

What Was Ours

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Top: A headdress on display at the powwow belongs to Bobby Joe Goggles. Photo by Alpheus Media.

Above: Philbert McLeod hunts for deer on the Wind River Reservation. Photo by Alpheus Media.

Right: A child dances at the grand entry into the Ethere Powwow on the Wind River Reservation. Photo by Virginia Moore.

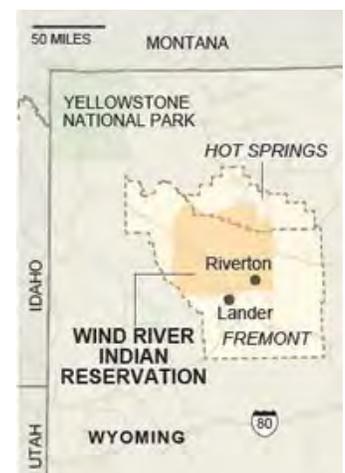


Program Synopsis

What Was Ours is a film that touches on the lives of three individuals from the Wind River Indian Reservation and their journey to The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois. They each take this trip with hopes to bring home artifacts stored within the walls of the museum.

The individuals: Philbert McLeod, a respected elder in the Shoshone Tribe, who served his country as a Gunner in the Vietnam War, is deeply entrenched in the ways of the past; Jordan Dresser, a Northern Arapaho college graduate, who returns to the reservation to help preserve cultural awareness by identifying and recovering lost artifacts; and Mikala Sun Rhodes, a young Northern Arapaho high school student, who entwines ancient culture and traditions with a more contemporary modern twist.

Each individual brings a perspective to the story which is unique to his or her age and life experiences—representing the past, present and future of the Wind River Indian Reservation.



Map of the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming.

In Their Words

“Arapaho and Shoshone people have always wanted a museum on the reservation. When people hear that we ask to borrow our artifacts, they wonder why we have to ask. They’re ours.”

— Jordan Dresser,
Northern Arapaho Tribal Member

Producer's Comment



Mat Hames

What Was Ours was made over the course of 13 trips to the Wind River Reservation during a period of four years. I decided to make a film focusing on three people who represent the past, present and future of the reservation as they reclaimed what was once theirs.

In 2011, I was hired by Wyoming Public Broadcasting System to work with the two tribes of Wind River Reservation (Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone) to create a digital photo archive of ancestral objects.

After many trips visiting with the elders over meals, I came to understand that some were upset that their ancestors' artifacts were now in the hands of non-Indians.

I wanted to help amplify their voices.

At a tribal elders meeting I was immediately drawn to Philbert McLeod. He spoke native Shoshone, was humble, and he loved to make jokes and laugh, but he could quickly turn very serious. He agreed to an interview, which turned into five different interviews over the course of a few years. I believe he was trying to help me understand the human connection to these artifacts. They are not just historical objects, but living things to him.

I met others in different ways. Jordan Dresser, a journalist, who was 27 years old at the time, and Mikala Sun Rhodes, a 17-year-old high school student. The three emerged as one way to represent the past, present and future of Wind River. Weaving their stories together became a way to tell one story. I consider myself fortunate to have met Jordan, Mikala and Philbert and to be there to see their lives unfold.

By the Numbers

1. The Wind River Reservation was solidified by the Fort Bridger Treaty in 1868, 22 years before Wyoming became a state in 1890. Throughout the years, more than 500 treaties were made with different tribes and the United States government. A total of 370 were ratified, which helped the United States expand its territories. Most of these treaties have been broken, nullified or amended throughout the years.
2. In the early 1850s the Eastern Shoshones alternated their winter camps between the upper Green River area around Pinedale, Wyoming, and the Wind River area. In 1868 Chief Washakie signed the Treaty of Fort Bridger. This treaty ensured the lands west of the Wind River Mountains and the Wind River Valley to be named the Wind River Reservation and the home for the Eastern Shoshone Tribe.
3. In the winter of 1878, leaders from the Northern Arapaho Tribe convinced the United States Army and Chief Washakie to allow the Northern Arapaho to become a part of the Wind River Reservation, thus allowing the two tribes to share the one reservation.
4. The Eastern Shoshone Tribe has approximately 5,000 members and the Northern Arapaho Tribe has approximately 10,000 members.
5. The Wind River Reservation is located in the center of Wyoming and is the seventh largest and fifth most populated Indian Reservation in the United States.
6. The Wind River Reservation encompasses more than 2.2 million acres.
7. There are four casinos located on the Wind River Reservation. The Shoshone Rose is operated by the Shoshone Tribe. The Smoke Shop, the Little Wind Casino and the Wind River Casino (where the artifacts are currently on display) are operated by the Arapaho Tribe.
8. The Plains Indian Museum at Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, houses one of the largest collections of Plains Indian art and artifacts of more than 6,000 objects.
9. The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois, houses thousands of objects from the major tribes across North America.
10. Jared Sun Rhodes said, "Everything has its purpose in the circle. We are given four starts to a song (pow-wow). The first start of a song, they dance for their young people. The second start, they dance for the adolescents. The third start of the song, they dance for adulthood, they dance for strength and encouragement to keep our ways going. The last start, the fourth start, is for the old people and the ones who have gone on."



Jordan Dresser visits the ruins of the Arapaho Cultural Museum in Ethete, Wind River Reservation. Photo by Virginia Moore.

Discussion Questions

1. After Jordan's trip to the Field Museum, to hopefully return home with stored artifacts he stated, "They wanted us to see them, provide a certain content for them, but they're still owned by them. They still have them. It was a sad thought. We went there to go view pieces of ourselves, but we had to leave them there." Consider this statement. Many of these artifacts hold sacred meanings to Native Americans. Ask yourself how you would feel if items which belonged to your great-great grandparents were housed in a place you could only view, but not have any physical access. Would you feel a piece of your identity was lost?
2. Mikala said, "A lot of things are lost. That knowledge is fading away and we're not really going to know everything now because the artifacts are not on the reservation." Consider this statement and discuss why Native American artifacts on the Wind River Indian Reservation are not available to the residents. What happened to them and why are they not kept on the reservation?
3. Philbert was reluctant to go to Chicago, Illinois, and view the artifacts in the Field Museum. Why do you think he was hesitant? Discuss why you believe he had a change of heart.
4. Philbert indicated, "A lot of the stuff that is gone from this reservation was stolen." What were the different ways the artifacts were taken from the reservation?
5. *What Was Ours* chronicles the journey taken by Philbert, Jordan and Mikala to Chicago's Field Museum with the intent of recovering lost artifacts. How did this trip impact each of them? Discuss if this trip changed their focus when they returned home.

Suggested Activities

1. The Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribal members are working to create a museum on the Wind River Reservation to house artifacts which belonged to their ancestors. Research items and materials you would need to build a museum which might include cases, temperature monitoring, etc. Include a budget for all items and a list of possible resources to help fund the project.
2. Jared Sun Rhodes speaks about the significance of beading and the designs used to connect the past with the future. Create your own design, keeping in mind your history along with goals/dreams you would like to accomplish in the future. Use colored pencils to create your own unique beading design.
3. Philbert, Jordan and Mikala all speak to the importance of family in *What Was Ours*. Make a list of activities they participate in with their family members, then make a list of what activities in which you participate with your family members. Compare and contrast the different activities. Ask yourself if they are comparable or very different and why.
4. Do an internet search of how many different museums currently house Native American artifacts. There were two museums named in the film. How many other museums are located in the United States and what different Tribal affiliations' artifacts are housed in these museums?
5. Research the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming and Edith Mae Adams. Create a timeline of when the church first appeared on the Wind River Indian Reservation and when artifacts were obtained.



Philbert McLeod makes a ceremonial hand drum. Photo by Alpheus Media.

Resources

About the film

<https://www.facebook.com/whatwasours>

About the tribes

Eastern Shoshone Tribe of Wyoming
<http://easternshoshone.org>

Northern Arapaho Tribe of Wyoming
<http://northernarapaho.com>

History of the Shoshone and Arapaho Tribes on the Wind River Reservation
<http://jacksonholehistory.org/an-introduction-to-the-wind-river-indian-reservation-of-wyoming/>

Source of map

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/03/us/wind-river-indian-reservation-where-brutality-is-banal.html>

Articles

Reflecting Community: Case Studies of Three Wyoming Museums and the Impact of Each on the Community.
www.uwyo.edu/robertshistory/readings_in_wyoming_history_kessler.htm

Virtual Museum brings Artifacts Closer
http://dailyranger.com/story.php?story_id=7187

History and education

The Field Museum, Chicago Illinois
<https://www.fieldmuseum.org/-native-americans-field-museum>
<https://www.fieldmuseum.org/node/4851>

Buffalo Bill Center of the West
<https://centerofthewest.org/explore/plains-indians/research>

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
<http://www.nmai.si.edu>

Lived History: The Wind River Virtual Museum
www.windrivervm.org

Wind River Education
windriveredu.org

Denver March Pow-Wow
www.denvermarchpowwow.org



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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Michelle Hoffman, a retired school superintendent and former educator in Fremont County School District #14, Wyoming Indian Schools. Michelle worked 30 years on the Wind River Indian Reservation as a teacher, special education coordinator, curriculum coordinator, middle school principal and 11 years as the district's superintendent. Michelle has recently collaborated with Wyoming Public Broadcasting Systems as the Education Coordinator working on the Wind River Educational Modules, to be distributed throughout the state for use in classrooms.

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Educational resources for this film are available at
<http://www.visionmakermedia/educators/what-was-ours>

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