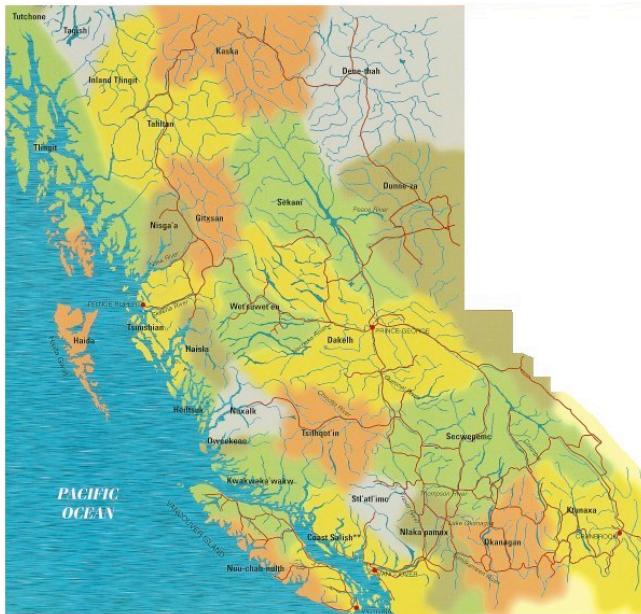


Background Information on the Coast Salish People

British Columbia has a large and diverse number of aboriginal groups. Shown below, courtesy of [Aboriginal Education, BC Ministry of Education](#), is a rendition



of a map of traditional locations of first nation's peoples. The lines have been blurred deliberately to exemplify the complex relationships between the first nations. (Click on it for an enlarged version and to go to the Ministry website).

Historically, it was the Klallum people, a subgroup of the Coast Salish First Nation, who lived in the coastal ecosystems of Race Rocks. Though there are no Klallum currently living in the area, we can glean something of their history and beliefs from, the [WSANEC or Saanich Peoples](#), who live on the Saanich peninsula and surrounding

area for millennia.

In 1997, the government undertook a study of the culture of the Saanich peoples in order to determine the impact of developing a new town. This report, entitled the Bambertown Town Development Project Environmental Assessment is an attempt to “translate” First Nations’ perspective on culture and the environment into “western” terms, recognizing that a First Nations’ perspective is fundamentally different in its treatment of human/nature interactions. As cited in this report, “this framework... is essential to understanding the depth and complexity of First Nation links with /Yaas/, the Malahat region, and indeed the entire Saanich Inlet. The following are quotes from this report:

“For the First Nations people of the Saanich Inlet, the relationship between culture and the landscape is reflected best in the concept of /tselengan/. In the Sencoten language, this word refers to the “teachings of the places where you come from” (Tom Sampson, July 30, 1996). It is a system of oral traditions by which people come to identify themselves with culturally significant places. These traditions mark more than places on the landscape; they also provide the spiritual teachings which guide members of the community in their interactions with one another and with the resources of the environment.

In sum, teachings of the First Nations of the Saanich Inlet speak of the land, the water and the people as equal members of a complex system, an integrated entity connected through cultural traditions. The landscape,

therefore, is essential to the continuity of traditional Aboriginal culture and, like traditional cultures, is threatened by the pace of development.

The Northwest Coast is recognized as a land of abundance, a land rich in marine resources and a diversity of plant and animal species. Increasingly, it is also recognized as a landscape which to a large extent, was managed and maintained by the First Nations peoples who have lived in the region for generations (e.g. Turner and Peacock in press; Anderson 1996).

As previously mentioned, the Saanich Inlet is included within the traditional territory of the Saanich, Cowichan and Malahat First Nations. Within these vast traditional territories, the rich marine and terrestrial resources were geographically dispersed and their availability varied seasonally. In other words, the abundant resources of the Coast were concentrated spatially and temporally throughout the territory and throughout the year. To survive, First Nations people developed seasonal strategies with planned and patterned movements throughout their traditional territories. These yearly cycles enabled the people to harvest available resources, store them for periods of scarcity, and to integrate these subsistence pursuits with social and ceremonial activities.

The Saanich people valued the moon because it counselled them of the changes in weather, signaled when to gather food and determined spiritual and social activities. The Saanich Year is based around thirteen moons which correspond roughly with the 12 months of the Gregorian calendar year. The names of each moon signify their origin and purpose and are markers of the rhythm of nature, rather like a calendar symbolizes changes in the seasons.

The yearly cycle of the Saanich Inlet peoples reflects the changing seasons, the changing resources and the sophisticated strategies developed by the people to deal with periods of abundance, as well as times of scarcity. According to Tom Sampson (January 28, 1997):

The length of time, the harvesting schedules, the spiritual needs are all tied into the seasons. We have 13 moons -- each with different significance, and that's how we worked.

Similarly, Earl Claxton Sr. wrote (Claxton and Elliott 1993:27):

. . . the economic activities and the cultural activities of our people were related to the seasons. It was not our way to separate these activities when we lived a traditional life because all was sacred to us. Our art, language, spirituality and everyday activities were all one."

Excerpted from the [Bamberton Town Development Project](#) , Environmental Assessment Report (1997), Environmental Assessment Office, Government of British Columbia

Go to the Information Sheet for more information on [Calendars](#) and how the Thirteen Moons of the Saanich year compares to other calendars used today.