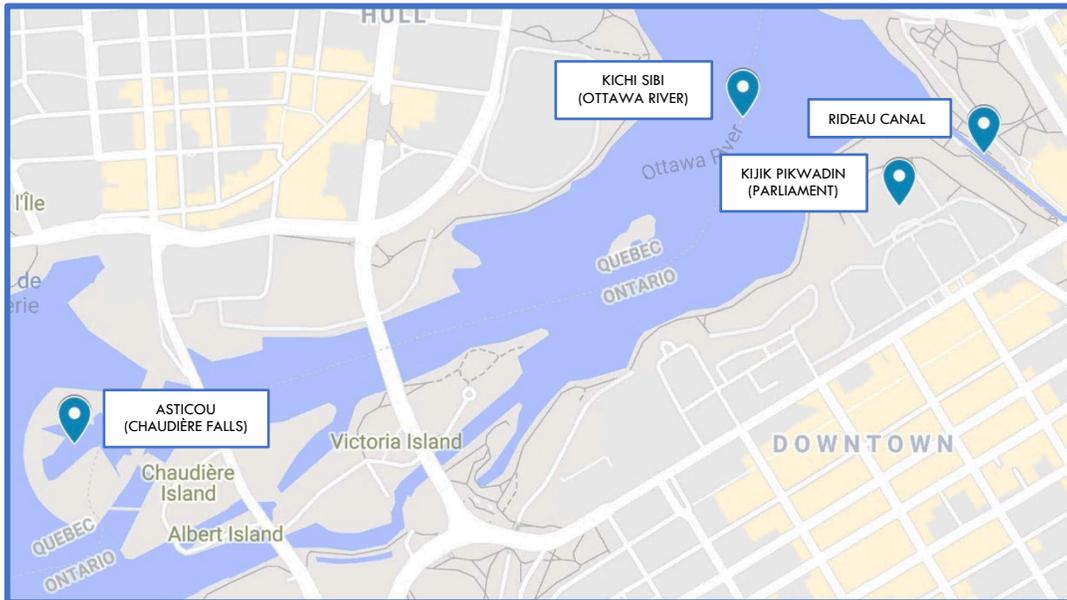


City History Hunt: Algonquin History



Asticou (Chaudière Falls)

What is today known as “Chaudière Falls” has an important presence in Algonquin history as the Asticou, meaning “place where the waters boil”. It was given this name due to the shape of the falls resembling a cauldron, and the ‘boiling’ appearance of the water as it crashed down. The falls demanded respect and awe from all who came across it, and certainly achieved these demands by both the First Nations and various explorers who laid eyes on it. To the Algonquin, the falls had particular significance, which is evident in their practice of a ritual ceremony upon encountering the falls, “Pétun”, a traditional Tobacco Ceremony. The ceremony took place on a steep escarpment overhanging the falls and called for a collection of tobacco in a wooden plate from each member of the group, followed by dancing and singing in a circle around the plate. One of the captains then makes a harangue (a lengthy speech), before throwing the tobacco into the water as they all let out a loud cry. This ceremony was performed to grant them protection against their enemies and the dangers of their travel (protection that otherwise would not be offered without the performance of the ceremony).



Figure 1: The Chaudière Falls in 1909 with the Eddy Mill in the background (Bytown Museum, P2459)

Kichi Sibi/Ottawa River



The Ottawa River is better known to the Algonquin Anishinabeg as the Kichi Sibi, meaning “Great River”. The Kichi Sibi is the defining feature of the Algonquin nation territory, as they have been the habitants of its shores and tributaries since time immemorial. Various Algonquin communities lived along its shores in kabeshinàn (social summer camps) during the summer months after spending the winter in their traditional family hunting grounds deep in the woods. The Kichi Sibi is particularly strategic because it links the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes region, thereby making it especially valuable to the success of the fur trade.

Kijik Pikwadin/Parliament

Parliament Hill is known in the Algonquin language as Kijik Pikwadin, meaning “Cedar Hill”. While this regal building represents a multitude of things that Canadians are exceedingly proud of, it also has a troubling history concerning its problematic perspective of the First Nations of Canada – even pre-dating its construction in 1867. The numerous acts that came from this iconic building, as well as the treaties negotiated in the name of the Crown (the British Government) played a massive role in the lives of the Algonquin, and all Indigenous peoples of Canada. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, as well as the Indian Act of 1876 and all its ensuing amendments, among other acts and pieces of legislature, were all created with the intention of addressing the “Indian Problem” through control and forceful assimilation into “civilized society”.



Figure 2: Centre block of Parliament in 1916 before the fire (Bytown Museum, P2103)

Recent efforts have been made by the Canadian Government to address and restructure the decades of mistreatment. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada represents a conscious effort on behalf of the Canadian Government to examine its actions, legislation and history.

Rideau Canal



The Rideau Canal is a testament to the ingenious engineering of Lieutenant Colonel John By, however, the canal is also indicative of the rapid growth of what would later become Canada's capital, and the insatiable hunger of Eurocanadians for natural resources. The canal brought a massive influx of European settlers who settled on traditional Algonquin territories without consultation or compensation for use of the land.

Timber was a vital resource in building the canal, which was in abundance in the traditional Algonquin land. Due to both the canal's construction and beginning of the timber industry, the Algonquin Anishinabeg were experiencing a severe loss of land. The Algonquin and Nipissing of Oka wrote letters to the Department of Indian Affairs and the Canadian Government asking for designated lands to be protected, as promised in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The concerns of the Algonquin were ignored because the lands in question were needed to supply timber for the canal. While the canal represents Canada's early development, it also indicates mistreatment of the Algonquin people concerning the loss of their traditional lands – a phenomenon that was not new and did not end with the completion of the canal in 1832.



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