



PEACEFUL PROTEST: Harold C. Frazier, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and lawyers filed a lawsuit against eminent domain, pointing to the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, in an attempt to block the pipeline's path onto sacred, sovereign lands. This land was temporarily known as North Camp.

John Willis

Without water, there is no life

Any leak from the Dakota Access Pipeline would go into the drinking-water supply for the Standing Rock reservation and millions of people living downriver. So it had to be stopped ...

In the introduction to *Mni Wiconi – Water is Life*, a weighty volume packed with images, stories, historical artefacts, timelines, and poems, in addition to his superb photographs, author John Wilkins tells how he became involved in the protest movement that led to a massive stand-off at the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota against the 1,200 mile long Dakota Access Pipeline crude oil project.

“I had heard about resistance movements, led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and supported by non-native allies, against the Energy Transfer Partners project

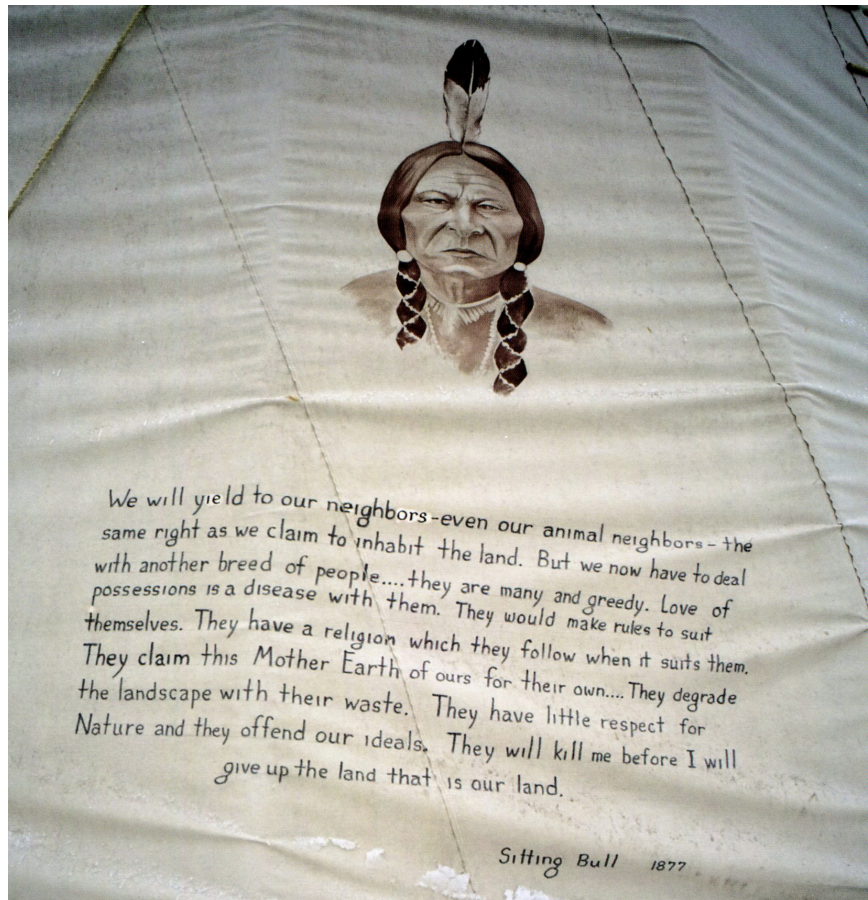


READY FOR WINTER CONFLICT. The upside-down American flag was frequently seen throughout the camps. Flying the union upside down is officially recognised by the United States Flag Code as a serious distress call.

to build an oil pipeline through the Dakotas, across Iowa, and into Illinois. In early September 2016, I headed west to witness the efforts of the resisters, or Water Protectors, as they chose to be called. Drawn to their dedication, I went to the Oceti Sakowin (“Seven Council Fires”) Camp in North Dakota, one of three camps set up to accommodate the resisters and their allies.

“The 1,772-mile-long Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)”, writes Willis, “would pass beneath the Missouri River just above the Standing Rock Indian Reservation’s northern border: sovereign land. The tribe objected because any oil leak would go directly into the drinking-water supply for both the reservation and millions of people living downriver and because the location of DAPL threatened tribal burial grounds and other sacred sites in the area”.

Willis adds that “The Standing



OUR LAND: Quote from Chief Sitting Bull on one of the tepees at the encampment.



Road signs at the camp in December 2016.



MNI WICONI Water Is Life

JOHN WILLIS

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Rock Sioux filed suit in court to stop the US Army Corps of Engineers from building the pipeline until a full environmental impact study could be done. When this and other efforts failed, the Mni Wiconi (“Water Is Life” in the Lakota language) and NoDAPL grassroots resistance movements grew up”.

Approaching Standing Rock, I encountered a National Guard roadblock with guardsmen carrying M16 rifles behind cement and razor-wire barriers. Their purpose, they said, was to let travellers know there was a protest camp ahead.

“Another security team, with neither weapons nor barriers, welcomed all visitors to the camp and let them know that no guns, drugs, or alcohol were permitted; the camps were for nonviolent resistance through prayerful ac-



OUR LIVES MATTER: Pleading with police officers in Mandan to consider water for the health of their children, grandchildren, and all future generations.

tion. They requested that visitors check in at the media tent to learn the protocol, if any of us intended to use any kind of camera, video, or other media. They told us where to find the volunteer resource tent, kitchens, medical tent, and donations area”.

Willis, who made six trips to North Dakota between September and December 2016, and spent a total of eight weeks living out of a car at the Oceti Sakowin Camp, adds, “All of the photographs in this book were made during those visits. I only wish I could have been on site for the Camp’s duration. When I first arrived, there were estimated to be 500–700 supporters. On later trips, I saw the camp’s size ebb and flow. At its peak around Thanksgiving, there

were said to be 12,000–15,000 Water Protectors on site. It is said that representatives from more than 300 native tribes and many thousands of people from around the world came in solidarity.

“Around the camp’s sacred fire circle, people shared their reasons for travelling to support the cause. People gave examples of fishing tribes whose waters became so polluted they could no longer eat the fish. Others told of communities that could no longer drink the water from their land after allowing corporations or the government to use their natural resources for fossil-fuel or similar extractive industries.

“The call from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline from being located on

its sovereign and sacred lands was a call for humanity to recognise that indigenous lands, reservation lands, are sovereign lands and the natural world is not an endless resource to be stripped without consequences from our actions.

“We must prioritise finding ways to live in harmony for the benefit of all, including the generations yet to come”.

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John Willis is Professor of Photography at Marlborough College and Exposures Cross Cultural Youth Photography Program. His other books are Recycled Realities, a collaboration with photographer Tom Young, and Views From the Reservation. His website is www.jwillis.net



JOINING THE FIGHT: Native and non-native military veterans defend the Water Protectors in response to police action at the Backwater Bridge.



VETS JOIN IN: Ex-US military veterans stand with protesters in the winter freeze.

Footnote

Court orders shutdown of Dakota Access Pipeline

A Washington DC court ordered that the Dakota Access Pipeline should be shut down and emptied of oil by August 5. The decision, on Monday July 6, came after four years of litigation by the Standing Rock Sioux, Cheyenne River Sioux, and others against the US Army Corps of Engineers. – *Common Dreams*