

Grand Ronde Foodways: Survivance and Food Sovereignty on the Grand Ronde Reservation

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In June 2016, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon installed a fishing platform at Willamette Falls. Within minutes of putting dip nets into the rushing waters of the Willamette River, Tribal fishers caught 15 salmon. This event marked Grand Ronde's formal return to the falls 130 years after the river was dammed.

For centuries, Clo-we-walla and Clackamas communities maintained settlements near the 1,500-foot wide and 40-foot tall falls located between the contemporary cities of West Linn and Oregon City, welcoming guests from east and west of the Cascades to visit, trade, and fish for salmon and lamprey. Following the removal of these communities to the Grand Ronde Reservation via the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855, members of the confederated nation faced restricted access to a place central to their teachings and histories (Lewis et al. 2013). With the construction of a dam and power plant in 1888, soon followed by the building of paper mills and other industrial facilities, Grand Ronde Tribal members were cut off from land that for millennia they had cared for and been supported by. With no access to this section of the Willamette, stories relating to the creation of the falls and surrounding landscape by Coyote, Meadowlark, Salmon and other figures could not be shared in the places of their creation. Grand Ronde's exclusion from the falls compounded following termination, which deprived the Tribe of federal recognition between the 1950s and 1980s. Following the Grand Ronde's restoration, Tribal members have reasserted their sovereignty and continue to maintain deep connections to their homelands, including Willamette Falls.

It was against this backdrop that in July 2016 we – members of Field Methods in Indigenous Archaeology (FMIA), a community-based field school and research project co-directed by UW archaeologists and the Grand Ronde Historic Preservation Office – were invited to a ceremony and dinner featuring the the salmon caught at Willamette Falls in achaf-hammi (the Grand Ronde plank house). The ceremony included a broad swath of community including Natural Resources and Culture Department staff; the Tribe's cultural, spiritual, and political leaders; members of Canoe family; and other invited guests including FMIA staff and students (Katy, Ian, and Sara). Seated on the cedar benches of the plank house, we listened as Tribal members shared stories of Grand Ronde's enduring connection to Willamette Falls and learned the history of how the Tribe and it's Department of Natural Resources successfully advocated for the establishment of the ceremonial fishery. Led by

Canoe family, the crowd gathered at achaf-hammi celebrated into the summer evening with song, dance, drumming, and feasting.

Grand Ronde Food Sovereignty and Field Methods in Indigenous Archaeology

That FMIA was invited to share in this experience and, importantly, learn from it speaks to the broader relations of conducting research in a Grand Ronde context. Briece Edwards, the Grand Ronde Historic Preservation Office Director, emphasizes that caring for and protecting Tribal cultural resources is about the interconnections between people, places, and practices. These relations do not exist solely in the past. They are alive today and are so principally because of Grand Ronde's survivance – their assertions of sovereignty in the face of settler colonial dispossession and the persistence of connections and relations with their homelands. Inviting us in to partake in ceremony – and prior to that, inviting Sara and Ian to collaborate with them on FMIA – was the Tribe's way of incorporating people into the network of relationships that have supported life in western Oregon since time immemorial. As King (2005:29) explains: "don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."

The stories shared with us on that night in July is one example of how community-based collaboration with the Grand Ronde Historic Preservation Office has shaped how the project and we as individuals understand and study foodways on the Grand Ronde Reservation. In this paper, we offer a brief snapshot of contemporary food sovereignty efforts led by Grand Ronde and the role that archaeology can play in celebrating the Tribe's nearly 170-year history of sustained connection with ancestral practices, places, and foods.

For Grand Ronde, studies of Tribal foodways extend across the entirety of their history, from time immemorial, to nineteenth-century settler incursion and forced removal, to twentieth-century termination and restoration, to the present-day. This approach underscores that food sovereignty is far from a novel concept. It is a constant in Tribal history. FMIA models this approach in our field and archival studies, which seek to understand how the Grand Ronde community have navigated settler colonial policies – past *and* present – expressly designed to sever the Tribe's culturally salient relations and stewardship responsibilities throughout their homelands.

FMIA's research has focused on reservation lifeways, those developed and enacted by the Grand Ronde community from the 1850s onwards. During this period, particularly the first seven decades following the reservation's establishment, government agents attempted to dissolve Grand Ronde land and forcibly assimilate Tribal members. Yet, in opposition to terminal settler colonial narratives that define this period as one of marked loss, our archival and archaeological work provides testimony to the survivance of the Grand Ronde community. FMIA's research supports contemporary food sovereignty by documenting

foodways enacted by Tribal members' recent ancestors to preserve relations with their homelands and foods.

People, Places & Practices: Grand Ronde Food Sovereignty Today

In the summer of 2016, I (Joyce) was invited to visit FMIA in preparation for macrobotanical analysis of sediment samples. As an ethnobotanist whose work focuses on people-plant relationships in the past and present, this and subsequent visits to Grand Ronde have helped me to better understand the holistic approach the Tribe takes to cultural and natural resource stewardship and protection. Their approach is central to Grand Ronde food sovereignty as it prioritizes protection and revitalization of cultural practices and the natural resources that are foundational to Tribal members' identity and well-being.

To give one specific and important example, camas is intrinsically linked to community and familiar actions within the Tribe's "First Food" engagements. The Tribe's ancestral homelands include portions of southwestern Washington State, the northern Oregon Coast, and the Willamette Valley and other lands between the Coast and Cascade Mountains. The Willamette Valley was an integral landscape within the Tribe's homelands for its production and harvest of camas (Boyd 1999; Douglas 1959; Morris 1936).

Grand Ronde's holistic approach to revitalizing camas in the community includes cultivation of the plant at the tribe's nursery, which is used for out-planting and community harvest; working with state land managers to integrate Indigenous stewardship practices on camas prairies located on state-owned lands; and reintroduction of camas into the daily life and annual rhythms of the community (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Camas at the Grand Ronde nursery.

For example, the Cultural Education Program, directed by Tribal member Jordan Mercier, offers immersive cultural classes and informal educational events throughout the year. These include participation in Tribal Canoe Journey, Chinuk wawa language classes, weaving, carving, and plant gathering. In addition to the specific classes and events that the cultural education program offers, Jordan has been working to reintroduce camas on an informal basis for the past six or seven years. He says that in the cultural education work that they do with Tribal members, they try not to objectify First Foods (i.e., they just call cultural foods like camas “our foods”). For example, at various community events throughout the year, he walks around with a plate of prepared camas, and offers it to people. He says that people are eager and ready to eat it, so it has become something of a community norm. He says that “even one bite [of camas] really has a lot of power to it.” He has found that the most effective approach to reintroducing cultural foods to the community is holistic, natural, immersive, and provides opportunities for people to enjoy the food and have a good time:

It's not a big deal. [It's] just who we are, and what we do. It's about bonding, and creating a social fabric for the community to gather around. The culture and the food bring people together, and is a way to relate to each other in a really deep way. You can go out, and be in the world, and do whatever you're going to do, but you always have that to fall back on. You know who you are, and you have your people.

Jordan developed this approach based on his experience, and what he's seen and found to work over the years. "What makes people feel comfortable and happy? How do you welcome that in the room? What makes the room full of laughter? You can't force that, all you can do is invite that spirit, and welcome that into the room." The organic nature of reintegrating foods into everyday practice alongside advocacy for Tribal access, as in the case of the Willamette Falls ceremonial fishery, speaks to the broad strategies the nation uses to assert its food sovereignty. These practices underscore the relations between people, places and practices in the past *and* present.

Historical Roots of Food Sovereignty: the Uyxat Powwow Grounds

I (Ian) began working with Grand Rond in 2014. The Historic Preservation Office invited me to undertake a land tenure project that explored the history of settlement and land ownership on the reservation, particularly in the wake of the General Allotment Act (Kretzler 2017). During the development of FMIA, I worked with Tribal staff to identify places that would be appropriate for archaeological investigation and would support Tribal initiatives related to food. Using results of the land tenure study, we selected a portion of the Uyxat Powwow Grounds to conduct this work.

The Uyxat Powwow Grounds are situated along Cosper Creek near the eastern edge of the Grand Ronde Reservation, as established in 1857. A quarter mile to the east, a federal garrison at Fort Yamhill policed the reservation's boundary. Troops imprisoned those who left without Grand Ronde permission. At the reservation's administrative headquarters two miles to the west, agents penned annual reports detailing the ostensible decline of pre-reservation lifeways and relationships – a decline they were quick to attribute to their implementation of various assimilationist programs. For those living between these sources of federal power, reservation life was one of considerable hardship. The Grand Ronde community struggled to establish an agricultural economy (as dictated by military and administrative doctrine) on the reservation's clayey soils and grappled with the lack of treaty-promised food and supplies. The first map of Grand Ronde, produced within a year of the reservation's founding, shows multiple cemeteries.

FMIA's work has shown that the history of the Uyxat Powwow Grounds is one of struggle, but also of success. Food sovereignty is a bright line running through this history, linking western Oregon Indigenous peoples in pre-reservation periods, the historic Grand Ronde community, and the contemporary Tribal nation. We identified food sovereignty efforts through archival research and through engagement with material belongings (the project's preferred term for "artifacts").

Archival research focused on enhancing existing Tribal databases with spatial information related to Tribal history but housed in local, state, and federal repositories. This information, primarily maps and land records, provides insight into how land remained central to the struggle between Grand Ronde's pursuit of a self-determined future and federal assimilation campaigns. During this work, we identified moments in which individuals and the entire Grand Ronde community strategically used land tenure to strengthen familial and social bonds. One of those moments took place at the present-day powwow grounds.

In June 1889, James Foster received a 153-acre allotment, 33 acres of which make up the powwow grounds. During the allotment process, Foster's friend Edward Teabo was fishing along the Columbia River. He was away from Grand Ronde and thus did not receive an allotment. The Teabo and Foster families were close, and in 1910 Foster sold the 33-acre portion of his allotment to Edward's brother, Joseph. Archival documents do not comment on why Foster sold this parcel or Joseph's interest in it.

Previously, we have suggested that Foster used individual land ownership to preserve familial ties (Kretzler 2019). If so, this action would be consistent with previous actions by the Grand Ronde community. During the initial allotment of Grand Ronde, reservation groups established clusters of parcels owned by individuals with shared familial, linguistic, and/or cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Foster may have been attempting to provide a land base for Edward and Joseph, thereby ensuring they remained connected to the larger Grand Ronde community.

When viewed through the prism of food sovereignty, it is also possible that offering land to the Teabos was inclusive of supporting off-reservation travel to fishing locations and other food gathering areas. Grand Ronde families often spent the summer months traveling throughout western Oregon to employment opportunities and significant food gathering areas. By providing land, and perhaps a home or other structures, Foster may have granted Edward not only a place to live, but one to process, store, and even distribute foods. His actions may have been about supporting the entire Grand Ronde community, not just the Teabo family.

Archaeological evidence suggests the Fosters, Teabos, and other members of the Grand Ronde community relied on an array of plant foods and medicines. FMIA spent three field seasons conducting an archaeological investigation at the powwow grounds. Employing a low-impact field methodology (Gonzalez et al. 2018), we identified household deposits along the banks of Cospers Creek. These deposits contained a range of belongings, including structural hardware, mass-produced ceramics and glassware, and lithic debitage. Analysis of sediment samples revealed charred macrobotanical remains of limulo-saplil (tarweed; *Madia sativa*), k'anawi (oak acorns; *Quercus garryana*), hayash-təmtəm stik (blue elderberry;

Sambucus caerulea), and ulali (*Rubus* berries)(Figure 2). The presence of these culinary and medicinal plants complements ethnographic accounts and community knowledge that detail gathering trips to off-reservation locations (Kenoyer 2017). Together, these lines of evidence contest the claims made by reservation agents. They expose the tenuous relationship between agents’ annual reports and the everyday experiences of the Grand Ronde community.



Figure 2. From left to right, limulo-saplil (tarweed), ulali (Saskatoon berry), hayash-təmtəm stik (blue elderberry), and k'anawi (oak acorns)

Today, the powwow grounds is a place at which food sovereignty takes center stage. For most of the twentieth century, the property was owned by non-Grand Ronde individuals. The Tribe reacquired the property in 2006 and established the powwow grounds in 2012. In 2010, Grand Ronde completed construction of achaf-hammi. Reflecting the diversity of the confederated nation, the structure incorporates architectural design and structural elements from historical plank houses built by northern Willamette Valley and Columbia River groups and historical semi-subterranean homes built by south-central and southwestern Oregon groups. In 2015, the Tribe built a permanent dance arbor at the powwow grounds (Figure 3). These structures anchor all manner of community celebrations and ceremonies. Food, and especially first foods, are mainstays at these events.



Figure 3. Dance arbor at the Uyxat Powwow Grounds.

Conclusion

As an FMIA student, I (Katy) had the opportunity to listen to Grand Ronde community members share their connections to foods and to to accompany them to visit, tend, and gather on the reservation. These conversations and trips sparked my interest in the connections between archaeology and contemporary food sovereignty efforts, which coalesced into [The Powwow Grounds as a Food Forest](#), a digital media project I developed for FMIA.

The powwow grounds are frequently used by campers attending Grand Ronde powwows and events at achaf-hammi. A portion of the area is meadow-like and home to a large variety of co-existing edible plants that need minimal management. The area includes both native plant species such as trailing blackberries, pacific crab apples, and Oregon white oak,

as well as introduced plants like Himalayan blackberries and pear trees. These plants appear well-established at the powwow grounds, and their presence may indicate this space was a food forest: a place where the Grand Ronde community acted as stewards, cultivating and caring for plants over generations (Armstrong et al. 2021). The possibility of a food forest at the powwow grounds speaks to the longevity of the area as a multi-generational effort to maintain foodways and assert food sovereignty.

The experiences we have included shed light on how archaeological research that focuses on the recent past can aid in tracing through-lines of foodways from the deep past to the present. The partnership with the Grand Ronde Historic Preservation Office allowed us to approach foodways in the past with a context of contemporary Grand Ronde foodways in mind which centers connections to foodways of recent ancestors and the importance of continued access to foods and landscapes. Through this approach, we and the Tribe actively demonstrate how the community maintained foodways despite settler incursion and continues to celebrate foodways and Grand Ronde food sovereignty today.

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