



CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS

Remarks Regarding Development at South March Highlands

Full Moon, August 24, 2010

William Commanda and Romola Thumbadoo



Today, the 24 August, 2010, on the evening of the Full Moon, we add our prayers to the prayers of Algonquin Elder Albert Du Mont and the friends gathered here for the protection of this very special place on Turtle Island, known now as the South March Highlands.

We were here in July 2010, and learned from Paul Renaud and Adam Caldwell much about the current crisis endangering this place. We invited them to inform others of this urgent matter at our annual *Circle of All Nations* Gathering in August. We are glad to see so many passionately engaged in this cause. We are adding our voices to call for a halt of the expansion of Terry Fox Drive and housing development at this ancient sacred site, one also of great archaeological importance to Indigenous Peoples of the Kichissippi, the Ottawa River Watershed.

We want to share with you something unusual, something strange perhaps. In August 1997, 13 years ago, we were returning from a long journey which retraced the steps of the ancient original ancestors of the land along the Ottawa, Mattawa and French Rivers, along the Great Lakes down through Sault Ste Marie and Minnesota, to Pipestone, the place of pipe, prayer and sundance, and then around Lake Superior and ancient copper mining sites towards home; when we reached the Arnprior area, we saw a strange sight – the space ahead was covered in water, and in the distance there were two hills or islands. This image stayed with us a long time, and we were startled, because we realized we were both seeing it! *Is this a vision*, I asked the Elder. *Write it down*, he said; *you will understand it some time. Don't analyse, that is not the way with visions.*

At that time I was a relative newcomer to Ottawa, and I did not know then of the ancient sea that had covered this land. Years later, when I began to study this history, I thought, *We did not have a vision of the future, we saw the landscape as it had been in the past!* This was pretty shaking.

Still, I did not know what to make of the islands – sure, we were deeply involved with Victoria and Chaudière Islands in the National Capital Region by now, and affirming it a Sacred Site, a site for a National Indigenous Centre, but, they were low, not high above a water filled basin.

On April 3, 2007, as we began to give thought to our writing, we were led to the word *Algonkian*, in William Commanda's *Webster's Ninth New*

Collegiate Dictionary (1987); quite unexpectedly, the word jettisoned us into the past – Mother Earth’s past, with the word *Proterozoic*. It led us to the word *Geology, a science that deals with the history of the earth and its life especially as recorded in rocks*, and in the accompanying Geologic Time and Formations Table (page 512), we learned *Algonkian* referred to an era of geological history that includes the period between the Archeozoic, the most ancient era, which commenced 3,800,000,000 years ago and the Paleozoic, which emerged 620,000,000 years ago. In that vast undifferentiated period of time are found the earliest records of invertebrates, spores and marine algae, the precursors to life.

So *Algonkian* was associated with magnitude of history beyond our realization!

Then, in *The People of the Ancient Americas* we learned that “hundreds of millions of years ago, long before mankind was on the earth, the Americas were two continental islands. The northern one, covering the area of Quebec, and some eastern parts of Canada and the United States, still survives as a geologic area known as the Laurentian Shield. The southern one remains in the very ancient mountains of Eastern Brazil, also among the earliest rocks to still remain on the surface of the earth. Millions of years later, a great convulsion of the earth, probably due to contraction during cooling, caused enormous crumplings of rock, thus originating the Alps in Europe and the Himalayas in India.

Thus we realized that here, in the National Capital Region, we were standing on one of the two most ancient rock formations of the Earth. Then, too, one could understand why the Sacred Chaudière Falls was quite so special.

This July, we began to see that the hills in the Gatineau and this spot, the South March Highlands, were the island hills that rose above the waters in the image revealed of the ancient sea in 1997. It is deeply private thing that we are now sharing – somehow, we are compelled to write this now; but, others too have reported the strange magic and energy of this area.

As the Champlain Sea began to recede some 12,000 years ago, numerous species of life on land were birthed, and a great forest developed here on this most sacred of earth. This area and the species that evolved here are said to be thirty five hundred years older than the rest of the city of Ottawa area, and proportionately stronger and pristine. The ancient ancestors occupied

this land from the earliest of times, and evidence of their presence in the Ottawa River Valley has been documented – documented, but scarcely studied yet.

Over the centuries of contact, Indigenous presence and relationship with the land was forcibly eroded, and the true history, the history of the peoples and their connection with this watershed, obliterated from the record and unknown to the people now occupying the shores.

But the Sacred Land is awaking us all from the fog that has dulled our senses and sensibilities, and is pointing to our responsibilities – we are all children of Mother Earth, and we must begin to affirm and honour our relationship with the penultimate provider. Her newer children are now leading the charge, and we are told by Paul Renaud that the South March Highlands is one of the most bio-diverse areas remaining in Canada and that it contains over 675 different species of life, including at least 26 types of plants traditionally used as medicine by the First Peoples. Sadly, due to our lack of balance with Mother Earth, 18 of these species are at risk of extinction, 11 species are already locally extinct, and another 18 may soon be at risk.

The proposed construction of a four-lane highway, the Terry Fox Drive, (what irony in the name) through this forest will sever the eco-connectivity of the area and will lead to the inevitable eradication of rare species of ancient life. The construction of the road has also triggered housing development plans whose realization will clear-cut and blast about a third of the forest, killing many endangered butternut trees and numerous other species. Scientists believe that the remaining forest areas will no longer be able to sustain the wildlife and rare plants that are currently found here because of the erosion of its unique ecological integrity and because of pressure from urban development on all sides.

Instead of destroying this special land, surely we should be celebrating it for its immense bio-diversity and unique physical and historic characteristics. Located in the National Capital Region, the South March Highlands can serve to raise awareness of native history, medicinal plants and the rich bio-diversity of our forests, and constitute a national example of how we can transform our relationship with Earth from one of interminable exploitation and abuse to one of respect, reverence and stewardship. It is this transformation in our relationship with Mother Earth that will contribute to

the deep healing, both hers and ours, that we are beginning to worry about at every turn in our modern society.

This special area is also a place of extremely important archaeological significance to the nomadic Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed and beyond, since evidence has recently emerged regarding its occupation by our ancestors 10,000 years ago. So much of the early history of the Kichissippi has been obliterated already, so much of our Indigenous history distorted by colonization, racism, cultural oppression and near genocide, as well as by linguistic and provincial barriers; and the Algonquin sacrifice and contribution to Canada's short history and development has been rendered invisible quite deliberately. The revelation of the true history of this site and its original inhabitants will reframe our understanding of our individual and collective place on Turtle Island.

Some have begun realize that the land requires the prayer of her first children to *be* sacred again – it is this awakening that we have sacrificed and prayed for over many, many years – this is the energy shift needed to breath life on into the future.

With this we shall return to a reconnection to Sacred Land, Sacred Landscape, and affirm our right to the great legacy of Mother Earth. From here, others will learn to retrace their footsteps to the source. It is telling that the August 2010 National Geographic magazine carries an article entitled *Native Lands: Something remarkable is happening in Indian country*, it states. *Tribes whose lands were once taken from them are setting an example for how to restore the environment.*

The past is a long way back, and the future? What of it? It is said that we make the road by walking it. May the prayer of the ancestors of the land, *Ginawaydaganuc – We are All Connected* - in the web of life - light our pathway into a future of *Sustainable Relationships* for all.

circleofallnations@sympatico.ca
www.circleofallnations.ca
<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations>
www.asinabka.com