

An Historic Journey Of Glacier Bay

Historian Kurtz wrote of the first people to settle in Glacier Bay, "...Archaeological evidence and oral history place the Tlingit people's occupation of the region at some 9,000 years..."

So, this is a 9,000 year historic journey of Glacier Bay. Some major stops are: the original inhabitants' arrival, the coping with nature's forces, the early 1900s outside human interferences, and what the historic legend of *Kaasteen/Shaatwatseek*' may mean.

Two Cold Climatic Periods Affected the Inhabitants

The Pleistocene ice age began about 2 million years ago. Large ice sheets covered the Earth's northern hemisphere. About 10,000 years ago, a warming period began.

Glacier Bay's ice sheet retreated leaving it ice-free. The bay was a valley of clay with grass growing on it. The original inhabitants named it "*S'e Shuyee*", which closely translates to "Area at the End of the Glacial Silt".

Much, much later, there was another severe cold period.

Around the year 1350 - - which is a little over a hundred years before Columbus discovered America- - a bitter and severe cold period began to form in the Earth's northern hemisphere. It lasted until the 1800s. It is known as the Little Ice Age.

At that time, large masses of snow originating in the Fairweather Range moved through the valleys toward Glacier Bay. In *Lingít* oral history, the snow moved through such places as

- a. *Anaxkuyaawal'eex'i Yé*, "Where the Snow Mass Broke Through". The current English place names for this area are: Hugh Miller Inlet and Scidmore Inlet.
- b. The snow mass also took place at *Tsalxaan Niyaade Wool'eex'i Ye*, "[Passage] That Broke Through From Mount Fairweather". The current English place name is John Hopkins Inlet.
- c. Nature's havoc, in the form of an ice sheet, forced the *Lingít* people to move out of Glacier Bay. The "*Shaatwatseek*"/*Kaasteen* historic legend is probably based on this cold climatic change.
- d. This Little Ice Age lasted over four hundred years. Later, the melting ice sheet left behind isolated glaciers and many icebergs. The name of the bay was changed to "*Xaatl Tu*" (Inside the Icebergs" or "Among the Ice Bergs").

At the next stop, there were house groups or "*hítx*"

Arrival and Social Organization

House Groups (*Hítx'*)

Before the bay was again covered with an ice sheet, it may be that, instead of clans, house groups comprised the *Lingít* social organization. The following are the known house groups:

Kaawagaani Hít (Burned Down House). Later formed into a clan with the name, *Kaagwaantaan*.

Woosh Keek Hít (People With Houses On Top of One Another or Half a House). Later formed into a clan with the name, *Wooshkeetaan*.

Eech Hít (Reef House). Its continued existence as a house group is not now known.

Naana Hít (House Up the River). Became a part of the *Chookaneidí* clan.

Xinaa Hít (House Down the River). Became a part of the *Chookaneidí* clan.

Chookaneidí (People of the Grass). Became a clan.

From the Raven moiety, the house group at the bay was ***Tsalxaan Hít*** (Mount Fairweather House.)

Note: ***Xaay Hít*** (Yellow Cedar House) may either have formed after the exodus of the house groups at the start of the Little Ice Age (1350 AD) or *Lingít* historians/researchers inadvertently left this house group of those that were in existence before 1350 AD.

The next stop of this journey is the differing perceptions of Glacier Bay.

Differing Perceptions of Our Land/Our "Breadbasket" Versus "Pristine"

Note: In 1879, the ice sheet had retreated about fifty miles up the bay.

In 1878, the naturalist John Muir had arrived at and took a look see of Glacier Bay. He perceived the bay differently from the traditional inhabitants.

That is, John Muir's "pristine" perception and the *Lingít's* "Our Land"/"Our Breadbasket" perception of Glacier Bay differed. "...To Muir...This was a land reborn from the ice, PRISTINE, FREE OF THE FOOTPRINT OF 'LORD MAN'". I'll touch upon Muir's "pristine". This word means "remaining in a PURE state, UNCORRUPTED by civilization":

The *Lingít* people had a different perception:

"The Tlingits did not SEPARATE humankind from the natural world; indeed, they drew their CULTURAL IDENTITY from their CONNECTION WITH the LAND".

These clashing perceptions of Glacier Bay precluded agreeable solutions.

- a. Should the land be kept "pristine" without interference from "Lord Man" or
- b. should the traditional inhabitants be allowed to utilize their *at.óow* (ownership) and harvest food sources from their ancestral land as they had been doing for thousands of years?

The tenor of the journey changes to contending with human interference.

National Monument and National Park

For the “pristine” advocates, a solution to the differing views came in the form of an executive order signed by President Calvin Coolidge in 1925 designating Glacier Bay as a national monument.

Once established, the Glacier Bay National Monument officials treated the traditional inhabitants as outsiders. But they did allow seal hunting, which they stopped in 1974. They put a stop to seagull egg collecting in the early 1960s.

Concerning hunting, fishing, berry picking, and cultural matters, the monument officials did not communicate directly with the *Xunaa Kaawu* (Hoonah people). Instead, they spoke to the Hoonah mayor or teachers or officials of the Juneau-based Bureau of Indian Affairs.

This changed with the passage of ANILCA in 1980, when Glacier Bay was designated a National Park.

Contrary to the national monument years, the current Glacier Bay National Park officials were, and still are, making concerted efforts to not only maintain oral and written communication with *Xunaa Kaawu*, but actively hold cultural sessions and meetings with them in Glacier Bay proper and in Hoonah.

The journey goes on to visit mythical beliefs and beings - - these two are closely intertwined and interact with traditional people’s understanding of *kustí* (way of life).

Mythical Association

Natives believe that the mythological being, Raven or *Yeil*, humanized animals and plants:

After Raven let Daylight out of the box, the people who were wearing clothing made from animal skins, ran frightfully into the forest or into the sea. Their bodies changed accordingly. The people who jumped into the sea live in their villages as sea animals. Those in the forests and mountains also live as land animals in villages. If conditions necessitate it, they can appear as humans.

The following brown bear myth is basically excerpted from John R. Swanton's book. It shows the association the traditional inhabitants had with mythical beings.

Brown Bear Tribe

Intending to do something for the people in his village who all died from a disease in Glacier Bay, the husband was looking for guests to feed in memoriam for his dead friends. He'd get out of his canoe and would shout, "Everybody this way"! Instead, the brown bears...or brown bear tribe...came down from the mountains, thinking they were invited. The husband was frightened; he told his wife to be courageous. His wife talked to the bears as if they were her own people.

When the brown bear tribe came to his house, he invited them in, saying to each of them, "It is your brother-in-law's seat you are going to sit down in". As the husband called out the names of the dead men who had held those seats, the seated members of the brown bear tribe would in turn answer, "*Haadé*"! ("Here"!), and the husband would pass food bowls to the respondents.

After the feast, the leader of the brown bear tribe spoke to his members, saying, "Do not leave this man friendless, but go to him, every one of you, and show your respect". When the brown bears were leaving, they told the husband to lie down in front of them, and one after another, licked his face.

And then the brown bears departed to their village.

Mythical beings and beliefs are integral ingredients to the *Lingits kustí* (life ways).

Our last stop is about a significant historic legend.

KAASTEEN/SHAAWATSEEK'

In this telling of the *Kaasteen/Shaawátseek'* historic legend, Richard and Nora Dauenhauer's observation in one of their books, sets the stage:

Atkookeidi (theme). SOME THEMES TOUCH UPON CONFLICT OR LOYALTY AND THE DIFFICULT CHOICES PEOPLE ARE OFTEN CALLED TO MAKE. IN THE *KASTEEN* HISTORIC LEGEND, SHE MUST MAKE THE DIFFICULT CHOICE BETWEEN HER OWN PHYSICAL SURVIVAL AND THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL OF HER PEOPLE.

With that in mind, I'll present a very short version of this historic legend of *KAASTEEN/SHAAWATSEEK'*.

Kaasteen was just entering puberty, and by custom, she was placed in seclusion where she would enter the rites of passage to womanhood. While in seclusion, she committed a taboo, *ligaas*, by unwittingly waving some sockeye strips at a glacier and mistakenly, like calling to a dog, shouting at the glacier several times, "*Nei! Sít'! Geis! Geis! Geis!...Hey! Glacier! Come here! Come here! Come here!*"

The glacier's spirit or *Sít' Yeik*, became angry with this show of disrespect and the spirit caused the glacier to move below sea level toward *Kaasteen's* village to destroy it. When the people were hurrying to leave, they asked *Kaasteen* - - even though she committed a taboo - - to leave with them. Knowing she was the cause of the impending tragedy, *Kaasteen* chose to remain with the land and her traditional house.

Shaawatséek', a very elderly *Chookwan Shaa*, offered to take *Kaasteen's* place. But *Kaasteen* declined. As the people were leaving, the glacier's action took the mortal life of *Kaasteen* and destroyed the land, traditional houses, and other *at.óow* or owned things.

When the mass departure from the land started, a man by the name of *Kaanaxduwoos'* stood up in his canoe and began to sing a song that had been forming in his mind. The central theme of this song is, "Won't my house be pitiful when I leave on foot... Won't my land be pitiful when I leave by boat".

As the fleet of canoes were passing by *Wanachich*, now known as Pleasant Island, another man by the name of *Stayaat*, who was the leader of the fleet of canoes, stood up in his canoe, and as the people took a last look at their crumpling houses and their disappearing land, *Stayaat* was moved to compose and sing a second song memorializing how the people felt about the tragic event. The central theme of this song is, "My land, will I ever see it again? My house, will I ever see it again"?

The *Chookaneidi* clan song, *Eeshaan Gushei*, conveys the same feelings. *Kaasteen's* decision to remain with her ancestral land and house continues to be powerful. The Dauenhauers wrote:

‘SOME SET OFF ON JOURNEYS TO ETERNAL LIFE, SUCH AS THE WOMAN WHO ELECTED TO STAY BEHIND AND BECOME ONE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE ICE’.

*YEEDÁT, YÁ GOOSHÚK TAAWSUN TAAKW DAAT YOO X'E TÁNK
YANDE SHUK KWASH XEEN.* Now, I'll close this 20 minute talk about
the 9,000 year historic journey.

Kenneth F. Austin

Lingít saayi (Tlingit name): *Té Shaa Kee* (Top of the Mountain)

Clan house: *Xaatl Hit* (Ice House)

Clan: *Chookaneidi naa* (Chookaneidi clan)

Moiety: *Ch'áak' naa* (Eagle moiety)