

Welcome to the Traditional Territory of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nation

This acknowledges the historic presence of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations and the importance of Esquimalt Lagoon to First Peoples as a place where we exercise our special and ancient relationship to the land, water and natural resources within our traditional territories.



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The Sea
The beaches and surrounding rocks provided edible mussels, oysters, species of clams, barnacles, chitons, sea cucumbers, sea urchins and crabs. The offshore kelp was used for eating and making fishing lines. The ocean provided rockfish, salmon, cod, flounder, halibut and herring, along with seals, sea lions and species of birds from large swarms to small ducks.

Hunting, fishing and gathering according to season were essential to the very existence of the Lekwungen people. As the original stewards of this land, sustainable harvesting was first and foremost.

The Land
Here, the forests of Douglas-fir and western red cedar, big-leaf maple, red alder and Garry oak were carpeted with salal and many other plants. Fresh water streams snaked through the forest to the shoreline. The forest provided berries, wild rose hips, horsetail plants, herbs, bark, roots and camas bulbs for food and healing medicines. Nettle plants provided string for nets. Red cedar bark was woven to make clothing, mats and baskets, and the wood used to build homes, temporary shelters, canoes and boxes for storage. Deer, elk and black bear were hunted and trapped in surrounding areas.

The People
At least five old village sites once surrounded Esquimalt Lagoon. These can be identified today as large amounts of shell midden. A large village at the east end of the Lagoon was extensively occupied for 1000 years. Two shell middens at the west end were occupied 2000-3000 years ago.

The Spirits
The spirits of the ancestors walk this land. The shore is where people built their homes and landed their canoes. The shoreline separating the sea and the land also represents the mid-line of a person's life. The long sand and gravel spit protected the salt water lagoon which supplied an abundance of life. To the ancestors, this wealth of resources and the teaching of wisdom and survival skills were gifts from the creator. The present day descendants of the people that lived here remain eternally grateful to the ancestors for the rich cultural legacy along with the land and resources that we have inherited.

A Gift from the Ancestors
The Lekwungen people, the ancestors of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, occupied this land long before European colonization. They lived in many locations from the southern San Juan Islands and Cordova Bay to Parry Bay west of Albert Head. There were permanent winter villages, seasonal fishing villages, and locations where they harvested plants from the land and marine food along the shore and from the Salish Sea.

Some artifacts recovered during excavation
(ABOUT THE IMAGE) The 11 people you see in this painting, were envisioned through a dream. They represent the individuals whose bone fragments were found here.

