

Nak'azdli 'ink'ez Tl'azt'en Wheni noh bulh yas'ulhtuk

Nak'azdli and Tl'azten: We Are Telling You



northern health
the northern way of caring





Northern Health is committed to partnering with First Nations and Aboriginal peoples and to building a health system that honours diversity and provides services in a culturally safe and relevant manner. Aboriginal Health supports Northern Health in this commitment.

Guiding Principles:

1. Respect diversity and the unique interests of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples.
2. Support the inclusion and participation of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Health care system.
3. Incorporate Indigenous knowledge(s) and holistic approaches.
4. Facilitate partnerships, collaborations and capacity building.
5. Ensure relevant initiatives and activities by reflecting the needs of those being served.
6. Build on the strengths of communities.

This publication is the result of a partnership between Northern Health, Nak'azdli Whut'en and Tl'azten First Nation.

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Cover photo, 'Tl'azten smokehouse' Smokehouse in Taché



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Tl'azt'en

The village of Taché takes its name from Tizli, which means upper inlet of a creek or river, and Ché, which means river or creek outlet. Similarly, Binché means “mouth of Bin Tizli” (Pinchi Creek).

In 1959 the Federal government amalgamated four communities (Taché, Binché, Yekooche, and Dzit'andli [Middle River]) into one Band, called then the Stuart-Trembleur Band. The purpose was to make it easier for the Department of Indian Affairs to liaise with the Chief and Council, without having to travel to disparate communities. The Stuart-Trembleur Band, based out of Taché, was meant to provide all of the services for all four communities.

In 1987, Stuart-Trembleur officially changed its name to Tl'azt'en Nation to better reflect its own identity. In 1994 Yekooche decided to separate from Tl'azt'en Nation as it entered into treaty negotiations with the Federal and Provincial governments (under the BC Treaty Process).

Tl'azt'en Nation is a non-treaty First Nations Band with a population of approximately 1700 members. There are approximately 900 Band members living in the three communities of Taché, Binché, and Dzit'andli, with Taché being the largest.

Tl'azt'en Nation receives transfer funds from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for the following services:

Band Administration – this includes the Executive Director covering general administration and Finance

Band Council – representatives from all three communities form the Band Council. There is one chief, four Council members from Taché, two from Binché, and one from Dzit'andli. The Council is elected through a Custom Election Code.

Education – provides services for all ages enrolled in school, from daycare through to post-secondary education. High school students take a bus from Tl'azt'en Nation to Fort St. James to attend school but Taché has its own elementary school.

Social Development – provides social assistance to community members that are not employed and over the age of 19. It also supports community members with employment planning and accessing other resources to gain employment or reach education goals.

Operations and Maintenance – responsible for all public buildings, sewer lines and water.

Tl'azt'en also has funding to provide services such as Health, which is under the First Nations Health Authority. Tl'azt'en Health also has contracts with the Ministry of Child and Family Services and the Justice Institute to provide programs and services to Band members.

Tl'azt'en was involved in the BC Treaty Process for many years. It had to withdraw from the process and is currently working toward self-government through other means. The Tl'azt'en territory as represented by the map reflects the territories used by Tl'azt'en members to continue their traditional activities and which were acquired through inherent right.



View of Taché



Tl'azt'en Education Centre offers training programs, adult education and career counselling

Nak'azdli

Nak'azdli Whut'en is a non-treaty First Nation located adjacent to Fort St. James, BC. It has eighteen reserves in total in and around Fort St. James. Most people live on Indian Reserve (IR) #1 which is separated from Fort St. James by Kwah Road. There are also a few families on IR #1A up the North Road at Four-Mile and William's Prairie Meadow.

The current population of Nak'azdli is close to 2000 members though only about 700 live "on-reserve." Most of those living "off-reserve" live in Fort St. James or Prince George. There is also a significant population in Vancouver but Band Members are scattered throughout BC and beyond.

Nak'azdli receives funding from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) based on its population. The money is to pay for the various programs available to Band Members (see Community Relations) but the programs are targeted at those living on-reserve. The one instance where this restriction is not enforced is in regard to education funding; those living off-reserve can apply for funding to go to school.

Currently the Nak'azdli departments include:

- Capital Housing and Lands – responsible for rental housing, land use, and leases on reserve as well as all capital projects
- Band Council – the eight councillors elected to Council oversee the financial management of the Band Administration
- Band Administration – the finance department and various support positions working at the Band Office
- Education – responsible for all areas of education for Band Members plus the daycare
- Social Development – provide Social Assistant services and programs to Band Members
- Economic Development – investigates economic opportunities for the Band

- Operations and Maintenance – responsible for the general maintenance of the Reserve and Band-owned properties

There are also departments that are not funded with AANDC funds:

- Recreation – activities and events for families and children; often these activities are open to everyone.
- Nak'azdli Education and Training Services (NETS) – part of the National Aboriginal Training initiatives
- Natural Resources – responsible for handling issues surrounding industrial activities in the traditional territory, environmental monitoring, land use research, and liaising with community
- Nak'azdli Justice Centre – a program funded by Federal and Provincial sources to assist people in areas of the justice system and to provide programs to reduce criminal activity

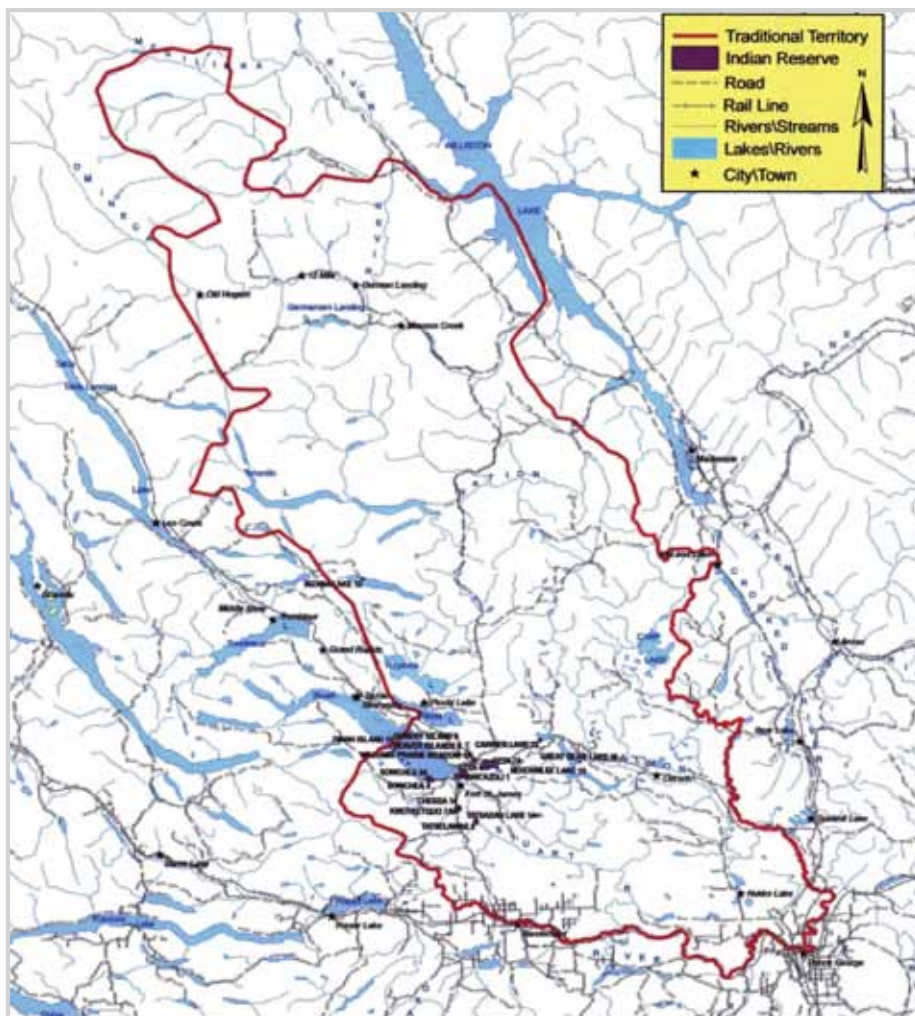
Nak'azdli also has its own Health Centre that was recently accepted for accreditation by Accreditation Canada. Along with two health nurses and numerous health programs, the Health Centre also provides a nurse practitioner and visiting health professionals. There are close to 80 people who work in these various departments with seasonal fluctuations.



View of Nak'al Bun (Stuart Lake) from Stuart River Bridge

There are a number of businesses owned or partially owned by Nak'azdli through the Nak'azdli Development Corporation (NDC). NDC owned companies include Sana'aih Market (pronounced Sa – na – eye, the name means sunset), Carrier Food and Fuel (“Petro”), Mount Pope Greenhouse, and Nahoonli Creek Gas Bar (FasGas). It is joint owner of Ti'oh Forest Products (closed in the summer of 2015), Nus De Environmental Services, and Jaboon Holdings. These businesses employ approximately 110 people.

Nak'azdli was involved in the BC Treaty Process. After several years of negotiations, Nak'azdli withdrew from the process as it was not progressing in an acceptable manner. The map here represents the traditional territory as it was identified while involved in treaty negotiations. All families in Nak'azdli were interviewed to determine their access to various keyoh for hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering, and general use. This map represents the area used by Nak'azdli Band members. Some of the areas are covered by traplines owned by Band members as well. There is overlap with neighbouring Bands because families intermarried and gained access to their spouse's territories.



Identity

What is Dakelh culture?

We are all the subject and object of our culture. We learn from birth how to think, act, speak, and identify ourselves. The fact that we are of the same species and genus throughout the world but manifest our surroundings and societies in a variety of ways is what makes this world fascinating. It is what fuels travel and study. People are not always aware of what constitutes their culture. In modern western thought, culture is often used to refer to art, theatre, literature, and dance. Culture is all that we think and do, including speech. Just like we all think we don't have accents, that other people do, we think our culture is "normal" and that others are "different."

Dakelhne did not have a writing tradition and even today write very little about their culture. We have an oral tradition and there is great importance placed on remembering stories and telling stories. Children are taught to listen from a young age and are told stories over and over again. These stories relate to events, people, supernatural events, moral stories, and stories that explain how the world came to be.

Some anthropologists have studied Dakelhne living around Nak'al Bun (Stuart Lake); there was a particular interest in the land-holding or keyoh systems of the area. Because of the presence of the fur trade post at Fort St. James, there has been significant observation of Dakelhne in post journals and correspondence. One of the earliest attempts to record Dakelh history, culture and language was undertaken by Father A.G. Morice, a missionary with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Father Morice wrote extensively while living in Fort St. James and continued to write even after leaving the region. The information he gathered and his efforts to record the language provide valuable information to researchers today but the information contained within his works do contain some biases and views of Aboriginal people as "primitive."

The theory of primitivism is largely discarded today but it was a major thought throughout the latter

Explorers and fur traders were able to travel across and throughout Canada because they quickly understood the benefits of hiring Aboriginal guides to lead them through the landscape.

Alexander Mckenzie, a fur trade explorer who traveled across Canada in 1793, noted:

At the commencement of this conversation, I was very much surprised by the following question from one of the Indians: 'What,' demanded he, 'can be the reason that you are so particular and anxious in your inquiries of us respecting a knowledge of this country: do not you white men know every thing in the world?' This interrogatory was so very unexpected, that it occasioned some hesitation before I could answer it. At length, however, I replied, that we certainly were acquainted with the principal circumstances of every part of the world; that I know where the sea is, and where I myself then was, but that I did not exactly understand what obstacles might interrupt me in getting to it; with which, he and his relations must be well acquainted, as they had so frequently surmounted them. This I fortunately preserved the impression in their minds, of the superiority of the white people over themselves. (W.K. Lamb (Ed.) (1970). The journals and letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Cambridge: Hakluyt Society.)

It's debatable whether or not "the superiority of the white man" was preserved in this instant or not.



Our Lady of Good Hope was built by Nak'azdli and Tl'azt'en members. It opened in 1873 but is no longer in use

half of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. There are contrasts between cultures but dismissing one culture as being less than another results in ignorance, not insight. The fact that Dakelhne lived in a rich but harsh landscape for millennia, attests to their sophisticated knowledge of their environment and how to make it work for them. For the first one hundred years of Native /non-Native relations, it was the Dakelhne way of life that sustained both peoples. This was the case in numerous fur trade posts throughout Canada.

Dakelh culture is tied to the land. In the traditional culture, all families have ties to certain hunting and fishing territories, handed down to them through family inheritance. These territories provide a variety of foodstuffs, building materials, firewood, and furs. Families have camps for various activities – fishing, hunting, berry picking, etc. When the resources were available, all family members participate in the work needed to create large food stores for winter. In the past this work meant survival and today, many people continue to rely on hunting and fishing for their winter supplies. The opportunity to hunt and fish enables people to visit their territory and reconnect with the land. Until the 1950s or so, people spent a lot of time in their territory, in camps or in small trapper cabins, but today most people work so can visit their territory only on weekends or on holidays.

In a culture where everything was available literally at one's doorstep, it is the possession of knowledge rather than the possession of things that is valued. In the past, the community was just as diverse as it is today. Everyone had their specialty and the ability to trade products and skills contributed to the overall function of the community. No one person could have the skills it took to hunt, tan hides, make snowshoes, preserve berries, fish, sew clothing, make fish traps, make beaver nets, make baskets, make arrow and spear point, and so on. In addition to all the crafts and trades people, there were people identified as shamans. These people were recognized as having exceptional skills and knowledge but in a variety of areas. Some were healers, others had the gift of foresight, others could help people with mental or psychological problems, and others could correct people who

Primitivism

Eighteenth century philosophers were challenging the view that God was the centre of the universe and dictated all that happened therein. How the long-held Christian beliefs began to change is a discussion too lengthy for this booklet. Alongside the idea that perhaps God did not create the world and everything in it, theorists also began to consider the various states of man and how they fit in to the world order. Many people are familiar with the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin, that of "survival of the fittest." There were many other philosophers offering up their own insights into why people were so different in different parts of the world.

There were basically two streams of thought regarding human evolution. One idea was that in some regions of the world, people remained closer to nature and so their society remained pure and simple. These theorists considered this "natural state" of man to be an ideal state and that cultures living in European cities needed reconnect with a simpler way of being. From these theorists we get the idea of the "Noble Savage" and the "Indian Princess."

Other theorists maintained that cultures that did not mirror that of the European – having concepts of private property, capitalist economies, based on agriculture and trade – were simply in a state of lower evolution. Their fate was to evolve gradually into sophisticated beings living in cities and towns and involved in myriad of activities. They believed that all cultures, given the opportunity and time, would gradually evolve to resemble the European culture.

It was this second thought that proved to be rather destructive to Aboriginal communities in Canada though both approaches created many stereotypes. Travelers, explorers, and missionaries visited Canada and returned to Europe with stories and images of Aboriginal peoples living in a "primitive" state and in need of saving. Great human effort and money was spent sending missionaries to Canada to save Aboriginal people from themselves and to raise them to a European standard of living. This ultimately became the foundation for residential schools as a thorough effort to "kill the Indian in the child" (a quote often attributed to Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott). Dakelhne confront the view that they need to "become Canadian" all the time but there is little desire to abandon their culture so the position is pointless.





Currently people catch fish in nets, left overnight in the water and retrieved early in the morning, before the heat of the day and recreation boaters

had gone wayward or who were a danger to themselves or society. Some were recognized for their ability to predict the weather. Even when a hunter ran in to a dry spell, they could consult someone who would help them correct whatever it was that was causing such bad luck in the hunt.

Many aspects of traditional culture carry on in to today. They may not be easily recognizable to many because the cultural traits manifest themselves in a modern context. As an example, people have observed that Dakelhne don't "take care" of things. They get new items and they don't seem to last. The problem is not that Dakelhne don't care about their possessions, but rather that they do not necessarily cherish them. Things come and they go. This is a reflection of a deep-seated relationship to objects that has not been erased by modern consumerism. In a culture where people made things to replace those broken or lost, there was no need to develop deep attachments to things. People do have things they cherish but normally not day-to-day items.

Another example of how these cultural traits are manifested today is the reliance on one another within the community. It is not uncommon for a person to be told, "go see so-and-so," when confronted with a problem or with a need to get something done. It is not considered weak or needy to ask for help. Certain people in the community become known for their ability to help in situations and are respected as such. Each family also has a main spokesperson who is asked to speak at events or on important matters.

It is common to see Dakelhne taking care of children not their own. Aunties, uncles, and grandparents will take in their nieces, nephews, and grandchildren and help to raise them. This is often as a result of the parents having difficulties keeping a good house for the children. In traditional times, a family with many children would sometimes give one child to a childless couple – sometimes for only a few years to help out, other times for the child's entire life. The child would grow up knowing the situation and did not feel cast out or abandoned by their parents.

Non-Dakelhne are sometimes frustrated by the Dakelhne appearance of being complacent about events or situations. This, too, stems from deep cultural understanding of the world and how Dakelhne fit in to it. In a culture so deeply tied to the environment, there is no situation that can be solved by railing against the system or shaking a fist at the world. There are situations that require a person to wait until a solution comes, either in the manner of a person to help or in an idea of how to resolve the matter. In the times when people do appear angry or confrontational over an event, it is often because of behaviours taught through the residential school system or its after-effects. People who are very grounded in their tradition never scream and yell or make a big scene.

Dakelh culture centres on the family and the clan. People are taught to be loyal to both and understand their obligations to both. In the non-Dakelh world, nepotism is seen as a bad thing. To Dakelhne, it is completely normal to take care of family and clan as much as possible. Modern Dakelh work places understand the need to avoid situations of nepotism but the idea of taking care of “one’s own” remains intact. For this reason, family members will sometimes insert themselves into situations that others might think is “none of their business.” This thought as it relates to family, does not make sense to Dakelhne. Almost everything is everyone’s business. Where this does not happen is in events where something terrible has happened or someone has behaved in a manner that may be punishable. In this instance, it may appear to non-Dakelhne that everyone is aloof and refusing to be involved. This response is tied to the feeling of loyalty and protection of the family.

As peculiar as Dakelhne may appear to outsiders, Dakelhne observe the peculiarities of non-Aboriginal people. Dakelhne have some advantage, however; they have observed the non-Aboriginal world through school curriculum, tv shows, movies, book, etc. and have some understanding of the non-Aboriginal world view and values. The reverse is not true. Dakelhne have become the “other” in their own land.

Pan-Indianism

Since first encounters between Aboriginal people and newcomers, there have been misconceptions about Aboriginal people. This has been well documented in a number of publications and articles. Today there is good information about Aboriginal people but the view of Aboriginal people is sometimes tilted by the pan-Indian movement.

Pan-Indianism is the view that Aboriginal people are all spiritual, are all environmentalist, are all healers, smudge themselves, pray to the Creator, have no impact on the world around them, and consider tobacco, eagles, drums, etc. as sacred. It is from this movement that the idea that all older Aboriginal people are “Elders” whereas in the past, Elder was a term used for older people who had specific knowledge or skills valuable to the community. These ideas come from practices of specific groups melded together to create an all-encompassing “Indian” who is all things. As generations of Aboriginal people are born and grow up outside their traditional cultures, this view of Aboriginal culture manifests as Aboriginal culture. People also encounter pan-Indianism through modern institutions such as prisons, friendship centres, and universities. A number of “spiritual healers” have also embraced Aboriginal traditions as healing measures in the New Age movement.

It is important to know that Aboriginal people are as diverse as people in Europe or Asia. There are many different cultures throughout Canada and they have cultural practices that differ tremendously from one another. For example, one Kwakwaka’wakw Elder pointed this out when asked to conduct a prayer at a meeting in Ottawa. She replied, “you don’t want that because it would require everyone here to take off their clothes and jump in the river!” Those attending the meeting were expecting a spoken prayer and a smudge of sweetgrass. It is dangerous to assume that traditions and practices are the same everywhere. But also, don’t be surprised to see that some elements of pan-Indianism appear on reserves or other Aboriginal communities.

As an example, in traditional culture Dakelhne practiced purification ceremonies not unlike those found elsewhere. These ceremonies required an individual to enter in to a sweat lodge but those of the Dakelh are very small, only fitting one person. The individual enters into the sweat for a period of time. Upon emerging, their skin is scraped with



stick to remove all the sweat and dirt. Then the person may enter the water and bathe. When the individual is considered clean, he/she will put on clean (often newly made) clothing. Once dressed, the person walks over a small fire upon which tree bracket fungi, gathered and dried for this purpose, is burned to create a smudge. The person walks over this fire four times, in each of the four directions. The sweat and bathing cleansed the physical person and the smudge cleansed the mind of the person, ridding them of impure thoughts and bringing their prayers up to the sky.

Purification ceremonies were performed when a person undertook a rite of passage, moving from one stage of life to another. They were also used in healing ceremonies, especially for ailments of the skin and lungs. They weren't done whenever a person felt like it and they were never done communally.

Today there are few if any people who undertake a purification ceremony but some people have adopted the Ojibway /Cree form of communal sweats. This they do for their own personal reasons and do not necessarily relate to rites of passage.



Eugene Joseph School has pupils from kindergarten to grade 7. High school kids are bussed in to Fort St. James to attend school

Dakelh Protocol / Etiquette

To outsiders, the view of life on a reserve may appear quite foreign. Everyone appears to know one another or to be related. Anyone who spends more than a few minutes with Nak'azdli't'en or Tl'azt'enne, realize how much people seem to laugh and joke with one another. Or sometimes people will sit together and say nothing, which can feel quite awkward to non-Dakelhne. The social cues non-Dakelhne understand as "normal" are different amongst Dakelhne.

Here are a few pointers to help navigate social and business interactions on reserve:

- When invited to someone's home, you don't need to bring a gift. If you do, bring something useful like some tea or cookies, not flowers. Don't bring anything too exotic, especially if visiting an older person. They will not appreciate an imported balsamic vinegar as much as a tin of cookies.
- When invited to someone's home, they will probably offer you something to eat or drink. Accept some tea or coffee. It's okay to refuse food but not if they are sitting down to eat a meal. In that case, a person should eat with the person or family. Don't make a fuss, just accept the food and eat it. If you are offered "Indian Ice-Cream" and don't like it, it is fine to say so. The host may have a laugh at your expense but it's nothing to fret about. Indian Ice-Cream, or Ningwus, is an acquired taste and not everyone likes it.
- When invited to a person's home and they don't answer the door, it is fine to go around the house looking for them in the back yard or in their smokehouse. Or if the person has mobility issues, it is okay to open the door and call out "hello!" rather than wait for someone to open the door.
- When invited to someone's home, don't be surprised if there are other people there. Unlike non-Dakelhne who control their interactions with family and friends, Dakelhne are accepting that people will come by at any time. There is little concept of "interrupting" so if other people come by

while a visit is taking place, they may be accommodated and not asked to come back later.

- Don't expect to shake hands with everyone that you meet. Wait for cues from the individual on whether or not to shake hands. Dakelhne don't feel the same obligations to shake hands when meeting; sometimes a simple "hello" is all that is required.
- If the situation is that people are waiting for something to start, there is no need to create chitchat. Dakelhne do not feel the need to talk all the time and many feel awkward making "small talk" with strangers. Nor do they feel the need to ask, "how are you?" everytime they meet someone. Dakelhne sometimes say "su int'oh" to which people respond, "su est'oh." This translates "you are well?" and "I am well." If they really want to know how a person is, they will ask "é daint'oh," which is a question asking after a person's health or situation.
- When at a meeting or gathering, Dakelhne will sometimes speak, pause, and then continue. For this reason, one should wait a short time before responding, just to make sure the person is finished speaking. On occasion, someone will speak and no one will respond. This is normal – not every statement must be acknowledged or receive a reply. Don't feel an obligation to fill in a silence.
- Dakelhne are connected through family ties, regardless of how far back they may go. For this reason, Dakelhne will often introduce themselves by their name and their parent's name and sometimes their grandparents names. They will usually identify their clan as well.
- Dakelhne may ask you about your children or family. They are not prying. For Dakelhne, family is very important so they view talking about family as a way to get to know people.
- When a community member is in the hospital, it is common for friends and neighbours to visit, not just the family. For younger people to visit an older person, it is often out of respect rather than to socialize.

Dakelhne place a lot of importance in spending time together so trips to Prince George will often include time to stop by the hospital to see someone who has been admitted.

- In a situation where Dakelhne laugh at a person in response to something that has happened or been said, this is not meant to be offensive. Dakelhne like to laugh and will take the opportunity as they see it. It is not considered mean or belittling to have a laugh at someone's expense and Dakelhne appreciate those who can laugh at themselves.
- It is uncomfortable for Dakelhne when an interaction turns into an anthropological interview. Even if you are interested in Aboriginal culture, be sure not to grill people about every aspect of their culture or what they are doing. If someone says something like, "geez you're nosey," and laughs, this is a cue that you have gone too far in your questioning. If you want to learn about cultural activities, offer to help and follow the instructions carefully.
- Dakelhne are a tight knit group and like to bug one another and laugh at one another. It is uncommon to see a group of Dakelhne quiet. The only time this happens is when the group is uncomfortable, usually because there is a stranger in the group.

If you feel like you don't understand a situation or what is expected in terms of behaviour or action, it is fine to ask for information or assistance.

Clan system and Bahlats

There is some debate about the origin of the clan system and Bahlats (potlatch) amongst Dakelhne of Nak'al Bun. Regardless of where it comes from, it exists and has been here for a very long time. Fur trade journals describe attending feasts and sometimes identify the feasts as having purposes such as "honoring the dead" or "taking a name." They did not use the term potlatch or Bahlats (as it is now called in Dakelh) but the descriptions of feast mirror those of contemporary Bahlats.



John McLean (1932: 157) writing in the 1830s describes a feast at Nak'azdli:

“ Immense quantities of roasted meat, bear, beaver, siffleu or marmot, were piled up at intervals, the whole length of the building; berries mixed up with rancid salmon oil, fish roe that had been buried underground a twelve-month, in order to give it an agreeable flavor, were the good things presented at this feast of gluttony and flow of oil. ”

Today, almost all Bahlats occur in relations to settling the estate of the deceased. When a person dies, a number of things happen. The deceased person is waked, usually from two to three days. The deceased person's clan goes in to mourning along with the family. People belonging to other clans are “hired” to do the work during the wake, such as prepare food, serve people food, pick people up from their homes to attend the wake and drive them home again, and so on. Some families prefer to avoid funeral homes and will have the coffin made by local carpenters, and people will be hired to bath and dress the body.

While all this is happening, the clan of the deceased will begin contributing money on behalf of a deceased. A “bookkeeper” (again from an outside clan) will collect the money and write down the names of those who contribute. Friends and family of the deceased who do not belong to the clan can contribute money by stating “gift, no return.” Otherwise, non-clan members who contribute to the estate will be reimbursed at the Bahlats, all their money plus “interest.” This can be costly so it is avoided when possible.

After the deceased is laid to rest, the clan and family will meet to discuss the Bahlats. They will pick a date, usually one year from the funeral. This gives everyone time to begin buying and making items that will be given away in the person's honour. Everyone in the clan is expected to contribute what they can. Those working may buy Bahlats gifts rather than make them and those who do not have much money may prefer to make things. Even with little money, people can make things like dried fish and meat, or make jam to be given away.



Once cleaned, salmon are hung in the smoke house for several hours to make them easier to cut up.

In the past, the Bahlats host went from door to door to invite people. This is not always done today. Rather, posters are put up in public spaces detailing the time and date of the Bahlats. On occasion, the Bahlats is identified as a Dinner/Payout which is a simpler version of the Bahlats.

Non-Dakelhne are invited to Bahlats and are normally seated with a clan. The person doing the seating will try to find an agreeable person to help the non-Dakelhne understand what is going on during the event.

On the day of the Bahlats, everyone gathers at the hall. All of the gifts are placed in the centre so everyone can see what will be given away. The Bookkeeper sits at a table with all the money arranged; some people contribute on the day of the Bahlats so there is a lot of counting that needs to be done. Clan leaders will help the family decide how much to pay everyone who helped the deceased and the deceased's family. So much money will go to the person who built the coffin, to those who helped wash and dress the body, those who transported the body, to those who cooked and served at the wake, and so on. The amount of money given away depends on the amount contributed by the clan. There is no right or wrong amount – the money that comes in is distributed.

When guests arrive at the Bahlats, they are seated according to their clan. The host clan does not sit, or sits off to the side, out of the way. Once everyone is seated, they are served

food and everyone eats except the host clan. Symbolically, it is now their turn to serve everyone who served them during their period of mourning. Once everyone has eaten, the remaining food is distributed so that people can bring it home. Some people bring food containers from home for this purpose but today, the host clan will also have take-away containers for this purpose.

Once the eating is finished, the business of the Bahlats begins. The Speaker will talk about the deceased for a while then will begin the process of paying for all the people who helped. Along with those hired, people may also be paid for such things as visiting the deceased in the hospital, or helping with the family while the person was sick. The Speaker will hold the money in the air, explain what the payment is for, say how much is given, and the money will be delivered to the recipient. If there are special gifts for this person, the gifts are also announced before being given to the recipient.

Once everyone has been paid, the Speaker will announce how much was given out altogether. One of the key aspects of the Bahlats is that all the business is witnessed by the clans so that no one can criticize the activities later on. Everything is done openly so that there are no suspicions after the fact. The purpose of a memorial Bahlats is to settle the accounts of the deceased. All debts, whether financial or social, have to be cleared.

After this is done, there may be other business that needs to be taken care of. Someone from the host clan may wish to pay someone for some reason and will announce it. Depending on the situation, the clan may join in and contribute money towards the payment. If so, they line up or dance up and give their money to the Speaker who will announce their name and how much they contribute. This is called ahwull. Common today is to have an ahwull to pay for the hall. In this instance, everyone can contribute, not just those belonging to the host clan. This is an opportunity for non-clan members to participate, which many people enjoy, giving them the opportunity to dance, sing, make jokes, and so on.

Once all of the business is concluded, the gifts that were heaped in the middle of the room are

distributed. The host clan will pick up items and start passing them out to the guests. The general rule for gifts is that there is food, items for the household (e.g. blankets, towels, etc.) and items for the person (e.g. socks, gloves, etc.). After all of the gifts are distributed, the Bahlats concludes and people take their gifts and go home.

It is very important for people to participate in the Bahlats system. If the community sees a person help and participate in clan events, the clan will support that person when it is their turn to have a Bahlats or it is the person's memorial Bahlats. People are expected only to give as much as they can but they should give something.

In the past there were many more reasons to have a Bahlats. Clans held them to mark important rites of passage. The Bahlats was banned in the Indian Act from 1881 to 1951. In addition, generations of people attending residential school had a negative impact on the importance of the Bahlats in community life. There is some misperception among non-Dakelhne that the Bahlats is a sacred or ceremonial practice. Certainly the Bahlats is very meaningful to Dakelhne but its primary function is to take care of the business of the clan. A memorial Bahlats may be filled with prayers, songs, and dancing but its ultimate purpose is to settle estates.



Fireweed



Dakelh Clan System

There are three main clans in the Nak'azdli – Tl'azt'en region: Lusilyu, Lhtsumusyu, and Kwun Bun Whut'en. Through intermarriage, other clans have come into the region such as the Wolf or Bear clans (Lax Kibu or Tsayu). The clans also have the names "Japan," "Polly Welson," and "Grand Trunk." These were names given to the clans by a storekeeper in Taché many years ago and some people still use these terms.

Lhtsumusyu has a Beaver as its symbol and uses the colour black. You will hear people call it the Beaver Clan and it is the largest clan in the region. The historical figure Chief Kwah was of the Lhtsumusyu clan and a lot of the territory around the southern end of Stuart Lake and Stuart River belongs to the Lhtsumusyu clan.

Lusilyu has for its symbol the frog and its colour is white. It is sometimes referred to as the Frog Clan. It is the second largest clan in the region with extensive keyoh in the northern parts of the territory.

Kwun Ba Whut'en gets its name from Fire Lake (Kwun Bun) and is considered the oldest of the clans. Their symbol is the caribou and they use the colours red, white, and blue. There are few in this clan at Nak'azdli but are more populous

in the Tl'azt'en region and farther north into the Takla Lake region.

People are born into the clan of their mother and those belonging to the same clan are considered kin. For this reason, in traditional times, people were not permitted to marry into the same clan. Marrying into a different clan also ensured that the family had access to more than one hunting territory in the event that one territory was not productive in any given year. Up until very recently, marriages were arranged and families made strategic decisions about how their children should be connected to certain families.

People can "cross the floor" and become a member of a different clan but this is a very expensive proposition so is done only when the family considers it absolutely necessary. Reasons for crossing the floor are usually tied to inheritance of certain keyoh or taking on an hereditary chief title.

When someone marries a person without a clan, the spouse will be adopted into a clan to ensure the family has access to additional territories. It is also beneficial for the Bahlats system as throughout the year, both spouses will be expected to contribute to a Bahlats but will also be on the receiving end at a Bahlats. Everything evens out eventually.



Children at Nak'al Bun cutting up salmon as part of hands-on learning experience each September

Family Relations

Even though almost all Dakelhne now live in villages or in urban areas, their culture remains tied to the environment and camp living. This is recognized in the family dynamics and obligations towards one another. Within the household, there may be several generations living together. Each adult maintains a role in the household. Their income, whether through work, social assistance, or old age pension, contributes toward the household. This is especially true with some of the poorer families. While the living conditions may not be ideal – many people sharing a small house, for example – the realities of modern living give people few options to live completely independently. Given that this type of living arrangement has been going on for generations, it is not considered dysfunctional or unhealthy.

Because the culture centres on these family units, children are taught from a very young age that there are expectations placed upon them. Even small children are given tasks and are assumed to have a certain level of understanding and capability. While in a Euro-Canadian environment, having small children of 6 or 7 mind toddlers or even babies is considered dangerous, it is not amongst the Dakelhne. In the close household environment, children witness all of the activities of the household and learn by observing and participating. Of course, the nature of the child is considered when assigning tasks. A hyperactive child would not be given the job of watching a baby; instead this child might be given physical work to do like carrying wood or bailing out the boat.

In a society where children participate in household activities at a young age, the concern for potential dangers are not as high as found in today's Canadian households. It is completely normal for Canadian children to grow up today with no scars, not having broken a bone, or suffered serious illnesses. No Dakelh parent wants their child to be injured but rather than avoiding work that may contain some danger (e.g. cutting kindling), children are taught to be careful. When Dakelh parents caution their children, they can sound angry. This tone of voice is used to imply

danger and is used to create a level of fear in children. This is a fear not of the parents, but rather a heightened awareness of the potential danger of the activity.

Amongst Dakelhne, it's generally accepted that families have hierarchies. Older children will boss around younger children with little or no consequences. Older children have more responsibilities and have been involved in raising the younger children so consider themselves as having more authority. When children are being taught new skills like hunting or fishing, they are first given all the menial and unimportant jobs. They may have to do these jobs for years before they can move up to do more challenging tasks. The delay may be because they are not demonstrating the maturity or skill to move up or it may simply be a matter that there are no vacancies in the positions higher up.



Baby Welcoming Ceremony. Each year, new babies are presented to the community with their lineage recited so that everyone knows who they are. The babies are then passed to each Elder and welcomed to the community.



Wash fish that has been gutted and hang on smokehouse poles



Bring fish to smokehouse and hang; keep smokehouse fire going



Set net and take fish from the net



Clean fish and cut for smokehouse



make dry fish, canned fish, and cut fish for freezer



Abilities and responsibilities associated with catching and preparing salmon as an example of how people move throughout different levels of activities. Age and experience allow people to move into new tasks in processing fish. People new to fishing (most often children) will have the job of washing the blood and slime off gutted fish then putting the fish on the smokehouse poles. As they get older, they will be given opportunities to do more tasks and learn alongside others. Ultimately, they will do their tasks well and teach others.

Even amongst the adults, there are hierarchies. Families may have one or more individuals who are considered strong and authoritative or with special skills. In the event that parents feel they need a stronger person to take control of a situation, they may call on this person to assist or intervene.

Dakelhne have their own systems for discipline and accountability within the family and society. The greatest offense causes shame so shame must be avoided. Shame is used to correct behaviour and to create expectations on children. It may seem cruel to see people pointing and laughing at a child who has done something wrong but in a culture where this is viewed as proper corrective action, it does not have the same resonance as to those outside the culture. As children grow and learn how to behave, something

as simple as someone gasping and saying “umm” will correct behaviour. This is tied to the society as a whole because someone bringing shame on the family or clan may require the family or clan to pay for the shame (in order to erase the shame). For this reason, it is important for children to understand what constitutes proper behaviour to avoid bringing shame to the family or the individual.

The understanding of how people were meant to behave within their family and within the community were reinforced with stories. The stories usually involved someone who did something bad and was punished in some way. Often these stories had to do with gambling or mistreating one's wife and children, being cruel to animals or people, and being too arrogant.

Within families, male and female expectations and obligations are different. The modern concept of all children being the same is not always recognized by Dakelh families. Boys and girls have very different chores and responsibilities within the household. There may be some overlap if the family has an imbalance in the number of sons and daughters but even then, the crossover in chores will go only so far. If a family has a lot of girls, girls may be expected to do boy's chores such as cut kindling and pack wood. But they will not be expected to hunt or navigate boats. Boys will rarely be asked to do jobs normally associated with girls, such as cooking or washing dishes. Some of this has changed very recently but it is rare.

Within families, there were many rules about interaction between male and female members. Girls and women were often forbidden to touch guns and traps or even to touch a man who was a hunter. Girls were not permitted to step over boys or men as it was believed to bring bad luck in hunting. The reason for the restrictions for females was because they were considered to hold certain powers that could overcome those of men. As an example, if a man was having a difficult time in hunting, he would have a pre-pubescent girl shoot his rifle. This would cause the gun to shoot straight and the hunter would be successful again. Boys and men hunt and fish but they are not supposed to go into the smoke house to cut up fish and meat; this is the domain of women. Some of these restrictions still exist and are not challenged as sexist or misogynist. They have served Dakelhne for generations so there is little desire to change.

Community Relations

Tl'azt'en and Nak'azdli both function under the Elected Chief and Council System. Elections are held according to custom election codes but do not vary too much away from the Indian Act system.

The role of Band Chief is complicated. This person must represent the Band on any discussions regarding legislation or agreements that impact on the community. An example of this would be the Chief participating in discussions about the changes in Indian Act legislation affecting schools on reserves. Another example would be the Chief

participating in negotiations with the government to receive compensation for a mine being constructed within the traditional territory. The Chief is also expected to participate in discussions of issues at a provincial and national level, such as those of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the First Nations Summit, the First Nations Health Authority, and the Assembly of First Nations.

The Band Chief is also someone who is called upon to participate in community events. Tl'azt'en and Nak'azdli have numerous community events throughout the year, from workshops to community dinners. Almost all events involve eating a meal together and at Christmas and during the Annual General Assembly, there is normally a big dinner and entertainment.

Families or individuals experiencing hardships may call on the Chief for assistance or direction. In the past, people were expected only to ask for help from their clan. This system has broken down for some people who don't mind going to the Band Administration for help. It's a tricky situation, however. In an instance where someone needs money to come home for a funeral and the Band provides gas money or a bus ticket, there is no way for the clan to pay for this assistance at the Bahlats, as they are obliged to do.

Both Tl'azt'en and Nak'azdli have significant populations that live "off-reserve." Most moved away because of the serious lack of housing on the reserve and the limited employment opportunities. Many of these people come back to the community from time to time but there are some who have little connection to Nak'azdli or Tl'azt'en. Most often, this is because they grew up in foster care or were adopted so did not have the opportunity to get to know their extended family.



Relation to the Environment

To Dakelhne, the land is everything. It is now and always has been. Some may be critical of the actions of a few in damaging or polluting land but for most Dakelhne, the land is the most important aspect of their culture.

Medicine

There are a variety of medicines used by Dakelhne today but most people rely on western medicine for serious illnesses. During the residential school period, a lot of information about gathering and preparing medicinal plants was lost. This activity required a type of apprenticeship whereby healers would teach acolytes how to gather medicines and prepare them according to the need. The knowledge about where to pick and how was very important. Some of the medicine growing areas were considered sacred and required healers to undertake certain ceremonies in order to pick the medicines. Father Morice identified twenty-seven types of herbs and plants harvested for their medicinal purposes.

Today the concept of using plants for medicines is introduced to children through school programs and field trips. The medicinal information shared in this context is very basic and includes those plants used for common ailments, such as a cold or skin irritation. The Health Centres also have programs to bring people out to pick and prepare their own medicines. Common medicinal plants used today include balsam for skin irritations and ledemischek (Labrador Tea) for colds and flu.

Food

For millennia Dakelhne lived with their food source outside their door. Though this environment is harsh with its mountainous terrain and cold winters, it contains an abundance of food. Because so much of the diet relied on fish and animals, Dakelhne developed sophisticated methods of preserving meat through drying. The dried meat could last for years.

Two major salmon runs enter Nak'al Bun (Stuart Lake). The Early Stuart run arrives near the end of July and the Late Stuart Run arrives near the end of August. Both runs are fished. Today, along with drying fish, people freeze it and can it as well. In

traditional times, families caught hundreds of fish each but with the reduced fish stocks today, not all families fish and they don't process as many fish as their ancestors did.

Moose, elk, deer, bear, and smaller mammals such as beaver and marmot provide both meat and fur or hides. Hides were used to make all clothing in traditional times and today are used to make items such as gloves, moccasins, and jackets. Along with game, Dakelhne women gathered substantial amounts of plant food. Father Morice identified not only berries and bulbs as food sources, but also plant stalks, leaves, lichen, and roots. He named no less than twelve types of berries that were gathered in abundance and dried for winter consumption. In addition, tree sap was harvested and consumed; the cambium of jack pine was harvested extensively until made illegal by BC governmental regulations.

The goal every year was to catch and preserve enough food to last the family the entire winter. Families also contributed to "welfare caches" that were made available to anyone in need as the threat of starvation was always real. People accessed these welfare caches only when in the most dire of circumstances as there was always the possibility that some other family was worse off.

Food was obtained in different parts of the territory. Most families had access to at least two keyoh so in the event a particular year was poor in game populations, they could hunt elsewhere. The annual round included traveling to various



View from the beach at Nak'azdli



camps for periods of time to hunt or harvest food. Dakelhne traditionally recognized five seasons, one being “break up” when the ice was leaving the lakes and rivers.

Today many of the harvesting activities remain but not every family has the ability to spend a lot of time hunting and gathering. They tend to go out on the weekends or during their holiday break to spend time on the land, hunting and gathering. Some families have “trapline cabins” that they use each year while others go on hunting excursions and return home after a few days.

People still fish for salmon each year, using gill nets and boats. Nets are set at twilight and left overnight. They are retrieved early in the morning before the heat of the day arrives and processed at home. Many people have smokehouses near their homes or have access to a smokehouse.

Spiritual Connection

For a culture that relies on the environment for its survival, it makes sense that people feel a spiritual connection to the land. In order to benefit from all that the land could provide, people are very respectful of the fish they catch, animals they kill, and plant material they harvest. Today a lot of people use tobacco and prayer to give thanks but in the past, there were different offerings for different harvests. A cottonwood tree designated to be cut down and made into a dug-out canoe, for example, would be bathed in water for four days before it was cut down. The water was a way of informing the tree that it would soon be living in the water. This level of respect was not a sign that Dakelhne were afraid of their environment, that if they did not do things a certain way they would be punished. But rather they respected all that was given to them and understood that all that the land gave them to keep them warm, fed and healthy was to be appreciated and celebrated, not exploited or misused.

Prior to the introduction of the church and residential schools (and even a few generations afterwards), people understood the power of Nature to provide peace of mind. People who were

suffering, from things as diverse as psychological problems to grief to bad luck in hunting, might be advised to go “out into the bush” for a few days. This journey alone would provide the opportunity to heal oneself. Encounters with animals, dreams, or strange sights would be interpreted as messages, allowing the individual to gain insight into their situation. The journey might involve fasting and prayer or the ingestion of certain medicines. People stayed out on these journeys for as long as they needed. This ability to heal from the land itself stemmed from the Dakelhne profound respect for the land and how it connected to the body and spirit.

Obligation and Ownership

Dakelhne understand the land to be a living entity that requires health just like individual beings and plants. One of the primary jobs of the Uza-ne is to know their territory /keyoh intimately. Uza-ne are chosen at a very young age for their role (sometimes even as babies) and are taught to know all parts of their land. Many family members have access to the keyoh for their family needs but Uza-ne are required to keep track of the land and ensure it is not being over-used. If there was a feeling that stocks were down then families had to access other keyoh available to them through their spouse’s family. (This was one of the reasons for arranged marriages – to ensure that families had access to more than one keyoh in the event of need.)

The twentieth century has seen considerable change in the way people relate to the land but their feelings of obligation to it has not changed very much. At Nak’azdli there has been a gradual reduction of Uza-ne so many keyoh do not have Uza-ne to speak for it. Tl’azt’en has done a better job of maintaining people in the positions of Uza-ne.

Some people have registered traplines on their keyoh and they use that as a system of control. This does not necessarily work within the Bahlats system but it is useful when having to discuss industrial projects proposed on the land and identifying impacts that may be negative to Dakelhne use and enjoyment of the land.



The situation is complicated additionally by the role of Chief and Council and their obligations to represent the Band members. Chief and Council are involved in negotiating impact benefit agreements on behalf of the members and ensuring the benefits are for the entire community.

History

The Indian Act and Reserves

The history of Aboriginal peoples and the formation of the Canadian state is complex. Information provided here can only touch on the subject. Most people are familiar with the story of European explorers happening on to North America in their efforts to find a shipping route to China. For many years European settlement of North America was minimal; much more effort was spent securing fish and furs for European markets so by the mid seventeenth century, there was a large scale fur trade happening in what would become Canada. This early fur trade made use of the extensive trade routes established by Aboriginal people of the St. Lawrence River - Great Lakes region.

British Columbia, being on the western side of North America did not experience any level of exploration until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The West Coast peoples did not have the fur resources the traders sought but by using established trade networks into the interior, they were able to create a viable maritime fur trade. Traders arrived in ships laden with goods; Northwest Coast peoples traded furs they had obtained from the interior for European manufactured items then in turn traveled inland to trade these items for more furs. The current location of Hagwilget /Morice town was a major trading centre.

The fur trade eventually established forts in the region, the main fort being Fort St. James. The site was first visited by Simon Fraser in 1806 and he remarked on the presence of European goods amongst the Dakelhne of Stuart Lake.

For most of nineteenth century, the relationship with non-Dakelhne centred on the fur trade. However, in 1876, the newly-formed government



Checking the salmon weir at Nak'azdli. Note the men standing on the weir, both catching and monitoring salmon. August 22, 1891. James McDougall Photograph

“The Hunting Grounds of [the Carrier] are not extensive, nor are they well stocked in beaver; but if they were common to all the Natives, would very soon be destroyed as the population here is considerable. The Hunting Grounds, as regards Beaver, however, belong to particular Families, who merely take from time to time such quantity as they require, and any encroachment, even by their next door neighbours, is tantamount to a declaration of hostilities, and frequently punished by Death; but the small Furs are common to all: they have not, however, until lately, directed much of their attention to small Furs, which are not numerous in this part of the Country.”

(George Simpson, 1947: 19)

of Canada passed The Indian Act, legislation that dictated the manner in which Aboriginal peoples should live within Canada. The legislation was passed to take control of the land for settlers and development. In the Great Lakes regions and later on the Prairies and in the Northwest Territories, treaties were signed to limit Aboriginal use of the land and to provide Aboriginal people with limited benefits in compensation for the land.

British Columbia had been established as a colony of Great Britain in 1846 but joined Confederation in 1871. As part of their “Terms of Union,” the government of BC was expected to secure treaties and secure certain lands for the Aboriginal populations. The racist views of the British Columbia government of the day has been well documented and this government did not sign treaties. Unlike other treaties that gave large swathes of land so that Aboriginal people could continue to hunt and fish, reserves in British Columbia covered only small patches of land where Aboriginal people could demonstrate they used. As a result, the Bands all have multiple reserves of various sizes, some as little as one hectare. The reserves set out in 1892 for Tl’azt’en and Nak’azdli relate to fishing sites, haying sites, fire wood plots, and settlements.

Initially The Indian Act had little impact on Dakelhne. Given there were only a few fur traders in the vicinity, they continued their life as before. A small school was built on Nak’azdli and some children began to receive a limited education. The Indian Act had outlawed the Potlatch in 1884

but people continued with their feasts and taking care of business through the Bahlats system. The Indian Agent assigned to the Stuart Lake Agency did not live there so had little impact; his responsibilities were to assist families in need and promote economic activity. People in Tl’azt’en and Nak’azdli were generally self-sufficient; they continued to get the majority of their food and wood from the land plus traded furs, salmon and labour at the fur trade post for manufactured goods.

Everything changed in the twentieth century. Numerous salmon canneries had opened along the northwest coast and as stocks were depleted by unregulated fishing, cannery owners began to lobby the government to end Aboriginal fishing. As a result, the use of weirs and barricades was made illegal in both the Babine and Stuart Lakes. The so-called Barricade Treaty Barricade Treaty was signed on June 19, 1911 by Chief Joseph of Nak’azdli, Chief Dominic of Binché (Tl’azt’en Nation) and Chief Alexis of Taché (Tl’azt’en Nation). This Treaty said that Dakelhne would no longer use barricades and fish traps to catch fish in return for receiving commercial fishing nets, seeds and farming equipment, a school, and other forms of compensation.

The change to net fishing had an impact on fishing because not everyone had access to boats to go out in to the lake and set nets. In addition, three years after barricades were banned, the Hell’s Gate rock slide on the Fraser River caused severe damage to salmon runs. When the Royal



Commission on Indian Affairs (the McKenna McBride Commission) came to the Stuart Lake communities in 1915, numerous people testified on the disastrous impact of the slide on their ability to feed their families

Given what we know of residential schools today, it may be surprising to read in the transcripts from the McKenna-McBride Commission that leaders from Nak'azdli and Tl'azt'en lobbied for a residential school. They knew of other schools in other parts of the country and wanted one here. They had no way of knowing the cruelty children would suffer at these schools but rather saw them as an option to ensure their children would be fed and educated. People had discovered that the day school at Nak'azdli was not viable for families because the family moved to their keyoh at different times of the year. Lejac Residential School opened in 1922 on the shores of Fraser Lake and Dakelh children from throughout the region attended from grades one to eight.

The government started to become more involved in Dakelh people during this time. When people were starving, they could ask the Indian Agent for assistance. Since the Indian Agent lived in Hazelton, it was often the local priest who made submissions to the Indian Agent on their behalf. The priest also had people register their traplines as a protective measure against the non-Aboriginal newcomers who were trapping in the area. People had houses around the Mission (Our Lady of Good Hope) and the area around the fur trade post was known as the Ranchery. Some people lived there but the area was used extensively for gardens and livestock.

From 1927 to 1951 there were provisions in The Indian Act that made it illegal for Aboriginal people to hire a lawyer for the sake of putting forward a legal challenge on land claims. This came about as the Allied Tribes (Southern Interior) and the Nisga'a Land Committee were pressing the British and Canadian government to settle its land disputes. The lifting of this provision coupled with the return of men from fighting in the Second World War moved people to become more political about the Indian Act and the poor state of reserves. The residential schools did a very poor job of educating people but those who had abilities

to read, write, and speak, began to be more critical of the government's role in alienating Aboriginal people from their land and ways of life.

Perhaps because no formal treaties were signed in British Columbia and the Aboriginal people there witnessed critical pressures on their land holding traditions and use of hunting and fishing territories, many of the challenges to Canadian law on Aboriginal title and rights came from British Columbia. One of the catalysts that brought about these challenges was the 1969 White Paper, created by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and then Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien. This proposed legislation would see the removal of Aboriginal people from reserves but without the abilities to continue to hunt, fish, occupy the land and form their own governments. The 1960s had been a time of increases social conscientiousness and concern for human rights. The 1969 White Paper was the impetus needed to get people organized and motivated.



Smokehouse on the shore of Nak'al Bun (Stuart Lake)

“At the time I was at Stuart’s Lake the Indians were busily engaged in catching and drying salmon for the year’s supply. Man, woman and child, all enter into this work with a will: for salmon is their bread and butter. This fish never takes a bait: hence the natives use ingenious devices to lure them into wicker traps sunk to the bottoms of the rivers. The bulk of the catch, however, is obtained from nets in the lake. The nets and traps are tended by the natives in their dugouts. This fish are brought to the land, split and cleaned, and hung up to dry. A fiery spectacle this makes, blotches of crimson along the shore, up out of reach of the half starved dogs. For the salmon is also the dog’s food. When working, he gets one fish a day: when idle, he is lucky if he gets one a week. The last stage of this industry is the storing away of the catch in peculiar houses of small logs set up on posts where the wind freely circulates. In these the fish are stored, several thousand fish to each family. When all else fails, the salmon last.

... Darting past us were schools of salmon, big fellows with red backs, making their way to the lake. The running season was about over. From time to time, we passed boys in all kinds of warped dugouts, with spears poised aloft, patiently waiting for the fish that must surely come. One woman was emptying her husband’s trap. One end of the long wicker tube was lifted into the boat and opened. She took out nearly one hundred fish, none of them weighing less than five pounds.”

A Hudson Bay Trading Post by Russell W. Porter (1899?). Pacific N.W. History Dept., Provincial Library, Victoria, BC. CIHM 17451



Outlet of Stuart Lake, Salmon trap & bush fire in distance, August 22, 1891.
James McDougall Photograph



View of Nak'azdli from Nak'al Bun (Stuart Lake)

The Nisga'a, who had been denied the ability to put forward their land claim by previous Indian Act legislation, had been embroiled in a lawsuit claiming their ownership of the Nass Valley. In 1973, a landmark Supreme Court ruling ended with a split decision on the question of whether or not the Nisga'a owned this land. The Nisga'a went on to negotiate a treaty with the Federal and Provincial Governments, which came into law in 2000.

In 1982 when Canada passed the Constitution Act, it contained within it Section 35 which stated:

1. The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.
2. In this Act, "Aboriginal Peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada.

The Act does not go on to define what those rights may be but a number of court cases have worked to establish some of those rights as recognized in law.

After Calder (the Nisga'a court decision), a number of other cases were tried by the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC):

- Guerin (1984)— the case centred on whether or not Indian Affairs had acted in the best interest of the Musqueam Indian Band when making a lease deal with a golf course. The court ruled that the Government had a fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of Indian Bands.
- Sparrow (1990) – a member of the Musqueam Band was charged with fishing with a net longer than authorized. The charges were challenged with the position that members had an inherent right to fish, that it was an Aboriginal right to fish that could not be extinguished by Provincial legislation. The ruled that Aboriginal people had a right to fish for food and ceremonial purposes that superseded that of commercial interests and which could only be infringed upon for conservation reasons.

- Delgamuux (1998) – the hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en groups brought forward a case claiming ownership and jurisdiction of their traditional territories. The SCC ruled that Aboriginal title may be recognized but it is a communal title on the part of communities.
- Haida (2004) – in a dispute over the transfer of a Tree Farm License, the SCC ruled that the government had a duty to consult with Aboriginal groups if their interests were going to be impacted upon. In addition, the government had to accommodate Aboriginal interests if any impact was identified.
- Tsilhqot’in (2014) – the Tsilhqot’in challenged the logging license given to a logging company, saying that they owned the land and had not given permission for the logging to occur. The court agreed that Aboriginal ownership of the land was demonstrated

and identified Aboriginal title to include the right to decide how the land will be used, including by industrial proponents. The government can override this if it can demonstrate that an intrusion of the Aboriginal title is for the greater good.

There are many cases not mentioned here but these major cases demonstrate the successive challenges to the provincial and federal governments’ jurisdiction over unceded Aboriginal territory. All Dakeelh territory within Tl’azt’en and Nak’azdli traditional boundaries is unceded and remains in dispute. All the “rights” enjoyed by Aboriginal people were brought about through court challenges; the Government has never recognized Aboriginal rights without court action and only recognizes Aboriginal title in the moment when Aboriginal people are signing it away (i.e. signing a treaty).



Our Lady of Good Hope, built in 1873

Highlights of the Indian Act

The Indian Act was passed in 1876 and provided a one-sized-fits-all approach to controlling Aboriginal people throughout Canada. Not only were Aboriginal people not consulted about this Act, it did not take into consideration any of the cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal people throughout the many regions.

- made “Indians” wards of the government where their life and lifestyle were legislated, including such diverse things as how band governments would be formed (elected Chief and Council), management of land and resources (including the ability for the land to be appropriated as needed), education (residential schools), and inheritance of property.
- determined where “Indians” could live and when they could leave the reserve
- banned ceremonies such as the Ghost Dance on the Prairies and the Potlatch on the west coast
- when Aboriginal groups started pressing their land title rights, the Indian Act was amended making it illegal for Bands to hire a lawyer to pursue land claims without the permission of the Indian Affairs Superintendent
- until 1951 “Indians” who obtained a university degree, voted in an election, joined the military, or moved off the reserve and held property were “enfranchised” which meant they lost their legal status as an Indian under the Indian Act. Women who married “non-Status” or non-Aboriginal men lost their status until the law was changed in 1985 (Bill C-31).

Today, Tl’azt’én and Nak’azdli function under The Indian Act and have their own custom Election and Membership Code.

Residential Schools

In May 2008 the Canadian Government under the Conservative leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to examine the legacy of residential schools. This pronouncement came just after a formal apology by the Canadian Parliament to Aboriginal peoples for its role in establishing and running the residential schools. *The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation.*

Therefore, on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian residential schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. . .

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long.

The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country.

There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

We are sorry.

(excerpt from the text of Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s statement of apology) <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/06/11/pm-statement.html>

Since the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People was released in 1996, Aboriginal political leaders have been lobbying the Federal government for a formal apology for its role in establishing residential schools and for forcing Aboriginal children to attend them.



There is already a significant body of work examining the history of residential schools and since 1995 the government has been addressing issues brought forward by former residential school students. In the 1990s complaints about abuse and maltreatment in these schools began reverberating into a powerful voice demanding answers from the government on why such a system was ever established and allowed to carry on for as long as it did. Individuals and groups began to charge former teachers and clerics with physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Soon the media was presenting stories on a regular basis about the horrific experiences endured by former students and their quest for justice. The term “residential school survivor” replaced “former student” in common language. In the progression of events from the early 1990s the Canadian Government went from defending itself in courts on its role in running the residential schools to agreeing to offer out-of-court settlements to former students who could prove abuse at one of the residential schools. Finally in 2006, after losing a class action lawsuit launched by students who had been victimized while attending residential school, the Federal government came to an agreement with the Assembly of First Nations to offer a blanket settlement as reparation to former students for the years they spent in residential schools.

Dakelhne from Tl’azt’en Nation and Nak’azdli attended the Lejac Residential School on the Nadleh Whut’en reserve, just outside Fort Fraser. The school was built there because of its proximity to the newly completed Grand Trunk Railway; children from throughout the north were sent to this school. The school was opened in 1922 and initially had 125 students. For most of its history it was over-crowded, having as many as 180 students living there. After the tragic death of five students in 1937 and a tuberculosis outbreak around the same time, parents began to protest conditions at the school. There were criticisms that children (especially boys) spent too much time working on the farm or cutting wood and too little time on academics. Parents wanted their children to be able to compete with the new settler populations growing in the region.

In January 1946, for example, the Nadleh Whut’en submitted a motion to the Indian Affairs Branch:

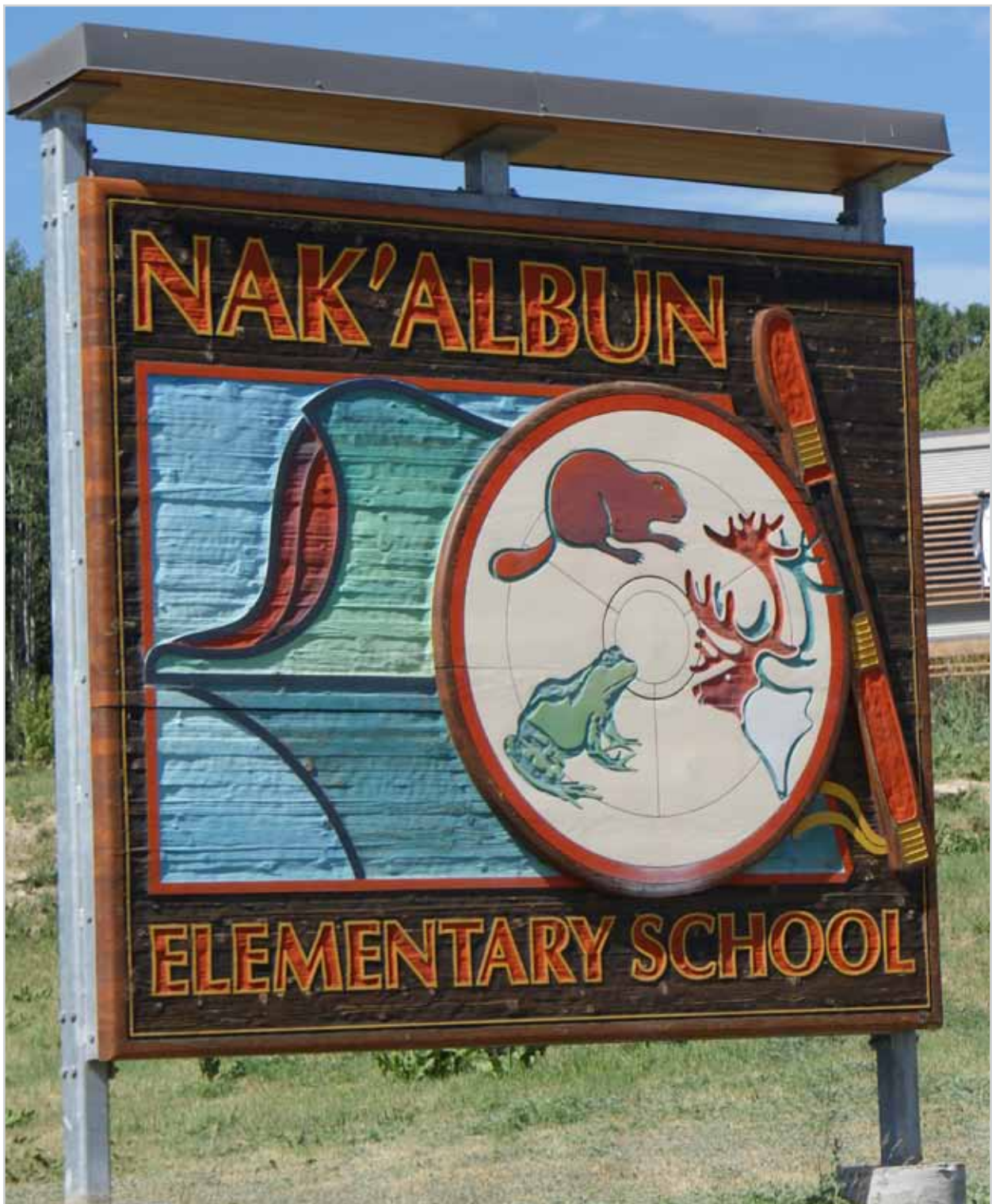
[a] meeting of the Fraser Lake Band of Indians at the Nautley Reserve, was held on January 5th 1946, and a motion was unanimously [sic] endorsed by all that a complaint was justified that when children were sick at the residential school at Le Jac, they were not kept separate from the other children. Also the school children were not allowed inside when the weather was cold, and we believe the educational system at Le Jac [sic] is not satisfactory. Therefore We the Fraser Lake Band of Indians are submitting an earnest request for a day school to be built on this reserve so that we can have our children at home and at the same time see that they get the best education possible, and able to compete in life with the white race in their future life. (‘Motion’ by Fraser Lake Band of Indians, Nautley Reserve, January 17, 1946, LAC, RG 10, vol. 6446,211 file 881-13, part 2)

Lejac operated until 1976 and a large portion of Nak’azdli and Tl’azt’en were educated there. The goal was never to create an educated person but rather to provide skills for manual labour. Boys learned farm work and carpentry while girls learned how to clean and sew. Efforts to stamp out the use of the Dakelh language was met with mixed results. Until recently the language remained strong but today, there are few fluent speakers being created.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its report in 2015. While it is very important to learn about this aspect of Canadian history, Tl’azt’en Nation and Nak’azdli continue to work to reverse significant cultural and social damage wrought by the residential school experience.

FN: The details of the Residential School Settlement is on-line but briefly, the settlement provides a lump sum payment (Common Experience Payment) to former students of residential schools with additional monies allotted for specific abuse cases. http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/english_index.html





Nak'azdli took over the former Catholic School in the 1990s to create its own independent school. The new school was completed in 2014 and educates both Band members and non-Band members

Understanding Dakelh Syllabic System

The syllabic system was developed by Father Morice and was based on a system developed for the Cree by Reverend James Evans. Morice said there are twenty-three vowel sounds in the Dakelh language and the use of syllabics helped to identify all the sounds in the language. The table shown here provides all the sounds in Dakelh. To begin, it is important to understand the basic sounds of the main vowels.

a	as in hat, plan, crab,
e	as in the French le and English pedal
é	as in say or mélée
i	as in seek
o	as in spoke or note
oo	as in flute

Therefore the syllabic with the “d” sound would be:

ᑕ	da
ᑕ	de
ᑕ	dé
ᑕ	di
ᑕ	do
ᑕ	doo

And the syllabic with the “n” sound would be:

ᑕ	na
ᑕ	ne
ᑕ	né
ᑕ	ni
ᑕ	no
ᑕ	noo

Combine two sounds ᑕᑕ and you have the word dené, which means “man” or “person.”

Common Dakelh Words and Phrases

(Some people have troubles with the glottal sound created by “lh” in words. If you say the word athlete and pay attention to where your tongue goes when you say the “thl”, you will be able to say Dakelh and other words.)

Hadih	hello
Sna tcha il ya	you have helped me a lot (thank you)
Andit dzin	today
Yas dek	I am speaking
An nih	come here
Gak	nothing
Yoh	house
Njan	here
Nyun	him or her (pointing out someone, referring to someone)
Mbe da int'oh	who are you?
Su intoh	are you well?
E daint'oh	how are you?
Su est'oh	I am well, I am fine
Da hu ja?	what happened?
Da whet'en?	what is happening? What is going on?
Nt'soh hu zelh	what time is it?
Animals	
Nangez	fox
Wasi	lynx
Noh bai	weasel
Je yo	bull moose
E ma	cow moose
Shas	grizzly bear
Sus	black bear
Lhi	dog
Tchen the lhi	coyote (spruce dog)
Yes tse	deer
Tsa	beaver



Tsé k'et	muskrat
Tsis	otter
Nus thel	wolverine
Yes	wolf
Yezih	elk
Sol gus	chipmunk
Family	
Elu	mother
Eba	father
Etsu	grandmother
Etsiyan	grandfather
Yé	son
Tsé	daughter
Ez'é	uncle
Ebizyan	aunt
Ano	brother
Dis	sister
Tchai	general term for grandchild
Dakelhne also has some French words in it:	
Lesel	salt
Lebedak	potatoes
Lesyet	plate
Ledi	tea

Glossary of terms:

Keyoh – land areas controlled by family groups. The term is sometimes used to refer to registered traplines as well.

Dakelh / Dakelhne – Dakelh refers to the adjective such as Dakelh way of life or Dakelh communities. Dakelhne refers to the people themselves, translating as “Dakelh people.”

Uza-ne – refers to both the head men (deneza) and head women (tsaykezya) of each clan.

Recommended Reading

Brizinski, Peggy. (1989). *Knots in a string: An introduction to Native studies in Canada* (second edition). Saskatchewan: University Extension Press.

A general but thorough overview of the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada since early contact, related to relations, legislation, and political and social changes.

Harris, D.C. (2001). *Fish, law, and colonialism: The legal capture of salmon in British Columbia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

King, Thomas. (2012). *An inconvenient Indian: A curious account of Native people in North America*. Anchor Canada.

Morice, A.G. (1893). *Notes Archaeological, Industrial and Sociological on the Western Dene*. Transactions of the Canadian Institute. (1892-93) CIHM 15680.

Sam, Lillian (Ed.). (2001). *Nak'azdli t'enne yahulduk: Nak'azdli elders speak*. Penticton: Theytus Books. A book of recounts of life in Nak'azdli territory as told by seven Elders.

Sherwood J. (2004). *Surveying Northern British Columbia: A Photojournal of Frank Swannell*. Prince George: Caitlin Press Inc.

Notes:



Nak'azdli Health Centre

Notes:



TI'azt'en Health Centre



Notes:



Being 40 minutes (in ideal conditions) from the nearest hospital, TI'azt'en maintains its own ambulance for medical emergencies.

