

Running head: NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Navigating Uneven Terrain: An Autoethnographic Reflection on a White Treaty
Person's Journey to Relational Responsibilities

by

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my committee. I understand that my thesis may be made available to the public electronically.

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

Grammarly was used for grammar and style edits, as well as for paraphrasing and rephrasing sentences and paragraphs to enhance clarity and fluency. ChatGPT and Google AI were used for source searches, and Google AI summaries were consulted to clarify key concepts and definitions from sources. Google Maps was used to create the Conceptual Journey Overview (Figure 1) based on the author's prompts. I reviewed and edited all outputs from these tools, and all ideas, arguments, and citations remain my own work.

Abstract

This autoethnographic study explores my relationship with Land and the Anishinaabeg as a White Treaty person spending time on FWFN Traditional Territory. It examines how White Treaty people experience these relationships and how they shape our responsibilities toward Treaties and planetary health. Spending time with Anemki Wajiw and its Sister Mountains deepens my sense of place and challenges me to confront uncomfortable emotions and (un)learnings that arise from spending time with Anishinaabeg Traditional Territory. Using an autoethnographic embodied movement method, I spent three days walking-with (skiing) on FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory in winter and spring 2026. I conducted a thematic analysis using NVivo software and manual methods. Grounded in the foundational theme of Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibilities, three main themes emerged: Listening to Land; Negotiating Presence and Belonging; and Navigating Accountability and Imposition. Listening to Land reflects my bond with Land through awe, nurturing, and recognizing interconnected relationships. Negotiating Presence and Belonging involved acknowledging my entitlement and colonial privileges to access Land, especially FWFN Reserve Lands. Navigating Accountability and Imposition revealed my awareness of responsibilities, fears of imposition, and learning to accept uncertainty. Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibilities highlights my evolving view of duties to Land and the Anishinaabeg. It reflects my intellectual and embodied development throughout the project and my ongoing commitment to accountability to Treaty obligations and to an ethical presence on Land, grounded in authenticity and humility. This study emphasizes the importance of providing White Treaty people with models for ethical engagement with Land and its original Peoples. Land is more than a setting for health-promoting activities; it is a source of belonging, responsibility, and relational accountability, and it is the foundation for understanding that human and planetary health are rooted in relationships.

Acknowledgments and Gratitude

I want to recognize the Anishinaabeg of Fort William First Nation and their Land, to whom I have become connected through this (un)learning journey, and who continue to inspire me to be a better Treaty Person and future Ancestor.

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NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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As I heard Wabugeshig Rice say in a CBC interview about his latest book, although there is only one name on the cover, many people are holding that person up. That is especially true of this thesis. Chi Miigwech, Grazie Millie, Moran Taing, Thank you!

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality	ii
 Artificial Intelligence Declaration.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments and Gratitude	iv
List of Figures.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
 Land, Place, and Responsibilities.....	1
 Research Setting and Context	5
 Positionality	9
 Settler Colonialism and Land.....	10
 Political and Environmental Urgency	12
 Research Objective.....	14
Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review	16
 Walking Methodologies	17
 Indigenous Knowledge Systems	18
 Land-as-Kin	20
 Treaty and Relational Responsibilities.....	21
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	25
 Methodology and Conceptual Framework	25
 Study Participants: The Walkers/Skiers	29
 Data Collection.....	30

1. Pre-Journey Journaling & Dialogue:	31
2. In-Journey Autoethnographic Recording	31
3. In-Journey Critical Dialogue:	31
4. In-Journey Audio Recordings:	32
5. In-Journey Photography/Videography:	32
6. Post-Journey Critical Dialogue:	32
Data Collection Journey Overview	32
Day 1 Description	33
Day 2 Description	34
Day 3 Description	34
Ethical Considerations	35
Data Analysis	37
Phase 1:	39
Phase 2:	39
Phase 3:	39
Phase 4:	39
Phase 5:	40
Phase 6:	41
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	42
(Un)Learning Journey Overview	42
Findings Overview	42
Listening to Land	45
<i>Moving Beyond Sightseeing</i>	46

<i>Land as an Active Teacher</i>	48
Negotiating Presence and Belonging	57
<i>Colonial Narratives and Place</i>	57
<i>Questioning Access and Entitlement</i>	60
<i>Discomfort and Restraint</i>	64
Navigating Accountability and Imposition	67
<i>Managing Accountability</i>	68
<i>Recognizing Responsibilities</i>	72
Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility	79
Chapter 5: Synthesis and Next Steps	89
Limitations and Challenges	92
Outputs and Contributions to Health Science	93
Concluding Thoughts	95
References	97
Appendix A: Solo Reflective Questions	111
Appendix B: Critical Dialogue Prompts for Walking Partner	114
Appendix C: Consent	117
Appendix D: Information Letter	119
Appendix E: Letter of Permission	124

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Fort William First Nation Traditional Territory	7
Figure 2. Conceptualization of Data Collection Journey.....	33
Figure 3. Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibilities	44
Figure 4. Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw	46
Figure 5. East Facing Mixed Stand	47
Figure 6. Recurring Nests as Land's Care	52
Figure 7. Sapsucker Wells of Knowledge.....	53
Figure 8. Whose Land are we on?	57
Figure 9. White Treaty Person Privilege.....	60
Figure 10. Spirit of Anemki Wajiw	64
Figure 11. Can I go now?.....	67
Figure 12. Always in my line of sight.....	73
Figure 13. Polypore Scaffolding	79

List of Tables

Table 1	28
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Land, Place, and Responsibilities

Land is our first relationship, and it is the first relationship that we need to restore.

We are used to standing on it, planting in it, and marvelling at it, but our relationship with it is complicated and colonial. We buy and sell it, extract resources from much of it, and then idealize parts of it. (Krawec, 2022, p. 126)

Before engaging with scholarship on settler colonialism and land, I used the terms "land" and "property" interchangeably. My understanding aligned with Western ideas of land as a piece of ground, as in the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) definition of land as a "portion of the earth's solid surface distinguishable by boundaries or ownership." I viewed land as encompassing rural and remote landscapes, a space for recreation, and a place to "get away from it all" to promote mental and physical health. To me, land was the earth beneath our feet, the soil that sustains us, and something that could be owned, visited, and used for personal benefit.

My understanding of land began to shift as I considered outdoor recreation as an activity that occurs in and depends on the natural environment (Morse et al., 2022). This definition frames land as a passive resource or conduit for leisure, whereas Indigenous ways of knowing regard land as relational and animate (Redvers, 2020). Land represents an interconnected web of relationships and a spiritual place, encompassing territory, humans, more-than-human kin, water, air, stories, and ancestors (Galway et al., 2022; Kimmerer, 2013; Reed et al., 2024). As Patty Krawec (Ojibwe, Lac Seul First Nation, Treaty 3) writes, "The land itself and the conditions of that land, like altitude and climate, impact our genome just as our human ancestors do" (2022, p. 11). Land shapes identity, responsibility, and belonging (Redvers, 2020; Reed et al., 2024). In an Indigenous context, health is fostered and sustained through respectful, ongoing relationships with Land and is guided by the knowledge and laws of the original caretakers (Campbell et al., 2020; Redvers, 2020;

Springgay & Truman, 2019). We are called not simply to use Land as a source of natural resources, but to become better kin and ancestors-to-be (Kimmerer, 2013; Kimmerer, 2021; Krawec, 2022).

For this reason, I capitalize 'Land' to signal a shift in my understanding (Davis et al., 2016), from seeing Land as a commodity to viewing it as relational, animate, and a source of identity (Galway et al., 2022; Krawec, 2022; Reed et al., 2024; Redvers, 2020). This acknowledgment recognizes Land as a being and challenges the settler-colonial mindset that regards it as property owned and controlled by individuals (Davis et al., 2016). This evolving view of Land, from a White Treaty person's perspective, underpins my autoethnographic work, in which reimagining Land as a relationship helps examine how a reflective walking journey across Traditional First Nations Territory could transform a White Treaty person's approach to recreation and foster relational responsibility to Land-as-kin (Ki/Kin) and to its original Peoples. This work also explores how sharing this embodied (un)learning process might encourage other White Treaty people to deepen their understanding and accountability (Adams et al., 2017). To reflect the animacy and relationality with the more-than-human world and to move away from objectifying Land as it, I will adopt the ki (singular) and kin (plural) pronouns herein, as suggested by Kimmerer (2015). Notably, in Anishinaabemowin, Aki means "Land" (Simpson, 2014).

This study took place on the Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory of the Ojibway People of Fort William First Nation (FWFN), under the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. These Lands are near what is now called Thunder Bay, Ontario, also known by its ancestral name, Animikii Wiikwedong (Sánchez Martínez et al., 2025). The FWFN Reserve was established in 1853 under the Robinson-Superior Treaty and covers 5,815.1 hectares (14,369 acres). In 2026, the Reserve Lands are significantly smaller than the Nation's Traditional Territory, reflecting ongoing processes of dispossession and land reduction (FWFN, 2019). Natural Resources Canada (2019) indicates that Fort William Indian Reserve No. 52 totals about 11,159 hectares (27,576 acres). Since the early 2010's, FWFN has initiated and negotiated several historic land claims to address Treaty breaches and the

unlawful expropriation of reserve lands. These efforts culminated in a settlement of a 160-year-old boundary claim with the Governments of Canada and Ontario, which included financial compensation and the transfer of provincial Crown Lands, such as Flatland Island and Pie Island, to be designated as reserve land for the Nation (Government of Canada, 2011). Throughout this paper, I distinguish between FWFN Traditional Territory, which encompasses the broader ancestral Lands historically used and cared for by FWFN, and its Reserve Lands, which refer specifically to the legally defined Fort William 52 Reserve under the Indian Act.

The FWFN community is situated on the western shore of Kitchigami (Lake Superior), beneath the wing of Anemki Wajiw (Thunderbird Mountain, colonially known as Mount McKay). The sacred Mountain, part of the Nor'Wester Mountain Range, formed over a billion years ago, with peaks characterized by distinctive mesas that define the region's skyline and serve as culturally and ecologically vital habitats for plants, animals, and people (FWFN, 2019; Harnden et al., 2015). The Anishinaabeg of this area have maintained profound relationships with Land through hunting, fishing, gathering, medicine collection, maple syrup production, and forest stewardship (FWFN, 2018; FWFN, 2019).

For the past 20 years, Anemki Wajiw has been a constant presence in my daily life. It is always in my line of sight - as I leave for work in the morning, visible from the lunchroom at my workplace, and as a sentinel on the horizon when I head home. However, for much of this time, I have superficially admired the Mountain's beauty without understanding its layered histories, including the forced relocation of the FWFN reserve to its current site in 1905, the colonial renaming of the Mountain, and the establishment of a rifle range and quarries at its base, which have inflicted violence on the Land (Hay, 2019). Now, guided by the youth in the Mountain Keepers program of FWFN, I endeavour to move beyond mere observation to Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (listen to Animikii Wajiw) by listening to the Mountain (Garrick, 2022), and considering how relationships with Land and its original caretakers might be repaired and renewed. Throughout the document, I will use the spelling Anemki Wajiw (Thunderbird Mountain), except when using the phrase Animikii Wajiw

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Manidoo Bizindaw, as language keeper Laura Calmwind indicated it should be spelled in this context (B. Carpick, personal communication, August 7, 2026).

As a White Treaty person living, learning, and spending time on Robinson-Superior Treaty Land, I often reflect on my sense of belonging to this place I call home. Note – I have chosen to use "White Treaty person" instead of "settler" throughout this text. Labelling myself as a settler can create division, help avoid guilt, garner sympathy, and emphasize the past (Cuthand, 2021). Guzman (n.d.) states that "colonizer" more accurately describes a group that claims land already occupied. However, I previously used "settler" as a respectful way to acknowledge my non-Indigenous identity in my personal language, which is why this term frequently appears in my data excerpts and Chapter 4 sub-themes. Using "White Treaty person" shifts the focus to my role as a Treaty inhabitant on Indigenous Land and my intention to fulfil my Treaty responsibilities going forward. I capitalize Treaty herein to signify respect for these legal agreements that specify Indigenous Rights (Younging, 2025).

Although I am "from" Thunder Bay, my ancestors are not. My great-grandparents arrived from the United Kingdom and Italy in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a time when "White settlers amassed wealth and developed a local industrial economy based on land resources such as silver, timber, and shale" (Hay, 2019, p. 281). During this period, the Anishinaabe people were forcibly relocated to the FWFN reserve and excluded from participating in the area's industrial development (Hay, 2019), while my ancestors succeeded as employees in the agricultural and transportation sectors. For me, as a White Treaty person with a post-secondary education, stable employment in a governmental organization, and a "land" and homeowner, my family and I continue to benefit from the systems and structures created and reinforced by the historic and ongoing practices of colonization and settler colonialism, which have oppressed, dispossessed, and excluded the Anishinaabeg (Davis et al., 2016).

My connection to the Land on Anishinaabe Territory grew from a lifelong curiosity about birds, trees, and sustainable foraging—a practice a non-Indigenous family friend introduced me to as a child, teaching me to harvest and prepare Labrador Tea and Cedar leaves for tea. I now recognize this as traditional First Nations knowledge. I am grateful for

the gifts the Land provides, including the geologic and metaphorical stability of the Canadian Shield; the beauty and grounding qualities of a stand of towering white pines on Nanbijou (Sibley Peninsula); and edible gifts such as fiddleheads, dandelions, and lamb's quarters. However, I am (un)learning that appreciating 'nature' (a contested term) is not enough, and that I must pair this with critical self-reflection and reflexivity toward the Land and its original Peoples (Davis et al., 2016) to move beyond recognition to relational accountability.

Jennifer Redvers, Métis Dënesųłiné from the Northwest Territories (2020), reminds us that connection with Land is central to humanity's well-being. This study was motivated by insights from Indigenous scholars that healing relationships with Land are inseparable from healing relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples, and that both are crucial to addressing the climate crisis and fostering physical, mental, spiritual, and ecological health (Kimmerer, 2013; Krawec, 2022; Redvers, 2020; Reed et al., 2024; Watts, 2013). Through an autoethnographic, reflective walking journey with Anemki Wajiw and Sisters¹ my research will examine how White Treaty people might (un)learn colonial assumptions, ethically recreate on/with Indigenous Lands, and build relational accountability with both the Land and its original (and present-day) caretakers, the Anishinaabeg of FWFN.

Research Setting and Context

The FWFN was established in 1853 under the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. From an Anishinaabeg perspective, the Treaty was intended to secure rights to Ancestral Land and to continue hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering on Traditional Territories, while granting settlers limited access to resources and establishing a relationship of coexistence (Anishinabek Nation, n.d.). In return, the Crown promised to protect Indigenous livelihoods, reserve Lands, and provide annuity payments, grounded in the understanding that the Land would be shared (Canada, n.d.).

¹ Gail Bannon referred to the other Mountains in what is colonially known as the Nor'Wester Mountain Range as the 'Sisters' in one of our conversations (personal communication, July 10, 2026), and since I had been searching for the ancestral names without any luck, this felt like the right description to land on.

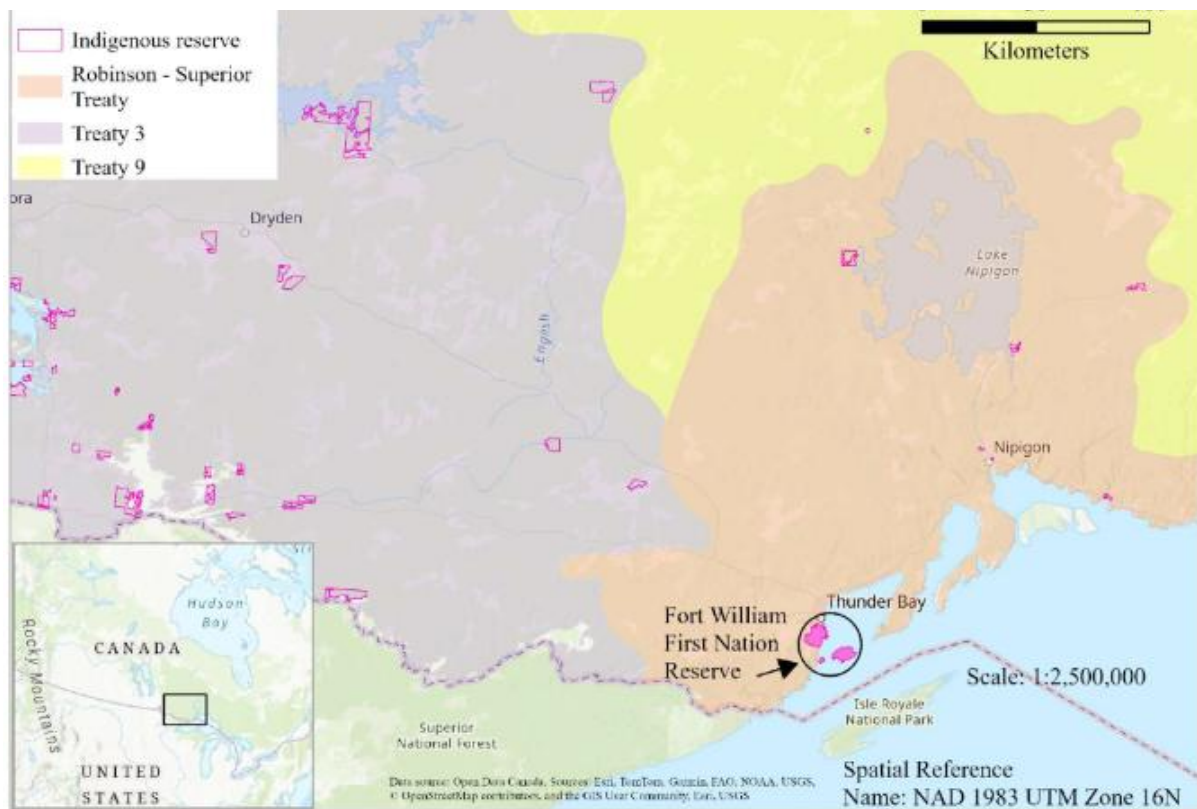
NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In practice, the Treaty facilitated widespread dispossession. The actual reserve Lands were a small portion of the Anishinaabeg traditional Territory, and settlers and industry took possession of Land and resources. The FWFN reserve was forcibly relocated in 1905 to accommodate industrial growth in what is now called Thunder Bay (Hay, 2019). These actions violated the spirit and intent of the Treaty and led to ongoing Land disconnection, economic marginalization, and unresolved Land claims (FWFN, 2018; Hay, 2019). In this thesis, "Fort William First Nation Reserve" denotes the legally designated Lands of FWFN. "Fort William First Nation Traditional Territory" refers to the broader ancestral territory with which the FWFN has deep cultural, historical, spiritual, and relational connections.

The FWFN Traditional Territory extends from Pigeon River in the south to the Treaty 9 boundary in the north and east to what is now called Nipigon (FWFN, 2019). It lies along the western edge of Kitchigami (Lake Superior), a crucial water body for the Anishinaabeg for culture, ecology, and spirituality. Historically, this area was home to the "Grand Fishery," a vital traditional Lake Superior fishing ground used by the FWFN, which served as a primary food source and economic resource for the Ojibway. It encompassed Isle Royale, Pie Island, Sturgeon Bay, Thunder Bay, Ignace Island, and reached Nipigon Bay (FWFN, 2018). The Territory includes varied ecosystems within the Boreal and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forests, featuring conifers such as Black and White Spruce, Balsam Fir, and Jack Pine, along with deciduous trees like Trembling Aspen, White Birch, and Balsam Poplar (Government of Ontario, n. d.). Less common species that highlight the ecosystem's diversity—especially on the slopes of the Nor'Westers include Eastern White and Red Pines, Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, American Elm, and Black Ash. The northeast part of the region also contains the Kaministiquia River delta, known as Mission Flats, which has lowland swamps and two moraines (FWFN, 2018).

To support this territorial overview, I include the map developed by Thapa et al. (2024), used under a Creative Commons license, which visually situates Fort William First Nation's Reserve and Traditional Territory within the broader regional landscape.

Figure 1. Map of Fort William First Nation Traditional Territory



Note. Source: Thapa, K., Laforest, M., Banning, C., & Thompson, S. (2024). *Where the Moose Were: Fort William First Nation's Ancestral Land, Two-Eyed Seeing, and Industrial Impacts*. *Land*, 13(12), 2014. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land13122029>. Used under Creative Commons license.

The Nor'Wester Mountains, a landmark on the Animikii Wiikwedong horizon, are among the world's oldest features, dating back over 1 billion years (FWFN, 2018). The six peaks along Highway 61 are colonially known as Mt. McKay (Anemki Wajiw), Mt. McCrae, Mt. Johnson, Mt. McQuaig, Squaretop Mountain, and Mt. Hurlburt and were named the "Nor'Westers" during the 1963 winter carnival ("Mount McKay", 1962). I am still searching for the ancestral names of this mountain range. However, aside from Anemki Wajiw (also known as Animkii Wajiw or Anemki Wacheu), I have not been able to locate the Anishinaabemowin names for these peaks. Indigenous place names reflect relationships with the Land and its stories, but colonists impose ownership through their own names, often

nodding to saints or royals (David, n.d.). Indigenous place names are descriptive and relational, so one can find and know the place from the name, as Basso (1996, p.104) so aptly elucidates: “On the pictorial wings of place names, imaginations soar.” Anemki Wajiw (Thunderbird Mountain) is a sacred site for FWFN. However, it has faced colonial violence, including the development of a rifle range (Hay, 2019). Historical and ongoing recreational pressures include climbing, mountain biking, recreational vehicles, and hiking on the “Lost Mountain” loop (“First Nation Will Not Accept Disrespect of Sacred Grounds,” 2013; Gail Bannon, personal communication, September 05, 2025; Superior Hiking, 2025). I have also accessed this area for snowshoeing and trail running without permission, thereby ignoring my Treaty duties. The Doctrine of Discovery, which European nations used to claim land upon discovery, and *terra nullius*, the colonial idea that land was unoccupied despite Indigenous presence, both reinforce attitudes of dominance and the settler belief in the right to access “wilderness” (Krawec, 2022; Wolfe, 2006). The idea that we own and control Land rather than belong to it (Watts, 2013) creates a disconnection from the Land and its original caretakers, hindering settlers from embracing their stewardship responsibilities. I expand on the ideas of Land ownership and relationality in the section “Settler Colonialism and Land”.

In August 2025, I met with the FWFN Cultural Manager, Gail Bannon, to discuss conducting an autoethnographic walking thesis project on FWFN Territory following an offering of asemaa (tobacco). We discussed how, in the past, some groups accessed Anemki Wajiw for extreme mountain biking or UTV off-roading without respecting protocols or requesting permission (G. Bannon, personal communication, August 2025). Guides have also been published, such as those by the Superior Hiking Club (Superior Hiking, n.d.), that list routes on FWFN Land without acknowledging the Land as such or including respectful protocols for recreating on Indigenous Lands. Today, FWFN shares its sacred mountain. For a fee, the public can access the scenic lookout for breathtaking views of its Territory, Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (listen to the mountain), and reflect on how the Land is communicating with us and the importance of listening to its stories. As Redvers (2020) reminds us, “connection with Land is a central dimension of humanity’s well-being” (p. 92).

Positionality

In qualitative research, rather than bracketing oneself (Creswell & Poth, 2018), it is important to make the invisible visible. Being reflexive about one's positionality in autoethnographic research strengthens methodological integrity and increases transparency about how one's social location influences the research and its outcomes (Morrow & Kettle, 2023). As a fourth-generation White Treaty person of Scottish, Irish, and Italian descent, I grew up in what is now known as Thunder Bay and have benefited from settler colonialism in ways I did not previously recognize, including the assumption that I would pursue post-secondary education, secure stable employment, and have a safe place to live, as well as the privilege of being able to consider my place in the web of creation and to embark on this (un)learning journey. I identify as a White, cisgender, able-bodied woman raised on rural Land. Growing up, I was unaware of my privilege, especially regarding Land access. I thought of our "property" as family-owned, and although I was vaguely aware of "the Reserve", I did not realize Indigenous Territory extended beyond FWFN. Growing up in a rural environment and having the privilege of exploring 'wild' spaces fostered a deep connection to the natural world (which I now understand I am part of). I observed plants, wildlife, and birds such as Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, which captivated me with their sunset colours. These experiences fuelled my passion for outdoor activities and conservation and were reinforced by an undergraduate Rural Stewardship course at the University of Guelph and by managing a small family farm over the past two decades. I have come to a deeper understanding that ideas of property and conservation are rooted in a human-centred discourse that separates 'nature' from culture and ignores Indigenous Land ontologies and epistemologies (Krawec, 2022; Reed et al., 2024; Springgay & Truman, 2019). Over the past twenty years, as a parent, student, food producer, public health practitioner, and White Treaty person living near what is now known as Thunder Bay, I have become aware of my Treaty responsibilities to Indigenous Land caretakers and defenders. (Un)Learning about settler colonialism, residential schools, and intergenerational trauma has

led me to develop a “settler consciousness”, recognizing the need to unlearn colonial biases, understand the benefits I have received from colonization and settler colonialism, and acknowledge my relational responsibilities as a White Treaty Person on this Land (Davis et al., 2016). Engaging with scholarship on settler ethics and treaties has shaped the premise of this autoethnographic study, which holds that relational responsibility can be built through embodied acts of walking with Land (Ermine, 2007; Springgay & Truman, 2019).

Settler Colonialism and Land

The ongoing disconnection that a majority of settlers continue to feel from the territories they live on, and their lack of education and practice around reciprocity with other-than-human beings, frequently cause great pain and harm both to the land itself and to Indigenous peoples from that territory. (Askew, 2025, p.485)

In countries with settler histories, such as Canada, colonization and settler colonialism have profoundly disrupted Indigenous relationships with Land, culture, governance, and more-than-human relations (Gram-Hanssen et al., 2022; Krawec, 2022; Reibold, 2022). Following Kimmerer (2013) and others (Reed et al., 2024; Springgay & Truman, 2019), the term more-than-humans will be used throughout to refer to all our relatives and teachers, challenging the separation between animacy and non-animacy and encompassing waters, rocks, minerals, plants, animals, and celestial bodies. Settler colonialism refers to the systems and structures through which settlers exploited Indigenous peoples and their Lands for labour and resources, imposed new laws and governance systems, and attempted to erase or assimilate Indigenous peoples through cultural destruction (Veracini, 2014; Wolfe, 2006). These processes are not confined to the past; they continue to influence access to Land, resource extraction, and health inequities (Reed et al., 2024).

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The dispossession of Indigenous peoples from Land and the ongoing exploitation of “natural” resources to boost economic growth are not only barriers to reconciliation but also fundamental drivers of global warming and the climate crisis (Reed et al., 2024). Altered weather patterns, wildfires, droughts, and severe weather events increasingly threaten planetary health and human well-being (Diaz et al., 2006; Hoogeveen et al., 2021; IPCC, 2023). Settler colonialism exploits Indigenous peoples, their Land, and their culture, and requires repairing relationships. Unsettling colonial systems of entitlement, recognizing Indigenous laws and governance systems, and supporting Indigenous-led stewardship are essential to ecological and planetary health (Whyte, 2017; Kimmerer, 2013).

The colonial hierarchy places humans above all other species and treats Land as a commodity to be owned and controlled. It regards Land, water, and rocks as “objects instrumental for human needs, rather than parts of our multispecies social worlds” (Elton, 2025, p. 40). Krawec (2022) emphasizes, “That we don’t own land the way that we own a car or a book” (p. 46). The settler outlook on Land ownership is shaped by concepts such as *terra nullius* and wilderness ideals, rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery, which reinforce the separation between humans and ‘nature’ (Adloff, 2025). Today, amid accelerating climate crises, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem collapse, the severing of relationships between humans and the natural world, rooted in settler colonialism, continues to drive environmental destruction and social harms (Watts, 2013). Healing relationships with the Land requires addressing the inequities and divisions caused by settler colonialism (Reed et al., 2024; Styres & Zinga, 2013). Locally, White Treaty People have a responsibility to build respectful, accountable relationships with the Ojibway of FWFN. Being in right relation with the Land and each other - a concept defined as mutual respect, reciprocity, and harmony - will promote shared stewardship, enhance mental, physical, and spiritual health, and contribute to planetary health, as Indigenous understandings of health are inherently relational and environmental (Redvers et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2024). Patty Krawec

reminds us that relationships are central at this crucial time and that “We need to unforget our histories and the relationships they contain. We need to become kin” (2022, p. 2).

National calls to action (Bill C-15 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action [2015]) can, in theory, help address the ongoing effects of colonization and settler colonialism. They help build better relationships and encourage settlers to recognize the interconnectedness of all things, including the understanding that everything we need comes from the Land (Kimmerer, 2013; Anishinabek Nation, n.d.). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2006), along with Bill C-15² (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2021) and the TRC Calls to Action (2015), provide further support and rationale for settlers to acknowledge and honour Treaty rights and responsibilities, respect Indigenous sovereignty, and build respectful relationships. This includes confronting the truths of the Sixties Scoop, residential schools, Land dispossession, and cultural suppression caused by the Indian Act (1876).

Political and Environmental Urgency

The current political context, including Bill C-5 in Canada (Government of Canada, 2025) and Bill 5³ in Ontario (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2025), are paving the way for unregulated development on traditional territories and potential violations of Treaty and Aboriginal rights. This legislation, combined with a federal budget that favours economic growth over First Nations rights, Treaty commitments, environmental protections, and cultural heritage, risks undermining reconciliation efforts and the well-being of future generations unless community members actively uphold Treaty responsibilities, hold

² Bill C-15 mandates that Canada align its laws with UNDRIP, establishing a minimum standard to transform the relationship with Indigenous Peoples from colonial control to one that recognizes Indigenous sovereignty and inherent self-determination rights related to government, Land, and culture. It offers a framework that emphasizes Treaties as ongoing commitments with binding obligations, serving as a foundation for coexistence.

³ Bill C-5 in Canada and Bill 5 in Ontario are laws that accelerate development approvals by bypassing environmental and heritage protections, while undermining consultation and consent on Traditional Territories.

governments accountable, and respond to the gaps these policies create (Vaillancourt, n.d.; Vaillancourt, 2025).

Climate change scientists (IPCC, 2023) and Indigenous voices, among others, emphasize that addressing social and environmental impacts requires transdisciplinary approaches that foster respectful relationships between people and Land (Adloff, 2025; Krawec, 2022; Kimmerer, 2013; Klinenberg et al., 2020; Whitmee et al., 2015). In 1977, Annie Peaches, a late member of the Cibecue Apache community in eastern-central Arizona, described Land as relational and animate when she told anthropologist Keith Basso, “The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right. The land looks after us. The land looks after people” (Annie Peaches, quoted in Basso, 1996, p. 38). Her words resonated deeply with me, serving as the defining motivation for my study - the feeling that the Land and its original caretakers, the Anishinaabeg, are calling me to take responsibility, learn about their way of life, foster relationships with the FWFN community, and ultimately address the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises by working together at a local level to nurture respectful, reciprocal bonds with Land and each other. Anishinaabeg Laws emphasize the interconnectedness of all things and the Land as a source of everything we need (Anishinabek Nation, n.d.). Their principles and duties encourage caring for one another and all of creation (Anishinabek Nation, n.d.). As Issac Murdoch highlights in the Anishinabek Nation video on colonialism and climate change, colonialism is based on resource extraction, which is the fundamental cause of climate change. He states, “Everybody is affected by colonization” (Anishinabek Nation, 2021, 4:15), which suggests to me that everybody must act to redress the harms and find solutions to the current social and ecological crises.

As a White Treaty person living, working, and spending time on the traditional Territory of the FWFN, I have the privilege of spending time on Robinson Superior Treaty Land. I am working to reconcile this privilege by deepening my understanding of Treaty and relational responsibilities. I aim to learn to engage in recreation on traditional Territory

respectfully, guided by research and critiques from Indigenous scholars. I hope that sharing these learnings with my social community and beyond will contribute to reconciliation and to the protection of the Land for the health and well-being of the planet and ancestors-in-the-making (Kimmerer, 2021).

White Treaty people require models for ethically spending time on ancestral Lands and for maintaining, improving, and building relationships with their original caretakers. This study explores the connections among Land, health, Indigenous-settler relationships, and Treaty responsibilities through a reflective, embodied walking (skiing) journey with the Nor'Wester Mountain Range (NWMR), located on the traditional Territory of the FWFN and the Robinson Superior Treaty Territory. By undertaking this reflective walking (skiing) journey, I aimed to (un)learn how to engage respectfully with the Land, honour the original caretakers, the Anishinaabeg, encourage shared stewardship, and strengthen Indigenous-settler connections. My study connects walking (skiing)-with-place, relationality (Springgay & Truman, 2019), and learning about Treaty responsibilities.

Research Objective

Through this autoethnographic walking (skiing) study, I sought to investigate my relational responsibilities to Land, the Anishinaabeg, the Ancestors, future Ancestors, and more-than-human relations as a White Treaty person and a guest living and working on FWFN Traditional Territory. The reflexive process of planning and walking (skiing) with the Nor'Wester Mountains deepened my sense of place and provided the ontological motivation to attend to (un)learnings and the uncomfortable emotions that arise from spending time on Anishinaabeg Traditional Territory and FWFN Reserve Lands. Engaging in critical self-reflection during this embodied research study provided the knowledge and awareness needed to act on my responsibilities and to engage in a reciprocal relationship with the Land-as-Kin (Grant, 2025; Stanley, 2020).

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

My central research question: How might a reflective, embodied walking (skiing) journey with/on traditional First Nations Reserve Lands and Territory transform a White Treaty person's recreational ethics and foster relational responsibilities to the Land-as-Kin and to its original Peoples?

Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

The literature review provided the context for this research, highlighting key concepts, justifying the chosen methodology, and linking it to broader scholarship on relational responsibilities associated with viewing Land-as-Kin.

Existing autoethnographic studies have employed walking methodologies to explore settler shame and relationality (Grant, 2025), reclaim Indigenous water sovereignty (Hill, 2020), and understand walking as a way of knowing (Amoroso, 2021). Some studies have used autoethnography to investigate how participation in “serious leisure” influences personal and professional relationships (Anderson, 2011), to examine the researcher’s experiences on adventure expeditions (Kennedy et al., 2019), or to analyze the effects of spending a solitary year in the wilderness on perceptions of animacy (Hull, 2004). However, there remains an opportunity for non-Indigenous researchers to employ autoethnography and walking as methodological approaches to foster respectful relationships and relational accountability among settlers who recreate on ancestral Lands in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area. The literature review was conducted iteratively throughout the research process. An initial review of the literature, guided by the research question and conducted in Academic ONEFile, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Web of Science, and the Lakehead University Library search engine OMNI using the search string: autoethnography* AND walk* AND ("land-based" OR "land-as-kin") AND (relational OR Treaty OR settler), yielded between zero (Web of Science) and 700 (Google Scholar) results. Adjusting the terms to be less restrictive, such as adding “land,” resulted in slightly more hits. Reviewing titles and abstracts for references that employed autoethnographic processes with a walking methodology, that discussed relationality, relational accountability, or Land-based pedagogies, and that examined settler colonialism or White Treaty relationships to Land and its original caretakers within a Canadian or Indigenous context, led to the selection of approximately 30 key articles and additional supplementary works. As the review progressed, I identified additional essential references through citation tracking (i.e.,

backward and forward snowballing) by examining references in related studies and frequently cited works; this approach is important for building a literature base focused on Indigenous scholarship (UBC, n.d.). This iterative approach aligns with qualitative inquiry, in which emerging concepts identified during analysis inform ongoing engagement with the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition, three master's theses (Amoroso, 2021; Desjardins, 2025; and Hill, 2020), identified through citation tracking and suggested by my supervisor, addressed walking as a form of embodied inquiry, examined how settlers might ethically incorporate Land-based practices on Indigenous Territory, and examined Indigenous water governance through personal experiences and the medicine wheel. These autoethnographic studies provided relevant methodological examples and background information that informed the methodology.

Walking Methodologies

Walking-with is 'accountable'. Walking-with is a form of solidarity, unlearning, and critical engagement with situated knowledges. Walking-with demands that we forgo universal claims about how humans and nonhumans experience walking and consider the more-than-human ethics and politics of the material intra-actions of walking research (Springgay & Truman, 2019, p. 11).

Springgay & Truman (2019) provide a strong foundation for walking as a methodology, using the concept of "walking-with" to delve into "being-in-relation-with" the world and emphasizing its emotional impact. They discuss how pace, rhythm, and interruptions shape the insights derived. They also note that walking-with can be done alone but requires intentionality and awareness of one's positionality and the implications of settler colonialism during the practice.

The literature supports walking interviews, which yield more spontaneous data because environmental elements influence participants and prompt discussion of place (Evans & Jones, 2011). This builds on Anderson's (2004) work, which posits that knowledge

creation occurs as we traverse pathways through the environment through ‘talking whilst walking’. Similarly, Kline (2025) advocates capturing the “impact of physical contact with the trail” (p. 10), and in his autoethnographic inquiry, *Walking Toward Relationality*, Grant (2025) indicates that he “intended for this walk to be a step toward cultivating an authentic relationship with my homeland” (p. 100). According to Peterson & Valisena (2025), practicing more-than-human walks can “...by moving, through, and from places, resignify them by weaving new, sometimes unexpected more-than-human trajectories of meaning” (p. 1). Walking-with offers strong methodological congruency for engaging with our more-than-human relatives from a critical and relational perspective (Grant, 2025).

In addition to a walking-with methodological approach (Springgay & Truman, 2019), three cross-cutting themes emerged from my literature review: privileging Indigenous methodologies, the Land-as-Kin perspective, and the need for a non-Indigenous researcher to recognize and act on Treaty and relational responsibilities. These themes are discussed below.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The literature emphasizes foregrounding Indigenous knowledge systems in my autoethnographic study, which examines our responsibilities to the Land-as-Kin and its original caretakers within a relational context. Indigenous researchers and allies/co-conspirators stress relational accountability (Smithers Graeme, 2013; Gram-Hanssen et al., 2022), emphasizing Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies (Datta, 2018; Watts, 2013), integrating place-based Indigenous knowledge (Smithers Graeme, 2013), and noting that ignoring Indigenous cosmologies perpetuates colonization (Datta, 2018; Smithers Graeme, 2013). Indigenous methodologies are diverse and context-dependent because knowledge is personal (Smithers Graeme, 2013). Indigenous knowledge systems generally acknowledge the interconnectedness of Land, Water, and Place and reject the human-‘nature’ dichotomy (Reed et al., 2024). Most Indigenous languages lack a word for “‘nature’” as the concept of separating humans from ‘nature’ does not exist (Reed et al., 2024; Watts, 2013). Rather,

Indigenous knowledge is grounded in relationships centred on people, Land, and reciprocity (Kimmerer, 2013), encompassing the idea of ‘All my Relations’ or Nii’kinaaganaa, which Krawec (2022, p. 1) describes as “I am my relatives, all of them. I am related to everything. All my relations.”

Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies maintain that agency is not solely the domain of humans (Reed et al., 2024; Watts, 2013), and Watts (2013) elaborates on this idea with her concept of Indigenous Place-Thought—the “premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (Watts, 2013, p. 21). Watts (2013) suggests that “Place-Thought” could serve as a space where humans and non-humans interact and “articulate their agency” (p. 27). Place-Thought is a space I explored on my (un)learning journey.

Datta (2018) advocates decolonizing the researcher and conducting research that uses an Indigenous framework, focusing on Indigenous Land, sovereignty, and epistemologies. However, they caution that Western researchers must “recognize the persistence of colonialism, oppression, and domination in systems of Western research training and seek to include an ethical understanding in their research practice” (Datta, 2018, p. 3) – something I strove to be mindful of in my research.

The concepts of ‘two-eyed seeing’ (Etuapmumk in the Mi’kmaw language), proposed by Mi’kmaw Elder Dr. Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation, and ‘ethical space’, proposed by Cree Elder Willie Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation (Ermine, 2007), help to both bridge and draw on the strengths of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems respectfully and collaboratively. Two-eyed seeing, a paradigm that suggests using one eye to view through the lens of Indigenous knowledge (which is relational, land-based, and honours the sacredness of all living beings) and the other eye to look through the lens of Western scientific knowledge (which is analytical, reductive, and focused on understanding the natural world), works holistically to develop a balanced, informed understanding of the world (Bartlett et al., 2012; Thapa et al., 2024). The practice of two-eyed seeing complements the idea of ethical space, “...as a space between the Indigenous and Western

thought worlds” (Ermine, 2007, p.194). Using these concepts in my research and analysis will help me consider issues of knowledge and power and rebalance the privileging of Western knowledge systems in favour of Indigenous methodologies (Ermine, 2007; Thapa et al., 2024).

Prioritizing Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing supported my efforts to build a reciprocal relationship with the Land and other Treaty peoples, helping me avoid further harm to the Land or to my relationships with Indigenous peoples throughout this (un)learning journey.

Land-as-Kin

Land from an Indigenous perspective carries with it the idea of journeying, of being connected to, and interconnected with, geographic and spiritual space – in other words, a deep sense of identification through a cosmological and ecological connection to both natural and spiritual worlds. (Sytres & Zinga, 2013, p. 302).

In her powerful essay “Greed Does Not Have to Define Our Relationship to Land,” Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020), a member of the Potawatomi Nation, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and founder of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, challenges us (ancestors-to-be) to consider, “Is land merely a source of belongings, or is it the source of our most profound sense of belonging?” (paragraph 10). Here, she calls on us to recognize our interconnectedness, responsibilities, and reciprocal relationship with Land, especially in the context of ongoing settler colonialism and resource extraction that fuels capitalism and the climate crisis.

Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies view Land as a healing space connected to a healthy life (Redvers, 2020; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). The imagery of humans being literally of, made from, belonging to, or related to the Land-as-kin is widespread in literature on Indigenous ways of knowing. Krawec (2022, p.11) states, “The Land itself and the conditions of that land, like altitude, climate, and topography, impact our genome just as our human ancestors do.” Watts (2013) describes how, in the Sky Woman

origin story, “When Sky Woman falls from the sky and lies on the back of a turtle, she is not only able to create land but becomes Territory itself.” In this story, Sky Woman literally embodies the idea of Land as kin, becoming “the basis by which all future societies will be built upon - land” (Watts, 2013, p. 23). Galway et al. (2022) describe the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Land as loving and familial (i.e., kin). This powerful imagery illustrates that Indigenous peoples have more than a relationship with the Land - they are related to Land (Galway et al., 2022; Krawec, 2022; Reed et al., 2024). Just as Louis (2007) emphasizes the importance of relational accountability to Land and people in Indigenous research methodologies, this principle also applies to relationships with the Land. In Indigenous worldviews, interconnectedness, relationality, reciprocity, and responsibilities to the Land are core concepts (Galway et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2024; Thapa et al., 2024). This is reflected in the phrase “all our relations,” which acknowledges that we are part of an interconnected family and that human health is inseparable from the well-being of our other ‘relations,’ including Land, water, and all other ‘more-than-human-beings’ (Galway et al., 2022; Louis, 2007). We have responsibilities and interdependence with ‘all our relations,’ just as we do with our human families.

If, as Kimmerer suggests, we cultivate a culture of gratitude for the Land and ‘more-than-human beings,’ where “we acknowledged that everything we consume is the gift of Mother Earth, [then] we would take better care of what we are given. Mistreating a gift has emotional and ethical gravity as well as ecological resonance” (2022, para.11). In other words, when you are in a relationship with the Land, you have a responsibility to care for it and to reciprocate the gifts it provides, now and in the future (Adloff, 2025).

Treaty and Relational Responsibilities

As a White Treaty person investigating the ethics of spending time on the Robinson-Superior Treaty Land, I found that recognizing and upholding Treaty obligations and relational responsibilities was a recurring theme in the literature. Treaties are not merely historic relics—they are living agreements that require active engagement from settlers

(Forsyth, 2010). During a workshop, the facilitator, who was supporting us in working in solidarity with equity-denied communities, reminded us that “We are all Treaty people.” I felt called in, rather than called out, and this moment sparked my pursuit of settler reflexivity to engage in right relationship with the Land and the Indigenous people who have cared for it for millennia.

Settler reflexivity is crucial to avoid reproducing ignorance and ambivalence. It helps cultivate a deep understanding of how colonization and settler colonialism have affected the health of Indigenous peoples and the environment and can lead to improved relationships (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2022). Settlers must understand how they continue to benefit from colonization to move towards reconciliation (Forsyth, 2010). However, settlers often find this difficult and tend to view colonization as a historic event their ancestors participated in, rather than an ongoing process from which we still benefit. Many settlers want to believe we have moved “beyond this” (colonization), implying we no longer hold direct responsibility to Indigenous peoples (Forsyth, 2010). Recognizing “truth” in the TRC—including land dispossession, environmental harm, the marginalization of women, and the denial of legal and political rights—is an essential first step (Forsyth, 2010). The goal of reconciliation is “not to forgive and forget, but to remember and change” (Forsyth, 2010, p. 6), and progress cannot be made without acknowledging our ongoing role in causing harm. We must use this awareness to prevent its repetition and to foster a desire to build new relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Tuck and Yang (2012) are resolute in their thesis that ‘decolonization is not a metaphor’ and advocate the repatriation of Indigenous Land and sovereignty. Like Forsyth (2010), Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize that settler colonialism is ongoing, not a single event, but a system and structure that continuously reproduces dispossession. I acknowledge that my study could be viewed as engaging in one of Tuck and Yang’s (2012, p. 1) “settler moves to innocence,” as it will not result in the return of Land to Indigenous peoples and could reinforce settler futures.

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022) identify, settlers who recreate on Indigenous lands, such as White mountain bikers, use three strategies - ignorance, ambivalence, and acknowledgment - to justify their presence on Indigenous territories. The investigators conclude that even when settlers acknowledge Indigenous peoples' territories or Land rights, they rarely move beyond recognition to relational responsibility or changed Land practices. Through this autoethnographic research, I aimed to move from simply acknowledging issues towards taking relational responsibility and working towards reconciliation. While it may not fully achieve the decolonization goals advocated by Tuck and Yang (2012), I believe it is better than remaining mired in ignorance or ambivalence. Reid-Hresko & Warren's (2022) work shows that Reibold (2022) extends this discussion, arguing that we need to rethink settler ideas of Land as property, a resource, or recreational space to avoid perpetuating colonial violence and climate change. Reibold (2022) asks us to move beyond Reid-Hresko & Warren's (2022) call to acknowledge our impact as settlers on traditional Land, honour the spirit of treaties, and adopt Indigenous ontologies that view Land as relational, living, and sovereign.

The vision for right relationships is a commitment to fulfilling one's responsibilities in relationships, including with humans and other beings (including inanimate objects, Land, and climate), as outlined in Gram-Hanssen et al.'s (2022) Indigenous-informed framework. As Treaty people and guests, we must understand and uphold our Treaty responsibilities to reconciliation, the Land, and its original caretakers. By working in solidarity, we can protect Mother Earth, which gives us all life.

As a White Treaty person recreating on Traditional Indigenous Territory, I acknowledge that I will always experience discomfort because my desire to spend time on Land for recreation does not always align with Indigenous values. I approached this work with humility (Bishop, 2018), learning from Indigenous-led frameworks (Reibold, 2022) and aiming for long-term accountability—while acknowledging that this work falls short of Tuck and Yang's (2012) assertion that the only path to reconciliation is the repatriation of Indigenous Land. In these polarizing times, we have both the motivation and the opportunity

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

to foster better relationships between settlers and the original caretakers of this Land, so we can work in solidarity to address humanity's challenges (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2022; Reibold, 2022). Kimmerer (2020) offers hope and inspiration, calling us to action by showing how the Land beneath our feet can serve as the foundation for improved relationships (p. 6). "Surely, however, the land has taught you differently, too—that in a time of great polarity and division, the common ground we seek is in fact beneath our feet. The very land on which we stand is our foundation and can be a source of shared identity and common cause."

Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodology and Conceptual Framework

I engaged in “biographically opportunistic research” (Anderson, 2006) by focusing on a topic and activity in which I am embedded as a member of the social community of White Treaty people, privileged to access Land for outdoor recreation that benefits physical and mental health. Although initially conceived as a walking journey, the methodology evolved in response to heavy snow cover during data collection (winter and spring 2026), so the (un)learning journey was undertaken entirely on skis. Consequently, while the term ‘walking’ is retained throughout the thesis, it refers more broadly to embodied movement with Land rather than a specific mode of travel.

Indigenous methodologies often use storywork and journeying (Nelson et al., 2025). My approach aligns with these Indigenous research methods, as I embarked on an embodied (un)learning journey and used narrative techniques to explore, understand, and share my experiences (Simpson, 2014; Styres & Zinga, 2013). I incorporated the concepts of Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012) and Ethical Space (Ermine, 2007) into my data collection questions ([Appendices A & B](#)) and research methodology to guide my work because these concepts connect Indigenous and Western epistemologies (Nelson & Reed, 2025). Additionally, I reflected the centrality of relationships to the research process (Styres & Zinga, 2013) to guide my engagement with participants and Land.

This qualitative study employed an autoethnographic, embodied approach to explore my relationships and responsibilities as a White Treaty Person on the traditional Territory of the Ojibway People of the FWFN. Autoethnography served as both a research method and an outcome (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ellis et al., 2011). I drew on my personal experiences engaging with Land-as-kin and critically reflected on relational accountability and Treaty duties. I chose walking (skiing) as a method of critical inquiry for its embodied, place-specific

qualities (Grant, 2025; Springgay & Truman, 2019). As Grant (2025, p. 106) explains, “The focus on sensory perception and emotional experience makes walking-with-place particularly effective for autoethnographic research,” and I treated Land as a co-participant in this (un)learning journey.

Autoethnography is an embodied, reflexive research approach that draws on lived experience to generate knowledge and uses critical self-reflection to position the self within wider cultural, social, and relational contexts (Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2005). This explanation supports the autoethnographic approach I used in my research and writing, which involved systematically analyzing my personal experience of planning, embarking on, and completing a roughly 50 km reflective journey across and with the Anemki Wajiw and her Sister Mountains. This journey connects and illustrates my personal story within the larger social and place-based context of being a White Treaty person living, working, and playing on the traditional Territory of the Ojibway of FWFN. I examined my sense of being both in and out of place on Indigenous Land, using a walking methodology to engage with Land and reflect on my identity as a White Treaty Person and as someone born here with a profound connection to the environment (Amoroso, 2021; Stanley, 2020).

Given the current climate of social inequality and polarization, qualitative methods like autoethnography are valuable for understanding ourselves and the communities we belong to (Starfield, 2020). Autoethnography, both a process and a product, involves using personal experiences to examine cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). This approach helped me deepen my understanding of my Treaty obligations to the Anishinaabeg and to foster a reciprocal relationship with Land-as-kin. Some researchers, such as Ellis and Bochner (2006), advocate for an emotionally expressive, evocative autoethnography that enhances authenticity. Others, such as Anderson (2006), prefer a more analytical approach that situates personal stories within cultural and social contexts. Anderson’s (2006) five principles of analytic autoethnography closely align with my positionality, research goals and study design, including:

The researcher:

- Identifies as a member of the social group being studied;
- engages in analytic reflexivity to understand their effects on the social world under examination;
- self is visible in the research narrative;
- dialogues with informants⁴ beyond the self; and
- is committed to theoretical analysis.

By using a methodology that enabled me to describe and analyze my personal experiences and (un)learning, I gained a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts I inhabit (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011). This approach heightened my awareness of my relational responsibilities as a White Treaty person and aligned with Tolmos et al.'s (2023) observation that autoethnography often unfolds in complex social circumstances, where a creative-relational approach can help researchers process these experiences. The study explicitly connected walking-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019), relationality (Gram-Hansen et al., 2022), and understanding Treaty responsibilities (Forsyth, 2010).

Walking practices “attend to the vitality and agency of matter, the interconnectedness between humans and non-humans, the importance of mediation and bodily affect, and the necessity of acknowledging ethico-political responsibility” (Springgay & Truman, 2019, p. 27). Walking functions as an embodied method of inquiry that naturally links the researcher to their environment (Amoroso, 2021; Springgay & Truman, 2019). As Stanley (2020) describes, “Hiking [walking] is both an epistemology and ontology” (p. 11). The rhythm of collecting data through movement supports embodied knowledge creation and allows me to physically experience my thoughts rather than having them “...crash[ing] around like spooked horses...” in my mind (p. 10). Springgay & Truman’s (2019) walking-with-place

⁴ Anderson (2006) uses the term ‘informant’; however, I want to acknowledge that this is problematic because it positions Indigenous people merely as data sources, thereby reinforcing colonial power structures and appropriating Indigenous knowledge (Nichols, 2022).

approach underpinned my effort to examine my settler responsibilities by "... promoting critical reflexivity and connections with the Land as a more-than-human agent and co-participant" (Grant, 2025, p. 100). It helped me explore my relational responsibilities to the Land, the Anishinaabeg, and my more-than-human relations, as well as my Treaty obligations as a White Treaty person.

Table 1

Outline of Study Design

Autoethnographic Research Journey Outline (adapted from Grant, 2025)	
Research Aim	To investigate how a reflective, embodied walking (skiing) journey with First Nations Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory might transform a White Treaty person's recreational ethics and foster relational responsibility to the Land and its original Peoples.
Setting	Anemki Wajiw and Sister Mountains (Nor'Wester Mountain Range) located on FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory within the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850.
Duration & Distance	Approximately 48.7 km in total across 3 separate day trips on February 28, March 17, and April 11, 2026: Day 1 (~21 km): I walked (skied) with a partner with whom I engaged in critical conversations and who posed the questions in Appendix B. The journey began at sunrise at Anemki Wajiw (Thunder Mountain, colonially known as Mt. McKay) and ended at Big Thunder (ancestral name still to be determined). Day 2 (18.6 km): With a walking partner, started on Falls Rd. in Neebing Township and finished at Big Thunder. Day 3 (9.10 km): Solo - started and ended on the road to the Anemki Wajiw Pow Wow grounds.
Methodology	Walking-with-place mode of inquiry (Grant, 2025; Springgay & Truman, 2019; Stanley, 2020), using autoethnography as an epistemological framework and integrating the concept of Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (Listen to Animikii Wajiw) (Garrick, 2022).
Journey Preparations	Met with FWFN Cultural Manager Gail Bannon at the Anemki Wajiw Pow Wow grounds (August 2025) and at the Community Centre (February 2026) to respectfully request permission by

	offering Asemaa (Tobacco) at each visit, donating to the Youth Mountain Keepers program, and listening to and reflecting on her teachings. I maintained contact with Gail Bannon in her role as Cultural Manager to keep her updated on my project timeline and activities. I visited the Mary J.L. Black Library to research ancestral names for Anemki Wajiw and her Sisters (Nor'Wester Mountain range).
Data Collection	1. Individual Pre-Journey Journaling and subsequent Recorded Dialogue with a walking partner, during which I responded to the pre-journey questions listed in Appendices A and B. 2. In-journey Autoethnographic Recording: where I privately answered mid-journey touchstone questions - listed in Appendix A - via voice memo or journaling. 3. Impromptu audio and video solo recordings in which I "record[ed] my thoughts and feelings in motion" (Grant, 2025). 4. Reflective journaling and recorded responses to walking partner mid-journey touchstone questions in Appendix B, with stops along the way. 5. Written/verbal solo reflections and subsequent walking-partner dialogues on post-journey questions (Appendices A and B) to uncover (un)learnings about emotional/ethical waypoints and how to walk with new consciousness.
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis of transcribed audio, visual, and written data used a combined approach of manual methods and NVivo software to identify key themes related to the research question and supporting literature, as well as emotional/ethical waypoints (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Grant, 2025).

Study Participants: The Walkers/Skiers

Autoethnographic studies explore the individual's relationship with the wider social community. I enlisted a walking (skiing) partner to accompany me on the first two data-collection days of this (un)learning journey to help me critically reflect on my thoughts, assumptions, and learnings (Cameron, 2012). I invited her because she had the physical ability and prior experience for a multi-day remote trek. She also has personal experience spending time on the FWFN Traditional Territory, is a graduate of the Health Sciences program, and we often engaged in critical dialogue during previous walks. I did not offer my walking (skiing) partner a monetary

incentive; however, I provided food, hot drinks, a first-aid kit, emergency supplies, and safety equipment.

Data Collection

Data collection in autoethnographic research varies but primarily involves ongoing self-observation and reflection on the research topic (Chang, 2022). It draws on diverse sources, such as interviews, photographs, journals, and recordings (Ellis et al., 2011), as well as engaged dialogues that examine “one’s actions and perceptions in relation to those of others” (Anderson, 2006, p. 382). It also includes self-observations, ethnographic field notes, voice recordings (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022), and memorabilia, documents, photos, and artifacts (Chang, 2022). Inspired by the study designs and modes of data collection used by Amoroso (2021), Grant (2025), and Desjardins (2025), who explored walking as an epistemological process and examined relationships with settler colonialism and the ethical incorporation of Land-based approaches on colonized Land through autoethnographic walking studies, I employed a multimodal data collection method that emphasized my personal experience and engagement in critical dialogue with my walking partner to enhance reflexivity (Cameron, 2012). As Anderson (2006) highlights, autoethnographic understanding arises through engaged dialogue: “Because that is how we best learn and how we are meant to live. In relationship,” as Patty Krawec (2022, p. 146) advises. Anderson (2004, p. 260) eloquently explicates the process of building collaborative knowledge through the movement of mind, mouth and body:

“Through talking whilst walking, by conversing and traversing pathways through an environment, we are able to create a world of knowledge (or pathways of knowledge through the world) by taking meanings and understandings into existence.”

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The literature definitively supports my decision to embark on this learning journey with a partner to challenge my assumptions, help interpret my stream of consciousness and co-navigate the tumultuous terrain.

The following outline describes the methods I used to gather data to promote self-observation, reflection, and connection to my social context (Starfield, 2020) over three days: February 28 (Day 1), March 17 (Day 2), and April 11, 2026 (Day 3). On Days 1 and 2, I skied with a partner, while Day 3 was a solo (un)learning ski journey with Anemki Wajiw. For the specific questions, see [Appendices A](#) and [B](#). A detailed account of the data collection process, which involved skiing in the Nor'Wester Mountain range, is provided after this overview of the data collection process, which entailed:

1. Pre-Journey Journaling & Dialogue: I journaled or recorded voice memos in response to the three pre-journey questions in [Appendix A](#) on colonial narratives, my current relationship to the Land and Fort William First Nation (FWFN), and the role of ancestral language. I then held a recorded discussion with my walking partner, using my initial reflections and the pre-journey dialogue prompts in [Appendix B](#) as a foundation to challenge and clarify my starting position(s).

2. In-Journey Autoethnographic Recording: I privately answered a set of seven autoethnographic touchstone questions listed in Appendix A, using voice memos or journaling. Initially, I intended to do this three times daily, but the questions became repetitive, so I did them less frequently than planned. These questions focused on embodied experience, emotional tensions, and emerging notions of relational responsibility and ethical space (Ermine, 2007; Springgay & Truman, 2019).

3. In-Journey Critical Dialogue: After completing my private recordings and journal responses to the touchstone questions in [Appendix A](#), I engaged in audio-recorded conversations with my walking partner using the critical dialogue prompts in [Appendix B](#).

These dialogues were prompted by the themes and tensions I encountered in my touchstone responses and were intended to explore and deepen my developing analysis in real time.

4. In-Journey Audio Recordings: Audio and video-recorded memos were made along the way to “record my thoughts and feelings in motion” (Grant, 2025, p. 108). As described in my analysis, these impromptu voice memos proved highly impactful and contained potentially more (un)learning than the rote questions, owing to their spontaneity..

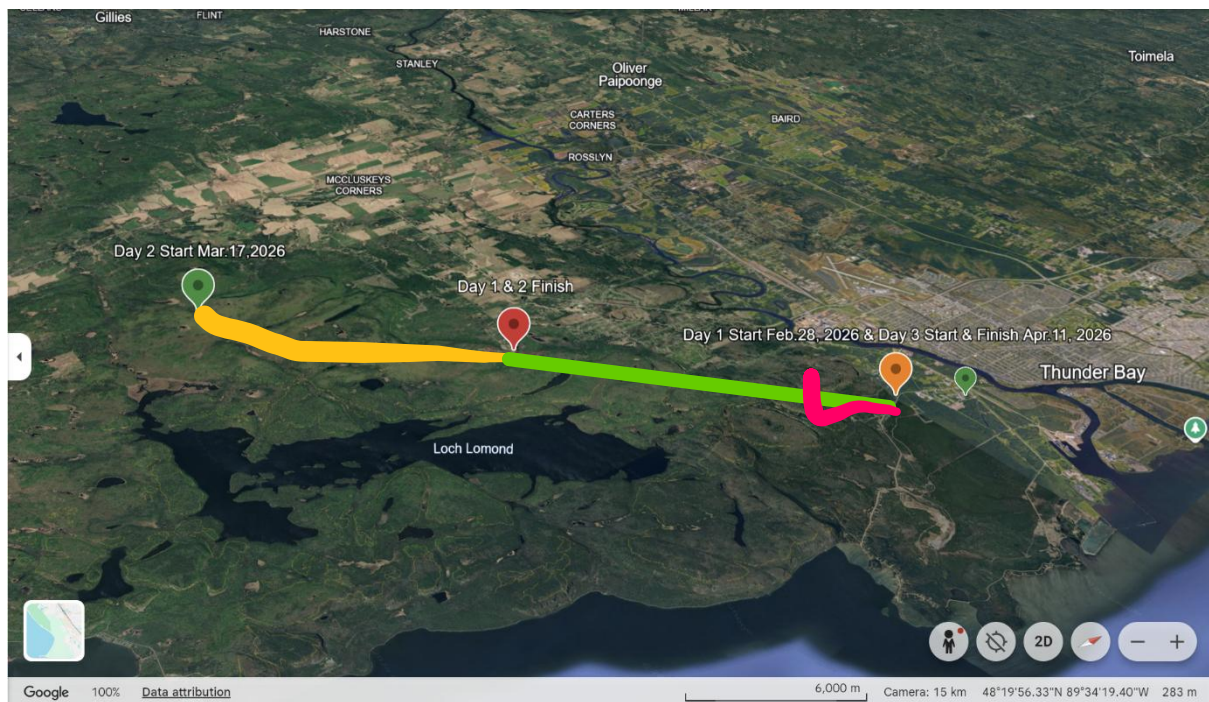
5. In-Journey Photography/Videography: I made many photographic and a few video observations in the field, focusing on turning points that evoked emotion and prompted reflexivity (Kuettel, 2021). Photos served as a visual record of the journey rather than documenting turning points.

6. Post-Journey Critical Dialogue: I completed a final set of personal reflections and engaged in a recorded discussion with my walking/skiing partner to consolidate (un)learnings about the evolution of my recreational ethics and Treaty responsibilities, focusing on emotional and ethical waypoints (Cameron, 2012; Grant, 2025).

Data Collection Journey Overview

This autoethnographic study explored my (un)learning journey as an emic researcher. Over three days, I skied about 50 km in the Nor’Wester Mountain Range using hybrid skin-based skis with step-in bindings for winter boots, ideal for deep snow and frozen waters. Betty Carpick (personal communication, May 27, 2026) noted that the cold weather and snow access provided a unique perspective that could not be duplicated. Data collection during these days in the range employed the Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw mindset.

Figure 2. *Conceptualization of Data Collection Journey.*



Note. Image generated using Google Earth (2026) based on prompts developed by the author. The figure represents three data-collection journeys:

Day 1 – February 28, 2026: Anemki Wajiw to Big Thunder (21.8 km; green).

Day 2 – March 17, 2026: Moon Lake to Big Thunder (18.5 km; yellow).

Day 3 – April 11, 2026: Solo journey from Anemki Wajiw Sugarbush to Mt. Godfrey and return (9.01 km; pink).

Day 1 Description

The journey began at sunrise on Anemki Wajiw on Saturday, February 28, 2026, covering about 20 km of skiing with Anemki Wajiw and Sister mountains, mostly on existing trails with some off-piste exploration prompted by features such as rock faces, unique trees, or views. Some trails had been snowmobiled, creating ruts that made travel harder. We finished at Big Thunder. Figure 1 shows an overview of our route and images. Day 1 data collection included pre-journey journaling and voice memos. At -20°C (felt like -23°C), my phone battery died, and the external charger didn't work. Before that, I made three audio

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

recordings. My partner voice-recorded the final responses on her phone and sent them to me, while I handwrote my reflections (see [Appendices A](#) and [B](#) for questions).

Initially, I planned to handwrite journal entries, but I found voice recordings more efficient and capturing nuances like tone, pauses, and emphasis, which added valuable data. I also aimed to complete mid-journey questions three times daily but found that redundant; in a data memo, I noted voice memos conveyed more emotion and insights, often with photos. So, I reduced responses to once or twice daily, based on natural pauses to eat and rest, and my sense that I had meaningful thoughts to capture.

Day 2 Description

On Day 2, Tuesday, March 17, we travelled 18.60 km on a cold (-21°C), clear day, perfect for communing with Land. The route started just off Falls Rd. in Neebing Township and headed toward Moon Lake, following McCuaig Creek to McCuaig Lake, then to Big Thunder (ancestral names for peaks and water bodies still to be determined). The day ended with observing and Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw. Data collection included solo and partner pre-journey voice-recorded reflections, six solo audio recordings with photos and videos, and post-journey responses to both solo and partner questions. To fix Day 1's battery issues, I kept my phone and power bank in my jacket pocket, used airplane mode, and turned off location services.

Day 3 Description

Initially, in fall 2025, I planned a two-day, one-night data-collection trip from Animiiki Wajiw to Ward Lake. However, switching to two separate day trips made me realize on Day 2 that I was rushing responses because my walking partner was waiting and getting cold. I also felt I hadn't fully explored my relational responsibilities, so I added a third solo day focused on Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw. I recorded two voice memos about this decision, noting I had become more attuned to Land but hadn't reached the level of

relationality I sought. Later, I received permission from the FWFN Cultural Manager to undertake a solo Day 3 trip to Animiiki Wajiw, a 9.10 km ski on Saturday, April 11, starting and ending at the road to the Lookout, which isn't plowed in winter. The weather was clear and sunny at 5°C, and my phone's battery was sufficient for data collection. I planned a flexible route around Animiiki Wajiw, following Land's guidance. My skis performed well in the warm conditions, allowing efficient travel and embodying the Youth Mountain Keeper's advice, Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw. I started before lunch and noticed many vehicles and abandoned snowshoes, likely from snow clumping in above-zero temperatures, suggesting FWFN community members were collecting maple sap. I considered abandoning my journey that day due to the risk of being told I was trespassing. In [Chapter 4: Findings](#), I discuss the tensions and implications of that encounter. Briefly, I had a very positive experience engaging with FWFN community members and Outdoor Recreation staff and students in the sugarbush, which set a positive tone for the rest of the data collection.

On Day 3, I collected data through spontaneous audio reflections, five impromptu recordings, responses to questions before and after the journey, and photos and videos capturing my thoughts and feelings (Grant, 2025). This deepened my understanding of the experience. The process aimed to enhance my reflective analysis of my relations with Land, the Anishinaabeg, and more-than-human entities.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this autoethnography, I acknowledged potential biases and employed strategies to mitigate them. As a White Treaty person exploring relational responsibility and my understandings of Land, I face an ongoing risk of settler-colonial bias and a tendency to reproduce colonial thought patterns, even as I attempt to challenge them. I observed this tendency in my data and continually questioned and adjusted my perspectives. I used reflexive questions before my journeys to examine my positionality. This transparency strengthens the rigour of this study (Datta, 2018; Styres & Zinga, 2013).

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I also risked presenting insights as “discoveries” when, in fact, Indigenous presence and knowledge on this Land span millennia (FWFN, 2019). I may also overfocus on my personal journey, feelings, and transformation, which centres the White settler experience on Indigenous Land (Springgay & Truman, 2019). Through the project, I actively engaged with the tension of assuming the right to spend time on Traditional Indigenous Territory, and I explored this by investigating the history of the Robinson Superior Treaty and its current implications. I have also considered the risks and tensions of portraying myself as a “good” settler or Treaty person, and the challenge of managing settler shame (Kizuk, 2020), which might lead me to downplay feelings of guilt, entitlement, or confusion in my notes. I felt this tension when respectfully requesting permission to conduct my project on FWFN traditional Territory, and I wanted to portray myself as “more” ethical than the “other” White people who have recreated on Anemki Wajiw without requesting permission. I was radically honest when sharing my results, strove to embrace discomfort as a learning opportunity, and was willing to confront uncomfortable data rather than avoid it.

Since conceiving this project, I have been concerned that it might become too self-referential and lose focus on the broader social, political, and historical contexts essential to meaningful data engagement (Anderson, 2006). Laurendeau (2023) acknowledges this risk, noting that decolonial autoethnographic work can unintentionally re-centre White Treaty people. Engaging in critical dialogue with my walking partner (Cameron, 2012; Kennedy et al., 2019) and sharing my ongoing writing and analysis with my social community helped me reflect on decolonization and relational responsibilities.

Recognizing that Indigenous community members are often asked to provide free emotional labour, I engaged with critiques from scholars such as Tuck & Yang (2012), Kizuk (2020), and Gram-Hansen et al. (2022), who offer suggestions for enhancing relationality and decolonizing research methods. I had critical conversations with Betty Carpick, a friend, artist, writer, and creative person of Indigenous descent. I donated to the FWFN “Mountain Keeper” youth program to express my appreciation for the knowledge shared with me. I

made this donation after we discussed permission to access traditional FWFN Territory, not as a reward for obtaining that permission.

A final ethical aspect of this critical autoethnography with a relational approach is that developing relationships and engaging in continuous reflection and critical discussion take time (Adams, 2006; Tolmos et al., 2023). This enhanced the study's quality but also extended its duration. Relational processing and growth are iterative and demand more time than conventional research methods (Tolmos et al., 2023). As Styres & Zinga (2013) note, doing research in a 'good way' requires maintaining accountability and responsibility to relationships. In contrast to today's short news cycles and shrinking attention spans, building respectful, complex relationships takes time but yields more meaningful and valuable findings.

Acknowledging and addressing potential bias strengthens the rigour and ethical integrity of this autoethnography, which sits at the intersection of personal experience and relationality with Treaty Lands and their original caretakers.

Data Analysis

Autoethnographic data analysis involves interpreting data to understand broader social issues, such as settler ethics, Treaty responsibilities, and relational accountability, thereby extending beyond what the data alone reveals (Ellis et al., 2011; Anderson, 2006). The data analysis process involved importing and cleaning data (making minor edits to remove filler words and false starts) from my field notes, voice recordings, photos, videos, and my walking partner's voice texts. I then uploaded these materials to NVivo 15. 4.0 (referred to as NVivo) and transcribed verbatim as needed. A thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2012) six phases was conducted using NVivo and traditional tools like pens, paper, and highlighters.

The first step involved transferring all voice memos from my iPhone via iCloud, saving them as MP3 files, and then uploading them into NVivo. Initially, I uploaded the audio

files directly to NVivo but discovered I could not use its transcription service with that format. However, it was useful to have the audio recordings saved in NVivo, because while coding transcripts, I could listen to a passage to gauge my tempo and tone and identify emotion and context (e.g., sounds of wind). I followed a similar process for my handwritten journal entries, recording them as voice memos and then transcribing them using NVivo's transcription service. I created a data log in Word to track all recordings and ensure that a transcript was generated for each. I noted that one file was lost during this process: the voice recording from the morning of February 28th and the Day 1 Pre-Journey questions with my partner. As soon as I realized this, I made brief notes of what I could remember from that conversation and cross-referenced them with my pre-journey journal entry from that date.

I saved the transcribed files downloaded from NVivo Transcription as Word documents and uploaded them to the NVivo project. Following Braun & Clarke (2012), I used full transcripts for coding because filler words, pauses, and ums and ahs were revealing. I made minor edits in Chapter 4 to improve readability, removing filler words and false starts while preserving the original meaning and tone. The audio recordings are stored in NVivo. I organized each day into a folder and created a case for each to compare data across days. Each folder includes audio, photos, videos, and transcripts. I linked audio files to transcripts for analysis. I also wrote daily memos during analysis to document my process and reactions.

I conducted a thematic analysis of all field notes, recordings, and journal entries to identify key themes, cultural patterns, and emotional and ethical milestones (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Cooper & Lilyea, 2022; Ellis et al., 2011). As Cooper & Lilyea (2022) advise, I applied multiple coding approaches to capture the meaning-making evident in my words and emotions. Following Braun & Clarke's (2012) process, I used six phases of thematic analysis "to facilitate interactions with the data that support creative insights" (Maher et al., 2018, p. 5). These six phases are described in detail below:

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Phase 1: I listened to audio recordings, transcribed them, and repeatedly reviewed transcripts and journal entries to grasp the content and context. I used NVivo memos and annotations to identify themes and conducted initial open coding with broad categories such as tensions, contradictions, meaning-making, environment, emotions, change, notable moments, and relationships to explore emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Cooper & Lilyea, 2022).

Phase 2: I generated initial codes in NVivo by identifying features relevant to my research question, naming these codes and sorting them into the theme buckets described in Phase 1. To visualize the data from multiple perspectives (Maher et al., 2018), I used captions, emotion, descriptive, or In Vivo codes, depending on the data type. For example, I coded text, transcripts, and voice memos using emotion, descriptive, and In Vivo codes. In contrast, I captioned visual data, such as photos and videos, and then analyzed the captions using descriptive or emotion coding (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022).

Phase 3: I developed themes by consolidating codes with common features related to how a reflective walking journey with traditional First Nations Territory could transform a White Treaty person's ethics and deepen relational responsibility to Land-as-kin and original Peoples. This involved various coding methods, including traditional tools such as highlighters, pens, sticky notes, and NVivo software (Maher et al., 2018). I began with broad categories like 'Walking With,' which became a top-level parent theme in NVivo and merged into the main theme, "Shifting Settler Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility," linking the three main themes: "Listening to Land," "Questioning Settler Presence," and "Navigating Accountability and Imposition." I manually reorganized codes into these themes, using NVivo to align them with paper-based themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Maher et al., 2018).

Phase 4: I refined potential themes to better reflect the data, revisiting coded data to discard, merge, or redefine themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For instance, I combined the

Tensions and Contradictions category into Negotiating Settler Presence since it already encompassed related sub-themes like settler access, questioning rights, entitlement, and restraint. I also renamed the Relationships category to Navigating Accountability and Imposition because it included related codes such as relationships with the Anishinaabeg, settler identity, and Indigenous place names. The theme Listening to Land was newly developed, incorporating codes like the "struggle against land," "default to sightseeing," and "assumption of an adversarial relationship with land," alongside many codes from "Environment," "Context," and "Emotions." Several sub-themes from "Meaning Making," including reflexive awareness of privilege, settler presence, motivation, and habitual settler orientation, were transferred to Negotiating Settler Presence. Remaining codes related to relational burdens, accountability, gaps in understanding, and awareness of Anishinaabe presence and culture remained in Listening to Land.

Phase 5: I refined and named themes to highlight distinctions and directly address the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Polat, 2025). The main theme, "Shifting Settler Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility," was developed to reflect insights and my (un)learning journey. Codes under "Change over Time" spanned the three primary themes, showing how my understanding evolved. Recognition and ongoing learning codes were integrated under the foundational theme of "Shifting Settler Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility." I identified three themes: Negotiating Settler Presence (139 references, 21 codes), Navigating Accountability and Imposition (100 references, 12 codes), and Listening to Land (81 references, 19 codes). Though not strictly quantitative, this pattern aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2012) Phase 1 & 2 analyses.

During Phase 5, after researching the term "Settler" (Cuthand, 2021; Guzman, n. d.), I chose "White Treaty Person" instead. I updated two themes, but "Settler" still appears in the data and sub-themes, as I previously used it respectfully for my non-Indigenous identity. Switching to "White Treaty Person" shifts focus to my role as a Treaty inhabitant and my Treaty responsibilities (Cuthand, 2021). I renamed "Negotiating Settler Presence" to

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

"Negotiating Presence and Belonging" to highlight my perspective and how I understand my role. Similarly, I changed "Shifting Settler Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility" to "Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility" to de-emphasize demographics and reflect my evolving insights.

Phase 6: This involved producing the report, which included completing the analysis, integrating themes into the data, and aligning the findings with the research question and relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Polat, 2025). The synthesis featured ethnographic writing with detailed descriptions and storytelling techniques, such as turning points, divergence, and convergence, to create compelling texts and evoke emotional resonance in readers (Anderson, 2006; Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). In my discussion, I used an analytic autoethnographic approach, linking my self-observations to broader social contexts (Anderson, 2006) and comparing them with existing research (Ellis et al., 2011).

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

(Un)Learning Journey Overview

This relational learning experience spanned three days of skiing with FWFN Land in winter and spring 2026: February 28, March 17, and April 11. All three days were perfect, sunny, bluebird-sky days. On Days 1 and 2, I skied with a partner to engage in critical conversations with and for navigation support. Day 1 started at Anemki Wajiw at sunrise, with stops at scenic lookouts and a snack break at a Beaver Pond, where my electronics failed in the cold. We mostly skied on snowmobile tracks and snow-covered trails, ending at what is now known as Mount McCuaig at sunset. Day 2 began on Boy Scout Rd. in Neebing, ON, heading to Moon Lake, then east to Big Thunder via McCuaig Creek and Lake, completing a traverse of Anemki Wajiw and the Sister Mountains. I added a third solo day to reflect and listen to Land without a partner. On Day 3, April 11, I aimed to consolidate my (un)learnings and take a new route, looping Anemki Wajiw and two Sister peaks. When I arrived, many cars and snowshoes were parked, so I suspected FWFN members were collecting sap. As I approached the sugarbush, I heard voices and dogs and felt it might be easier to turn back, but I listened to Anemki Wajiw and kept moving towards the sugarbush. I recognized someone from Lakehead's Outdoor Recreation Program, who introduced me to a FWFN member organizing sap collection. I explained my purpose, and we talked about the history of the sugarbush and her daughter's schooling. I felt welcomed. Later, I realized I had made a tobacco tie that morning to offer Land, so I returned to offer it to her as thanks. She was grateful for the gesture, making it a meaningful moment on my (un)learning journey.

Findings Overview

My thematic data analysis revealed three interconnected themes: Listening to Land; Negotiating Presence and Belonging; and Navigating Accountability and Imposition. These

are supported by a foundational theme: Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibilities. This theme reflects the journey from simply appreciating Land's beauty to recognizing gaps in my understanding, acknowledging colonial narratives influencing my actions and inactions, and negotiating feelings of entitlement and restraint. As a White Treaty Person, my understanding of my relational responsibilities developed through ongoing reflexive engagement, analytic memoing, and reflection. Critical discussions with Dr. Helle Møller⁵, my thesis advisor, and my son Ewan, a new Lakehead Nursing graduate, strengthened this reflexive process. The journey involved exploring challenging intellectual territory, including (un)learning respectful relationships with the Land and its original caretakers.

Like the physical journey I undertook during data collection, data analysis and theme development also required route planning, navigating uneven terrain, and occasionally retracing my steps to correct course. I kept reevaluating my presence as I sought to answer my research question: How might a reflective walk across traditional First Nations land transform a White Treaty person's recreational ethics and foster relational responsibility to Land-as-kin and its Indigenous Peoples? The Discussion in Chapter 5 elaborates on the meanings and implications of each main theme, linking cultural, emotional, and ethical shifts to existing literature to highlight key findings and next steps on this (un)learning journey, which will be a lifelong project.

This section outlines themes in order: Listening to Land; Negotiating Presence and Belonging; Navigating Accountability and Imposition. This sequence reflects my three-day data collection journey, during which I became more aware of my relationality with Land and more-than-human relations, questioned what these reveal, and reflected on responsibilities to Land, Treaties, and the Anishinaabe. For each theme, I include data

⁵ Hereafter, encouraged by Dr. Møller, I refer to her as Helle, as this better reflects the warm and supportive relationship we developed while undertaking this journey together. As she indicated, in her homeland, Denmark, they call their teachers by their first names to remove the hierarchical relationship that honourifics imply.

excerpts supporting sub-themes and analysis linking self-reflection to broader cultural and social contexts, referencing relevant literature. Excerpts are marked by data collection day and source type; solo reflections are labelled 'solo,' and collaborative ones with my walking partner are 'partner reflections.' Finally, I present the foundational theme, Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility, which connects the three themes and reflects my (un)learning process during this thesis. I describe my experiences listening to Land, which fostered a sense of relationality, challenged my sense of presence and belonging as a White Treaty Person, and prompted reflections on accountability, Treaty obligations, and emerging responsibilities. The image in Figure 3 illustrates the three interconnected themes, emphasizing entitlement, belonging, and place development over the three days, and highlights the core theme of shifting understandings of relationality and responsibilities, the outcome of this inquiry.

Figure 3. *Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibilities*



Listening to Land

What it takes is a walk upon the land. Learning to see these things that exist here with something other than your eyes. Leaving the material trappings behind awhile and allowing yourself to become part of the sweep and grandeur of the planet: allowing your heartbeat. (Wagamese, 2021, p.9)

Following Wagamese (2021), I sought to rethink my relationship with Land throughout this journey, as I revealed in Ki's beauty, idealized the remoteness of the Anemki Wajiw and her Sisters, and began to recognize how colonial narratives influenced my habits. By reviewing the data and autoethnographic questions in [Appendices A](#) and [B](#) and reflecting on my thoughts, feelings, and perspectives about spending time on Land as a White Treaty person, I identified a consistent pattern of Listening to the Land, both as a teacher and as a relative.

Initially drawn to Ki's beauty, I approached Land as if on a recreational journey. This shift from awe to seeing Land as an adversary, due to challenges like snow and rugged terrain, led me to see Land as an active role in my learning. As I grew to appreciate Land's care, I felt cared for by Land, fostering deeper listening—like the Youth Mountain Keepers' call to Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw 'listen to the Mountain' or, in my case, Land.

Ultimately, listening to Land helped me form a relational connection to Land-as-kin (Krawec, 2022), rather than merely experiencing wonder and beauty. During analysis and critical discussions with Helle and my editor and advisor, Betty Carpick (O-Pi pon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, Northern Manitoba), I realized that my learning through Land reflected many of the Gichi-dibaakonigewinan, The Seven Grandfather Teachings, which promote well-being and are embodied in our more-than-human relations: Truth (Turtle), Humility (Wolf), Respect (Buffalo), Love (Eagle), Courage (Bear), Integrity (Raven), and Wisdom (Beaver) (Nelson et al., 2025). As teachings such as humility, respect, and love emerged during my (un)learning, I became more aware that I am not separate from place (Reed et al., 2024).

Figure 4. *Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw*



Moving Beyond Sightseeing

Initially, my 'walking with Land' felt as though I was simply on an outdoor adventure, noticing the variety of species and revelling in the beauty of the landscape.

While moments of awe and reverence for the stunning scenery often emerged, they were overshadowed by a sense that I was merely exploring, not relating. One of my earliest Day 1 impromptu voice memos captures a breathless observation: "Just turned off Crescent Lake, heading west in an amazing birch grove. This is. It's palatial" (Day 1 Solo Reflection). However, in situ, it felt as if I were just on an outdoor trek, observing a stunning birch grove. During another impromptu voice recording at the beginning of Day 1, I captured my appreciation for the beauty and diversity of my surroundings:

[I'm] looking east now, at the sun rising, surrounded by mostly conifers. I'm in a stand of firs, and it looks like a maple with some kind of lichen on it. I'm going to take

Figure 5. *East Facing Mixed Stand*



a picture. Lots of poplars, birch, and an amazing white pine behind me, kind of to the northwest, rising on a peak with an erratic boulder behind it. (Day 1 Solo Reflection)

However, when I listened to the recordings during data analysis, they also conveyed a sense of relationality with my surroundings, including these responses to a midday solo question in Appendix A: 1. What am I seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and

feeling on my skin as I walk-with-place? 2. What kinds of immediate, emotive, and embodied feelings do I experience as I intentionally walk-with-place (Springgay & Turman, 2018)?

...a feeling of, grace and beauty and I would say spirit as there's a couple spots what I'm calling the wiigwaas Cathedral and there was another spot with, a poplar grove that I, really felt a sense of, spirit like the mountain, was with me.

(Day 1 Solo Mid-Journey Questions)

While I enjoyed the beauty of my surroundings, I also began to connect with the Land in a relational way. Noticing the diversity and spirit of my more-than-human relatives reflects a growing understanding of the web of relationships I am part of and a heightened attention to my relationship with Land (Kimmerer, 2022), rather than defaulting to sightseeing and familiar recreational ways of relating to Ki. This aligns with the findings in Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022), which identify the need for White settler mountain bikers to reorient to different relationships with Land. As the excerpts above reveal and Reed et al. (2024) highlight, when you are in a reciprocal relationship with Land, you start to see yourself as part of it rather than merely enjoying it. Throughout the journey, including the days between official walking with land data collection days, I noticed that I needed to be intentional about noticing this relationality and honouring my connection to our more-than-human relations.

As Askew (2025, p. 474) advises:

In Anishinaabe law, being in a dynamic relationship with the land and the more-than-human beings that inhabit it means constantly growing and adapting to meet the relationship's changing needs. This form of legal responsibility requires presence above all else — a person must be consistently attentive to what the living landscape surrounding them is communicating.

My walking inquiry excerpts reflect Askew's (2025) call for settlers to become more attentive to their relational engagement with Land. While I initially feared I was only enjoying the landscape's beauty during my reflexive inquiry with Anemki Wajiw and her Sisters, I gradually deepened my relationship with Land, moving toward one grounded in respect and reciprocity, inspired by awe and reverence for the surrounding beauty and diversity. This aligns with Grant's (2025) idea of relationality in his theme of "Unlearning land as topography" (p.101), where he points out that "It took several disruptions for the land to open space for an embodied, relational experience of land in a more-than-human sense (p.101). Building on the themes of growth and change, Redvers (2020), in her research on land-based healing by Indigenous practitioners, highlights that land-based pedagogies are realized through direct interactions with and on Land. Recognizing and intentionally connecting with Land is the first step toward embracing relational responsibility (Reed et al., 2024). What started with noticing environmental features such as tree species, bird nests, topography, and weather gradually evolved into a conscious awareness of being in right relation with Land and the more-than-human beings who shared this journey.

Land as an Active Teacher

Travelling across the peaks and valleys of Anemki Wajiw and Sisters during a heavy-snow winter, this embodied inquiry on skis became a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual challenge, with Land actively shaping our route choices and my (un)learning

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

journey. During data analysis, I observed a shift from frustration and resistance to viewing Land “as an animating force of teaching and learning” (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. IX), which shaped my experiences throughout the (un)learning process. This experience

On Day 1, I struggled to maintain my balance in deep snow. Instead of walking with Land, I felt as if I was working against it, or that the Land was a negative force trying to “teach me a lesson.” This was evident in my responses to the mid-journey touchstone questions on Day 1, as I attempted to answer the two questions: 1. What am I seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling on my skin as I walk-with-place and 2. What kinds of immediate, emotive, and embodied feelings do I experience as I intentionally walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019)?

I feel like maybe the mountains are trying to teach me some lessons. Because I've wiped out today more than ever possible, at least five or six times and have had a really hard time getting up. At some points, I had to actually take my skis off so I could get up. And so that's been a test of physicality and patience. But maybe the mountains are trying to remind me to go slow and feel and appreciate the privilege of being in this place.

(Day 1 Solo Voice Recording)

In the afternoon, during the Day 1 solo mid-journey question series (see Appendix A for full list of questions), I still believe Land is attempting to teach me humility rather than providing care. This is evident in the response to question #5: What are the signs or turning points that show I am learning to relate to the land-as-kin (Grant, 2025; Krawec, 2022; Watts, 2013)?

The signs or turning points and maybe the humility as I was wiping out all the time and thinking that maybe some lessons learned are, even though we're safe and we have a bunch of gear, that one slip into a tree hole or going off a cliff, can really mean the difference between life and death. And so, we need to be humble.

(Day 1 Solo Voice Recording, Mid-Journey Touchstone Questions)

By midday on Day 1, I still struggled to feel I was walking intentionally, afraid that simply observing repetitive bird nests or tree species meant I was walking 'on' rather than 'with' place. During my solo reflective questions in the afternoon, I noted, "I'm starting to embody that, learning that, you know, this isn't a place to just get away from it all. This is a place to feel it all." Reflecting on this during data analysis, I realized that being with Land involves feeling joy, connections with more-than-humans, and the tensions that come from being a White Treaty person on Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory. I had begun to shift from 'sightseeing' towards embodiment and the emotions that 'walking with' evokes. The Land had become an active teacher; on that first day, I just wasn't ready to listen yet. During our midday break at the Beaver Pond, Marlene remarked that I was starting to see my connection to the Land as a relative, which reminded me how quickly I had adapted to my environment. For example, when answering question #3, posed by Marlene in Appendix B about identifying turning points in my perception and relating to the idea of "Land-as-Kin" (Krawec, 2022), I indicated:

...when I noticed my hands weren't cold when we stopped for half an hour, I didn't have my gloves on. Normally, I would have Raynaud's-like symptoms, and then the other thing was, honestly, when I could read the map without my reading glasses. And I thought being out in 'nature', something seems to have shifted for me.

(Day 1, Partner Voice Memo)

Although I didn't feel I was deeply observing Land on Day 1, my innate connection with Land was still enhancing my physical abilities. Looking back on that initial journey, I realize that my intentional efforts might have been effective and that I was actually listening to Land, even though I initially feared my engagement was just like on a recreational ski:

Pre-trip, I imagine the land connection would hit me like a lightning bolt. But instead, it was like a slow burn, where I'd have occasional glimpses of connection, like in the birch cathedral. When I saw the repetitive birds' nests or had the realization that multiple falls and unstable ground [snow], might be trying to teach me something.

(Day 1, Solo Reflections)

Throughout Day 1, it became clear that my understanding of Land as an active participant was deepening, even though I often criticized myself for not walking with more intention and for focusing mainly on what I perceived at the time as superficial environmental details. While I doubted whether I was fully experiencing movement with Land, these reflections indicate a developing awareness and a readiness to engage with Land relationally rather than merely appreciating its aesthetics.

I began my solo Day 2 pre-trip observations, noting:

And, you know, in the last journey, I thought I would have this spiritual awakening or this really loud message from the Land and from 'nature', but maybe it was just really quiet and insistent. And I'm not part of this Land yet or anything. I need to work more to earn that trust. Opportunity. Ability. That cultural understanding. That oneness, of walking with the Land.

(Day 2, Solo Voice Memo)

My research connected with the literature on Gwayakwaadiziwin: The Seven Grandfather Teachings, revealing that humility involves recognizing our interdependence with more-than-human relations and understanding our web of relationships with Land (Askew, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025). I was learning to cultivate healthy relationships with Land by paying attention to the messages it conveyed about Dabasendizowin (Humility) (Nelson et al., 2025), my relationship to Land-as-Kin (Krawec, 2022), and the importance of listening to Land intentionally and without interruption. This experience motivated me to undertake a third day of data collection as a solo endeavour. Following Askew (2025), I understood that being receptive to what Land communicates improves my ability to listen attentively and to recognize how my more-than-human relations influence my actions. Grant (2025) exemplified this in his autoethnographic study, where he realized he was "always in relation with non-human beings" (p. 101). If I hadn't embarked on this journey, I probably wouldn't have had the Zoongide'ewin (Courage) to actively listen to Land (Askew, 2025; Nelson et al., 2025).

Figure 6. *Recurring Nests as Land's Care*



Feeling Cared for by Land

This sub-theme describes how my perception of Land shifted from viewing it as an adversarial force to seeing it as a teacher that offers care and comfort, both physically and mentally. In my pre-trip reflections, I question:

How am I integrating the idea of Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw into my unlearning journey preparations is, just switching from that piece to walking on or to walking with, listening to the mountain, considering that

the place thought and that the mountain has agency and also just like people aren't always mad at me, the mountain isn't always mad at me. I am trying to be a better relation and ancestor-to-be by doing this."

(Day 2 Solo Pre-Journey Questions)

Later, in an impromptu voice memo on Day 2, I noted:

"...that maybe we're assuming that the land is going to be cruel and tough and hard to get through, but actually, is it really taking care of us? And if we view it as us, rather than in opposition. Then it changes the relationality."

(Day 2 Impromptu Afternoon Recording)

During analysis and close reading of the texts, I observe that as the journey unfolds, my approach shifts from opposition to listening to Land as a relational teacher. The change in my connection to and engagement with Land becomes clearer after I responded to my solo questions on Day 2, where I indicated:

Okay, here we are. I think we're on - Let's look at my map - Mount Johnson in, a stunning - back in a maple grove. We just climbed up a really steep slope from a valley in between Square Top, again, Anishinaabemowin name to be learned. And

Figure 7. *Sapsucker Wells of Knowledge*



we're on, uh, the west side on a trail west of McCaig Lake, now heading towards Big Thunder. And, just explored a valley wetland, different than what we had been in, towering white pines again, had that Quetico feel, granite outcroppings. ”

And in the recording I actually pause, and my tone of voice and pace change significantly when I state:

I actually *am* feeling more connected with the land rather than just being on it. Um, again, fighting the maple seedlings on the

way up on that ascent a bit. I'm feeling a bit guilty about that. Stepping on them for my recreational, pleasure. Great conversations, with Marlene. It almost feels like this trip has been too easy. But maybe it's easier, because just letting the land guide us is today's theme and I just - as I look up, I see one has been holes in trees.

Whereas last time it was nests and this time it's nest cavities. So maybe something to be said for that.

(Day 2, Solo Recording)

This excerpt illustrates many lessons at once. For instance, it reveals my tendency to be drawn to the landscape's beauty, to note the topography, and to notice the absence of identified ancestral names. It also highlights how I am beginning to sense that the other species (maple seedlings) are my relatives, that I'm affecting them with my presence, and that I'm connecting the place I'm in with other places I've been, which is part of listening to Land. I finish by acknowledging two important facets of Day 2, namely that “letting the land guide us” made the day “easier” and that the repeated holes in trees I noticed that day (mostly made by sapsuckers) contrasted with the repeated bird's nests we observed on Day

1. When discussing the evolution of my themes with Helle, I described these as metaphors

for the holes or gaps in my knowledge. However, she immediately connected the nourishment the sapsuckers receive from the trees to the nourishment we received from the Land. When Betty reviewed my work, she noted it could be both: a sign of gaps in my knowledge and nourishment from the Land. I really appreciated how that viewpoint aligned with the realization that the Land was caring for us and guiding us on Day 2, and that when we let go and listened, our journey became more comfortable.

During my pre-journey questions on Day 3, I indicated that “I don't want to observe the mountain as sort of a, uh, tourist. I really want to walk with it, consider it a living being equal to me. And what are the teachings it's going to offer me?” This excerpt shows that although I'm embarking on my last day of data collection, I'm still afraid of and fighting the pull to default to sightseeing, and I must consciously remind myself that the Mountain is a relative, not a separate entity. As I completed my Day 3 mid-journey questions, it was clear that I had developed the skills and habits of mind to listen to Land, as evidenced by my response to the question in Appendix A, “What is the most valuable lesson I have learned so far?”:

I think that's to be open - to be open to signs and not feel like they're this woke or this weird spiritualism, but maybe just accept them for what they are. Being in right relations with all our kin. And so that's not just human people and try and be a better ancestor in the mountain today. What it was doing, it was calling me forward and said, don't just turn back on your trail, but also you don't need to do a perfect loop, but follow the signs, follow the footprints, follow the trees, follow the water, follow the height of land. And that's where your learnings are going to come from, Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw. (Day 3 Mid-Journey Solo Questions)

In my concluding reflections after Day 3, I considered the lessons learned while embracing the concept of Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw:

The mountain was calling on me, the mountain led me to the sugarbush, you know, it was like, keep going. This is the lesson you need to learn today. It's about interacting with the First People of this land and being humble, but also showing that having a relationship isn't as hard as you thought. And so, replacing the shame,

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

although I was still sort of shameful and awkward today, but replacing the shame with action for sure.

(Day 3, Solo Recording)

This response describes my journey from struggling to hear the Mountain's message to being captivated by its beauty and awe and eventually learning to truly listen to Land and confront my fears. Simpson (2014, p. 9) emphasizes that “Intelligence flows through relationships between living entities.” At first, I experienced tension and hesitation when interacting with FWFN community members harvesting sap in the sugarbush but listening to Land helped me overcome this fear and develop a sense of connection.

As Hannah Askew (2025) eloquently describes the importance of listening to Land:

In Anishinaabe law, being in a dynamic relationship with the land and the more-than-human beings that inhabit it means constantly growing and adapting to meet the changing needs of the relationship. This form of legal responsibility requires presence above all else — a person must be consistently attentive to what the living landscape surrounding them is communicating.

This theme demonstrates the relational and embodied connection I was cultivating with Land, including moments of awe, observing signs nurtured by Land, such as multiple sightings of bird's nests and sapsucker feeding wells, physical interactions with the environment, and times when I slowed down to listen to my thoughts and feelings and notice connections. This awareness aligns with Grant's (2025) reflection on his relational journey, in which he noted, “The place-based disruptions provoked small openings of relational awareness that quickly settled back into this general state of anxiety” (p. 119). He described how the “disruptions” Land enacted during his journey helped him move toward embodied relationality; however, as his quote shows, it is a journey to relationality, not an endpoint. These experiences and emotions reflect my process of Listening to Land. As Askew (2025) describes, her Anishinaabe teachers encouraged her to spend time with Land, listening, observing, and noticing the beings around her to foster relational communication. Similarly, Wildcat et al. (2014, p. V) state, “Being present on the land provides powerful ways of seeing

one's relationships to the land and other-than-human beings, as well as new ways in contesting settler colonialism and its sense-making mechanisms." I was lucky to have similar moments when Land taught me about the web of relationships I am part of; this is echoed in Bishop's (2023, p.192) work, where she emphasizes the importance of embracing the values of *Humility, Listen, Respect* in our pedagogies and research methodologies, "to restore our relationships with Country [Land], each other, and more-than-human kin."

The data suggest that I was open to being transformed by listening to Land and appreciating the care and lessons of truth, humility, and respect it offers. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014, p. 9) notes, "Like governance, leadership and every other aspect of reciprocated life, education comes from the roots up. It comes from being enveloped by Land".

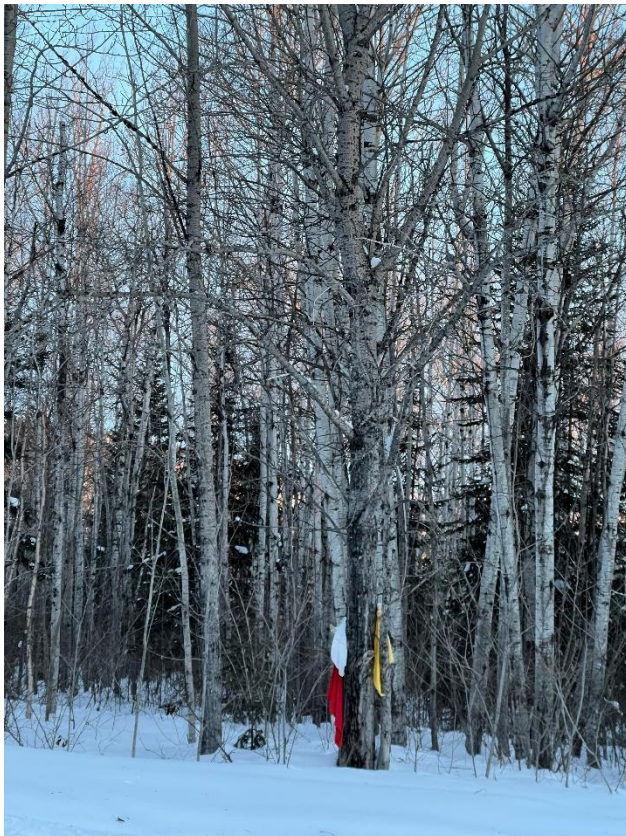
Kimmerer (2013, p. 174) recommends viewing our more-than-human relatives as teachers and "... lead[ing] with the wisdom of the Maples." As detailed above, I also acknowledge that awareness of colonial narratives shapes my evolving relationship with place, aligning with Laurendeau's (2020) observations on how we create and define wilderness through colonial structures such as Parks, who has access to it, and the values governing recreational use of Land. This leads to the next theme: Negotiating Presence and Belonging.

Negotiating Presence and Belonging

“Land is a spiritually infused place grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, cultural positioning, and is highly contextualized. Let us begin by asking ourselves whose traditional land we are on.” (Sytres & Zinga, 2013, p. 301)

The theme of Negotiating Presence and Belonging reflects my growing awareness of colonial constructs and Treaty responsibilities, and challenges assumptions about my privilege as a White Treaty person spending time on FWFN Reserve Land and Traditional Territory. It connects my feelings of uncertainty about belonging, raises questions about my legitimate presence, and reflects recognition of colonial histories. The data analysis revealed sub-themes: Colonial Narratives and Place; Questioning Access and Entitlement; and Discomfort and Uncertainty, explained below. Overall, this theme reveals the tension I experienced as I felt drawn to place yet questioned my assumptions about good intentions. As my relational awareness increased, my certainty about my rightful presence on these Lands decreased.

Figure 8. *Whose Land are we on?*



Colonial Narratives and Place

This sub-theme explores how colonial narratives, such as the Doctrine of Discovery, *terra nullius*, and colonial naming practices, affect a White Treaty person's ability to connect with Land and its original Peoples (Wolfe, 2006). The data revealed how I observed and reflected on colonial place names and their contrast with Anishinaabemowin place names, and on how my identity as a

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

White Treaty person impacts my assumptions about access, belonging, and place.

At the beginning of Day 1, as I answered my walking partner's pre-journey questions, including the first question (see Appendix B) "You indicated that colonial narratives (Dominion, Manifest Destiny, terra nullius doctrine) influence your current understanding of Land. Can you describe a concrete example of how you think this impacted your planning for this journey?", I expressed how my desire to explore "new" places as part of my outdoor activities including trail running or skiing was shaped by my positionality as a White Treaty Person. I also noted that others use FWFN Land for recreation, such as the cross-country ski tracks I noticed (operating under the assumption that they had been made by other White Treaty People who had not requested permission to be there):

Like that freedom to roam where I feel like, even conceiving this journey and feeling like I had the right to be out here, and that these pristine, untouched places that we've never been before are a bit of a settler doctrine, right? Like, we're discovering this even though clearly, we're not. I'm curious what First Nations people in this area might have done before. I think just that privilege and the assumption that, I can go where I want to go. Oh, and it's like looking for that absolution when I saw those other cross-country trails when we started, I [thought], oh, other people are doing this [without permission]. (Day 1 Partner Voice Memo)

This excerpt highlights how colonial narratives of wilderness as a place to get away from it all (Grant, 2025) influence my views on the right to access traditional Territory throughout the research process, and my growing sense of responsibility toward the original caretakers of this place. This resonates with Laurendeau's (2020) autoethnography, where he complicates "settler" mobility and our ideas of wilderness as a place created by colonizers through dispossession of Indigenous Lands to experience 'nature'.

On Day 2, as I complete the pre-journey reflections with my partner, I continue to consider how colonial ideas and White privilege influence this journey, both literally and metaphorically, as I answer the question: "You indicated that colonial narratives influence your current understanding of Land. Can you describe a concrete example of how you think

this impacted your planning for this journey?" I discuss the privilege of imagining this adventure, review various types of maps during planning, and recognize settlers' hubris in naming landmarks after themselves rather than honouring the Anishinaabe tradition of passing down environmental knowledge of Land (Basso, 1996).

So one thing I said in my self-reflection was, even examining, different maps. So the topo map, the city map, the, Nor'wester, the trails map - that even maps are a colonial construct, but obviously the names that we've ascribed to things which tend to be after our own, after ourselves, rather than the ancestral language, where they describe the landmarks. Also, just the ability to have the maps, look at the maps, and [think] I want to explore this interesting place next, or oh, we missed this. Just the idea that I have the agency and ability to access the Land more, spend more time on the Land and investigate these interesting natural areas that are on Fort William First Nation traditional Territory.

(Day 2, Pre-Journey Partner Voice Memo)

This excerpt illustrates how my perspective on Land shifted from viewing it as neutral ground, as it had been on previous trail runs or adventures, to feeling a deep connection to Ki. Like Laurendeau's (2020) identification that his "love of the mountains" is not neutral but rooted in consumption, I recognized how colonial narratives of superiority and control (Reed et al., 2024) shaped my assumptions about White Treaty people accessing traditional Indigenous Territory for adventure. Building on the theme of Listening to Land, my awareness shifted from simply enjoying the scenery to grappling with the historical and political context and the nuances and potential impacts of my presence on this Territory. Springgay & Truman (2019) suggest that White Treaty people perceive spending time outdoors as recreational or conservation-oriented. As they articulate (2018, p. 17): "nature' is something we visit for a period of time". Reed et al. (2024) indicate that we tend to frame Land as existing for the benefit of society, i.e., as "ecosystem services" (p. 2), rather than as something we are part of and belong to, as noted by Indigenous scholars (Nelson & Reed, 2025; Watts, 2013; Wildcat et al., 2014).

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

This experience disrupted my previously held assumptions that Land is a place for self-restoration and that all people have equal access to Ki. The reflections above reveal that although I see myself as aware of colonialism's impacts on the health and well-being of all treaty people and the planet (Reed et al., 2024), colonial values and naming practices still shape my sense of belonging and place. I noticed that when I tried to pronounce Anishinaabemowin names, I stumbled over their many syllables, and it was much easier to defer to colonial names, for example, using Loch Lomond Lake instead of Kazakekeegewaigemag ([Map of Loch Lomond, Thunder Bay District], n.d.). Over the three days, my admiration for the beauty of Anemki Wajiw and her sisters was complicated by a growing awareness of colonial histories and of how my understanding of belonging and place has been shaped by settler-colonial perspectives on access to Land (Askew, 2025; Styres & Zinga, 2013).

The connection between colonial narratives and place challenged my previously held assumptions about neutral access to Land. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes unsettling colonial narratives to develop reciprocal relationships with communities, Land, and our more-than-human relations (Askew, 2025; Bishop, 2023; Reed et al., 2024; Simpson, 2014). White Treaty people undertaking relational learning need to engage with both our current and historical settler-colonial contexts and acknowledge that our presence on Treaty land is not neutral. (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2022; Springgay & Truman, 2019).

Figure 9. *White Treaty Person Privilege*



Questioning Access and Entitlement

At the start of this experience, I wondered if it was respectful for White Treaty people to visit sites that felt almost too sacred. I struggled with opposing feelings of guilt and gratitude for the privilege of spending time in the Mountains.

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I considered my entitlement as a White Treaty individual, questioning how much access was suitable and if my appreciation of Land justified my presence. My initial Day 1 solo reflections reveal a growing awareness of the privilege of my presence on this traditional Territory:

And so far, the trip has been pretty magical. Snow rolls. Couple ravens. Only one blue jay. I'm pretty sure we spotted a peregrine falcon flying off Rose Mountain.

Again, identifying that these are colonial names that I'm using. And, yeah, there was Cathedral Grove that I'm calling it, even though cathedral is really a colonial construct. But still, it felt kind of religious in there. Feeling really grateful to be out here and a little conflicted about my rights to be in this beautiful place and having the access and the equipment.

(Day 1 Solo Reflection)

My instinct about the privilege of having access and equipment to experience time with Land is supported in the literature, when Wildcat et al. (2014) highlight the cost of eating traditionally and the paradox of having to participate in a capitalist economy to afford the equipment to “spend regenerative time on the land” (p. XI), and Laurendeau (2020) comments on the elites who have access to the Rocky Mountain “playgrounds” (p.87) and how this benefits outdoor industries. In responding to my partner about the emotional and intellectual tensions that arise during the Day 1 mid-journey touchstone questions, the entitlement of wanting more - time and access to FWFN Land appears:

We feel so grateful to be out here and how magical it is. We just stopped at a lookout over Loch Lomond, but also the settler entitlement of feeling like we want to be out in this place more, but knowing we're not, we shouldn't. But how much is enough? Or should we be here at all? I guess that's always been sort of my major question.

(Day 1 Partner Reflection)

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

During my Day 2 Pre-Journey reflections about how colonial narratives influence my recreational habits, I continue to question my need for more access and what the motivations for this are:

And so, noticing that as I was looking at the maps to plan for this second trip, and also those feelings of wanting to explore more? I don't know. Are those part of conquering, or of owning land, etc.? Something to consider as I delve into the next part of my research. (Day 2 Solo Reflection)

On Day 3 of my solo journey, I start by questioning my settler presence in a short voice memo. My discomfort was clear as I imagined an awkward social interaction with FWFN community members on their Land, as a White Treaty person undertaking a solo learning journey on skis:

Looking out at the City of Thunder Bay, Animikii Wiikwedong, with trepidation, about to head out on this journey, honestly hoping I don't run into people, but also maybe [hoping] I do so that I can have a conversation. (Day 3 Solo Voice Memo)

Later on Day 3, I had a meaningful interaction with FWFN community members at their sugarbush, which taught me that, with humility and respect, I can build relationships and be accepted as a settler on traditional Territory. While recognizing my settler privilege, I felt welcomed and discovered I had more connections to the FWFN community than I initially realized while responding to my mid-journey touchstone questions about the immediate, emotive and embodied feelings I was experiencing:

The feeling is really gratitude again. Such a nice sunny day in spring. And I get to do this, and I have the gear, you know, and the electronics. And even having these skis has been such a benefit on all three trips. And, it's sort of like when you're meditating, how you have to keep bringing your mind back, but definitely easier. I've exercised that muscle to cultivate that. Maybe it's relationality or realizing that I'm related to this land, too, now, by virtue of being here. And so, I have a responsibility, and it's going to be easier. It's still going to be work. But you know, I have threads of

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

strings to Fort William First Nation relationships that I didn't even realize I had, like with the youth I had coached in Jackrabbits.

(Day 3, Solo Reflection)

At the sugarbush, I reconnected with a young person I had previously coached in cross-country skiing during their childhood. We shared a strong connection when they were part of my ski group, and reconnecting during this learning experience was positive. Later, I realized they aren't actually a member of FWFN but belong to another First Nation community, though they still maintain ties to FWFN. This experience of questioning one's belonging to Land in a colonial context echoes Stanley's (2020) idea that walking-with enables an embodied, holistic engagement with Land, helping individuals understand their place within it.

Over the three days of data collection, my reflections focused on access, belonging, and the ethics of spending time on FWFN Reserve Land and Traditional Territory as a White Treaty Person. As I became increasingly aware of my ties and gratitude to Land and the FWFN community, this relational awareness prompted questioning rather than certainty. I realized that connection to Land and people did not always guarantee belonging, and caring for Land did not resolve my concerns about entitlement. This growing awareness aligns with the literature, as Styres & Zinga (2013, p. 304) identify the tensions that arise when White Treaty People attempt to engage in ethical space-making while undertaking collaborative research "...which results in an increasing awareness of colonial influences and associated treacherous undercurrents leading collaborators to become more aware of the colonial underpinnings and related assumptions that may be embedded in their chosen method."

Treaty relationships and responsibilities are more complex than simply offering a Land acknowledgement or obtaining permission to access. I realized that the legitimacy of my presence on FWFN Reserve Land and Traditional Territory will always remain uncertain. However, that does not diminish the relationship-building work I need to do with FWFN. As Davis et al. (2016, p. 14) identify, as a beneficiary of colonization, I must "come to see [my] place in relationship to Indigenous peoples".

Discomfort and Restraint

This sub-theme details how, during this (un)learning experience with Land, feelings of discomfort and restraint frequently emerged, particularly regarding responsibility, access, and belonging. My reflections often ended in ambiguity rather than clarity. I was still navigating the tension between connection, discomfort, and settler shame while responding to the question (Appendix A): What are the signs or turning points that show I am learning to relate to the Land-as-kin? On Day 1:

What I'm calling the wiigwaas Cathedral and there was another spot with, kind of like a poplar grove that I, really felt a sense of, spirit, like the Mountain, was with me and but then again, always that mixed with that, settler shame. It almost feels like I'm getting away with something like being out here.

(Day 1, Solo Reflection)

The ongoing tension between entitlement and restraint is evident as I continue my solo reflections and answer Question #4 ([Appendix A](#)) about how to foster better relations with the people of FWFN:

And the only thing I've really thought of to foster better relations has been monetary, but that is one way, I guess, of acknowledging land rights ...you know, should we pay if we want to go here? Should we pay a membership? But then again, should we even be accessing this area? (Day 1, Solo Reflection)

Figure 10. *Spirit of Anemki Wajiw*



On Day 2, as I finished my pre-journey questions with my walking partner regarding my current relationship to Land and FWFN, I kept wrestling with my motivations and questioning my settler presence:

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

And it's sort of like this one-way relationship. So, I've been reflecting on that. Like, I want to have this relationship with Fort William First Nation because I need to, to sort of absolve my settler shame or I think I should. It's also for, not nefarious, but, selfish because really, I just want to be able to access their Land for my adventures guilt free. But also, more than that, what's my settler responsibility? And I'm just reckoning with that. But again, I need this. There's not really reconciliation. I didn't have a relationship with them prior. I don't think my relatives did. And so now I want to establish this relationship. But what... Is that what they need? Or is it just what I need?

(Day 2, Partner Reflections)

As I begin Day 3, I am still grappling with the tension between entitlement and restraint. I aim to complete my journey respectfully and apply the lessons I gain from my engagement with Land as a White Treaty Person on FWFN Reserve and Traditional Territory. However, I wonder whether I can truly do both, continue accessing FWFN Territory and fulfil my Treaty responsibilities going forward:

It's really this, the respect of private versus not private land. You know, the whole impetus for this project was, I want to access these beautiful places in the Nor' Westers and, kind of figuring out how to negotiate that as a White Treaty person so that I'm able to continue doing that. But as I've gone through this unlearning journey, I realized that might not be the right question to answer.

(Day 3, Solo Reflections)

These experiences demonstrate that learning does not guarantee certainty and that ethical reflection is an ongoing process. To relate to land-as-kin, one must accept continuous uncertainty rather than seeking final answers, because questions tend to multiply rather than be resolved during inquiry. This perspective aligns with findings from other White Treaty researchers exploring their relationships with Land and settler identity. For example, Laurendeau (2020) concludes his (un)learning journey in the Mountains by asking, "What will it take for us to do this meaningfully and ethically?" (p. 92). Similarly, Stanley (2020, p. 11)

emphasizes that “This is a lesson, then, in seeing shades of grey and not jumping to binarize into monochrome the labels of ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’.” The journey of identity and understanding one’s privilege is never complete.

The overall theme of *Negotiating Presence and Belonging* centred on understanding how colonial narratives shaped my planning and unlearning process; the tension between feeling entitled and wanting to explore FWFN Territory more freely; the recognition that my presence could reinforce settler colonialism; and the need to practise restraint and seek ethical permission as a White Treaty Person. Key insights emerged, particularly on Day 3, during interactions with FWFN community members at their sugarbush, where I was warmly welcomed rather than shamed. This reflects Davis et al.’s (2016, p. 14) acknowledgement that ‘transforming settler consciousness’ requires “...shifting the way beneficiaries of colonization come to see their place in relationship to Indigenous people’s”. This underscores the importance of ongoing relationship-building, curiosity, and a willingness to learn about colonial histories and current realities.

During the three-day (un)learning journey, awareness of entitlement and restraint persisted, revealing ongoing tensions and echoing Reid-Hresko & Warren’s (2022, p. 114) call for White Treaty people to “question the foundations of their own senses of belonging.” This process was reinforced by a deeper understanding of colonial histories on Traditional Indigenous Territory, including recognition that colonization and settler colonialism resulted in the removal of the Anishinaabe from their Land and their disconnection from language and culture (Askew, 2025; Reed et al., 2024; Simpson, 2014). Even with good intentions, my presence on this Land is not neutral; this aligns with Reid-Hresko & Warren’s (2022) view that White settlers engaging in outdoor activities must go beyond rhetorical acknowledgment and take meaningful action. My growing awareness of how my presence affects FWFN Traditional Territory and the responsibilities involved reflects Zoongide’ewin, or courage — which “involves the strength to love or to reconcile, even with those who have caused harm, to foster peace and harmony for future generations” (Nelson et al., 2025, p. 425). For me,

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

this courage means loving myself, recognizing I may have caused harm, and choosing to move forward in a good way.

As a White Treaty person, I recognize my privilege and the colonial histories that have granted me access to Land, especially the FWFN Reserve Lands. This awareness deepens my commitment and gives me the courage to uphold my relational responsibilities to both the Land and the FWFN community. This tension relates to my final theme, Navigating Accountability and Imposition, which emphasizes the ongoing challenge of acting as a respectful guest. It involves cultivating respectful relationships with the Land and FWFN people and engaging in critical self-inquiry with others in my social circle to encourage meaningful change.

Navigating Accountability and Imposition

“Acknowledgement, often accompanied by appreciation, counterintuitively bolsters settler colonialism through admissions of racism, while also offering genuine possible inroads to meaningful settler self-reflection and to imagining different futures.” (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2022, p. 108)

Figure 11. *Can I go now?*



NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

This theme explores my journey as a White Treaty person navigating ethical and relational challenges during an (un)learning relational walking inquiry. It emphasizes my responsibilities to Land and its original caretakers. Sub-themes include Managing Accountability, particularly the burden on FWFN Cultural Manager Gail Bannon to grant access, share teachings, and review my work, and Recognizing Responsibilities as a White Treaty person spending time on Traditional Indigenous Territory. I also discuss my efforts to stay accountable and concerns about imposing on FWFN members as a privileged White student. The theme addresses the tension between caring for Land and its original caretakers, focusing on entitlement, ethical doubts, and potential solutions. The Navigating Accountability and Imposition theme captures my initial attempts to accept responsibility for the relational obligations that emerged as a White Treaty person conducting research on FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory, similar to what Laurendeau (2020) identified as a need to consider his settler positioning "...as a complex, layered, and dynamic set of relational responsibilities (p.86).

Managing Accountability

The process of obtaining FWFN approval to access their Traditional Territory and Reserve Lands for my autoethnographic study began well before data collection. In summer 2025, I reached out to Gail Bannon, the FWFN Cultural Manager (will ask Gail if she wants to share her traditional name, clan, etc.), to discuss my project goals, understand her perspectives, learn the protocols, and seek permission to access Anemki Wajiw and its Sister Mountains (G. Bannon, personal communication, July 10, 2026). I offered Asemaa (tobacco) as a gesture of respect for her time and knowledge. We had an insightful discussion about White Treaty People accessing FWFN Territory, and she supported my inquiry into my relational responsibilities to Land, the Anishinaabeg, Ancestors, and our more-than-human relations as a white Treaty person on FWFN Traditional Territory. I informed her that I aimed to complete data collection in fall 2025, provided a draft approval letter for her to edit, and scheduled data collection for October or November 2025. However,

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I underestimated the time required to finalize my thesis proposal and secure ethics approval, which delayed the timeline until February 2026. During this period, I grappled with how often and how detailed my updates to Gail should be. I felt a personal connection and believed she was interested in my project, but I knew she was very busy with personal and professional responsibilities. I didn't want to burden her with my concerns or delays, which were my own fault. I shared maps and information about FWFN from the Brodie Library, and she seemed to appreciate these gestures. In hindsight, I wish I had sent shorter, more frequent updates instead of infrequent, lengthy ones.

In January 2026, Gail and I met at the FWFN community centre to review my route plans. During this visit, I also offered Asemaa and donated to the Youth Mountain Keepers program. We discussed maps, my route, and the dates for the data-collection journey with my walking partner. Gail showed interest in meeting on Anemki Wajiw if the timing worked. The first day with Animikii Wajiw was February 28, a weekend when Gail was away. I hesitated to ask for ongoing approval, feeling I might be a burden after initial permission, and was unsure whether to keep bothering her. However, our ongoing email and text exchanges remained positive; she supported my data collection plans, as reiterated on March 17 and April 11. I felt embarrassed about the time gaps and the project's length, which made me hesitant to stay in touch, but she was always gracious and supportive. Looking back, I realize I should have communicated more proactively, providing regular updates without expecting replies or ongoing approval. This lesson will guide my responsibilities as a neighbour and Treaty person in respect for FWFN Territory. Other autoethnographies (Grant, 2025; Stanley, 2020) investigating relational responsibilities and accountability to Land and Indigenous people did not engage directly with community members as I did with the FWFN Cultural Manager. However, Laurendeau (2020) and Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022) acknowledge the responsibility that comes with recognizing one's implication in settler colonialism.

My initial responses to the Day 1 partner questions expressed the discomfort I mentioned earlier about balancing accountability and imposition. Reid-Hresko & Warren

(2022) suggest we must move past this ambivalence and take action on our "...roles and responsibilities in the landscapes of recreational settler colonialism we call home." (p.108). When responding to Question #6 ([Appendix B](#)) about my current relationship with the Land and FWFN, and what feels abstract or challenging about turning that responsibility into action feel abstract or difficult, I replied, "I just went and dropped 130 bucks on maps for the privilege of being able to do this, and then [I'm] putting it all on Gail, like, is this okay? Can I go now?"

It is evident that I was struggling to determine my duties as a Treaty person when I responded to my solo Day 1 question about upholding Treaty responsibilities to the people of FWFN:

What are my Treaty responsibilities to be a better Treaty person again? Are they to attend Fort William First Nations events, donate to Indigenous causes, read more books and seek out more art by First Nations and Indigenous authors and creators in this place? (Day 1 Solo Recording)

As I awkwardly consider building relationships with people from FWFN and learn about their culture and needs, this excerpt from the Day 1 partner questions about my current relationship to the Land and FWFN and what feels most abstract or challenging about turning that sense of responsibility into tangible action or understanding illustrates how I'm unsure how to balance accountability with the risk of overstepping when asked about plans to strengthen relationships and meet our Treaty obligations:

Marianne: What's your role and how do I just become friends? Better friends with some more people from FWFN. Should it happen naturally, I don't [know]?

Marlene: And are you worried more about perception?

Marianne: Yeah, probably I am. Right. If it's not happening naturally, then do I need to make it happen? Do I need to go to some more things [events, ceremonies]. But again, finding out what ones where the general public [is welcome]. And then I guess my thing [feeling] is, well, if I don't go to these things or understand, then how I will build empathy or know how to be, allyship isn't really a great term. People like be a

co-conspirator. If I don't, if I'm not more aware of what's happening in the community?

Marlene: Without impacting the community negatively by getting yourself more...

Marianne: Informed. Yeah. And engaged and trying to just...But if you don't know how you might support them. Yeah. It's a balance, I guess.

(Day 1 Partner Recording)

Reading this transcript unsettles me because it suggests I might view myself as a 'savior' to the FWFN community rather than as a peer, a fellow human being. Other researchers, like Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022), have also highlighted the importance of holding ourselves and communities accountable for power imbalances in our environments. This realization shows I am still learning how to build stronger relationships and take responsibility as a White Treaty person in maintaining them. Sytres & Zinga (2013) discuss the stages and responsibilities involved in creating ethical space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Ermine, 2007). They emphasize that non-Indigenous individuals need to confront colonial baggage to restore internal balance and foster collaboration. They also highlight the importance of both parties reflecting on their assumptions and understanding how these beliefs shape their interactions (Sytres & Zinga, 2013). Their idea that relationships require ongoing engagement with the "tensions, challenges, and power relations. We see it as a continuous engagement wherein strength is created through the act of pushing through and staying engaged." (Sytres & Zinga, 2013, p. 292) aligns with my experience managing accountability with the FWFN Cultural Manager throughout the project.

As I respond to my final set of pre-journey questions on Day 3, I'm demonstrating growth in Managing Accountability, particularly in my responses to the question about my current relationships and responsibilities to FWFN, I indicate:

I still don't have a relationship with them. You know, this has really been, I think, as a protective measure, a personal journey. And I'm going to talk when I meet with Gail about [how] I can present to council, what kinds of things I should be doing as a person going forward, participating in Indigenous Peoples Day ceremonies, etc., so

really showing up and how to be a good co-conspirator. And what's my service?

How do I develop that relationship going forward?

(Day 3, Solo Recording)

The Seven Grandfather Teaching of Manaaji'indiwin (Respect) emphasizes our interconnectedness and the importance of showing compassion toward all beings (Nelson et al., 2025). This teaching aligns with my (un)learning process as I reflect on my efforts to be accountable and respectful to the Land and FWFN. As Betty Carpick (personal communication, June 15, 2026) noted, asking for permission isn't a burden; rather, "it feels like a burden when a First Nations person isn't respected." Coincidentally, Respect for self and others is the teaching that Gail most closely identifies with, and she shared that she fosters connections with the Seven Grandfather Teachings (Nelson et al., 2025) among the Youth Mountain Keepers throughout their summer program (personal communication, July 10, 2025), underscoring the importance of these teachings for recognizing responsibility. Recognizing the activities and responsibilities I must uphold toward FWFN highlights my growing awareness of the accountabilities that arise from Treaty and Land relationships, which ties into the final sub-theme of Recognizing Responsibility.

Recognizing Responsibilities

This sub-theme explores how my understanding of my relational responsibilities to Land and to Ki's original caretakers evolved during this embodied (un)learning inquiry. On Day 1, when responding to the partner questions about the emotional and intellectual tensions that emerged as I walked-with-place, I fixated on the idea that others seemed to access Animiiki Wajiw for recreational purposes, likely without permission, assuming they were not members of the FWFN community:

...it's like looking for that absolution when I saw those other cross-country trails when we started, I was like, oh, other people are doing this. Look at other [people]. Did they ask for permission? Or did they just feel like they can do it. And then you, it's kind of like that reverse peer pressure.

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

(Day 1 Partner Recording)

Here, I am debating internally whether I can access FWFN Territory in the future, given that some non-Indigenous individuals visit without establishing relationships or respectfully obtaining permission. During Day 1's final partner questions, I was still focused on the idea that others use Animiiki Wajiw for recreation, assuming they haven't followed proper procedures to seek permission. This raised an important question for me: is it acceptable to keep hiking or running on the Anemki Wajiw trails in the future? After discussing this with Gail (personal communication, July 10, 2026), I concluded that White Treaty people should not use trails on Anemki Wajiw (such as the hike to the top) unless they are invited as guests. While it feels disappointing not to be able to access these meaningful places I have previously visited, I recognize that spending time on FWFN's sacred Mountain is akin to someone hiking on my Farm without being an invited guest or without my permission. The following passage from the Day 1 questions regarding the intellectual and emotional

Figure 12. *Always in my line of sight*



tensions that emerge also reflects my effort to justify my settler presence on FWFN Reserve Land and Traditional Territory as someone who cares for Land. It reveals my internal conflict about fulfilling my responsibilities as a guest on Treaty Land:

I think the two sides of the tension are trying to do the right thing, or which is the relational responsibility and like taking action? And then the other side of that tension is, I'm a person that cares about 'nature' - I like spending time outside. I care about this land too, so why can't I be here? Right? Which is sort of those like colonial thoughts, but I can't argue that I didn't think them, especially when I saw those ski tracks this morning.

(Day 1, Partner Recording)

Throughout Day 1, the data indicates I still face challenges in managing my responsibilities, especially when I discussed the implications of donating to the Mountain Keeper program as an expression of gratitude for permission to access FWFN Reserve Land and Traditional Territory during this (un)learning journey:

Marianne And then like seeking permission, which almost feels like I'm seeking to get to just do this guilt free. Right?

Marlene Absolution.

Marianne Yes, exactly. Seeking absolution. That's what I felt like I was doing for this journey. And then so the other thing I did was I donated to the Mountain Keeper program, which was supposed to be not as a payment, like just as a thank you. But even that felt a little like even though it was well-intentioned, it still felt a little like.

Marlene I'm paying.

Marianne For access. Yeah, exactly. Buying privilege. (Day 1, Partner Recording)

The Day 1 post-journey reflections indicate that, although I recognized the need to go beyond just respectfully requesting access, I was still uncertain about how to assume that responsibility:

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I felt my settler shame was a cloud following me. On this journey. Felt shame and privilege of being on the land, getting permission because of my student status and felt I needed to do more as a white Treaty person, but unsure of how.

(Day 1, Solo Recording)

I realized that my student status gave me access to the FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory, which I might not have otherwise had. Still, I believe I would have pursued this journey to better understand my Treaty responsibilities, though perhaps with less intensity, even if I hadn't incorporated it into a thesis project. My earlier trail runs had already made me question my presence on FWFN Lands, which served as the project's underlying motivation. This mirrors Grant's (2025) motivation to undertake his autoethnographic study, driven by a sense of "settler shame" awakened by learning about the forced removal (*the Exodus*) of the Indigenous people of Arizona from their Lands.

I also recognized that I have more to learn when I indicated on Day 2, "I do know I need to do more to fulfill my Treaty responsibilities to Land and FWFN people, but I am unsure exactly what that looks like." As I reflected on my Day 2 solo pre-journey responses, I acknowledged that my current relationship with the FWFN community was limited, which meant I was placing additional pressure on my relationship with Gail, the Cultural Manager. This acknowledgment signifies growth and a readiness to accept responsibility for expanding my connections within the FWFN community beyond my relationship with Gail:

And, you know that relationship, I don't really have a proper relationship. And so, I need to establish one. I need to attend events as appropriate at FWFN. And I realized in this and my awkward reaching out to Gail that, I'm reliant on her and almost becoming a burden on her to permit me to access the Land. But I don't have those. I haven't made those natural, relationships with FWFN, but definitely realizing that I have, more responsibilities that I've been taking and showing.

(Day 2, Solo Recording)

During my pre-journey discussion with my walking partner on Day 2, I observed once more that I had not yet established a natural relationship with the FWFN community:

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I think that's because it's really forced. Right? And it's sort of like this one-way relationship. So, I've been reflecting on that. I want to have this relationship with FWFN because I need to, to sort of absolve my settler shame or I think I should. It's also for like, not nefarious, but like, selfish. Um, right. Because really, I just want to be able to access their Land for my adventures guilt-free. But also, like, more than that, what's my settler responsibility? And I'm just reckoning with that. But again, I need this [relationship].

(Day 2, Partner Recording)

In the passage above, I recognize that my relationship with FWFN is largely one-sided; they do not share the same desire for a relationship with me, except in the broader sense of having a White Treaty Person who is empathetic and understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and relationality with Land and people, as well as someone who fulfills Treaty obligations and leads by example. On Day 2, during our midday partner questions, I continue to wrestle with feelings of guilt associated with my White Treaty privilege in accessing Land, as well as the emotional and intellectual tensions involved in understanding and accepting my Treaty responsibilities:

And so that leads into the emotional and intellectual tensions as I walk with place, asking, 'Am I truly walking with place?' because I'm using, you know, this manufactured outdoor gear to be able to "enjoy it", and I'm a white settler. And I have this opportunity, this recreation, to "get away from it all". It's a weekday. I took a vacation day, and it feels like I'm 100 miles away. And so, is that because... I'm just distracted by this lichen? And is it more than getting away from it all? What are my relational responsibilities to, you know, advocate? If they were to want to put a wind farm on here, when I didn't do anything about that, and what are my responsibilities to the Anishinaabe?

(Day 2, Partner Recording)

This excerpt shows that I am indeed engaging with place (Springgay & Truman, 2019) and being influenced by place-thoughts (Watts, 2013), as I was mid-sentence when the lichen

“interrupted” me so I would notice its symbiotic beauty. I also reflect on my missed opportunity to oppose the proposed wind farm site in the Nor’Westers and consider my future responsibilities to speak up for FWFN Traditional Territorial rights. As Betty Carpick reminded me (Personal Communication, June 10, 2026), “relationships take time. It’s like making bread. When people try too hard, that vibe comes across.” this connects to Styres & Zinga’s (2013, p. 292) statement that “Our approach to research is grounded in the development of relationships and shaped by our responsibilities we have to those relationships.” My research findings are grounded in the understanding that, although I have begun forming relationships with the original caretakers of this Land, I need to nurture this “sourdough starter” I’ve established to create many more loaves. Although Grant (2025), Laurendeau (2020), and Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022) don’t directly address undertaking Treaty responsibilities and building relationships, they all indicate that we must move beyond awareness to action. This includes moving towards relational responsibility (Grant, 2025), considering how our outdoor recreation activities intersect with the TRC calls to action and UNDRIP (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2022), and imagining how “giving up our entitlement to unfettered movement” might contribute to decolonial futures (Laurendeau, 2020, p.92).

As detailed in the Data Collection section, I incorporated a solo Day 3 data collection session because I identified themes and questions that warranted further exploration. During this day in early April, I had a major insight while interacting with a group from FWFN who were tapping trees and harvesting sap in their sugarbush. I captured my feelings in my responses to my mid-journey questions about the feelings I’m experiencing as I intentionally walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019):

My immediate emotive and embodied feelings I felt were, you know, discomfort, fear, and I don't even know how to word it. Wanting to turn around, wanting to diminish myself when I knew I might meet people. I also sort of the embodied feelings of the unsteadiness of the trail [the snowmobile trail made skiing really difficult as I was off balance], and I could see footprints, and then, like, pure, like a release of emotion, like pure gratitude [when they welcomed me]. And, like I mentioned earlier, realizing

that we are we're all humans. We all want the best for our kids. We want to be in relationship with each other. And, you know, no one questioned me. I didn't have to pull out Gail's letter. They didn't make me feel unwelcome. They didn't make me feel like I shouldn't be there, even though I had already realized that. And now I'm talking about the people from FWFN who are tapping the maple trees. As I intentionally walk with place today.

(Day 3 Solo Recording)

Listening to the recording, I can hear joy in my voice. I was genuinely excited by the warm reception from the people of FWFN. Instead of feeling like a burden, even though I did feel a bit out of place arriving at their work party on skis, I came away enriched with stories about the sugarbush's history and insights into the lives of FWFN members and the LU Outdoor Rec staff who were harvesting sap that day. It was a powerful lesson in relationality: approaching others with humility, honesty, and gratitude encourages them to share their knowledge with you. As I navigated accountability and imposition to the people and Land of FWFN, I began to progress along the continuum from acknowledgement to relational responsibility as advocated by Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022). As Sytres & Zinga (2013) posit in their Land-Centred Theoretical Framework, I was exposed to challenges and tensions inherent in collaborative relationships, and to "...the engagement that occurs while negotiating the ethical space created by the clashing of disparate worldviews" (p. 298).

Throughout this theme, I came to understand that relationships carry responsibilities. This aligns with the principles of Manaaji'indiwi, which emphasize that respecting all creation involves caring for the Land and our more-than-human relations (Nelson et al., 2025). It also applies to our human connections, such as those I developed during this learning journey. This suggests that I should follow the advice of Davis et al. (2016), who state that although it is not the responsibility of Indigenous people to educate settlers, it is the responsibility of White Treaty people to consult and engage with Indigenous Peoples. The data illustrate that I have begun to embrace Gram-Hanssen et al.'s (2022) concept of 'right relations', which entails living up to the responsibilities that come with being in relationship with other beings,

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

through listening deeply, self-reflexivity, creating space, and taking action, all of which are functions or outcomes of this work, although I acknowledge I still have growth to pursue in this area.

In summary, the theme, Navigating Accountability and Imposition, reflects my journey of confronting ethical and relational challenges as a White Treaty person conducting research on FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory. I examine my responsibilities to the Land and the Anishinaabe, my commitment to accountability, and my concerns about potentially burdening FWFN members because of my status as a White graduate student. I discuss the tension between caring for the Land and honouring its original caretakers while engaging in research, explore ethical uncertainties, and suggest ways to navigate these challenges. Overall, this theme captures my ongoing effort to understand and fulfil my evolving relational responsibilities to Land and my neighbours in FWFN as a White Treaty person living, working, and engaging on FWFN Reserve Lands and Traditional Territory.

Figure 13. *Polypore Scaffolding*



Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility

After repeatedly reviewing the data, immersing myself in it, and engaging in meaningful conversations with Helle, who noticed a shift in my overall perspective over the course of the project and our many discussions, I decided to include a foundational theme: "Shifting Understandings of Relationality and Responsibility." This theme encompasses the other main themes: Listening to Land, Negotiating Presence and Belonging, and

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Navigating Accountability and Imposition. It reflects my growing understanding of my role as a White Treaty person committed to deepening my relational responsibility to the Land and its original caretakers, the Anishinaabeg. It shows my intellectual development throughout the project and my ongoing commitment to reflecting on accountability, Treaty obligations, and ethical presence on Land with authenticity and humility.

I realized that this (un)learning journey has no fixed conclusion and won't be completed upon submission of this thesis. It requires ongoing, daily effort to consciously listen to Land and Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw, not only during the data collection and analysis period. This became clear in my Day 1 post-journey response to the question, "What is the most important unlearning from this journey that I can share with other White Treaty People?" You can't just flip a switch and become a more responsible Treaty person. It's a journey. You can't do one walking expedition or self-examination. Reach out to a cultural land manager, i.e., Gail, and be absolved of settler shame or guilt. (Day 1 Solo Recording)

My solo reflections on Day 2 reinforced my sense that this journey does not have a clear endpoint:

The signs or turning points that I'm learning to relate to the land as kin. I hugged this cedar tree, and I don't think it was performative. No one was looking at me. But I've always felt an affinity to trees, and now I think that maybe because the trees are kin. And can I translate that into all of the land and this ethical space between myself, the agent land, and its original custodians? I feel like I'm still working on that, but I'm realizing it's a journey and I'm not necessarily going to get to that endpoint. (Day 2 Solo Reflection)

This sentiment about my affinity for trees aligns with the reasoning of the Council of Terrasse-Vaudreuil, QC, in supporting the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Tree and recognizing trees as living beings, since, like humans, they breathe and require water (Lowrie, 2026). Their human-like qualities help us see trees as our relatives and offer a

starting point for viewing our broader relations with the more-than-human world as Kin (Norkunas, 2018).

During my midday question session with my walking partner on Day 2, I reflected on the challenges and benefits of learning Anishinaabemowin words and phrases and noted how learning the word for poplar, *azaadi*, positively influenced my observations during our ski:

Marlene: Because it flows. Yeah, you. It won't flow when you're trying [in reference to me trying to pronounce *Kazazekeegewaigeemag* (Loch Lomond Lake), which, according to the Map of Loch Lomond, Thunder Bay District (n. d.), means “the high lake which is always overflowing”].

Marianne: One more reflection. So, when we were walking, this was a cool thing. This birch tree. Sorry, birch is *wiigwaas*, right. But poplar [trembling aspen] is *azaadi*. And they described the bark in the Ojibwe book that I've been reading as smoother, more greenish gray. And I thought, oh, poplar, I always thought poplar bark was whiter. But up here, when we were walking, I did [notice] that the bark was more greenish gray. So, I don't know if that's more in this area, or more because I read that word and learned it, and I noticed that. Anyway, so those are my thoughts on language, but [it is] hard, with lots of vowels and a harder language, but more descriptive.

Marlene: Yeah. And probably doesn't make sense to have it written out in our alphabet.

Marianne: But as I was writing it, that's the same thing I was thinking. It's more of an oral tradition, right?

Marlene: So we're trying to shoehorn it into our spelling. Yeah, which is the only way you have to communicate it to yourself is in a memory-prompt way.

Marianne: Exactly. Because I have a hard time hearing things, actually, so I need to see it written. But then, like you said, it's not really meant to be written in our alphabet.

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Marlene: It's like translating in both directions.

Marianne: So I'm doing my best, but I think it's better to learn it from a language speaker than from reading it in books.

To promote accountability and take tangible action, I enrolled in an Anishinaabemowin course for Spring 2026, recognizing the value of learning directly from a speaker. This decision was also motivated by Gail's interest in the language and a remark by Elder Linklater at the opening of the Community Safety and Well-Being Conference (R. Linklater, personal communication, October 2023). He emphasized that Treaties imply we learn each other's languages, not just that First Nations people learn English. Elder Linklater noted that Anishinaabemowin is more descriptive and verb-focused than English, a point reinforced by Nelson et al. (2025), who noted that Anishinaabemowin sentences may contain as many as seven verbs in an eight-word sentence. They model this in their definitions of the seven grandfather teachings, where "...each virtue term denotes a dynamic practice rather than a static trait" (p. 427). For example, Dabasendizowin is not just "Humility"; rather, it can be described as "Knowing Yourself as a Sacred Part of Creation" (Nelson et al., 2025, p. 427). I hoped that, as Helle indicates, starting to learn a new language - like Anishinaabemowin - can help us adopt new ways of thinking (H. Moller, personal communication, February 17, 2020), which supports Davis et al.'s (2016) assertion that learning and self-education are critical parts of the relationship-building process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. None of the researchers whose work I reviewed documented attempts to learn an Indigenous language to build relationships and adopt new ways of thinking.

While responding to my solo touchstone questions on Day 2, I started to recognize more specific actions I could take to fulfill my relational responsibilities as a Treaty person and co-conspirator:

What are my responsibilities to the Anishinaabe? And it's not. To support, you know, to work with underground gym, to do the kinds of things that are within my purview. And I guess I'm starting to feel more optimism, always discomfort and, grief for what we've caused ...and the Land we've taken, but hope for a way forward as well, to

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

foster better relations. And uphold my Treaty responsibilities again. You know, when I heard Peter Panetta on the radio with the Underground Gym and the kids he supports, that's something in my wheelhouse, so it's not necessarily helping First Nation people access the land, because that might not be my thing, but maybe my thing is, helping with the running club or [helping] kids to read or cooking or those things.

This reflection shows that I am taking Davis et al.'s (2016) advice to heart: "...when reconsidering our relationships with Indigenous peoples, our actions must be grounded in a critical, self-aware understanding of history. Such awareness helps avoid actions that could reinforce paternalistic colonial dynamics, which often cause more harm than good" (p. 5). It underscores the importance of assuming relational responsibility, taking tangible actions, and recognizing my role in this process. As Nelson et al. (2025) remind us, a two-eyed approach offers "...insight into why humans need to live sustainably and compassionately and connect with others and the environment in order to flourish" (p. 430).

My Day 3 pre-journey questions highlight the ongoing need to build and nurture relationships with FWFN community members and the challenges of taking on this responsibility, as I consider how I describe my current relationship with and responsibilities to Land and the people of FWFN:

And so, my current relationship and responsibilities to the land and the people of FWFN, who are the protectors and defenders of the land and keepers of the traditional knowledge, culture, beliefs, practices, values and language of the Ojibwe people of Gitchee Gumee. I still don't have a relationship with them. You know, this has been, I think, a protective measure in my personal journey. I'm going to talk with Gail on the 22nd about whether I can present to council. What kinds of things should I be doing as a person going forward, participating in Indigenous Peoples Day ceremonies, etc., so really showing up and how to be a good co-conspirator? And, you know, what's my service? How do I develop that relationship going forward? Obviously, it's much easier, I think, to develop the relationship with the land than with

the people, but maybe that's the space. Maybe that's the entry point, the land. And that's the thing. You know, that's the thing we all have in common, caring for the land.

And then how can we do that in better, [in] right, relations with each other?

As Helle noted when reviewing my results, for many people it may be easier to develop a Kin relationship with Land than with people. "This could be because Land does not 'talk back' in obvious ways and because we do not need the affirmation or acknowledgement of Land - we do not need to feel 'liked by Land', when we shame Land and abuse Land, it does not obviously shame us or make us feel shameful. It does not argue with us if we transgress. It does not uphold areas as secret or holy, etc., at least not in ways we perceive" (H. Møller, personal communication, May 29, 2026). This idea aligns with my own experience throughout this (un)learning process, where listening to Land is the first step towards kinship and towards understanding our responsibilities to Land and each other (Krawec, 2022).

Throughout this learning process, I kept noticing the colonial names given to landforms. On Day 2, I told Marlene we had to "Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw," meaning "listen to the mountain." This highlights the importance of acknowledging the names of the places we visit. While preparing for Day 3, I recorded an impromptu voice memo noting, "I even noticed that my play spot is called Mount McKay Lookout Drive," which is the auto-generated location name from my voice memo app. Understanding colonial naming practices has become a key insight of this project, and learning the ancestral names of communities and natural features is now an ongoing personal goal. Patty Krawec (2022, p. 126) reminds us that "Naming creates relationships, reveals identity." She also says, "So we name the land, claiming relationship to it. And what if the land also claims us?" (Krawec, 2022, p. 127). This powerful statement reminds me of my sub-theme, Land as an active teacher, and of how, if we are open, we can begin to see Land as our relative. This reflection shows how my understanding of my relationships and responsibilities as a settler has grown over the three days of data collection and throughout this project. It informs the lessons I will carry forward on building just and decolonized relationships with Indigenous peoples, Land, and all beings (Davis et al., 2016, p. 5).

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

On Day 3, I reach a turning point in my reflection on my settler privilege. The willingness of the FWFN members and friends to share their knowledge helped me move beyond guilt and shame and see that I can build meaningful relationships with Land and people (Davis et al., 2016):

And that made me think I need to pull on these strings a little more. And so, I think I talked about those emotional and intellectual tensions, knowing that I was a colonizer, that I was passing. You know, I'm still benefiting from colonialism. I passed a 'no-trespassing' sign on my way in, and I was able to pass by it because I had "permission" or because I was a White person. But I very much did feel like I was trespassing. I knew I was headed towards a sacred maple stand, but I also felt compelled or called to go there. And I ended up giving [a FWFN knowledge keeper] my tobacco tie that I had made for this walk, and it was the right thing to do. So now it's more about my shift from viewing the Land as a place. I think I've realized it's not just a place of recreation. You know, and that term [recreation] just uses land as a thing. Right. But, really, it's my relation. And I do have a responsibility to cultivate better relationships with the people of FWFN, but on their terms, and to do things that would be helpful.

This closing passage, written just after my time in the FWFN sugarbush, reflects how my mindset has evolved during this project and highlights the emotional fluctuations I went through to ultimately finish this (un)learning journey both literally and figuratively, although learning to relate to Land is a lifelong journey:

I was definitely feeling a lot of shame as I skied up to that Sugarbush. And then when I left, I had this wave of gratitude and hope that, if I was that easily welcomed, come on, get after it, Aambe (Let's go), and make better relationships. And this immense grief is sort of like everything with this thesis. But in life, you think something's going to be so hard, but when you confront it, it's never as bad as you imagined. And the same thing with that encounter with the people from FWFN. I had discomfort the whole way up. You know, I was going up a mountain [the whole way to the

sugarbush], and I didn't really realize it until I got there. And they mentioned that I had. 'You ski all the way up this mountain?' And I think I was so distracted. I wasn't in my body. I was in my mind, as usual, and I didn't notice [the elevation change]. And to actively foster better relations and acknowledge responsibilities is just Ah! Reach out. Notice. Make the connections. Take the opportunities. When I see there are learning events, make the time and set the intention to do it. Because that's the thing that's going to make this world a better place. And, you know, as I learned that colonialism is the thing that's caused climate change, then I have a responsibility to become a better settler, to make those relationships, to model for other people that you can get through this discomfort. And it's okay. And I'm not just this woke person. We need to do this to take care of this planet. That's taking care of us. That's. It's part of us, it's alive. And, you know, even as I was going through the erratic, glacial boulders just past the sugarbush, I didn't want to stop and take pictures again. I felt a little bit sheepish and waited till I was out of sight, but it was alive with ferns and lichen. Yeah, it might sound touchy-feely, but I believe that. This Land is a relative, you know? It's in your bones. It's in the minerals. It's in the water that is in your cells. And we need to take care of it. And I guess all those understandings are a turning point that I kept moving forward today. I wanted to turn around. Everything in my being was like, just turn around, go to the PowWow Grounds, take some pictures, answer your questions and go home. And you won't have to interact with people and you can just shirk away. But I went there and talked to them about how I was trying to be a better Treaty person. So that's not necessarily Land is kin, but that's more of that relational responsibility.

This pivotal Day 3 experience aligns with Sytres & Zinga's (2013) Land-Centred Theoretical Framework, which holds that researchers will encounter transformative experiences and must choose to accept them for change to occur. They emphasize that relationships and our responsibilities within them are crucial to our learning and to how we think about our spiritual and relational connection to Land (Sytres & Zinga, 2013). That experience in the sugarbush

has forever altered my relational connection with Land and its original caretakers. In my final recording on Day 3, I shared how I finally connected with the concept of Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw:

What's the most valuable lesson I've learned so far? What did I learn from an Animiiki Wajiw Bizindaw Manidoo? [Does] This place have thoughts? Am I inhabiting place? Thought. Absolutely. This. Place. Has. Thoughts. And they keep showing themselves to me. It is like someone keeps giving you advice. And you, you keep not listening. And you, and you just have to open your eyes and your heart. And listen. And I'm going to leave it there.

(Day 3 Solo Recording)

By adopting a two-eyed seeing and pluralistic approach (Bartlett et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2025), I integrated the Indigenous concept of place-thought (Datta, 2018) into my data collection. On the final day, I practiced Zaagi'idiwin (receiving and giving love) and Zoongide'ewin (acting with courage), recognizing how listening to Land enhanced my sense of connectedness and relationality (Nelson et al., 2025).

This central theme, Shifting Settler Understandings of Relationships and Responsibility, mirrors my experiences of Listening to Land, Negotiating Presence and Belonging, and Navigating Accountability and Imposition. During a three-day ski journey with Anemki Wajiw and her Sisters, accompanied by a learning partner for the first two days, I moved beyond mere sightseeing. I acknowledged gaps in my understanding, recognized the influence of colonial narratives, and reflected on feelings of entitlement and restraint. The journey also revealed actions I can take to deepen my relational responsibility to the Land and its original caretakers, such as building on existing relationships with the FWFN community, using my voice to advocate for Indigenous rights, and attending events where White Treaty people are welcome to further my learning (Askew, 2025; Styres & Zinga, 2013). Skiing for three days on FWFN ancestral Land greatly increased my knowledge, awareness, and commitment to my Treaty duties as a White Treaty person connected to Land and community. Developing an intentional relationship with Land has enhanced my

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

self-awareness and my responsibilities toward my more-than-human kin and the original caretakers of this Territory I call home. As Kimmerer (2021) suggests, I hope the ground beneath us can act as a unifying force for better community relations, and I am committed to finding ways to become a better ancestor-to-be. Finishing this data analysis is not an ending but the beginning of a new journey committed to Zoongide'ewin (acting with courage) (Nelson et al., 2025).

Chapter 5: Synthesis and Next Steps

Building strong relationships of reciprocity with the land results in the crumbling of settler capitalism because it fundamentally shifts the relationships people experience and what they believe about who they are, how they are in relation to and with land, and what they believe to be true. (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 76-77)

Embarking on this (un)learning project has significantly transformed me. I moved from simply appreciating Land for its beauty, biodiversity, and the well-being it offers while enjoying trail running, skiing, and camping, to adopting an identity as a White Treaty person. I feel a new sense of relational responsibility towards Land, our more-than-human relatives, and its original caretakers, the Anishinaabeg. This personal resolution is supported by Redvers et al. (2023), who remind us that UNDRIP and Bill C-15 (Department of Justice Canada, 2023) provide the framework to transform the relationship with Indigenous Peoples from colonial control to one that recognizes Indigenous sovereignty and inherent self-determination rights related to government, Land, and culture. By paying attention, sharing my insights, adapting my Land-based practices to be a more respectful guest and relative, and subtly encouraging behaviour changes through small acts of activism, such as sharing whose Land I am on in the Strava App or donating to causes that support Treaty rights, I aim to foster reciprocal relationships between humans and the Land that work towards 'right relations' (Gram-Hanssen et al., 2022). As Juan Sánchez Martínez (2025, p.219) notes:

I am the link

The wampum

Lake Superior seen from the moon a wolf's head

I hope that this project illustrates how the Land (and waters) in our bodies, all around us, and beneath our feet might serve as a link between White Treaty people and the Anishinaabeg of this region, fostering right relations (Gram-Hanssen et al., 2022) and honouring Treaty agreements, such as the wampum that Sánchez Martínez (2025) invokes above.

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Prior to this research, I had not considered the extent to which colonial histories shaped my thinking, from using phrases such as “my property” to refer to my home to assuming I had the right to access “Crown Land” that is actually Traditional Indigenous Territory. I have continually reinforced these colonial narratives. Askew (2025) and Betty (personal communication, June 15, 2026) note, “we use the touchpoints we grew up with and were educated with; our education system is problematic”. As Davis et al. (2016) suggest, further research is needed to “understand the conditions that help settlers turn toward, and acknowledge, their own implication in the settler colonial project” (p.14). This aligns with my project’s findings, which indicate that listening to Land, while reflexively considering the impact of colonial narratives on actions and recognizing our relational responsibilities, could help White Treaty people take action rather than remain mired in paralysis and guilt (of which I have done my fair share). As Redvers (2020, p.102) powerfully articulates: “A healthy land relationship not only ensures the land’s health, it also facilitates healthy relationships within ourselves, between one another, and within the larger world, leading to greater balance and mental wellbeing for future generations.” This sentiment aligns with my study’s objectives to foster relational responsibility to the Land-as-kin and its original Peoples, showing how sharing the experiences of this (un)learning and physical journey might help other Treaty people deepen their understanding of and commitment to these relationships.

Relationality was central to my autoethnographic approach. I drew on the relationships I built with Land, the FWFN Cultural Manager, my walking partner, supervisor, committee members, and community advisor to develop knowledge and reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and questions. These conversations often revealed difficult lessons and shaped how I understood my responsibilities as a White Treaty person. Although I did not formally employ collaborative autoethnography, Hernandez et al.’s (2017) emphasis on co-constructed meaning resonates with my experience of learning through relational encounters. Following Tolmos et al.’s (2023) relational approach to autoethnography, my methodology relied on relational conversations as a primary means of engaging with and

understanding the complexities I encountered. In this way, my approach builds on existing concepts of relational autoethnography by treating knowledge as generated through ongoing, accountable relationships. This also aligns with Adams' (2006) use of a relational lens to reshape his relationship with his father, showing how meaning arises through relationships, a dynamic that paralleled my own learning and unlearning throughout the study. Future autoethnographic studies examining responsibilities to Land and its original caretakers, particularly from the perspective of White Treaty people, should consider a relational research approach that involves ongoing reflection and revisiting experiences over time to foster relational growth (Adams, 2006; Tolmos et al., 2023).

Social-ecological health goes beyond traditional health models, which focus on interactions among individuals, communities, and environments, to emphasize the quality of relationships with Land. In this study, Land functioned as an active participant in the (un)learning journey, rather than merely a setting for health-promoting activities traditionally championed by public health, prompting reflection and questioning about belonging, responsibility, and relational accountability. This supports the aims of decolonial scholars (Datta, 2018; Redvers, 2020), who hold that the health of humans and our more-than-human beings is rooted in relationships.

As Reid-Hresko & Warren (2022) advise, I wanted to move beyond ambivalence to action. Initially, I planned to create a checklist for White Treaty people spending time on Reserve Lands and Traditional Indigenous Territory to foster relational responsibility, respect for Land, and understanding of colonial histories as part of this (un)learning process. However, after reflecting on my findings and the colonial context I am part of, I realized this approach was neither practical nor ethical. Moving forward, I will instead share my (un)learnings on Listening to Land, Negotiating Presence and Belonging, and Navigating Accountability and Imposition, which can help others shift their understanding of their relational responsibilities to Land and its original caretakers. This journey has no fixed endpoint; instead, it resembles a river delta, like the Kaministiquia, with many possible endings or outlets that warrant ongoing reflexivity among White Treaty people.

Limitations and Challenges

Although I strove to incorporate a two-eyed seeing approach (Bartlett et al., 2012) into this research, my learning partner was also a White Treaty person. To counteract this monocular vision, I could have engaged with members of the FWFN who spend time on the Land or with the Elders circle at Lakehead University to strengthen my work.

Anderson (2006) and Kennedy et al. (2019) highlight the need to record tasks both mentally and physically during activities. Focusing on capturing in-journey recordings and journal entries, and on engaging in critical discussions with my walking partner, can distract from fully experiencing the moment. For this reason, I added a third day of solo data collection to create space and time to capture my thoughts and feelings without worrying about how recording my insights would affect my learning partner. In addition, because the research was conducted in the winter and early spring, the temperatures were extremely cold, which caused my electronics to fail on the first day of data collection. As a result, I wrote some reflections by hand and recorded them later, which could have affected the quality and quantity of my responses to the mid-journey questions that day; however, it could also have enriched them, as I was forced to review them in depth while transcribing.

As noted in the ethical considerations above, the researcher risks losing social relevance if they become overly self-absorbed. Autoethnography is a relational practice, and the researcher must move beyond self-discovery to achieve epistemological relevance (Anderson, 2006). It also risks overreliance on narrative accounts rather than rigorous analysis and interpretation of data in relation to social contexts and cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). I attempted to balance sharing my narrative accounts with connections to broader community impacts and the body of literature dedicated to relational responsibility. To enhance methodological rigour, I engaged in an autoethnography rooted in relationship, including with Land, with my walking partner for data collection, and with my Supervisor for data analysis.

In addition to the risks of inward focus, autoethnographies do not occur in isolation. Because they produce outward-facing texts, they risk unintentionally revealing or identifying others in the outputs (Chang, 2008, in Starfield, 2020). Researchers should conduct member checks and share their writings with others before publishing to ensure that anyone who might be recognizable is aware of their exposure. My learning partner waived her right to confidentiality, and I shared a draft of this thesis with anyone named herein for member checking before publication.

Given the challenge of ensuring anonymity or obtaining permission from invisible participants who may be identifiable, even when the primary participant is the researcher, this does not mean that ethical standards should be ignored. Researchers should still obtain ethics approval for their studies (Starfield, 2020), and I received ethics approval from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board in November 2025 (see Appendix F – Approval Letter).

As Anderson (2006) indicates and as noted above, autoethnography as a research method has inherent challenges and limitations. However, if the researcher is aware of the potential risks, they can apply mitigation strategies.

Outputs and Contributions to Health Science

Exploring how settler colonialism intersects with local social and ecological health factors can advance health science by demonstrating and linking how addressing colonial legacies affects both individual well-being and the environment, with the aim that sharing the experiences of this (un)learning and physical journey helps other Treaty people deepen their understanding of and commitment to relational responsibilities to Land and the Anishinaabeg.

The final research findings are integrated into this thesis and will be included in complementary knowledge mobilization materials. Betty described herself as a citizen-academic in one of our conversations; in that vein, I aim to share my insights through accessible media platforms, such as The Walleye, to encourage vulnerability, openness to

learning, and listening to Land among our community members and citizens. These outputs may include a journal or magazine article in *The Walleye*, *The Walrus*, *Canadian Geographic*, or a similar publication; a YouTube video; or a list of considerations for respectfully engaging with Traditional Indigenous Territory as a White Treaty person. These additional outputs will be shared with the FWFN Cultural Manager and, if appropriate, with Chief and Council to identify the most appropriate and beneficial formats for fulfilling my Treaty responsibilities. The research participant and FWFN will be informed once these results are disseminated through the specified knowledge mobilization and translation products. This master's thesis will be publicly available on Lakehead University's website after approval by the thesis committee. Both the participant and FWFN can request a copy of the research results from the researcher at any time using the contact details provided in the Consent and Information Letter.

This learning inquiry provided several benefits to me as an autoethnographic researcher and to the broader community, including:

- **Personal insight:** It deepened my understanding of my relationship with Land and my sense of relational responsibility to Indigenous Traditional Territories and their original caretakers.
- **Ethical reflection:** Engaging in critical dialogue provided a meaningful opportunity to reflect on and strengthen my relational ethics and personal commitments. Concrete actions I have taken to date include attending the Indigenous Waterviews book launch; volunteering at FWFN Culture Camp in June 2026; spending time with the Youth Mountain Keepers program in July 2026; enrolling in the Anishinaabemowin Language Course; and reading more books by Indigenous authors, including *52 Ways to Reconcile* by David Robertson, which offers accessible approaches to reconciliation.
- **Knowledge contribution:** Undertaking this study contributed to the creation of knowledge that aims to support other White Treaty people in spending time more respectfully and thoughtfully with Traditional Indigenous Territory.

- Aimed to Animiiki Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (Listen to Anemki Wajiw), as we have all been invited to do (Garrick, 2022)
- Methodological contributions to autoethnography, including employing a critical walking (data collection) partner to challenge my thinking and engage in critical conversations (Cameron, 2012), and employing critical dialogue prompts ([Appendices A](#) and [B](#)).

Concluding Thoughts

“If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right.” (Wilson, 2008, p.135). As someone profoundly changed by this learning inquiry, I found that statement deeply resonant. My research emphasizes the need to provide White Treaty people with models for engaging ethically and respectfully with the original caretakers and the Lands they inhabit. Skiing with Anemki Wajiw and her Sister Mountains created a space where routes and roots converged as I reflected on my privilege as a white Treaty person living and spending time on traditional Anishinaabeg Territory. This transformative experience enabled me to critically examine my cultural connection to Land and to listen to Ki’s place-thoughts (Styres & Zinga, 2013; Watts, 2013), which proffered that we are all relatives. Lessons from this journey shaped my understanding of Land-as-kin, reinforced my Treaty obligations of relational responsibility, and shifted my focus from simply spending time on Land for personal well-being to living in a respectful, reciprocal relationship with the Land and its original caretakers. It also helped me develop an ethics of place (Ermine, 2007; Springgay & Truman, 2019; Styres & Zinga, 2013) that begins with the understanding that Land is our relative (Krawec, 2022). Ultimately, sharing insights from this embodied (un)learning process through accessible formats such as considerations for spending time on Traditional Indigenous Territory, a YouTube video, and an article in alternative media outlets will foster greater awareness of relational responsibilities among other white Treaty People. Creating accessible and engaging knowledge products broadens reach beyond traditional academic audiences and may inspire personal transformation on a broader scale

(Ellis et al., 2011; SSHRC-CRSH, 2023). As I write these final sentences, we are experiencing a heat event with near-record temperatures in what is now known as Thunder Bay. I watched water bombers battle a nearby forest fire from our front deck. Despite these challenges, the nest of Eastern Phoebe chicks I had been fretting about survived the heat wave and fledged, offering a measure of hope on a wing and a reminder of my responsibilities to our more-than-human relatives.

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NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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Appendix A: Solo Reflective Questions

Reflective Questions for Treading Lightly: An Autoethnographic Reflection on a White Treaty Person's Journey to Relational Responsibility by Walking with the Nor'Wester Mountains on Fort William First Nation (FWFN) Traditional Lands

These autoethnographic touchstone questions aim to foster self-reflection on my thoughts, feelings, and perspectives related to spending time on the Land as a white treaty person. Engaging in this reflexive self-dialogue will support the development of a sense of relational responsibility toward the Land and its original caretakers and will help strengthen treaty relationships as I walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019). During my data collection, I will incorporate the concept of Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (Listen to Animikii Wajiw) (Garrick, 2022). This idea will serve as a reminder to consider my relationship with the Mountain (and its people), encouraging me to move from mere observation to listening to the teachings it offers on this (un)learning journey.

Autoethnographic Pre-Journey Questions

The responses to these questions will be recorded using voice memos or through reflective journaling as I finish the final preparations for my walking journey across the Nor'Wester Mountains.

1. How do colonial narratives (Dominion, Manifest Destiny, *terra nullius* doctrine) influence my current land ethics, relationality and recreational habits?
2. How do I describe my current relationship and responsibilities to the Land and the people of FWFN, who are the protectors and defenders of the Land and keepers of traditional knowledge, cultural beliefs, practices, values, and language of the Ojibway people of Kitchigami?
3. How am I integrating the idea of Animikii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw into my (un)learning journey preparations? What messages is the mountain conveying to me?

4. How might learning Anishinaabemowin ancestral place names deepen my understanding of the Land-as-kin and the First Peoples of this Territory, and support my journey toward relational responsibility?

Autoethnographic Mid-Journey Touchstone Questions

Responses to these questions will be recorded using voice memos three times a day (morning, afternoon, and end of day) during the two-day journey, or through journaling during walking breaks. I will record my own responses to these touchstone questions before engaging in the critical dialogue and audio-recorded conversations with my walking partner, as outlined in Appendix B.

1. What am I seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling on my skin as I walk-with-place?
2. What kinds of immediate, emotive, and embodied feelings do I experience as I intentionally walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019)?
3. What emotional and intellectual tensions emerge as I walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019), as a white settler, and shift from viewing the Land merely as a place for recreation, “to get away from it all,” (Grant, 2025) to considering my relational responsibilities to the Land and its original custodians, the Anishinaabe, as a white treaty person?

Prompts: shame, hope, relief, grief, guilt, optimism, discomfort

4. What ideas emerge to actively foster better relations and uphold my treaty responsibilities with the people of FWFN, the original caretakers of this Land, as I walk with place?
5. What are the signs or turning points that show I am learning to relate to the land-as-kin (Grant, 2025; Krawec, 2022; Watts, 2013)?
6. What are the signs that I perceive an emergence of ethical space between myself, the agent Land, and its original custodians as I walk-with-place (Ermine, 2007; Krawec, 2022)?

7. What is the most valuable lesson I have learned so far?

Autoethnographic Post-Journey Touchstone Questions

Responses to these questions will be recorded after the journey either using a voice memo or through journaling. I will record my own responses to these consolidation questions before engaging in the critical dialogue and audio-recorded conversations with my walking partner, as outlined in Appendix B.

1. How has cultivating an embodied relationship with Land, through the practice of Animkii Wajiw Manidoo Bizindaw (listening to the Mountain) and confronting my settler shame reshaped my relational responsibilities to Land and the First Peoples of this Territory?
2. How can I apply these learnings to strengthen relationships among treaty people and deepen their connection with the Land-as-kin to foster shared responsibility for ecosystem health?
3. What is the most important (un)learning from this journey that I can share with other white treaty people?
4. What new questions arose, remained unresolved or became more complex as I walked with place?

Appendix B: Critical Dialogue Prompts for Walking Partner

Purpose: This document provides guiding questions for the walking partner to facilitate meaningful dialogue with the student researcher during the pre-, mid-, and post-journey stages. Your role is not to be a research subject but to act as a critical friend and dialogue partner. Your aim is to listen intently, ask probing questions, and help the student researcher deepen her reflections, clarify her thinking, and confront her assumptions about her relational responsibilities as a white treaty person recreating on traditional Indigenous Territory.

Confidentiality: As per the information letter, all dialogues will be audio-recorded for the student researcher's data analysis. Your contributions will be used to provoke and refine the researcher's autoethnographic insights. The final written work will focus on her experiences and (un)learnings from these conversations.

Pre-Journey Dialogue Prompts

To be used after the student researcher has shared her initial private reflections on the core pre-journey questions in Appendix A.

1. You indicated that colonial narratives (Dominion, Manifest Destiny, *terra nullius* doctrine) influence your current understanding of Land. Can you describe a concrete example of how you think this impacted your planning for this journey?
2. You described your current relationship to the Land and FWFN. What feels most abstract or challenging about turning that sense of responsibility into tangible action or understanding? Why do you think that is?
3. You mentioned learning Anishinaabemowin place names before our journey. Is there a specific ancestral name or word you carry with you? What does it make you feel or hope to understand differently about this Territory and its original caretakers, the Anishinaabeg?

Mid-Journey Dialogue Prompts

To be used during impromptu breaks to probe the student researcher's private reflections. These prompts will be used to challenge and explore emerging thoughts.

1. When you describe the sensations you're experiencing (seeing, hearing, smelling), how are those different from what you might have noticed on a purely recreational hike? What does that difference suggest?
2. You noted your feelings (e. g. , shame, hope, discomfort). Can you describe where you feel that in your body? Was there a specific moment or observation that triggered it?
3. You were identifying turning points or shifts in your perception. What was the before and after of that moment? How does it relate to the idea of "Land-as-Kin" (Krawec, 2022)?
4. When you refer to "fostering better relations" (Krawec, 2022) or "ethical space" (Ermine, 2007), what would a tangible, real-world action that reflects that feeling look like once we finish this walk?
5. You mentioned intellectual or emotional tensions that arose as we walk-with-place (Springgay & Truman, 2019). What are the two sides of that tension? How might you sit with or navigate through it?
6. What concrete ideas come to mind for actively strengthening relationships and fulfilling our treaty responsibilities with the people of FWFN, the original caretakers of this Land, as we walk-with-place?

Post-Journey Dialogue Prompts

To be used after the journey to promote consolidation and synthesize learnings.

1. If you were to map the emotional and intellectual journey from our pre-trip talk to now, what is the most significant change in your perspective?
2. How has your understanding of your “relational responsibility” specifically evolved?
Can you now define it more clearly in a way that would benefit other white treaty people?
3. What specific, committed action will you take to make sure these learnings aren't 'left behind' on the trail? How will you hold yourself accountable?
4. If you were to share the most important (un) learning from this journey with another white treaty person who recreates on this land, what would you tell them?
5. What questions are you leaving with? What remains unresolved or has become more complex?
6. What feelings (Kizuk, 2020) surface or intensify as I walk-with-place when thinking about walking-with-place as a white settler (rather than a Canadian woman) With the prompts (shame, hope, relief, grief) - or maybe that is what you are asking in question 5 and you want a specific question relating to shame?

Appendix C: Consent

**Consent for Treading Lightly: An Autoethnographic Reflection on a White Treaty
Person's Journey to Relational Responsibility by Walking with the Nor'Wester
Mountains on Fort William First Nation (FWFN) Traditional Lands**

Consent

To be signed, completed, and returned to the researcher before starting the data collection process

MY CONSENT:

I agree to the following:

- ✓ I have read and understood the information contained in the Information Letter.
- ✓ I agree to participate.
- ✓ I understand the risks and benefits of the study.
- ✓ I am a volunteer and can choose not to answer any question.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw any information you've shared before I submit my thesis, please contact me at memcginn@lakeheadu. ca or call 807-620-9365 and express your wish to do so.
- ✓ The data will be securely stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Helle Møller's office for a minimum period of 7 years following completion of the research project.
- ✓ I understand that the research findings will be available to me upon request.
- ✓ The student researcher and thesis supervisor will know my identity, and I may be identifiable in the research results; I am comfortable with this, as indicated by ticking yes to have my confidentiality waived below.
- ✓ All my questions have been answered.

By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

Name of Participant _____

(please print)

Participant's Signature Date _____

NAVIGATING UNEVEN TERRAIN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, or to request a copy of the research results, please contact Marianne Stewart (memcginn@lakeheadu.ca; 807-620- 9365) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Helle Møller (hmoeller@lakeheadu.ca; 807-343-8010, ext. 8965). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant in general, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix D: Information Letter

To be provided to the participant alongside the consent letter to provide scope and context, and allow for purposeful understanding of the research being conducted

Dear Potential Participant:

I appreciate your interest in this research project: *Treading Lightly: An Autoethnographic Reflection of a White Treaty Person's Journey to Relational Responsibility Through Walking with the Nor'Wester Mountains on Fort William First Nation (FWFN) Traditional Lands*. Your time and expertise are sincerely appreciated. This letter provides basic information about the research, including what you can expect, how the data will be managed, and its intended future use.

WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED OF ME?

You are invited to participate in this research because of the connection we formed in Introductory Biostatistics (HESC-5030) and the philosophical discussions we've had about access to the "wilderness" during outdoor adventures. You are comfortable spending time in the outdoors and challenge me to think critically. I am asking you to join as a planning and walking partner to engage in critical dialogue, sharing your knowledge and perspectives on spending time on the Land as a white treaty person to support my reflective research process.

Your participation is entirely voluntary; you may refuse to participate in any discussions or withdraw from the study at any time. Before deciding whether you want to participate, please read this letter carefully to understand what it entails. After reading this letter, feel free to ask any questions you may have.

PURPOSE

I, Marianne Stewart, the student researcher, will carry out this research project under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Helle Møller, as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Health Science Thesis. The goal of the research is to explore how to respectfully engage with the Land and its original caretakers, foster relationality, and strengthen treaty relationships. The research study involves undertaking a reflective walk across the Nor'Wester Mountain Range over two days on the traditional Territory of FWFN.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

This study involves me, the student researcher, as the primary subject conducting this autoethnographic research. You will be my potential walking partner on this journey. You share the following characteristics with me as a full member researcher:

- Identify as a white, cisgender, non-disabled woman.
- Post-secondary educated.
- Possess the physical ability and prior experience to undertake a multi-day wilderness trek.
- Have personal experience recreating on traditional Indigenous Territory in the Thunder Bay region.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT, AND WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

This is an autoethnographic study where the student researcher is the primary subject. You are not a formal research participant but rather a walking and critical dialogue partner. Your role is to accompany me, the student researcher, on a two-day, approximately 21 km walking journey and to engage in conversations that support my reflexive process. You will use the critical dialogue prompts in Appendix B to ask probing questions that will deepen my reflections, clarify my thinking and challenge my assumptions about my relational responsibilities as a white treaty person recreating on traditional Indigenous Territory.

Your involvement includes:

- 1. Participating in three recorded critical dialogues:** You will take part in three audio-recorded discussions using provided prompts (see Appendix B).
 - a. One Pre-Journey Dialogue: To explore my initial thoughts and reflections on the questions in Appendix A before the walk.
 - b. Spontaneous mid-journey dialogues: To engage in impromptu conversations during the walk, reflecting on my ongoing experiences (see Appendix B).
 - c. One Post-Journey Dialogue: To support the consolidation of and reflect on the learnings from the entire journey (see Appendix B for prompts).
- 2. Participating in the Walking Journey:** You will accompany me, the student researcher, for the entire two-day, approximately 21km walk across the Nor'Wester Mountain Range, providing companionship and a supportive presence for critical dialogue. You will provide your own sleeping bag and sleeping pad, as well as appropriate clothing, footwear and other personal necessities for the journey.

Your contributions in these dialogues will help challenge and clarify my thinking, thereby strengthening my analysis. The study's focus remains on my personal experiences and reflections; your role is to support those reflections through conversation and refine my autoethnographic insights. The final thesis writing will focus on my experiences and (un)learnings from these conversations. All dialogues will be kept confidential, as outlined in the confidentiality information below. However, some of your ideas or insights may be included in the analysis and research outputs, and you may be identifiable to readers as my walking partner. I would like to obtain your permission to use those and to attribute them to you as per the consent waiver below.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

- You are under no obligation to participate. You are free to withdraw at any time without it affecting anything you were already entitled to (*e. g. , the food, drink and tent shelter I will provide for the walking journey*).
- You can refuse to discuss any points raised without facing any negative consequences.
- All questions regarding the research, its aims, and its results will be answered openly and honestly.
- You will receive important updates about the study and data analysis as it progresses, so you can decide whether to continue participating or to withdraw.
- You may withdraw any information you have shared at any time before I submit my thesis by contacting me and expressing your wish to do so. Additionally, I will provide you with an opportunity to review a preliminary synthesis of our critical dialogue and a draft of my research findings before publishing the analysis in my master's thesis and related knowledge translation products.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

Your participation in this study involves two main categories of potential risk:

- **Physical Risks:** The journey is a physically challenging, two-day 21km walk across the Nor'Westers mountain range. Potential risks include fatigue, injury, sudden weather changes, and wildlife encounters.

Mitigation: These risks will be managed by carrying bear spray, a Garmin In Reach satellite communicator for emergencies, a first-aid kit, appropriate weather gear, and large-capacity power banks for charging electronics. The trip will be postponed or amended to a two-day walk without an overnight stay in the case of adverse weather.

- **Psychological/Privacy Risks:** Our critical dialogue may involve sensitive topics related to settler/white treaty person's identity and colonial history, which could cause discomfort. You may also be concerned about the privacy of your contributions.

Mitigation: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are only expected to share what you feel comfortable with, and you may decline to answer any question. Your input will be used to support the student researcher's reflexive process; however, your insights and ideas may be included in the final research outputs. I will share a preliminary analysis and draft of my research findings before publication so that you can validate my findings to ensure your voice is accurately represented, confirm my interpretations of our discussions, and clarify the information you provided to deepen my reflections, and challenge my assumptions.

Your participation in this journey may offer several benefits, including:

- **Personal insight:** It may deepen your own understanding of your relationship with the Land and your sense of relational responsibility to Indigenous territories and their original caretakers.

- **Ethical reflection:** Engaging in critical dialogue can provide a meaningful opportunity to reflect on and potentially strengthen your own relational ethics and personal commitments.
- **Knowledge contribution:** Your involvement will directly support the creation of knowledge that aims to help other white treaty people to recreate more respectfully and thoughtfully on traditional Indigenous Territory.

WILL I RECEIVE AN HONOURARIUM/INCENTIVE/COMPENSATION?

There will be no monetary honorarium; however, I will provide food, drinks, and a tent for shelter and sleeping if the weather permits spending a night on the Land.

WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED, AND WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MY DATA?

The recorded information you provide will be kept confidential. Only my thesis supervisor, Dr. Helle Møller, and I will have access to the discussion notes and other materials, including audio recordings, handwritten notes, and your consent form. You will not be included in the in-journey photographs or videos capturing my thoughts and feelings in motion or recording turning points. Ownership of these photos and videos of the Land will be transferred to FWFN.

WHERE WILL MY DATA BE STORED?

All raw data, audio recordings, and transcriptions of our critical dialogues will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Helle Møller's office for up to 7 years, in accordance with Lakehead University's policy. After this period, they will be destroyed.

WHAT WILL MY DATA BE USED FOR?

The final research results will be included in my master's thesis and related knowledge translation products, which may consist of a journal or magazine article, a YouTube video, or a checklist of considerations for spending time on traditional Indigenous Territory as a white treaty person.

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?

You will be notified when the research results are shared through the knowledge mobilization and translation products listed above. The master's thesis will be available on Lakehead University's website once the thesis committee has approved it. You can request a copy of the research results at any time from the researcher using the contact information below.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

You can withdraw any information you've shared at any time before I submit my thesis by contacting me at memcginn@lakeheadu.ca or 807-620-9365 and stating your wish to do so. I will also allow you to review my analysis of our conversations before I publish the results in my master's thesis and related knowledge translation products.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved this research study. If you have any questions related to the research ethics and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sheena Beach at the Research Ethics Board at [807-343-8010 ext. 8933](tel:807-343-8010) or research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix E: Letter of Permission

Gail R. Bannon
Culture & Mountain Coordinator
Fort William First Nation
Phone: 807-623-9543 x502
Email: GailRBannon@fwfn.ca

October 21st, 2025

Marianne Stewart
Master of Health Science Student
Lakehead University
Mobile: 807-620-9365
Email: marcginn@lakeheadu.ca

Dear Ms. Stewart,

On behalf of Fort William First Nation (FWFN), I am pleased to provide a letter of support and permission for you and one walking partner to access FWFN's territories, which include the Nor'Wester Mountain range. This access will begin at what is colonially known as Mount Harlourt (Ojibway name to be determined) and extend northeast to the Anemki Wajiw Pow Wow grounds in early to mid-November 2025 (exact dates to be confirmed and communicated). It will support a walking journey for your Lakehead University Master of Health Science Thesis: "Treading Lightly: An Autoethnographic Reflection of a White Treaty Person's Journey to Relational Responsibility Through Walking with the Nor'Wester Mountains on Fort William First Nation Traditional Lands."

I acknowledge that the purpose of your thesis project is to explore the relational responsibility of white treaty people to the Land and its original custodians, and you will grant FWFN ownership of any photos or videos taken during your journey. As outlined in the 2019 report, "The Importance of the Duty to Consult & Accommodate," FWFN members are the protectors and defenders of the Land and the keepers of traditional knowledge, cultural beliefs, practices, values, and language of the Ojibway people of Kitchigami. Seeking permission to access FWFN territory for your thesis project aligns with FWFN values, the duty to consult, and the goal of building respectful relationships and strengthening community engagement.

The work towards the needed reconciliation is supported when our neighbours in Thunder Bay and surrounding areas build respectful relationships and honour their responsibilities under the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. We look forward to reviewing your insights, learnings and suggestions for white treaty people to respectfully engage and obtain permission from FWFN before participating in recreational activities on our Traditional territory.

Sincerely,



Gail R. Bannon, Culture & Mountain Coordinator

Appendix F: Approval Letter



Research Ethics Board
t: (807) 343-8010 ext. 8933
e: research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca

November 14, 2025

Principal Investigator: Dr. Helle Moeller
Student(s): Ms. Marianne Stewart
Health and Behavioural Sciences\Health Sciences
Lakehead University

Dear Dr. Helle Moeller and Ms. Marianne Stewart:

Re: Romeo File No: 1471391
Granting Agency: n/a
Agency Reference #: n/a

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "Treading Lightly: An Autoethnographic Reflection of a White Treaty Person's Journey to Relational Responsibility Through Walking with the Nor'Wester Mountains on Fort William First Nation Traditional Lands".

Ethics approval is valid until November 14, 2026. Please submit a Request for Renewal to the Office of Research Services via the Romeo Research Portal by October 14, 2026, if your research involving human participants will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Access the Romeo Research Portal by logging into myInfo at: <https://erpwp.lakeheadu.ca/>.

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monica Flegel".

Dr. Monica Flegel
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/sb