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## Presence and recognition of Indigenous Cultural Heritage under the World Heritage Convention

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I have been fortunate to work in the World Heritage domain in various roles, beginning with my academic study –already over 15 years ago– then as a heritage officer with the Old Town Lunenburg World Heritage site, as a consultant at the World Heritage Centre, at the provincial heritage level in Canada, and finally as a focal point at Parks Canada, Canada’s State Party representative. In that time, I have always continued to learn on the job, and in working with and observing others. Perhaps the most profound area of growth for me has been witnessing the increasing presence and recognition of Indigenous cultural heritage under the *World Heritage Convention*, and the parallel discussions of the strong ties between natural and cultural heritage stewardship.

Since the start of the new millennium, an increasing number of State Parties have

put considerable efforts into bringing forth nominations to the *World Heritage List* for places that express Indigenous heritage and are very often managed under traditional Indigenous stewardship. It is heartening to see that these have been proposed and inscribed from all corners of the world, including Budj Bim (Australia); †Khomani Cultural Landscape (South Africa); Aasivissuit – Nipisat (Greenland, Denmark); Chiribiquete National Park (Colombia); East Rennell (Solomon Islands). Many more are included on Tentative Lists worldwide.

From the early days of my employment with Parks Canada, I had the honour to work with Indigenous and provincial partners on the nomination of Pimachiowin Aki: an ambitious mixed site nomination for an expansive boreal forest area and cultural landscape. Working with partners on

this project over many years has undoubtedly been one of the biggest learning opportunities I've had, offering me lessons in community engagement, Canadian culture, and World Heritage all at once. In January 2012, Canada submitted Pimachiowin Aki for Committee consideration at its 37<sup>th</sup> session. While being extremely positive about the Indigenous community-driven engagement in the nomination, the World Heritage Committee concluded that the nomination did not, at that time, satisfy all the criteria and requirements for inscription.

Nonetheless, with that decision this nomination became widely regarded as one of the catalysts for new considerations in the recognition of natural and cultural values together in heritage conservation. The proposed ouv stressed that these values were fully integrated and a manifestation of an ancient, enduring, and sustainable kinship between culture and nature. The World Heritage Committee's 2013 decision on Pimachiowin Aki (37 COM 8B.19) recognized that discussions on the nomination "have raised fundamental questions in terms of how the indissoluble bonds that exist in some places between culture and nature can be recognized on the *World Heritage List*."

In 2018, after further work by all the Canadian partners to take into account the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies and the Committee's first decision, the site was subsequently inscribed on the *World Heritage List* (42 COM 8B.11). This was indeed a memorable day – falling by chance on Canada's national day of July 1<sup>st</sup>. It was a long road to get to that point but many valuable lessons were learned and also taught along the way.

This World Heritage site continues to generate considerable interest internationally,

and is seen as advancing the lens through which Indigenous heritage and Indigenous cultural landscapes are considered within the World Heritage community. Canada continues to advance dialogue on nature-culture links, and Canada's place at the forefront of this international discussion is widely recognized by fellow State Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* and other international partners. Our work in World Heritage as a State Party and as individual professionals, with our community and site manager partners, helped pave the way for where we are today, at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention.

It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous worldviews may differ fundamentally from the philosophies that have traditionally guided the establishment of protected areas, where conservation is achieved by restricting activities and limiting access. In many Indigenous worldviews, conservation is achieved when the relationships and uses that have conserved the lands and waters for thousands of years remain intact or are re-established.

Another personal highlight of my work in World Heritage was witnessing the creation of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage, rising out of the 2017 site managers' forum in Krakow, Poland. I look forward to seeing related ties made by World Heritage practitioners across the UN system, notably with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

Working directly on projects such as the Pimachiowin Aki nomination gave me optimism about the future for a more balanced and 3-dimensional World Heritage. We continue looking for opportunities to champion efforts aimed at reconnecting

Indigenous peoples to their traditional lands and activities, enabling Indigenous peoples to fulfill their roles as traditional

stewards of lands and waters within their places, and maintaining the reciprocal relationships that have existed for millennia.



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