The Point No Point Treaty Tribes by

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The present day tribes who were signers to the Point No Point Treaty live on the Olympic Peninsula in Western Washington State. The Peninsula is an area rich in resources including plants, insects, fin fish and shell fish, and mammals. For thousands of years before the coming of Americans and the signing of the Treaty, it provided a rich environment for human settlements occupied by the predecessors to the present-day Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S’Klallam, Port Gamble S’Klallam, and Skokomish among others.

The Skokomish are Twana speaking people who occupied the Hood Canal area. Twana is a branch of the Southern Coast Salish or Lushootseed language. Twana was the language of the Hood Canal people and its river drainages.

The Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S’Klallam, and Port Gamble S’Klallam speak a branch of Central Coast Salish called Clallam. They occupied the north slope of the Olympic Peninsula from the Hoko River to Port Discovery Bay.

Because of the varied resources of the Peninsula, the pre-Treaty population was dense compared with other areas of North America. Food was available literally year round. A predictable, staple of the diet was salmon, among other fish. The salmon that is caught in the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Hood Canal and the rivers of the Peninsula are anadromous. That is, these fish live out their adult lives in ocean water but return, predictably, to rivers to spawn. All five species of salmon were present at different places and times. The people developed a variety of techniques for harvesting these fish as they ascended the rivers as well as they moved through the salt water. Fishing technology included traps and weirs, seines and gill nets, and hooks and spears. Chinook and Cohoes salmon could be trolled for from late winter through spring. Sockeye and pink salmon arrived in the Strait of Juan de Fuca around mid July. Because the fish returned yearly, the people had a reliable, bountiful annual food supply (barring ecological catastrophe) that they reaped efficiently. The people used these fish fresh but also preserved the meat in a variety of ways, including wind and sun drying and smoking, so that the harvest could be saved and used throughout the year.

The people of the Olympic Peninsula lived in winter villages along bays, river mouths, along productive coast lines, and near the banks of rivers and streams, that is anywhere that might provide access to their primary means of transportation, i.e., waterways, and food supplies. These village communities were comprised of wood frame plank-houses. These villages were both economic and social units. It was during the winter that most elaborate religious and ceremonial activities took place.

Village exogamy was the general rule. That is, people sought marriage partners from outside the village and even outside their immediate tribe or language group.

The people of the Olympic Peninsula used a variety of canoes depending upon circumstance. Canoe designs were specialized for use in the open sea, in bays, or on rivers. Some were used for travel and the transport of goods. Others were used for hunting or fishing. There was also an extensive network of trails that led to resource laden meadows and foothills or followed ridgelines so that people could cross the rugged terrain. These routes were used for hunting, particularly of elk, deer, bear, marmot, and trade.

Hunters used bows and arrows, often hunting with dogs. But deer and elk were also taken in drives. Other techniques for taking animals included pitfalls, snares, and nets.

During warmer seasons, people traveled away from winter villages to fish or collect shell fish or collect berries, including salmonberry, blackberry, thimbleberry, blackcap, serviceberry, salal berry, red huckleberry, and blueberry, and other seasonal crops such as vegetable shoots and the bulbs of camas and tiger lily on the natural prairies that dotted the Peninsula. Other food species taken included at least twenty species of water fowl. Shellfish were also abundant and used for food. These included the littleneck clam, butter clam, horse clam, cockle, geoduc, mussel, and tiny native oyster. Some of these were dried for later use and some were traded.

During these collecting trips, travelers set up temporary camps. Small groups ranged widely over the Peninsula and along the coast lines.

Though people savored a rich variety of foods provided by their environment, salmon was inarguably the staple food of the region. Other fish species supplemented this fare. Depending upon season, water conditions, and location, halibut, herring, smelt, flounder, and perch could be found in abundance.

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