



Kitsumkalum Territory

The Kitsumkalum (Gitsm’geelm) Tribe is a part of the Tsimshian Nation. Tsimshian means “inside the Skeena River”. Kitsumkalum Lake is part of Kitsumkalum First Nation traditional territory, which ranges from north of this location near Gainor Lake and Lava Lake, all the way to the marine coast. The Kitsumkalum Valley was and still is an important area for the Kitsumkalum people. Rich with berries, fish and wildlife, which the Kitsumkalum people still harvest today, this valley has always been an essential part of Kitsumkalum’s seasonal rounds.

At the north end of the lake is the Beaver Valley used for trapping, hunting, fishing and gathering. The traditional territory belongs to the Eagle House group (Laxsgiik). North of

Rosswood in the Cedar River Valley and down the east side of the lake where you are standing now, the traditional territory belongs to the Wolf House group (Laxgibuu). West of Kitsumkalum Lake including the Nelson River Valley around the south of Kitsumkalum Lake and up the Goat Creek Valley, the traditional territory belongs to the Raven House group (Ganhada). Southwest of the lower Kitsumkalum River from Alice Creek to the Skeena River is the traditional territory of the Blackfish House group (Gispuwudwada). Each House group has other territories that extend all the way to the marine coast, giving each group its own areas to harvest and forage year round for their traditional culture, sustenance and livelihood.

Kitsumkalum’s main village is currently located

west of Terrace on Highway 16 at the confluence of the Kitsumkalum and Skeena Rivers. Historically, Kitsumkalum had villages up the Kitsumkalum River at Robin town, on the Skeena River at Ts’iwaan Loop (Salvus), Spokechute (Port Essington), Casey Point and Barret Rock in Prince Rupert, and Dzagaedil’s (Watson island). In addition to these villages, there were many camp and harvest locations scattered throughout the territories. There are many historic trails throughout the territories that the Kitsumkalum used to transport and trade grease, furs, and other goods. The Nisga’a to the north, the Gitxsan to the East and other Tsimshian groups to the west were, and still are, trading partners of the Kitsumkalum. Kitsumkalum peoples moved with the seasons, ranging from the

Kitsumkalum Valley to the marine coast and back, following food, wildlife and weather, patterns.

Kitsumkalum people became involved in the western cash economy during colonial times. This continued with the onset of industrialization of the lands and resources. Historically, the Kitsumkalum people worked in the fishing and cannery industries at the mouth of the Skeena and on the coast as well as in the logging industry closer to the Kitsumkalum watershed as did many of the new settlers arriving in the territory.

Charles and Emma Nelson

Mount Nelson, seen above, and the Nelson River, which flows from the west into Kalum Lake, are named for Charles Nelson (who held the high name, Xpilaxha) and Emma Nelson, both highly regarded and high ranking Tsimshian leaders who were born in the mid-1800’s. The Nelsons assisted many of the European settlers in the region by providing food, hospitality, and local knowledge, though they are not often given credit for having done so. (George Little who is widely known as the founder of Terrace, borrowed money and food from them in order to begin his first sawmill). Many of Charles and Emma’s descendants still live in the area. Emma, who was known all over the country for her kind deeds, lived until she was 105. In this photo, taken in 1908, she is shown with Charles who is holding traditional snowshoes. Also depicted are the descendants of Charles and Emma Nelson of the Kitsumkalum Nation, Charlie Richmond and Miriam Nelson, paddling a traditional dugout canoe on Kalum Lake in the last century.

~ A Brief History ~

Annie Ross

Annie Ross (above), wearing glasses and a hat second from left in back row, is shown above with family and friends in the 1920s behind the Kalum Lake Hotel, now the centerpiece building at Heritage Park Museum in Terrace. Annie, born Sarah Anne Kenna, in 1863, came to this area in the early 1900s with four of her children. She homesteaded along Wesach Creek at the north end of Kalum Lake, built a cabin, prospected, trapped, traded furs, and operated a stopping place and sub-post office. She became a mother figure of sorts to most of the bachelors in the area. Rosswood was named in her honour.

Kitsumkalum Lake and the surrounding area have been inhabited since deglaciation. Kitsumkalum peoples utilized the area for thousands of years prior to the comparatively recent age of Euro Canadian exploration and settlement. Remnants of ancient village sites and culturally modified trees are scattered throughout the area, and many of the rich berry patches, hunting grounds, and salmon and trout fishing holes remain.

The little community of Rosswood (about 150 people) is located at the north end of the lake. Early settlers referred to the area as Paradise Valley. Tourists and locals alike are often unaware of the rich history of Rosswood and the Kitsumkalum watershed. Rosswood is named after Annie Ross, a pioneer woman and one-time Rosswood Postmistress who settled with her children in this area in 1909. Pictured to the left, Annie is shown with fellow travelers, including Walter Warner, telegraph operator, and Frank Nightwine, miner,

beside the “Kalum Lake Transfer.” The Kalum Lake Transfer was used to bring people and goods to Cobb’s Landing at the south end of Kalum Lake, where the Kalum Lake Hotel (pictured below), and Dix Dance Hall were located. These buildings are now standing at Heritage Park in Terrace.

To the right is a picture of the early Rosswood settlement along Kitsumkalum Lake. In those days, access to Rosswood was limited. There was the pack trail along the east side of the lake that overlapped the ancient transportation

corridor used by Kitsumkalum peoples since time immemorial. In 1910, the telegraph line to the north followed this corridor, as did a logging road suitable for vehicles, built years later, in the 1970’s. When possible, crossing Kitsumkalum Lake by boat was more direct. However, when the lake was rough, travelers sometimes became marooned at Maroon Point (for which Maroon Creek and Maroon Mountain are named). Some chose to travel alone or in small groups using small vessels, while others chose to catch Cobb’s Ferry or “the Queen Mary” as the old-timers called it. The ferry

had horse power – literally – as it was powered by a horse circling the end of a long sweep that worked a stern wheel. Below is a picture of the Queen Mary.

The Nisga’a Highway (also referred to as Kalum Lake Road) was paved in 1983, and power poles appeared along it in 1999, finally providing power, and later, telephone service to the little community of Rosswood. The Highway passes Wesach Creek Falls, the “Peeing Tree,” the Rosswood Community Hall, the Rosswood General Store, and onwards to the Big Cedar Bridge, Sand Lake, Lava Lake, and, finally, the Nass Valley.