

A Forgotten Land: Tsek'ehne Concepts of Wilderness and Development in the Finlay-Parsnip Watershed of Northern British Columbia, 1871-1956

Job/Project Description:

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This position is part of the larger project and entails the examination of historical records and based on the findings compiling a database and/or mapping out locations in northern British Columbia. Although the location is given as the Prince George Campus this job can be conducted anywhere as long as the student periodically has an internet connection.

Project Description

Concepts of wilderness can vary from person to person. This simple fact may seem inconsequential until you realized that these differing perceptions influence how one views proposed economic developments. Nowhere is this better seen today than with the Transmountain Expansion Project. Despite not existing, the question of whether it is worth building it, and risking an environmentally devastating oil spill, has resulted in numerous protests (on both sides), a federal court ruling, and the spending of \$4.5 billion in tax payer money, ostensibly to ensure its construction. Clearly, an economic development does not have to be built to affect society or reveal how a concept that is deceptively simple, such as wilderness, can play a role in its success. After all for fifty years oil has moved through the Transmountain pipeline. This research program aims to explore this role. In it I propose to examine the relationship between concepts of wilderness and the failure to successfully farm or operate mines, like the Ingenika Mine, in the Finlay-Parsnip watershed of northern British Columbia between 1871 and 1956. Based on preliminary research it appears there was a debate between those who saw the area as untouched wilderness and those who saw it as untamable wilderness that hindered private investment and state funding for infrastructure projects like the Turgeon Highway and Pacific Northern and Omineca Railway. Beyond this hypothesis, however, it also appears the local Tsek'ehne actively encouraged outsiders to view their homeland as untamable in the hopes of preventing widespread non-Tsek'ehne settlement and development. In doing so it appears they were engaging in colonial discourses to resist economic and settler colonization.