

*Sojourners*

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*Jil'kaat aani*  
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Early the next morning, from a ridgetop above John Muir's last Glacier Bay camp of 1879, a bald eagle launches. Wings outstretched eight feet, the adult male slices east over an arm of Muir Inlet to a pair of 7000-foot castles yoked by a glacial cape, then rides a williwaw over Davidson Glacier into the grand canyon of Lynn Canal, largest fjord in North America. The bird rockets over the fanned toe of Davidson Glacier, then over two miles of seawater to the tip of the peninsula that divides Lynn Canal into two narrow inlets, Chilkat and Chilkoot. Just off land's end, five stepping-stone islands drift down the middle of the sea-filled canyon. Veering north, the eagle hitches a draft over the Chilkat Peninsula's 15-mile-long spine to a summit nearly two thousand feet between sinuous coastlines. The bird slows to scan muskeg meadows for ground squirrels or grouse. An unconcerned porcupine waddles over the saturated moss-matt. Still hungry, the feathered predator descends to the narrow isthmus where the peninsula joins other mountain ranges hunching north toward a vast Interior. The eagle alights on a limb of an old-growth spruce that overlooks a cove which someday will serve as a harbor for the town of Haines, a community that in the early twenty-first century sustains about two thousand humans.

On this slate-sky October day, however, the eagle's stereoscopic gaze scours a crescent beach devoid of humanity, guarded on the uplands by a phalanx of shaggy spruce and hemlock. From the shore, seawater stretches three miles east to the Coast

Range, a glacier-caped wall abutting eight hundred ragged miles of Pacific edge. The eagle scans the point where the Inlet bifurcates—the eastern branch a narrow, cliff-sided corridor, leads to the seasonal village of Dyea at the grassy terminus fifteen miles due north; its western finger hooks back to the mouth of the Chilkoot River and the larger village of L’koot. Twice daily, seawater from an ocean a hundred miles away flushes the fjord with twenty-foot tides. Into a chasm deeper than the Grand Canyon flows fecund brine to mix with the silty discharge of hundreds of glacial streams and waterfalls, producing a pale turquoise dilution that supports a teeming marine population. Unabashed vitality rivets the eyes of the eagle as he scans the water for supper.

Moonwashed tides propel rafts of bladderwrack, bull kelp and sea-hair into Lynn Canal, a skein through which herring, needlefish, capelin, sculpin and smelt school in iridescent galaxies. In April, a glinting run of eulachon—fish so oily it can be set ablaze—wriggle up the Canal pursued by anything big enough to eat them. Sea lions, seals, and sharks chase the greasy morsels by water; clouds of gulls, crows, plovers, godwits and curlews thicken and dive. Like ornaments on Christmas trees, ravens and eagles ornament the trees, ready to swoop when food flashes below. Diners scatter in the presence of whales pursuing fish flesh—famished humpbacks just in from Hawaii; killer whales ravenous for anything that bleeds. Sixty-pound king salmon arrive in May, harbingers of huge runs of sockeye, chum, pink and coho driven by genetic destiny to spawn and die in the rivers that pour into each inlet tucked in respective corners of the Canal.

On this gray November day, the eagle is roused only by a half-dozen ravens standing like deacons around a black carcass curled into beach boulders. He plunges from

his perch and scatters the protesting ravens by landing on the shoulder of a fermented harbor seal. With its thick beak, the eagle tears away a few scraps of belly fat, then returns to an upper branch of the big spruce. He needs hardly extend a wing to the afternoon's freshening sou'easter to ascend from the treetop and soar northwest over the narrow Deishu isthmus and up the Chilkat River valley.

A tailwind propels the eagle over twenty miles of interwoven river channels, dark braids separated by ribs of sand. Smoke curls from lodge fires in a cluster of log buildings near the river mouth called Yandeist'akye ("Yawn-deh-stuck-yeh") by Tlingit residents. Low water exposes rotting salmon carcasses, but the high-flying predator passes. Even this late in the season, the river boils with fish, hence the human name *Jil'kaat*, or salmon cache. A half-mile away, a cow moose and two calves trot across the valley bottom, unencumbered by the deeper river passages into which they plunge and swim, muzzles pointing skyward. The eagle flies on.

Moments later, the bird traces a right angle in the valley and plummets toward a broad plain fashioned by the confluence of four streams. From this lofty perspective, dendritic channels unravel, then gather at the narrowing river bend. Closer, a piercing chorus of four thousand fellow eagles becomes audible. The outsized bird alights on an overhanging branch of a big cottonwood to survey the muscular current below, milky with glacial flour, and the delta expanse where the rivers meet. Six or seven to a tree, perched on every driftlog or rootwad, even crouched on stream banks, eagles watch for fish.

The last salmon run of the year draws these bald eagles to a raucous feast at the "Council Grounds." Although freezing temperatures have sealed most northern rivers by

November, the Chilkat stays open due to warm upwellings flushed by convergent waters. Joining the big raptors for the autumnal banquet are wolves, coyotes, marten, wolverines and the occasional brown bear willing to delay hibernation for a last meal. On banks facing the flats, two Tlingit villages four miles apart attest to the rich resource. Most people live in Klukwan, sometimes called the “mother village,” which, at the time of Muir’s 1879 forays, was one of the largest permanent Native American communities on the continent.

With one shrill, descending whistle the eagle flaps several long, steady beats across the flats, angles over Klukwan, and rides the thermals upriver twenty river miles north to Turtle Rock. Below his wings, the upper Chilkat twists northeast and stairsteps into cloud-hemmed peaks toward its origins in Yukon ice, only ten miles from the head of the Yukon River, where water travels two thousand miles to the Bering Sea. Instead of following the stream past treeline, the bird rises over a pass in the Takshanuk Mountains, angles east, and drops into the head of another river valley hemmed by another granitic range. From a vantage several thousand feet high, he scrutinizes the deep forest of the upper Chilkoot watershed as it tumbles through an uninhabited valley to Chilkoot Lake. Opposite its mouth on the far side of the lake, the valley narrows to a few hundred yards where the Chilkoot River leaves the lake for its last mile to the sea.

The powerful bird descends for a closer view of the river, a misty corridor flanked by old-growth spruce. Just in from where the river leaves the lake, another Tlingit village hugs the shore. Slab-board platforms extend into the river from which villagers spear passing salmon. The eagle glides a half-mile downstream until he spies his mate hunched atop a coho carcass on a grassy bank. The new arrival pipes a shrill acknowledgement

and lands on a nearby house-sized rock seamed with moss and blueberry. Bramble around the outsized boulder is pressed flat to the ground, evidence of the scores of humans who recently gathered around Deer Rock for the purpose of making peace. The eagle sees only the rotting salmon under his mate. He half-unfolds his wings and hops clumsily toward his life-long companion. She delivers a piercing admonition, returns to her meal. He sulks back to the rock.

In the lazy, late morning that it takes to wing from Glacier Bay to the lower Chilkoot River, the eagle soared over much of a 2.6 million-acre homeland once considered the property of Chilkat and Chilkoot people. They still claim it.

Unlike the popular misconception of communal property among Native Americans, the Tlingits of southeast Alaska possessed a keen sense of ownership, especially for clan treasure, or *aat.oow*, which included artwork, regalia and weapons as well as landscape—lakes, stream mouths, berry patches, beaches—even stars. As custodians of two coveted passes into interior lands, northern Tlingits historically required that visitors ask permission, and likely pay for, use of their *aani*, or territory.<sup>i</sup>

In the centuries before John Muir's visit to Jilkaat *aani*, or Chilkat country, traditional conflicts usually ignited around rights of entry, resource use or personal affront. In his 1927 memoir, Muir's missionary friend, Hall Young, held that Tlingits derived from the ancient Jews because of their "ready acceptance of the doctrine of blood-atonement." Tlingit law dictated that wrongs be avenged with swift force, often with prolonged tensions between village and clan groups.<sup>ii</sup> In his books, the missionary neglected to note the custom of establishing "peace rocks" where embattled local parties resolved grievances and recommitted themselves to unity. He offered a more righteous

path to peace. “Boston men” expected Natives to resolve their conflicts differently, on paper signed before armed soldiers, sometimes consummated by ceremonial alcohol, ending with prayer.<sup>iii</sup>

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*“always been a community”*

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According to Lukaax.adi headman Austin Hammond, the story of the northern Tlingit began with the Flood. Hammond wasn’t sure when it happened, but he retained key details from repeated tellings by his grandfather, Joe Whiskers of the House that Came Down from the Sky.

An abrupt rise in water level off the tip of Chilkat Peninsula sent fishermen back to L’koot to warn villagers. The community responded immediately. Men felled trees that they lashed together into huge rafts. Women and children wrapped food and possessions in hides secured to the logs. Barking dogs kept bears from clambering aboard, so wild animals rode out the Flood on other logs.

The water rose over four thousand feet until the rafts reached the rock spires of Kashagnak, a steep mountain whose walls plummet to the western shore of Chilkoot Lake. Villagers tied their canoes to the spires, sometimes called “Noah’s Posts,” but the flood currents tore them loose. The errant vessels carried castaways hundreds of miles into the Interior where they were found by the Gunana, or “Someplace Else People.”

The bands of Athabaskans that roamed the Yukon-Rocky Mountain region assimilated the newcomers, but Tlingit elders warned their children against settling: “This

isn't our land. This isn't our land. Don't get crazy here. Our land is way on the other side of the mountain.”

When the children were grown, Hammond said, they longed for their homeland, so groups paddled down from the Interior plateaus on the great rivers of the Northwest Coast—Taku, Stikine, and Nass. Upon reaching the coast, clan groups dispersed throughout the island empire that white men later called Alexander Archipelago. Scholars suggest the mass migration likely occurred about ten thousand years ago, followed by settlement patterns based on food, glaciers, and/or politics. Those who navigated the Nass River settled in the southern portions of Alaska's Panhandle, including Tongass (Ketchikan-Saxman) and on Prince of Wales Island at Klawock. Most Stikine clansmen congregated at a large village near the mouth of the Stikine River, but some ventured west to Sitka on the outer coast and into the area that eventually became Glacier Bay.<sup>iv</sup> Taku people settled closer to their salmon-rich river, near present-day Juneau. After venturing down the Nass, Hammond's mother's people built a village in Duncan Canal, a sheltered inlet that nearly pinches Kupreanof Island in two. They called it Lukaax and themselves the Lukaax.adi.<sup>v</sup>

Since Tlingits resided near year-round subsistence resources, food tied people together. For purposes related to food and social balance, villages and seasonal camps were established throughout each claimed territory. Domestic conflict might be a reason that a group might move away from their *aani*, which may have happened with the Lukaax.adi.<sup>vi</sup>

“We were sojourners here,” said Austin Hammond.<sup>vii</sup> Wanderers in search of a home. As they paddled north, the Lukaax.adi scouted for unoccupied territory but

encountered only lands claimed before them, so they moved on. They continued at the head of Lynn Canal where they discovered in the central arm a thriving salmon stream apparently unclaimed by another group. Before long, other Tlingit arrived in canoes from a big village in a neighboring valley. They claimed the river but permitted the Lukaax.adi to establish a community called *L'koot*, or “without a cache.”

For their village site the immigrants chose a river-bend just below the lake outlet. From there, the river muscles through a mile of old-growth spruce and huge boulders until it spills into Lutak Inlet. Its name derives from the cooling shade of the narrow valley which made fortified sheds unnecessary to over-winter salmon stocks. Expansive and sunny, the river in the western valley was called *Jil'kaat*, or “with a cache” because food preservation required the protection of log structures. Melt-off from six glaciers keep *Jilkaat* waters opaque. *L'koot* runs clear.<sup>viii</sup>

Exactly when the Lukaax.adi settled at *L'koot* is hard to say. Fish trap remains found at the Chilkoot River mouth in 2002 were carbon-dated to 2100 years. Someone lived there then, possibly *L'koot*, but their precise identities remain a mystery.<sup>ix</sup>

The story told in these pages might differ from the version Austin Hammond and elders intended in the 1980s when they urged me to “tell the story,” but it is one a non-Tlingit person may tell. Except as context, I leave the legends and clan stories to their owners. Instead, this book and its companion survey two-and-a-half centuries of Chilkat-Anglo interface through a rhetorical lens to tell a story of indigenous people using persuasive strategies on whites and vice versa, and the results. This work borrows from anthropologists, linguists, historians and culture bearers, but does not aspire to retrace their steps nor necessarily affirm their theories. Rather, my intent is to tell an overlooked

saga involving a rare, nonviolent confrontation during the United States' war on Native America.

This book also parts with Austin Hammond's perceptions of time. According to anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Catherine McClellan, the Tlingit mind conceives of time within these frameworks: Early Mythic Time, Raven Myths, Legendary Time, and Historical Time. The first three time-frames connect Tlingit people today with their ancestors—myths set origin themes; Raven grafts the mortal with the divine; clan legends reinforce affiliation. The Tlingit sense of time allows myth to arise even in recent times, old stories are still considered clan property to the modern Tlingit. Those stories are best told by clan members or those authorized to do so.<sup>x</sup>

These pages focus on northern Tlingit encounters with non-Natives in the decades leading up to and including John Muir's encounter. The companion volume traces the effects of Muir on the next seven generations of Chilkat-Chilkoot Tlingit featuring a longstanding conflict over some of the most valuable Native artifacts in America. Woven into a narrative built from authoritative texts and documents are the voices of contemporary Tlingit elders whose forbears were transformed by the Ice Chief. Although sometimes vague, contradictory, or incomplete, Native oral histories offer cultural insights not available in the diaries and reports of Euro-Americans. Beyond infrequent archeological discoveries on the Northwest Coast, pre-contact activities are primarily known by legend or hearsay. Anyone seeking clues to the past must consider—or at least listen to—the threads of cultural memory. For example, northern Tlingit elders agree that while the Lukaax.adi were the first permanent inhabitants of Chilkoot and Taiya Inlets in the eastern half of the *aani*; they also suggest that the Ganax.teidi controlled the entire

area long before the sojourners' arrival.<sup>xi</sup> The Chilkat "first family" saw the advantage of an alliance, so formed partnerships with Chilkoot latecomers. Elders are less certain about the Great Flood, which nineteenth century biblical scholars claimed occurred around 1650 BC.

Five days' paddle south from Chilkoot, signs of human settlement at Groundhog Bay indicate activity ten thousand years ago. But until knowledge of the L'koot fish traps, archeologists lacked evidence of inhabitation in the huge northern fjord earlier than the sixteenth century.<sup>xii</sup> Had he known about the fish traps before his death in 1994, Austin Hammond would probably say that they belonged to the Old Ones whose log rafts washed away in the Flood.

Ganax.teidi canoes landed in Glacier Bay perhaps eight hundred years ago, before glaciers in the Little Ice Age began creeping closer to the villages.<sup>xiii</sup> Clan members sought a new homeland, where they could lay claim to salmon streams and berry patches which they would pass on to untold generations.

They were exiles from the Henya *kwaan* ten days' paddle south, kicked out over a domestic dispute involving a woman's relationship with an enormous woodworm. The large clan abandoned their village on Prince of Wales Island at the southern end of the Tlingit domain and set out to build a new community. Fifty-foot war canoes delivered the Ganax.teidi to places already occupied by other tribes, so they pushed on. In the northernmost reaches, far in the hydra-headed terminus of Lynn Canal they discovered an expansive region of mountains and rivers, the largest of which hosted all six species of Pacific salmon. From the mouth of the *Jil'kaat Heen* (Chilkat River), flowing into the western arm of Lynn Canal, the explorers paddled a full day against a rushing current to a

south-facing embankment they called Kuthwultu. It seemed a fine site for a village until the men discovered a spring two miles upriver where the water tasted sweeter. The clan agreed, and built the first log clan house a few feet from the rushing current, where tribal members would forever feast and dance and live by the water that gave them life.

According to Klukwan elder Sally Burattin, the newcomers found at least one old clan house built by Athabaskan migrants down from the Interior long before, so the Ganax.teidi called their new home Klukwan, or “always been a community.”<sup>xiv</sup>

They knew nothing of white people. The Ganax.teidi settled in the “mother village” around the time Viking and Danish ships were pillaging the northern coasts of Britain. In the aftermath of a devastating plague, millions of Eurasians were embroiled in bloody battles over land and souls. In its protected valley on the other side of the world, Klukwan thrived.

The warm centuries that drew back the ice-cover from the Northwest Coast abruptly reversed during the Little Ice Age between 1400 and 1800 AD. Just over the icy crown in Klukwan’s south viewshed, a massive glacier at the base of 15,000-foot Mount Fairweather gushed mineralized meltwater into streams that veinated a ten-mile-wide delta plain sloping to Icy Strait and the Pacific Ocean. Along the sockeye-rich river on the plain’s eastern edge, several hundred Tlingit lived in Klem’sha’sshakeen, or Sandhill Town. A smaller village flanked the mouth of Chookanheeni, or Grassy Creek, at the western corner of the outwash. A cooling trend which became the Little Ice Age fed the ice-giant, later called Muir Glacier, whose catastrophic advance altered the course of human history.

Certain that villagers were being punished for some heinous act, a shaman advised leaders to appease the glacier by sacrificing their best slaves, but the glacier continued its forward grind. The freezing force likely killed salmon stocks first, then a generation or two later crushed the village itself. The glacial mass pushed as far as Icy Strait, furrowing the sand plains under its weight. Weather patterns changed again. As the ice mass retreated the sea rushed in to form Glacier Bay; today the Muir has pulled back more than fifty miles from its apogee in the 1700s.<sup>xv</sup>

About the time Glacier Bay refugees dispersed in canoes, Spanish galleons a half world away were probing the secrets of a great ocean. Three or four centuries later, the Queen's ships would bear the first whites into a region unknown to Europeans headed by a majestic fjord controlled by fierce Natives.

The advance of Muir Glacier forced some to resettle on the opposite shores of Icy Strait in a community they called Hoonah. According to Klukwan headman Joe Hotch, remaining members of the Kaagwaantaan escaped in two directions. One group followed the rugged outer Pacific coast south to Sheet'ka (Sitka) where Kiksadi residents permitted the immigrants to stay. Others paddled east through Icy Strait, a waterway up to eight miles wide that twice daily flushes the northern arteries of the archipelago. A clan house was erected at Point Couverden where the strait meets the southernmost extent of Lynn Canal, but most kinsmen turned north into the grand fjord. As the canoes pushed forward the ocean passage narrowed between sheer mountain walls. Finally they reached the large river that flows into western arm. At the broad, sandy delta the Kaagwaantaan encountered Ganax.teidi from Klukwan who welcomed them as valued cohorts.

Group members likely knew of each other, perhaps even consorted at *koo'eex*, or potlatches, that drew celebrants from afar. The Kaagwaantaan had a penchant for war and wealth; a relationship with the Ganax.teidi secured their legacy within Tlingit social conventions. For the lineal vitality of their various populations, Tlingit culture recognizes two kinds of people—Eagle and Raven moieties dictated by maternal lines. Clan houses tend to belong to one or the other. Until recent years, same-moiety marriage was considered taboo. Committing to one's opposite moiety evolved into a complex system dependent on "in-laws" for house construction and funeral arrangements. The Kaagwaantaan Eagles arrived just when the Ganax.teidi Ravens needed them most.

The meeting of the two clans on the riverbank presaged a long-lived reign.

The visitors maintained a majestic air in addressing their hosts; the Ganax.teidi spoke likewise, anticipating a profitable merger. Every word counts when two parties commit to an long-term relationship. Cautious language engenders respect. "It's just like carrying a long pole," Joe Hotch recalls elders saying. "If you're talking any old way, you never know who that pole will hit."<sup>xvi</sup>

Careless words and deeds are blamed on historic conflicts between Chilkat and Chilkoot kin. Insertion of a labret into a Tlingit woman's lower lip began as a means to curb gossip, later evolving into a fashion ornament. Replaced with larger versions through one's life, the lip plug made speech quieter, slower. Thus encumbered, the matriarchy nonetheless retained social control.<sup>xvii</sup>

Together, Ganax.teidi, Kaagwaantaan, and Lukaax.adi combined forces to defend Jil'kaat *aani* against unwanted intrusion. Generally, power-sharing among Tlingit clans required highly regulated discourse; in Jilkaat even more so. For centuries, warriors from

the north raided groups along the Northwest Coast with legendary boldness, appropriating slaves and valuables as they desired. Grudges between clans and/or communities might fester for generations then erupt in deadly skirmishes.<sup>xviii</sup> While aggressive behavior on “away games” was a point of regional pride, at home it amplified tensions between families and clans, sometimes with fractious results. Klukwan was known for inter-clan entanglements that sometimes threatened to tear the village apart. Chilkat anthropologist Louis Shotridge despaired that his people lacked a more harmonious temperament: “How bad it must have been on our ancestor for his offspring only to be the antagonist to another man.”<sup>xix</sup>

In old times, brutal reciprocity was the mortal consequence of certain crimes like murder, witchcraft, or facial disfigurement, but in some cases, when traditional law led to years of revenge and retaliation, clan leaders turned to ritual.

Details of the peace ceremony varied from place to place, but the idea was the same: members of one clan visited the home of their adversary where they engaged in formalities leading to a mock battle to be resolved by exchanging “hostages,” usually clan leaders. Through a period of prayer and song, the hostages transformed into *guwakaan*, or deer, the most peaceful animal in the forest. In Chilkoot, *guwakaan* maneuvered around Deer Rock, a house-sized boulder on an upper riverbank carpeted with chocolate lily, Nootka rose, and marsh globe. Following the ceremonial selection, each hostage resided as an esteemed guest of his former enemy—sometimes for years—until the dispute was fully settled.<sup>xx</sup>

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*“I’m a Tlingit and I’m rich—I’m overflowing because nothing was given away.”*

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“We were all one Chilkat,” Joe Hotch says at a Klukwan history talk in April 2009. At eighty-one, Hotch emanated stability. Crowned by a shock of white butch-cut hair, the Kaagwaantaan clan leader holds his stocky body like a wrestler prince. Like Hammond, who died in 1994, Hotch was raised by grandparents who strove to keep the culture alive in their grandson. In a culture without designated village chiefs, Hotch is widely recognized as the traditional spokesperson. His voice is calm, assured.

“We only got divided because non-Natives started to infringe all over our land. All of this—“ Hotch waves his hand in a broad arc—“it still belongs to us. No one signed a paper to take it away. Two-point six million acres. I’m a Tlingit and I’m rich—I’m overflowing because nothing was given away.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Twenty miles upriver from the Chilkat mouth, the mother village hugs south-facing shores, protected from frigid north winds by Iron Mountain at its back. In Klukwan’s viewshed, the confluence of three rivers create an open expanse called the Council Grounds with enough late-run salmon in the braided channels to attract a convergence of eagles and wildlife before winter’s door closes tight. On the horizon ten miles south, the Takhinsha Range rises into a serrated glacial crown that tilts ice-rivers southward into Glacier Bay’s ocean fingers.

Shielded from weather and white men, Klukwan people believed then and now that they lived at the best place on earth. No other coastal Tlingit village boasted access to teeming fish and wildlife resources so far out of the range of gunboats. Ample

subsistence stocks and a singular commitment to place left leisure time enough for a proliferation of traditional arts—carving, weaving, dance, oratory. The “last old-time Tlingit village,” Klukwan became a repository for cultural treasure.<sup>xxii</sup>

Along with abundant local resources, village location assured Chilkat control of the Grease Trail, a steady source of income for over a century. Named for the highly valued oil of the eulachon (“hooligan”), the trading route started at tideline near present-day Haines, crossed Deishu isthmus to Yandeist’akye, and followed a narrow cut-bank along the Chilkat River to Klukwan. At the village, gear was stowed in canoes for a twenty-mile upriver paddle to trailheads off the Klehini or upper Chilkat. Then the real work began. Men strapped on packs that weighed up to 160 pounds, eighty percent of which was trade goods. Each trail led up the coastal mountains until tall trees were replaced by waist-high alders and alpine meadows, then over 3400-foot Chilkat Pass and north across tundra. In trains of twenty or more packers, Chilkats trekked northward hundreds of miles to locate their Athabaskan trade partners; similar-sized crews paddled south in war canoes to partners and relatives in coastal communities.

The earliest Chilkat forays beyond the Pass likely involved a day’s hike west to a pass near Samuel Glacier. Travelers traversed the Samuel’s crevassed surface into the O’Connor River drainage, then walked two days through the crumbling glacial canyons that spill into the Tatshenshini-Elsek watershed, a swiftwater passage to the Gulf of Alaska. The earliest Tlingit explorers may have walked beside the river to the sea, but in later times they rode cottonwood canoes on cement-hued currents to the ocean.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Close to the convergence of the Tatshenshini and the larger Elsek, a few Chilkat families lived at a seasonal outpost called Nukva’ik, a halfway house built to maintain

closer ties with coastal partners. Only a speck in the panorama of rock and ice, the outpost offered little respite for residents accustomed to lush lowlands and intertidal zones. Touched by the breath of glaciers, transplanted residents subsisted on salmon speared in glacial torrents and berries gathered from an occasional patch of tundra. All other victuals—seal meat, eulachon oil, dried seaweed, potatoes—were at least a three-day journey away. Though a testament to Chilkat economic verve, Nukva'ik is barely remembered today.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Steering a cottonwood canoe down the substantial currents of the Alsek brought traders to a small village at Dry Bay, a sheltered haven on the exposed North Pacific coastline. A number of Chilkat Valley Tlingit today still claim a family connection with the long-abandoned coastal community.<sup>xxv</sup> From Dry Bay, a three-day hike westward on North Pacific beaches brought travelers to relatives and trading partners in Yakutat, which remains a thriving Tlingit village of about six hundred residents.

Wood chips floating down the Alsek alerted Nukva'ik residents to the existence of humans upriver, said Annie Ned, a southern Tutchone elder. Several days of tracing the Tatshenshini toward its headwaters brought a Chilkat party to Neskataheen, the southernmost Athabaskan village in the Yukon Basin. Ned said that the Tlingits found people upstream dressed in thick, decorative furs which were much warmer than their coastal “groundhog clothes.” Soon they were trading eulachon oil for Athabaskan attire.<sup>xxvi</sup>

A well-known Chilkat story proposes otherwise, naming Khaakeix'wti of Glacier Bay as the first coastal man to cross the barrier mountains and make contact with Southern Tutchone. Additionally, Joe Hotch and Tom Jimmie Jr. tell of a time when

Klukwan villagers spotted unfamiliar people on Chilkat Pass. The new people were so shy that the aggressive Chilkats called them *gunana*, or “strange people.” Villagers left gifts of salmon and eulachon oil on rocks in the high country, which eventually won over the newcomers. In generations to come, Chilkats engaged Interior Athabaskans in trading and familial relationships which evolved into a regional cartel enforced by Tlingit claims of exclusive trading privileges.

In 1999, Canadian hunters found the half-thawed remains of a man in the mud near a melting crevasse into which he fell while crossing a glacier. His close proximity to the Grease Trail suggested that the twenty-two-year-old was on the Alsek River route to Dry Bay and Yakutat. DNA testing put the fatal journey around 1450AD, about the time Spanish wool merchants became parents of Christopher Columbus and Henry VI ruled with terror and madness.

A bear or wolverine likely made off with the man’s head, but the body was intact. His effects included a finely woven cap, squirrel-skin robe, a small bow and a pouch containing dried salmon. Forensic examiners announced in 2004 that Kwaday Dan Ts’inchi, or Long Ago Man, lived most of his life on the coast and had eaten a meal of shellfish and asparagus a day or two before his death. The absence of a pack points to a motive beyond economics and more likely, say some, courtship.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Genetic investigation identified Kwaday Dan Ts’inchi’s blood relatives among Tlingit and Tutchone living today. The announcement spurred several events celebrating regional ties, but at least one descendant was unimpressed. At a public discussion in 2008 Haines elder Al Morgan grouched that despite flaunting his genetic ties to the archeological celebrity, “I still can’t find a girlfriend in this town.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Jimmie, Tommy Jr. Interview with DLH, Haines, Alaska, July 23 2008
- <sup>ii</sup> Young, Samuel Hall, *The Mushing Parson*, New York: Fleming Revell, 1927 101-02; Emmons, p. 51.
- <sup>iii</sup> Emmons, George Thornton *The Tlingit Indians*. Seattle: Univ of WA Press, 1991; 351-355; *Haa Shagoon*, film produced in Haines, Alaska, 1982, Sheldon Museum archives.
- <sup>iv</sup> Shotridge, Louis "A Visit to the Tsimshian Indians: The Skeena River;" "Nass River," *Museum Journal* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1919; Thornton, Thomas. *Ethnographic Overview and Assessment*. Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, 2004, 15-16; Olson, Wallace M. *The Tlingit: An Introduction to Their Culture and History*. Juneau, AK: Heritage Research 1997:12-15.
- <sup>v</sup> Hammond, Austin, Oral History with DLH, August 1991, Chilkoot Culture Camp, Haines, Alaska.
- <sup>vi</sup> Olson, Ronald L. *Social Structure and Social Life of the Tlingit in Alaska*. Berkeley: Univ of CA Publications, Anthropological Records, Vol 26, December 29, 1967: 69-80.
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