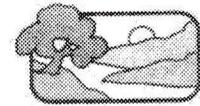


Nov 2018

Trustee Notebook *By Laura Busheikin*



Islands Trust

Feasting, Learning and Connecting with the K'omoks First Nation

There is so much that residents of Denman Island don't know about the place we call home—in particular, about the Indigenous people who once lived here and enjoyed the island's abundance, and who currently have constitutionally-guaranteed rights in this region. On October 14, approximately 150 Denman community members had an opportunity to fill this gaping knowledge gap, while also sharing food and good will with leading members of the K'omoks First Nation (KFN).

The Community Potluck and Fireside Gathering, held at the Activity Centre, was organized by the Islands Trust local trustees and the K'omoks Nation.

For some participants, the day started in the early afternoon when KFN Chief Nicole Rempel, Band Manager Tina McLean and her husband, and KFN archeologist Jesse Morin came over for a tour of the island with local trustees. Blessed by sunny and crisp autumn weather, we made a loop around the island with stops at Chickadee Lake and a couple of favourite beaches.

By the time we got to the Activity Centre, it was filling up with Denmanites bearing food, as well as a group of K'omoks Elders and community members.

The program included opening remarks from trustees and Chief Rempel, and a traditional welcome from Elder Vivian Fortin. Next on the program, as we ate, was a presentation by Dr. Morin on the Indigenous history of Denman Island. Dr. Morin was hired several years ago by the K'omoks to research and record this history, and he spoke on behalf of the KFN. This is the first time this information has been shared on Denman.

We learned that what is now known as the K'omoks Nation came out of an amalgamation of the original K'omoks, who were based around what is now Campbell River until they moved south to what is now known as the Comox Valley in the mid-1800s, with the Pentlatch people, who originally inhabited this area.

According to archeological evidence, Denman Island had four or five large settlements, at Village Point, Metcalf Bay, Fillongley Park, and Henry Bay (where a village of 300 people was described by settlers in 1860), and Hornby had a major settlement at Shingle Spit.

Dr. Morin described how the K'omoks people were decimated by two separate waves of smallpox, asking us to imagine losing 80 - 90% of our population—children, elders

who carry knowledge, and adults who provide food, build homes, and keep us safe—over a period of about three weeks. Twice.

By 1862, the K'omoks people had apparently ceased occupying their Denman and Hornby Island settlements, although they continued to use smaller camps seasonally. In 1876, they requested a reserve on Southern Denman Island but it was denied. Early settler accounts describe K'omoks travelling seasonally to north Denman until about 1900; with continued resource harvesting on and around Hornby continuing throughout the 20th century.

Dr. Morin asked Denman community members to let him know if we find any archeological evidence on our properties, such as shell midden or artefacts. Chief Rempel graciously reassured us that her nation would not take anyone's property or stop anyone from being able to live on their land.*

After the program at the Activity Centre wound up, a number of people crossed the street to the bonfire beside the Community Hall. Around the fire, Chief Rempel talked about studying the K'omoks language, and also about the significance of a recent precedent-setting KFN court case which verified the right of an Indigenous nation to manage their own lands and resources.

By the time Chief Rempel left on the 9:10 ferry, I think all participants felt a warm glow of connection, and a number of us had learned the correct pronunciation of taystayic, the K'omoks name for this island (it can roughly be transcribed as kliesh-tie-eetch; check out the app First Voices to hear it, and many more Indigenous words).

This event grew out of a series of government-to-government meetings hosted by the KFN. One main goal for the evening was to bring the Denman community into this relationship. All parties involved seemed to feel that had been achieved, creating a foundation for further travels together along the road to reconciliation, mutual appreciation, and respectful collaboration. Gilakasla!

*If you find any possible evidence of Indigenous use, such as shell midden or artefacts, please contact *both* the K'omoks First Nation (reception@komoks.ca/250-339-4545) and Dr. Jesse Morin (jdmorin@gmail.com)