

Secwepemc – Territory and Animals

(The information here is comes from the **Shuswap Cultural Series** and was created by Secwepemc Cultural Education Society.)

The majority of the Shuswap people lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place as foods became available in different areas. The Shuswap people had to devote a great deal of their lives to satisfying their basic needs, but they did so very successfully, developing a unique culture that was totally self-sufficient. This manner of living required a great deal of knowledge about the surroundings, the workings, of nature and the skills of the generations that had come before them. To live comfortably in their environment, the Shuswap people had to develop as capable and strong individuals. Every aspect of the traditional Shuswap society was directed toward this goal to create knowledgeable, responsible and independent people, who could look after all of their personal needs and be aware of the needs of the whole Shuswap people. (Book 1, p. 4).

The Shuswap people of the interior relied on a wide variety of plants, animals, and fish to provide them with food. Although the people of the Fraser River division relied more heavily on salmon as the main source of food, the Shuswap people generally made meat the biggest part of their diet.

The continual search for food lead to a nomadic lifestyle for most of the Shuswap people. They traveled, throughout the spring, summer and fall, to areas where they knew certain plant, animal or fish foods were available. Because this search was more difficult during the long, interior winter, many items of food were preserved and stored, to ensure a winter food supply. From the time of the first snow to the earliest thaw, the Shuswap people lived together at the winter villages. Even in the winter, however, food was secured. Fish were caught from the nearby river, many animals were hunted, trapped and snared within a short distance of the winter villages, and the men made longer hunting trips for larger game. (Book 2, p. 1)

Fish Foods of the Shuswap People

The Shuswap people depended heavily on supplies of fish from the rivers, lakes and streams for food. The people of the Fraser River and the Canon divisions made the salmon their main source of food. They lived within range of the best interior location available for fishing the salmon that migrated up-river from the sea; the area surrounding the mouth of the Chilcotin River.

Although the other Shuswap people did not rely so heavily on salmon, they still regarded them as an important part of their diet, and moved into fishing areas as the salmon moved up-stream. The Lake divisions of the Shuswap people used large supplies of land-locked salmon, or kokanee, which they took from the large lakes in their areas. Many Shuswap people also fished the rivers, lakes and streams for trout, catfish, sturgeon, and a variety of white fish. But the greatest quantity of fish was taken from the Thompson and Fraser Rivers, and the most important food fish was the sockeye salmon. It was a supply of dry, stored salmon that helped the people through the winters when food was scarce, providing needed protein and vitamins to maintain strength in difficult times. (Book 2, p. 10)

Shuswap Fishing Methods

Many methods were used by the Shuswap people to catch a wide variety of fish. They chose from many different methods, and used specially developed materials; to make sure that their fishing efforts would be successful.

A variety of spears, hooks, nets and traps were made for fishing. Nets were constructed with the use of awls, and needles made of wood and bone. Holes were drilled in them to draw the thread through.

Salmon fishing was often done with a fish spear. The spear head was made of deer antler, sharpened to points. The prongs were attached to a long fir handle with twine of braided Indian hemp bark. (Book 2, p. 11)

A shorter three-pronged spear was used when fishing for trout from a canoe. Single pronged spears were also used, as were hook and line. The small hooks were made of stone and floats were made of dry reeds. (Book 2, p. 12)

Animal Foods of the Shuswap People

Animals of the interior supplied the greatest quantity of food for most of the Shuswap people. Although the Fraser and Canon division people relied more on their excellent salmon fishery, all of the others secured large supplies of deer, caribou, and elk meat to feed their people. They used a wide variety of mammals and birds to supplement their diet. Those they included, in the order of frequency and quantity of use were: deer; elk; caribou; marmot; mountain sheep; rabbit; beaver; grouse; bear; moose; duck; good; crane; squirrel; porcupine; and a few turtles. (Book 2, p. 12)

Shuswap Hunting Methods

The Shuswap people devised a great many hunting methods for the large animals that made up most of their food supply; the deer, elk and caribou. For successful hunting of these animals, many skills were required of the hunter. He needed the fitness and knowledge to track them, and the ability to get close enough to them to use a weapon. Being within range, he had to have a dependable weapon and needed to use it with skill, before he had secured his food. Although spears and clubs were in use, the most important weapon of the hunt was the bow and arrow. Every hunter learned how to manufacture the tools needed for successful hunting. (Book 2, p. 13)

The arrow, or spearheads, were chipped and flaked from stone, usually basalt, but many other stones as well. Arrowheads could also be made from beaver teeth and bone. They were carefully shaped with stone hammers, arrow flakers and sharpened with whetstone to a razor edge. The spear and arrowhead was hafted to the arrow shaft with a winding of deer sinew, glued into place with pitch. A blunt arrowhead was used to hunt birds.

The arrow was made of Saskatoon or rosewood, cut about sixty-five centimeters long. It was grooved along its length with a bone-grooving tool, to allow blood to escape, which helped with tracking a wounded animal. The arrows were polished smooth with an arrow smoother to ensure swift flight.

The arrow was assisted in its flight by the even attachment of bird feathers around the end. The feathers were held in place with wrapping of fine sinew smeared with glue or gum from balsam poplar tips ... Arrows were carried in a quiver made of wolverine or fisher skins, with the tails left on. In the Kamloops areas, quivers of buffalo hide were used.

The bow string was made of sinew, from the back of a deer, strengthened by rubbing it with glue, made from salmon or sturgeon skin. If sinew was not available, twisted Indian hemp bark was used. The Shuswap bow was reported to be the strongest in the interior.

Clubs were used in hunting and war. These were made of stone, some of jade, and could be used to kill food or foe. A tomahawk of stone with a wooden handle was used as well. Clubs made of whale bone, incised with designs were used in the Kamloops Shuswap area. Bone and antler daggers were used. Some of the daggers were designed with lines and circles. Beaver spears, with detachable handles, were made of bone or antler. (Book 2, p. 14)

Traditional Shuswap Clothing and Adornment

The Shuswap people long ago were totally self-sufficient. They used the resources in their environment to fulfill all of their needs. This was a particularly challenging task when it came to the people of making clothing. In order to be comfortable during all season in their temperate climate, the Shuswap needed a wide variety of clothing.

Most clothing was made from the hides of the same animals that were used as food. Occasionally, the Shuswap used the hides raw, but usually they were made soft and pliable by the tanning process. After tanning, the buckskin was carefully cut into various shapes and sewn into a wearable item. When hides were scarce the people used different kinds of plants, woven or braided, to make clothing. (Book 4, p. 1)

Clothing was made from the hides of all hair and fur bearing animals. Those used included deer, elk, caribou, moose, beaver, wolverine, muskrat, rabbit, marmot, coyote, mink, marten, otter, squirrel, ground squirrel, fox and lynx. (Book 4, p. 2)

Articles of Clothing included moccasins, shirts, skirts, dresses, pants, capes and ponchos, robes, caps, and headbands.

Methods of Sewing

Awls and needles were made from the fine leg bone of the deer. Sinew and thread of eleagnus bark were used for sewing. (Book 4, p. 4)

The materials used for most clothing was buckskin. Buckskin is deer hide, which has been softened and preserved through the tanning process. Many implements were used to make clothing and other useful items. The knife was used in the skinning of the animal; the hair was then removed with the knife. Bone from the ulna of a deer was used to scrape the hides clean. The hide was stretched and softened with a tanning tool made of stone, which was attached to a wooden handle with buckskin wrapping. (Book 5, p. 7)

Winter Wear

Besides the warm moccasins, pants and robes, the Shuswap people had other ways of keeping warm in the winter. They made mittens from furs, wearing them fur side in. The mittens were sometimes attached to the winter robe at the shoulders by long thongs so that they would not be lost. They also made neck wraps of small fur, sometimes woven to wear with their robes. Winter socks were made by cutting small animals furs to the shape of the foot and sewing them together, fur side in, to be worn inside the moccasins. (Book 5, p. 9)

Adornment of Clothing and Body

Animal teeth, feathers, quills, claws and bone were some of the materials used to decorate clothing or make jewelry. (Book 5, p. 9)

Technology

Food Gathering Implements

Many implements of bone, antler and wood were used in the gathering of food. The knife, was an item carried by each person, for use whenever cutting was necessary. Another common item in use was the root digging stick. This tool was made of elk or deer antler and used to expose the many roots gathered throughout spring and summer.

The sap scrapers, used to collect sap for food, were made of caribou antler. Others were made of the shoulder blade of black bear or deer, or the leg bone of a deer. These were used to collect the sap from the cambium layer of yellow pine, lodge pole pine and black cottonwood for food. (Book 5, p. 2)

Fishing technology

Salmon fishing was often done with a fish spear. The spear head was made of deer antler, sharpened to points. The prongs were attached to a long fir handle with twine of braided Indian hemp bark.

A shorter three prong spear was used when fishing for trout from a canoe. Single pronged spears were also used, as were hook and line. The small hooks were made of hare, dog, and deer bone and the lines of Indian hemp bark. Sinkers on lines were made of stone and floats were made of dry reeds. (Book 5, p. 2-3)

Food Storage

Several kinds of bags were made for food storage. Meat and fat were stored in pouches made of goat skin or bear skin. Marrow from the deer was kept in the cleaned out stomach of a deer or caribou, which was sewn up on one end. Deer fat was stored in a cleaned and sewn deer bladder. The open end was tightened with twine. Raw hides of different animals were sewn on three sides for storage of various foods. Bottles made of dried salmon skin sealed at the ends with glue and twine were used to store salmon oil. (Book 5, p. 5)

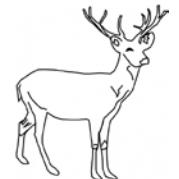
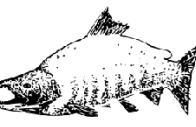
Household and other manufactured goods

Many items from the plant and animal environment were put to use in the household of the Shuswap people. A bed consisted of a cushion of dry grass covered by raw or tanned deer, sheep or bear-skin. Blankets were softened bear-skin, woven lynx, or rabbit skins. The pillow was heaped up grasses or fine brush under the bottom blanket. Floor mats made of hides were used.

Different types of bags were used. Household articles were stored in bags of woven Indian hemp or eleagnus bark laced up the wised with buckskin. A bag of sewing supplies was made from tanned buckskin. Needles and awls were also kept in a container made of a hollow elk antler. (Book 5, p. 7)

Bags made of caribou leg skins sewn together and finished around the top with a bear skin strip were used to store personal items and for travel. Smaller raw hide bags were also used for storage of personal goods. (Book 5, p. 8)

Bingo Pieces

			deer	seal
			rabbit	sheep
		Free Space	salmon	coyote
		bear	beaver	fox
		clam	whale	eagle

B	I	N	G	O
		Free Space		