

Journey of the Sarlequun Tribes

The *Sarlequun* Tribes, like other Northwest Coast Peoples, depended upon the region's abundant marine resources and local flora for their subsistence. Knowing when and where to harvest these resources, the Sarlequun People traveled over their territory, busy year-round with nature's gifts' providing sustenance for all, relying on the fish, wildlife, shellfish, etc. The five Sarlequun villages were not only twelve miles up along the Nanaimo River, their permanent winter villages were in St'lilup (Departure Bay) and in Xwso'lexwel (Habour Waterfront). Over on Gabriola Island there were two other villages, one on False Narrows called Tle:txw and the other Thithwutqson (Indian Point). In a 1792 Spanish Expedition, the Spaniards arrived at Descanso Bay and came upon a village at Twin Beaches called Wh'sumiletsen. They drew a map showing the two longhouses within Taylor Bay.



Credit: Geraldine Manson

Figure 32: Diagram showing the seasonal movement of the Sarlequun Tribes

The Change of the Weather

This seasonal movement began in the late fall, where the five villages along the Nanaimo River would transport their roof and wall planks by canoes along with all their belongings to their winter village sites St'lilup and Xwso'lexwel.

The four villages at St'lilup where people lived were: Yeshexen, Kwelsiwelh, Teytexen, and Enwines. There were three rows of longhouses, each row with their own village family name: at the north end, T'iwulhxun; in the middle, Enwines; and at the south, Yeshexen. Hilda Wilson, Elder of Snuneymuxw was one who contributed to David Rozen's thesis. She recalled St'lilup being a permanent winter village having three rows of houses, and that the permanent house frames and planks were transported from the Nanaimo River Villages. During their stay here ceremonies took place such as the mask ceremony and other sacred ceremonies. In George Gibbs 1857 Journal notes, he mentions traveling up Nanaimo River taking note of seeing several villages. The longhouse had a

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narrow platform above its entrance where people were sitting. When he asked what was happening, the old man with him said potlatch. Blankets were being thrown to the guests below. He also noted several carved figures similar to those found in St'lilup graves, which designated their burial sites, masks placed with the deceased who were put in boxes, some wrapped and placed on a platform above ground.

The Xwso'lexwel village along the Nanaimo River was further away from the other four villages and said to be very self-sufficient and very dominant. This village did not participate in the winter ceremonies. Their winter village was in the Nanaimo Waterfront also known as Xwso'lexwel. There was another village known as Solexwel that was part of Xweso'lexwel. Later, after they were displaced from their longhouse because of the coal mine that was built there, they moved into the Xwsolexwel village. With enough food stored for the winter the women of the Xwso'lexwel village focused their attention to weaving blankets and cedar baskets. Very proficient in weaving, they used a combination of domestic dog hair, fireweed, and down from geese and ducks, along with mountain goat hair.

Early Spring

During their stay in St'lilup, families began preparing for the earliest herring arrival in March when it was caught in great quantities at an important site known as Sk'olem, approximately three and a half miles northwest of Departure Bay. The herrings were put through a process of sun-drying then dried on racks and cured by roasting on cedar splints.

Over the months of March and April, the Sarlequun followed the herring runs into St'lilup and Nanaimo harbour. Herring roe was collected by placing cedar branches at various locations along the shore. Herring deposited their spawn on the branches. One important collection site for herring roe was on the reef between Protection and Saysutshun Island. They also went out into the surrounding waters and hunted ducks and other waterfowl. A popular species was the black duck (scoter), which was harvested in vast numbers in the early spring when they followed the herring run. The variety of hunting techniques included snares, nets, and duck spears. Other birds that were hunted were swans

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and geese. They were equally important not only for the meat, but for their down-feathers which were used in making regalia.

Journey to Tle:ltxw

The next journey began with the members of the four villages preparing to move from St'lilup to their village known as Tle:ltxw along the False Narrows, Gabriola Island. This village site was recorded to be two miles in length. After arriving, families helped in setting up the longhouses with putting together the planks and roof boards they had brought with them.

Once that was completed the families would then disperse to other areas of the island. One area that they went to was Flat Top Islands, known as Xwiyuw'sum, where they camped in a place called Thut'qa'lets. This site was known for gathering seaweed, harvesting clams, and seal/sea lion hunting. The surrounding area had around fifty acres of clam beds. In Thompson's report (from Barnett field notes) he mentions that there were around forty families, comprised of around one hundred people there, digging for butter clams, littlenecks, and mussels.

Another area for harvesting clams was Mudge Island, where many people lived in tents. Mudge Island is right across from Tle:ltxw, an area with about thirty-five acres of the best clam beds. Thompson mentioned in his report that families stayed on Mudge Island from September until May processing clams by steam pit cooking then skewering the clam meat on ironwood sticks (Ocean spray) which were then placed in front of open fire to get the smoked flavor. The clams once removed were placed onto cedar bark strands then hung to dry. Jenness (field notes) recorded that the Nanaimo people not only harvested seafood along the False Narrows area but also fished for cod and halibut and hunted seals and sea lions.

Gabriola Passage (Sqac'su) between Gabriola and Valdes Island was formerly important as a place where Snuneymuxw, Stz'uminus and Quw'utsun raked herring and collected herring spawn in late March. This area was also abundant with ironwood trees which were collected and used by all for various tools, from digging sticks to knitting needles to BBQ sticks. The teeth for herring rakes were also from ironwood.

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Families also dispersed to other areas north end of Gabriola Island to setup fishing camps and harvest camas and to collect rushes. The rushes were used to make mats which formed temporary shelters during throughout their campsites. Orlebar Point (Xuwtluqs) on the south-east side was one of their seasonal fishing sites.

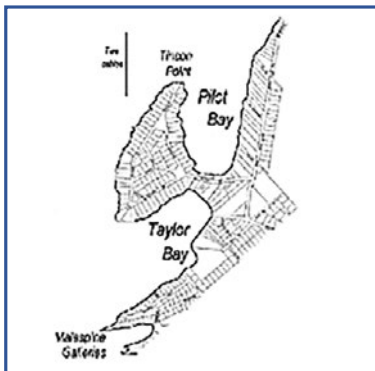


Credit: Nick Doe, Shale 1, pp. 12-21 November 2000.

Figure 33: Map of Gabriola by Alcala Galiano (June 18, 1792)

Xwumi:lucun, Twin Beaches: Taylor Bay is next to Twin Beaches. The Spanish of both the 1791 and 1792 expeditions made contact the Sarlequun tribe. It is noted from the 1791 chart which shows a settlement at or near Silva Bay and an anchorage off the Whalebone Beach area. From the written records of the 1792 expedition the Spanish visited the village at Twin Beaches called Wh'sumiletsen and drew a map showing two longhouses within Taylor Bay. The 1791 map "Carta que comprehende" showed a village of three longhouses at Pta de Gaviola assumed to be Silva Bay on Gabriola Island.

It has been recorded in the journals of the Spanish Alcala Galiano and Cayetano Valdes expedition of 1792 that upon their arrival in mid-June as many as thirty-nine canoes surrounded their two ships. Exchanging of gifts, they received sun-dried and smoked sardines (herring) for beads, and pieces of rough iron.



Adapted from Regional District Nanaimo 92G.01.1.4.3/4

Regional District of Nanaimo map of same area

The Spaniards reported that four canoes loaded with house planks were seen leaving one evening. The next day, one of the officers with five men went by land to discover where the Indians had their village and found the frames of the houses and remains of fire and shellfish. This location would have been Taylor Bay where two longhouses were mapped out, one larger than the other. Observations were made at 8 a.m. June 18, 1792. The map shown was adapted from RDN (Regional District Nanaimo) 92G.01.1.4.3/4. This site was the summer village of the Wh'sa'lougwul/ Xwso'lexwel. (Two spelling versions of the village.)

Crossing Over the Open Waters to Lower Fraser River Village Site-Xwthuxthuxun

In June, the Sarlequun families made the journey over to the lower Fraser River where they had their seasonal summer fishing village. When the Spaniards anchored at Twin Beaches in June 1792 it was Galiano witnessed four canoes

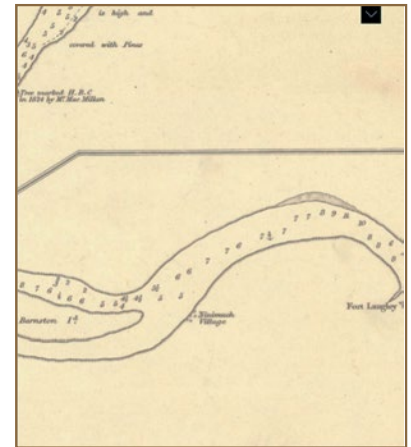
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traveling early evening, each loaded with boards and roof planks heading east to open waters. These canoes would have been heading over to their Fraser River village site where the people would fish for sturgeon and salmon and pick berries. In a July 1827 entry, the Hudson Bay Company journal records the population of the Nanaimooch village (pronunciation for Snuneymuxw) to be “400 souls on the Fraser River few miles downstream from Fort Langley (Katzie First Nation).

The Fort Langley journals documented the daily events from 1827 to 1830 and reveal the seasonal summer movement of the Snuneymuxw to the Fraser River to fish for sockeye. It was noted that Snuneymuxw people traded large quantities of salmon to the post as well as other fish such as sturgeon. Some of the trade items were for blankets, trade beads, ammunition, etc. It was also noted that these fishers were the most industrious and traders to the post. The advantage was their village was only a short distance from the Fort Langley post. In August 1829, in a single morning, 1,100 salmon were traded, and the post could not take anymore from anyone else. This site today is recognized as a Douglas Treaty summer fishing village.

Return of the Fall Movement

Just before the fall season, all five tribes prepared for their journey to return to their villages along the Nanaimo River in time for the chum salmon run. Once settled in their villages, families would catch and process the chum salmon by smoking and sun-drying for the winter. The only tribe that owned and controlled weirs in the mouth of the river estuary was the Xwsoloxwel Tribe, also they were the ones that owned most of the western sword fern beds in the surrounding area. Individual families would go out and harvest these fern beds. The Western sword fern was available year-round and developed many uses. Their rhizomes were roasted, peeled and eaten when other food sources were scarce. Other times of the year, the fern’s fronds were used to infuse other foods with flavor, lining food baskets, berry baskets, drying racks, and steam pits. The fern fronds have a natural non-stick quality that led to them being used as a mat under fish when they were being cleaned and cut.



Credit: Nick Doe, Simon Fraser's Longitudes, 1808 – Gabriola

The first map to be drawn of the Snuneymuxw village site along the Fraser River, 1827, by Emilius Simpson, in HBC Schooner *Cadbore*.