

SIGNS OF LEKWUNGEN

This is the land of the Lekwungen People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. As you travel through the city, you will find seven carvings that mark places of cultural significance. To seek out these markers is to learn about the land, its original culture, and the spirit of its people.

The Lekwungen People have hunted and gathered here for thousands of years. This area, with its temperate climate, natural harbours and rich resources, was a trading centre for a diversity of First Peoples. When Captain James Douglas anchored off of Clover Point in 1842, he saw the result of the Lekwungen People's careful land management, such as controlled burning and food cultivation. These practises were part of the land and part of Lekwungen culture.

The development of a modern city here makes it more difficult to experience the landscape that is home to the Lekwungen. However, footprints of traditional land use are all around us, and this land is inseparable from the lives, customs, art and culture of those who have lived here since the beginning.

The hills, creeks and marshlands shaped the growth of the city of Victoria. There are messages in the landscape here; oral histories, surviving traditional place names, and the soil itself are all ancient stories waiting to be told.

Victoria's Inner Harbour is in the heart of Lekwungen territory, and it has seen rapid change in the last 150 years (see overleaf). The seven numbered areas in the painting below are special places of importance to the Lekwungen people, and as you visit these sites, you will find each one marked with a carving created by Songhees artist, Butch Dick. The carvings are of enlarged spindle whorls, small discs used traditionally for spinning wool.

These spindle whorls are enlargements of a traditional tool. Enlargements and depictions of traditional objects can be seen in the work of many local Coast Salish artists, including Butch Dick – the artist nominated by the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations to carve the whorls for the markers.

To follow the markers and visit these traditional places is to learn about the land, its original culture, and the spirit of its people. The traditions that were born here carry on today.

The Lekwungen people's art is traditionally used on internal house poles and for the decoration of household objects and clothing. This artwork became much more scarce when western living supplies became available after 1842. Historically, the outward expressions of Lekwungen culture were more modest than some of the other coastal nations such as the Haida or Kwakwak'wakw. In fact, European travellers interested in native art would sometimes leave from Victoria unaware of the tradition in their midst.



"I remember my grandma using a spindle whorl. She didn't speak much English, and I didn't speak much Coast Salish, but I understood that the spindle whorl is the foundation of any family – it can weave a tapestry of information."

BUTCH DICK,
SONGHEES ARTIST



BUTCH DICK CARVING
A SPINDLE WHORL



CARVED HOUSE POSTS ON THE
OLD SONGHEES RESERVE



"Mythology is important to us especially when we are young. It is important for capturing the spirit of different animals to enhance our own spirits. The highest order of mythical animal is the Thunderbird."

BUTCH DICK,
SONGHEES ARTIST



INDIAN BURIAL GROUND NEAR
VICTORIA

Project partners include: the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, the City of Victoria, Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, Cultural Capitals of Canada Program, the Province of British Columbia, the Provincial Capital Commission, the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority, and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.



ARTIST'S IMPRESSION
OF A COMPLETED
MARKER

SIGNS OF LEKWUNGEN

1 Songhees Point | p'áləc'əs

PAH-lu-tsuss means "cradle-board." Traditionally, once infants had learned to walk, their cradles were placed at this sacred headland because of the spiritual power of the water here. More recently, there was a settlement here, and subsequently an Indian reserve, that traded with the fort on the opposite shore. This place is also known as Songhees Point.

2 The site of the South West Bastion of the Hudson's Bay Company Fort

An imposing wooden fort, called Fort Camosun (and later known as Fort Victoria), was built here by the Lekwungen men and women in exchange for trade goods. This marked a drastic change in traditional ways and traditional sustainable land use. A large forested area was destroyed to raise the fort.

3 Outside City Hall | skwə'əŋjɪč

skwu-tsu-KNEE-lth-ch, literally "bitter cherry tree." Here, willow-lined berry-rich creeks and meadows meandered down to the ocean, and paths made by bark harvesters bordered the waterways. The imprints of these creeks can still be seen in the uneven ground of the Market Square area. This was a creek bed that led back to the food gathering areas now contained by Fort, View, Vancouver and Quadra streets. Bark from the bitter cherry was used to make a variety of household objects.

4 Lower Causeway | xwsýq'əm

(Interpretive Panel Location)

whu-SEI-kum, "place of mud", marked wide tidal mudflats and some of the best clam beds on the coast. These flats were buried when the area was filled in to construct the Empress Hotel. This place was also one end of a canoe portage. The portage could be used to avoid the harbour entrance during heavy seas by cutting through from the eastern side of what is now Ross Bay Cemetery. Along the route, arrowheads and other stone tools are still found, reminding us that the lowlands were rich for hunting. When housing development began, the lower elevations were left for market gardens and nurseries until after the Second World War.

5 Beside the "Lookout" on Beacon Hill | míqən

The hill here is called MEE-qən which means "warmed by the sun". This seaward slope was a popular place for rest and play – a game similar to field hockey, called Coqwialls, was played here. At the bottom of the hill was a small, palisaded village that was occupied intermittently from 1,000 until approximately 300 years ago. The settlement was here for defence during times of war, and it was also important for reef net fishing. The starchy bulbs of the wildflower, Camas, were an important food source gathered in this area. The hill here is also known as Beacon Hill.



6 Royal British Columbia Museum | q'emásən

Corner of Government and Belleville Streets

The objects, carvings and art of the Lekwungen people are unique. The Lekwungen have loaned many cultural objects from this area to the museum so that the traditions can be shared as we share the land. Some of these objects are on display inside.

7 Laurel Point

The carving here marks a nineteenth century First Nations burial ground. Small burial shelters with different carved mortuary figures, including human figures, were placed in front of the graves and stood here until the 1850s. No traditional name is known for this area.



SONGHEES NATION



ESQUIMALT NATION

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