

INDIGENOUS APPALACHIA



The First Peoples of the land now known as the United States named their towns, the waterways, forests, mountains, and other places throughout the sacred landscape, using terms from the hundreds of richly descriptive Indigenous languages. Reading some of these traditional place names is an important way to make connections across time and space.

Sources indicate “Appalachia” is derived from “Apalchen,” the transcribed name of a Muscogee village near what is now Tallahassee, Florida. In the 1500s the Spanish, including DeSoto, began to use the term as a generalization for the tribes and broader, mountainous landscape to the north.

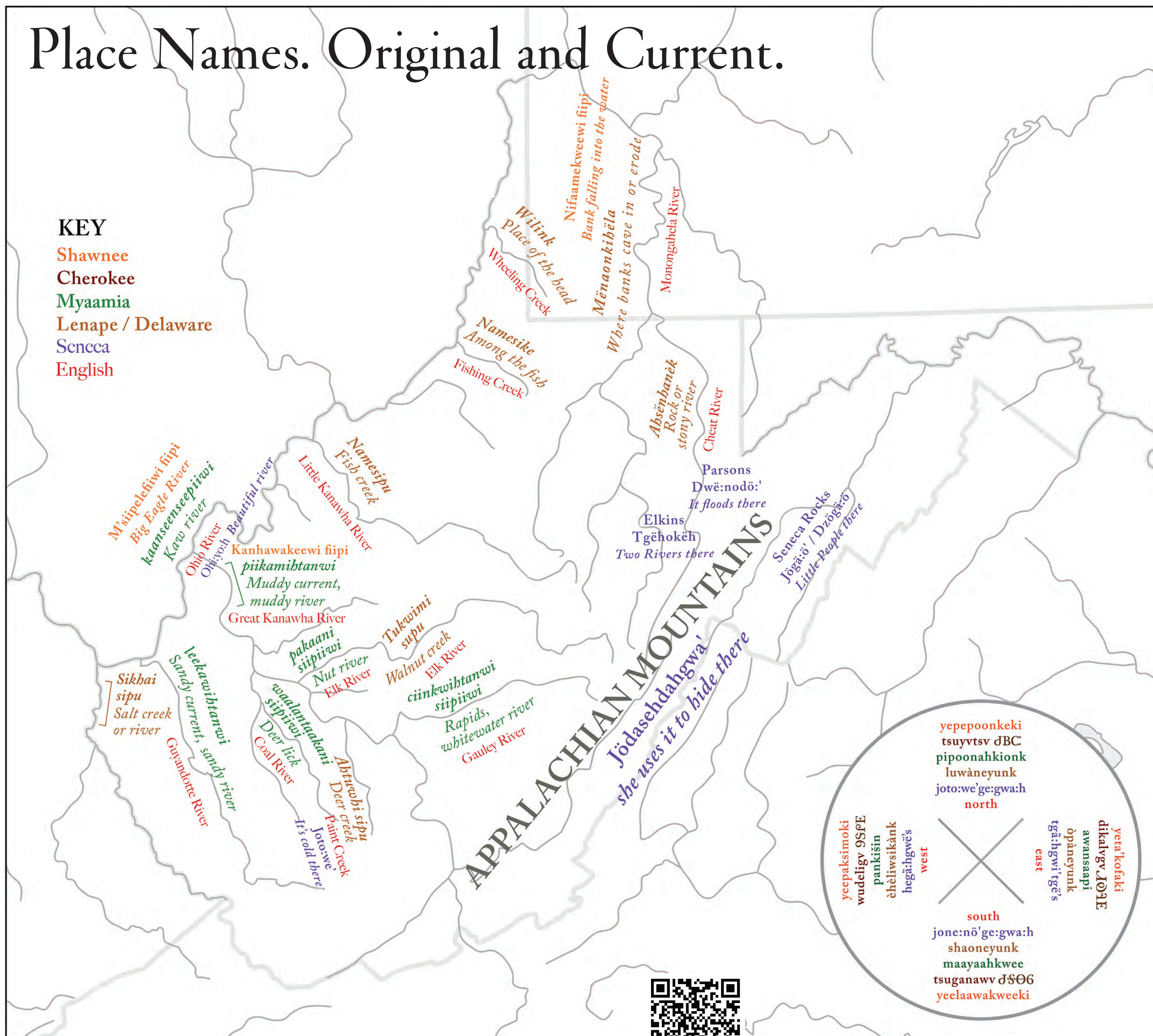
Today, when you travel throughout West Virginia, make note of the place names connected with Indigenous peoples, such as Seneca Rocks and Seneca Caverns, Allegheny Mountain Range, Ohio River, Kanawha River, Monongalia County, Shawnee Lake, Miami, Powhatan, and so many more.

As you explore the exhibit and ponder the term “Indigenous Appalachia,” consider an excerpt from the poem “Homeland” by Monacan Nation poet Karenne Wood, Ph.D., 1960-2019, WVU Native American Studies 2010 Peace Tree Guest of Honor.

“Blue Mountains encircle a prayer/to the mist we call breath of the dead—/everywhere, seeds lie dormant/in the ground. This is a country/remembered—dogwoods, redbuds, deer at field’s edge, the river roiled/into its embrace of red earth. We are/powerless here, in the face of our/love for legends of granite/and shapes that gather at night. We are powerless when/mountain laurel spreads its stars/through forests, when cedars/dance with the yellow leaves falling,/and hawks cry out over us. [...] Nothing was discovered./Everything was already loved.”

“Homeland” was written as the inaugural poem for the National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial, 2003. Published in Wood, Karenne. *Weaving the Boundary*. University of Arizona Press, 2016. Project MUSE: <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/47033>

The map below is an elaboration of a 2018 template provided by cartographer Dr. Margaret Pearce (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) • Placement of names represents approximate locations. This map was created with the generous collaboration of Indigenous linguists and other language experts.



CLICK here to read more about Indigenous Place Names:

