

Fieldwork in Indian Country

A Conversational Experience

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overview...

I have performed interview and participant-observation fieldwork in "Indian Country" (Southwestern Oklahoma) the past two years; this poster highlights my pathway of experiences. I have spoken with Native American farmers and other traditionalists about their knowledge of weather and climate, including traditional ways of knowing, and how they view people should interact with nature, as they farm, ranch and garden. Conversations have rekindled memories of weather knowledge and stories once passed down, and have described observational signs some farmers still rely upon. Conversations also have revealed a vibrant effort within Native Oklahoma to become more self-sufficient and to create healthier and more sustainable lifestyles through agriculture, underpinned by the "decolonization" of food-producing activities. This fieldwork opportunity has been a rewarding privilege, and I hope to convey here the reciprocal nature of the relationship I have developed with the people I have met. My work adds to the broader scholarship of cross-cultural research and environmental co-management efforts that explore different ways of knowing – not just advances in science but also on-the-ground, rooted-in-place-and-meaning observations of, experiences in, and adaptations to the natural world. This research area has contributed unique, unexpected, and non-intuitive insights into conceptualizing, recognizing, and understanding the natural environment.

pathway guide...

1. Anadarko Community Library – site of first meeting with Kiowa leaders about my work (2/09), and site of several interviews
2. Langston University 18th Annual Small Farmers Conference, Oklahoma City – learned about programs to assist under-served farmers, and made contacts (5/09)
3. Apache Tribal Environmental Camp, Dance Grounds, Fort Cobb – spoke about weather to Native campers, and met the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma Chairman (6/09)
4. Temptations Restaurant, Anadarko – site of first interview (7/09) and many others
5. Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council Meeting, Fort Cobb – learned about conservation programs available to Native farmers, and made a key contact (2/10)
6. Mvsokke Food Sovereignty Initiative Symposium, Okmulgee – tribal and local grassroots leaders, plus experts on organic agriculture, climate change, and cultural revitalization, discussed food security, healthy eating, and the future of local communities (3/10)
7. Langston Outreach Beginning Farmers Program Meeting, Anadarko Library – heard about Native seeds, "thinking healthy", and community gardens; more contacts (4/10)
8. International Summit on Indigenous Environmental Philosophy, Redstone Baptist Church, Caddo County – forum for 22 Indigenous thinkers from around the world to discuss how Indigenous philosophy is distinct from Western environmental philosophy. Facilitator said, "The one issue that unites Indian communities is climate change." (4/10)
9. Langston University 19th Annual Small Farmers Conference, Oklahoma City (5/10)
10. Apache Tribal Environmental Camp, Dance Grounds, Fort Cobb – spiced up my display with a VORTEX2 Mobile Mesonet that was popular with campers (and adults) (6/10)
11. Self-Esteem Garden, Redstone Baptist Church, Caddo County – at the site of an interview, I was able learn about the Anadarko Community Esteem Project for teenage girls that this informant started; the girls planted and tended this traditional garden (6/10)
12. 79th Annual Indian Expo's 1st Annual Native American Veggie Contest, Caddo County Fairgrounds – I helped judge vegetables, and interviewed one of the winning watermelon gardeners (8/10)
13. Museums, Anadarko – Anadarko is home to the Anadarko Heritage Museum, National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians, and Southern Plains Indians Museum. I spoke with museum curators (one of whom I interviewed) and saw an art display by the Urban Indian 5 collective that provided interesting perspectives on nature – e.g., "If we pay attention to the animals around us, they reveal messages to us." (8/10 and 11/10)
14. Rainy Mountain, near Gotebo – "Rainy Mountain is an ancient sentinel of the sun. When the Kiowas came down from the north hundreds of years ago, they ended their journey there. Rainy Mountain became the center of their world. It is said that whenever they camped there it rained. But I think it was the sun, the sun appearing through the mists of rain and rising to a brilliant eminence above the clouds and above the whole of the land, that struck wonder in them and held them in thrall. Even now, in that place, it is so for me. There do I believe in the sun." N. Scott Momaday, excerpt from *Sunrise at Rainy Mountain*, first published in *Oklahoma Today* (2002) (12/10)

