



LIG^wILDAX^w RESEARCH CENTRE



We are starting regular newsletter updates to share exciting history from the Archives with the community. Some of you know these stories but others do not, so it is our pleasure to introduce you to our second installment of: **Tales from the Vault.**

Why there are so many frogs at Nəlgəmps

"The following legend belonging to the Salmon River people, the words are those of Chief James Martin Smith as told to E.D. Sismey" Likwala updated by Kirsten Dobler & Emily Aitken.

Long, long ago, so long that no one remembers, a group of girls were busy washing clothes in the Salmon River. A voice soon called to them from across the river, "Come over in your canoe and bring me across." "What young man are you?" they yelled back.

"I am Mayus (raccoon)" came the reply. "He knows how to gather dry wood for a fire," whispered the girls to one another. "Let's bring him across." Presently another youth's voice was heard from across the river. "Come over in your canoe and bring me across." "Who are you?" the girls answered. I am Məça (mink). "He also collects much dry wood for the fire and he is quite handsome too," giggled the girls. "Let's bring his across too."

After a while a third voice called, "Come over and get me in your canoe." "Who are you?" was the shouted reply. "I am Siłəm" the garter snake. "He will bring pitchy wood which will burn really well," said the girls. "We shall bring his across."

Before very long another voice was heard, calling to the girls from the opposite bank of the river, "Come and get me," an awkward voice this time, deep and gruff. "Who are you," called the girls as before. "I am Čawi (beaver) the gruff voice called. "Oh," whispered the girls, "His wood is always wet. He is ugly, we don't want him."

“Who is Ćawi” they asked. “I am Haq^watusala (the one swimming downstream early in the morning before sunrise)” said the beaver proudly.

“Who is this one swimming downstream?” they asked again. “I am ?əm?əmgayuku (he who builds dams across creeks)” said the beaver with confidence. “Who is this dam builder?” the girls again inquired. “I am Heləməstasila (He who fells trees in a short time)” answered the confident beaver. “Ye-aye” shouted the girls, “We don’t want you – your head is too big. You are very ugly. Your face is too short and bulges. Your hands are small and shrunken.”

Shedding many tears, the beaver went home. His mother asked him why he felt so miserable. Soon his sad tale was told. “Never mind them son” said mother beaver. “We’ll pay them back for what they have done to you. You must call for rain and I shall help create a tremendous downpour.”

While the sun shone brightly on this clear summer day, the voice of the beaver was raised in song.

“Ligakəs ?ekad^wayuk^w da”

(Let those be, who are chosen, so beautiful in your eyes)

“Weswəł ʔəmaniq^wek”

(Those little people with small heads)

“Haya Heka Wahaqsi”

(Magic words in beaver language calling for rain)

“Ha ćuqa he”

(What will happen will happen. Let it be)

As soon as the Beaver finished his song the horizon darkened, big black clouds came scudding across the sky. But the girls, undaunted, teasingly shouted, “Ye-aye, we have lots of shelter; we don’t mind the rain.” But they sent “Holamolağa (lady rat, lady always in a hurry) up to see how the conditions were upstream. She came back with the news that rain was already falling fast.

Beaver repeated his song a second time and Mother Beaver repeated her mystical chants; the might of her endeavour brought tears streaming down her cheeks. Rain started to fall on the girls but they shouted louder at the Beaver, “We don’t care, we have our shelters, we are nice and dry under them,” but they sent Lady Rat hurrying up the river for a second time. She brought back that the water was rising fast.

For a third time beaver repeated his spiritual song and again the girls shouted, undaunted, that he could never harm them, what was a little rain to them. But they send the Lady Rat a third time on her errand. This time she brought back word that the water was about to burst its bonds, so, for safety's sake they boarded their canoe, for already the river was flowing faster and faster.

Again, Beaver repeated his song and as he finished for the fourth time the rain came down so heavily that the inside of the canoe was filled. The water burst its bonds and came surging down. The river flooding its banks carried uprooted trees and debris along the crest of the flood. Water struck the canoe and swamped it; the girls clutched and grabbed at trees, logs, or anything that floated to save their lives. At the moment the deluge struck them their cries became “Wə́qes! Wə́qes! Wə́qes!” – the voice of frog, and then they, who had once been vivacious girls, were turned into croaking frogs, carried along the crest of the torrent. Some were swept into Nəlgəmps while others were carried further along and driven into the bay on the other side of the channel.

And that is why, our old folks say, there are so many frogs at Nəlgəmps and in the bay across the channel.

Wa! Laʔəm ǵʷaʔ. (That is all about this.)

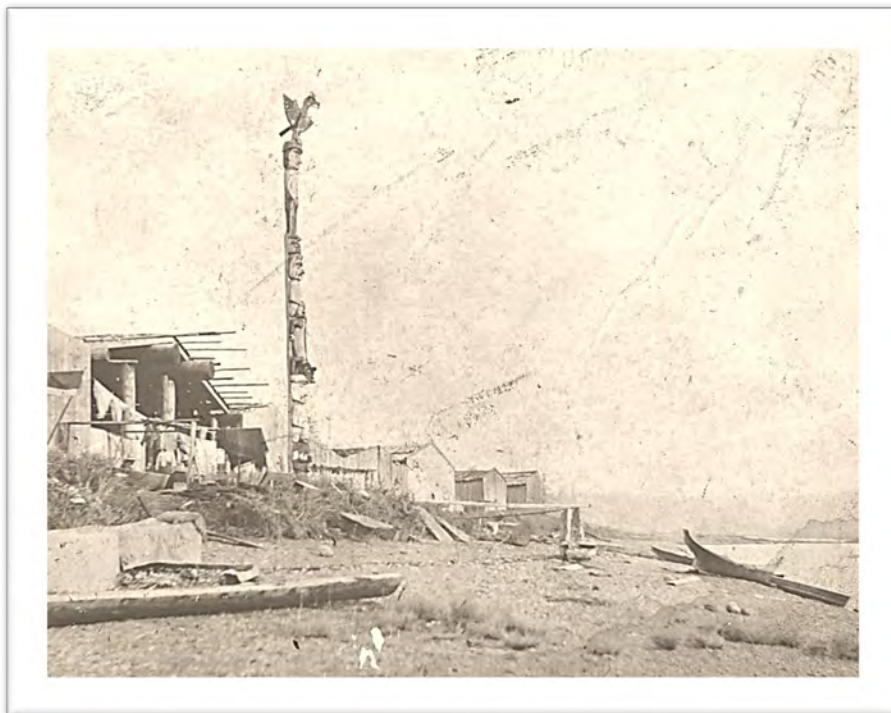


Figure 1 Salmon River, photograph courtesy of Mitzi Assu

Note by E.D. Sismey. The Salmon River is and can be a wild stream, its runoff rapid. On one occasion, 1958, I saw the river rise about 12 to 15 feet during a night of heavy rain. This was in August.

Call 250-287-9460 (ext.3) or email: LRC@wewaikaitreaty.com to reach us at 664 Seahawk Drive.
8:30am - 4:30pm, Monday – Friday.