

The Fishing Rocks at Xwisten (Bridge River)

SITE #040102

GC1TQF9

Written & Researched by Wendy Fraser

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Lillooet, V0K 1V0
 Location: N 50°45.086'
 W 121°55.923'
 Parking: N 50°45.026'
 W 121°55.995'
 Geocache Location: N 50°45.046'
 W 121°56.012'
 Accuracy: 5 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing
 clues page
 UTM: East 0575234;
 North 5622652 10U
 Geocache altitude: 224 m./734 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 2.5
 Terrain difficulty: 2.5
 (1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: n/a
 Ownership: First Nations Land
 Access: • Highway
 • Year-round
 • Vehicle accessibl
 • *Detailed access
 information on next
 page.*

For more information or to report a problem
 with this site please contact:
 Gold Country Communities Society
 P.O. Box 933 Cache Creek, B.C. V0K 1H0
 Tel: 1-877-453-9467
 email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

For more site pages go to:
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Fishing camps where the Fraser River meets Bridge River

In St'at'imc mythology, a story says that in the beginning, the people living along this section of the Fraser River were without salmon. They heard that some women living at the mouth of the Fraser had built a weir that prevented the salmon from swimming upstream. Coyote, the trickster, decided that since he was smarter than anyone else, he would go and get the salmon for the St'at'imc people.

After being assailed by flies, wasps and salmon lice, Coyote broke the fish weir and released the salmon. "Follow me!" he called out to the salmon and began to run along the river. As he ran, he called out to the people, "Make your fire! The salmon are coming! The salmon are coming!" And that is how the salmon found their way here to Xwisten, the confluence of the Fraser and Bridge Rivers and the principal fishing site of the St'at'imc people.



Here, in a tumultuous surge of white water, massive ridges of bedrock burst from the river bottom, slowing the upstream migration of the salmon, making it easier to catch them and creating one of the greatest fishing sites anywhere on the Fraser.

Five species of Pacific salmon are present in the Fraser River: Chinook or Spring, Coho, Chum, Pink and Sockeye. All begin their lives in fresh water, journey to the sea where they disperse, grow and then return, at ages ranging from two to eight years of age, to spawn in their home streams and die.

The largest salmon runs began in July; therefore, late July and early August were traditionally devoted to catching salmon, primarily sockeye. The success of the catch during these runs determined the ability of St'at'imc families to survive the winter, as the fish were dried and stockpiled. Salmon heads, eggs and innards were used to make salmon oil, which was stored in bottles made of salmon skin. The skin was also used to make shoes. Salmon was a valuable trading commodity; St'at'imc elders say this trade brought the first horses to their territory.

For millennia, salmon has been the primary food of the St'at'imc. The techniques currently used for aboriginal salmon fishing on the Fraser River are gill netting, set netting and dip netting. An unforgettable sight at Xwisten is the view of a St'at'imc fisher perched precariously on the fishing rocks and skillfully using a dip net on a pole to snare a silvery salmon. The fish are still preserved in the traditional way by hanging the fillets from the poles of a drying rack, after making cross-grain cuts in the flesh. These cuts allow the strong, hot winds along the riverbank to dry the flesh. The salmon are then stored for the winter.

The Xwisten (Bridge River) Band opens the fishing rocks to all members of the St'at'imc Nation. The Band also conducts tours of the fishing rocks and s7istken (pit house) sites on its land.



Preparing the fish for drying

Detailed access information:

- The Xwisten fishing rocks are 7 km north of the Mile 0 Cairn.
- From Lillooet, follow Highway 40 (Moha Road) north.
- There are 2 small pullouts before the bridge over Bridge River.
- The fishing rocks are below at the junction of the Bridge & Fraser Rivers.
- Use caution along slopes and rivers edges, slippery rocks & uneven terrain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Francis, D. (2000). *The Encyclopedia of British Columbia*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing.

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Hayden, B. (1992). *A Complex Culture of the British Columbia Plateau: Traditional Stl'alt'imx resource use*. Toronto, ON: UBC Press.

Pringle, H. (1996). *In Search of Ancient North America*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.