

## Salish Straits (Coast Salish)

### 1. Description

1.1 Salish Straits (Coastal Salish of Canada); Salishan Language Family

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): The Coastal Salish reside in contiguous territories in or adjacent to the Lower Fraser Valley of Southeast Vancouver Island and intervening into San Juan and the Gulf Islands. The Coast Salish Territory includes much of the ecologically diverse Georgia Basin and Puget. This huge drainage basin comprises the coastal mainland and Vancouver Island from Campbell River and the Georgia Strait south through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Lower Fraser Valley, and the lowlands of Puget Sound (5).

1.4 Brief history: The ancestors of today's Northern Straits Coast Salish began to appear in the wake of the continental ice sheet that resided 11,000 years ago. It is suggested that the land started supporting hunting and gathering 6,000-8,000 years ago. The indigenous people of the San Juan islands and surrounding areas were primarily members of six Central Coast Salish tribes who spoke the Northern Straits language: Sooke, Saanich, Songhee, Lummi, Samish, and Semiahmoo. In addition to sharing language, the Coast Salish tribes shared a culture that encompassed a wide variety of marine, riverine, and terrestrial resources. They followed patterns of seasonal movement between islands and the mainland from large winter villages to smaller resource collection camps in the other seasons. Explorer Juan de Fuca may have encountered the Northern Coast Salish in 1752, and British and Spanish trade ships arrived in 1792 to a friendly welcoming (1).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: At one point in history a trading language, Chinook Jargon, was used by the diplomats, traders, and interpreters, when encountering members of other Salish tribes. The earliest European records of contact with the Coast Salish people appears to contain Chinook Jargon, and toward the end of the nineteenth century it was in extensive use throughout the Pacific Northwest. European settlers learned it to communicate with the Salish Strait people and missionaries gave sermons, published hymns, prayers, and catechisms in it (2). Catholic missionaries arrived in the 1860's and many natives converted and renounced their ceremonials and some self-sufficient Christian villages were established, with the missionary-imposed governing structure. By the end of the century, missionaries and Catholic boarding schools had destroyed the native language and culture. Due to the severe damage of the Salish people's traditional economy, the men took jobs as longshoreman, loggers, migrant farmers, and commercial fisherman. In 1876 Canada officially established reservations, by which time the Coastal Salish people had already lost much of their land. In the early twentieth century, several organizations such as the Allied Tribes and the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, formed to pursue title to the aboriginal lands (1).

1.6 Ecology: The Central Coast Salish area has a mild and relatively dry climate, abundant in natural resources. The Salish Sea is the intricate network of coastal waterways located between the south western tip of British Columbia and the northwestern tip of the U.S. state of Washington. The major waterways are the Strait of Georgia, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Puget Sound. Vancouver Island lies in the temperate rainforest biome. The southern and eastern portions of the island are populated by Douglas fir, western red cedar, madrone, Gary oak, Oregon-Grape, and manzanita. The northern, western, and most of the central portions of the island are home to coniferous trees: western hemlock, western red cedar, Pacific Silver Fir, yellow cedar, Douglas fir, and big leaf maple. Vancouver Island supports Canada's Roosevelt Elk, and the Vancouver Island Marmot and the Vancouver Island Wolf. The island's rivers, lakes, and coastal areas are renowned for fisheries of trout, salmon, and steelhead (3).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: (4)

Pre Small Pox epidemic in 1862: 12,600

1850: Around 5,000

1885: Less than 2,000

1884: Sum total around 18,000 (58 Bands in British Columbia today)

## **2. Economy**

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): The Salish gathered medicinal plants, roots, herbs, and berries (5).
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: The main supplement of food for the Salish was salmon and coastal shellfish that populate the Fraser and Squamish Rivers from May through November. Other fish such as founder, dogfish, cultus cod, red cod, rock cod, herring, and halibut were also abundant in the Salish territories (5).
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: The Salish food supply was mostly of marine type and therefore required deep nets and large trawl nets that were towed between canoes. Fish were typically taken with gill nets, basket traps and weirs, gaffs, and tidal basins of stakes and rocks. Straits Salish preferred the reef net, a unique trap set between pairs of canoes at locations in the sea where Fraser-bound salmon were known to pass (6). Seal nets, clubs, and harpoons further served as marine mammal hunting equipment. Land mammals were hunted with snares, bow and arrows (2.5-3 feet long, made of yew), knives, traps, and spears (1).
- 2.4 Food storage: Several lines of evidence point to a storage based economy and salmon intensification in the early times of Salish history. Rectangular surface dwellings and villages were prominent, and their presence suggests potential role for food processing and storage facilities. The houses and villages also point to some degree of sedentism, which is not appropriate without some sort of storage on the coast. The technology and skill to make wooden boxes was displayed and evidence for expanded use of mass-harvesting techniques (nets and weirs) shows increased need for storage demands. Furthermore, large numbers of salmon remains have been recovered and tools have been found that may have been part of processing fish for storage. The storage and food preservation was accomplished through drying and smoking (7).
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: The Coast Salish people practiced gender equality although there was a clear division of labor by sex. Women were secluded at the time of menarche and stayed out of public life until marriage. Some assumed political influence after menopause (8).
- 2.6 Land tenure: The Coast Salish upheld, and continues an indigenous mission to "restore, preserve and protect our shared environment and natural resources in our ancestral homelands - the Salish Sea" has resulted in a number of annual gatherings. "Our ancestors have passed down the traditional teachings of songs, dances, and spiritual ceremonies that depict our identity and strengths of our peoples. Our sacred trust has been given to us from our ancestors and defines our role as protectors of our Mother Earth. We are entrusted with the protection and sustainability of environment and natural resources of our ancestral lands and waters of the Salish Sea. Over the decades our lands and waters have been severely impact by pollution that affects our culture, food, health, and economy. Most importantly hurting our elders who have relied on these since the beginning of time and threatening the lifeways of our children's future" – Coast Salish Gathering (9).
- 2.7 Ceramics: The artwork of the Coast Salish Straits people has been described as diverse and sophisticated. The most famous form of artwork in the Northwest coast are totem poles. Painted wooden masks, rock paintings, cedar boxes, stone bowls shaped into a human or animal, are also included in the art and sculpting of the Northwestern Coast people (10).
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Neighboring people, whether villages or adjacent tribes, were related by marriage, feasting, ceremonies, or common or shared territory. There were also strong ties among the same waterways (4). Summer and autumn were the seasons for potlatches, when people from neighboring villages were invited to feast and recognize the social positions of the host tribe. Potlatches often took a year to plan and the ceremony corresponded with the person's change in social status. Upon arrival, each person received a gift according to his or her social rank. The more gifts that were given exemplified the wealth and high rank of the hosting family (6).
- 2.9 Food taboos: None
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: The Coast Salish people dug out red cedar canoes (14-26 feet in length) and that could typically carry an entire family. Throughout the season, the open areas of the Strait of Georgia could be crossed in dugout canoes. The challenge for advanced ingenuity in canoe constructing was not so much needed on the strait as it was on the rougher, west coast of Vancouver Island. In the mid 1800's the Salish style canoe went through a transformation and adaptation of the Nootkan style (possibly through intermarriage, trading , or adopting) (5).

## **3. Anthropometry**

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): N/A
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/A

#### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): Females were secluded and behavior was restricted (1).
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): N/A
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Large extended families lived together in homes that would hold around 40 people (1).
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): N/A
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Coast Salish people were considered marriageable when they reached adolescence (1).
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: N/A
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny was abundant, and wives lived in same household (1).
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: None
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Heredity titles, wealth, and status were inherited down the patrilineal line (11).
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: N/A
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: None
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Exogamy was frequent and at extremely high rates (1).
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? N/A
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"): N/A
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: N/A
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): None
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?: None
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Gifts were given to family of the female in exchange for the marriage agreement. Gifts were continued to be given throughout the entire marriage.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?: The extended family of the mother, either the grandmother or aunt of the children.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: N/A
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: N/A
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): N/A
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? : Kinships were considered to be very strong and accessible considering the amount of intertribal relationships and marriages; Respect was not limited to the tribe of residence
- 4.24 Joking relationships? N/A
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: N/A
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?: Typically marriage was noted by an exchange of gifts, either material or heredity privileges and a cleansing ceremony; Exchange of food and gifts continues throughout marriage
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?: Through Marriage
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Marriage
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? : Marriages are not arranged and intermarriage between tribes is extremely relevant and encourages trade and sharing between tribes (1).
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: None

#### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: N/A
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Alcoholism and Small Pox became relevant after the overtake of villages from the Europeans and Catholic Missionaries (6).
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Enemies included the Lekwiltok and the Nootkans (1).
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): External relations were extremely strong, especially in family relationships and marriage. There was a large amount of intertribal marriage which facilitated a means of trade and adoption of the surrounding tribes (4).
- 4.18 Cannibalism?: None

#### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Roughly 90-200 residents in each village (6)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The winter villages were always regarded as the permanent residence which held traditional winter ceremonies from November until March. The summer villages were temporary and used to store and gather food sources.
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): The Coast Salish society was divided into upper, lower, and slavery classes.

- 5.4 Post marital residence: Salish communities had a patrilineal system of inheritance, with a virilocal rule: a new wife would take up residence with her husband's family, either within the same settlement or by moving to another settlement. In this way, husbands continued to live and work in the same long-houses and villages as their fathers and grandfathers, eventually inheriting their titles, properties and privileges (11).
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Plank house households were organized into village communities, owned dwelling and food storages, had access rights and privileges to some resource procurement areas (1).
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Females are separated from society until they have reached menstruation (1).
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: N/A
- 5.8 Village and house organization: The highest ranking male had the role as ceremonial leader, however rank could vary and was determined by various standards. Villages were often linked to others by high accounts of intermarriage. The Coast Salish society was divided into class systems: upper, lower, and slaves- Nobility was determined by genealogy, intertribal kinship, use of resources, and knowledge of the spirit world. Houses held as many as forty members of a kinship network, many involved extended family networks (4). The Northern Coast Salish built plank houses made of redwood and planks were able to be removed and transported to construct permanent frameworks for summer villages. Most longhouses were between 60-70 feet long and most were fortified with deep trenches or stockades (1).
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): N/A
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: Interior walls of longhouses were lined with sleeping platforms. Storage sheds above the platforms held baskets, tools, and clothing, and firewood was stored below the beds. Mattresses and pillows were constructed of woven reed mats and animal skins (4).
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: There was a hierarchical class structure within the clans as well as slaves. Class position was imprecise, without ranked lineages or titled positions, but people strove to maintain class standing by hard work, selective marriages and proper behavior (6).
- 5.12 Trade: Goods such as baskets, berries, furs, fish oil, and hides, were traded within the tribe and to neighboring tribes (1).
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: Yes

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6 Time allocation to RCR:

- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Shamans provided religious leadership (6).
- 6.2 Stimulants: N/A
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Boys were encouraged to seek guardian spirit in journey to manhood
- 6.4 Other rituals: Spirit dances were celebrated in the winter months which focused on the spiritual helpers who conferred personal powers, for hunting, doctoring, or entering into manhood (6).
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Some spirit powers took the form of cleansing rituals, performed with masks and decorated rattles. High status families performed elaborate mask dances in the winter. A spirit dance was also performed for all tribal members at that time. Masks of exquisite artistic design and color were worn by dancers at night so that the darkness created a backdrop. Lighting came from the fire at the center of the lodge. The flickering of the flames created dancing shadows across the masks that gave them a lifelike quality. Typical masks were of Raven, Thunderbird, Bear, and other worldly entities representing spirits (10) .
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: N/A
- 6.8 Missionary effect: Missionaries imposed in 1860 to change government and bring Christianity; Also missionaries banned the traditional potlatch (1).
- 6.9 RCR revival: There has been a tremendous revival of ceremonial life, especially from 1950-1990. The winter Spirit Dance was revived along with the potlatch tradition was coincided with the ending of prohibition in the Indian Act of 1951. Many of the new winter houses have been constructed to hold spirit dancing and by 1990 one could encounter five hundred or more dancers at a single gathering.
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Initiations into spirit dancing follows from a diagnosis of a sickness or a decision upon family to increase the initiates life. Initiates are confined to winter houses, are limited in food and water, cannot bathe in the ritual bath, and receive spiritual advice and training (receive a song and spirit helper). Many families continue the practice of holding ritual burnings. A ritualist places plates of food into an outdoor fire to feed the dead and subsequently burns the personal possessions of the deceased. In some cases, all the items within the family house are removed and given away (8).
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: None
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?: N/A

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Salish peoples continue to practice, a ceremonial life focused on the maintenance of respectful relationships between humans and the spirits of animated non-human beings, including animals, plants, rocks, and waters. Some of these spirits are thought to be beings organized into communities of their own, with will and intelligence. Humans are regarded as weaker than immortal spirits, who possess the power to change shape. Many immortal beings become guardian spirits for individual males and females. Through a process of ritual purification starting in childhood, individuals can seek out guardians in areas of solitude where spirits live. "Important group rituals help maintain relations with immortals, including the first salmon ceremony. Salmon are believed to live in the ocean in longhouses and to don their salmon clothes to swim upriver and make themselves available to humans. The first salmon to go upriver, the chief of the salmon, is treated ritually, cooked, and its bones returned to the water. The chief then resumes its form and informs the other salmon that it had been treated properly, thereby guaranteeing the return of the run. First-berry ceremonies are similar" (8).

## 7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: Body paint and tattooing was common in both sexes of the elite affiliations and was especially concentrated over important joints and those prone to loss of vital forces and spiritual energy
- 7.2 Piercings: Ears, noses and lips were pierced and sometimes extended with plugs; Plugs through the bottom lip are referred to as labrets (typically worn by women)
- 7.3 Haircut: Men cut their hair to shoulder length or parted it in the middle and tied it with wooden pins in a knot on the back of their head when at work or going to war. Otherwise, long hair was usually disheveled around face and shoulders. Women did their hair in two braids with a center part. At puberty girls' hairlines were extended by plucking her eyebrows (5).
- 7.4 Scarification: None
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Salish Straits culture was rich in adornment and often involved sophisticated dressing which often symbolized the status level. Such dressings as blankets, nose rings, labrets, and Potlatch hats (woven hats topped with rings) were often seen as symbols of status.
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: The Coast Salish deformed the heads of their infant children by binding a cedar-bark pad tightly against the forehead under a strap tied to the sides of the cradle; A flat forehead and a wide face were considered to be handsome. There was no clearly conceptualized association of the flat head with terms of status attributes. Everyone displayed it with the exception of a born slave (1).
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women wore plateau style basketry hats and both sexes wore mushroomed shaped, brimmed spruce root hats (1).
- 7.8 Missionary effect: Catholic missionaries banned the potlatch practice, and therefore the ornaments that went along with the ceremony.
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: None

## 8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: N/A
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: No
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### Numbered references

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