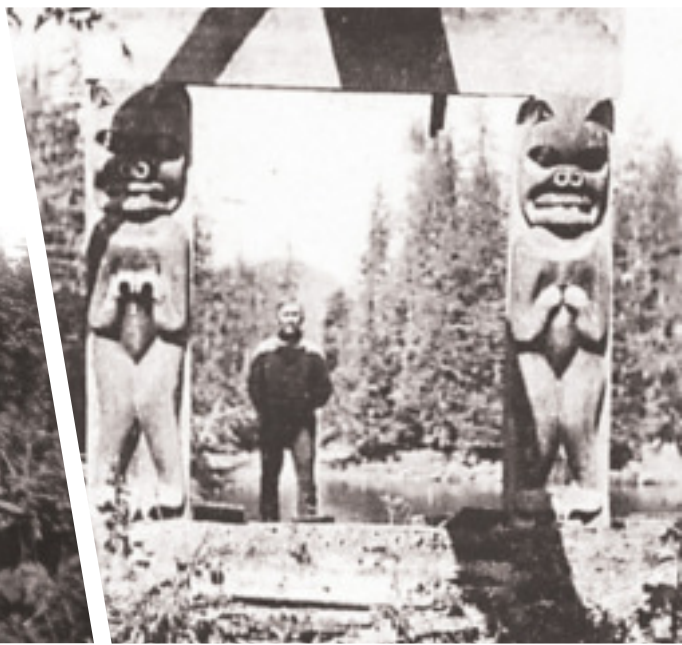




GWA'SALA-NAKWAXDA'XW
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Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw Nations: Our History

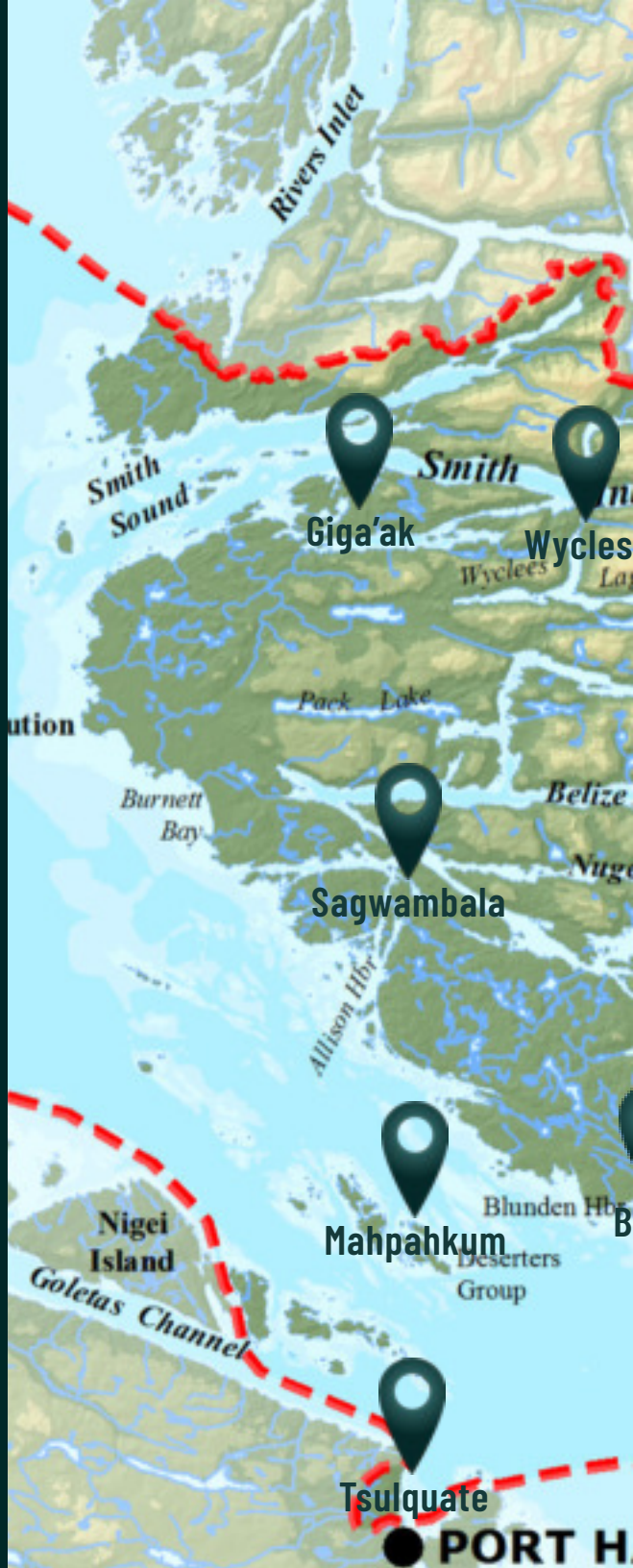


Our Homelands

Cover Photos: (L-R)
Wyclese (Gwikalis), 1905
House Post at Wyclese
Village front of Ba'as

Nusans Sax Gwigilas

"The Way We Do Things"



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Homelands: Where we come from

The Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw are two separate tribal groups closely related through ties of kinship and marriage. From the earliest times the Gwa'sala inhabited all the lands and waters of Smith Inlet and the offshore islands. 'Nakwaxda'xw territory includes the vast network of sounds and inlets of Seymour Inlet, stretches south to Blunden Harbour and includes Mahpahkum and numerous other small coastal islands.

Our Villages

Gwa'sala Villages. We lived together in a large winter village at Wyclese (Gwikalis) in Smith Inlet until the 1880s, when we moved to Giga'ak, known as Takush, on Indian Island and made it our permanent home. Throughout the year we continued to make our living from the resource rich areas around our villages at Table Island, Nekite, Toksee, Halowis, Long Lake, Ethel Cove and Naysash Inlet.



'Nakwaxda'xw Villages. Our principal winter village was located at Tigwuxste in Nugent Sound in Seymour Inlet until 1884 when we moved to Ba'as in Blunden Harbour. In earlier times we lived at the winter villages of Dals and Wawwalth at the head of Seymour Inlet. We also had substantial settlements at Sagwambala and on Deserters and Storm Islands.



Photo: Ba'as, 1901



Photo: Tigwuxste

Our history reaches far back to a time of creation and transformation in the myth, human and natural worlds. Our people belong to extended family groups, each with its own origin story where first ancestors descended from the sky or rose up from the sea. Bear, Dzonoqua, Whale, Sisiutl, Thunderbird, Raven, Salmon and many other ancestors and creatures of the natural and supernatural world are carved into our house posts, dishes and tools and we tell their stories in dance and song wearing their masks and regalia. Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw carvers produced work of great quality and this knowledge has been passed down through the generations.



Photo: Hereditary Chief Thomas Henderson Senior, Hereditary Chief Willie Walkus and Chief Paddy Walkus (Hereditary and Elected) on the Seymour Inlet, November 2008

Colonial History

From the first recorded encounter in 1792 between the Gwa'sala at Wyclese and Captain George Vancouver's crew to the present day, the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw have experienced a constant threat to our very existence. Forced to share our territory and our resources with the settlers, we adapted to work in their canneries and in their fishing and forestry industries while maintaining our own way of life, living off the resources in our territory. We have survived the decimation of our populations by disease, the reduction of our territory to small reserves, the near annihilation of our forests, the destruction of our fisheries, the theft of our language and our children by the residential school system, the suppression of our cultural and spiritual practices and, in 1964, the relocation from our Homelands to our present day reserve at Tsulquate.



Photo: Chief Paddy Walkus (Hereditary and Elected), Chief Negotiator Colleen Hemphill and Hereditary Chief Thomas Henderson Senior rowing the Seymour Inlet, November 2008

Home: Where we live, Tsulquate

Amalgamation. In 1964 the Department of Indian Affairs organized and carried out the relocation of the Gwa'sala from their home village at Giga'ak (Takush) and the 'Nakwaxda'xw from Ba'as at Blunden Harbour. We were moved to Tsulquate, a reserve that belonged to the Kwakiutl Band and in the same year, the Gwa'sala, the 'Nakwaxda'xw and the Kwakiutl Band amalgamated to form one group, known as the "Kwawkwalth Band". This administrative "solution", engineered by the Department of Indian Affairs, proved disastrous. Promised a new townsite, we arrived at Tsulquate to undeveloped land, unpaved roads and three houses with no running water. Our houses at Giga'ak were burned along with our possessions and our houses at Ba'as were looted and destroyed. Many of us were forced to live on our boats. Many lost their lives to drowning, alcoholism and despair.



Photo: Tsulquate after relocation

Separation. In 1968, the Kwakiutl Band petitioned Indian Affairs to dissolve the amalgamation and in 1979 they separated from the group. The 15.7 hectare Tsulquate IR#4 became a Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw Reserve and new lands were purchased for the Kwakiutl to replace the loss of the Tsulquate Reserve. In 1992, after 20 years of legal action the Kwakiutl Band received a 102 hectare reserve, the Walden IR#9, as well as a monetary settlement.





Photo: Hereditary Chief Walter Brown, Talon George, Steven George, Jr. Henderson, Greg Henderson, Chief Negotiator Colleen Hemphill, Jonathan Henderson and Alex Heuman



Photo: Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw carving shed

Return to the Homelands

Over nearly 60 years Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw families have gradually made Tsulquate their home. After the first dark years the community began to recover. Hereditary Chief Willie Walkus describes this recovery:

"And things started changing. We started seeing blankets, we started seeing vests made. You know our people were starting to pick up our traditions, which we've never had for all these years. People started picking up their self-esteem, it really helped them, hey. Today you see it, everywhere."

Today, Tsulquate is undergoing rapid economic development and revitalization of language and culture. In this spirit of renewal there is growing interest in returning to the homelands for cultural and spiritual connection, education, healing and instruction in language and traditional technologies. Over the past few years more and more elders, youth and community members are travelling to the homelands. Both Ba'as and Giga'ak have new docks and feasibility studies are underway to build accommodation and infrastructure that will allow for community building in the Homelands.

This booklet was created in collaboration with Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations' Treaty staff and consultants along with 50th Parallel Public Relations. A special thank you to Linda Dorricott for gathering photos and preparing the information and to David Scott for assistance with maps.



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