

AFTER THE LAST RIVER



INTERNATIONAL SALES & DISTRIBUTION

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Residents of the Attawapiskat First Nation enjoying the evening along the main community road.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Filmed over five years, *After the Last River* is a point of view documentary that follows Attawapiskat's journey from obscurity and into the international spotlight during the protests of Idle No More. Filmmaker Victoria Lean connects personal stories from the First Nation to the entwined mining industry agendas and government policies, painting a complex portrait of a territory that is a imperiled homeland to some and a profitable new frontier for others.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

At an elegant Toronto party celebrating Canadian diamonds, De Beers unveils some of its first gems mined outside of the African continent. Over 1,000 kilometers to the north, the company's latest project sits on the Attawapiskat River, which forms part of the largest pristine wetland left on earth, and is an important resource for the nearby Mushkegowuk Cree community.

Filmmaker Vicki Lean begins by following her father, David Lean, an ecotoxicologist, to the community of Attawapiskat. Community members have invited him to discuss concerns that the new mine will increase mercury contamination in the local fish to dangerous levels.

Lean returns repeatedly to Attawapiskat, and trains her camera on the community's remarkable journey from obscurity and into an unforgiving spotlight. She joins Rosie Koostachin, a local volunteer and mother of five, on intimate tours of the community and in delivering donations to families who live in uninsulated sheds, overgrown with toxic mold. Over one-eighth of the community is waiting for livable housing. Rosie aims to raise awareness through social media, believing that if only Canadians knew, her hometown's dire situation would improve.

Theresa Spence, the Chief of Attawapiskat, is also resolved to show the world that her people exist. With winter approaching, she declares a state of emergency in October 2011, the third one in three years. MP Charlie Angus shoots a video of the conditions in Attawapiskat that goes viral. The scenes of poverty provoke outrage and shame, as well as victim-blaming, but the diamond mine next door and related discoveries on the First Nation's land, worth billions, are largely overlooked. The provincial politicians believe the mine will bring in hundreds of millions of dollars from the mine through royalties and taxes, and Attawapiskat will see none of this revenue.



De Beers claims that no significant environmental impacts are occurring, but David Lean, environmental groups and the community believe otherwise. Residents are increasingly troubled by the lack of mining benefits and mounting concerns over the mine's environmental issues. Realizing that similar frustrations are shared by First Nations across the country, Chief Spence embarks on a controversial hunger strike, a move that helps galvanize the international protest movement, Idle No More.

Filmed over five years, *After the Last River* is a point of view (POV) documentary that connects personal stories from Attawapiskat to entwined mining industry agendas and government policies, painting a complex portrait of a territory that is a homeland to some and a profitable new frontier for others. Weaving together intimate scenes from everyday life and archival images, filmmaker Victoria Lean follows the community's fight for awareness and justice in the face of a profound divide that is amplified by distance, language, culture and competing views of Canada.

Left picture

The Attawapiskat airport is the only way to access the fly-in reserve for most of the year.

Right picture

Rosie Koostachin is a community volunteer, citizen journalist and mother of five who is working to raise awareness of the issues facing her community.



Community members celebrate National Aboriginal Day on June 21.
Traditional ceremonies like this were banned by the Canadian government for much of the 1900s.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2008, I visited Attawapiskat with my father, David Lean, and representatives from Ecojustice and Wildlands League, to discuss the environmental impacts of the Victor Mine with concerned community members. The mine – De Beers' second outside of Africa - had opened just two weeks before.

I was originally motivated to tell this story because before the arrival of the Victor Mine, the Attawapiskat River formed part of the largest pristine wetland in the world. The deep layers of peat in the James Bay Lowland store 26 billion tons of carbon, and contribute to roughly one tenth of the globe's cooling benefit. The area, which had not yet seen major industrial development, has profound ecological significance globally, and the Victor Mine risked setting a dangerous precedent for mining in Ontario's Far North.



Described by the NGO MiningWatch as making as much engineering sense as “mining a sponge in a bath tub,” the Victor Mine had scientists, environmental groups and local residents concerned that corporate power and experimental mining techniques would lead to long-term damage, with minimal benefit to the local communities.

My father, Dr. David Lean, an ecotoxicologist, was particularly concerned that as the Victor Mine dewateres the site (and creates an ecological footprint equivalent to four times the size of Toronto), mercury that was stored for thousands of years in the peat would be mobilized, and could potentially contaminate Attawapiskat’s fish beyond human consumption guidelines.

Despite these concerns, the Province was excited about its first diamond mine - the gems extracted from this area are among the highest clarity in the world. The economic impact for Ontario is estimated to reach nearly \$7 billion over the 12 lifespan of the mine.

In May 2010, at the age of 25, I returned to shoot a film for my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) thesis at York University. The film intended to focus on questions involving the relationship between De Beers and Attawapiskat: Were the mining benefits reaching the community – and what was cost? I quickly realized the deeper story lay beyond my environmental lens, and was rooted in the vast disconnection between the reality of Attawapiskat and the myth of Canada.

Over two summers, I spent 80 days living in the community, which included teaching youth video workshops, participating in community life and documenting an increasingly dire situation. I believed – like the main participants, including Rosie Koostachin and Chief Spence - that if only Canadians knew, the situation would be different.

Once the community was put under the national media spotlight, I observed a disturbing blind spot. I was deeply troubled by some of the coverage and conversation around both the 2011 Attawapiskat Housing Crisis and Chief Spence’s hunger strike in 2013. In both instances, the underlying cause for the situation in Attawapiskat was frequently tied to poor leadership, financial mismanagement and the idea that remote communities are simply not viable.

" THE VICTOR MINE IS EXPECTED TO CREATE AN ECOLOGICAL FOOT-PRINT THAT APPROXIMATELY FOUR TIMES THE SIZE OF THE CITY OF TORONTO."

Dr. David Lean
Ecotoxicologist



The Canada Post Office in a community with a 70% unemployment rate and few activities for children and youth.

Meanwhile, significant structural and historical explanations, such as outstanding issues with Treaty 9, the inability to share in resource revenue and chronic government underfunding, were overshadowed. I had come to see Attawapiskat as a viable, promising community, but that its people have been denied access to resources, education, and land – key ingredients to the sustainability of any community.

While my primary interest was initially with the threat of mercury contamination, it expanded to the community's rights to education, healthcare, housing and a clean and safe environment. One of the goals of the film is to draw attention to a number of intersecting challenges.

I want to encourage greater understanding about a community that has divided a nation, and to embolden audiences to continue to engage in listening to First Nations activists, journalists and leaders, participating in events like Idle No More, and to learn more about how Canada's wealth relates to the emergency situations in communities like Attawapiskat. The stakes are high for Canada to develop a fair and lasting terms of the relationship.

De Beers is currently preparing for an environmental assessment for another of the 15 diamond deposits near Attawapiskat, and existing environmental concerns with the first mine have not yet been addressed. Billions in resource development is planned for across Canada in the coming decade, while the country is facing what has been called the "death of evidence" – a situation in which public science is being censored and environmental protections and safeguards have been cut back through legislation like Omnibus bills C-45 and C-38. More recently, the ability to speak out and organize has come under threat. Bill C-51 will enable security agencies to impinge on the rights of protesters and indigenous communities alike.

Set against this dangerous backdrop of political games and economic exploitation, *After the Last River* intends to create a space for reflection. The film is a call for the viewer to seek further information and question their understanding of Canada – both past and present.

Victoria Lean,
Producer/Director,
After the Last River

DIRECTOR BIO

Victoria Lean is an award-winning filmmaker and creative industries consultant. Her first feature documentary, ***After the Last River***, is screening in festivals across Canada, including Cinefest Sudbury, Planet in Focus, Bay Street FF, One World FF, and DOXA, where it won the Nigel Moore Award. Her director credits also include the short documentaries ***The Bits and Pieces of Mrs. Fisher*** (2009) and the interactive documentary, ***Baby on the Beach*** (2011). She has also edited ***Racing Home***, an interactive, documentary by Phil Hoffman. Her work explores notions of time and national identity, and the complex interrelationships that define them. Beyond her filmmaking practice, Lean is also a consultant for the creative industries, with a focus on Northern Canada and in supporting the growth of Indigenous voices in arts and media.

At Nordicity Group, she has managed several projects for clients including the Governments of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, including conducting strategic planning for screen-based media and the visual arts sectors. She holds an MFA in Film Production and MBA in Arts and Media Management from York University and a Joint Honours BA from McGill in Cultural Studies and International Development.



KEY CAST AND CREDITS

Written and Directed by: **Victoria Lean**

Produced by: **Victoria Lean and Jade Blair**

Associated Produced by:

Sandbox-La Boîte a Films Inc.

Cinematography by:

Kirk Holmes and Victoria Lean

Edited by: **Terra Long**

Music by: **Jeff Morrow, the Valleys**

Mentor to the Director: **Ali Kazimi**

Made at York University

With appearances by:

Gabriel and Theresa Fireman

Rosie Koostachin

Tesla Koostachin

Chief Theresa Spence

MP, Charlie Angus

MPP, Gilles Bisson

Lisa-Marie Linklater

Tom Ormsby (De Beers Canada)





ADDITIONAL PRESS AND WRITING

" IT WAS LEAN'S COURAGE THAT WAS ULTIMATELY HONOURED, ALONG WITH THE INTENSE CURRENCY OF HER SUBJECT MATTER WHICH SHOULD BE EVALUATED BY ANYONE WITH A CANADIAN PASSPORT. "

The Georgia Straight on After the Last River Nigel Moore Award win and the production



" THIS HOWL OF ANGER AND DESPAIR DEMANDS TO BE SEEN ... AFTER THE LAST RIVER WILL REACQUAINT YOU WITH REALITY. "

The Georgia Straight Review: After the Last River



GLOBE AND MAIL WORLD PREMIERE ANNOUNCEMENT.



"YORK FILMMAKERS SUPPORT ADVOCACY EFFORTS OF STUDENTS IN ATTAWAPISKAT FIRST NATION"

Article profiling the team's involvement in youth video workshops in Attawapiskat.



"ONTARIO'S FIRST NATIONS DESERVE MORE OF THE DIAMOND INDUSTRY'S CASH"

Article by the director, on Attawapiskat blockading the ice road to the De Beers Mine.



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WWW.TWITTER.COM/THE_LAST_RIVER



