
SALQ'IWEL

Artifacts from a Prehistoric Pilalt Village



Zoomorphic stone effigy bowl from the Salq'iwel Collection (DhRk 6)

Sponsored by:

The Pilalt Historical Society
A Non-Profit Organization of the Cheam Indian Band

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We are forever thankful.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i</i>
Exhibit Introduction	1
<i>Salq'iwel: A Prehistoric Pilalt Village</i>	2
The Pilalt	3
<i>History</i>	3
<i>Mythology</i>	4
Archaeology and Northwest Coast Prehistory	6
Future Directions	9
<i>References Cited</i>	10

Exhibit Introduction

In 1995, the *Pilalt Historical Society*, a not-for-profit organization of the Cheam Indian Band, purchased the Rosedale farm site of the late Mr. Connor Porter, a property known to contain a large portion of archaeological site DhRk 6. In 1965, Cheam elder Harry Edwards (1885-1969) recorded the Halq'emeylem place-name of this site as *Salq'iwel* (pronounced Sahl-KAY-wuhl), translated to mean, "*Place of Cracked Trees*", the site of a once large, plank-house winter village belonging to the Pilalt community (Keddie 1971; Mohs 1987; Wells1987:98).

Since 1964, Mr. Connor Porter had been cultivating fragments of this past from the till of his fields. Upon notice of the sale of the farm, the Cheam Indian Band decided to purchase the property in order to protect the archaeological resource; secondly, to establish *Salq'iwel* as a site for collaborative academic research and education; and thirdly, to economically develop the heritage site as a First Nation interpretive centre.

Mr. Connor Porter's private artifact collection has since become generously donated to the Stó:lo Nation by Ronald Porter, the late Mr. Connor Porter's son. A neighbour, Jacobus Wynker, further donated the zoomorphic stone effigy bowl (cover illustration) which was discovered by UBC archaeologists in his field adjacent to the Porter property. *SALQ'IWEL: Artifacts from a Prehistoric Pilalt Village* presents these artifacts for their first public exhibition.

SALQ'IWEL: A Prehistoric Pilalt Village

Scattered between the furrows of tilled fields near the present townsite of Rosedale, British Columbia, the *Salq'iwel* site resides upon a low, grassy rise adjacent to the north bank of the meandering Hope Slough upon the floodplain of the Lower Fraser River Valley. Situated 200m back of the Hope Slough, it is not presently clear whether the site was originally oriented towards this slough or to an older slough channel now disappeared. It is even suggested that the *Salq'iwel* site was perhaps situated along an ancient course of the Fraser River itself long ago in prehistory.

Archaeological research identifies the Lower Fraser Valley of the Stó:lo as a major developmental core of Northwest Coast prehistoric culture. Centrally located within this region, the *Salq'iwel* site is believed to have been first inhabited by at least 3,500 to 2,500 years ago during a period of florescence in the material culture of the Northwest Coast. In ethnographic times, the site is reported to be a winter village of the Pilalt, a powerful Stó:lo community, whose Halq'eméylem name signifies, (*The Smoke from their Fires Rise*) "*High above and can be seen from Afar*" (*They are so Rich*) (Duff 1952:27)

The *Salq'iwel* site only came to the attention of archaeologists in 1971 during an archaeological survey of the dyke system of the Chilliwack-Matsqui districts (Keddie 1971). As scientific excavations have yet to be conducted at *Salq'iwel*, the exhibited artifact collection represents, at present, the only material information we possess about this archaeological site.

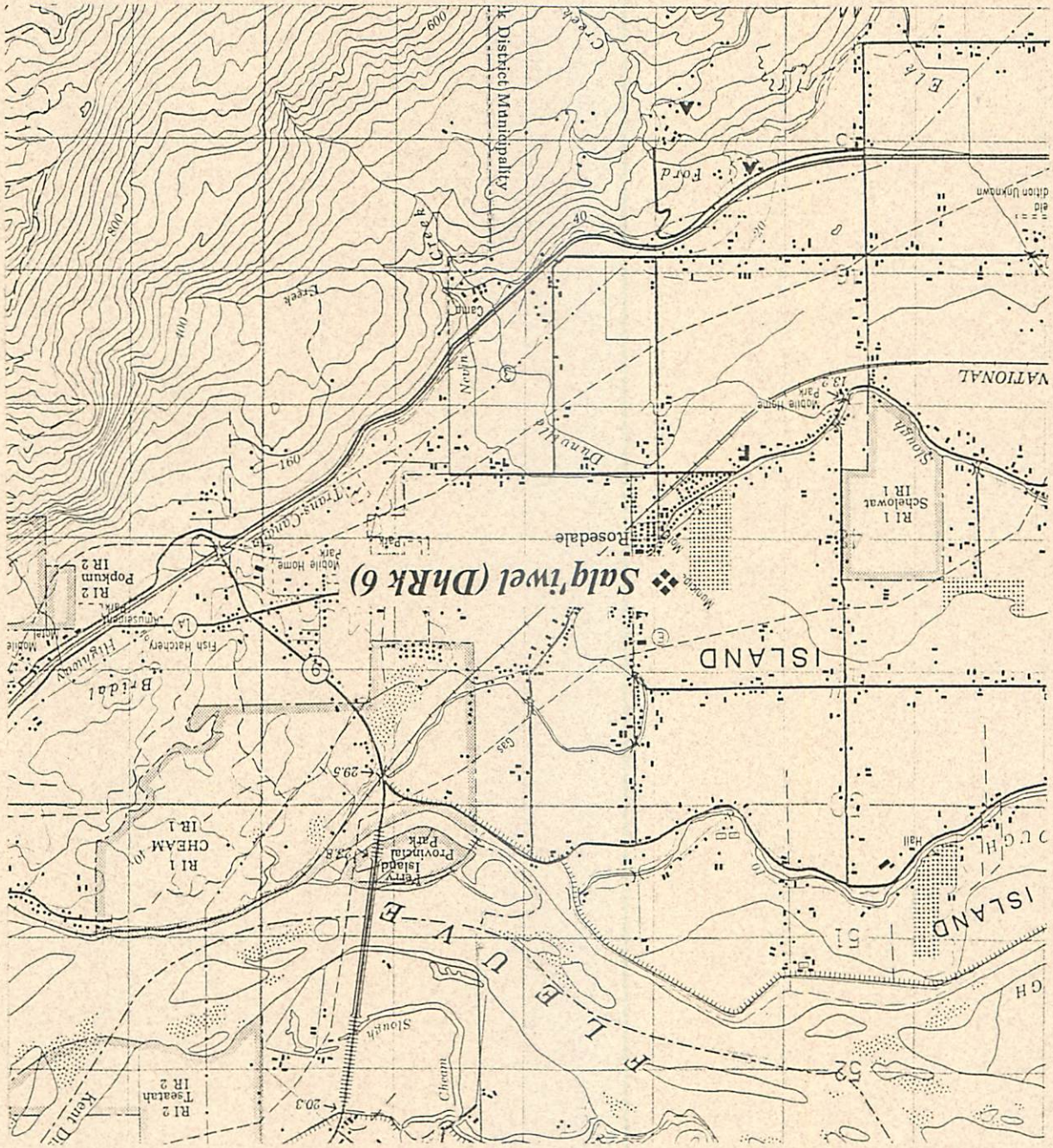


Figure 1: The Salq'iwel Site, near Rosedale, B.C. NTS Map 1:50,000

Based upon the general types of artifacts represented in the collection, the majority of the collection best illustrates the chronological periods known as the *Marpole Phase* (2400-1400/1100 BP [Before Present, AD 1950]) to the *Developed Coast Salish* (1400-1100-200 BP). However, several artifacts, such as the ground slate hexagonal points, indicate an earlier component dating to the *Locarno Beach Phase* (3500-2500 BP) may be present at the site. No historic artifacts are known to derive from the *Salq'iwel* site and it is believed that the site was abandoned in late prehistoric times.

The Pilalt

Today the Pilalt are only distantly remembered as a once affluent, powerful people. The Pilalt historically resided in the Central Fraser Valley as a cluster of independent Sto:lo villages closely linked through kinship, who likely shared a local dialect of the Halq'eméylem language, and whose community once encompassed both sides of the Fraser River, from Agassiz south of Harrison Lake, to the eastern bank of the Chilliwack River mouth (Duff 1952, Wells 1987). Celebrated for the artistry of their mountain goat wool textiles, the Pilalt occupied the landscape beneath Mount Cheam, settling along the rich labyrinth of sloughs and river channels adjacent to the Fraser River.

History

Early historic reference to the Pilalt is recorded in the 1827-30 Fort Langley census, "the Pallalts, north bank of Fraser River a short distance above Harrison's River", who numbered 304 persons (Duff 1952:42). The term *Pila'lqw* was originally the name of a large, populous village on the north bank of the Fraser near Agassiz, located at the mouth of the slough below Hopyard Hill.

Settlement patterns were highly disrupted by historic epidemic, trade and colonial settlement. One oral tradition recorded by anthropologist Wilson Duff in the 1950's records the migrations of the villages from the north side of the Fraser into neighbouring communities, resulting from the actions of a notorious leader in the 1840's (Duff 1952:42). The village of *Pila'lqw* is related as merging with the village of *Chiyo:m* across the Fraser River.

However, this historical event was anti-climatic to the devastation that smallpox created for all the Sto:lo people in the late eighteenth century prior to contact. The epidemic is suggested to have decimated entire communities, resulting in widespread local migrations and the amalgamation of Sto:lo villages. By 1895, anthropologist Charles Hill-Tout reported that the Pilalt community had become reduced to only 25 persons residing at Chilliwack Landing (Hill-Tout 1904).

Mythology

There are several ancestor myths recorded for the Pilalt which embed their culture into the local landscape. In 1895 at the turn of the century, one ancestral myth of the Pilalt was recorded by anthropologist Franz Boas:

"A woman called Clem (sandhill crane) lived in Tca'tcòHil, where there are many rushes. One of them assumed the form of a man and the name Qä'latca (Becomes Visible). He carried a hammer and an axe and was a skilled canoemaker. He married the woman and they became the ancestors of the Pela'tlq. When Qals came, he transformed Qä'latca into a rock. His hammer and axe can still be seen by his side today" (Boas 1895).

Several other Transformer sites are located in the Pilalt area, including a Transformer site near the Pilalt village of *Qwoliwiya*, recorded by Charles Hill-Tout (1904):

[*Qwoliwiya*] was so named from a large boulder which lay in the stream close by the village. This rock was once an old woman, a *seuwel*, or witch. She was turned into her present image by Qals, the Transformer, for venturing to contend with him in magic. Her metamorphosis came about in this way. One day having heard that Qals was at Yale, pitting his owers against those of a noted shaman there, and was about to come down the river, she urinated in a little receptacle of basketry with the intention of using the liquid to *seuwel* (bewitch) Qals.

When they met Qals derided her attempts to overcome him and turned her into the rock. Said he: "You are a very poor sort of *seuwel*. I can do what I like with you. I will punish you by transforming you into a boulder and placing you in the stream." This he did, and also the little receptacle she had used; and, placing it on her shoulders, turned it likewise into a stone. Both may be seen there to this day.

James Teit (1917:129) records a further Pilalt Transformer site at Cheam:

"[Qals] came to Cheam, where two gigantic twins and their families were living. He transformed them into rocks in a cliff, and their children into small rocks at the base of the cliff" .

This cosmology, which conceives of the environment as a cultural geography of personified landscapes and anthropomorphic landforms, is best illustrated in this region by the well-known legend of Mount Cheam, as recorded by amateur anthropologist Oliver Wells in an interview with Dan Milo in 1962:

THEETH-uhl-kay- this great big mountain was a woman at one time. She had three sons that are living behind here- the one that is in front of her sitting there- is a little girl. She wants to be out in front there, so she can see the people travelling on the river. THEETH-uhl-kay, that is the name of the mountain when it was a lady (Wells 1970:11).

Wells's interview with Mrs. Cooper further elaborates this narrative:

Well, Mt. Cheam is a lady and Mt. Baker is a man - this is an old legend - Mt. Baker comes over and looks for a wife and he finds Cheam is a nice looking girl, so he takes her over to his country. They live there and they have three boys - Mt. Hood, Mt. Shasta and Mt. Shuksahn and they have three girls, she says " I had better go back home", she says - to my people on the STAW-loh - so she comes back and she says, "I'll stand and guard", she says, "I'll stand and guard the [Sto:lo], that no harm comes to my people and no harm comes to the fish that comes up to feed them;"

Then she takes her three children and she stands up there. If you are coming down from up the road there are three little points and those three little points are her children. They say she holds the smallest one, I-oh-wat, in her hand, and behind her - towards the south is the dog's head - the head of the dog that followed her. She told the dog to go back home - but it stood there and stayed there (Wells 1970: 12).

The locations of the first two Transformer sites, noted above, and their associated Pilalt villages are presently unknown. Neither one have been archaeologically recorded. The Transformer sites are feared destroyed by modern development, and the villages are presumed to be buried underneath private property.

Archaeology and Northwest Coast Prehistory

Archaeology is the study of past human behavior through the investigation of its material remains. Archaeology is a social scientific discipline which incorporates a broad variety of academic fields of study, including anthropology, history, geography and the physical sciences. Through the use of meticulous scientific recording methods and techniques and through cooperative academic research, archaeologists can unearth the history of past civilizations.

Archaeological research on the Northwest Coast has created a relatively detailed understanding of the past 10,000 years of culture history in the Lower Fraser Valley and southeastern Vancouver Island area, a region encompassed by the Strait of Georgia.

This culture history is primarily based on the comparative analysis of artifact types, technologies, and subsistence remains from archaeological sites, evidence which is variously interpreted as reflecting distinct past economic and social behaviors. The basic cultural adaptations to the coastal region by indigenous, prehistoric cultures have existed for at least 5000 years (Mitchell 1990: 340)

As relevant to the *Salq'iwel* site, the Locarno Beach Phase (3300-2400BP) represents a culture which first exhibits increased cultural complexity on the Coast, illustrated by a large-scale adaptations to salmon resources, the full range of ethnographic technology and the appearance of status-related decorative objects. Yet, evidence for the ethnographic cultural attributes of large mutli-family houses and inherited status are still lacking in the Strait of Georgia region, and it appears that the Locarno Beach Phase represents more of an egalitarian, or non-hierarchical, social organization than interpreted for its succeeding phases.

The *Marpole Phase* (2400-1400/1100 BP) is conceptualized as the florescence of the Developed Northwest Coast ethnographic pattern, a cultural phase which illustrates clear archaeological evidence for large multi-family planked houses, permanent winter villages, and an economic reliance on stored salmon. The Marpole Phase also includes the appearance of a sophisticated art, and evidence of inherited social status.

Thus, the elaborate archaeological complex of the Marpole Phase is interpreted as the initial achievement of cultural complexity in the Strait of Georgia region, an achievement which is contemporaneous with similar regional developments elsewhere on the Northwest Coast.

The *Developed Coast Salish Culture Type* (1400/1100-200 BP) represents a continuum of Developed Northwest Coast ethnographic pattern in the Strait of Georgia for at least the last thousand years. However, there is archaeological evidence for marked social and technological transformation between the Marpole and Developed Coast Salish Phases, as indicated by profound changes in settlement patterns, technology and burial practices. The chipped stone industry is proportionately a minimal aspect of most Developed Coast Salish Culture Type assemblages, while bone and antler tools exponentially increase. The modifications in the use of more bone tools, wood and antler is suggested to stem from the development of more complex, composite technology as populations developed more permanent settlement patterns. The prehistoric practice of interring the dead within middens is transformed during the Developed Coast Salish Culture Type to the ethnographic practice of above ground burials, indicated by the general lack of burial remains found in archaeological sites dating to this period. The period terminates about 200 years ago in the late 18th Century A.D. with the arrival of European explorers on the Northwest Coast and the beginning of historical records.

Future Directions

Through the activity of the Pilalt Historical Society, the *Salq'iwel* site will be carefully conserved for future generations. *Salq'iwel* is one of the few Pilalt village place-names that has been archaeologically recorded and remain accessible to research. In total, out of the 17 published Pilalt villages known, only eight archaeological sites have been identified. Many more unnamed archaeological sites are certainly unrecorded and awaiting discovery.

The Pilalt Historical Society has a proposal to establish a First Nation interpretive centre at the *Salq'iwel* site in the next millenium. This interpretive centre, located upon the broad, open fields overshadowed by Mount Cheam, may involve the construction of a full-scale prehistoric Stó:lo village. This interpretive centre is planned to sponsor both education, research and cultural tourism in the area, as well as creating meaningful economic opportunities for First Nations.

In the near future it is hoped that university archaeological fieldschools may be attracted to initiate research at the *Salq'iwel* site. Future archaeological investigations at *Salq'iwel* promise to greatly contribute to our knowledge of local Stó:lo culture history, Northwest Coast prehistory, and to our understanding the past lifeways of these prehistoric villagers.

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