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# What I Did on my Summer Holidays:

## *Visiting Pow Wows and Mingling With First Nations Communities*

Marion Lynn



I began this summer's attendance at Pow Wows on July 26, at the Grand River Pow Wow of the Six Nations. This was followed by a weekend visit on August 9 and 10 to the Mattagami Reserve, 80 kilometres south of Timmins, on the beautiful Lake Mattagami. I plan to go to one at Curve Lake Reserve near Peterborough on September 20, and finally to an urban Pow Wow at Dufferin Park in Toronto on September 27.

I have been to Pow Wows before over the years, but have developed a deeper involvement in First Nations' history, culture and politics through the Aboriginal Issues Working Group at the Redeemer over the past year. Learning about and attending Pow Wows is a

wonderful way to appreciate the historical and contemporary culture and spirituality that binds together the First Nations people in Canada.

I found it helpful to gain an understanding of Pow Wows by visiting the Curve Lake web site: [curvelake-firstnation.ca/tourism-and-culture](http://curvelake-firstnation.ca/tourism-and-culture). From the website I learned that a Pow Wow is a gathering or celebration. In the past, families traveled far and wide for hunting and food gathering and the Pow Wow was a way of celebrating their reunion by feasting and thanking the Creator. Now, it provides the same function for people who are scattered to various cities and provinces to find work in order to provide their daily bread. The Pow Wow can

be held in any season, depending on the patterns of the community. As in many First Nations' social activities, a central aspect of the Pow Wow is the circle, wherein all are equal. The drumming and singing and dancing are ways to reconnect with the ancestors and the Creator. Let me quote from the Curve Lake document:

*"The drum beats out the solemn rhythm of all creation. It is the sound we remember from before we were born. It is the rhythm of our mothers' heartbeat. The drums summon up a memory that is common to us all."*

Being in attendance at a Pow Wow enables us to feel the spirituality and historical significance of the event. As I was reading the information about the Curve Lake Pow Wow, I gained some insights into what took place and why, and some helpful guidelines for those who may be attending a Pow Wow for the first time. For example, all stand and are silent during the Grand Entry as the Chief carries in the Eagle Staff, and others follow with various flags which are posted in the centre of the site. No photographs are to be taken at this time and throughout the day it is important to ask the permission of dancers and musicians before photographing them. I also learned about the beautiful and intricate handmade

regalia worn by the dancers. The regalia are to be treated with the greatest respect as these fabrics and designs have special meaning and are worn for particular purpose. For example, the women's fancy shawl dance is a way for women to demonstrate their beauty and skills. The women's jingle dance, when they wear dresses covered in silver cones, is a healing dance. The intertribal dance is a way in which men carry out

mock battles. The round dance can be used to get a large number of people in a circle, perhaps celebrating a birthday. I joined this dance at Mattagami to celebrate Lorraine Naveau's birthday.

For me, a settler of European background, it was a great privilege to be a part of these celebrations in two very different locations and communities. The Grand River is considered one of the largest Pow Wows in Ontario with a few hundred dancers and musicians competing for fairly lucrative prizes; some coming



from different provinces to do so. Mattagami is a small reserve in Ontario's north that has just begun to celebrate their Pow Wow over the past three or four years. This smaller Pow Wow meant that I was able to sit very close to the dancers, drummers and singers. I was privileged, as well, in being with the family of my niece whose father, Wally Naveau, has been the Chief of the Mattagami Reserve for nearly ten years. I was seated with him and his large extended family at the Pow Wow site and introduced as a part of his group. His family has been part of this reserve for many generations. I spent time and shared a meal, in his home, with more than 20 family members, from babies to grandmothers. The Chief took me on a tour of the reserve with me riding behind him on his four-wheeler feeling quite the celebrity as people waved when we passed. I was made to feel so welcome by this family and this reserve.

By the time you read this you will have missed the Pow Wows for 2014 so start to plan your summer holidays for 2015. Go to the web sites for different reserves or just google Pow Wows to get a list of those available. Outsiders are very welcome to watch the spectacles,

eat bannock and fry bread, buy special teas, beautiful dream catchers and earrings. Take an eight-hour drive north to Mattagami, introduce yourself to Chief Naveau, and learn some of the history. Go to Curve Lake, stay in a cottage on Buckhorn Lake, visit the Petroglyphs, the Whetung's Art Gallery and Craft Shop and look for some work by David Johnson. Or you could spend two weeks on Manitoulin Island following the Great Spirit Circle

Trail where you can learn about medicinal and edible plants, listen to traditional song and drum, hear the legends and engage in story telling and sleep in a teepee. Won't you leave the city and cell phone behind and experience the richness of the First Nations of Canada?

*Marion Lynn is a member of the 11.15 community and works with the Aboriginal Issues Work Group with a particular focus on the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.*