Animikeek* is used over *Animike wekwed* to designate the celestial beings (i.e., the thunderbirds, giant eagles) who resided along the various mountain tops or mesa's found in the region. Anishnabee (Anishabek) is the term used instead of "Ojibwe" in this text because it is the preferred term for citizens of the Fort William, Red Rock, and Pays Plat First Nations. *Kitchi Gami* also spelled Kitchi Kami, is the wording used for *Anishnabe Chi Gaming* "the Anishnabee's Ocean," the big waters, the great waters, Lake Superior. Although also called *Gitchie-anahimi-bezheu* the "great underwater wildcat," *Muchi-manidoo* (fearsome spirit) and Mishepeshu, we have selected *Mishipiszheu*, as "the most likely candidate for this title is the great guardian of the underwater realm" (Conway & Conway, 1990, p. 26). Five different spellings of *Nanaboozho* were found, they include Naniboujou, Nanabijou, Nanibijou, and Nanboosho. We selected *Nanaboozho*. The fact, that there are multiple spellings of these terms is indicative of oral traditions, various dialects, and the multiple meanings of Aboriginal narratives in Canada (Unwin, 2008). According to Lemelin and Blangy (2009) one of the first things Euro-Canadian researchers should do is "recognize the importance of labels and designations, this is not an exercise in semantics, it is the development of capacity and the implementation of respect" (2009, p. 80).

To avoid the type of interpretation of the region's past that has been the staple of visitor experiences for the last century, those involved in the creation of the LSNMCA need to understand the contextual fluidity in oral societies and the multiple narratives associated with legends and lore. Such discussions are particular important as the LSNMCA develops its interim management plan, a plan that will need to recognized Parks Canada's increasing attention to creating memorable visitor experiences as well as

maintaining sustainability on the land. However, the accurate and thorough research required is complex as the struggles and compromises provided by the written word, and hesitation of some Elders and First Nation members vis-à-vis the written, needs to be taken into consideration. We will discuss how this can be accomplished in the latter sections of the chapter.

The Anishnabee and Kitchi Gami

The Anishnabee have lived and depended on *Kitchi Gami* from time immemorial. They are, according to some legends, the chosen people of *Nanaboozho*. The knowledge of the Anishnabee regarding the lake was crucial, if somewhat disregarded in the descriptions of the early "exploration" of the North American continent by European explorers. According to European lore, *Kitchi Gami* was "discovered" by Etienne Brule in 1618. On 2 September 1665, Father Allouez entered Lake Superior and named it "Tracy", after the Marquis de Tracy, Lieutenant Governor of that period. On the Jesuit maps of 1670-71, it is called "Lac Tracy, ou Superieur" and shortly after, the second, and much more suitable name became general (Albanese 1984; Lytwyn, 1995; Morrison 2001; Stuart 2003).

The establishment of over 100 different protected areas such as Pukaswka National Park and Lake Superior and Sleeping Giant Provincial Parks in Ontario, Isle Royale National Park and Biosphere Reserve in Michigan, and Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin, and more recent initiatives to protect the lake's aquatic environments such as the LSNMCA in Ontario, and the proposed Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve in Wisconsin, attest to the socio-ecological importance of *Kitchi-Gami* in North America. Tourism and visitor experiences are a key component in the establishment and operation of these protected areas, as is interpretation to the tourism industry and tourists (Conway & Conway, 1990; Lemelin et al., in-press).

Parks Canada defines "visitor experiences as the sum total of an individual's personal interaction with heritage places, people and events. It is an interaction that awakens their senses, affects their emotions, stimulates their mind and leaves them with a sense of personal connection to these special places" (Danchuk, 2008). This suggests that the intent of visitor experiences is for visitors to see National Parks, National Historic Sites, and National Marine Conservation Areas as places where visitors can explore on their own terms what it means to be Canadian and create there, their own meaningful experiences and memories (Danchuk, 2008). Stories, legends and lore whether told by guides or showcased in interpretation centres are central to the visitor experiences offered in provincial and national parks in Ontario and Canada. Along the north-shore various accounts of *Nanaboozho* and *Mishipizheu* have been shared with visitors, others such as those relating to *Animikeek* are less well known (Lankford, 2006). This chapter provides an overview of three central figures: *Mishipiszheu*, *Animikeek*, and *Nanaboozho*. In many ways, these creatures were the earliest guardians and protectors of *Kitchi Gami*.

Mishipiszheu (the great guardian of the underwater realm)

Also called *Gitchie-anahimi-bezheu* the "great underwater wildcat," *Mishipiszheu*, in some of the most famous pictographs in Canada, is often depicted as lynx like creature with tufts of furs sticking out from his cheeks, horns on its head, and dragon-like spines running the length of its back and tail (Conway & Conway, 1990). According to other interpretations it is a shape-shifting entity capable of being in several places at once (Andra-Warner, 2008). Often demonized, it has also been called an avenging creature, a beach stalker, a child stealer. The word *creature* is problematic, "for the thing isn't so

much a creature as a spirit, and not so much a spirit as a composite entity – it is a bird, a loon, a serpent, a lynx, a merman, a trickster" (Unwin, 2008, p. 24). What is known for sure about *Mishipiszheu* is that it resides underwater with the *Chignebikoog* (giant serpents), and that it controls the waters of the Great Lakes, and Kitchi-Gami in particular (Unwin, 2007).

According Unwin (2008) *Mishipizheu*'s dwellings included various "wigwam-like" mountains located on the island of Michipicoten and Michimakinaka, and underwater caves. Because it can appear at any time, at any moment often during sudden squalls, the Anishnabee, reliant as they were on the water for transportation, would try to appease this "unpredictable Manitou with offerings of tobacco and respect" (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998, pp. xvii-xviii). Even today, native fishermen speak guardedly about the many legends of *Mishipiszheu*. Thus, in many ways, *Mishipiszheu* is the ultimate metaphor for *Kitchi Gami* - powerful, mysterious and ultimately very dangerous (Conway & Conway, 1990).

The first European to actually see and document *Mishipizheu* was Father Paul Le Jeune, the renowned editor of the *Jesuit Relations.* In 1636 he watched a young man catch a fish, which he described as resembling a great lizard with four feet and a long tail. The young man quickly returned the creature to the water, explaining to the "Jesuit that it would be a mistake to keep it, since it caused enormous winds on the water" (Unwin, 2008, p. 27). Claude Jean Allouez reported a similar narrative in 1667. Bishop Frederick Baraga, referred to the creature as a lion, while Nicholas Perrot, a well-known 19th century French fur trader in Wisconsin claimed the creature had a large tail, which could at the slightest movement create great storms (Andra-Warner, 2008). Vincent St. Germain, a trader and shareholder in the North West Company noted that "the frequent appearance of this extraordinary animal in the spot has given rise to the superstitious belief among the Natives that the God of the Waters had fixed upon this for his residence" (Unwin, 2008, p. 28). In 1812-30 years after seeing *Mishipiszheu*, St. Germain filed a sworn affidavit in Montreal court to record his story of the sea creature off Pie Island, an island located near the present day location of Fort William First Nation (Andra-Warner, 2008). Even the acclaimed zoologist and geologist Louis Agassiz was a firm believer and postulated that *Mishipiszheu* could be a living fossil. In 1894, the crew of two steamers reported seeing a sea serpent about 75 feet long, near the Presque Isle River, the monster, thus acquired a new name of Pressie, short for Presque Isle where she was sighted. A year later, Captain George Robarge, along with his second mate and watchman observed a sea serpent for over 5 minutes. In more modern times, a hiker and a recreational fisher claim to have seen the creature (Andra-Warner, 2008). Many of these legends and stories of *Mishipiszheu* have been linked to the Agawa pictographs located in Lake Superior Provincial Park and elsewhere in Northwestern Ontario (Pukaskwa National Park, Quetico Provincial Park).

Although there have been 117 recorded images at the Agawa Rock, most likely painted by shamans within the last 500 years. Today only 35 figures, including the three paintings of *Mishipiszheu* are visible (Conway & Conway, 1990). The most arresting image found at Agawa Rock, according to Conway and Conway (1990) is the mysterious image of *Mishipiszheu.* Some speculate that *Mishipiszheu* "protects those it looks directly upon which may explain why it is sometimes painted with its face staring straight out from the rocks, an unusual pose for manitous" (Unwin, 2008, p. 26). Yet, only the

powerful dare call upon it for support. Most travelers routinely left offerings "at these rocks as an insurance policy for safe travel on the Great Lake" (Conway & Conway, 1990, p. 49).

In addition to the various depictions of *Mishipiszheu* in pictographs, *Mishipiszheu* is also the subject of many legends throughout the northern Lake Huron and Lake Superior areas. Unusual rock formations found near Thunder Bay and Thessalon, Ontario are also associated with it (Conway & Conway, 1990). The enemies of *Mishipiszheu* and protectors of the Anishnabee, were *Animikee* and *Nanaboozho*, both are described next.

Animikeek (Thunderbird, Thunderers, Giant Eagles)

The *Animikeek* were the protectors of the Anishnabee who lived and nested on *Anamikiewakchu* "Thunder Mountain" (i.e., Thunder Cape and Mount McKay). Another name for this mountain was *Missanbaing Wajdew* (Crane Mountain). All of these associations between birds and the mountains were discarded by the Euro-Canadian appropriation of these natural features. In 1857, H. Y. Hind called it "Mount McKay", though in the majority of references up to the 1880s, it was called McKay's Mountain'. According to European, and Euro-Canadian lore, it was named after a free trader, William McKay. The story goes that trader McKay was in the habit of climbing the mountain as his daily constitutional (Saj & Andra-Warner, 2007). Today, the Fort William First Nation also calls the mountain *Animki*, and visitors are permitted on the first plateau where a panoramic view of the city and *Kitchi Gami* can be seen. A hiking trail also provides access to the second plateau.

Living along cliffs and mountains tops, and travelling in storms clouds the voice of the *Anikikeek* was the thunder and the lightning were flashes from their eyes (Redsky, 1972). According to numerous legends the *Animikeek* protected the Anishnabee by hunting *Mishipiszheu* and *Chignebikoog* (Conway & Conway, 1990). One particular legend tells the story of the Thunderers protecting an unsuspecting woman doing her laundry, when suddenly a portion of the sky darkened, waters swirled, and great flashes of lightning appeared. The lady in question recalled seeing a silvery form possibly a *Chignebikoog* being carried into the sky by a giant thunderbird (Conway & Conway, 1990).

Nanaboozho (Manitou/Trickster)

In the creation myth of the Anishnabee, *Nanaboozho* fought with *Mishipiszheu* to secure the rights of the Anishnabee. After his victory, "one legend describes how Nanaboozho moved his people to the end of Lake Superior to protect them from impending catastrophe" (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998, pp. xix). Like most Manitou/tricksters, *Nanaboozho* was foolish and wise, and vindictive and charitable. Many of the most impressive land formations around *Kitchi Gami* such as Sleeping Giant, Devil's Warehouse and Devil's Chair are associated with him (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998). In one story, *Kitchi Gami* is said: …to have been created when a beaver build a dam at Sault Ste. Marie. One time, when Nanaboozho was too lazy to trap the beaver, he began pulling apart its dam so that beaver would crawl out. In so doing, he created the St. Marys Rapids that drain the waters from Superior (Chisholm & Gutsche, 1998, pp. xix). According to another legend, *Nanboozho* now sleeps at the tip of Sibley Point in Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, guarding his people at the lake's head.

While the challenges associated with these legends have been discussed, the physical depictions of these, in pictographs and petroglyph form provide other issues because they

attract visitors. In the ensuing discussion, we examine how some petroglyphs (aboriginal rock carvings) and pictographs (rock paintings) found along the shoreline of *Kitchi Gami* are protected in Ontario and in Canada.

The Management and Protection of Pictographs and Petroglyphs in Ontario

Protected pictographs and petroglyphs are found throughout Canada (e.g., Petroglyph Provincial Park, B.C., Kejimkujik National Park, Nova Scotia), and the world (e.g., the Bhimbetka Rock Shelters World Heritage Site, India; Kakadu National Park, Australia; Petroglyph National Monument, New Mexico). For this discussion of management, we focus on the pictographs found along the shores of *Kitchi Gami* in the Lake Superior Provincial Park, Pukaskwa National Park, the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, and Petroglyphs Provincial Park. All of these protected areas are found within the province of Ontario.

According to Conway and Conway (1990), very few pictographs sites have been discovered on Lake Superior. The most famous and accessible is the image of *Mishipzheu* on the Agawa Rock. This particular pictograph is a tourist destination providing parking spots and some interpretation (i.e., signs, and texts) to visitors. Strategies aimed at minimizing anthropogenic impacts have meet with various levels of success.

> Parks officials gamely tried to erect a steel walkway, bolting it to the rocks so that people could come and examine the images. Superior ripped the rails down within a year. Now to see Mishipzheu, visitors must flatten themselves face-first against the ancient rocks, hold on a chain. The pictograms themselves are fading; enormous chunks of rock have dropped into the water (Unwin, 2008, p. 28).

Other pictographs located along the north shore of Lake Superior include a site in Pukaskwa National Park, and two more sites within the LSNMCA. The first of these two sites is found near the mouth of the Nipigon River and is accessible by boat or canoe, the second is located near Worthington Bay, near the community of Schreiber, and is accessible by boat and by land. While numerous figures are found at the Nipigon river pictographs, the most famous depiction is of *Maymaygwayshi* (Little Spirit or Rock Medicine Man) (Conway & Conway, 1990). Increasing visitation to this latter pictograph could, without proper management, create similar challenges to those at Agawa Rock.

The largest known concentrations of petroglyphs in Canada are found in Petroglyph Provincial Park. These 900 or so petroglyphs known as *kinomagewapkong* (the teaching rocks) depict various animals like turtles, snakes, and birds, humans, and celestial entities. The carvings have been dated between 900 and 1400 CE (Vastokas & Vastokas, 1973). The site was initially protected with a wire fence. However, various improvements to the site have included the construction of a learning centre, a raised walkway encircling the site and an "alter" for tobacco gifts (Spielman & Unger, 2000). Of particular importance is the engagement of the First Nation with the management of this site (Spielman & Unger, 2000).

These examples provide some insights into how pictographs and petroglyphs can become tourist attractions. In some cases, proper management strategies have lessened the impacts on these attractions, while in others, challenges associated to site access and visitation have exacerbated the difficulties in preserving these sites. In the case of the two sites found near or in the LSNMCA, it is of particular importance that these sites be

protected through proper inventories, various management strategies, including zoning, interpretation, codes of conducts, and the construction (if required) of infrastructures.

Conclusion

In this discussion we attempted to provide an alternative voice in the lore of the lake, while also highlighting the multiple depictions of *Animikeek, Mishipiszheu*, and *Nanaboozho*. Although some discussions regarding the limitations associated with the transformation of oral lore to the written word, and the cultural appropriation of some of these legends were acknowledged, we recognize that much of these data were derived from written documentation, and from some informal discussions with Anishnabee citizens from Fort William, Red Rock, and Pays Plat First Nations. Therefore, what will also be required is much more work such as interviewing various elders and members regarding the appropriate spelling of the names, and depictions of these stories. It is important that researchers not be intent on finding the one "true" legend, but rather focus on the purposes of and contexts in which the various versions arise. The recognition of "multiple interpretations" as Ham and Weiler's (2002) study of wildlife tourists and Hueneke and Baker (2009) in their study in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) in Australia, recognize that all narratives are didactic and contextualized, and that both interpreters and participants are agents in this process. After the transcription of these interviews, the stories could be written down, recorded, presented back to the participants and communities and then incorporated into respectful interpretation strategies. Some suggestions for future presentations of these legends is that guides and interpretation centre(s) through audio and visual technologies provide visitors with various versions of these stories, and allow the Anishnabee to be heard "in their own voices" and expose the visitors to both the complexity of oral traditions and multiplicity of meanings attached to the landscape and lakescapes (see Ham & Weiler 2002 for further details). Recognizing that these legends extend beyond the realm of creation stories and mythical figures is, according to Carr (2004) and Lemelin and Blangy (2009), an acknowledgement of past injustices, and the implementation of respect and empowerment for the Anishnabee. While much more research needs to be done, it is, using the symbolism of this text, one small step for *Nanaboozho*, and one giant leap for the Anishnabee.

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