



# Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier

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## **Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier** Hugh Brody

The Canadian subarctic is a world of forest, prairie, and muskeg; of rainbow trout, moose, and caribou; of Indian hunters and trappers. It is also a world of boomtowns and bars, oil rigs and seismic soundings; of white energy speculators, ranchers, and sports hunters. Brody came to this dual world with the job of "mapping" the lands of northwest British Columbia as well as the way of life of a small group of Beaver Indians with a viable hunting economy living in the path of a projected oil pipeline. The result is *Maps and Dreams*, Brody's account of his extraordinary eighteen-month journey through the world of a people who have no intention of vanishing into the past. In this beautifully written book, readers go on a moose hunt; trap beaver; mourn at a funeral; drink in white bars; visit camps, cabins, and traplines by pickup truck, on horseback, and on foot. Brody's powerful commentary also retraces the history of the ever-expanding white frontier from the first eighteenth-century explorer to the wildest corporate energy dreams of the present day. In the process, readers see how Indian dreams and white dreams, Indians maps and white maps, collide.

## **Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier Details**

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**U02awf2 says**

Readable anthropological book

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**Bob Newman says**

When Dreams Collide

The Big Boys planned to build a pipeline from Alaska down to the US Midwest, bringing energy from source to consumer. The line had to cross some hundreds of miles of British Columbia, over land that had once belonged exclusively to Indians, but which had already been invaded by trappers, sport hunters, ranchers, oil and gas explorers, loggers, drillers, and the beginnings of suburbia. By some miracle, somebody thought that it might be a good idea to see what the Indians thought about this. It seems they had never been consulted up to then. Treaties had been made, then subverted---the old North American pattern. In general, nobody had paid much attention to the Indians of northeastern British Columbia. It was believed that their way of life was kaput, that they were all alcoholics living on welfare, and that they hadn't kept their traditions. It seems they had been living for centuries in an "energy corridor" without a viable way of life. But now they were seriously in the way. Enter Hugh Brody, a British anthropologist.

In MAPS AND DREAMS, Brody accomplishes the near impossible. He writes a marvelously sensitive, interesting report, incorporating such often-boring details as hunting and land use maps, and accounts of meetings. Not only does he show that the culture of the Athapaskan Indians was alive in 1979, he allows them to speak, describes the land use situation from their point of view, and connects their economy with their culture and daily lives. His book is at once a report, an answer to those who had written off the Indians, and a readable work of anthropology. White man's dreams of ever bigger projects, ever more exploitation of the land, he says so exactly, "are the most established carcinoma of the North American imagination". They are ever poised to crush the Indian dreams. The Indian dreams, of how to find game, how to find their way to Heaven, stand in the way of the white man's maps---the maps that show where to put the pipeline, where to drill, where to stake out more claims. Both the Indian maps on paper, which showed how they used the land and their traditional dream maps, showing the way to the Beyond, stood in the way of the white man's dreams. A few thousand souls against the tide of Western visions of "progress". We don't find out what happened, but it wasn't looking hopeful. Different maps, different dreams. For good anthropology, for deeper understanding of the problems of the Far North, for just a fascinating book, you can do a lot worse than read MAPS AND DREAMS.

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**Luce Cronin says**

A very disturbing read about traditional life ways, industrialization, white would-be "sportsmen", pipelines and the ever-decreasing lands of aboriginal people in British Columbia. This sums it up: "The Indians' maps are in the way of the white men's dreams". Aboriginal people have always had and still have a viable traditional economy with hunting and trapping, and although Canada keeps talking about pluralism,

multiculturalism it does not , in practice, have the room for another type of economic system within its boundaries. Very alarming, very sad.

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## **Scott says**

This was an enjoyable and eye-opening book. Brody is more than just an anthropologist; he is a skilled writer as well. This is among his earliest works, and I am told that his skill really took wings as he released subsequent books. His book, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* is reputed to be really excellent; if he wrote this well early on, I'm convinced I want to read his highest-rated book as well. I have it on my "To Be Read" list.

Brody was sent to live among, study, and document the land use of a group of Beaver tribespeople in the face of the encroaching Alaska oil pipeline, which was to be built right through their territory. The author's objective was to demonstrate that this community wasn't one that could be simply swept aside, bolstered by white stereotypes that this race was doomed to destruction anyway, beset as they were by poverty, laziness and drunkenness. The rationale has been that these people were going extinct because their way of life was incapable of supporting them, that a hunter-gatherer economy was hopelessly out of touch and actually destructive to the First Nations. (Note I am using vocabulary that is current in Canada, rather than familiar USAmerican jargon.) Thus, it would be doing them a big favor to usher in resource and economic development, leading to jobs and a better way of life. Besides, their lack of developing the land is just so wasteful! So much land, rich in potential energy reserves, is better entrusted to those with the vision to take advantage of it...or so the thinking goes.

The author alternates between a narrative of the seasonal round of community and economic activities of the Beaver people, and intercalary chapters which document the history of interaction between First Peoples and white traders, settlers, and developers. He relates the old, all-too-familiar story of encroachment, treaty, reserve, and treaty violation--rinse and repeat, right up to the present day, when the cycle continues. Other intercalary chapters document the hidden, but economically viable, way of life that these people have traditionally followed. First world Europeans are unable to even recognize as economic activity anything that does not easily liquidate into dollars. Native people derive a substantial portion of what they require from the land, but because many of these items are not marketable, they are not seen as having any value. An example is the meat hunted: moose, caribou, lynx, marten, beaver, etc. One doesn't encounter much of these commodities in the supermarket. Because whites don't market them, they must have no value. However, Brody compares these meats to the ones commonly consumed in white supermarkets, hypothetically pricing them according to supply and demand. By price-scaling these to comparable items we use, Brody demonstrates that the hunter economy is strong and viable. In doing so, he demonstrates that the First Nations' economy is not dwindling to an inevitable extinction. If their economic way of life is threatened, it is only because we are stripping the resources (land, habitat, game, traplines) that they require for their economy to function correctly. Brody makes it impossible to maintain that this way of life is dwindling because of its inability to support its adherents. The forces that threaten it are from without--from us.

The narrative chapters are graciously and sympathetically written. Brody lived among these people for a year and a half, during which time he followed their seasonal migrations to various hunting camps and cabins, accompanied them on hunts, lent his back to their work projects, drove them on trips to town, observed their customs surrounding funerals, feasted with the community, and tried to understand their tradition of having been guided to their territory via dreams of their forbears, who drew dream maps that linked their ideas of the heavenly realms to their earthly home. A major project was to enlist the help of the community, drawing

up maps which documented their use of the land for hunting, trapping, fishing, berry picking, and other things necessary for their lifestyle. The hope was to present these maps as proof that energy developers could not build with impunity within their territory without wreaking massive economic and cultural upheaval.

The collaboration between Brody and this Beaver community was spearheaded by Joseph Patsah, an elder whose wisdom and grace were universally respected. It is instructive to see their way of life, and threats to it, through his eyes. He is a thoroughly decent, generous, and openhearted man, who has a fatherly interest in every person in the community. Patsah had tremendous pride in their way of life and traditions, while having tremendous concerns about their continuance. Brody was skillful in getting us to see things through such a sympathetic character--much more effective than a detached argument could ever have done. I'm already inclined to care deeply about these people and their situation, and Brody made it even more so. The book is quite dated, and the necessary economic analysis was dry and slow reading, which is what kept it from being a 5 star book. In all other respects, however, I am very glad that I read it.

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### **Daniel Dumas says**

Highly interesting research project conducted with Cree and Dane-zaa (Beaver) Nations of Northeast British Columbia. For a book written 40 years ago, it is surprisingly pertinent to discussions of indigeneity and frontier resource development, providing insight into forms of Indigenous traditional economies and how they continue, amidst ongoing encroachment, to be viable.

The book itself is presented in an original way with even-numbered chapters delving into academic considerations and odd-numbered chapters recounting the experiences of the author with a specific Nation over the course of a year.

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### **Malcolm says**

Two of the most potent stories we tell of colonialism are first that it destroyed first nations communities and second that it was 'back then': this book forcefully confronts and challenges both those stories while not denying the essential truth of the first or asserting the falsity of the second. Based on fieldwork in north east British Columbia in the late 1970s (and first published in 1981) this excellent book demonstrates both the extent of the contemporary assault on first nations in the region while shows their resilience.

The project that led to Hugh Brody spending 18 months living in an Athapaskan community was funded as part of a project linked to the construction of the Alaskan pipeline to supply the US with energy, a pipeline that cut across these groups' territories. One of the many strengths of the book is Brody's willingness to explore the contradictions of this funding and the difficulties it posed for him. More importantly, however, it allows him to explore the energy frontier that was moving across the area at the time (and over 30 years later continues to influence first nations in the area and elsewhere in northern Canada).

This energy frontier is layered with others – the creep of ranch-land across Athapaskan hunting territories, the wastefulness of sports hunters allowed into the areas that are also Crown land for several weeks a year, the appearance and disappearance of mining and energy exploration camps, the settlement of squatters on Crown land and forms of land use and occupation that continue to push first nations into new and smaller areas of occupation. There is little doubt that for these communities colonisation was not something 'back

then' but was (and remains) current.

Despite these impositions, however, Brody draws on his experiences and informants to suggest a rich and resilient first nations life. Official records of first nations economic life, for instance, measure only cash economies whereas Brody, in the manner of other economic anthropologists, attempts to calculate the economic effects (in terms of income equivalence) of hunting, for instance, to suggest a much richer and more complex economic life than official data suggests.

This is not to suggest that these first nations are doing well, but to note that Brody has got beyond the surface appearance to present a sophisticated and engaging representation of life in these Athapaskan communities. More importantly he shows how they adapt, change, develop, incorporate settler and colonial approaches, techniques and ways into their own to adopt and adapt new things that are useful. At the same time, they keep hold of their own ways to such an extent that many of the new/settler acquired ways of doing things become 'traditional'. The key point here is that Brody has shown both the power among outside observers and the error of the core point of 'fatal impact' ideologies – that indigenous people had static cultures that were wiped out by colonisation.

The presentation of the ethnography gives us, as readers, some telling insight to this community's ways. Brody alternates 'scientific' analysis and history with ethnographic moments – hunting expeditions, a funeral, a trip to town, a meeting with group investigating the impacts of the Pipeline. In this way we get to see the ways the old and new area adapted, get a sense of the band's experiences of the frontier and understand the pessimism of some of the members about their ability to continue and survive as a distinctive people.

Although dated, this is a very good example of an ethnography of a people in the context of on-going and continuing cultural, social and economic adaptation: the reserve is a static moment in time but populated by people managing their worlds, managing change, and dealing with the continuing contemporary experience of colonisation. Fabulous.

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## **Parsoua Shirzad says**

Hugh Brody wanted to understand the history of land use. The book entails interviews of people about their historical land use, including hunting, and maps their hunting territories. For the first time, rather than showing village sites and agricultural land in maps, which Europeans would recognize as having legitimacy, he made numerous incredible maps which lend as evidence to indigenous land claims. This is important because the Canadian government only considers written documentation. Brody successfully took oral statements and created written documents and maps out of them. This work helped reshape the larger legal terrain starting back in the 70's.

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## **Paul says**

A very moving examination of a way of life under threat from the continuing White settlement and commercial expansion and exploitation of natural resources in northeast British Columbia, Canada. Brody's insight is coloured by his 18 month sojourn with the First Nation bands of the area. The chapters alternate

between his beautifully and respectfully written accounts of various key moments in the annual season, with relevant essays exploring in some detail the different aspects of the historic betrayals and increasing pressures and restrictions on the Indians' way of living on their own land.

An early chapter retells a hunting trip to the Bluestone area. The dreams of the hunters play their part in guiding the itinerary, and the soul of these men and women is conveyed to the reader with considerable art and delicacy by Hugh Brody.

Occasionally becomes a touch dry with some of the extensive detail covering the Indian economy , but on the whole the book is very informative and written with passion and sensitivity for the subject. I now plan on reading Brody's 'The Other Side Of Eden'.

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### **Leslie says**

This was a good read but not as broad in scope as Brody's other book. It was written earlier and is more of a specific case study than a big picture kind of book. Still, a good read.

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