

Blackline Master 4-3

Stone Fish Traps

Stone fish traps were one of a number of fishing technologies used by coastal First Nations to harvest fish. They were an efficient form of **selective** harvesting of a large quantity of fish, but they required a relatively large labour force to build, maintain and operate.

Stone fish traps used the energy from two main sources: the ebb and flow of the tide, and the outward flow of a stream or river into the ocean. They used the falling tide to trap fish behind a rock wall or the stream flow to direct fish into a pond or pool.

Building a stone fish trap

The basic structure of trap is a wall of boulders and stones built in a semi-circular formation along the shore. It required considerable skill and knowledge to select the stones and place them correctly to build a strong wall. It needed to withstand constant tidal action and rough waves.

Salmon traps

Many stone tidal fish traps found along the coast were used to harvest various species of salmon as the migrating fish returned to their birth rivers and streams to spawn.

Small fish traps

In some areas traps were used to catch large quantities of small fish such as herring or perch. These were not near streams, but protected waterways where schools of fish gathered.

Working the traps

Using the stone tidal traps was an active job. People didn't just wait for the tide to trap the fish. They might guide the fish into the trap by splashing with branches or paddles. They may also stand along the wall while the water is high to make sure they fish don't escape.

Once the tide went out the fish could be harvested. Some traps were designed to drain completely, and the fish could be scooped or raked up. Others were designed to hold some water until the fish to be harvested were selected, and the rest released.

Social Organization

Usually it was a hereditary right held by lineage or house chiefs to build a stone fish trap in certain locations. It required the effort of all members of the lineage or house group to build, maintain and operate it.