

The Misplaced Mountain: Maps, Memory, and the Yakama Reservation Boundary Dispute [Abstract]

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This article details the Yakama Nation's century-long struggle to recover Mt. Adams, a major snowpeak in the Cascade Mountains of south-central Washington State, which was wrongly excluded from the Yakama Reservation by a series of erroneous boundary surveys. Known as Pátu (snow-topped mountain) and Xwayamá (golden eagle) in the Sahaptin language of the Columbia Plateau, the mountain has long been identified with the five sacred foods of the Wáášat religion. Between 1855 and 1972, when an executive order restored part of the peak to tribal ownership, it acquired new significance as a symbol of Yakama identity and nationhood due to its association with the tribe's treaty and disputed reservation boundary. The story of the Yakamas' quest to redraw that boundary and reclaim their sacred peak is in part a familiar tale of the federal government's repeated failure to fulfill its trust responsibility to Indian tribes. On a deeper level, though, this history also offers valuable insights into the cultural construction of landscape, the production of oral tradition, and the tension between indigenous and colonialist ways of bounding space and remembering the past. Pátu visually reinforced and recalled memories that were produced and preserved through the spoken word, thereby sustaining an interpretation of the treaty that successfully challenged the maps and manuscripts of the dominant society.

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