

THE PEOPLE OF THE K'ÓMOKS NATION

həhəwčis; Hayuthela la xens
Moving Forward Together





K'ómoks Village 1901, RBCM PN 5052.
Potlatch platforms in front of houses

THE PEOPLE OF THE

K'ÓMOKS NATION

hɛhɛwčɪs; Hayuthela la xens:

Moving Forward Together.

We, the K'ómoks people envision a prosperous and healthy nation, in which we exercise our rights and title throughout our territory, honouring our people, lands, waters, cultures and languages.



K'ómoks House, K'ómoks IR, Courtenay,
Vancouver Island, 1866 (Frederick Dally)



K'ómoks Village, Courtenay, Vancouver Island,
1907-1912



Moon face collected from K'ómoks Village 1898 (American Museum of Natural History). This post was collected from a sāsítla house, likely belonging to Old Beaverskins

INTRODUCTION

The ancestry of the K'ómoks Nation is from three distinct Indigenous peoples – the K'ómoks, the Pentlatch, and the Hahamatsees/Walitsma. The K'ómoks people occupied eastern Vancouver Island and offshore islands from Salmon River to Little River and spoke the ayajuthum language; the Pentlatch occupied the areas from Little River to Englishman River and offshore Islands and spoke the Pentlatch language; and the Hahamatsees/Walitsma occupied Salmon River and parts of Quadra Island, and spoke the Kwakwaka'wakw language. These peoples shared a rich and vibrant culture, a long history of intermarriage, and many were fluent in each others' languages.

Oral histories and archaeology describe a rich and bountiful relationship between the K'ómoks and Pentlatch people and their territories. Salmon, herring, shellfish, deer, elk, seal, cod, rockfish, geese, duck, and a plethora of berries and plant foods filled the bellies of young and old alike. The harvest, preparation and cultivation of local resources were appropriate to the environment, resource, and spiritual beliefs. Fish weirs, clam gardens, duck nets, berry picking techniques and clothing design met the needs of K'ómoks and Pentlatch people,

and for generations provided variety, utility, and sense of cultural uniqueness. Masked dances and rhythmic songs filled the winter nights and throughout the seasons. Property was distributed to guests in potlatches and elaborate naming ceremonies honoured the youth, leaders, and elders of the communities. Long before the arrival of settlers in this region, the K'ómoks and Pentlatch people were made up of several sub-tribes; the K'ómoks sub-tribes included the sāsítla, sathloot, yayaqwiltah, katkadul, ieksan, xa'xe, komokwe, and

salaltbut, and the Pentlatch tribes included the Pentlatch, s:uckcan, saclam, and chuá-chuatl. Following contact with Europeans, northern First Nations groups started a southerly move into K'ómoks territory. A period of conflict displaced the K'ómoks southward to the territory of their relatives, the Pentlatch around the Comox Valley. Followed by a period of colonial policy and practices, the K'ómoks and Pentlatch families endured hardship and loss of land, resources, and cultural connections.

In the present day the K'ómoks Nation is a community of approximately 350 people. There are four K'ómoks Nation Indian Reserves (pre-treaty). The main Indian Reserve is located at the mouth of the Courtenay River on the K'ómoks Estuary, the Pentlatch Reserve is located at the junction of the Puntledge and Tsolum Rivers, a small reserve is located on the Goose Spit, and finally there is a large reserve at the mouth of the Salmon River near Sayward.

People of the K'ómoks Nation share a complex history; one which is rooted in deep layers of interconnections. Members of the K'ómoks Nation recognize their tribal histories and value their relations and kinships with the Kwakwaka'wakw, Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, and other peoples along the coast and throughout North America.

MODERN-DAY K'ÓMOKS NATION





K'ómoks village of ch'kwúwutn visited by members of the Vancouver expedition on July 13th, AD 1792 (Williams 1798)



Intertidal Wooden Fish Trap, Cape Mudge (July 13, 1792)

Early Times – The sathloot (sálułtx^w/ salúłt) K'ómoks

The K'ómoks Nation has held Aboriginal Title and Rights to their traditional territory since time immemorial. Made up of between 10 and 14 sub-tribes, the K'ómoks occupied territories from Salmon River in the north to Little River in the south, including Quadra Island and other islands in Desolation Sound. At one time they numbered between 6,000 -8,000 people. They spoke what is called the Island Comox dialect of ayajuthem.

K'ómoks is the name for a people, and became the name for the settlement at IR#1. The name K'ómoks is derived from a

Kwak'wala word: kw'úmalha which is a word for wealthy' or 'rich'. The older and traditional name for the K'ómoks people was the sathloot. The name K'ómoks was applied to the sathloot after a sathloot man stole a ball containing a copper from a supernatural bear named "komakwe", and after potlatching, took the name "komakwe" for his tribe (formerly sathloot). Thus at least some of the sathloot became known as K'ómoks to Kwak'wala-speakers, and eventually this name became more widely applied to all the K'ómoks tribes and people.

K'ómoks tribes had distinct summer territories and winter village sites. Many of these village sites were located on Quadra Island (e.g., ká7gichn/Seymour Narrows, Heriot Bay, Drew Harbour, Kanish Bay, Granite Bay, April Point, ch'kwúwutn/Cape Mudge), and around tl'ámatexw/Campbell River. The summer territories allowed access to the very rich migratory salmon runs that travel through Johnstone Strait and Discovery Passage. Some of these summer territories include extensive inland watersheds (e.g., Salmon River and Campbell River).



Grave markers in front of mortuary houses at K'ómoks cemetery (1870s)

There are five sathloot tribes who were said to be the highest-ranking groups and were socially, ceremonially, and politically integrated into the Whale House on Quadra Island during winter: säsitla, sathloot, yayaqwiltah, katkadul, and komokwe/ salaltbut. They undertook elaborate rituals using a whale effigy together. The integration of these five groups in the Whale House indicates, according to K'ómoks cosmology, that these groups survived the Great Flood.

Over the mid to late 19th century most of the sathloot sub-tribes were significantly diminished by events such as warfare, smallpox, and other diseases. As a result of these events, and sometime around 1850 at least four surviving groups relocated to the Comox Valley, and then later merged with the Pentlatch: sathloot, säsitla, ieksen and xa'xe.

sathloot (salalt/sálułtx^w)


The sathloot territory included southern Quadra Island and the Quinsam River watershed, and included settlements at Cape Mudge, Campbell River, and Seymour Narrows. Oral histories record that sathloot first ancestors (ciā'tlk'am and tē'sitla) originated at Quinsam (k^wániwsam), at the junction of the Quinsam and Campbell rivers.

A sathloot Origin Story

“A long time ago, ciā'tlk'am ('shal-kum) descended from the sky. He wore the feather garment qua'eqoe ('khwhy-khwhy) and settled in nga'icam (Quinsam). He became the ancestor of the catlołtq (sathloot). With him, his sister te'sitla (teh- 'seet-la) arrived. She was so big that she needed two boats to cross the sea. The brother and sister wandered through all countries and visited the Nanaimo, tlahu's (Klahoose) and many other tribes who all became their younger brothers.”

The säsitla summer territory included Salmon River, and säsitla ancestors wintered at Gowland Harbour, Seymour Narrows, Kanish Bay, and near Kelsey Bay and Hardwicke Island. The säsitla have genealogical and cultural connections to the Kwak'wala-speaking groups to the north. The name säsitla has clear ties to a Kwakwaka'wakw culture hero named se'ntlaē. The earliest known chief of a K'ómoks-speaking village upstream at Salmon River was named sintli which corresponds to the name "se'ntlaē" ('the sun').

säsitla



h'kusam - Salmon River IR#1, Sayward, Vancouver Island



Sun face in bird form collected from K'ómoks Village 1898 (American Museum of Natural History). This post was collected from a säsitla house, likely belonging to Old Beaverskins

ieeksan

The ieeksan occupied the Campbell River to Oyster River area and had rights to Mitlenatch Island. The ieeksan may have spoken a slightly different dialect from the rest of our K'ómoks ancestors.

The founding ancestor of the ieeksan was called aiē'len ('the sun in human form'). In Kwak'wala aiē'len is known as se'ntlaē. Because of this relationship to 'the sun in human form', the sun crest is the right of the ieeksan.

xa'xe

The xa'xe sub-tribe occupied Campbell River and southeast Quadra Island. It seems likely that they had origins among the ieeksan or the sathloot and that they splintered off one or both groups relatively recently. "xa'xe" means 'sacred or holy' in Upriver Halkomelem (a different but related Coast Salish language). These ancestors appear to be one of the K'ómoks groups that relocated to the Comox Valley and existed as a distinct K'ómoks group into the late 19th century and early 20th century.



An incised pebble excavated from Puntledge IR 2 by SFU in 2016, dating to between AD 400-700. The imagery represented on these incised pebbles represent women (never men), often wearing woven blankets and parted and braided hair. They have been interpreted as related to girls' puberty ceremonies, similar to that described for the Ehatteshat (left). The junction of the Tsolum and Puntledge Rivers is known as an important ritual bathing place for women.

EARLY TIMES - THE PENTLATCH

Pentlatch Origins and Flood:

A long, long time ago, two men, kōaī'min and hē'k'ten, descended from the sky. They became the ancestors of the pe'ntlac. Once the sea receded far from its shore and the women went far out and filled their baskets with fish. The bottom of the sea remained dry for a long time. But hē'k'ten was afraid that the water would rise that much higher later. Therefore, he made a long rope of cedar branches and tied together the four canoes. At last, the water really flowed back and began to flood the shore. So, he tied the rope to a big rock in the mouth of the pe'ntlac River, fastened the other end to the canoes, and the two chief families floated about on the rafts. The other people begged hē'k'ten, "Oh, allow us to tie our canoes to your rope. We will give you our daughters as wives." But hē'k'ten didn't allow it and pushed them away with poles. When the water receded, they alone found their home again, while all the others were scattered throughout the wide world. A whale remained stranded high up on the mountain near pe'ntlac Lake. The water up there froze, and the whale was unable to get away again. The whale can still be seen there today and that is why the glacier in the pe'ntlac Valley is called k-onēis. (Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:237-238).

The Pentlatch is the name of the people who spoke the Pentlatch language, and occupied territories from Little River to Englishman River. The name Pentlatch means 'buried belly', referring to the richness of Pentlatch territories. Like the K'ómoks, the Pentlatch consisted of several independent tribes, each with their own winter village sites and territories.

The Pentlatch occupied a cluster of settlements around Comox Harbor, the Puntledge River, and Hornby and Denman Islands. Pentlatch territory extended from about Cape Lazo in the north to about Englishman River in the south and included Denman Island and all Hornby Island. Oral histories describe the origins of the Pentlatch at the mouth of the Courtenay River and/or at Comox Lake with the First Ancestors kōaī'min and hē'k'ten.



i-hos Gallery on IR#1 - K'ómoks Nation, Courtenay, Vancouver Island

THE OTHER PENTLATCH TRIBES INCLUDED:

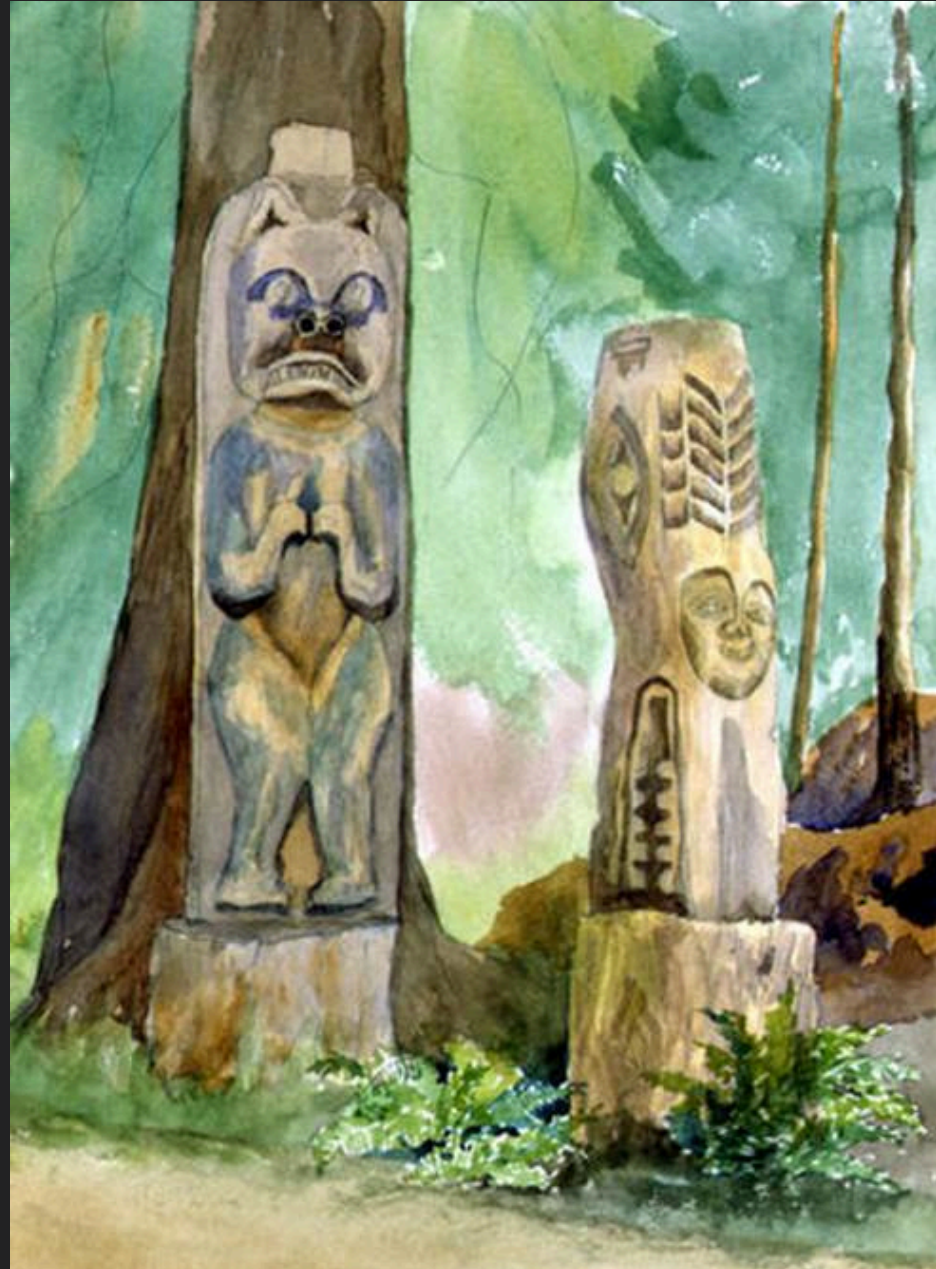
- s:uckcan: A group inhabiting an area from Union Bay to Deep Bay;
- saclam: A group whose main village was at kw'ú7uxwem ("Qualicum") at the mouth of the Qualicum River. Their territory was centered around the Big Qualicum River and extended from about Deep Bay/Metcalf Bay in the north, to about Parksville in the south.
- chuá-chuatl: A group whose territory extends from the Little Qualicum River in the north to the Englishman River in the south. Their name refers to the place name for French Creek (swáxlhu7lh) and the Pentlatch-speaking people who lived there.

K'ómoks Village AD 1866 (RBCM PN1146)



The images included in this document were selected to illustrate aspects of K'ómoks's culture and history.

"Indian Carvings", painted 1933 by Josephine Crease while visiting Denman Island (Crease 1933c) (BC Archives, Crease Fonds, PDP03099)



Relocation and Amalgamations - Part 1

Between about AD 1830 and 1850, K'ómoks people were swept up in a sequence of events that resulted in their relocation around 1846, (Dorricott & Cullon, 2012: p36) from their traditional territories around Campbell River and Quadra Island to the Comox Valley and Baynes Sound area. In the years prior to AD 1830, the Lekwiltok had obtained muskets from European traders and began to occupy the northern reaches of K'ómoks territory around Salmon River and Topaz Harbour. From these areas, the Lekwiltok began to regularly raid the Coast Salish people to the south, stealing wealth and taking slaves. At this time some K'ómoks tribes were allied with the Lekwiltok, and others with the Coast Salish. The relationships between the K'ómoks and Lekwiltok was complex, with several examples of mergers between K'ómoks and Lekwiltok groups.

Relocation and Amalgamations - Part 2

Around AD 1830, groups of Coast Salish people also began to obtain muskets and to retaliate against the Lekwiltok. K'ómoks and Pentlatch people were caught between these warring factions. Raids and counter-raids between the Lekwiltok and Coast Salish increased in scale, and culminated at the Battle of Maple Bay (near Duncan) where thousands of warriors fought from canoes. Around AD 1840 at Maple Bay, a large armada of Coast Salish warriors encircled a group of Lekwiltok and K'ómoks warriors and nearly annihilated them. Some Coast Salish then travelled north in Lekwiltok canoes and attacked K'ómoks and Lekwiltok villages. At the same time, some surviving Lekwiltok warriors worked their way up the coast of Vancouver Island and sought refuge at the house of a K'ómoks (ieeksun) chief at Campbell River. These Lekwiltok people who sought refuge there were deceived and killed within that house, but a message was sent by a chief of K'ómoks and Lekwiltok descent to his Lekwiltok relatives in the north. The Lekwiltok then resolved to kill the remaining K'ómoks.

Relocation and Amalgamations - Part 3

The Lekwiltok returned in force and attacked the K'ómoks (ieeksun) village at Campbell River, and the surviving ieeksun people moved south to the Comox Valley to live alongside the Pentlatch. A few years later, the Lekwiltok attacked a K'ómoks fortified village at April Point on Quadra Island. The remaining K'ómoks tribes (sathlute, säsitla and xa'xe) lived at Cape Mudge and Seymour narrows for a few more years, and fearing more attacks from the Lekwiltok, moved south to Denman Island by Circa 1846-1850.

Relocation and Amalgamations - Part 4

There was some initial conflict between the Pentlatch and the K'ómoks in the Comox Valley area, but peace was soon made against a common enemy. However no more attacks from the Lekwiltok came, and peace was made between the K'ómoks and Lekwiltok chiefs with marriages between their respective families. These marriages established peace between the peoples, but did not relinquish K'ómoks rights or title to their territory.



ETHNOLOGY DIVISION—BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL MUSEUM	
Collection:	Catalogue No.: PN 5921
Photographer: Mrs. B. M. Cruse, Coll'n	Date:
Remarks: BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL MUSEUM VICTORIA, B. C.	A Comox chief.
Com'Quil'Ache, Chief of Puntletz/Comox (contemporary of Hul'ka'satKetaen)	
* See catalogue page for further information	

K'ómoks Nation ancestors had a very turbulent history in the first half of the 19th century. Some tribes have been lost to smallpox epidemics and others to warfare. The remaining K'ómoks tribes migrated south to the Comox Valley, with the last of the K'ómoks groups withdrawing from Quadra Island, and Cape Mudge circa 1850. Many hundreds of K'ómoks people relocated to the Comox Valley and Baynes Sound, members of the ieksen,

sathloot, säsitla, and xa'xe tribes. The Pentlatch and K'ómoks initially occupied separate settlements, but following the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1862, these separate settlements merged into relatively few jointly occupied settlements, including the mouth of the Courtenay River, and Henry Bay on Denman Island.

RELOCATION AND AMALGAMATIONS

In 1876, the surviving sub-tribes of K'ómoks were amalgamated with the Pentlatch by the Indian Agent and collectively became known as the Comox Indian Band. In 1940, the K'ómoks modern composition was complete when the Hahamatsees/Walitsma, a Kwakwaka'wakw group with partial K'ómoks origins amalgamated, bringing the Salmon River Indian Reserve with them.

Hahamatsees/Walitsma

The last of K'ómoks Nation amalgamations is with a group called the Hahamatsees/Walitsma. The Hahamatsees/Walitsma are a Laich-kwil-tach group with partial K'ómoks origins. The Laich-kwil-tach belong to the Kwak'wala language family. It is likely that Hahamatsees (xáxa7matsis) is a place name, perhaps a village location, on the Salmon (xwesam), Memekay or White rivers..

Oral history and Indigenous place names indicate that prior to the arrival of the Laich-kwil-tach here, the Salmon River area was occupied by the K'ómoks, more particularly the säsitla. Many K'ómoks place names in the Salmon River area had been adopted by the Hahamatsees/Walitsma and been adapted to the Laich-kwil-tach dialect. Between 1792 and about 1827, the Laich-kwil-tach had come to relocate to Salmon River. Our K'ómoks ancestors from upstream Salmon River merged with the Laich-kwil-tach that recently settled there and was a newly formed group - the Hahamatsees. In the latter half of the 19th century, the Hahamatsees also became known as the Walitsma ('great ones').

Hahamatsees/Walitsma ancestors have an important place in K'ómoks history. This then merged (or reunited) with K'ómoks in 1940, bringing the Salmon River reserve to K'ómoks Nation.



K'ómoks First Nation Salmon River IR#1, Sayward, Vancouver Island

RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AT A
COMBINED MEETING OF THE COMOX AND SALMON RIVER
BANDS AT CAMPBELL RIVER, B.C. on SEPTEMBER 13, 1940.

"We, the following members of the Comox Band of the Cowichan Agency, and the Salmon River (Kahkhamatisis) Band of the Kwakwaka'wakw Agency, hereby request the Indian Affairs Branch to approve of the amalgamation of our bands under the following arrangement:-

1. That the two bands, when amalgamated, shall be known as the "Comox Band", all business and correspondence relating thereto to be henceforth done in the name of this Band.
2. That Chief Andrew Frank, present Chief of the Comox Band, and Chief Moses Moon, present Chief of the Salmon River Band, shall remain as Chiefs of the combined Band, with equal powers and responsibilities.
3. That the Reserves of the two bands shall be amalgamated under the ownership of the new Comox Band.
4. That Trust Account No. 331 of the Salmon River (Kahkhamatisis) Band shall be transferred into the present account of the Comox Band, the combined accounts henceforth to be the property of the two amalgamated bands.
5. In regard to the administration of the amalgamated Comox Band, we feel for this purpose it would be better to have this new Band included in the Kwakwaka'wakw Agency, as that would merely extend the boundaries of this Agency to Comox, whereas the Cowichan Agency would have to be extended within the territory of the Kwakwaka'wakw Agency to include Salmon River Reserve No. 1."

"We hereby sign the above resolution signifying our agreement thereto, and request the Indian Affairs Branch to approve of same at their early convenience. "

Members of Comox Band

Chief Andy Frank
J. Foreman
George Hardy (by proxy)
Henry Mitchell
Edward Hines
Ernest Hardy
Robert Clifton (by proxy - Chief)
X Jacob Frank (by proxy - Isaac Frank)

Members of Salmon River Band

Moses Moon
Ernest Moon
Sarah Moon

Certified correct.
M. S. Seal
Indian ag.

Signatures of the voting members of the Comox Indian Band and Salmon River Band regarding the amalgamation of the two bands, September 13, 1940



K'ómoks Village, ~1866, RBCM PN 879

Grave markers in
front of mortuary
houses at
K'ómoks cemetery
(1866)



Salmon River Village (h'kusam) circa AD 1880. Note the Coast Salish style shed roof house second from right (BC Archives B-03560)





SUMMARY

By 1940 the modern-day K'ómoks Nation was formed. The Nation consists of the surviving K'ómoks Tribes: ieeksen, sathloot, säsitla, and xa'xe. These tribes went on to amalgamate with the Pentlatch, and then later the Hahamatsees/Walitsma tribes. Thus, the modern K'ómoks Nation is a hybrid of ayajuthem, Pentlatch and Kwak'wala speaking groups.

Ultimately, the K'ómoks people are complex and unique: as a border community they are comprised of numerous different house and village groups. Through severe population loss, marriages, and wars these groups came together to live and prosper in the Comox Harbour area.

BASIC PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

ayajuthem - 'eye-ah-juth-um'

ch'kwúwutn - 'chk-kwe-wut-in'

chuá-chuatl - 'swua-swua-tl'

ciā'tlk·am - 'shal-kum'

Hahamatsees - 'haa-haa-mat-seas'

hē'k'ten - 'heck-uu-tin'

ieeksan - 'ee-uk-sun'

ká7gichn - 'kah-gitch-in'

katkadul - 'cut-cud-ul'

kōaī'min - 'koy-ah-min'

komokwe - 'koe-moe-kway'

k^wániwsam - 'kwa-neec-am'

pe'ntlac - 'pentlatch'

saalam - 'saul-um'

salalt - 'sath-lut' or 'sath-lut-who'

sálułtx^w - 'sath-lut' or 'sath-lut-who'

salaltbut - 'sath-lute-butt'

säsitla - 'sah-seet-lah'

se'ntlaē 'se'ntlay'

síntli - 'sent-lee'

s:uckcan - 'sook-san'

tē'sitla - 'teh-seet-la'

tl'ámatexw - 'tlam-at-too'

qoā'ēqoē - 'kwee-kwee'

Walitsma - 'wall-eats-mah'

xa'xe - 'haa-hey'

xwésam - 'khoos-sum'

yayaqiltah - 'yah-yah-kwil-tah'

American Museum of Natural History - qoā'ēqoē gravemarker, collected from K'ómoks cemetery in 1898.




American Museum of Natural History - qoā'ēqoē housepost, collected from K'ómoks village in 1898, probably derived from the house of Old Beaverskins (sasitla).



American Museum of Natural History - carved man, collected from K'ómoks village in 1898.





kwénis, White Whale (Queneesh)
K'ómoks Nation, Courtenay, Vancouver Island

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Jesse Morin, PhD, Archaeologist, Ethnohistorian, Heritage Consultant

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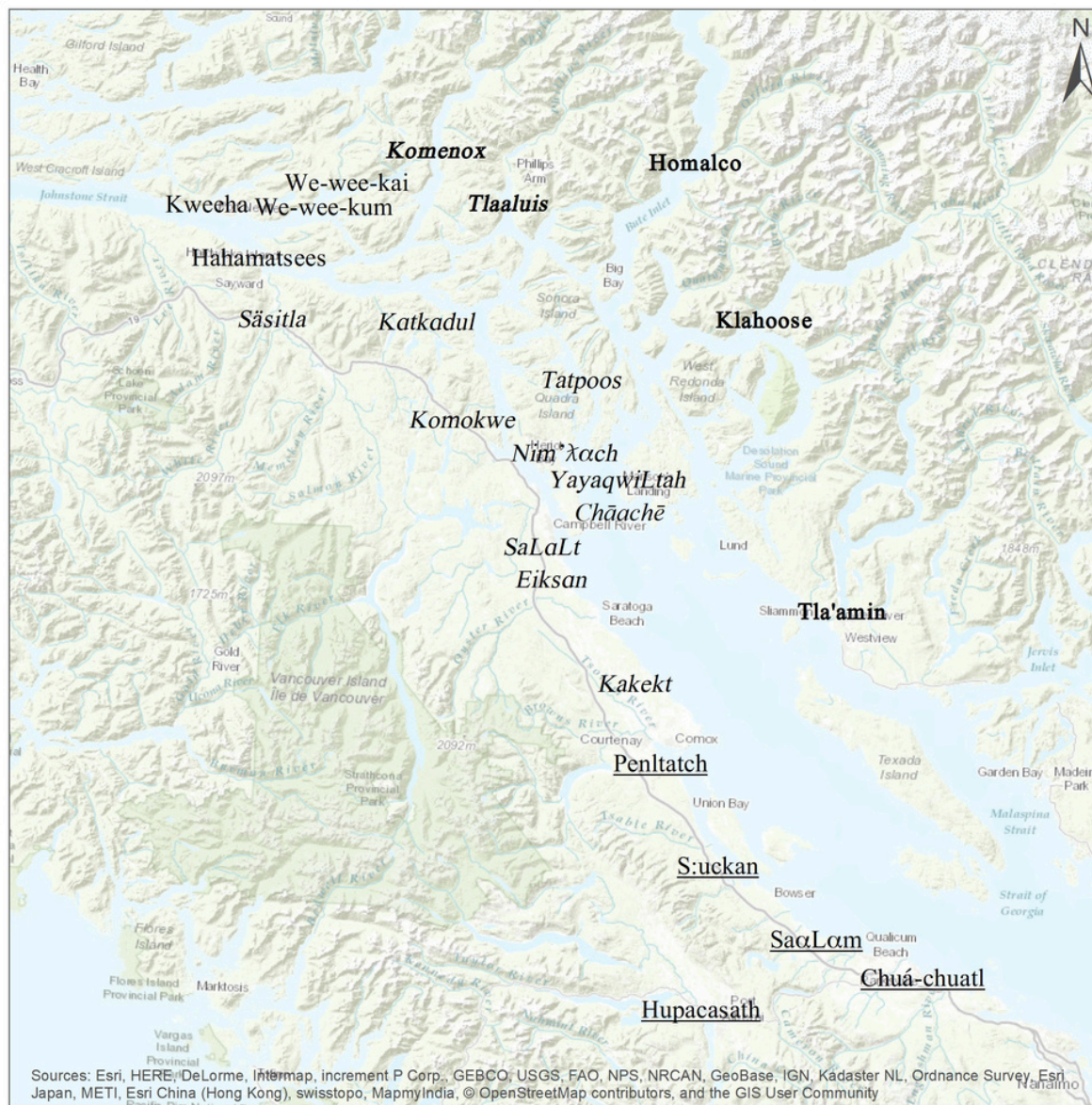
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Tribal Groups by Language Affiliation

Identity

K'ómoks/Salulxw

Mainland Comox

K'ómoks or Mainland Comox

Lekwiltok

Pentlatch

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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 10N; Map Scale: 1:1,250,000; Data Sources: K'ómoks First Nation





— K'ÓMOKS FIRST NATION
TRADITIONAL TERRITORY

SAYWARD

CAMPBELL RIVER

POWELL RIVER

COURTENAY

COURBERLAND

K'ÓMOKS FIRST NATION

NANAIMO

SALISH SEA



**K'ómoks Nation, Courtenay, Vancouver Island
Tribal Journeys 2017**



K'ómoks Nation, Courtenay, Vancouver Island
IR#1



K'ómoks Nation IR#2, Courtenay, Vancouver Island



Goose Spit, IR #3

K'ómoks Nation, Courtenay, Vancouver Island



Salmon River IR#1, Sayward, Vancouver Island





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