

James Teit



Photo: Nicola Valley Museum and Archives

Site Identification

Nearest Community:
Merritt, B.C.

Geocache Location:
N 50°08.978'
W 121°01.142'

Altitude:
536m

Ownership:
Crown Land

Accuracy:
3 meters

Overall Difficulty: 1.5
Overall Terrain: 2

Access Information and Restrictions:

From Merritt City Centre follow Hwy 8 West towards Spences Bridge for 18.8 km approx. until you arrive at Petit Creek Rd area. Look for an unmarked small dirt road on the right hand side and pull off to the side of the dirt road. Do not block road.

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:

Gold Country Communities Society
PO. Box 933
Cache Creek, BC.,
VOK 1H0

Tel: 1-877-453-9467
email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

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James Alexander Teit was a highly regarded anthropologist who gained his knowledge through living among, and working with the people he was studying. Teit played a crucial role in our modern understanding of native cultures and their traditions and languages. A gifted linguist, Teit was fluent in English, French, Danish, and a host of native languages and dialects from across British Columbia. He was also a socialist and a powerful crusader for native rights.

Born on Scotland's Shetland Island in 1864, Teit came to Canada to work with his uncle at his store in Spences Bridge. He changed the spelling of his name from the original Tait to better reflect the original spelling used by his Danish ancestors. Within a few years he had met and married Lucy Antko, a local Nlaka'pamux woman from a nearby village. Living with Lucy immersed Teit in the Nlaka'pamux language, culture and traditions.

In 1894, Teit met legendary anthropologist Franz Boas who was visiting British Columbia on an ethnographic field trip. As a result, Teit and Boas worked together for the rest of Teit's life, and Teit was invited to participate in the Jesup North Pacific Expedition between 1897 and 1902. A program of the American Museum of Natural History, the expedition's goal was to create an ethnological and archaeological overview of connections between indigenous people of the Pacific Rim and northeastern Asia. Some believe it was Teit's ethnographic efforts that made the project such a success. He documented not only the worlds of men, as many anthropologists did, but also the plight of women in great detail. Native elders expressed their thanks for his efforts to record the culture and traditions of their people. On March 2, 1899, in the middle of the project, however, Teit's wife Lucy died of tuberculosis.

Later, Teit married Leonie Morens. Morens, whose family ran Morens farm near Spences Bridge, was 17 years younger than Teit. The couple moved in with Leonie's widowed mother on the farm. Through the years they had 6 children together. Teit continued working for Boas in the early 1900's, gathering artifacts, myths, and ethnographic data from the native people of the area. Trusted and respected by aboriginal people and leaders from across the province, Teit's fluency in the native languages and his understanding and passion for the people led to his being asked to join the board of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia which was formed in June, 1916. He wrote letters, positioning statements, and reports, and lobbied heavily for aboriginal rights.

At the height of his lobbying efforts, Teit died of bowel cancer in Merritt on October 30, 1922, at the age of 58. His passing was a great loss to both the aboriginal people and the anthropology community. He was remembered as a prolific author, and a man who was passionate for people and human rights. The Merritt museum has one of the most extensive collections of Teit items in existence.

One of Teit's sons was on the board when the museum opened.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Campbell, P. (1994). "Not as a white man, not as a sojourner: James A. Teit and the fight for native rights in British Columbia, 1884 – 1922", *Left History*. Web. 5 Jun. 2012.

Wikipedia contributors. "James Teit." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 23 Sep. 2011. Web. 5 Jun. 2012

Wickwire, W. (2000). "Teit, James Alexander." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography online*. Web. 5 Jun. 2012.

Wickwire, W. (1993). "Women in Ethnography: The Research of James A. Teit." *Ethnohistory*, 40(4), 539.

See site page "Morens' Farm & Family Gravesite", *Gold Country GeoTourism Adventures Field Guide Volume 1*, 103.

Letterboxing Clues:

Climb hill, cache is under sage plant roughly 20m from corner, parallel to Hwy 8.