

II ETHNOGRAPHY

At the commencement of the historic period early in the nineteenth century, the South Thompson River region was inhabited by the Shuswap language group, one of four ethnographic Interior Salish language groups of the south-central plateau. The Shuswap territory covered an area of approximately 182,000 square kilometres (Palmer 1974b: 13), from the Fraser River eastward to the Columbia River, and northward from the Arrow Lakes to the great bend in the Fraser. The Shuswaps that occupied the territory surrounding the confluence of the North and South Thompson Rivers comprised the Kamloops Band, which, together with the Savona Band from the western reaches of Lake Kamloops, formed one of seven Shuswap territorial and dialectic tribal divisions (Teit 1909:455). Figure 4 shows the ethnographic Shuswap territory and the neighbouring aboriginal territories of the Salish, Athabaskan, Kutenai, and Algonkin language stocks.

Comprehensive ethnographies on the Interior Salish have been recorded by James Teit (1900, 1906, 1909), Franz Boas (1890), and by George Dawson (1892). These were later supplemented by Verne Ray's distribution analyses of aboriginal Plateau cultural elements (1939, 1942). Interpretations of prehistoric and early contact cultural ecology of the southern Shuswap have been provided by Gary Palmer (1974a, b). It must be noted that analogies made to the early ethnographies should warrant careful analysis. Even though the ethnographies attempted, for the most part, to record aboriginal Plateau culture prior to European contact, they described the Interior Salish only after they had been introduced to and severely decimated by European social values and disease, the Christian Church, and the reservation system.

As portrayed in the ethnographies, the culture of the Shuswaps was representative of the overall aboriginal lifestyles of all four Interior Salish language groups. Boas (1890:632) states that the customs of the Thompson, Lillooet, and Okanagan "...differ very slightly from those of the Shuswap," while Ray (1939:145) describes the Shuswap as retaining "...Plateau culture in almost full measure," without modification from the Coast or the Plains. Representative elements of Plateau culture include emphasis on pacifism, egalitarianism, the Guardian Spirit Concept, and a material culture which reflects an adaptation to a wide range of plateau resources. A list of manu-

factured items utilized in subsistence activities, storage, ornamentation, and warfare is given in Appendix A.

Traditionally, the Shuswap developed a semi-nomadic riverine settlement pattern based upon a hunting, fishing and gathering subsistence. The short-range altitudinal distribution of biotic zones of the plateau permitted an intensely diversified economy, utilizing several ecological habitats. This economy was characterized by a specialized exploitation of intermittently abundant resources such as deer, elk, Pacific salmon, and several species of berries and roots (Teit 1909; Palmer 1974b; Surtees 1974). The land mammals and species of berries and roots available for Shuswap subsistence in and around the Kamloops locality in ethnographic times are listed in Appendices B and C respectively.

Seasonal transhumance maximized exploitation of plateau resources, and formed the basis for Shuswap social and political patterns. Permanent settlement did occur however from December to March of each year in semi-subterranean dwellings, constructed together in large numbers to form winter villages. Non-habitation features, such as storage pits and sweat lodges, were often associated with these permanent dwellings. The winter villages were situated in the larger valleys close to the shores of the major rivers, usually on sandy, well-drained soil (Dawson 1892:18; Teit 1900:192), close to fresh water and berrying and root-digging grounds (Smith 1899:129), and preferably with a sunny, southern exposure.

Teit (1900:192) records that in contact times winter dwellings rarely occurred in groups of more than three to four at one place, and often occurred individually. The archaeological record, on the other hand, implies much larger groupings of dwellings, thus possibly indicating a late aboriginal trend away from winter settlement in large villages. The dwellings themselves, commonly known as pit houses, consisted of a conical-shaped, wood-framed and earth-covered structure, built above a large round hole, excavated up to two metres deep and, according to Smith (1900:404), from seven to ten metres in diameter. Pit house dimensions varied depending on the nature of the village and on the number of families residing in the dwelling (Hill-Tout 1907:56; Teit 1900:192).

Seasonal residence for the non-winter months occurred in temporary, easily constructed frame lodges, covered

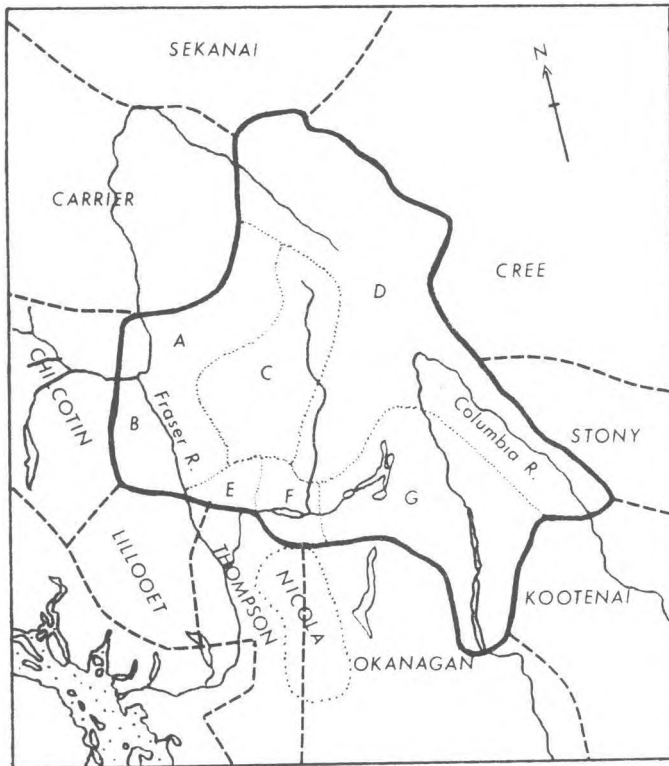


Fig. 4. Territory of the ethnographic Shuswap, showing the seven tribal divisions (taken from Teit 1909:450). (A) Fraser River Division; (B) Canon Division (by 1909 largely occupied by the Chilcotin); (C) Lake Division; (D) North Thompson Division; (E) Bonaparte Division; (F) Kamloops Division; (G) Shuswap Lake Division.

with bark, grass mats, or skins. Typical summer dwellings are illustrated in a photograph by Hill-Tout (1907:57).

Both Teit (1900:192–199) and Boas (1890:632–635) graphically describe the construction of all types of aboriginal habitation used by the Interior Salish. Aboriginal frame lodges and pit houses are no longer extant, but the pit house depressions themselves, referred to as house pits, still indicate the presence and location of former winter dwellings and villages. The reader is referred to Smyly (1973) and to Surtees (1975) for discussions on the recent construction of two pit house replicas near Salmon Arm and Chase, B.C., based on information gathered from older members of the Salmon Arm and Nisconlith Indian Bands.

The large Shuswap villages were autonomous, but might be associated with others through intermarriage and the sharing of common hunting and berrying grounds (Teit 1909:569). Smaller villages would frequently vary location and size from winter to winter, as family units would not traditionally winter in the same place. Generally however, Shuswap bands consisted of closely related families who

wintered within a definite locality, at or near a large village (Teit 1909:457).

Springtime saw the dispersal of winter village inhabitants into individual family units, which would hunt, fish, pick berries and dig roots in the more elevated, forested and lake regions of the plateau, or congregate at summer fishing stations beside the major rivers, such as at Pavilion on the Fraser (Wade 1907:14). Maximum resource exploitation occurred during early autumn when all the bands would gather at fishing stations on the rivers for the annual Pacific salmon runs. Dawson (1892:15) emphasizes the importance of this resource:

Dried salmon...before attempts at agriculture...constituted the sole winter staple. The right to occupy certain salmon-fishing places, with the annual visit to these of the more remote families, and the congregation of large numbers of Indians at specially favourable places, largely influenced the life and customs of the Shuswaps.

Sanger suggests that this seasonal transhumance might have been minimal among the peoples of the South Thompson, because of the relatively close proximity of the summer hunting and fishing grounds (Sanger 1968:128). However, as an example of the distance travelled for food procurement, Dawson mentions that aboriginally, the Shuswaps who lived west of Kamloops along the banks of the Thompson River to the mouth of the Bonaparte River, and in the Bonaparte Valley itself, took their winter stock of salmon from the Fraser River, at the western base of Pavilion Mountain, a distance of well over 80 km (50 mi.) (Dawson 1892:24).

This seasonal economic pattern influenced the egalitarian nature of Shuswap society. There were few restrictions upon the open achievement of non-hereditary status, with little emphasis upon nobility, clans, or "societies". Village or band leaders represented little authority or prestige beyond the supervision of economic and social activities. Hunting grounds, fishing stations, berrying and root-digging grounds were all common tribal property. The sexual division of labour resembled traditional nomadic hunting and gathering patterns, with tool manufacturing and the procurement of meat and fish being male-oriented activities, and the gathering of roots and berries, and household maintenance being female-oriented activities.

The above description of social organization by Teit (1909:569–575) and Ray (1939) pertains to all but the westernmost divisions of the ethnographic Shuswap. As recorded by Teit (1909:575–583) and Boas (1890), the social organization of the Canyon and Fraser River Divisions, by contact times, had become increasingly influenced by the social systems of the neighbouring Athabascans and Coast Salish, and included such "coastal" institutions as

rank, wealth, hereditary nobility, crest groups, and potlatching. These social patterns reflect still another variant by the Canyon Division to the overall cultural system of the plateau. These people were almost completely sedentary, with most inhabiting the same site both winter and summer, and giving "...all their energies to salmon fishing, the preparation of oil, and trading," and doing "...very little travelling or hunting" (Teit 1909:535).

There was much social intercourse between all the Interior Salish bands, and also with the neighbouring Nicolas, Chilcotins, Carriers, and Kutenais. Sharing of common hunting and fishing grounds, trading of food stuffs, skins, utilitarian and wealth items, and the selling of slaves (Teit 1909:536) were reasons for bringing people together, and this often resulted in intermarriage (Teit 1909:468).

The Kamloops Division had the most intercourse of any of the Shuswap divisions, because of its central location and relatively easy access by water. Teit (1909:536) records that they traded dentalia, copper, marmot and rabbit skin robes, dressed moose and caribou skins, snowshoes, and a little paint with the Okanagan and Thompson, in exchange for certain kinds of roots, Indian-hemp bark and thread, dried salmon, salmon oil, woven bags and baskets, buffalo robes, parfleches, wampum beads, and horses.

Warfare, based upon revenge, plunder, or as a means of acquiring distinction, was also practised by the Interior Salish, but was conducted only by small raiding parties (Teit 1900:267-271; Smith 1900:406-407).

The introduction of the horse late in the eighteenth century (Teit 1909:533) created much change in the social and economic structure of the Shuswaps. The possession of good and many horses became "...the most important element of wealth and social prominence" (Dawson 1892: 14). The horse must have also been a factor in increased mobility and greater diffusion of cultural elements between bands (Ray 1939:137).

The advent of the early contact period saw the elimination of at least two-thirds of the aboriginal population (Teit 1909:463-466; Mayne 1861:216). The estimated population size of the Kamloops Division in 1850 was approximately 900 individuals, and of the entire Shuswap tribe was about 7200 individuals. Teit (1909:463) states that the latter figure was "...probably less than one-third of what it was fifty years ago", and he attributes smallpox epidemics to be the primary cause of the decrease. Coinciding with this decline in population was the partial or complete loss of traditional subsistence patterns, and of aboriginal political, social, and religious values.