

# Semiahmoo Reef Net

Don Welsh

## The Reef Net Fishing System of the Semiahmoo First Nation

The reef net system of fishing evolved within the generally island territory of the speakers of the North Straits Language [Sencot'en]. This territory lacked good salmon streams so this system was developed to access the migrating salmon on the open ocean before they entered rivers to spawn. In this way, they had access to salmon prior to the river people giving them a trading advantage. Equally, the salmon had not entered fresh water and had a full amount of fat and were therefore more nutritious than river salmon.

This paper is focused on Semiahmoo reef net fishing and focuses on the reef at Point Roberts at the south-eastern end, known as Cannery Point or more recently, Lily Point. However, the local cultures married out of their respective communities and within these marriages shared resources. Data will be presented from Saanich, Cowichan, Malahat and Lummi sources as relating to the fishery at Point Roberts.

### Reef Net Glossary

The following glossary has been gleaned from Wayne Suttles' PhD thesis. Additional Saanich names have been added from the work of Earl Claxton. They are alternately transcribed in both International Phonetic Association fonts, [black], and the local Saanich Sen-Elliott Script, [red].

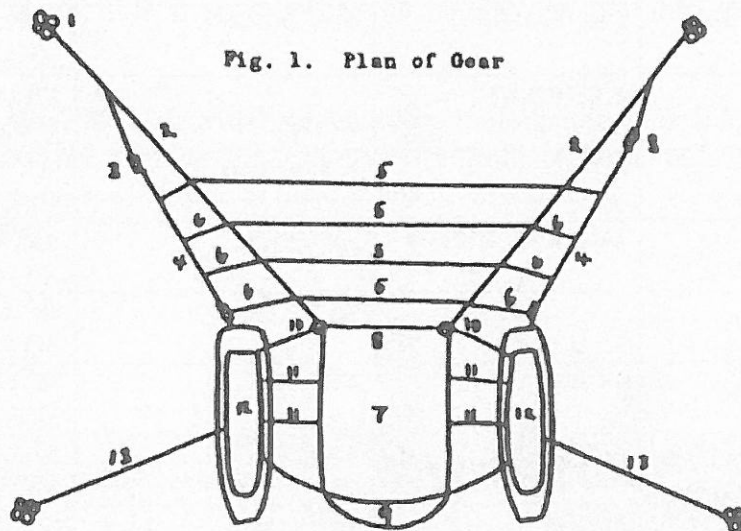
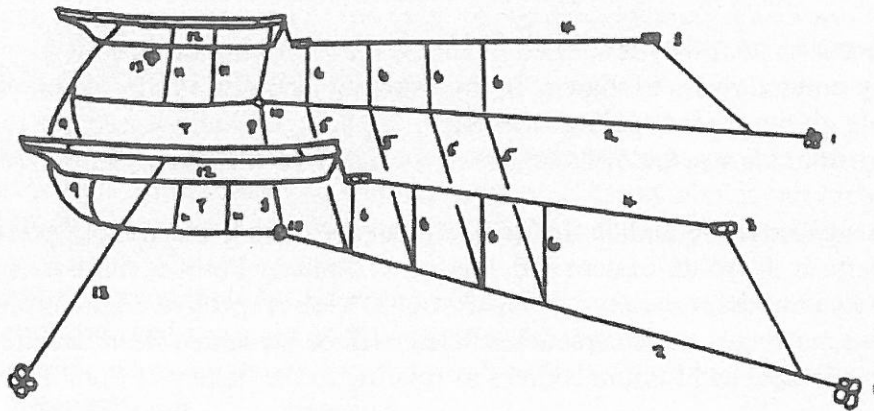


Fig. 2. Side View of Gear



Suttles 1952: p157, 158.

English	Lummi	Songish	Saanich
1 Head Anchors	sqɛ'nt		šq'a,ləs ŠKO,LES
2 Head Anchor lines	čəx'álatən	čəx'álatən	xəx,k'ɪtən ,eíɬEN
3 Head Buoys	k'tɛ'lqəən		s'hiuisən S,HIUKSEN
4 Lead Lines	stx'íu	tqəné'tən	stx'iu STWIU
5 Floor Lines	šstənaič, šnélnil	sastənaič	xətK'ɪtən XETɛɬEN
6 Side Lines		sq'ɛ'.ta	sk'ɛtəl SQAɬEL
7 Net	sx'álə	sx'ələ	sx'alə SXOLE
8 Front Edge of Net	čəŋtínəs	čɪŋtínəs	xɪinəs XTINES
9 Bunt of Net	éličən	sq'íyusən	t'əstənayač TɛSTENAYEĆ
10 Net Sinker	k'ələs	sqɛ'nət	ɪčɪtən TĆILEN
11 Net Sidelines	tx'al'wəxtən	'al'esən	sk'ɛtəl SQAɬEL
12 Canoe	sx'ətɛ'k'ət	ɪələi	sx'aléčət ɛXELÁɛEL
13 Breast Lines	x'qəw'éičən	x'qəw'íčən	x'k'uwíčən

In addition, Suttles recorded:

k'əŋaləs

“dropping rocks”

haya šɛɪt tɛčəɪsɪ šɛɪt

When captain saw fish jumping ahead of the net, he and other watchmen say, “Thank you, elder brother: come, elder brother.”

nətəsət

“release it”, pull pin at breast lines – bring canoes together.

lɛ'ŋət, lɛ'ŋət, lɛ'ŋət, lɛ'ŋət

“Look, look, look, look.” When captain saw fish swimming toward net. He moved hand up and down to startle the fish into the net.

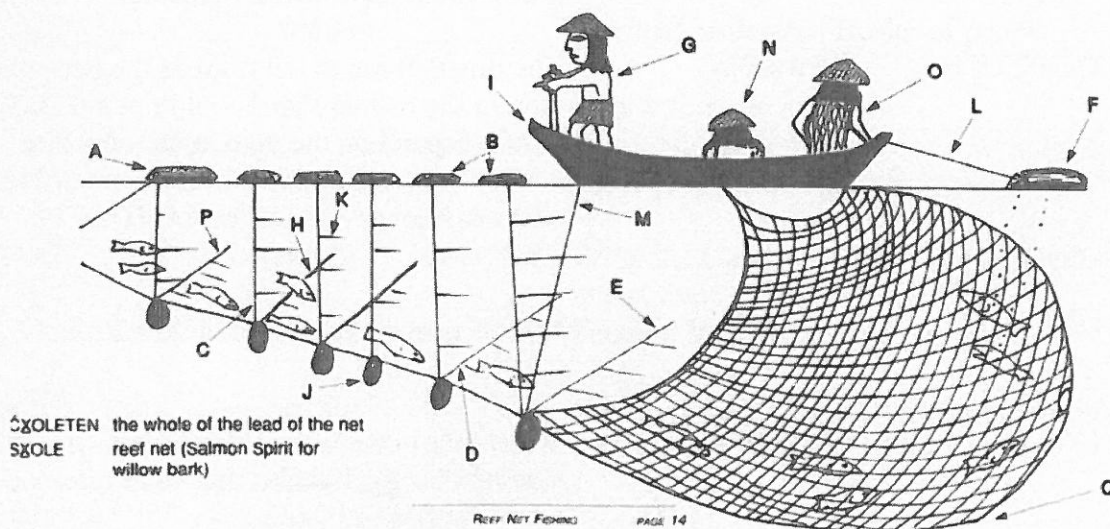
šəmət, šəmət, šəmət, šəmət

“lift, lift, lift, lift.” All pulled at net sidelines or at lines attached to the net weight.

hé, é, é, é, hé, é, é, é, é.

as they lift net – to salute the fish.

Earl Claxton, working with Saanich elders built up a more detailed vocabulary. It is presented here in the Saanich, Sen Elliott Script, [red], and International Phonetic Association fonts, [black]. Some of these terms refer to activities while others are descriptive names.



A. S,HIUKSEN	s,hiux˘sən	Head buoy on each lead: the biggest log. 4' diameter, 6-8' long.
B. KĪÍKSEN	qʰiqsən	5 smaller buoys – 2-3' diameter, 4' long.
C. SQÁLEL	sk˘éʰəl	Upright side lines of the lead of reef net [the setting].
D. XEÍĪLEN	xətʰk˘ʰən	Rope floor lines of the lead of the net.
G. ĆENÁLYEN	k˘ənélyn	Front watchman, stands in front – hauls net up.
H. ŚWŚOMES	šx˘šaməs	Part of lead line that rises, the second floor line. [shallowest part of lead line]. Salmon would jump at times when they would reach this point to indicate their entrance to the net
I. SXĒLÁĆEL	sx˘ələćəʰ	Reef net canoe – passed to the captain who would inherit the name [NEHIMET].
J. TĪILEN	xčʰən	Rock weight – a specially made net weight, passed down from one captain to the next.
K. SLEQAI	slək˘eyi	Dune grass – placed in twinings of ropes of lead.
L. WQUWÍĆEN	x˘k˘uwičən	Adjustable breast line, that allowed the fishing gear to swing one way or the other to allow direct tidal flow into the net.
M. ĆENTEĻFIN	k˘əntəlθin	The line that ran to the front of the net – the man in the bow at times could not see and would depend on the man in the opposite canoe facing away from the sun, to tell him when to haul as he held the ĆENTEĻFIN [front rope].
N. ĪXELWEĻTEN	ʰxəlwəʰtən	Middle part of canoe or middle person.
O. I,YELES	i,yələs	Watchman – the man in the stern – who watched for the bubbles that were released when the fish are turning.

P. STWIU	stx̃in	Front anchor lines [upper and bottom], first of floor lines.
Q. ƦESTENAYEĆ	ḡæstənayəċ	The bunt of the net that would bag out into the tide
SKEMAYEKŠ	sq̃əməyəq	Dye for net – balsam, to make it greyish brown to match the ocean floor.
ILEĆEN	iləċən	Front of net floor-line, outer edge of bunt of net. Browning Harbour.
ŠKO,LES	šq̃a,ləs	Area where front anchor binds or connects with other rocks. Four large rocks tied together for front anchor.
,EÍLEN	xəḡ,k̃iʔən	Front lines of the lead of the net.
KENOLEŠ	x̃əŋaləs	Start of season, when anchors are put in.
ĆXOLETEN	ċx̃alətən	Reef net lead.
SWÁ,LET	swé,lət	Reef net location, belonging to certain families.
EENTÁLSEN	k̃əntélsəŋ	Haul up the line.
ƦENĪNES	ḡəŋiŋəs	Line in front of net – attaches to lead and boats, the shallowest floor line [fourth line].
ŠNÁ,EM	šná,əm	Spiritual protector. Healer of people.
SFXÁLEM	sθx̃éləm	Winter ferns, sword fern.
TEMEL	təməʔ	Sacred red earth.
NEĪET	nəʔət	Bring the Canoes together, [pull the pin on breast line].
KELXÁLYEN	x̃əlx̃élyən	Fencing of the netting before lead.
SXOLE	sx̃alə	Reef Net [Salmon spirit's word for willow bark].
BEĪTAN	bək̃teyn	Float

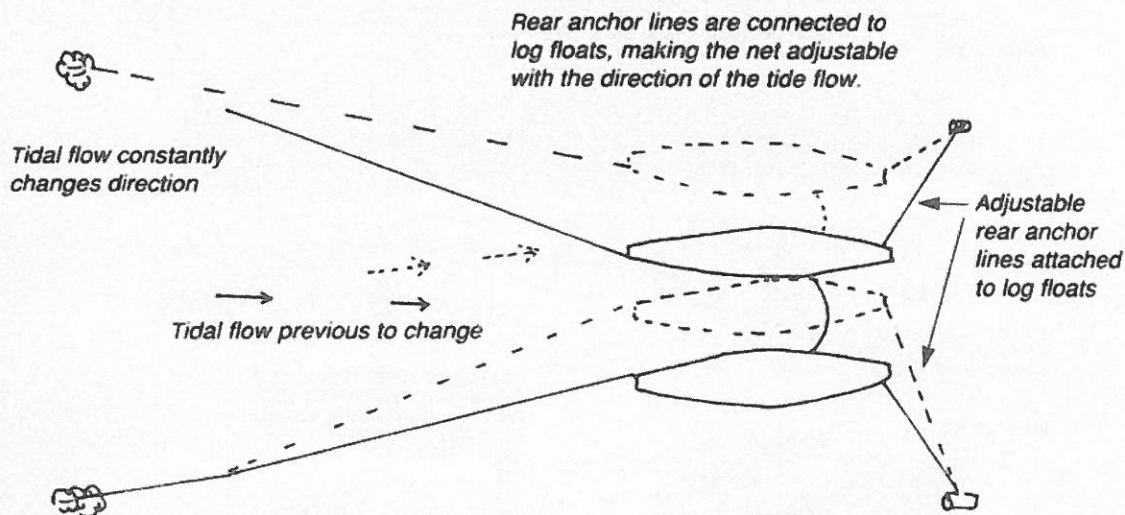


would be made of split cedar rails. This extension was added to the outside lead to re-direct salmon that were partly missing the lead at its original normal length. These rails were approximately twenty to thirty feet in length. The extension of the lead was call the **KELXÁLYEN** which interprets in English as a fishing fence.

The lead extension was built of split cedar rails that were secured with rock anchors to cause the rails to be submerged in an upright position. The rails were tied together at the top and the bottom with ropes. It appeared that when the salmon saw the rail fence or lead extension, they were then re-directed to the normal lead of the **SXOLE**.

Great care was taken in the setting of the **KELXÁLYEN** [extension]. Once it was set, fishing would resume [Claxton and Elliott p19].

### Adjustments for Changes in Tidal Flow



Claxton wrote:

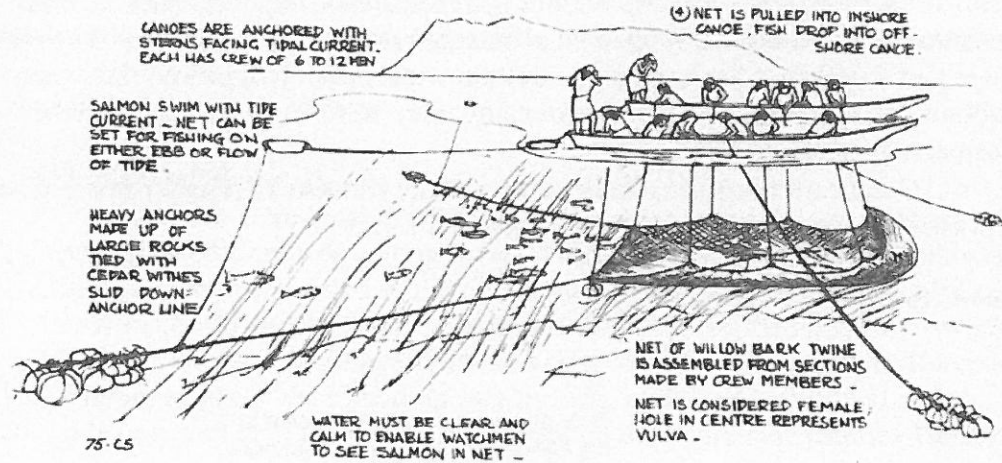
As the tide constantly changed direction, the anchor ropes that were tied to the canoes were attached to buoys to allow adjustment with the direction of the tide. When the tidal flow changed direction, adjustments were made to re-align the setting with the direct tidal flow. The **QENÁLYEN** [the front watchman] also watched to see if the **SLEQÁI** [dune grass] was at right angles to the floor line and was flowing directly into the net between the canoes [Claxton and Elliott p17].

### Artist Representations of the Reef Net

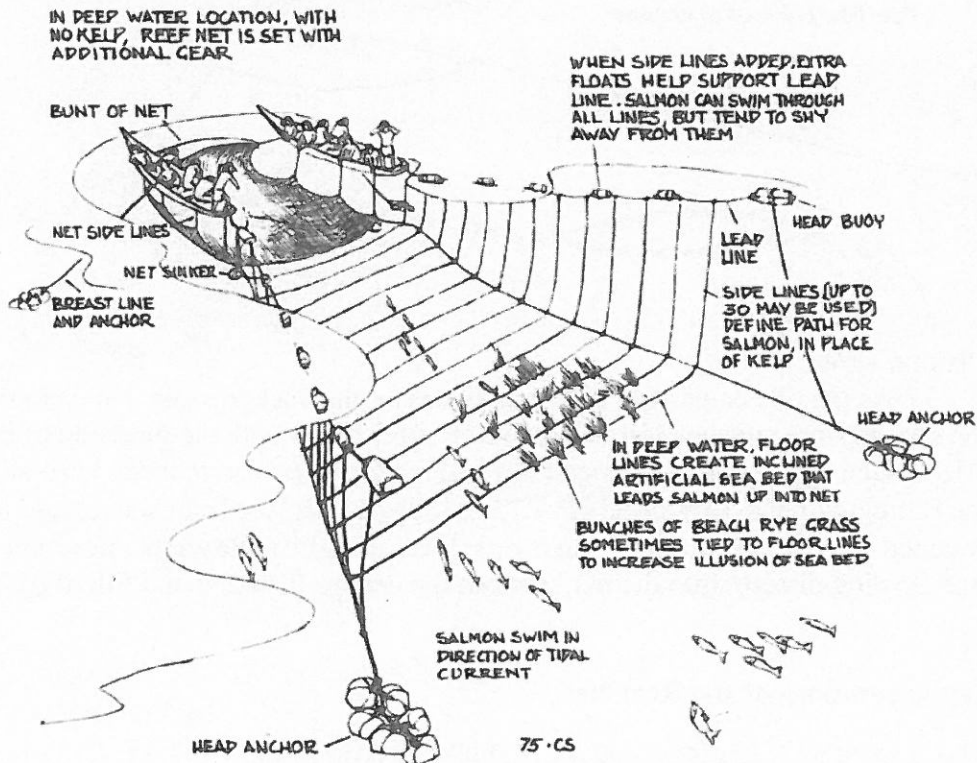
The reef net has been the subject of several drawings by the well known illustrator of west coast traditional life, Hillary Stewart, in her book *Indian Fishing* [Stewart, Hillary



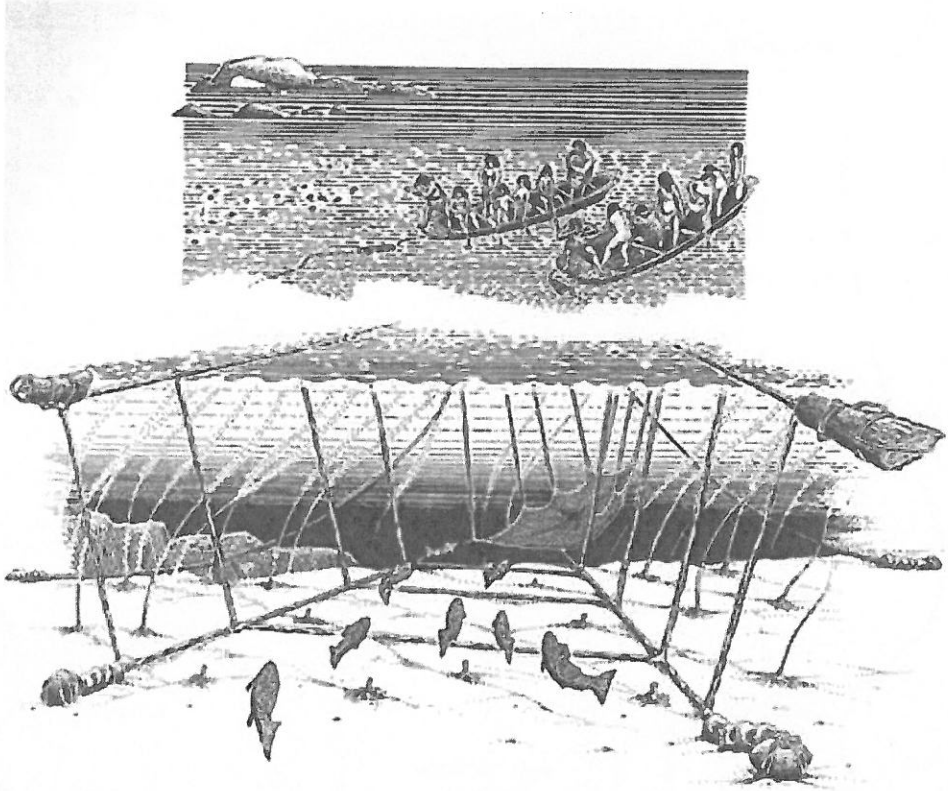
1977]. The first shows a gear set in a kelp bed, the second a larger gear with a more elaborate false reef.



#### REEF NET, DEEP WATER

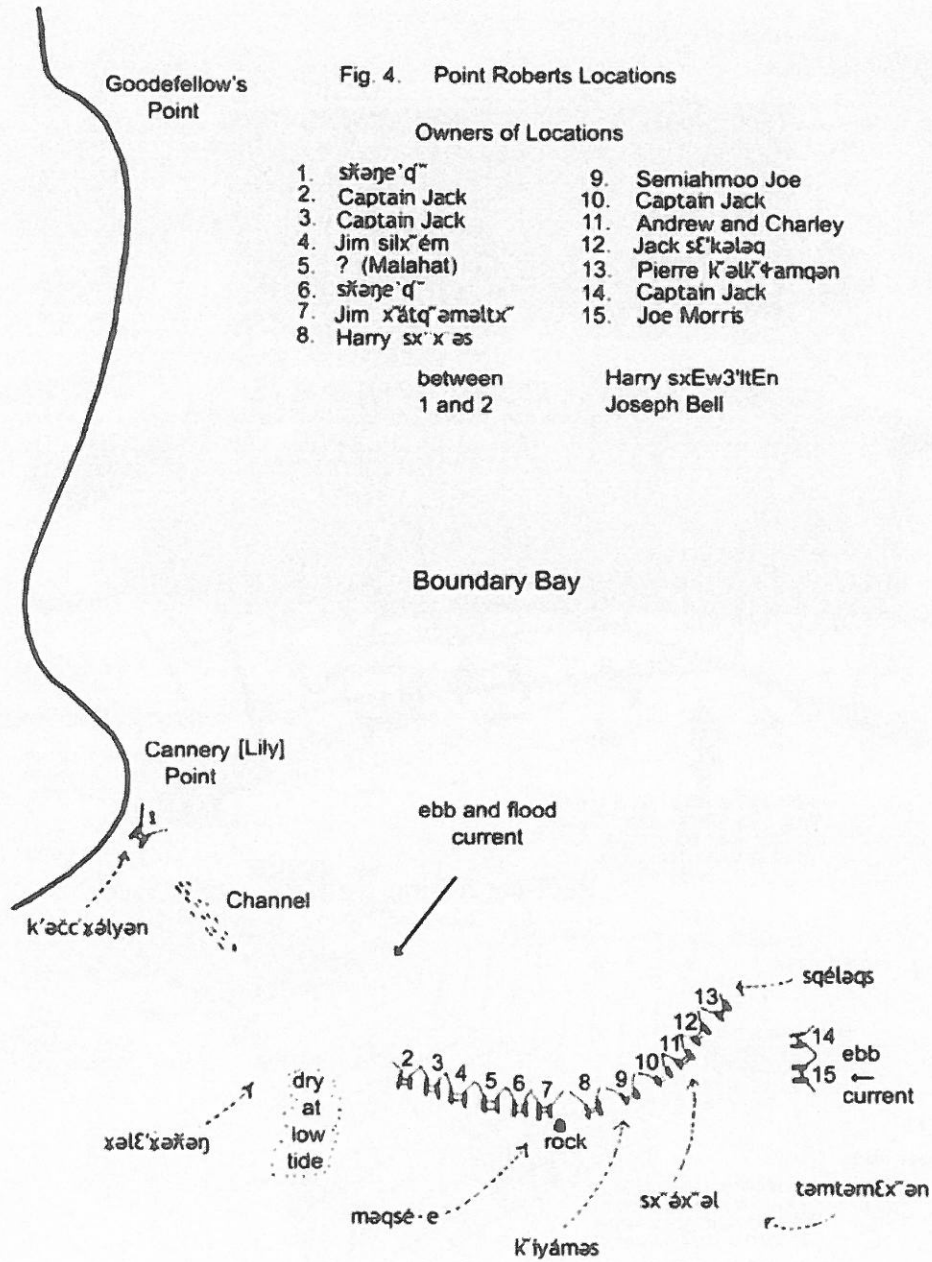


The following illustration was prepared by Gordon Friesen in 1991-1992 as part of a series as part of a project on Beacon Hill Park in Victoria sponsored by the Friends of Beacon Hill Park Society.



Reef-net fishing

# Point Roberts Reef Net Locations

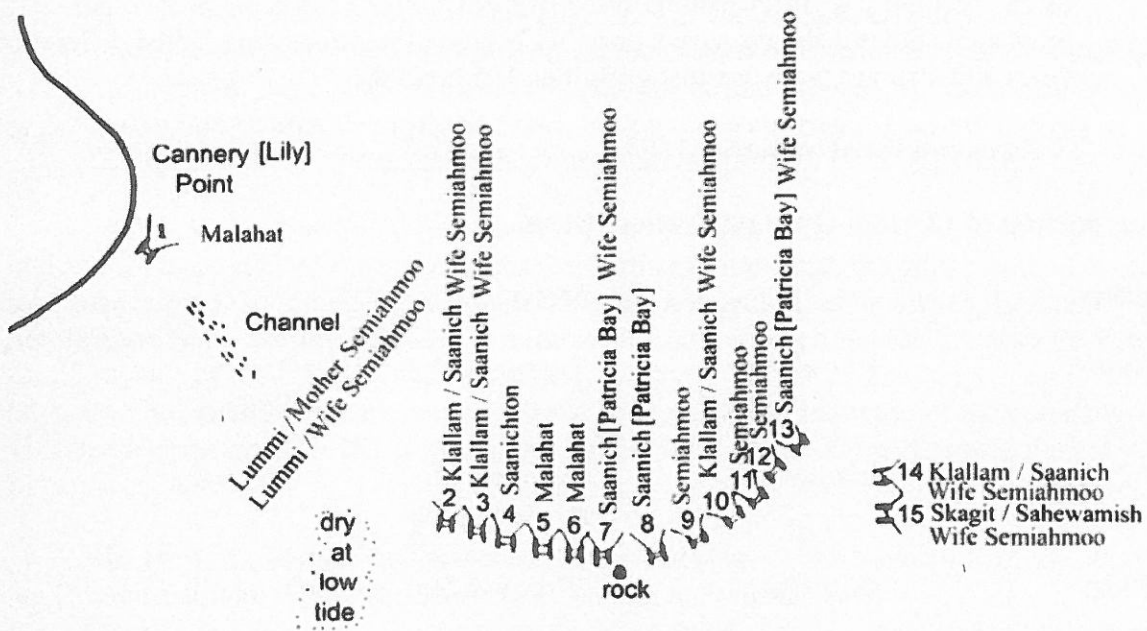


Here is the same map arranged to show the tribal origins of the individuals owning locations, as recorded by Wayne Suttles in the late 1940's [Suttles 1952: pp 210 - 213].

Suttles stated:

It is likely that only Semiahmoo and Saanich owned locations at Point Roberts and that the ownership of locations has been passed on to members of other groups through marriages. Genealogies show marriages between Semiahmoo and Active Pass people early in the last century. It may be that locations were originally transmitted from the Semiahmoo to the Saanich through the Active Pass group [Suttles 1952: p213].

Although the owners of the locations are of diverse origins, they seem to have a common feature, which is that, almost all were married to Semiahmoo women. Suttles had little genealogical information on the Malahat man and one of the Saanich men, so they as well could have had a marriage connection to the Semiahmoo, in whose core territory this site is situated.



**A Comparison of Location Names and Owners recorded by Suttles and Stern**

Suttles	Meaning	Stern	Meaning
		Tsetlsngtonele	one nearest shore
k'əc'ə'lyən	feces-net	Qetsxolyin	the leavings

xələ'xəħəŋ	<i>crossing, crosswise</i>		
məqse'e	<i>lump</i>	Mokwsoi	<i>kissing rock</i>
k'iyə'məs			
sx'ə'x'əl	<i>hole</i>	Sxoxol	<i>Hollow or deep place on reef</i>
sk'e'ləqs	<i>Point of the reef</i>	Sqileqs	<i>Outer end of reef</i>
təmtəm'xən	<i>edge of current</i>	Tomomexon	<i>edge of current</i>

There is a quite good concordance between the two lists. Suttles used a more rigorous linguistic recording, but despite that, Stern has recorded similar sounding names.

Suttles wrote:

I have indicated these names and the locations and their owners as given by PG on Figure 4. Information on relative positions of gears given by other informants did not always agree, possibly because the informants fished different years and changes were occurring [Suttles 1952; p208].

Stern gave a list of owners in 1898.

#### Comparison of Lists Of Owners: Suttles / Stern.

Suttles		Stern	
s'ə'nəq'	k'əc'ə'lyən	Tcexenoq & father	Tsetlsngtonele Sqileqs
x'ətq'əməltx'	məqse'e	Sxotqomltxw & son Stenoq	Mokwsoi
y'kšp	sx'ə'x'əl	Yiqsep & Bro in law	Sxoxol
		Tleluqom & Yeqwetx	Sxoxol
		Tlpetcon	
pk'ə'čtən & siət'ə'xəltən		Poquchtin & Sitexolton	
s'əuw'ə'nəx' & suq'ə'lq'		Semiahmoo Joe & Saqalkett	
Joseph Bell & Felix Solomon		Joseph Bell & Felix Solomon	
Harry sxəw'ə'ltən		Harry Sxewalton	

It should be noted that  $y\acute{e}'k\acute{s}p$ 's brother in law was  $pk'á\acute{c}t\acute{a}n$ .  $y\acute{e}'k\acute{s}p$  or Captain Jack was a Klallam / Lummi with at least a Saanich relative as well as a Semiahmoo / Lummi wife whose brother was  $pk'á\acute{c}t\acute{a}n$ , or Charley George. Suttles details various locations fished by Charley George. At some points in time he was either working on other gears, partners with Andrew Tom, running his own gear, working next to Captain Jack or working for Captain Jack as watchman. Andrew Tom  $si\acute{a}t\acute{e}'x\acute{a}l\acute{t}\acute{a}n$ , was Charley's cousin; Andrew's mother was Charley's father's sister. [Suttles 1952: p210]. This shows close intermarriage within the location owners that could be obscured by looking only at the tribal origins of the location owners. The two names Tleluqom & Yeqwetx associated with Yiqsep noted in Stern's list as brothers, were probably relatives of Captain Jack.

There is quite good concordance between the two lists. Suttles includes some additional names of location owners from different time periods. He stated:

About 1880 Andrew was fishing as captain on a gear belonging to his step-father  $x\acute{t}\acute{a}'\acute{c}t\acute{a}n$ , with a Saanich crew.

Jim's father  $\acute{f}\acute{c}\acute{a}i$  fished in the 1880's.

Jack started out with one gear; he was captain himself and his wife's sister's husband, Edward Bill from Clemclemalitz at Cowichan, was the other watchman. Later Jack got a second gear, so he and Edward Bill each took one, taking on Patrick George and Frank Hillaire as watchman. These two gears shifted back and forth, using the four locations [Suttles 1952: p 210, 211].

After Alaska Packers took over Lily Point [calling it Cannery Point] in 1884, the native fishermen moved their camp location further to the North to a piece of land owned by a man named Goodefellow. Goodefellow was not neutral, as he owned the cannery at Semiahmoo Spit. During this time, a number of Lummi fishermen sued Alaska Packers for disruption of their fishery, protected, they believed by treaty. The judge, [who was alleged to be related to the owners of Alaska Packers], ruled in favour of the company. This cannery lasted until 1917. However, by this time it had totally disrupted the native fishery.

In 1895, the Lummi Indians sued Alaska Packers. In the transcripts of the court, the Lummi fishermen state their history of fishing at Point Roberts.

Old Polen [Gchelghuamitken or Chil-whamet-kun] stated:

Captain Jack has fished there every year since he was a boy. I knew Jack's father and I know that he fished there every year. I know Jo Norris, Harry Sewalton, Louis Washington, Joseph Bill, George Sknoughton, Tom Squaqui, Indian Mike, Jo Tobe and many others of the Lummi Indians who have fished at Point Roberts every year since they were boys. I knew old Ben, Timothy Yelatameon, Old Washington, Old Nolton and many other Indians now dead, all of the Lummis, and with whom I fished when I was a small boy.

[Old Polen's testimony]

Old Polen's list includes, I am assuming, crew members as well as captains and watchmen. Captain Jack, Harry Sewalton, Joseph Bill [Joseph Bell] and Jo Norris [Joe Morris] are represented on Suttles' list of owners.

**John Elwood** was forty years old in 1895. He was the official interpreter for all the Indians who witnessed at the court. Respected and known by the Indians, Elwood testified:

In 1875 or 1876, I began trading with the **Lummi, Saanich and Cowichan** Indians, and also the **Semiahmoo** at Point Roberts and buying from them the sockeye salmon taken each year at Point Roberts. When I began purchasing their salmon, to the best of my recollection, there was but one cannery in British Columbia and not one in the Territory of Washington. I was the first American or white man on the American side of the international boundary who began the packing of salmon.

From 1875 or 1876, every summer I made my residence at Point Roberts, and bought and packed the salmon taken by the Indians on the reef at the Point. I salted and packed such salmon in barrels, and had a vessel and at times sold such salmon to the Fraser River Cannery.

Since 1875 I have known as many as 250 Indians to be engaged in fishing at this Point, and in the light years the numbers were somewhat reduced. Since I have known this Point, large numbers of Indians have annually fished there, but more than on-half of the fishermen have always been Saanich and Cowichan Indians. Between one-third and one-half of such fishermen have been Lummis. I have known all of the Lummi fishermen during all these years, and have bought their fish and kept book accounts with them and paid them a great many thousands of dollars for the fish they caught at Point Roberts.

During all these years I have been very familiar with the Point Roberts reef, and each and every part of it. I was on and over that reef every year scores of times. When I first went to Point Roberts, three or four acres of the mainland at the point where the cannery now stands was literally covered with racks built and maintained by these Indians for drying their salmon for their own use and for trading purposes. There were a great many shacks along this part of the beach, and the condition of these shacks and racks showed that they had been in use for a great many years.

All of the Indians have been for years and generation friendly. They have intermarried and have maintained an alliance against the Northern Indians who frequently made war upon them and carried away the captives taken for slaves. The Northern Indians not only were hostile to these Indians, but to the early white settlers. All these tribes of Indians were friendly to the white and made common cause with them against the northern invaders.

I also know from my frequent conversations with these older Indians that for generations Point Roberts has been a common fishing ground for all these tribes, including the Lummi. Upon Point Robert's reef and on the beach where their shacks and racks were maintained, these Indians and all of them who fished at the Point had their several allotments of land. Their net locations and their rights to these respective locations and allotments of land were scrupulously respected, and here existed an old custom and law among them that was never violated in this regard. I know and the fact is that Captain Jack and the other Lummi had their several allotments of land on the Point and their several locations on this reef, and occupied them during all the time I have known them. These locations on the reef extended from a point near the mainland out to the point of that reef.

**John Waller**, the husband of **Kate Waller**, came to Point Roberts a year or two after I began trading with these Indians at the Point. Waller located on the Point at the place where the cannery now stands, and had been there several years before he attempted to interfere with the Indians. At the point where the cannery is located there is a little sheltered cove and sandy beach, and such point is the only natural or fit harbor in that vicinity at which canoes such as are used by the Indians can be landed. The rest of the shoreline is rocky and exposed.

About 1880, Waller destroyed the racks of the Indians located where the cannery now stands. The Indians then moved up the easterly shoreline to the north six or seven-hundred yards. Afterwards, Waller asserted claim to these lands also, and the Indians complained to me that Waller had torn down their shacks at that place and used the lumber.

The Indians have never fished at the Point with any other kind of appliances than with their hand and lift nets, and they do not understand the use of any other kind of fishing appliances. I have known white men at this Point to catch fish with gill nets and purse seines, but the Indians have always fished at the Point, only on the reef, with lift nets.

The Indians are very poor and could not invest in trap equipment such as that used by the Alaska Packers Association. As for the three huge traps that the Association had placed before the reef, the old net locations of the Indians were rendered useless and none of them can be fished with profit.

John Elwood, a trader familiar with Chinook Jargon acted as interpreter for the court for the following: Joe Toba, Harry Sewalton, Jack Sumptilino, Jim Kwinooks, Henry Kwina, Louis Washington, Saanich Jim, Harry Saquist, George Sknoughton and Indian Mike.

He added the following:



Sockeye pass over Village Point Reef, Point Whitehorn Reef and the Point Roberts Reef. Pass run jumping. This is the only place you can catch with a hand net – where water does not exceed 2 fathoms. Indians removed boulders from reef and constructed channels. The anchors were on the side. Every year cleaned channel at start of run.

Not everyone could run nets. He named Captain Jack, Old Polen and Harry Sewalton. Captain Jack was the best.

2 years large run, 3<sup>rd</sup> reduced, 4<sup>th</sup> failure.

Knew Lummi; Captain Jack, Jack Sumpiltino, Henry Kwina, Tom Squiqui, Louis Washington & others – Saanich Jim and Harry Saquist.

When he started, they all used willow bark. When he first went there 3 or 4 acres where cannery stands covered with racks for drying fish for food and trade. It was an old burying ground and there were piles of shells.

Lummi, Saanich, Cowichan & Semiahmoo all speak practically the same language. They have been friendly for years and maintained an alliance against the northern Indians.

People owned lots and net locations for generations – these lots and locations were respected and never violated,

At the point where the cannery is a little sheltered cove and sandy beach. This is the only natural harbour, all the rest is rocky. This was the only place to land canoes.

Lummi also fish for dogfish and extracted oil for sale.

Harry Sewalton added:

He was a Lummi, his father was named Krenomit. Hillaire Crocket has been chief since 1879, his father before him.

He knew Captain Jack, Old Polen, Jo Morris, Louis Washington, Joseph Bill, George Sknoughton, Tom Squaquit, Indian Mike, Jo Tobe, Mathias Paul, Billy Lear. All owned nets except Mathias Paul and Billy Lear.

He fished the point prior to 1855 and every year since. Since 1855 he personally removed boulders. He placed anchors on sides for 2 canoes. The reef was covered in canoes from a point near the mainland to  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles from shore.

The outer edge was where the land is not exposed at low tide so you can't remove boulders.

Can only catch fish for 3 hours out of 24 on ebb tide.

Joe Tobe added:

He has seen hundreds camped on the point. All from within 100 miles. Saanich, Cowichan, La Connors, Tulalips, Lummi, Semiahmoo and others.

They camped on the beach. There were 30 or 40 shacks, cabins, buildings for drying fish. The sandy beach was protected from the south and south-westerly winds and was the only place where you can land a canoe in rough weather.

There were houses for curing salmon.

It was not true that they relied on a natural channel in the reef to catch fish. Never within 30 years have there been less than 20 nets used. It took 10 to 12 men to handle the net. At times they employed other tribes.

Those that owned nets supplied those without – 400 people last year and previously more.

John Kwinooks added:

All locations were owned by men and their fathers before them.

Joseph Bill was son-in-law to Jack Sumptilino and maintained the location after Jack was too old.

Nets were of willow, ropes of cedar bark.

Fish approach the reef in a South-westerly direction.

His aunt married a Saanich. Many Lummis were intermarried with the Saanich.

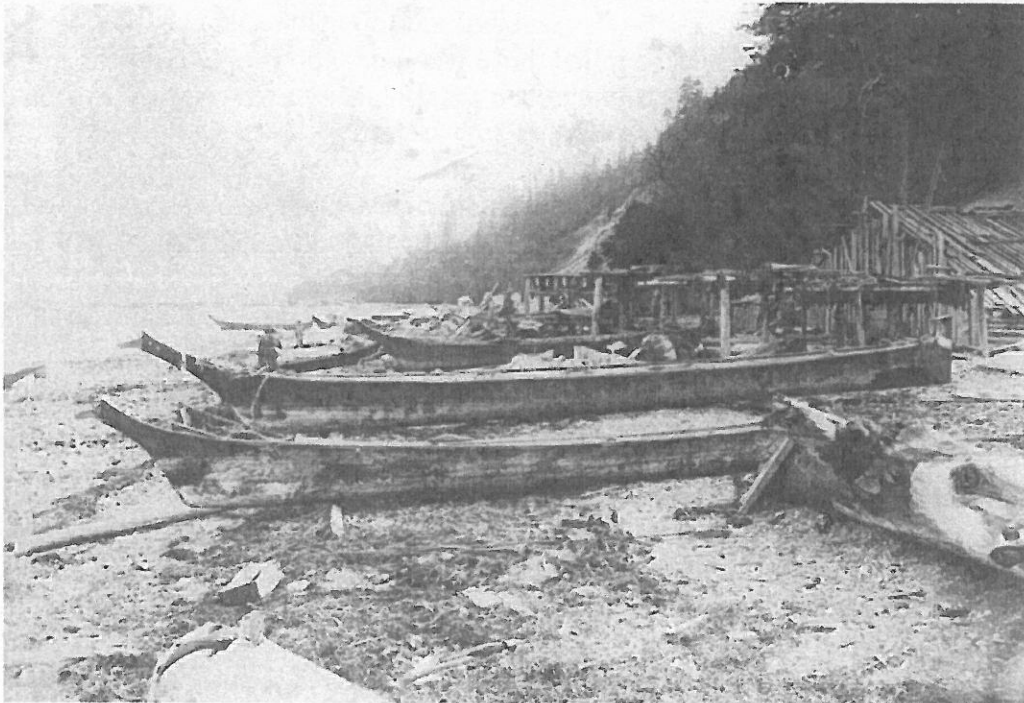
Many Lummi for more than 50 years have fished the reef in spring for dogfish [rendered for oil]. Also took sturgeon there in springtime. Also took clams in the bay and dried them.

Harry Saquist added:

Our people have always regarded Chaltenum as a common fishing point for not only themselves [Saanich] and the Lummi Indians but the Cowichans and Semiahmoos and other Sound Indians.

These court records add a vision of how it may have been at Point Roberts from the viewpoint of participants in the reef net or as they call it at that time, the lift net or hand net. These testimonies are biased in favour of the Lummi as it was them that laid the law suit. It should be remembered, that the Semiahmoo Tribe had by this time been split in two by the international boundary in 1846. Some members of the Lummi were in fact Semiahmoo. Unfortunately, some of the individuals are not represented on Suttles' map or text. I am particularly interested in who Old Polen in fact was, as he seems to be a key figure. In a separate news paper article, he was referred to as the oldest living Semiahmoo although it is clear he lived at Lummi. Most of the names brought out in the court documents should most likely be regarded as crew members. In the list of location owners, there are few new names. Old Polen was one that does not appear on either Suttles', or Stern's list.

At least two photographs exist of the camp at Goodefellow's Point. The first is in the Delta Archives. This photo is estimated to be from 1895. Alaska Packers' wharf and buildings are just visible in the background.



The second picture is in the provincial archives. It appears to be the same view but at a different time with different buildings.



**Title: Boundary Bay near Point Roberts.**

**Photograph of the Reef Nets at Point Roberts [Bert Huntoon 1938-08-30]**



As another photograph by Bert Huntoon is dated 1898, I feel that this photo has been misdated. In fact there was not such extensive fishing after the Alaska Packers

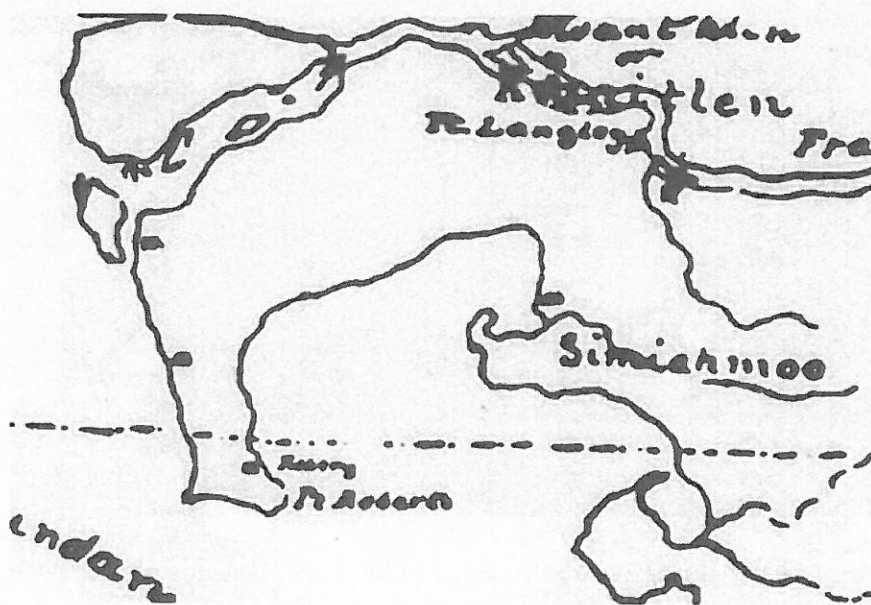
court case, I therefore suspect the photo is from the late 1800's. In support of this, the Alaska Packers' buildings are visible on the point.

### Alaska Packers Buildings at Lily Point



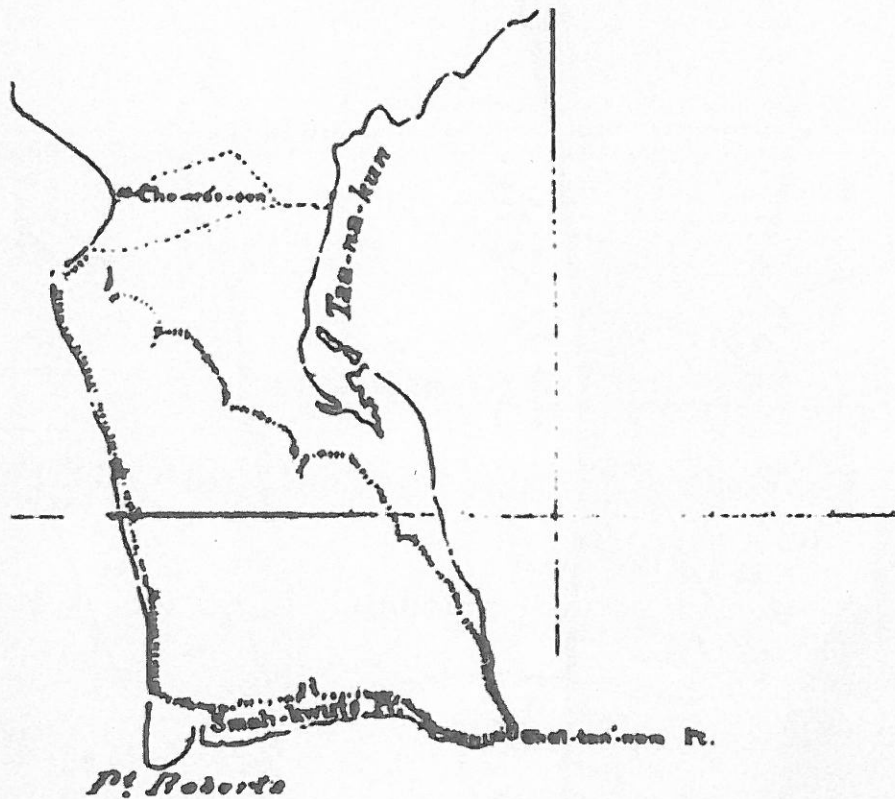
The village or camp was noted on several maps. The older maps show the village at Lily Point. However, this early map by Gibbs seems to locate the "fishery" further up the point, at its later location at Goodefellow's point.

### George Gibbs: 1856



Although dated to the time when the U.S. Boundary Commission set up camp at Campbell River, it is not clear from which source Gibbs got this material. Gibbs is known to have incorporated material from government agents and other local sources. It may be that he produced this map from reports of others, before he was in fact established at Campbell River.

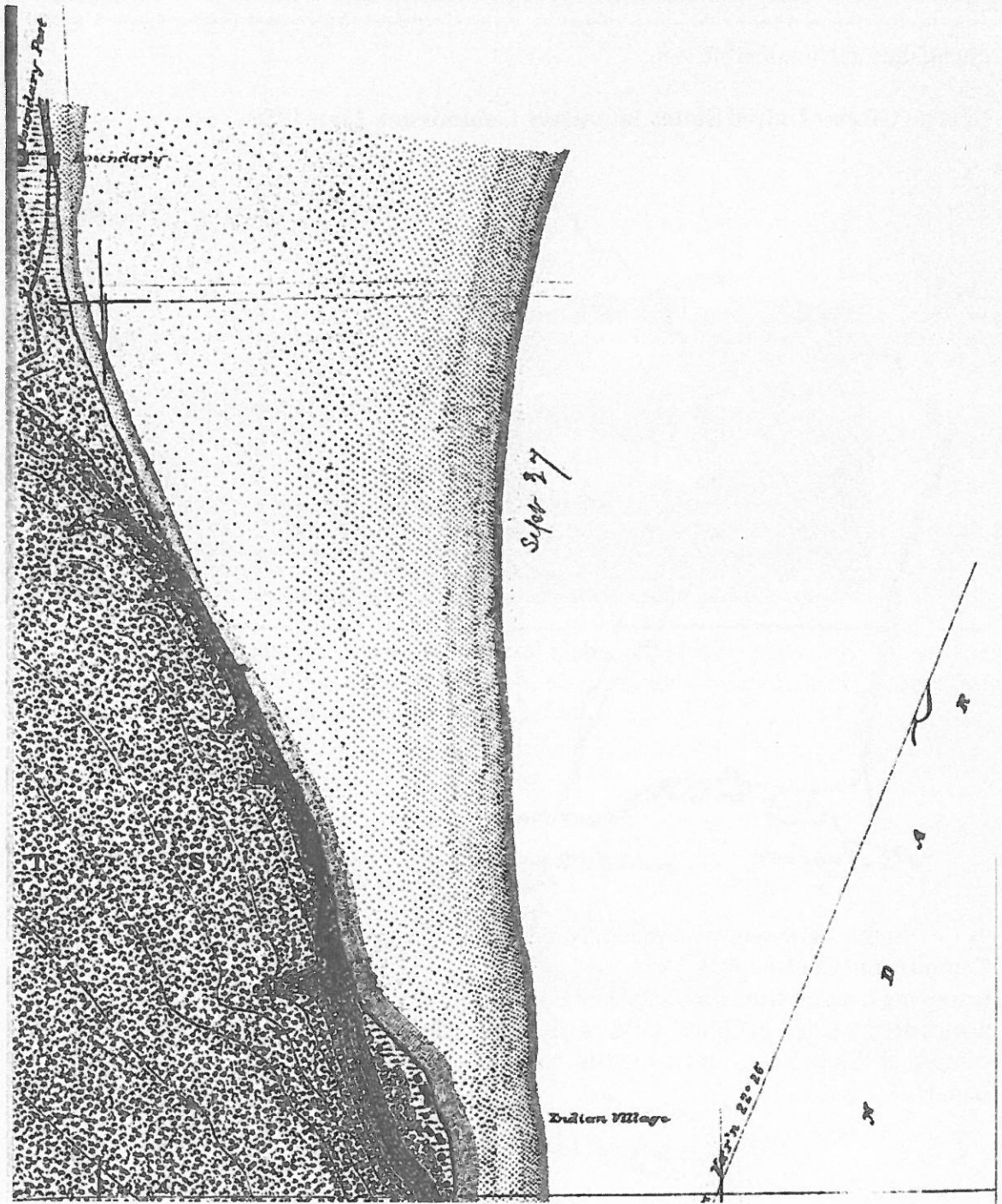
### George Gibbs / United States Boundary Commission Map 1858

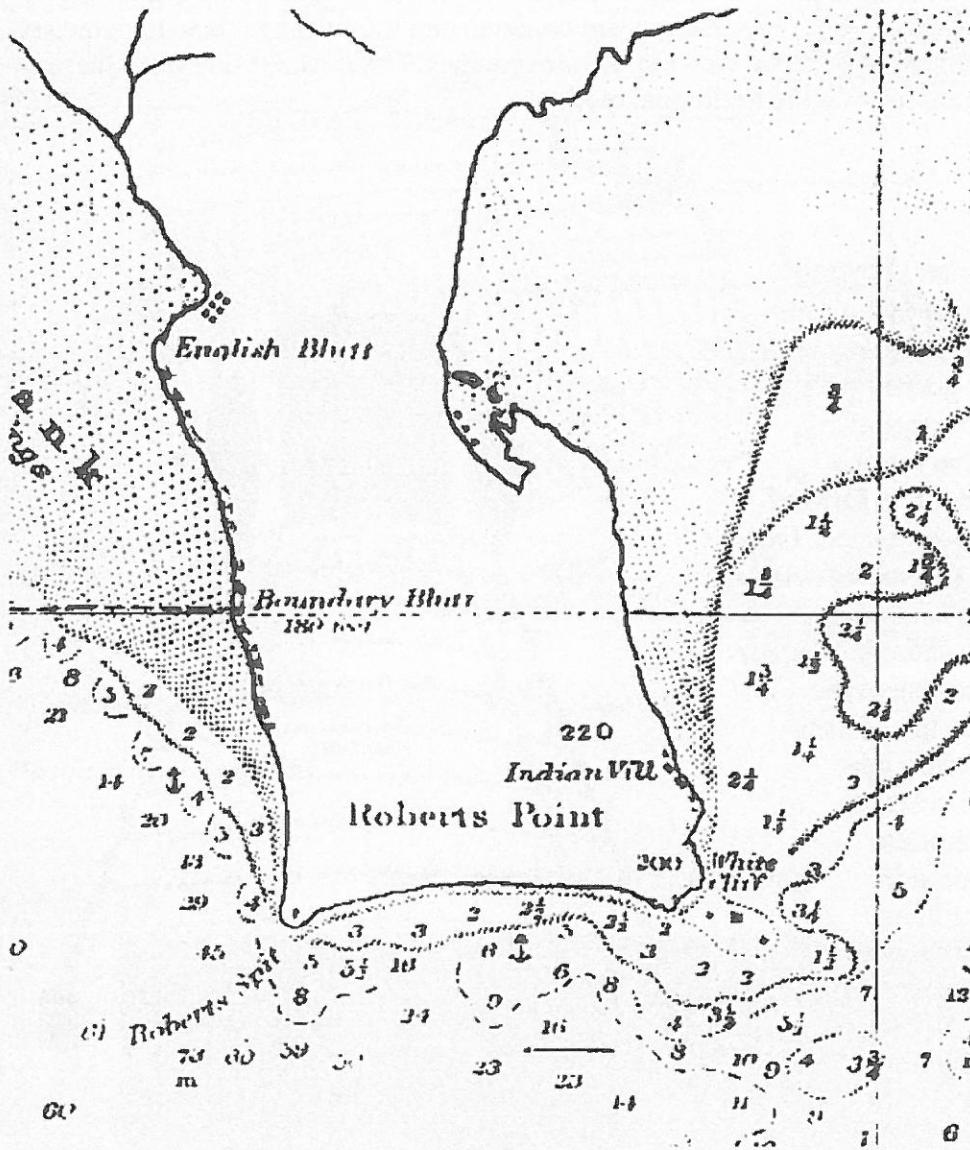


In the 1858 map with Indian Names, produced by the U.S. Boundary Commission, Chul-ten'-um Point is clearly marked at what became Lily Point. These names are derived from direct questioning of native people by George Gibbs. Lists of names are included in Gibbs' field notes, based on questioning of Semiahmoo natives camped at White Rock, and a later list based on questioning native people at Fort Langley.

The camp at Goodefellow's Point is also recorded on several maps.

U.S. Coast and Geological Survey Map.



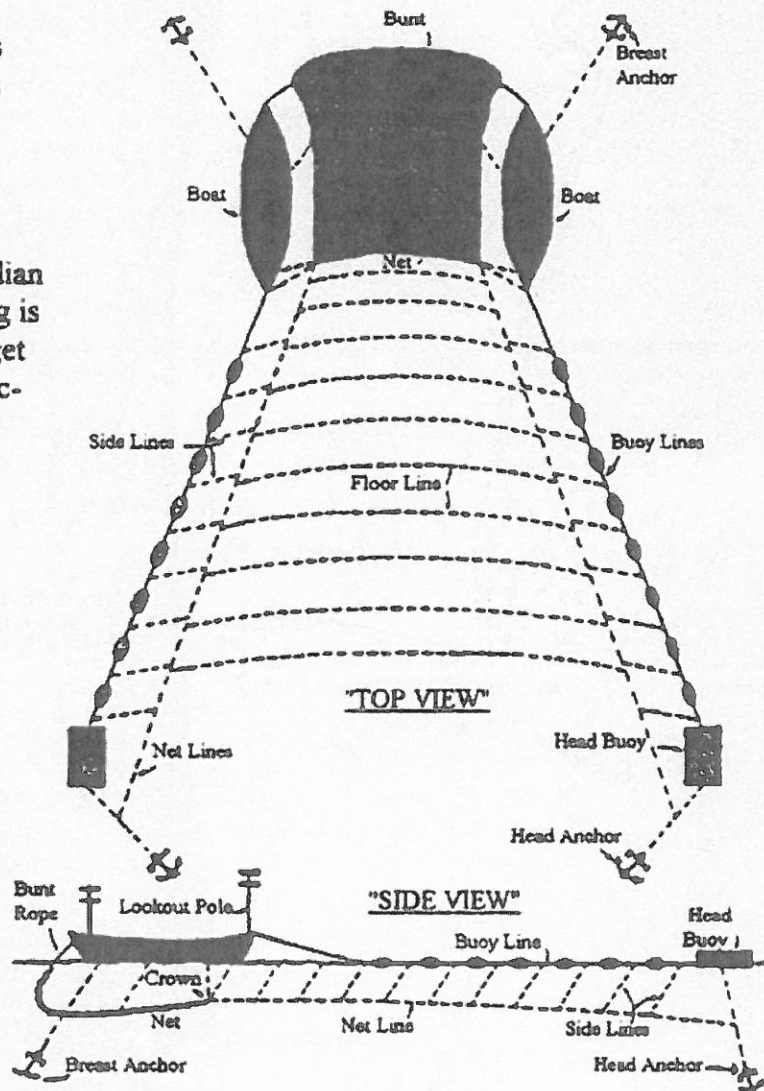




## A more modern Gear

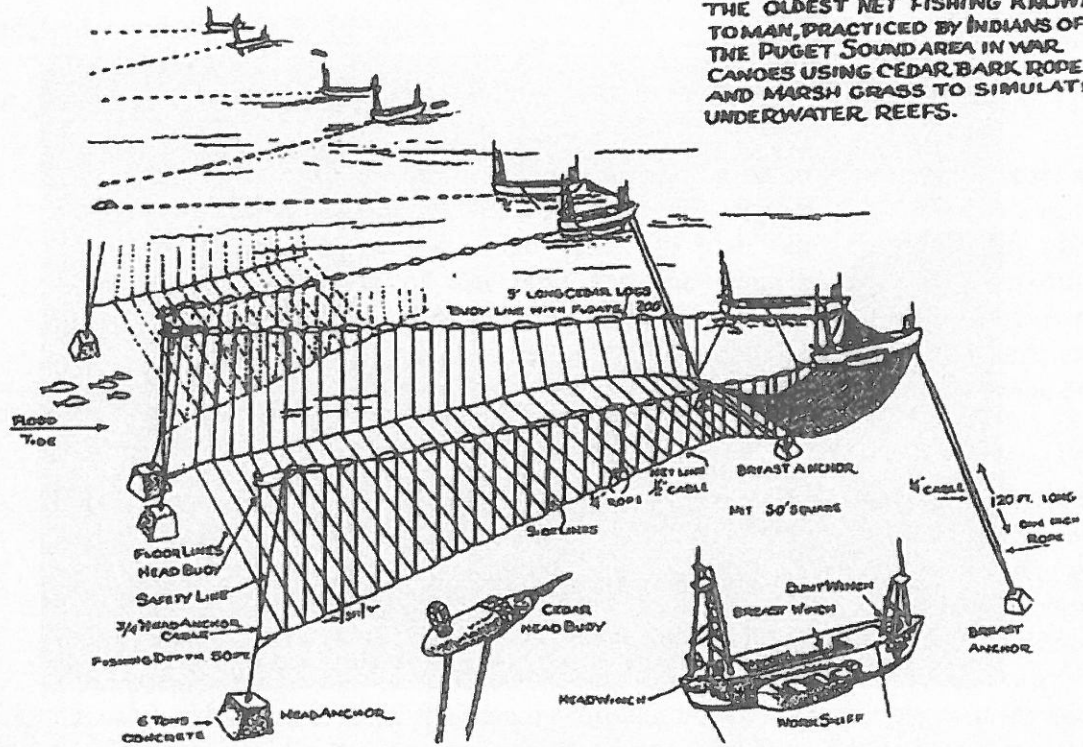
This illustration shows the reef net gear with some modification incorporating some industrial technology. The anchors are concrete and the lifting is done by winches. Towers are arranged to enhance viewing the movements of the fish. Aside from these changes, the setup follows the traditional method.

Reefnet diagram sketched here shows how nylon ropes and netting, electric winches and Polaroid glasses with their reflection-cancelling properties have made a modern, productive form of fishing out of the ancient Indian method. This form of fishing is believed to be unique to Puget Sound waters, and to be practiced nowhere else in the world. Where the Indians originally set their gear only from the crest of actual reefs, modern fishers rig their side lines and floor lines to serve as artificial reefs in favorable locations where the migrating salmon strike in along a shore.



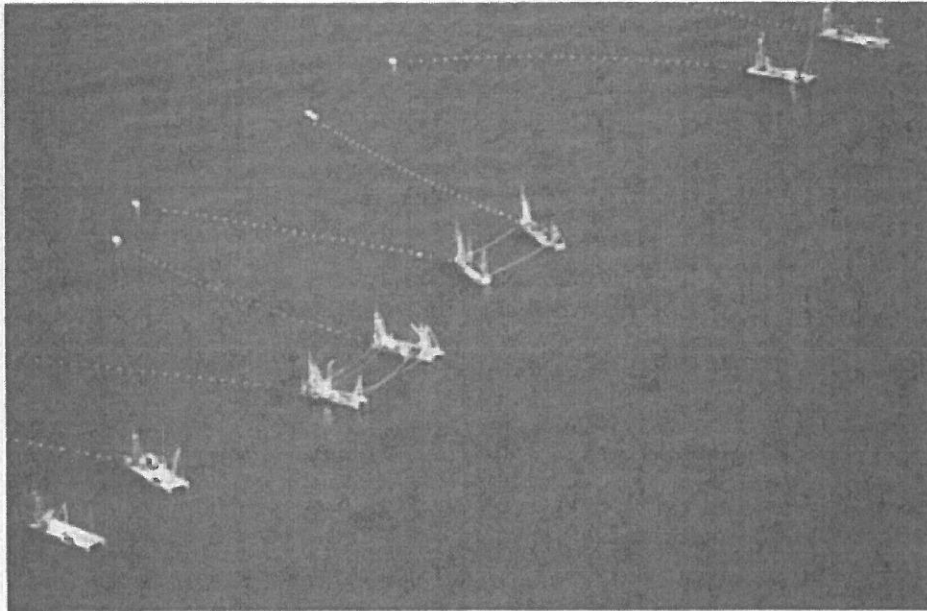
## REEF NETTING

THE OLDEST NET FISHING KNOWN TO MAN, PRACTICED BY INDIANS OF THE PUGET SOUND AREA IN WAR CANOES USING CEDAR BARK ROPE AND MARSH GRASS TO SIMULATE UNDERWATER REEFS.

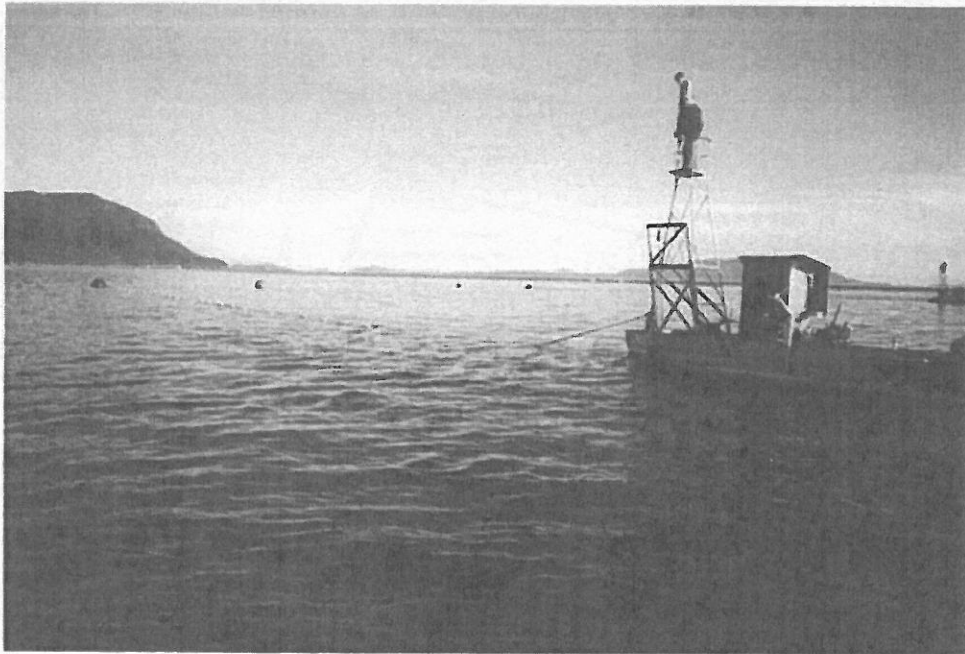


*Pacific Fisherman* 1966

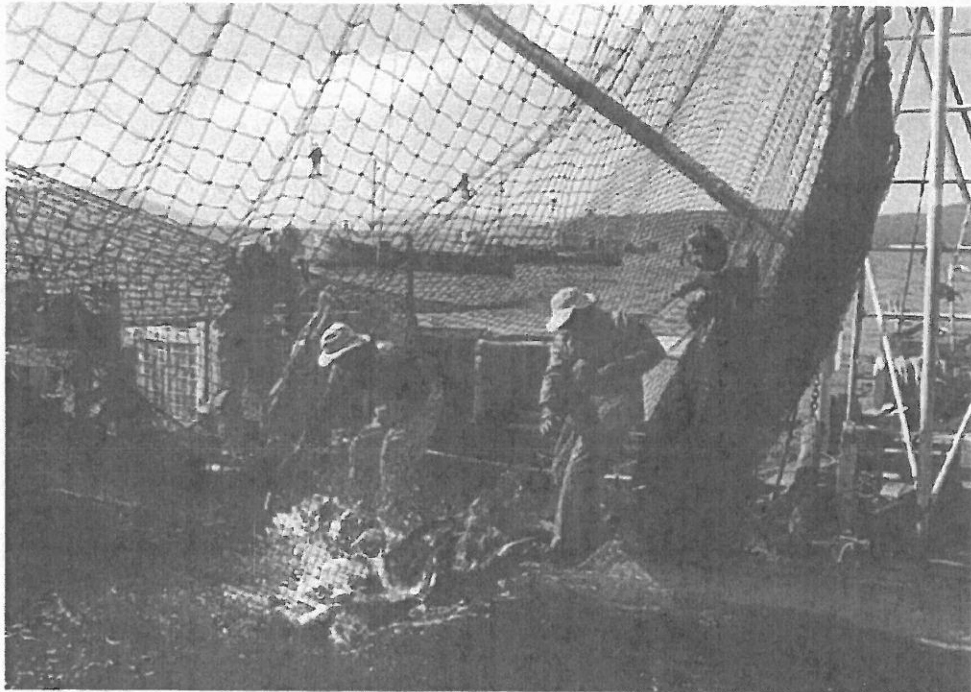
## Contemporary Reef Net Fishing



**Fishermen patiently wait for a school of salmon to cross over the "head", or beginning, of the net.**



**Fishermen spill live salmon into a netted well in the boat, to allow the captured fish to stay alive.**



## Historical Accounts of Chulthtunum.

### Pantoja, from Eliza [in late June]

—It is believed that on the north side there must be some very copious river as, close to the Isla de Zapeda and for a distance of 2 leagues, they sailed through a line of white water more sweet than salt. On both sides there are very good anchorages, many plots of flat land and the same abundance of pasture, quadrupeds and birds as in the strait itself. At the Isla de Zapeda there is an incredible quantity of rich salmon and numerous Indians, much more docile and tractable than those at the entrance. They speak an entirely different language and in spite of the fact that we did not understand it they explained with entire clearness that there had been vessels within the canal much larger than the schooner, one of which brought some bracelets of very fine brass engraved apparently with a burin, which they would not exchange. Such a thing has not been seen in the possession of any Indian on the whole coast, still less among the trifles which the foreign vessels have brought which have been in Noca since we have been acquainted with it. It was also learned from an Indian of eleven or twelve years of age, whom the store keeper José Ignacio Gonzales bought, that on the north side there is some flat country through which many people come to trade for fish and stay for two moons, bringing iron, copper, and blue beads, wearing distinct dress and having different bows and arrows, some longer than theirs, and with some large quadrupeds, with a round hoof, a mane, and a long tail. They tie on their backs of these four *tercios* [In the early days in Mexico a *tercio* was 100 pounds, the third part of a *carga*. The *carga* was thus divided so as to be more easily distributed so as to be more easily distributed on a pack mule or horse. By this time it seems to have acquired the meaning of half of a *carga*, but there is no certainty about it]. Of fish and in order to make them travel whip them with a piece of hide. Comprehending from his signs that there were horses, a painting of one was shown to them. As soon as he saw it he said that was what they were [Wagner 1933: p 186, 187].

This journal account mentions the fishery almost in passing. The most that can be gained is the fact that it existed and there were incredible numbers of natives present.

Peter Puget, starting June 12 1792, stated:

On this Morning I accompanied Captain Vancouver with the Launch and Pinnacle on a further Examination these Streights. Mr. Whidbey was likewise to proceed back to the Southern end to take up the Continent where we had left off Last Day + bring it further to Birch Bay--- This Place certainly is the Best provided the Ship anchors on the Continental Shore as it is performing double Work in the Same time, that formerly employed only one Party---Rounding the North Point of Birch Bay we found a low Rocky Shore for 3 Miles in a NNE Direction with

sounding 5,6,+7 ¼ of a Mile from the Beach, this brought into another Bay, the Inner or South front of which, is Fine low level land and produces large Quantities of tolerable flavored Strawberries and abundance of wild Onions---The Day contrary to our Expectations was exceedingly Fine, as on Leaving the Discovery, it had threatened Rain from a Strong Southerly Breeze, that by nine had totally subsided. This 2<sup>nd</sup> Bay is quite Shoal a very little way within the Point about 2 Miles.[two unreadable words] From this Situation a White Bluff bore S75 W7 7 Miles Distant. The Intervening Space appeared an open and continuous channel to the NW, the Distant Land in the Continental Shore, forming apparantly a very low point---At the Distance of four miles From Strawberry Level & in the Direction of the Channel, we came into 6 & 4 feet water which Depth we found quite aways to the White Bluff & far beyond the Outer Edge of the Shoal to the NW, the Lowland and Fens were distinctly seen, this Space therefore proved to be only a very Large deep Bay & entirely Shoal. We stopped to dine at a deserted Village on the White Bluff---This must by its Size have formerly been the habitation of Near four hundred People, but was now in perfect Ruins and over run with Nettles & some Bushes, but as this Village differs materially from what we have already seen I shall note [words off bottom of page]

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what its Construction appeared to be---The Body of the Village was of three Rows of Houses each Row divided by a Narrow Lane & was partitioned off into four or six Square houses & every one large and spacious---This Frame the only Remnant of the Village must have [given] the Native Inhabitants an Infinite Trouble in the Construction, & it still remains a Mystery, to me, by what power of Mechanism they have been able to lift up the heavy and long Logs of Timber which are placed on the top of Standards. These last are 2 ½ feet in circumference & erected perpendicular about fourteen Feet from the Ground. On the Top of these Standards or Posts is a Notch cut to secure the Rafters, which From its Length will serve two houses or perhaps more, each Side and End of the house having three Standards to support it; Besides the Rafters going length ways, they are likewise laid across & with their Standards Partition off the Different Habitations. I have no Doubt that when occupied, the Sides and Tops are boarded in, as large planks smoaked dried were found contiguous to the Village, & if we could form any opinion, from this Short and imperfect Visit it would be, that the habitations are well adapted to defend the Natives from the Inclement Seasons.

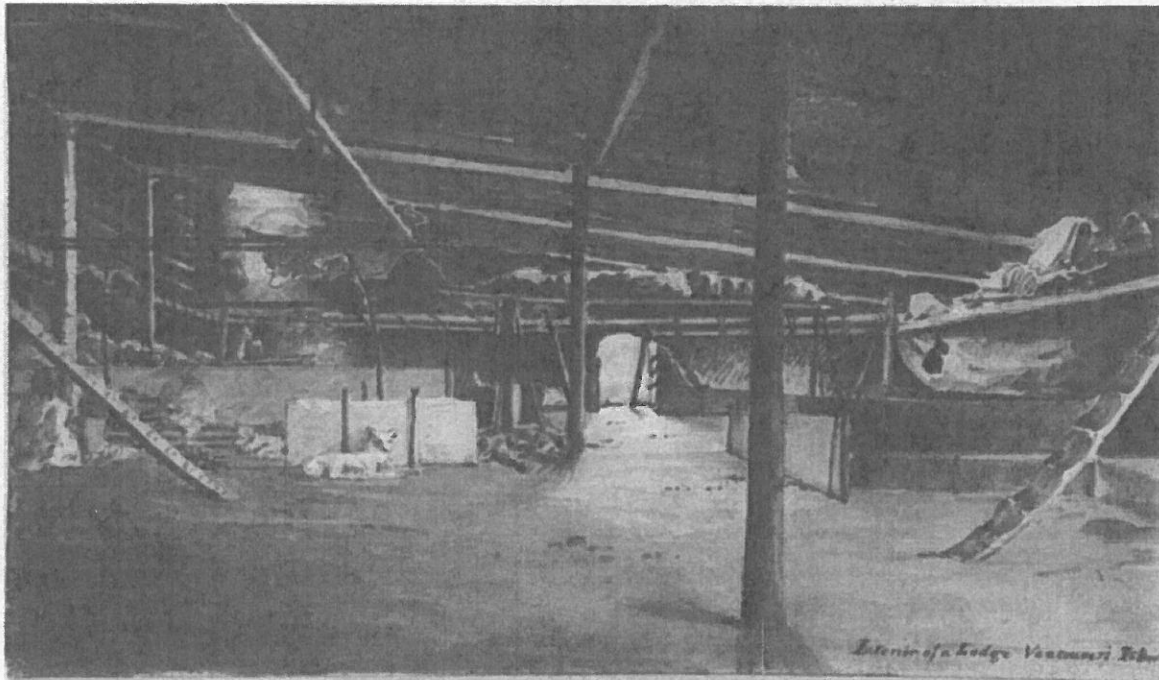
On the same expedition, Menzies wrote:

When they left the Ship on the Morning of the 12th they First explord a lange shoal water Bay till thay came to a conspicuous whtie Bluff / of a moderate height Forming the western point of it & which afterwards obtained the Name of Cape Roberts. Here they landed to dine near a large deserted Village capable of countaining at least four or five hundred. Inhabitants, tho it was now in perfect

ruins-nothing but skeletons of the houses remained, these however were sufficient to show their general form, structure & position. Each house appeared distinct & capacious of the form of an oblong square, & they were arranged in three separate rows of considerable length; the Beams consisted of huge long pieces of Timber placed in Notches on the top of supporters 14 Feet From the ground, but by what mechanical power the Natives had raised these bulky beams to that height they could not conjecture. Three supporters stood at each end for the longitudinal beams, & an equal number were arranged on each side for the support of smaller cross beams in each house.

These sound like standard Salish style plank house frames observed in the off season in which the planks have been removed to the winter village. The fact that the "large planks smoaked dry" were present, indicates [to me at least], that the location owners were not far off, presumably working on the site preparations for the up and coming fishing season.

The houses are built with three poles along the length and three poles along the breadth making an oblong square. This differs from the "standard" plank house illustrated or described by most writers, having a number of poles along the length and two poles forming the breadth. However, Kane illustrated a "Klallam" house observed near Fort Victoria showing three poles supporting the horizontal beams of the roof.



[Paul Kane: Stark wwc81; crIV-545].

A number of historical photographs of the Songees' houses in Victoria also show some houses with three poles along the breadth. This seems to be within the range of

variation of the basic shed roofed longhouse. Perhaps this form is more common among speakers of the Straits Language.

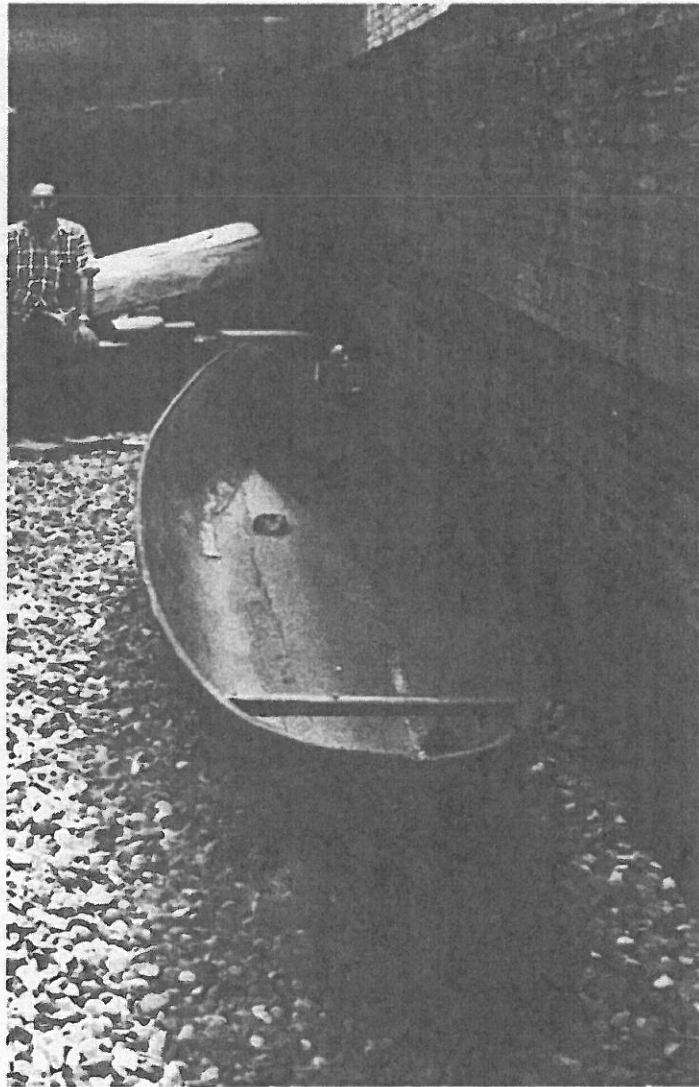
### **The Reef Net Boats**

As the origin of the reef net system is ancient, it is problematic what types of canoes were used in the early days. Presumably any canoe would work to some degree but a flat bottom would be useful in dealing with hauling out nets.

By the time photography had become possible, changes had taken place in the native culture. The Strait of Georgia style Coast Salish canoe had almost dropped out of use and the West Coast Style [or Chinook style] was the most common. Both types are visible in the photograph of the camp at Goodefellow's Point although the majority of the canoes are West Coast. This can easily be explained as the cedar forests in this area were commercially stripped of good wood to rebuild San Francisco after the great fire. As a result, the remaining trees of canoe quality were to be located in the less settled territory of the West Coast people.



In the above photograph by Bert Huntoon, in June 1898 at Lummi Island, all the reef net canoes are of the West Coast style. A smaller boat is visible as part of the set on the right of the picture. This is probably used to transport the crew from shore. This boat is similar to one in the Bellingham museum, which is reported to have been used in the reef net fishery. A photograph of this dugout is below.



Whatcom Museum: 1971 p9.

As time went on, the dugout canoe was replaced by boats built up by more European techniques. Numerous photographs exist of more modern reef net boats. I have included the following photograph as it shows the construction of two boats in the 1950's. Note also the flat deck inside the boat which no doubt assisted in the hauling out of nets. This style of boat concords well with the illustrations prepared by John Elliott for Claxton and Elliott's book *Reef Net Technology of the Saltwater People*. As can be seen, lookout towers have been added to assist in seeing the net and whether the fish are entering the net.





More recent boats include power winches and wells allowing the fish to remain in water and therefore are delivered live and fresh. For someone interested in the more modern reef fishing, numerous web sites exist with numerous photographs. I recommend [www.washingtonruralheritage.org](http://www.washingtonruralheritage.org), and [www.lumiislandwild.org](http://www.lumiislandwild.org).

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## Pronunciation Guide

The SENĆOŦEN language is spoken by the Semiahmoo and the closely related Saanich, Songhees, Samish, and Lummi. It is termed the north straits language by linguists and is closely related to the larger straits language group which also includes the culturally similar although linguistically separate Klallam.

SENĆOŦEN linguistic fonts and international phonetic association fonts are more or less functionally equivalent. One sound is given one symbol. If the symbol is not included in the following list, it means that it is pronounced similarly to the English spelling.

International phonetic script includes a few more diacritical marks which indicate pronunciation emphasis and accent in addition to the pronunciation.

SENĆOŦEN	International Phonetic Fonts	English Equivalent	
A	ɑ́	ah	father
Á	e	eh	fair
Á	e	ey	
C	k	k	celt
Ć	č	ch	church
Ċ	ḳ	kw	quick
E	ə	uh	the
Í	y	ee	between e of 'met' and a of "mat"
K	x̣	xw, wh	
Ķ	q̣		
K̄	q	q	like k but further back in throat
K̄	q̣	qw	like above with rounded lips
Ł	ɸ	voiceless l	
N	ŋ	ng	ring
O	a		
Q	ḳ		
Ś	ʃ	sh	she
I	θl	thl	athlete
Ʀ	θ	th	thin
Ʀ	c	ts	gets
W	x̣	xw, wh	
X	x	ch	like German "ach" made in throat
X̄	x̣		same with rounded lips
Z	ṭ		
	'	accent syllable	
,	ʔ	glottal stop	

This is a rough guide. For further information refer to a linguist.

Fig. 1. Plan of Gear

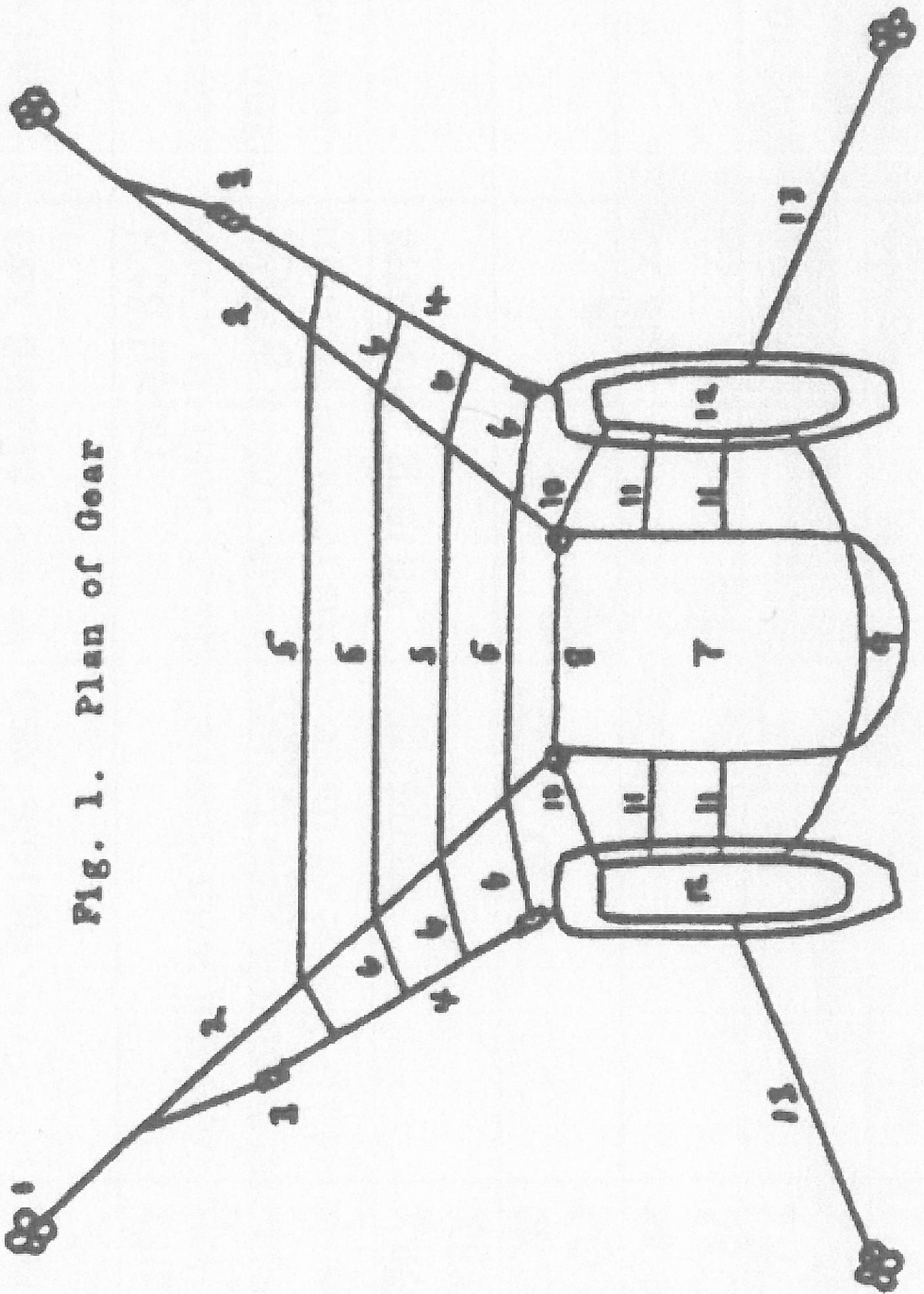


Fig. 2. Side View of Gear

