

Minute for Right Relations - The Pow Wow

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Have you ever gone to a Pow-Wow? During the year there are many opportunities to attend a pow wow in First Nations communities within Manitou Conference. I look forward to the Nipissing First Nation pow wow held Labour Day weekend on the traditional lands at Jocko Point Lake Nipissing. It's an opportunity to enjoy First Nations hospitality and culture.

Pow Wow's are both a social gathering and a way of preserving culture, identity, tradition and story telling for First Nation's people. They provide the setting for dance, drumming, regalia (dance apparel) traditional food and crafts. Pow Wows promote pride, honour, respect, tradition and generosity and the health of young and old alike. It's like a family reunion of friends and relatives enjoying each other and the traditions that bring them together.

Are non-native people welcome at a pow wow? From my experience I would say yes...provided you show respect for the traditions that are part of any pow wow. If you are not sure...take your cue from the people around you. There are established protocols at a pow wow and in most cases they are announced by the host. It's appropriate to stand during the opening Grand Entry and Opening Prayer. Leave your camera at home. This is not a performance but a living tradition that deserves our respect. Do not touch the dancer's regalia. Drugs and alcohol are forbidden on pow wow grounds. Enjoy the food...my favourites are the "Indian tacos" and fry bread. The vendors are skilled crafts-people happy to talk about their wares. I usually come home with a few gifts for family and friends. Engage in conversation when you can. Most of all have a great time.

It's important to remember that at one time the pow wow was not permitted under Canada's laws. The basic right of peaceful assembly was denied to First Nation's people until the mid-twentieth century as part of the intentional government policies of assimilation and cultural suppression. The re-emergence of the pow wow is an important link with the past and a way to preserve cherished cultural traditions for future generations. The joy and pride of the dancers and drummers is evident and heartfelt. Let the drum be heard in the land!

If you are wondering when and where pow wows take place, you might want to check the Anishinabek News site on the internet and search for the pow wow schedule. Hopefully attending a pow wow will become part of the way neighbours get to know neighbours...and a way to continue the work of reconciliation and right relations.