

Travelling through southern British Columbia: Environment, History and Culture



ES400b (summer 2003)
School of Environmental Studies
University of Victoria
CANADA

Special Thanks to:

Dr. Mary Thomas and family, Janice Billy, Chief Ron and Dr. Marianne Ignace, Bert Williams, Peter McAllister, Ida John, Jeanette Armstrong, Coqualeetza Centre, Secwepemc Museum, Neskonlith Band, Enowkin Centre, Dr. Eric Higgs, and all the people who have made this course a reality!



What we want to learn:

- **The environmental and cultural history of southern British Columbia**
- **Environmental philosophy, and how our attitudes shape the ways we treat our environment**
- **Importance of plants and the land to First Nations and other communities**

What we want to learn, continued:

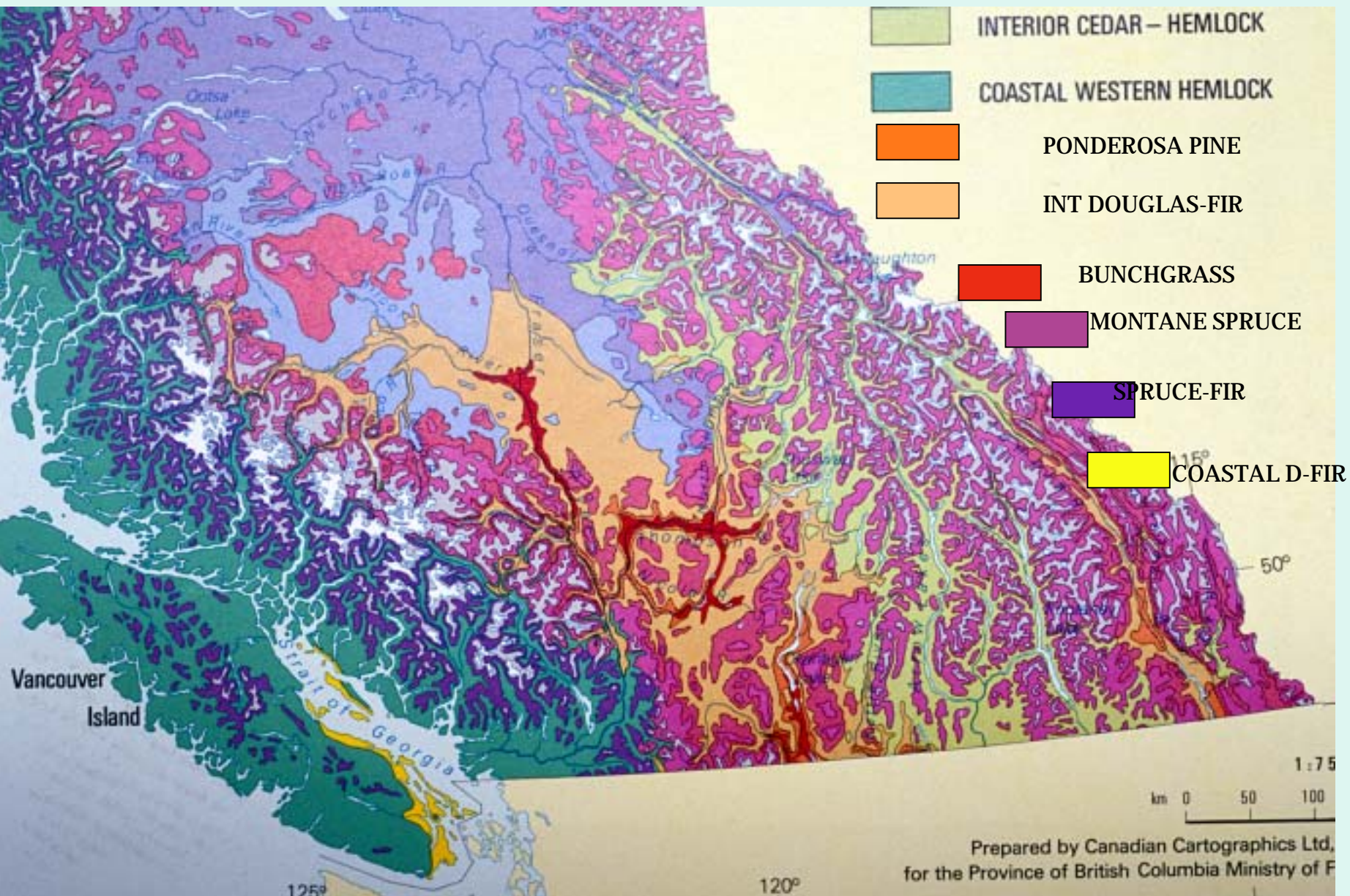
- **The geographical, ecological and cultural variation over the study area**
- **How we can better look after our lands here in Canada and in Japan and all over the earth.**



*from
Heathrow
Airport,
London, UK*

Approx. 30 different
First Nations language
groups whose
territories are within
British Columbia





Major Ecological Zones of Southern British Columbia



Ecologically diverse landscapes

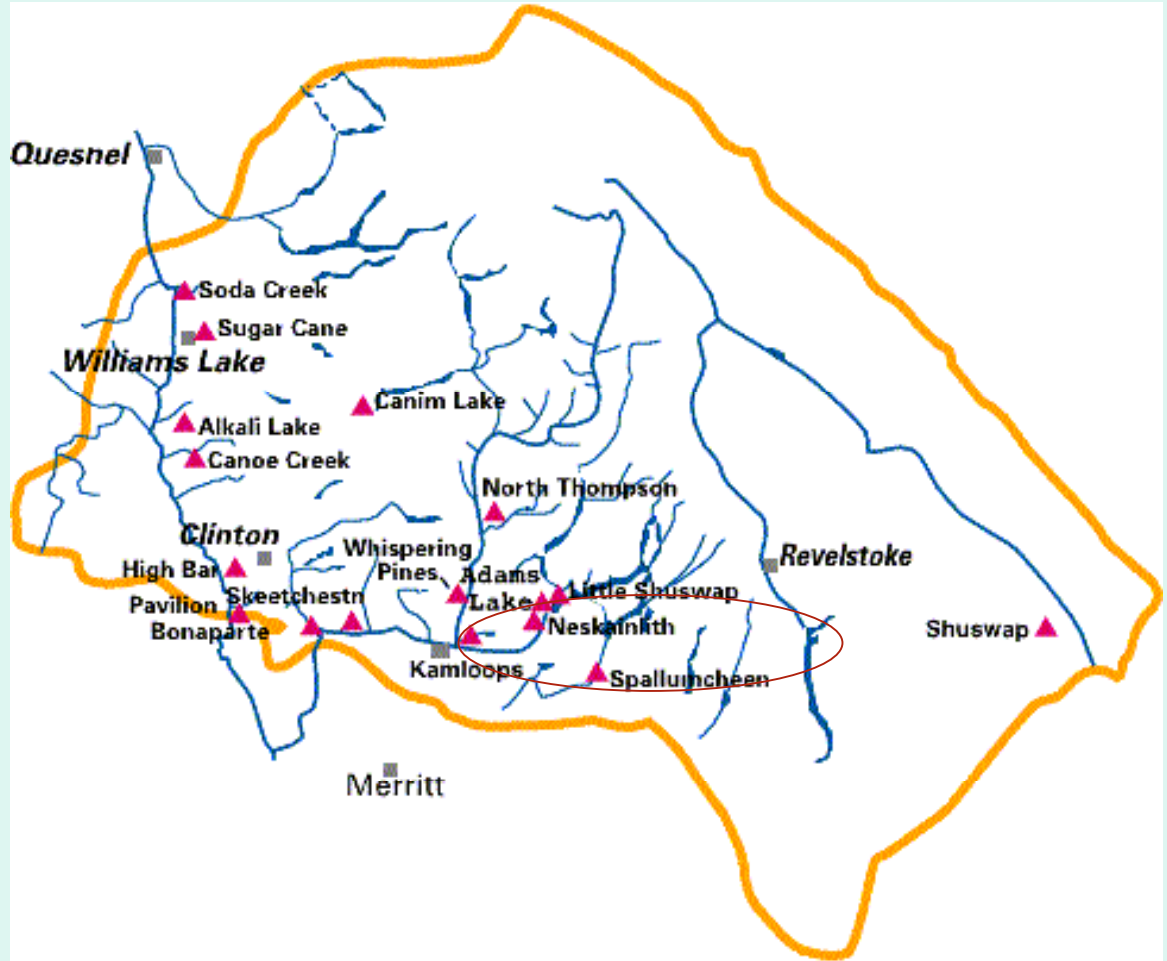


Engelmann Spruce -
Subalpine fir; dry Bunchgrass
Zone; Ponderosa Pine Zone



**Long-term human use and occupation of the land:
Botanie Valley near
Lytton; Sandra Peacock in
~1000-year old pit-
roasting depression**

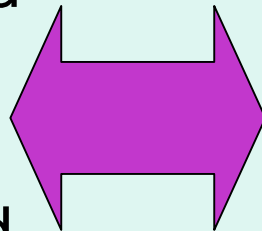




Secwepemc, or Shuswap Territory

Inextricably Linked

- **Biodiversity** - the total diversity of living things, at genetic, species and ecosystem levels
- **Biosphere** - the entire area of the earth - land, water and air - inhabited by living things



- **Cultural Diversity** - the total diversity of human cultures at different scales of similarity and difference
- **Ethnosphere** - the sum total of human thought, language, imagination, creativity ... Wade Davis



Environment and People



Cultural knowledge, wisdom, practice and language are inextricably linked to habitat and place



Changing Lifeways: Causes



Social/Cultural

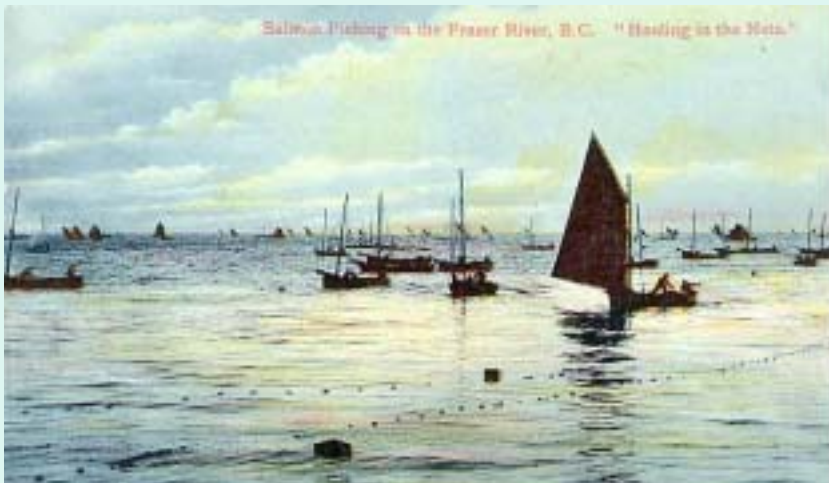
- pressures from residential schools, churches, government

Economic

- wage economy
- new technologies

Environmental

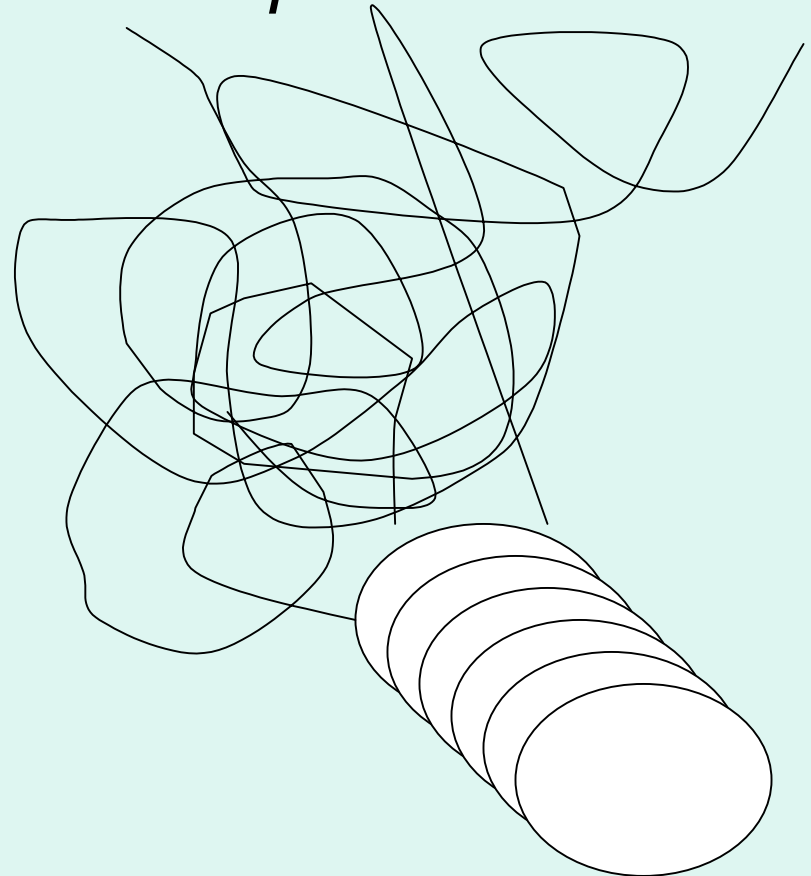
- Loss/deterioration of resources
- Loss of access to resources



Other Causes

- Loss of teachers
- Loss of motivation to learn
- Lifestyle changes
- Alienation from tradition
- Loss of confidence

The Rope unravels....



Environmental Deterioration

Loss of resources or of access to resources



e.g., Damage from Logging

I sympathize for loggers, because it is their job, their employment, and they have families. But, on the other hand, we had to change our lifestyle... because of the changes that came.... And yet, if they continue the practices that are going on now there'll be *nothing* left. (Daisy Sewid-Smith, Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, 1994)

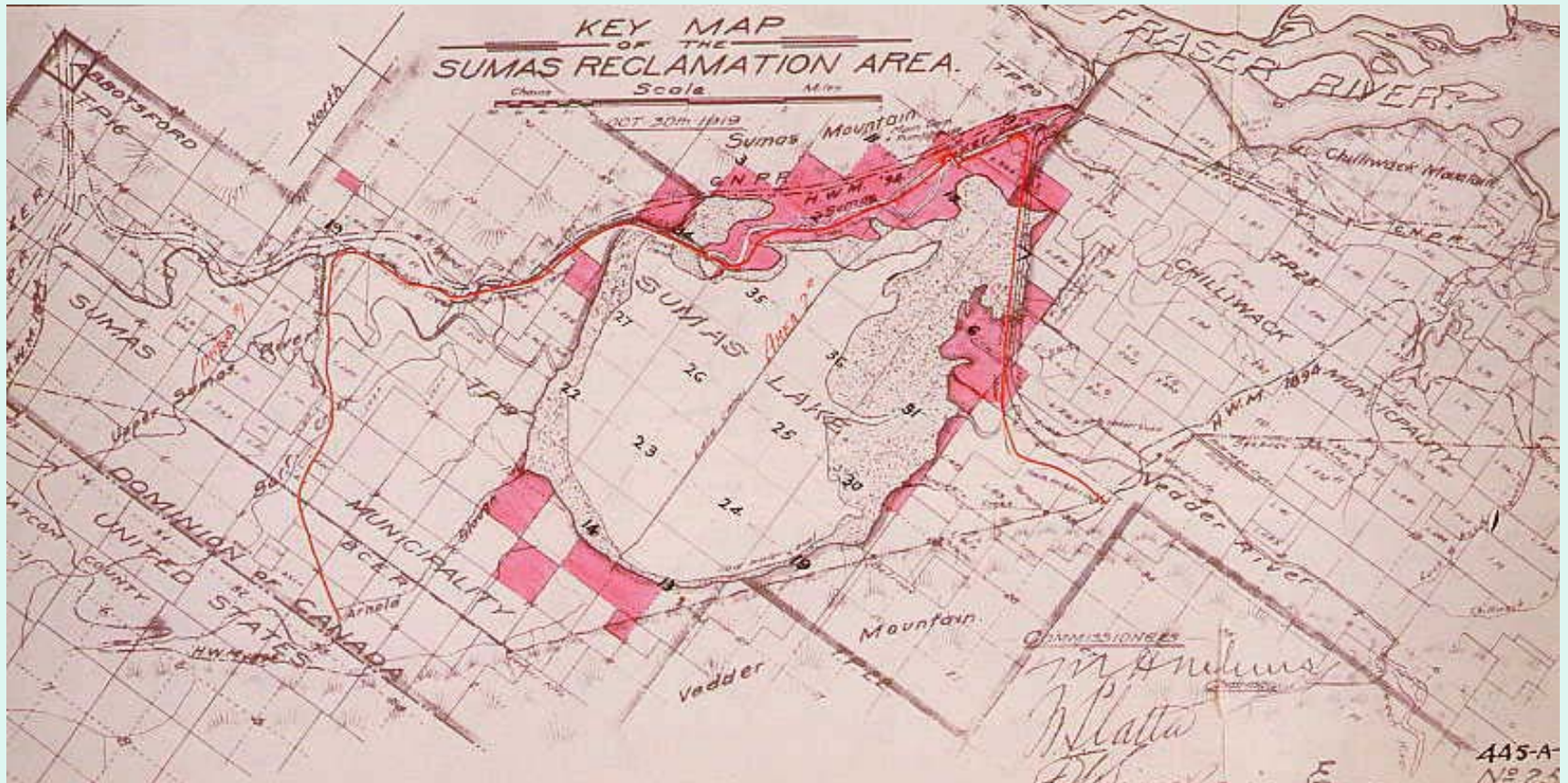


Once a Lake...

Sumas, Fraser River Valley, B.C.



Sumas Lake, Fraser River Valley, British Columbia



Sumas “Reclamation”: Site of Former Sumas Lake



Sto:lo Resources from Sumas Lake

- Cattails
- Reed grass
- Willows
- Western red-cedar
- Bitter cherry
- wapato
- Beaver
- Deer
- elk
- Canada Goose
- Whistling swan
- Sandhill crane
- Duck
- Salmon
- Sturgeon
- Cutthroat, rainbow, Dolly Varden trout





Baskets...

Formerly
critical to
peoples'
survival:
cedar wood,
cedar root,
cherry bark
for
decoration



Minnie Peters, Chehalis
coiled cedarroot baby cradle,
Chilliwack area, 1978

“Pioneer Gentlewoman”, Susan Allison, 1860s:

“The Indians [at Hope] made baskets, blankets, and rugs.... The Baskets were very costly and were useful as well as pretty. They were watertight and took a long time to make, some of them months even of hard work; ***they were used for many purposes.***” (A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia. The Recollections of Susan Allison, edited by Margaret Ormsby, UBC Press, 1976)



Trading with Baskets

"These[widow] women... have no more husbands to go and gather fish. So that's the way they trade with the people from the interior. They make baskets, round baskets for making soapberries into it, or berry baskets, they trade them. And their mats, too, ... and people from here [Spuzzum] likes a silver willow bag. They bring that down here too... and they trade with that baskets... that's made out of split cedar." (Annie York, ca. 1985)



Loss of Traditional Management Practices

- Burning and clearing
- Pruning
- Selective harvesting
- “keeping it living” philosophy and practice



Changes...



"They had special buckets for soapberries and other kinds of berries, ones that won't leak... woven of cedar roots. Nobody makes those baskets any more. They use ice cream buckets now...."
(Edith O'Donaghey, Stl'atl'imx elder 1992)

The Old and the New

Traditional Stl'atl'imx
cedarroot packbasket,
butterfly design



Coiled
cedarroot
suitcase,
ca. 1920s

Coiled cedarroot tea set ca. 1930



Different Values



Baskets: practical,
Useful, beautiful

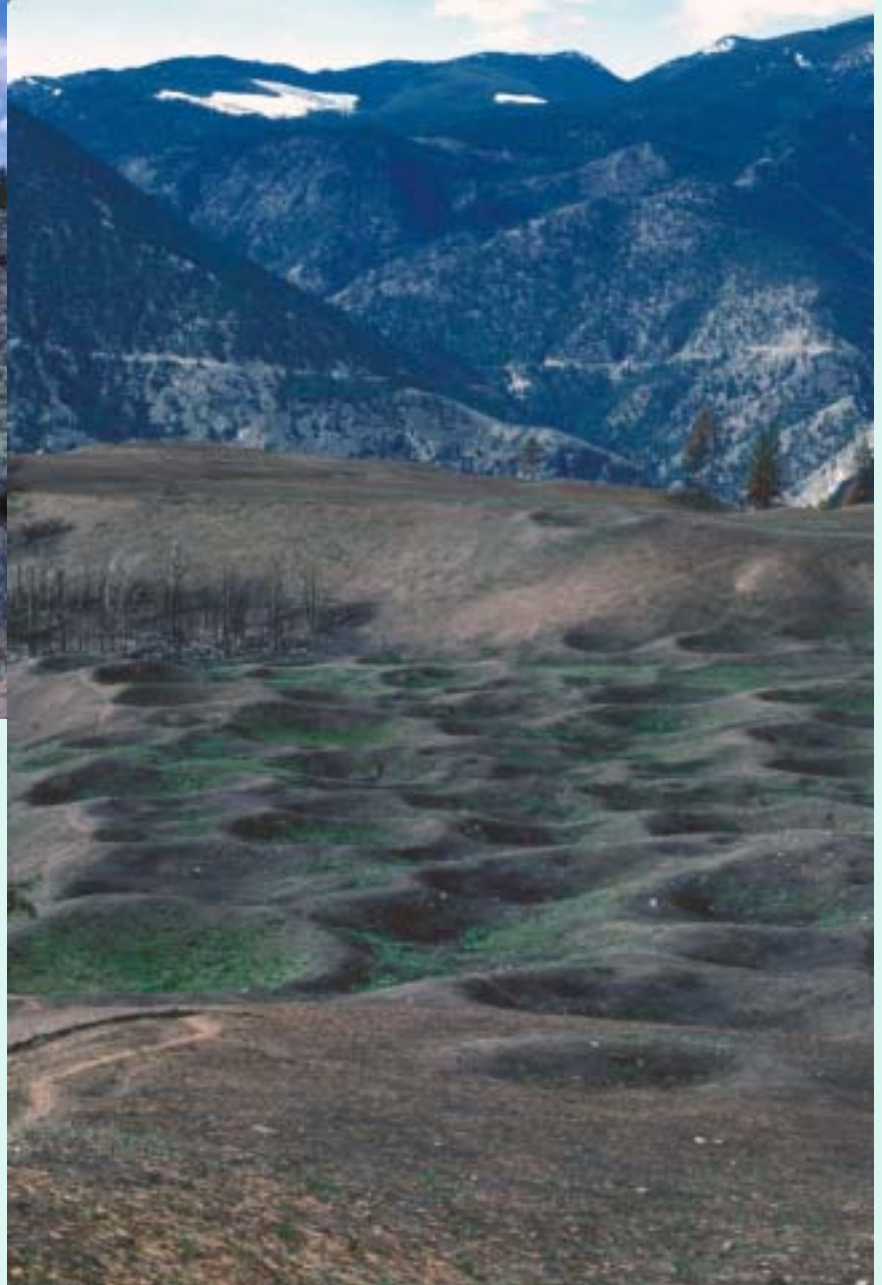
Baskets on
Museum
Shelf, UBC





**Looking west downriver in
Fraser Canyon, opposite
Keatley Creek site**

**THINK: FULL LANDSCAPE
USE AND OCCUPANCY -
“SEASONAL ROUNDS”; ALL
NEEDED RESOURCES**



**Keatley Creek pithouse
village site, ne of Lillooet,
Fraser Canyon, before and
after burn of 1998**



**Chief Louie Centre, Kamloops; benchlands
site of major ancient camp - 8000+ years
BP**

“Our Food is Our Medicine”

**Haida Gwaii
Diabetes Project,
1997**



**A gift of Edith O’Donaghey’s
winter preserves: salmon,
huckleberries, blackcaps,
mushrooms, “Indian rhubarb”**



Mary Thomas' Cattail root-harvesting basket





Saskatoon berries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*); **V.I.B.**
“Very Important Berry”



Saskatoonberry (Rose Family) - a staple fruit in W North America; berries rich in iron; used as a sweetener for other food

**Highbush
cranberry
(*Viburnum
opulus*)**





Creeping snowberry
(*Chiogenes hispidula*)
and Bog cranberry
(*Vaccinium oxycoccus*)

Red
huckleberry
(*Vaccinium
parvifolium*)



Plants and Human Cultures

- Traditional Plant Foods: Cultural and Dietary Importance



Hazelnut
(Corylus cornuta);
Birch family



**BOTANIE VALLEY, DIGGING
ROOTS, ABOUT 1910**



**Mountain potato,
or spring beauty
(*Claytonia
lanceolata*) -
edible corms;
harvested by
Sam Mitchell,
Stl'atl'imx elder**





**Yellow Glacier Lily
(*Erythronium grandiflorum*);
important bulb food**



Nodding onion (*Allium cernuum*)
- root vegetable of Interior
Peoples; usually pit-cooked



Balsamroot or Spring Sunflower
(*Balsamorhiza sagittata*) - edible
shoots, bud-stems, seeds and **roots**;
roots usually pit-cooked; resin from
roots used for medicinal salve





**Bitterroot (*Lewisia rediviva*) - flower,
and peeled edible root, showing
“heart”, which is removed before root
is dried**



Joe Thomas Ignace

Wapato, a wetland tuber



Specialty foods: Trapper's tea and soapberries





nexwtín-az'
(lit. 'rope-plant'; cf. ***nexwtín*** 'rope') -
used for lashing, binding, cordage, fishtraps

Sam Mitchell, Stl'atl'imx elder making rope from "rope willow", *Salix exigua*, ca. 1973

Indian-hemp, *sp'éts'in* (*Apocynum cannabinum*)



Mabel Joe, Nlaka'apamux, with Silverberry (*Elaeagnus commutata*)



Silverberry - Indian-hemp
Mats (Nlaka'apamux)

Dr. Mary Thomas, Birchbark Basket Maker, Secwepemc

“... If you have a picking basket and you made it with your hands, you treasure it - you don't leave it laying around for kids to kick around for a football.”





"It's harder to find birch now - - I have to walk for miles now before I can get a decent piece of bark." (Mary Thomas, 1995)

When Cultural Values are Lost



**“...Now today what our young people do is they take ice cream buckets, mass-produced plastic stuff; finish picking berries, the thing is sitting around, kids kicking it around... - so we're contributing to pollution.”
(Mary Thomas)**



**FOOD AND
MEDICINE:**

**Kinnikinnick and
“red-willow”;
edible berries,
plants for medicine**





**False hellebore, or
“poisonroot” (*Veratrum
viride*), in the Lily Family; a
very important and very
poisonous medicinal plant;
used for many purposes,
mostly externally as a wash
or poultice for arthritis and
sore joints**

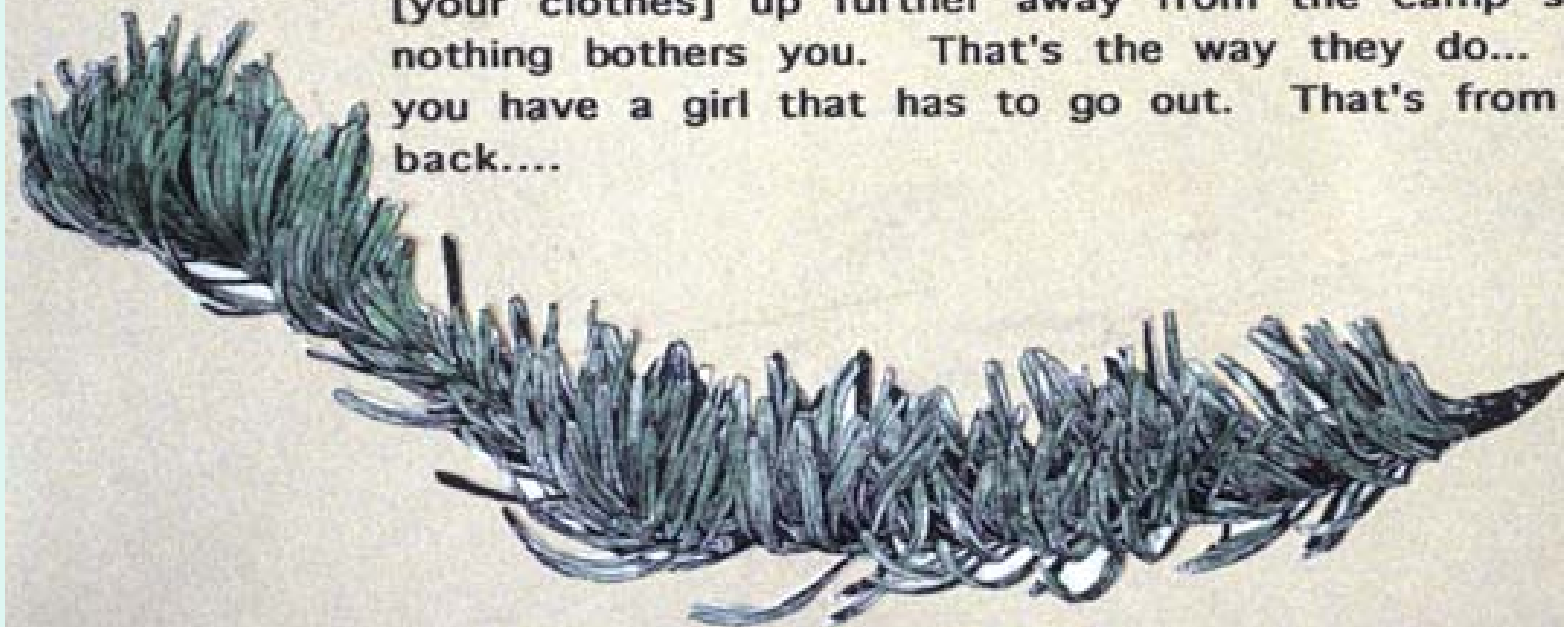
**Yarrow, Big
Sagebrush,
dragon
Sagewort**



**All aromatic;
important
medicines of the
dry Interior**

PROTECTING YOURSELF, by Annie York,
Nlaka'pamux, Spuzzum

Any food you eat, say for instance if it's dry fish, before you go to bed, you wash your face clean. You take that [subalpine fir] and you wash your face with that, and your clothes, you rub it with that... and you put on clean clothes, and you hang [your clothes] up further away from the camp so nothing bothers you. That's the way they do... if you have a girl that has to go out. That's from way back....



Requirements: Continuity in Environment-based Knowledge and Practice

- Environmental integrity; available resources
- Access to harvesting sites
- Knowledge and understanding of harvest, species requirements, protocols
- Expertise, willingness to teach, mentor
- Willing learners, social/cultural incentives
- Time, energy, economic incentives



