

Dals – An Old Winter Village

Dals was an important winter village site in earlier times. Located at the farthest reaches of the Seymour Inlet watershed at the head of Salmon Arm, Dals is known in the ethnographic record as a place of origin for the Nakwaxda'xw. It is shown as a winter village on an 1864 Admiralty Survey by Captain Daniel Pender and the 'Nakwaxda'xw ask for a reserve there in 1883, 1914 and 1922. A 7 acre reserve was finally surveyed in 1925 and incorrectly named IR#18 Kuthlo. In 1911, Indian Agent Halliday described it as an old Indian Village and it is mentioned in origin stories recorded by George Hunt and Franz Boas and by Nakwaxda'xw elder Katie Ferry Adams or Ubumpa.

It is not known why the village of Dals was abandoned as a winter village but the oral history suggests a catastrophic event. Ubumpa begins the story of the Thunderbird and the Whale:

There was a big tribe at a place that's called Dals, the Indian name of that, I don't know the English name of it at Seymour Inlet, way near the head. But we call it Dals. And people from that village they'd go out in their canoes and they'd get lost. They wouldn't come back. Sometimes there was a family that all went out in a canoe and then they'd just disappear. And for a long time people wondered what was happening to them because there was never any trace of them anywhere. And here it was a thunderbird family farther down the channel where when as soon as the thunderbird would see it, it would go out and get them, capture them like you know and they would just all die. And when people wondered they got together and they wondered what they could do to find out what was killing their people.¹

Hereditary Chief Thomas Henderson heard that the families in Frederick Sound were wiped out by disease, probably smallpox, brought by a sailing ship. This event was documented in a pictograph of a three masted sailing ship that can still be seen at Eclipse Narrows near the entrance to Frederick Sound.²

The abandonment of Dals as a winter village may also be explained by recurring failures of the salmon run. The story of Omal, the Transformer, at Dals suggests such a failure. Omal orders his brothers to dig a ditch to create a river at Ostowa from the waters of the river at Dals. Then Omal orders his brothers to build salmon weirs and seeks a wife who will bring salmon to fill the weir. There is a period of abundance and then the salmon woman leaves with her fish tribe and the tribe goes hungry once again. A prolonged battle with the salmon king is required to bring fish back to the rivers at Dals and Wawalth.

¹ Adams, Katie (Ubumpa) Circa 1987

² Henderson, Thomas 2008