

Reflection on visiting the canadian canoe museum – an important part of canada's ...

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The Canadian Canoe Museum is a unique place that tells the story of a fundamental component of Canadian heritage. This national heritage centre was established in Peterborough, Ontario, in 1997. The museum allows people to understand how the canoe has a lasting significance to the peoples of Canada through hands-on galleries, canoe displays and storyboards.

The natural heritage centre communicates the meaning of wilderness in a variety of ways. The museum helped portray the value of wilderness to Indigenous peoples. The canoe allowed the Indigenous people to explore the wilderness, while the paddle had many purposes. The canoe demonstrated their needs, ranging from small clam boats to ocean-going war canoes. The trees in nature allowed the Indigenous to build their canoes. Depending on their culture they used different types of trees for specific parts of the canoe, from a single 100-year-old red cedar several canoes could be constructed. I found it interesting in that there were 3-5 types of trees used to design each canoe to the standards of a particular culture. The Ojibway & Algonquin peoples often used the bark of white birch, the woods of eastern white cedar or maple and the roots of black or white spruces. The ways Indigenous peoples utilized the variety of trees is unique and in my opinion, well thought out.

Additionally, the paddle was used as a weapon as many were pointed, which allowed the Indigenous to hunt an abundance of the food they relied on and it also served as a drinking vessel for them while they were on fresh water. I found this interesting because I never realized that the paddle could have such valuable uses apart from canoeing. The value of wilderness to

Indigenous peoples was also portrayed through the three sisters, this became evident to me in the upper east wing of the museum. In the early 1600's, the Huron had 2833 hectares of cultivated land between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay which provided Indigenous peoples with the three sisters (corn, squash and beans) as well as tobacco. I really enjoyed the way the exhibits throughout the museum portrayed the wilderness narrative. There were also several artifacts throughout the entire museum that portrayed wilderness and Canadian identity.

The museum holds " more than 600 canoes, kayaks, and paddled watercraft". It was truly amazing to see the different shapes, sizes, creative designs, and how much time and effort were put into constructing the canoes. Furthermore, near the entrance of the museum, there was a variety of paddles hanging on the wall, each with a different shape, size and design. I feel that people don't appreciate the Indigenous connection to the canoe and how far this boat dates back in Canadian history. Not only are humans ignorant about the history of the canoe, but they are also not aware of the past relationship between Indigenous peoples and Europeans. As displayed in the upper south wing of the museum, storyboards noted that the initial contact between the Europeans and Aboriginals usually involved an exchange of gifts such as the Europeans offering knives, iron goods, and liquor. However, not all gifts were beneficial to Indigenous people's, liquor was first used for ceremonial exchange and later became a trade item with devastating effects. As Indigenous people didn't fully understand what alcohol was, many became addicted. The most disastrous outcome from the

interaction with Europeans was the contact with European diseases for which Aboriginal peoples had no immunity to.

I also believe that it is important for people to know how valuable the canoe was to both Indigenous peoples and Europeans. The canoe was an active agent in the economy and trade, recreation and wilderness destruction and preservation in Canada. Trade all began with a beaver hat as displayed in the upper west wing of the museum. The charter issued by Prince Rupert in 1670 gave the Hudson Bay company the exclusive right to trade furs in Rupert's land along with all the territory that drained into Hudson's Bay and James Bay. When there were no roads or railways, there were rivers from May-November and the best means of access to resources was the canoe. The canoe brought together the two main elements of the western Canadian economy; the fur trade and the buffalo hunt. The canoe also allowed 19 nations who inhabited Vancouver Islands for 5000 years to whale hunt on Canadas Pacific coast and they still whale hunt today. Furthermore, the canoe allowed for the Indigenous to hunt for a variety of fish, while other fish were often eaten when caught smoked salmon could be marketed, along with oil from whale blubber and the eulachon fish. Additionally, the three sisters mentioned previously, Huron people traded for meat, hides, and furs, which was transported by canoe.

Apart from its negative impacts, liquor accounted for 5% to 12% of the value of trade shipments, thus an important item of trade to the Native peoples. Canoes were not only used to acquire and transport goods but were also used for recreational activities as displayed on storyboards in the upper east

wing of the museum. The most popular recreational activity was racing competitions at summer festivals in the mid 19th century and still continues today. Although Indigenous peoples had a deep connection with nature, biologically valuable trees were destroyed in the making of canoes. Trees were burned at the base, then hollowed out by burning and using an ax like tool. Contrarily, I do believe that the museum endeavors to evoke an emotional response in visitors based on the cultural, social and spiritual elements of wilderness. The Native people believed that humans and animals are connected spiritually, this influenced the Native peoples to embellish animals that inhabit the forest where the construction materials for the canoe were collected. This allowed me to realize how much wilderness truly means to Indigenous people and unlike many non-natives they have a better understanding of the value of nature.

As portrayed on the upper south wing, the Indigenous believed that their homeland was the source of their language, food, medicine and a way of life. This made me notice how important their land was to them in that it contained spiritual, social and cultural significance. One of the storyboards discussed that a raised paddle meant that the Indigenous came in peace and respect. It is interesting how a simple paddle could have so many purposes, in this case, it aided as a social benefit as it acted as a way of communication for Indigenous peoples. It is fascinating how communication throughout history is so different from the communication we use today, it allows me to appreciate that historically communication was not always as simple. Indigenous people saw the value and appreciated everyday items

more than one would ever think of doing today. An admirable example of this is that most canoeists seem moved to write because of their connection to the spiritual or emotional aspects of canoe tripping. They wrote about their general love for canoes and land, and an appreciation for canoe design.

The natural heritage center influenced my emotions and appreciation to the cultural, social and spiritual elements of the canoe, Indigenous peoples and wilderness. Overall, the Canadian Canoe Museum is a valuable experience that ensures people do not forget an important part of Canada's heritage.

The natural heritage centre tells an engaging story that communicates the wilderness narrative and includes many artifacts and storyboards that allow for a better understanding and connection to the importance of the canoe in history. I enjoyed my tour of the museum and would most definitely recommend it to all of my friends and family.