



Traditional Food Sources of Tsleil-Waututh Nation

By Tia Rose a Member of Tsleil-Waututh Nation
As part of the Indigenous Internship Program with Clear Seas



Tsleil-Waututh Nation

PEOPLE OF THE INLET

About Tsleil-Waututh Nation

Tsleil-Waututh Nation is one of several Coast Salish groups residing throughout British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon in the Pacific Northwest. Our strong connection to the land and water in our territory has played a significant role in shaping our community over many generations. The abundance of resources in the area contributed to the success of our people and bestowed upon us a sacred responsibility to preserve and revitalize our traditional lands. The Tsleil-Waututh community takes pride in being stewards of the land, air, and water, as we believe that the well-being of our people is intertwined with our environment.

History Tsleil-Waututh Nation

Archaeological evidence and oral history passed down generations tells us our people have lived on this traditional territory for thousands of years. Up to 10,000 Tsleil-Waututh members lived on these traditional lands before contact with European settlers. With our ancestors' survival depending on cycles of hunting, harvesting and preserving foods, and trading with our neighbours.

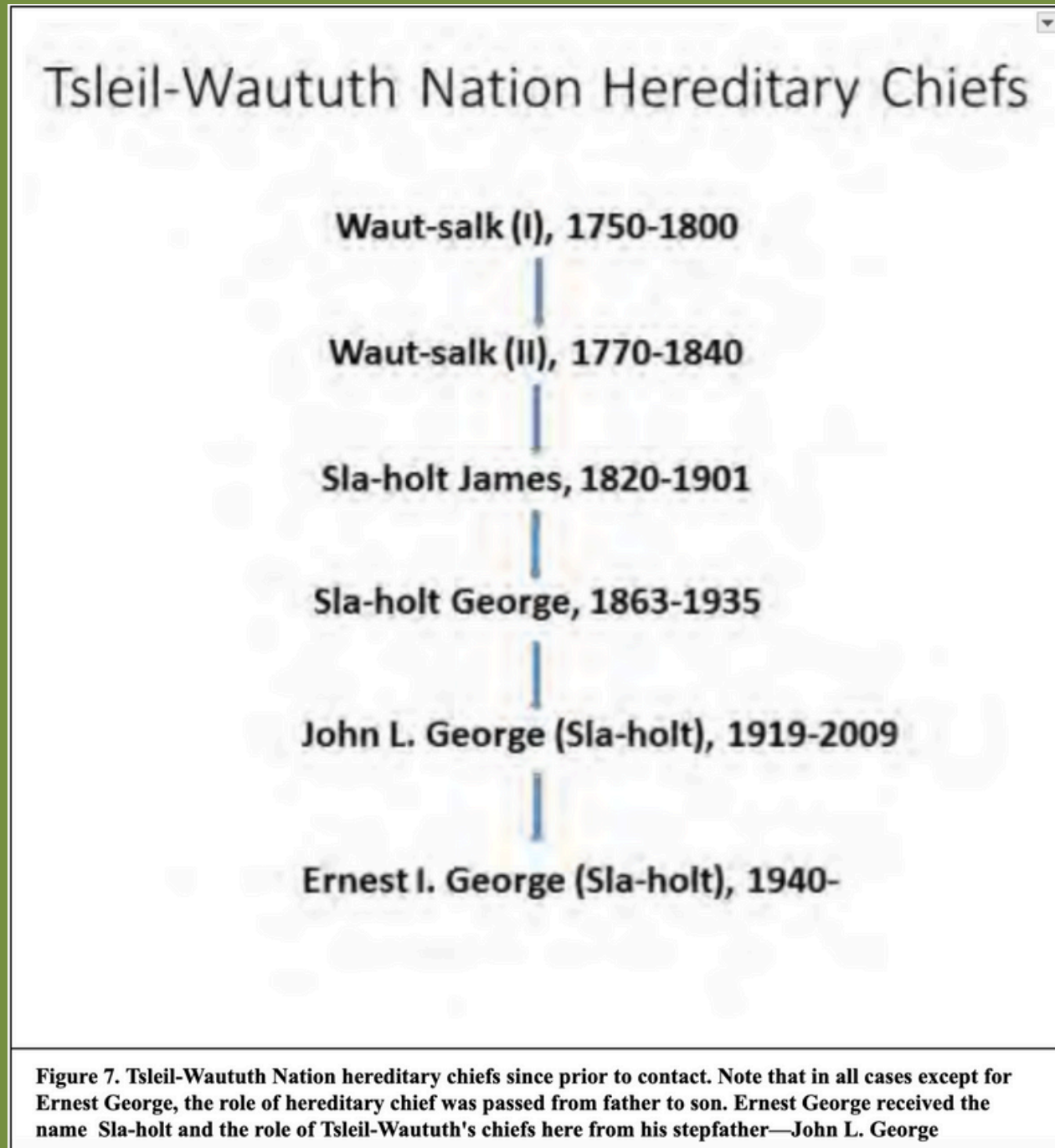
Tsleil-Waututh territory includes Burrard Inlet and the waters draining into it. The Burrard Inlet has sustained the Tsleil-Waututh Nation with food and shelter. Our ancestors kept villages throughout the territory to live where seasonal resources were plentiful. A complex cycle of food gathering, spiritual and cultural activities that has formed Tsleil-Waututh culture.

Tsleil-Waututh have their main village called Xwméthkwyiem in the eastern Burrard Inlet. Historically, Cates Park (Whey-ah-wichen) in North Vancouver was an ancestral village site. The place name for this area means "facing both directions" and "facing the wind." .

Tsleil-Waututh's documented genealogy traces back to the mid-18th century, with the majority of the present-day Tsleil-Waututh Nation descending from the common ancestor Chief Waut-salk I.

During the initial contact in 1792, indigenous communities were encountered in Burrard Inlet and Indian River, near the current Tsleil-Waututh reserves.

Archaeological findings support Tsleil-Waututh histories, confirming their origins and continuous presence in Burrard Inlet since ancient eras. Tsleil-Waututh stands as a unique Coast Salish First Nation with profound ancestral ties to eastern Burrard Inlet, with historical occupancy in the region dating back at least 1,000 years.



During winter, Tsleil-Waututh peoples would gather in large villages located in sheltered bays. Large shed-roofed houses divided into individual family apartments would provide shelter for families. The community would survive on stored dried foods that had been gathered and processed throughout the rest of the year. Some winter activities included weaving blankets of wool, wood carving and participating in spiritual ceremonies.

Families would disperse in late spring to set up camps on virtually every beach and protected cove on Tsleil-Waututh territory. They would transport planks from the winter shelters by canoe to build smaller summer structures. Our people would make excursions to hunt, fish and gather food from these base camps as resources became seasonally available. With some food being consumed immediately, while other food was processed and stored for winter.

In the summer, Tsleil-Waututh and other Coast Salish groups travelled to the Fraser River to catch and dry sockeye salmon and harvest and dry berries. Following the Fraser River run, Tsleil-Waututh families would gather in camps on the Indian, Capilano and Seymour rivers to fish for pink and chum salmon.

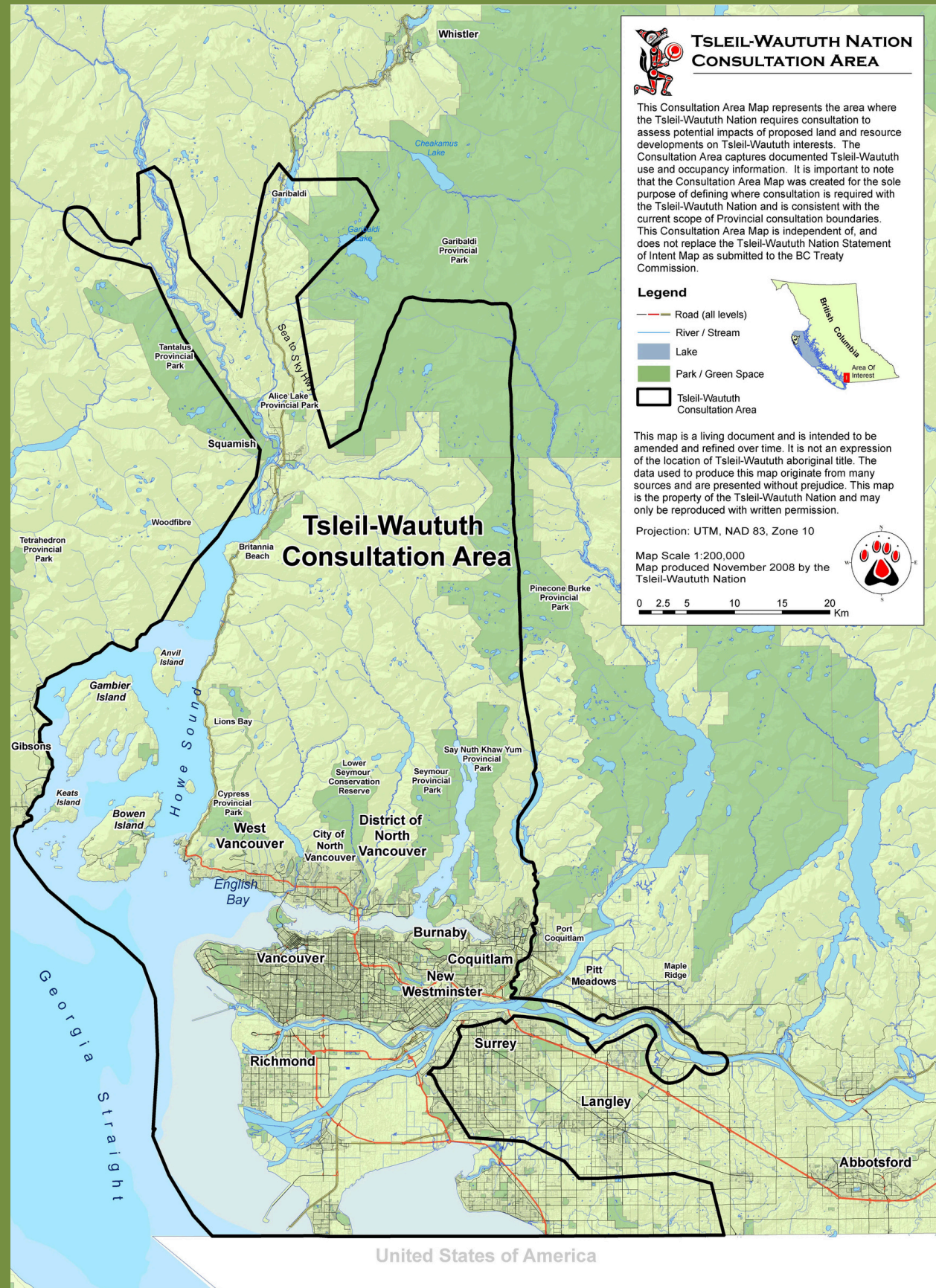


Figure 3. The earliest known aboriginal place name map of the Vancouver area (Mathews 1932, City of Vancouver Archives AM1594: Map 56.02). Note that the name 'Slailwit-tuth' for all of Burrard Inlet is indicated

Traditionally, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation relies on a diet that consists of seafood, such as salmon, herring and shellfish. They also gather a variety of plant foods including berries, roots and other vegetation native to Tsleil-Waututh territory. The specific foods may vary based on their seasonal availability and the natural resources of their ancestral lands.



Gathering Practices

The Tsleil-Waututh people engaged in a variety of gathering practices as part of their traditional way of life. Apart from hunting and fishing, they gathered a diverse range of foods, including shellfish, berries, plants and other resources available in their coastal and forest environment. Gathering practices were not just practical for sustenance but held cultural significance. The Tsleil-Waututh people fostered a deep connection to the land, passing down knowledge about the environment, seasons and specific gathering techniques through generations. Reinforcing a sense of community and connection to nature. Gathering activities also had associated rituals, stories and ceremonies that contribute to the cultural identity of the nation. The variety of foods gathered reflected the diverse ecosystems within their territory. Coastal areas provided an abundance of shellfish and fish, while forests offered berries, plants and other plant-based resources. The seasonal nature of gathering created a cyclical rhythm in the community's life, aligning with the natural cycles of the environment. Storing gathered food was essential for ensuring a stable food supply. Drying or smoking fish, preserving berries and storing plant-based resources in root cellars or caches were methods employed for long-term sustenance. Gathering strengthened the connection between the Tsleil-Waututh people and their ancestral lands, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship. The shared experiences of gathering, along with associated rituals, stories and ceremonies, contributed to their cultural values, identity and an understanding to their place in the world.

Gathering Practices

Some gathering techniques that the Tsleil-Waututh people used include plant identification, fishing techniques, shellfish harvesting, preservation methods and land navigation. Knowledge of edible plants, medicinal herbs and other resources in the local flora were passed down. This involved recognizing plants, understanding their seasons and knowing how to harvest them sustainably.

Techniques used for fishing, included the construction and use of nets, traps and spears, understanding the behaviour of fish and the timing of fishing seasons were crucial. Gathering shellfish required specific knowledge of tides, coastal ecosystems and the proper methods for harvesting clams, mussels and other shellfish sustainably. Techniques may have included using digging sticks or other tools. Some preservation methods such as smoking and drying fish was a valuable skill that ensured that the community had a stable food supply throughout the year. Understanding the landscape and navigating through different terrains were essential for successful, efficient and sustainable gathering practices.



Photo: Museum of Anthropology

Hunting Practices



Artist: Gordon Dick
Digitized by Tia Rose

Hunting practices among the Tsleil-Waututh people were an integral part of their way of life, providing not only sustenance but also contributing to their rich culture. The diversity of the landscape offered a range of wildlife that became part of their hunting traditions. The Tsleil-Waututh people pursued a variety of game, adapting their hunting techniques to the available fauna. Larger animals like deer and elk provided meat, hides and bones, while smaller game such as rabbits would be hunted for their fur and meat. They would hunt within their territory where there was an abundance of game animals, while the coastal environment provided hunting opportunities for marine mammals or birds. Preserving and storing hunted food was crucial for sustaining the community. Meat was often prepared by smoking, drying or curing, which not only extended its shelf life but also added flavour. Hunting practices also came with cultural ceremonies and rituals that acknowledged the spiritual connection between the Tsleil-Waututh people and the animals they hunted. Respect for the animals, gratitude for the sustenance provided and a profound understanding of the balance between humans and nature were woven into their cultural identity. Hunting practices symbolized not just survival but also a harmonious relationship with the land and its inhabitants.

Salmon



A pink salmon climbs a fish ladder in a spawning channel Tsleil-Waututh Nation just restored this summer. The cool groundwater stream became a refuge for a few thousand of salmon as water levels in the Indian River dropped. Photo: Jennifer Gauthier / The Narwhal

Traditionally, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation consumed a variety of salmon species including Chinook, Coho, Chum, Pink and Sockeye. They sourced salmon from the waters around their territory, specifically the Burrard Inlet in British Columbia, Canada. The Burrard Inlet and surrounding areas provided abundant salmon runs, allowing the Tsleil-Waututh people to sustain their communities through fishing and incorporating salmon into their cultural practices. The seasonal salmon runs were a crucial aspect of their food supply and cultural traditions. Salmon hold a cultural significance for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. The salmon is viewed as a symbol of life, abundance and interconnectedness with nature. Traditional ceremonies, stories and art often feature salmon, reflecting on the deep spiritual connection the Tsleil-Waututh people have with this vital resource.

The Tsleil-Waututh people have a rich culinary history centred around salmon. They would create various dishes that reflect their cultural heritage. Some traditional dishes they would make using salmon include smoked salmon, soups, dried and canned salmon which could be stored for later use. Salmon was prepared using traditional methods such as smoking or drying to preserve it for the winter months. The Tsleil-Waututh people also incorporated salmon into stews, chowders and other recipes.

While salmon hold primary cultural significance for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, other fish species including trout, halibut and herring were also valued. The Tsleil-Waututh Nation also consumed a variety of shellfish including crabs, mussels, oysters and clams.

“Tsleil-Waututh means people of the inlet. There is a saying that was passed down through the generations, ‘when the tide is out, the table is set.’ We were able to gather oysters, clams, assorted fish and my favourite, crab! Which is the only thing we can harvest this day due to pollution in our inlet. I was fortunate enough to be able to enjoy and teach all my four children to catch crab, not only to feed out bellies but to feed our soul. It is and was definitely fun everytime we go out as families or individuals. I pray that they will be able to do the same with their children as I have with mine.” - Gordon Dick



Drum Hand Painted by Gordon Dick

Dungeness Crab

The Dungeness Crab plays an important part of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation's coastal heritage. The Dungeness crab not only provided sustenance but also played a role in cultural practices, ceremonies and storytelling, symbolizing abundance, resilience and the interconnectedness of all living beings.

In terms of preparation, Dungeness crab was often boiled or steamed and served whole or in various dishes such as salads, soups or stews. The Tsleil-Waututh people may have also smoked or dried crab meat for preservation and later consumption. Hunting Dungeness crab involved specialized knowledge of the crabs' habitat, behaviour and seasonal migrations. The Tsleil-Waututh people would typically harvest crabs from intertidal zones, rocky shorelines or shallow waters using traps, nets or even long sticks. They would also employ techniques such as wading in shallow waters or using canoes to access areas which had an abundance of crabs.

The Tsleil-Waututh people have always practiced sustainable harvesting by limiting the amount of crabs allowed to harvest, only harvesting crabs of a certain size or larger, and not harvesting female crabs. Traditional knowledge passed down helped identify these characteristics.

Crab harvesting was not only a means of obtaining food but also a cultural practice that strengthened connections to the land and sea, passed down traditional knowledge, and reinforced the Tsleil-Waututh people's relationship with their coastal environment.



Male

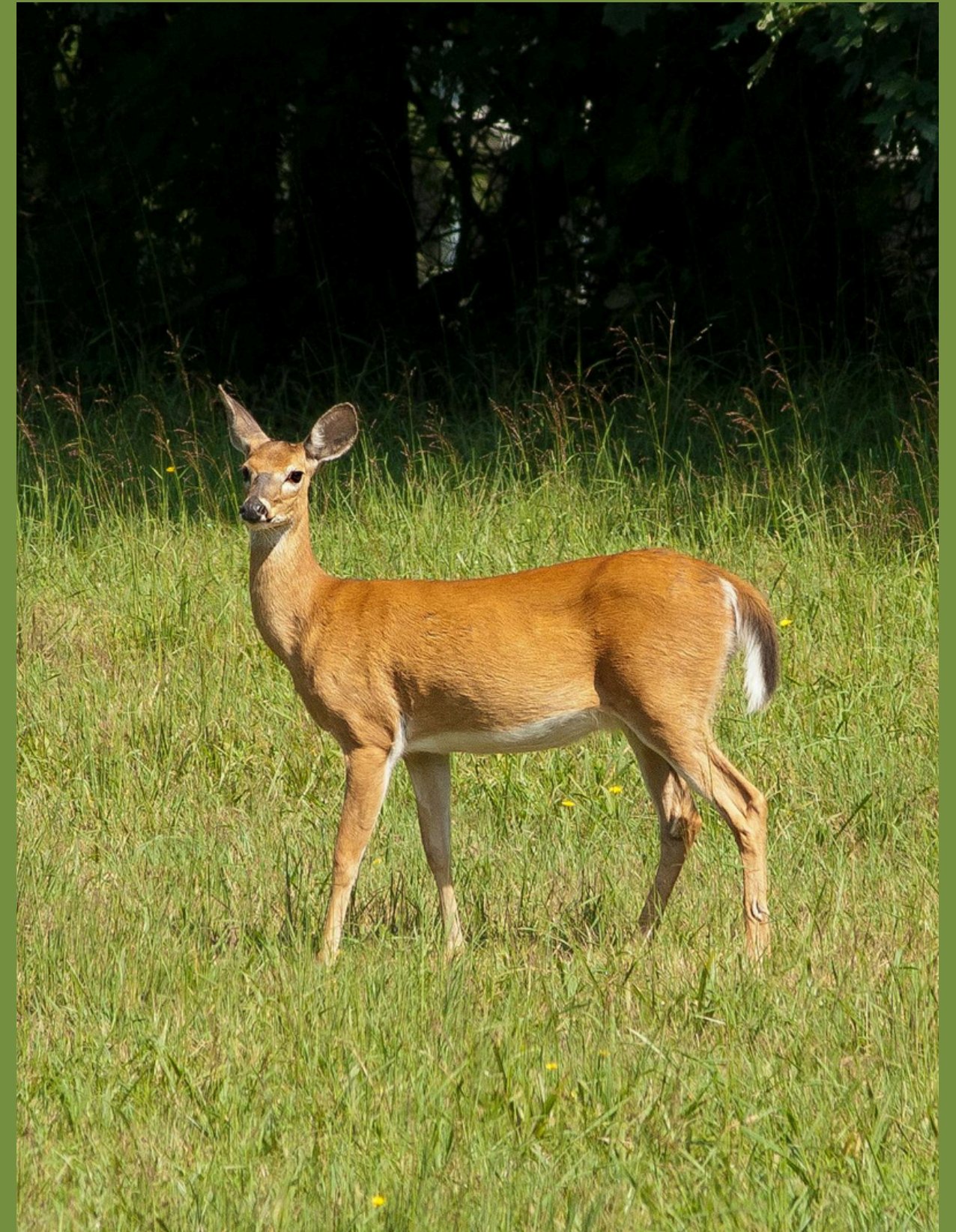
Female

To tell the difference between male and female crab, turn the crab belly-side-up, with the head facing away from you. If the belly "flap" pointing towards the eyes of the crab is shaped like a lighthouse (pointed), it is a male crab. If it is shaped more like an igloo (rounded), it is a female crab.

Photo Source: <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/library-bibliotheque/365613.pdf>

Deer

Tsleil-Waututh Nation traditionally employed various hunting methods for deer including traps, snares and bows & arrows. After hunting, the deer would be processed by skinning and butchering. The Tsleil-Waututh Nation values using all parts of the animal and practiced sustainable and respectful hunting, emphasizing the importance of balance with nature. Not only did deer provide a crucial source of sustenance, their parts were used for clothing and other practical items. Bones and antlers could be used for crafting tools and ceremonial items. They would utilize deer hides for various purposes, the hides were tanned and processed to create durable materials suitable for making clothing such as moccasins and other traditional clothing items. Deer hides would also be used to make ceremonial drums which traditionally would be sewn together with sinew. Sinew is a tendon fibre. It is favoured for its strength and elasticity, it was used as a natural material for sewing clothing and other ceremonial objects. When processed sinew can be separated into individual fibers and then used for tasks such as stitching together hides, creating durable threads or binding materials.



Elk



Photo Source: <https://rmef.org/elk-network/elk-population-falling-in-british-columbia/>

Elk held a place of significant and spiritual importance for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, as it was a key source of sustenance and played a central role in their traditional way of life. The elk not only provided food but also materials for clothing, tools, and ceremonial items, making it a vital part of their culture and livelihood.

In terms of preparation, they would typically butcher the elk and use various parts of the animal for different purposes. The meat would be cooked in various ways, such as roasting, smoking or stewing depending on their preferences and available resources. The hides would be used for clothing, blankets, or shelter, while bones and antlers could be fashioned into tools, weapons, or decorative items.

Hunting elk was a skilled endeavour that required knowledge of the animal's behaviour and habitat. The Tsleil-Waututh people employed various hunting techniques, including tracking, stalking, and driving elk into strategically placed traps or ambush sites. They would often use specialized tools such as bows and arrows, spears, or snares to capture the animals.

Overall, the elk played a multifaceted role in the cultural and material life of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, serving as a symbol of their connection to the land and providing essential resources for their survival and well-being. In modern day, the elk population has decreased due to habitat loss.

“When I hunt, I use a compound bow or a rifle, it is dependent on the season and what I am hunting. I have tried hunting elk with my bow but when you get within 10 or less feet from a big bull elk it is intense. So, I have never killed one with my bow, only my rifle. I have hunted quite a few deer with my bow, as well as with my rifle. After a kill, I do a tobacco offering and prayer for the animal that gave its life to me. After the prayer, I then will fully gut it and I personally only take the heart and liver from the organs. An elder once told me to bury the rest of the guts so you don't prevent any future hunting in that spot. I keep the hide on for travel and usually try to find someone who wants to make drums and other traditional items. Since I do not personally make drums, I give the hide away, as well as the heart and liver, since I do not like the taste of them. My mom always loved the liver. As for the meat, I make cuts of steaks, roasts and grounds and keep most of the bigger bones for my dogs.” - Peter Waugh



John Thomas and Peter Waugh in the Indian River watershed, the Tsleil-Waututh's traditional hunting grounds. (Zoe Tennant and Garrett Hinchey)

Photo from CBC News: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-elk-hunt-in-125-years-for-tsleil-waututh-nation-1.2605591>

Berries



Photo of Salmonberries

<https://www.ecoforestry.ca/plant-of-the-month-march>

Many berries were consumed as part of the traditional Tsleil-Waututh Nation diet. During the summer, Tsleil-Waututh people would harvest salmonberries, which are abundant throughout the coastal regions of Tsleil-Waututh territory.

These berries are known for their sweet and slightly tart flavour. Huckleberries, were also gathered during the summer season, grow in the mountains and forests, offering a mix of sweetness and acidity. Blackberries would be gathered during the late summer/fall. These berries could be eaten fresh or used in various traditional dishes. The Tsleil-Waututh people were resourceful, utilizing different berries for both nutrition and taste. The knowledge of which berries and plants to gather was passed down through generations, and their seasonal harvesting practices were deeply rooted in the natural rhythms of their environment. They would make berry preserves which could be used for a sweet spread on bannock, or could be made into a sweet sauce to eat with smoked fish. Berries were often collected using a cedar woven basket and the preserves could be stored for a later use.

Bannock

Bannock is a dish that I grew up believing it to be a traditional food. Through my research I have discovered bannock was brought in by settlers; it was not eaten by Indigenous peoples prior to colonization. The ingredients used for bannock were introduced by settlers. Throughout Indigenous communities there are many recipes for bannock but the ingredients stay more or less the same utilizing flour, baking powder, sugar, salt, milk and fat. It can be baked, deep-fried, pan-fried or cooked over a fire. It can be consumed as a savoury or sweet dish, often times family members of mine would eat it with jam or berry preserves. It is known to have arrived with Scottish fur traders, in the 18th or 19th century, as fuel for their expeditions.



Photo of bannock:
<https://www.eatdrinkbreathe.com/bannock-first-nations-style/>

“That’s all they gave the Native Americans down south was their flour, sugar salt & yeast. They figured out how to make bannock because they didn’t want their rancid meat. They actually tried to make all of our traditional food extinct. So it forced us to trade, eat and buy their foods. If you look, it was simple, we hunted and gathered all year long, taking only what we needed from mother earth to make it by through the winter as a family in our longhouse. Just to do it again year after year. Everything we took from mother earth we gave back and returned whether it was to the bodies of water or her soil itself. We had it down to a science so that we wouldn’t run out of resources and better yet, no waste.” - Gordon Dick

Potlatch



A photo taken in 1914 by Edward Curtis of a Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch ceremony. The potlatch was outlawed in Canada for decades, and some Indigenous leaders and activists say the ban's effects are still felt today. (Edward Curtis/Historica Canada)

Photo source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/historical-ban-spirituality-felt-indigenous-women-today-1.4036528>

A potlatch is a ceremonial feast practiced by Tsleil-Waututh and many other Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest of Canada. It involves feasts, dancing, and gift-giving, often to celebrate important events such as weddings, births, or funerals. It is a complex social and cultural event that holds deep significance within Indigenous communities. The exchange of gifts fosters social bonds and reinforces alliances between families and clans. Potlatches also serve as occasions for storytelling, traditional dancing & singing, and the performance of rituals that reaffirm cultural identity and values. Additionally, they can be platforms for resolving disputes, bestowing names and titles upon individuals. Historically, potlatches were banned during colonization because they did not want us practicing our own culture.

Community Members Favourite Traditional Foods

Salmon cooked over a fire with Cedar planks - Gordon Dick



Photo sourced from:
<https://indigenousskills.ca/project/traditional-salmon-preparation-and-preservation/>

Venison Stews - Shauna Lawrence



Photo sourced from:
<https://www.missallieskitchen.com/venison-stew/>

Steamed or boiled crabs with butter - Gordon Dick



Photo sourced from:
<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/155375/crab-legs-with-garlic-butter-sauce/>

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine within the Tsleil-Waututh people encompasses a variety of natural remedies, practices, and beliefs aimed at promoting physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These medicines are derived from plants, animals, minerals, and other natural elements within their traditional territory.

Some examples of the traditional medicine used by the Tsleil-Wautuh people include various plants native to the Tsleil-Waututh territory such as cedar, sage, devil's club, and yarrow. These plants may be prepared as teas, poultices, or salves to treat ailments ranging from colds and fevers to wounds and infections. Certain foods, such as berries, seaweed, and seafood, are valued not only for their nutritional benefits but also for their medicinal properties.

The Tsleil-Waututh people practiced traditional healing ceremonies and rituals. These may involve prayers, songs and dances performed by healers or medicine people to restore balance and harmony within individuals and communities. Tsleil-Waututh medicine emphasizes a holistic approach to health and healing, addressing an interconnectedness of the body, mind, and spirit. Healing may involve not only physical remedies but also emotional, mental, and spiritual support from elders, community members, and spiritual leaders. Traditional medicine within the community is deeply rooted in cultural teachings, oral traditions, and ancestral knowledge passed down through generations. Elders and knowledge keepers play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting this wisdom to younger generations.

Overall, traditional medicine within the Tsleil-Waututh community reflects a profound respect for the natural world, a deep connection to ancestral teachings, and a holistic understanding of health and wellness.

Devil's Club



Photo Source:
<https://www.kwumut.org/news/x42r35bc8a4tobeauwflfnpouyndgf>

Sage



Photo Source: <https://www.creehealth.org/health-tips/traditional-medicine-sage>

Yarrow



Photo Source: <https://eya.ca/news/plant-relative-yarrow-achillea-millefolium/>

Bannock AKA Fry Bread

- 1 Cup of Flour
- 1 Tablespoon Baking Powder
- About 1/3 Cup of Water

1. Mix flour and baking powder.
2. Slowly add water until moist.
3. Fry about 3 minutes on each side or until golden brown.



Now, serve and enjoy.