Some of the Traditional Territories of the Lekwungen

The City of Victoria and adjoining territory has been occupied by Aboriginal people for over 400 years. The Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations people are a part of the Coast Salish ethnic group and descendants of the following family groups: Kakyakaaan, Teedsimelitch, Whyronymilth, Kossamson, Swanwhun, Chilcowich and Chelkoneen. Their ancestors lived in large cedar houses, in extended family groups that were self-governing. All household groups claimed specific living areas and areas where they could hunt, fish, and collect plants.

They occupied the area from Albert Head to Cordova Bay to the San Juan Islands. The language spoken was a dialect known as the Lekwungen. Listed below are a few of the many locations that are of particular importance to the Songhees and Esquimalt people.

1. Albert Head

**Tiespat.** This was traditional Songhees land. The Staugans people lived by the lagoon here, near the western end of Songhees territory. It was a well known fishing area.

2. Esquimalt Harbour

**Whyronymilth.** This area of West side of Esquimalt Harbour was occupied by the Whyronymilth family group. The East side of the harbour was claimed by the Kossamson people, who were to become the present Esquimalt people.

3. Portage Inlet

A. Craigflower Creek on the portage inlet was known as Pulkwustung, “the place of Ghost.” At one time large number of Coho Salmon ran up the Gorge.

B. The Craigflower Schoolhouse was established in 1854 and was used as a one-room school for settlers’ children until 1911. Before this time it was part of the Kossamson people’s land. In an archeological dig concluded in 1994, two dog skeletons were found, one was probably the type from which the fur was used to weave blankets, and the other large type was used for hunting. This is at the corner of Gorge Road and Admirals Road.

4. The Gorge

**Camossung.** The Gorge was once known as Camossung, named after a girl who was turned into stone at the Gorge Falls. This is where the name for Camossung College comes from. The Kossamson People used this site. There is a shell mound site over 4000 years old located south of the side of the Tillicum Bridge, at Kinsman Park off of Tillicum Road.

5. West-side Victoria Harbour

In 1844, the Songhees people built their village along the west shore of the Inner Harbour. This became a reserve in 1853 and the main Songhees village when they moved in 1911. The present day Ocean Point resort was built on the location of the house owned by Chief Lum George. Songhees long houses once covered the shoreline from Songhees Point to the north side of what is now the Johnson Street Bridge.

6. Songhees Point

**Pallatsit.** Pallatsit is the Songhees name for this point of rock at the entrance to Victoria Harbour. Pallatsit means “place of craddle.” This is located where the Commonwealth pole now stands. This was a sacred place for the Songhees people. When their children learned to walk, they would place their cradles along this point to ensure their children a long life.

7. Fort Victoria

**Fort Camoun.** Fort Victoria, first known as Fort Camoun, was founded in 1843 by Sir James Douglas. The Songhees people contributed their labour to the building of the Fort. The Fort was located where Bastion Square is today. This is located off Wharf Street.

8. Downtown Victoria

**Kao-sing-al-oz.** This Songhees name means place of strong fibre, a reference to the Pacific Willow. The inner bark was used to make fishing lines, which were attached with stone net weights.

9. James Bay

**Whosasipam “clay” or “muddy place”**

The Songhees people camped near the present St. Ann’s Academy while collecting canvas bags on Beacon Hill and crafts from the bay, which is now filled in. The Empress Hotel sits on what used to be part of the bay.

10. Beacon Hill

**Meegan, “warmed by the sun”**

This is “where people sat to have their bellies warmed by the sun.” This is also where people play a field hockey-like game called gopwilas. Canvas bulbs, a starchy food much like potatoes, were collected on Beacon Hill. The point below the hill was used as a defensive village site. The people that lived here buried their dead in cairns. The restored cairns can still be seen on the hillside. These date back through the past 300 years. Housepost marking found here date as recently as 300 years ago. This is off Circle Drive in Beacon Hill Park.

11. Harling Point

**Sahazima “harpoon”**

The name recognizes a special event in Lekwungen peoples’ history. The transformer Haylas performed an act of creation, turning a seal harpooner into stone. This is also the location where part of two ancient continents, Wrangellia and Leeds River terrain, collided. You can see where they met on one side is pale green sheet rock and on the other is dark basalt. Located on the end of Crescent Road off of King George Terrace.

12. Gonzales Point

**Kukweiluk.** The name meaning “place of war,” is from a village on this point. It is believed that the hill was a look-out point for the Chilcowich people who live on MeNeil Bay. The waters were so swift here that passing in canoes were not allowed to stop. From Anderson Hill you can see much of Haro Strait, the neighboring islands and nearby points. The bay was called Chilcowich, meaning “big hips,” because it is shaped like a large posterior. Anderson hill can be found on Island Road off of Newport Avenue.

13. Willows Beach

**Stitchamish.** The name refers to drift logs and trees that lodge themselves in the sand. It is the site of a former village occupied by a people of the same name, parts of this site dated back 2,700 years. From the beach, one can see the Discovery Islands and Chatham Island or Tichness meaning simply, “island.” This island belonged to the Skimmemis People before Victoria was founded and they returned to their territory at the height of the smallpox epidemic in 1862. Willows Beach can be found on Dalhousie Street off of Beach Drive.

14. Cadboro Bay

**Sungayka “snowpatches.”** The site of the present day Royal Victoria Yacht Club is a former village site. The small peninsula next to it was an Aboriginal fort. At the north end and was another village (now Gyro Park), where during low tide people would play gopwilas on the sandy beach. This is the village of Chee-al-oz, known as King Freeny. King Freeny was a prominent chief named for his curly hair. Cadboro Bay was the principal village for the Chelkoneen people before they moved over to Songhees Point with the other family groups. This is at the end of Sinclair Street, off Cadboro Bay Road.
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Sponsors:
Songhees Band
Victoria Heritage Society
Cultural Services
Te’mexw Treaty Association

Special Thanks:
Grant Keddy, Royal B.C. Museum
Victoria Native Friendship Centre
Maltwood Museum
Butch Dick, Lekwungen/Songhees Band

"Thank you, Cedar" (cover): Butch Dick, Lekwungen/Songhees Band

Research Completed in 1995

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The Lekwungen Family
Groups Traditional Territories

Traditional foods in this area included many types salmon: sockeye, spring, coho, chum and pink. Other common foods were clams, crab, oysters, eel, seal, octopus, heron eggs, seaweed, whale, duck, elk, deer, pheasant, berries, crabapples, cherries, camas roots and many kinds of herbs. The herbs were a source of nutrients and were also used for medicinal purposes.

Red and Yellow Cedar

Legend of Harrow Point

The Lekwungen People

The Traditional Territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt People

Legend of Camosun