

How the Gwa'Sala People Began to Fish at Long Lake

A long time ago the Gwa'Sala people lived on the islands at the mouth of Smith Inlet. One day two brothers saw mergansers swimming by. They were beautiful with their red and black feathers. The brothers admired them and wanted to eat them. They pushed their canoe into the water and paddled after the birds.

That's how they learned about Smith Inlet. First they followed the mergansers into the mouth of the Inlet. They saw a long beach there, and salmon. Then the mergansers swam far up the Inlet to the head. The brothers saw a big river there, the Nekite, but the Mergansers kept swimming on. They saw another river where small dog salmon spawn late in the fall, but the mergansers swam further. The brothers followed the mergansers into a channel where the water ran fast towards them, but it was wide enough for them to pass through into the quiet water of a lagoon on the far side.

They paddled on after the mergansers, and soon they saw smoke across the water ahead. They were very surprised at that and said to each other, "Let's stop there and see what is going on." They let the mergansers swim away, tied up their canoes, and went ashore. They started walking towards the smoke. There was a large, strong river there and they saw a man making *lubək^w* (barbequed salmon) in a way they had not seen before. He had clamped the salmon horizontally on their stakes around the fire. They asked the man his name.

"I am Sug^walis, he said, "I am from the 'Nakwaxda'xw people."

The brothers said to Sug^walis, "That's not the way of the salmon in our river."

"Then show me how the salmon are in your river," Sug^walis said.

The brothers pulled out a stake and reclamped the salmon on it not sideways but vertically. "There," they said, "that's the way of the salmon in our river."

That is how the brothers began to fish in the river at Toksi, where the river flows from Long Lake into Wyclese Lagoon.

The brothers returned to their people on the islands at the mouth of Smith Inlet. They told them about everything they had seen and said that everyone would be better off up the Inlet. Then all the people moved to Toksi. There, at the river, they all came together.

This story was told by Harry Walkus (Gixsistalisəma?i Wak'as). It was published in 1997 in "Gwa'Sala Nakwaxda'xw Stories, Volume 1: In Our Own Words".

Chief Harry Walkus lived in both Ba'as and Takush. His father was Chief George Walkus of the Gwa'Sala people and his mother was Louise Walkus of the 'Nakwaxda'xw. His first wife was Mary Charlie. She died in 1972. Harry Walkus died in 1994.