

Pelpala ʔwít  
i ucwalmícwa  
múta ʔti tmicwa  
The people and  
the land are one

# the Lil'wat Nation

A Fact Book



# We are the Lil'wat Nation, an Interior Salish people

We live in a stunning and dramatic landscape with a rich biodiversity — a mysterious place of towering mountains, ice fields, alpine meadows, white-water rivers, and braided river valleys that run to a milky colour due to the silt and clay deposited by glacial melt.

While the Lil'wat is a separate and distinct nation, it remains part of the St'át'imc group.

Our language is called Ucwalmícwts. It is taught at both Xit'olacw Community School and Pemberton High School, and through Simon Fraser University in cooperation with the Mount Currie Ts'zil Learning Centre.

Most Lil'wat people live at Mount Currie, near the confluence of the Lillooet and Birkenhead rivers, just east of Pemberton, a two-and-a half hour drive north of Vancouver on the Sea-to-Sky Highway.

Our 797,131-hectare traditional territory is about twice the size of Rhode Island — or one-fourth of Vancouver Island. Our territory extends south to Rubble Creek, north to Gates Lake, east to the Upper Stein Valley and west to the coastal inlets of the Pacific Ocean.

**2260 BC** | Sites in our traditional territory confirmed by carbon dating.

**400–200 BC** | Lil'wat people are well established in their traditional territory.

Our geography — between two formidable mountain ranges — ensured our important role in the early regional economy. We were traders. For centuries we bartered and exchanged all manner of goods with many other First Nations, and later with non-aboriginal fur traders, miners and settlers.

Skilled fishers and hunters, we are closely tied to our land. The plant and animal resources of the high mountain slopes and river valleys remain critically important to us. Like our ancestors we have a profound and harmonious relationship with this land.

First European contact came in 1793 when Alexander Mackenzie made his overland journey to the Pacific. Over the next two centuries traders, miners and settlers arrived in our territory, without an invitation.

Over the years, as the colony of British Columbia grew and prospered, the Lil'wat people, like other First Nations, were systematically stripped of land, rights and resources. Starting in the late 1800s, our ancestors were increasingly disenfranchised and confined to 10 tiny reserves, totaling 2,930 hectares or .004 per cent of our traditional territory.



1579 AD | Sir Francis Drake claims the West Coast for England.

1742 | Russians start trading on the Northwest Coast.

In 1887, Premier William Smithe made his infamous decree: “When the white man first came among you, you were little better than wild beasts of the field.” Little wonder that this kind of racism soon translated into narrow policies that plunged the province into a century of darkness for the Lil’wat and other First Nations.

# ucwalmícwts

Today, more than 70 per cent of the Lil’wat people live on these reserves. Majestic Mount Currie towers over our community of the same name; it sits at the centre of our traditional territory. Today, we have a population of more than 1,850, of whom 550 live off-reserve. This makes us the fourth-largest on-reserve First Nation community in the province.



# The most beautiful baskets in the world

In earlier times, in preparation for adulthood, each Lil'wat child underwent a "vision quest" by training alone in the mountains to receive a guardian spirit power. This spirit power guided and protected initiates throughout their lives and gave them special skills or supernatural strength or vision.

Some guardian spirits were more powerful than others, bestowing upon the receiver the ability, for example, to heal the sick. Every year, through special songs and *mílha7* (spirit dance ceremonies), the relationship with guardian spirits was renewed.

Ours is a young population, growing fast. And today, a rite of passage for our young people also involves sports. Our athletes thrive on competition. Rodeo sports are taught as part of physical education classes in our schools. Over the years, we have produced the Native World Bronc Riding Champion, and Bull Riding and Barrel Racing Champions. The annual Lions Club Lil'wat Rodeo brings our best riders home to show off their talents.



1763 | Royal Proclamation. 1793 | Alexander Mackenzie travels overland to the Pacific Ocean.

We are famous basket makers, producing baskets with intricate weaves and patterns created from cedar roots, cedar and wild cherry bark and various grasses and reeds.

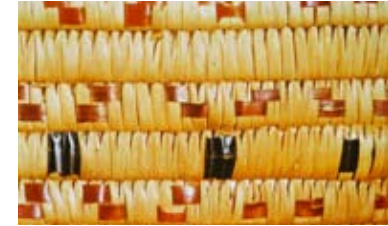
Hand drums that our skilled artisans make from wood and the skins of deer, coyote and moose are eagerly sought. Carvers in wood continue to create beautiful art, and clothing made of deer and moose is made and worn for special occasions. Singing and hand drumming are an integral part of all Lil'wat gatherings, and passed along with our language through the teachings in our community school.

Other athletes play floor hockey and basketball, while our soccer association organizes regional tournaments and has sent teams to international competitions in Hawaii, Brazil and Scotland.

Lil'wat youth are also front and centre on Canada's First Nations Snowboard Team and regularly participate in the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) held in Denver in 2006 and planned for Duncan in 2008. We will send a major contingent to the world's largest Indigenous amateur sporting competition.

1808 | The Simon Fraser expedition arrives at the mouth of the Fraser River, meeting neighbouring First Nations.

1827 | Fort Langley is established by the Hudson's Bay Company.



# We have lived here long before recorded time

We live in a transition zone between the wet coast and the dry Interior plateau. Climate here is variable, ranging from the sun and heat of summer, to rain and snow in winter. Moisture-laden air from the Pacific Ocean pushes up the slopes of the Coast Mountains, and cooling as it rises, turns into precipitation.

As a result, Mount Currie, on the wet side of the mountains, receives an average rainfall of 92 centimetres a year, whereas Lillooet, located further inland, sees an annual average of only 29 centimetres.

Rugged valley walls, smoothed by glaciers, rise 1,200 to 1,800 metres above turbulent rivers providing an ideal setting for our region's winter sports activities.

In earlier times, we organized ourselves in extended families. During the winter months our ancestors lived in villages consisting of clustered semi-subterranean dwellings known as *ístkens* (pit houses).

Here people lived on foods prepared and preserved during the year. Pit houses were constructed in circular or squarish holes dug about two metres deep and about

1870 | BC unilaterally denies existence of aboriginal title.

1876 | Confederation. Ottawa agrees not to discuss aboriginal title before establishing reserves for Indians.

eight metres in diameter. The rafters forming the conical roof of each pit house were thickly insulated with earth and grass to protect people from the cold.

Inside, each family member, including grandparents and other relatives, had his or her own designated space.

We have lived here long before recorded time. Today, archaeologists confirm that village sites along the Birkenhead River were occupied by human beings some 5,500 years ago, at a time before the Pharaohs ruled Egypt.

We describe our oral history as being “written upon the land.” It divides into two distinct category of stories, *sqwéqwel’* (true stories) and *sptakwlh* (legends).

Our ancestors used the landscape to anchor events much in the way other cultures used calendars. Both *sqwéqwel’* and *sptakwlh* told dramatic stories of magical transformation, mystery and fierce power. Lil’wat cosmology tells how the Creator made the world and all its creatures, humans and animals; many myths feature bears and eagles.

# sqwéqwel’



**1878** | Canada restricts traditional Indian fishing rights, making a distinction between food and commercial fishing. **1880** | *Indian Act* passed in Parliament.

Two species of bear, black and grizzly, make their homes in Lil'wat territory. We have an ancient reverence for these magnificent animals, and in our art, stories and carvings, they continue to cast a long shadow over our collective subconscious. Bears also stand as an indicator of the health of our ecosystems, and we recognize that for people around the world, bears have become a symbol of wilderness.

Bears eat salmon, of course. So do bald eagles, a familiar sight flying over our traditional territory. Our ancestors were accomplished fishers; salmon and trout were mainstays of our traditional diet. Salmon, it was believed, were supernatural beings, who came every year to give their flesh to the people who were then obliged to treat them properly. The salmon were cooked in a special way and their bones carefully returned to water in a sacred ritual. This ceremony is still carried out today.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of fishing in the lives of our ancestors. Fish were a central part of the diets of all the Salish peoples. A variety of methods of catching fish were used. In some tributaries of the Fraser River, weirs were built to trap the fish as they tried to swim upstream. In deeper parts of the river, people

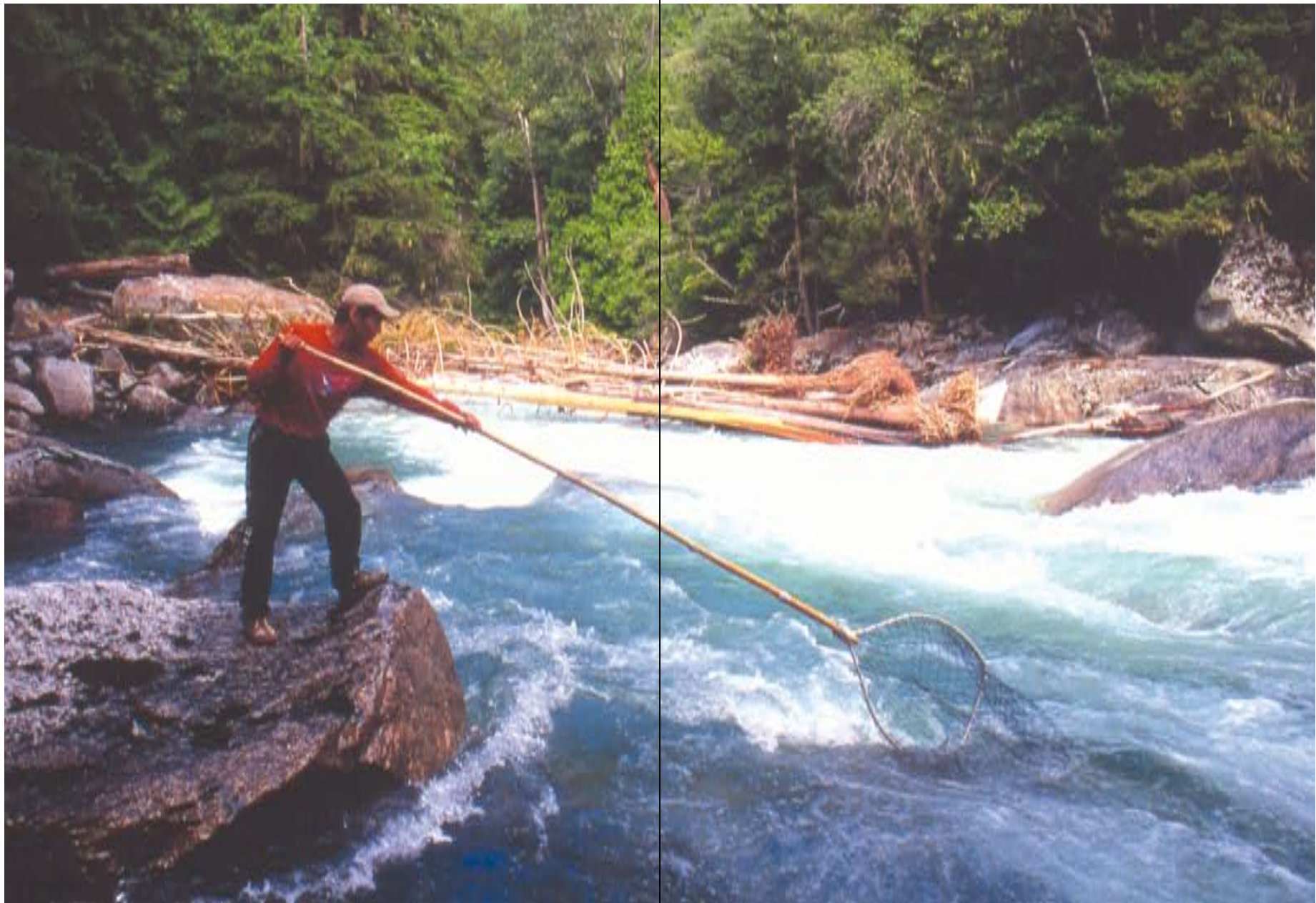
**1884** | The *Indian Act* amended to outlaw cultural and religious ceremonies such as the potlatch. **1889** | Federal system of permits introduced to govern commercial fishing. Indians effectively excluded.

strung nets across the water or used dip nets to scoop the fish out of the river. Fishing is critically important to us today as Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, bull trout, steelhead, bullhead, suckers and whitefish are critical and healthy mainstays of our diet. Each year we harvest salmon at the Lillooet Lake Fish Camp near Mount Currie.

Also at this time of year, spawning salmon, which have made their way up the Fraser, Harrison and Lillooet rivers, begin the last part of their journey in the Birkenhead River. The sockeye run is particularly spectacular: the river turns red with them in a sight so remarkable that at first visitors can hardly believe their eyes.

Our ancestors were skilled hunters, too. Deer, moose, black bear and beaver were hunted in season, supplementing the regular diet of fish. Together, deer and fish were the most important components of a traditional diet.

Plant life was also important to our ancestors, who practiced selective harvesting activities in the production of camas bulbs, huckleberries and medicinal plants. Elders from the community are teaching the younger generations about medicinal plant gathering, harvesting and preparations.



# Preserving our home and asserting our rights

The Lil'wat is one of 78 BC First Nations that have chosen not to participate in the BC Treaty Commission process.

We have never given or sold any of our land to any government or nation. Although settlers and colonial governments marginalized us from the land, we never relinquished our right to our home. As we fought to restore and preserve our rights, we earned a reputation for political protest and resistance.

In 1911, the Lil'wat people joined other First Nations to sign the Lillooet Declaration. This document outlined the demands for the reinstatement of our right to our traditional lands.

# Lillooet Declaration 1911

**1910** | Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier promises to resolve Indian Land Question. Initiative dies with his electoral defeat in 1911.

**1911** | Lillooet Declaration demands reinstatement of rights to our traditional lands.

It stands as an important document in the history of relations between First Nations and the governments of Canada and the Province of British Columbia. Signed in Spences Bridge on May 10, 1911, by a committee of First Nations chiefs, and recorded by anthropologist and local resident James Teit, it asserts sovereignty over traditional territories and protests the theft of our lands.

After 1927, it was illegal in Canada for Indians to organize against the Crown for the recognition of our rights to the land. This law forced the resistance underground, but it did not go away.

In 1975, Lil'wat led a protest to protect our fishing rights. Later, we also organized to stop clear-cut logging and the destruction of our sacred heritage sites.

In 1989, at Mount Currie, we worked with other First Nations and environmental groups on the "Save-the-Stein" valley initiative. A concert, attended by tens of thousands, featured an appearance by David Suzuki and performances by Gordon Lightfoot, Bruce Cockburn and Buffy Sainte-Marie. As a result, the Stein River Watershed was protected in its entirety and remains a pristine wilderness.



# A renewed sense of hope, confidence and energy

For the first half of the 20th century, our ancestors were largely ignored, except by the church, the Indian agent and a few bureaucrats. Ironically, this provided the basis for the development of a people with strong and committed leaders and a determination to overcome the many obstacles put in our way.

All this would change, as first the train (1918), then the highway (1970) pushed north from Vancouver. Settlers, sanctioned by a colonial government that stole and pre-empted our lands, were given free 160-acre allotments. Rivers were dyked and straightened.

Commercial development soon followed. All this time, the Lil'wat people were excluded from the Canadian mainstream. But we never gave up; we struggled to participate in Canadian society and its economy. Some of our members fought for Canada in World War I and World War II.

Today, there is a renewed sense of Lil'wat energy, a resurgence of hope and confidence. Actively engaged in work and play, more Lil'wat youth are finishing high school. They are learning the new skills needed for new jobs.

1920 | Compulsory attendance of Indian children in schools is introduced.

1923 | Ottawa permits Indians to acquire commercial fishing licences.



1927 | Ottawa prohibits Indians from organizing to discuss land claims.

1931 | Native Brotherhood of BC is formed. Secret, underground discussions launched to keep Indian Land Question alive.

We are partnering with governments and private companies to take part in a series of economic initiatives including forestry, fishing, cultural tourism, construction, carpentry and other trades, hydroelectricity, retail, hospitality, business, communications, marketing and management.

In 2002, we signed a Legacy Agreement with the BC government to co-host the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games. We are partners in building and owning Olympic venues within our traditional territory.

In 2005, we signed a forest and range agreement with the provincial government to provide jobs and revenue from our forests.

Together the Lil'wat Nation and Squamish Nation are building a new cultural centre in Whistler to showcase traditional arts, heritage, culture and diversity.

The centre will open its doors to visitors before, during and after the Olympic Games. At pull-outs along the Sea-to-Sky Highway visitors can learn about Lil'wat history and culture.

K'úł'tsam  
take only  
what food  
we need

# Land Use Plan » sustaining our traditional territory

In August 2006, the Lil'wat published its formal Phase 1 Lil'wat Land Use Plan, a comprehensive document that details the vision, tools and steps needed to protect the land and aquatic resources of our 797,131-hectare territory. Aware of ever-increasing global demands for resources such as water, minerals and timber, the Lil'wat people will insist that any industrial activities respect and protect Lil'wat Nation's environmental and cultural values.

The Lil'wat Land Use Plan spells out actions to protect the beauty of our mountains and wilderness valleys — habitat for hundreds of species of birds, animals and fish — which have become a popular drawing card for visitors from around the world.

Proud stewards, we have updated traditional Lil'wat concepts of K'úl'tsaḥ ("take only what food we need") and K'ul'antsút ("take only what materials we need") in order to conserve and sustain a modern way of life.

**1951** | Parliament repeals provisions of the *Indian Act* that outlawed the potlatch and prohibited "land claims" activity.

**1960** | Aboriginal people on reserves are granted the right to vote in federal elections. Phase-out of residential schools begins.

## Water

Demand for our water is growing. Communities build reservoirs and wells. Logging, road building, farming, herbicides, industrial and residential development, farming practices, riparian disturbance, road salt and pesticides all combine to degrade water quality. Dykes and dams have diverted the flow of major rivers such as the Lillooet. We are committed to ensuring a clean, safe and reliable water supply for our community.

## Fisheries

Our people travel among traditional fishing grounds along rivers, lakes and streams throughout the year to catch sockeye, coho, chinook, pink and chum salmon. Other fish also play a role in Lil'wat life, including Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, bull trout, steelhead, bullhead, suckers and whitefish. The lowering of Lillooet Lake in 1947 and the many attempts to straighten the upper Lillooet River in the early 1950s have greatly affected the habitat in the watershed.

# K'ul'antsút

1973 | In the Calder Decision the Supreme Court of Canada splits on the question of aboriginal title.

1975 | Lil'wat protest to protect fishing rights.

1985 | Last residential school closed.

1989 | Lil'wat hosts Save-the-Stein festival in Mount Currie.

## Wildlife

Wildlife provides a year-round source of food, as well as raw materials for tools, clothing and ceremonial regalia. Our knowledge of these creatures is extensive, and our respect for them immense.

Mammals in the traditional territory include deer, black and grizzly bears, mountain goats, skunks, otters, porcupines, muskrats, raccoons, cougars, minks, bobcats, owls, ground hogs, marten, moose, beavers and many others. Some of the reptiles and amphibians found here include turtles and frogs. Today, mountain sheep and fox have been hunted to extinction in our traditional territory, and grizzly bears, wolverines, muskrats, tailed frogs and mountain goats are threatened or endangered.

Birds are also a source of legend and myth, and a staple of our diet. Our people hunted birds such as geese for food, quills and feathers. Our traditional territory supports a number of rare, endangered and threatened bird species. We recognize, as does the BC government, that the spotted owl, peregrine falcon, bald eagle, northern goshawk, American bittern, great blue heron, green heron, trumpeter swan and harlequin duck are facing





1990 | Lil'wat block road to protect logging.

1992 | BC Treaty Commission established to oversee treaty negotiations. Lil'wat Nation decides not to participate.

challenges. Water birds and songbirds are also important to our people, with woodland, riparian and wetland sites providing breeding habitat for these species.

### **Vegetation**

Plant communities in our traditional territory reflect both coastal and Interior influences, which contribute to a great number of different plants. The plants of our traditional territory provide food, medicine and tools for sustenance and trade, and help to define the character and beauty of our landscape.

We are blessed with stands of old-growth forests — a mix of Douglas fir, western hemlock, western red cedar, cottonwood and Engelmann spruce. We take a holistic view of our forests, understanding that they provide for all living creatures. We have uses for all of the species found in our traditional territory. Intensive logging and other major developments have altered most of the forest and plant ecosystems in our traditional territory, and the use of pesticides and herbicides has damaged our plant resources. There is a need to find a balance between economic needs and the health of plant communities.

2001 | Historic protocol agreement signed between the Lil'wat and Squamish nations.

2002 | Lil'wat and Squamish nations sign 2010 Olympic Legacy Agreement.

Continued access to the plants harvested by the Lil'wat people requires appropriate management of a range of sites, including forests, grasslands and alpine areas. In addition to the species that they support, old-growth forests form an important part of Lil'wat culture and spirituality. Our traditional territory also has a wealth of mushroom species. These fungi include all four of the primary wild food mushrooms: pine mushrooms, chanterelles, morels and boletes. In addition to their being of cultural value, domestic and international markets exist for wild mushroom products.

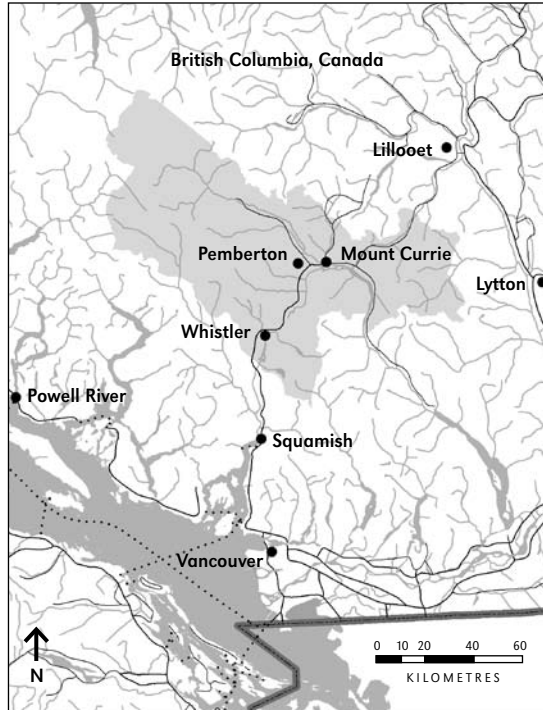
# ístkens

### **Heritage Preservation**

Throughout our traditional territory, archaeological evidence of enduring Lil'wat occupation exists — ístkens (pit houses), stone materials, culturally modified trees and pictographs. We intend to preserve our land, language and culture for untold generations to come.

2007 | Lil'wat and Squamish nations open new cultural centre in Whistler to showcase traditional arts, heritage and culture.

2010 | Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics begin. Nordic events to take place in Lil'wat traditional territory.



□ Lil'wat Nation traditional territory



This Fact Book is produced by the Lil'wat Nation. To learn more:  
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Tsícwalus

Tí tmícwsa i Líl'wata wa7 eszwát kwes wa7 áma  
ti tákema ti qú7a.

Wa7 t'it szwat kwes áma wa7s i tákema i spúz7a i wa7 n'p  
múta7 i st'sut'sóqwaoža.

Wa7 stecw wa7 nilhmintúmulhas ti tmicwkálha, kwas wa7 áma  
kwesa7lhkálh, múta7nt'akmenlhkálha, múta7 xwe7nilctenlhkálha.

Nímulh wa7 nilhmintáli ti tmicwkálha múta7 tsitcwálha  
múta7nwa7tenlhkálha, múta7 lti'akem'emlhkálha.

Wá7lhkahl nilhmintwál ku ucw7úcwalmicw múta7 kwes wa7  
ka-géla i s7ucwalmicwkálha.

Wa7 nkalstúm i nt'akemlhkálha tswa7 qwezne'm ti qwal'uttenlhkálha  
kwes tecw wa7 szwátne'm i ké'kéle7 swá7lhkahl múta7 kwat wa7  
tecw sla7 lti tákema tmicwlhkálh.

Wi snímulh úcwalmicw lti tmícwa, wá7lhkahl kw'ezusmíne'm ku  
stecw7a w'spínusem múta7 száyten'ni tmícwa kwes wa7 ka-amastáli-ha  
ti tmícwa, ucwalmicwkálha múta7 ku háž' aw't lhel wá7 snímulh.

Ti tmícwa, i ucwalmícwa, múta7 na wal'uttenlhkálha, st'át'imcets, ts'íla iz' t'u7.