



Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations

The Only Multi-Racial Worldwide Indigenous Confederacy In Existence

VISIT WITH THE AUNDECK FIRST NATION

By Norman Faria

It was with an enjoyable feeling as we headed north out of Toronto in Canada's Ontario province one weekday morning last September. Destination was the island of Manitoulin on the northern shores of Lake Huron.

There, I hoped once again the renew acquaintances with Patrick "Wedaseh" Madahbee, the Chief of the Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation (formerly Sucker Creek Indian Reserve).

To get there, my friend and I took the 400 Highway and then Highway 69 through the industrial (nickel mining) city of Sudbury. The approximately 500 kilometre (320 miles) trip is an exhilarating six hour drive. On the way, we stopped to admire farmlands and historic barns and small towns and stopped at restaurants for tea and hamburger or muffins.

Manitoulin was first settled by Canada's Aboriginal, or native, peoples. Collectively, they are known as First Nations. Manitoulin has six First Nations, collectively known as Anshinaabe but popularly known by three main groupings, the Objive, the Odawa and the Pottawatomi. They are similar genetically to Guyana's Amerindians. The ancestors of both of them came across from China many hundreds of centuries before to settle the Americas. Manitoulin's main town of Little Current was started in 1880 by an Objive man George Abotossawy and his family. Some of their descendents still reside in the Aundeck community and other parts of the island where they were moved following arrival of non-native settlers.

It is a large island. It is 2766 square kilometres (1068 square miles) and is the largest island in freshwater in the world. We saw deer running in the woodlands, woodpeckers and crows and had local hawberries to eat. There is a sizeable tourist presence in summer to swell the 12,500 permanent residents, says staff reporter Susan Hart at the Manitoulin Expositor weekly newspaper when I paid a courtesy call.

The provincial government must be commended for promoting tourism, not only for Canadians but those like myself. I found the parks, signage and other historical attractions well maintained and presented.

I was happy too to once again meet with long time and now retired residents Jerry and Lois Bond, whose ancestors came from Europe. Jerry has the beneficial hobby of buying old tractors from around the province and restoring them. One time I saw him working on one made in the 1940s (a Ford, I think it was).

At the Aundeck First Nation office, I brought greetings from the Guyana Government, on behalf of Consulate General in Toronto and also from the Hon. Pauline Sukhai, Guyana's Minister of Amerindian Affairs. I expressed my admiration for the attractions and achievements of the community and that of all the island's residents and I presented Chief Madahbee with tourist literature for him and his family and others to visit Guyana. He said he was familiar with the Caribbean and Guyana. Some of his people had done advisory work in Trinidad on fish farming on a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) project. Some people from other First Nations on the island had taken trips on cruise liners to the Caribbean, he said.

How are things going, I asked ? "Our ENDAA-AANY tourist facility on the lakeshore, where we rent lodges to visitors, is doing well. People come from all over, including from Europe. It is open year round and I am proud to say our local craftspeople made the furniture from local woods."

Last time we met, he had given me some trout from the Aundeck's fish farming enterprise. It was really good. Chief Madahbee: "The Wabuno Fish Farm is holding its own. Since the processing plant was opened in 1994, we have provided employment where there are now 75 full and part time employees. We look forward to further progress for our community and the island as a whole."

There are 700 registered members of Aundeck on the 897 hectare community land . All told, there are about 42,000 registered Aboriginal people in Ontario province. Country wide, according to the 2006 census, there are 1,172,790, or about 3.8 per cent of Canada's population.

Without touching too heavily on Canadian politics, Chief Madahbee, who in addition to heading the local Council, is also Chairman of the United Chiefs and Councils of Manitoulin Island and involved with the Union of Ontario Indians, says there are the "ongoing issues of land claims". As with other native bands across Canada, there is communication with the Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (present Minister Hon. Chuck Strahl) of the federal Canadian government in Ottawa in connection with economic development and other programmes. The word

"Indian" , though considered offensive today, is apparently retained by the Ministry for convenience reasons. It stems from Columbus' naming of the peoples whom he first met in the Caribbean while getting lost on his way to China. It doesn't refer to Indians as in Indo-Guyanese.

Among the main tasks of native peoples organisations such as the Aundeck Council is to preserve indigenous culture . But they also celebrate traditional North American special occasions such as Halloween and Christmas and national days like Canada Day.. So, Chief Madahbee explains, there would be quite a few Christmas trees and fairy lights at this time in community houses. And they don't have far to go to get them - cut them right in their back yard !

On a visit to the Wikwemikong, a First Nation on the north eastern side of the island a few years back, I saw the photos on the walls of Aboriginal Manitoulians who served with the Canadian army in World War II.

Canada's native peoples, like the Amerindians in Guyana, have a long and proud history of socio-economic and political development and achievements. Among other things, they assisted later settlers from Europe to adjust to the new lands, though being repaid with tragic results in some cases.

They have stood up for their rights. In the 1880s , native peoples took part in the "North West Rebellion" led by Louis Riel in what is now Manitoba province. Most serious analysts said it came about because of the cruel poverty and hardships brought about in part by dwindling herds of a main food source, the buffalo . These cow-like animals were being killed off in an unsustainable way by non-native people.

Riel was actually what is termed a "Metis". This is a mix of native peoples, French Canadian, Scotch or English stock. He was hanged for treason in 1885 by the Canadian overnment but debate has started in the Canadian parliament today recognising him in a different light. He is for example considered one of the founders of the praire province of Manitoba. A unveiling of a plaque in 1972 in Battleford honouring him was attended by a representative of the Federal government.

One of the great Canadian native peoples chiefs was Pihtokahanapiwiyn (popularly known as Poundmaker). A Cree, he sided with Riel and was also tried and convicted for treason . Released on account of ill health caused by the imprisonment, he died at age 44 in 1886.

It was a memorable occasion indeed for me to meet once again with Chief Madahbee and his courteous and welcoming staff. To once again recall the fine achievements of Canadian native peoples and to learn more about them working with Canadian authorities and mainstream Canadian people to meet ongoing challenges including climate change which is affecting native peoples' hunting patterns for example.

On a peninsular of the island, while on an afternoon hike, I celebrate friendship and goodwill (and also to mark my way back) by erecting a symbolic traditional native people stone arrangement called the INUKSUK..

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