Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Project Research Summary
Ojibwe Cosmology

This research lays out the key Ojibwe idea of other-than-human persons, Thunderbirds, *memegweiswag,* great snakes, etc. and introduces the cast of semi-human entities and spirit beings who are said to inhabit the Anishinaabeg natural and spirit world. This Ojibwe ontology will be explored via anthropologist Irving Hallowell's work of the 1930s and 1940s as well as Maureen Matthews fieldwork conducted in Pauingassi over the last 15 years.

Using Thunderbirds, the most powerful spirit entity of the Ojibwe pantheon and *memegwesiwag*, charming semi-human dwarves, as exemplars, the research will introduce the rather difficult idea of Ojibwe legendary characters and dream visitors, *aadizookaanag* and explain the difference between those who are seen only in dreams and semi-human entities like *memegwesiwag* and *wiindigo* which furtively inhabit this world and interact with humans in astonishing ways.

Using the example of *memegwesiwag*, the research will make the point that some really important entities in the Anishinaabe natural world will NOT turn up on a map of regional flora and fauna and that these beings are part of what Rand Valentine calls 'intangible heritage.' While every community in this region has a nearby cliff where *memegwesiwag* are said to live and many people have heard or seen them and would credit the *memegwesiwag* with contributing to their hunting luck and herbal healing skills, *memegwesiwag* will never be counted in a biological survey because of their magical powers and furtive habits.

This paper will also explore the nature of Ojibwe understandings of the most powerful spirit being in the Ojibwe pantheon and through them ideas about the source of good fortune and *bimaadiziwin* – a good Ojibwe life. Thunderbirds are also an excellent vehicle for looking at the relationship between metamorphosis, personhood and power and at the provisional Ojibwe approach to the attribution of agency which Mary Black-Rogers calls 'percept ambiguity.'

Using the transcripts of conversations with Pauingassi elders from the Pimachiowin Aki area this paper will detail the relationship of this specific community with one particular named Thunderbird who has had a historic association with several generations of healers and medicine men and was introduced by a helpful intermediary, a *memegwesi*.