
These are the users of the Indigenous Mapping (IM) Database, one of Native Planet’s most important projects. Designed to record indigenous cultures before they are assimilated or disappear, the Database brings together information on over 420 of the world’s native peoples, with information on another 45 currently in development. Data range from population statistics, location, language, and environment to lifestyle, alternative names, and level of assimilation. In addition, the IM Database includes links to external resources on different groups.

Ayan Humbert-Droz, who leads the Indigenous Mapping Project, described the impact it currently has.

“. . . judging by the feedback we’ve received from the general public [the IM Database] is quickly becoming the well-regarded source for a wide range of information as it pertains to the indigenous cultures of the world,” she said.

The general public is one of the IM Database’s main audiences. To try to reach as many people as possible, the completely online database is designed so that people looking for information on any specific indigenous group using a search engine will see the IM Database in their list of hits.

With thousands of indigenous groups in the world, the all-volunteer team working on the Database still has a lot of work to do. However, in the two years since it began, it has already grown to include over 65 volunteer researchers, archivists, web editors, information technology specialists, quality assurance researchers, and team leaders, working to gather data on over 400 groups on three continents.

Working on the Database has been an eye-opener for many volunteers. Ales Kosir, who first joined the Database team in 2004 as a web editor, got involved with the project when he was in his last year of school, and was looking for something to do with his time.

“To tell you the truth before getting involved with [Native Planet], I didn’t put much thought to indigenous peoples,” he said.
However, his interest has grown significantly. Now, Ales is the archive manager for the IM Database, which he feels “will be one of the best databases on indigenous peoples.”

Liz McDonough, who first joined as a researcher in 2005 and is now the team leader for Latin America, also knew little about indigenous groups when she first learned about Native Planet.

“I looked at the Indigenous Mapping pages on the [Native Planet] website and my jaw dropped as I was amazed at just how many indigenous groups there were. I’m sometimes still taken aback,” she said.

Liz sees the IM Database as a tool for education. She believes it provides important resources for information in several areas:

* indigenous language maintenance, revival, and death
* what we can learn from tribal cultures and their interactions with the world around them
* traditional attitudes towards the environment and how many indigenous people live in harmony with their surroundings; and
* the way many groups, assimilated and discriminated against, are fighting to keep their way of life alive.

“There is something about the way I feel when I hear about injustices against indigenous peoples or the areas they live in which hurts my soul . . . .”

“If we are helping to place information where others can read about it then we are helping people to become less ignorant.”

Ayan agrees.

“Undertaking research for the [Indigenous M]apping Database has really opened my eyes and, in fact, it’s increased my desire to ensure that this Database reaches as many people as possible because of the amazing scope of information contained therein.

The IM Project as a whole is and will continue to be, a very important part of the Native Planet organization and I, for one, am very proud of the IM teams achievements.”

Visit the Indigenous Mapping Database on the Native Planet website: http://www.nativeplanet.org

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In Brief

Native Planet Goes Bilingual

The Native Planet website is now available in French as well as English. Produced entirely by four volunteers, the French site went live in August, although some sections are still under development. Visit the new site either through the link at the top of the English webpage, or directly at www.nativeplanet.org/fr/

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Did You Know?

Traditional aboriginal sentencing circles have been integrated into the Canadian justice system in several Native communities. Instead of meting out punishment such as jail terms, circles focus on healing the victim, perpetrator, and community. The circle is a powerful alternative to prison terms imposed by courts, not only for aboriginal people, but potentially for all communities.

For more interesting facts on indigenous peoples around the world, visit http://www.nativeplanet.org/indigenous

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Kuna San Blas Archipelago, Panama

© Jean-Philippe Soule / www.npimages.org
Riding for a Reason
By Kelly Batstone

To members of the Native Planet Outdoor Club (NPOC), cycling is about more than promoting good health and outdoor activities. It’s also a way for a group of people concerned about the environment to come together to raise awareness and funds for Native Planet.

While it is its own non-profit corporation, NPOC holds fundraising events to support Native Planet’s mission of preservation, protection, and promotion of indigenous cultures.

Vice-president of NPOC’s competitive division Darol Tuttle joined the club, which began in 2006, at the request of Native Planet President Jean-Philippe Soulé.

“[Jean-Philippe] described the importance of the Native Planet mission and his vision of creating a community of environmentally-minded cyclists who could ride to support Native Planet,” said Tuttle. “I agreed that it was a super idea.”

To help support Native Planet’s efforts, many members of the NPOC cycling community buy and wear the Native Planet jersey. Custom-designed by Native Planet volunteer Sayuri Watanabe, the jersey sports an innovative indigenous tattoo design and bright colors. Anyone, whether a member of NPOC or not, can buy one, with money from the sales going towards helping Native Planet forward its mission.

Many club members wore their jerseys during the Native Planet Classic, NPOC’s first fundraiser for Native Planet. The classic was held in June in Washington’s North Cascades. Organized completely by volunteers, the Classic led cyclists over their choice of three different routes along some of the state’s most beautiful scenery.

It was a difficult ride. However, participants took part not only for the challenge, but also because of its purpose.

“Over the years, I’ve learned a good bit about Native Planet and the amazing work they accomplish with so few resources,” said Classic participant Shan Perera. “When they decided to organize this event to raise much-needed funds and increase awareness, I felt compelled to participate and to seek pledges.”

Perera did not regret his participation in the ride.

“When I think about [the ride], it’s clearly a ‘Classic’ in my mind. The Native Planet Classic offered spectacular mountain scenery, an intense physical challenge, first-class food, and excellent support. I think I’ve just picked up a new annual ritual.”

Along with next year’s Classic, NPOC plans to have at least one other fundraising event, a road race, for Native Planet. In addition, the club, which is under a year old and already has approximately 40 active members, sees itself growing to over 100 members. Eventually, NPOC hopes to add mountain biking, cyclocross, hiking, running, and cross-country skiing to its outdoor events.

For more information on the Native Planet Outdoor Club, visit http://www.ride4areason.org/
Profile: Ayan Humbert-Droz
By Galina Lawrence

Ayan Humbert-Droz, Native Planet’s Indigenous Mapping Manager, is originally from Vegemite territory (Australia), although she currently lives with her husband in Geneva, Switzerland. She is a bright and very energetic person; her combination of interests, including hiking, traveling, painting, sculpture, and amateur photography reveals a multi-talented woman who loves to study all the time.

Ayan’s ongoing interest in the indigenous cultures of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, particularly the Jarawa people, has made her a strong believer in the protection of indigenous people’s welfare and culture. To put her convictions into action, she started to look for volunteering opportunities.

“When I found the Native Planet website, I knew I’d struck gold!!!” she said. “Here was an organization whose focus was on preserving indigenous cultures so I signed up immediately!”

Ayan began working with Native Planet (NP) in March 2005, when she became a researcher. Though NP was her first experience as a virtual volunteer—a volunteer who donates time exclusively via long-distance communication using the internet and email—it wasn’t her first time volunteering in general. Before coming to NP she was involved with fundraising activities for various humanitarian organizations. More recently, she became involved with the United Nations Development Programme’s International Poverty Center: she is a key volunteer in an important research project that gathers contacts and information from and for non-governmental organizations and development organizations in Thailand.

Ayan’s many skills helped her quickly move up within Native Planet. In just over a year she has been promoted three times—first to Team Leader, then to Senior Editor, and finally to her current position, Indigenous Mapping Manager. In addition, she works as part of a team that is writing NP’s 2007 business plan. She also provides critical support to NP’s vice-president, general manager, and newsletter editor, and is involved on an ongoing basis with analysis and project management roles within other areas of Native Planet.

The many roles Ayan fills within Native Planet speak to her incredible dedication and support. She strongly believes in Native Planet’s mission, and the opportunities her involvement affords her in being able to work with like-minded people who make her conviction grow even stronger.

She said, “[Native Planet] consumes my life (but in a very nice way)! In any case, I would continue with my virtual volunteering for Native Planet until my faithful computer seizes up!