

The spirit of Asinabka rises as Algonquin First Nations assert land rights in Canada's capital city

March 2016

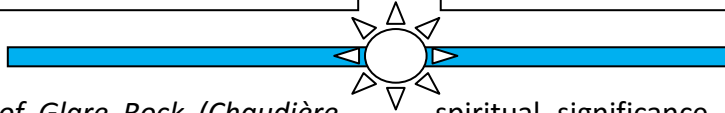
by Albert Dumont (South Wind), Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg and Debra Huron, citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario



The place of glare rock and three islands, with the industrial past removed. What if the concrete were to become truly “green” by creating open, public place celebrating Algonquin First Nations?



The place of glare rock becomes the head of a great bird (Kitchi Binesi) with the islands forming its body. The bird faces east, toward the place where visions arise.



Oh Asinabka, the Place of Glare Rock (Chaudière Falls and its islands), where the medicines of the moon, wind and sun mix with the falling waters of the Kitchi Sibi (Ottawa River), thus creating a place of sacredness.

After suffering 200 years of industrial pillage, three islands and a magnificent waterfall in the Ottawa River are again threatened by corporate greed. Supported by the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, by a federal body called the National Capital Commission (NCC), and by mainstream media in the nation’s capital, two corporations are seeking to build a \$1.2 billion condo complex on sacred Anishinaabe and unceded Algonquin territory.

Oh Asinabka – how we long for that time again, when the song of the land and the songs of human beings could rise as one voice, to be heard above the roar of the falls, as it was eons ago.

The late Algonquin Elder, William Commanda, whose vision of Asinabka continues to have many supporters, spent 30 of his 97 years lobbying and praying for colonial officials to recognize the

spiritual significance of the site. He proposed a Circle of All Nations and called for an Algonquin cultural, healing and historic site on the islands, and for Chaudière Falls to be freed from its dam, long before Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began its important work.

Hundreds of years ago, before settlers from Europe arrived, Asinabka brought healing and hope to the Peoples. The energy of the waters there carried our songs of honour and praise for all things Creator placed here.

Following release of the TRC’s final report in 2015, and with a new government led by Justin Trudeau, Canada may be ripe for reconciliation. If so, this needs to happen at all levels, including the municipal. Throughout 2015, five individuals launched a legal challenge to overturn the City of Ottawa’s rezoning of the islands. The ongoing case aims to stop sale of certain lands on the islands to the condo developers.

Asinabka has been lost to us for too long. Let us look to the teachings of the turtle, bear and hawk

for guidance on how we should proceed from here to retrieve it.

The Kitchi Sibi is a waterway that united the Algonquin Nation before colonial times. A line on a map, right down the middle of the Ottawa River, now divides Algonquin First Nations in Ontario and Quebec. The only Algonquin First Nation located in Ontario, Pikwakanagan, is supporting the corporate condo builders, lured by the promise of jobs. It is also entangled in a controversial and flawed land claim negotiation with the federal and Ontario governments that would cede traditional Algonquin territory forever.

If we are always sensible with our plans and push forward slowly and cautiously and soar with joy in our hearts as we celebrate even the smallest of victories by acknowledging spirit, we will overcome the power and influence of money and win out. Let us trust in Creator and in all things of creation to inspire and motivate us.

In August 2015, four Algonquin chiefs and communities in Quebec asserted Indigenous land rights to the unceded islands, citing sections of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). In November 2015, five more legitimate Algonquin First Nations in Quebec joined the fight against the condo development.

Only kind spirits emitting goodness and health danced in the wind around the Falls of Asinabka at that precious time of our past. How can anyone not

want to restore such a place today, as all of us can gain from it again, emotionally and spiritually?

The Algonquin Chiefs are demanding that the sacred site be protected in perpetuity and recognized within the National Capital Region as an Algonquin Nation Cultural Park and Historic Commemoration Site under an Algonquin controlled institution to be established by the legitimate Algonquin First Nations of the Algonquin Nation. They are adamant that development of the islands not happen without the full, prior and informed consent of the Algonquin Nation, as outlined in UNDRIP.

It is disheartening that at this time of reconciliation, Asinabka, also known as Akikodjiwan, our ancient place of ceremony and healing, is under threat of being forever lost to us, by Windmill Developments who have vowed to build condominiums upon it. The curse of money should never be allowed to divide our ability to be sensible, or to divide families and the people of Canada.

In November 2015, Canada announced it will implement UNDRIP, which mandates that governments obtain “free, prior and informed consent” from Indigenous peoples on questions of land and resource development. Will this important duty to consult be extended to Algonquin Chiefs asserting land rights at Asinabka?

This piece will be published in Spring 2016 in The Dominion Special Issue: Warrior Up!, a compilation of writings and art about Indigenous land defence struggles happening in the settler colonial state of Canada. <http://www.dominionpaper.ca>

To learn more and to stay informed:



Circle of All Nations: www.asinabka.com

South Wind (Albert Dumont's blog): www.albertdumont.com

Freeing Chaudière Falls and its Islands: www.freethefalls.ca