Reading Log #1

Modern Canadian history has been defined by two key factors. The first being the medium in which we find most of our sources, which tends to be documents. The second factor that influences our definition of history, is who records it. As a result, a large majority of our history has been predominantly recorded by European explorers and settlers, and almost always in written form. In direct correlation to this, many crucial moments in history may have been forgotten, or our knowledge of them is based on the understanding of events according to a select demographic. However, by incorporating the oral history of the First Nations people, as well as archaeological discoveries, we are able to enrich our understanding of the past.

Brink discusses the level of difficulty involved in accurately depicting what really occurred at Head-Smashed-In. In successfully doing so, he has not only broadened the world’s understanding of the thousands of years of work and intellect that had gone into Head-Smashed-In Buffalo jump, he has also helped keep a vital source of information from withering away. Almost all of the accounts about Head-Smashed-In Buffalo jump are traditional, Blackfoot stories. These stories, much like a written document, hold valuable information that would otherwise disappear if neglected or ignored. He is able to breathe life into a time that we are unable to fully comprehend in a way that is both respectful of the people and culture.

In combination with traditional Blackfoot stories, Brink capitalizes on the archaeological discoveries made by his team at the site. Radiocarbon dating of buffalo bones found several metres below the Earth’s surface allowed for Brink to estimate the age of the arrowheads found in the area. Along with the detailed sources of the Buffalo jump, the arrowheads provided insight into just how long Head-Smashed-In had been used as a site for buffalo jumps.

Through his use of the stories of the Blackfoot people and archaeological finds, Brink has expanded our prior knowledge of the lives of the Blackfoot people that resided in the Great Plains thousands of years ago. In doing so, he has proven that by using more than written documents written by a specific demographic, we are able to broaden our understanding of a world that we have no other way of reaching.