

Plant Knowledge of the Salish Sea Region



Elsie Claxton, Tsawout First
Nation, WSÁNEC'/ Saanich



Seliliye Belinda Claxton,
Tsawout, & Nancy J. Turner
University of Victoria

South Pender Historical Society &
the Pender Reconciliation Circle,
November 12, 2016

Acknowledgement:

The WSÁNEC / Saanich Nation and other First Nations of the Salish Sea, who have lived here since time immemorial and cared for the lands and waters that sustained them...



Thanks so much!



- South Pender Historical Society
- Pender Reconciliation Circle
- Paul Petrie & all the other friends and organizers of our visit, including John Chapman and Kathleen Moriarty
- Earl Claxton Jr. & John Bradley Williams for all the great work you do!


*May you always find
wild strawberries
galore!*

Dedicated to:



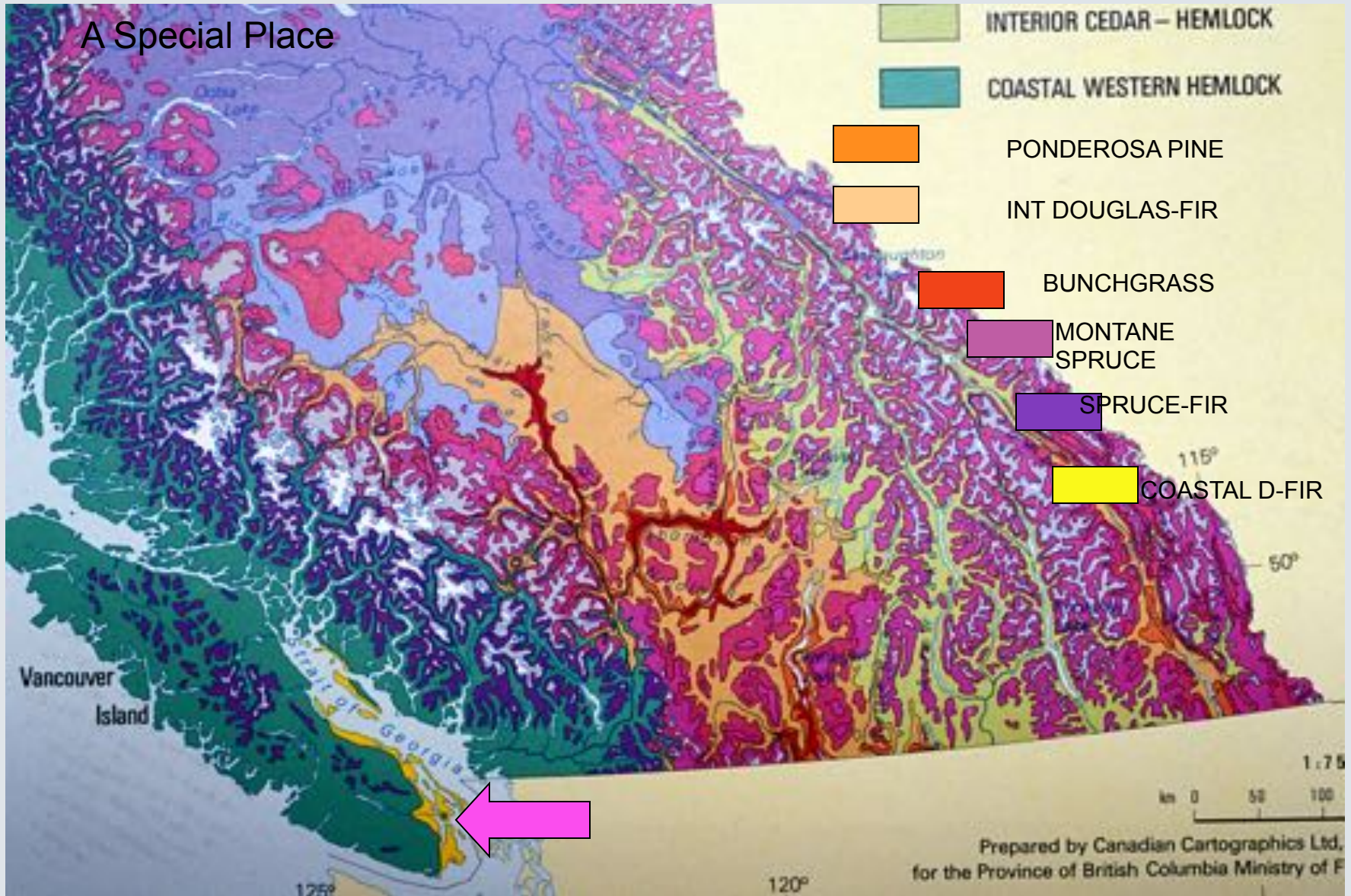
- Elsie Claxton, Violet Williams, Dave Elliott, Chris Paul and the other elders and knowledge holders featured in this talk.
- We also want to dedicate this to children and youth of the WSÁNEC' Nation and to children and youth everywhere...

Seliliye with Adam
and Tristan



A living landscape and seascape

- This entire area has a rich history of biocultural interdependence that continues to the present day



The Leeward Side of Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands; a special vegetation zone

SAANICH ETHNOBOTANY

Culturally Important Plants of the W̱SÁNEĆ



Pacific Yew - important tough wood
TENKÁŁĆ (tl'əng'q'-ílhch)

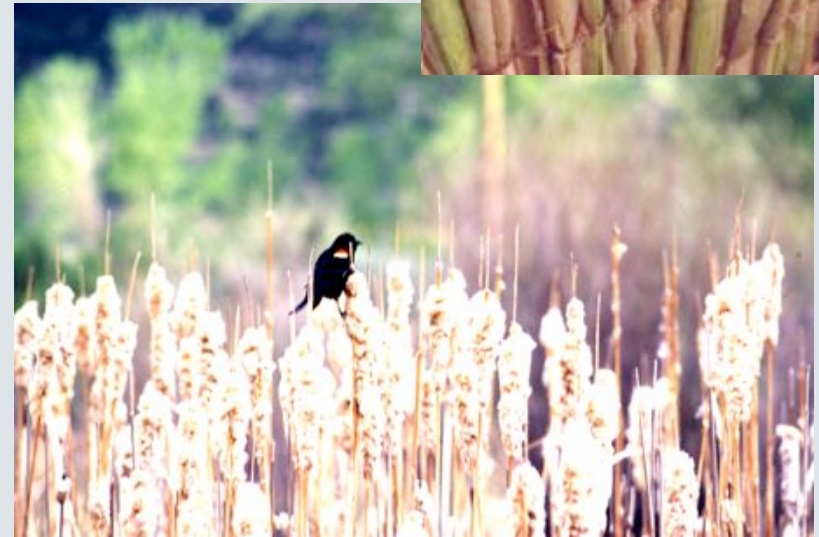
Plants for all reasons...

- Food
- Materials
- Medicines
- Sacred ceremonies



WSÁNEC´ territory: Diverse Habitats

- o Lakes, rivers, estuaries, tidal marshes, rocky and sandy coastline and other wetlands and marine habitats
- o Forested habitats: Garry Oak, Coastal Douglas-Fir, Coastal Western Hemlock, Mountain Hemlock
- o And prairies/meadows
- o Many rare and unique species



STA, KEN (st^{thé}7qən) (“something with hair on the top”) – cattail (*Typha latifolia*)

PEAT BOGS, A SPECIAL HABITAT: formerly more common on Saanich Peninsula



“Swamp tea” or
Labrador tea
“MAK’EM tea”



Bog cranberry: K’EMC’OLS

Traditional Resource Management...

- Looking after the resources by:
- Harvesting carefully and selectively
- Clearing and burning
- Tilling, weeding, replanting
- Pruning
- Ownership
- Seasonal rounds
- Ceremonial management



Bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*):
DELEM (t'ə'ləm) = cherry bark

WSÁNEC' Seasonal Round:

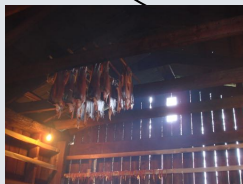
from the ocean to the islands, mountains and back...

Spring: herring
eggs, root
vegetables,
green shoots,
inner bark;
seaweed;
medicines

Summer:
berries from
many places;
cedar bark,
basket
materials;
cattail;
medicines

Fall: autumn
fruits, root
vegetables; nettle
fibre, medicines;
smoking fish

Winter: root
vegetables,
teas;
medicines;
dried and
preserved
berries, etc.



e.g. Saanich Song of Swainson's
Thrush (WEWELEŚ; *Catharus*
ustulatus)



- NENELKXELIK ('the little black/dark red-headed ones')
- NENELPKIK ('the little white-headed ones')
- NENELCEMIK ('the little red-headed ones')
- NENELPWIK ('the little blond/golden-headed ones')
- WEWELEWELEWELEWEŚ! ('ripen, ripen, ripen, ripen!')

[from Elsie Claxton, Tsawout]



Rubus spectabilis, and the
salmonberry bird, Swainson's
Thrush



Photo by Glenn Bartley

Plant Names can tell us about relationships among peoples

- Heiltsuk: *témx^wiy'áí* (berries); *témx^wm'ás* (bush)
- Kwak'wala (Kwakwaka'wakw): *t'émx^wel'i* (berries); *t'émx^wmes* (bush)
- Ditidaht: *tłabuux^way* (berries); *tłabuux^wayapt* (bush)
- Comox: *t'ám'ex^w* (berries); *t'ám'ex^way* (bush)
- Sechelt: *st'amx^w* (berries); *t'ámx^way* (bush)
- Squamish: *t'əm'x^w* (berries); *t'əm'x^wáy'* (bush)
- Quw'utsun', Musqueam: *t'ám'x^w*, *t'émx^w*, *t'émx^w*
- Saanich: **ƘÁMQ** /*qémk^w'* (berries); *qəmk^w'-ítch* / **ƘÁMQ** **İŁĆ** (bush)
- Klallam: *t'um'ux^w*
- Upper Chehalis: *t'amə'x^w* (berries); *t'amə'x^wn't* (bush)



Coastal black
gooseberry;
Proto-Coast-
Salish *t'aməx^w*
'gooseberry'

Springtime: greens/ shoots



- Salmonberry, thimbleberry
- Wild rose
- Blackcap
- Giant horsetail
- Wild dock
- Fireweed
- Stinging nettle and dandelion (recent)



Giant horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*): SXEMXEM (sxə'm'xəm')

Camas...**ĶŁO,EL** (q^wlhá7ə1): the “Number One Vegetable”

- Christopher Paul,
Tsartlip (WJOLELP)



Also **SPÁNW_** (spéenx^w)



Clearing the land for camas...

The way that the family group... would establish claim to a plot of land [for camas harvesting] would be by clearing it. Once a family cleared a plot, it would “just naturally” become their plot to use, ... clearing was done in the fall or spring before the gathering season, ... The plot from which the bulbs were to be gathered would be cleared of stones, weeds, and brush, but not of trees. (Ethnographer Marguerite Babcock, from interview with Christopher Paul, Saanich, 1967)

Blue camas (*Camassia* spp.)



Camas bulbs, different ages, from a 1 m² plot (Kate Proctor's MSc research, Garry Oak Preserve, Somenos Lake, Duncan, VI)





Many other species enhanced in prairies & savannahs

- Other root vegetables: wild caraway (*Perideridia* spp.), **onions** (*Allium* spp.), **chocolate lily** (*Fritillaria affinis*), false onions (*Brodiaea* and related genera)
- Berries: **wild strawberries** (*Fragaria* spp.); trailing blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*); **blackcap** (*R. leucodermis*), soapberries (*Shepherdia canadensis*)
- Acorns, hazelnuts, mushrooms (California)
- Edible greens and medicinal plants
- Grazing areas for deer, elk, bear
- Travel corridors, lookouts, etc.



Wild strawberries:
DI,LEK (t'iləq^w)



Summertime



Red huckleberries **S**,
KEK'CES (sq^w'ə'q^wchəs);
Trailing blackberries:
SKELÁLNEW
(sq^w'əlélngəx^w)

Red elderberries:
TIWEK (t'^{thi}wəq');
and salal berries
DAKE, (T'aqa)



Skunk-Cabbage
TOQI, (t'^{tha}'k^w'i7)

- Berries
- Skunk-cabbage, for drying berries
- medicines

SØELEL (sk^waləl') – Tule



(Saanich); plaited edging
of mat; sewn with
needles of KA'T/ELC'
oceanspray (*Holodiscus
discolor*)



Fall time



- Fall fruits
- Fishing; drying and smoking for winter
- Wood for implements
- Medicines



Pacific Crabapple

Fruit: **KÁ,EW** (qé7əx^w)

Tree: **KÁ,EWIŁĆ** (qəx^{wi}7-ilhch)



“evergreen
huckleberries” –
best in the fall...



Berries: **YIYXEM** (yi7xəm’)
Bush: **YIYXEM IŁĆ**
(yi7xəm’-ílhch)

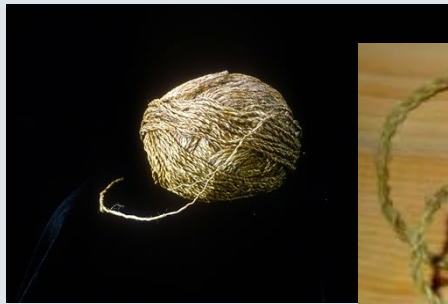
Violet Williams from Pauquachin, with evergreen
huckleberry, a delicious late fall food

Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

($\text{ʈEX}, \text{ʈEX}$
($t^{\text{th}}\text{ə}'\underline{x}$ -
 $t^{\text{th}}\text{ə}\underline{x}$) (cf.
 $\text{ʈEX}, \text{TEN}$
($t^{\text{th}}\text{ə}'\underline{x}\text{tən}$)
= “poison,
stinging”)



- Used as a counter-irritant for arthritis and muscular aches
- Major source of twine and fishing line; commonly grows in village sites



Many Plants feature in Traditional Narratives, ceremonies, place names, discourse...



e.g. The Saanich Story of

Two Girls up in Sky

Country (Violet Williams,

Hul' qumi' num, pers.

comm. 1993):

“There were [two] girls...
who were out camping
with their families, digging
camas bulbs....”

Medicine



Elsie Claxton's "10 Barks" Medicine...
passed down through
generations....

She taught us just how
important these medicines
are for survival; one day
Belinda and I went out
with her to learn how to
make this medicine

Traditional treatment for tuberculosis and other ailments; also taken as a tonic



- Boil barks of 10 different trees and shrubs until dark brown; sweeten with licorice fern (**TESIP** / tl'əsíp); drink solution as sole beverage for several days, until it is all finished.

10-barks medicine, some ingredients



- Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*) – long strip of bark;
- Grand fir (*Abies grandis*) – long strip of bark

Cascara:

KÁYXILĆ, (q'éyxilhch)

Grand fir:

DEWI,ELĆ (t'əx^{wi}-ílhch)



But more than the ingredients...

- *Who* collects the medicine?
- Who has *rights* to it?
- *When* do they collect it?
- *Where* do they collect it?
- *How* do they collect it?
- How *much* do they collect?
- How do they *prepare* it?
- You need to know the special words to address the medicine plant and the medicine (Earl Claxton, Sr.)



Licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*)

TESIP (tl'əsíp)

- Rhizomes contain polypodoside A, 600 X sweeter than sugar
- Used for coughs, colds, and as a sweetener for other, bitter medicines
- Also used as a mouth freshener and appetite stimulant



Waxberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)

- Berries poisonous to eat but used in very small amounts for stomach problems; also rubbed on warts
- Twigs boiled and solution used as a wash for swimmer's itch and paralysis of the limbs & to relax muscles

(pəpɔ'əyas-ílhch)



SĪLA 'WEN ET SXEA 'NEW



- “frog’ s mat/mattress”
- broad-leaved
plantain (*Plantago
major*) - leaves used as
a poultice for burns
and sores

Ceremonial Plants: First Salmon Ceremony, ᐱᐱᐱ Tsawout Seafood Festival



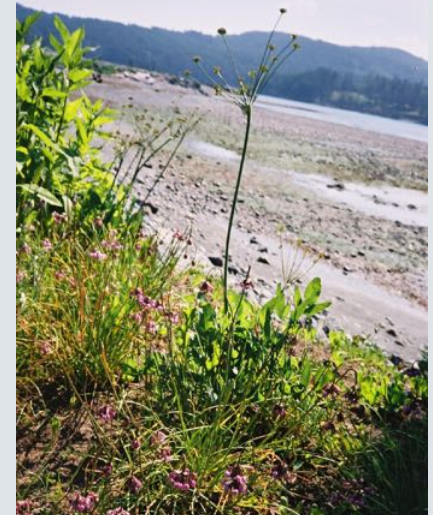
KEXMIN
(q'əx̄mín)



Sword Fern
SFXÁLEM
(sthx̄éləm)

Qexmín and the Origin of Salmon (Saanich) - I

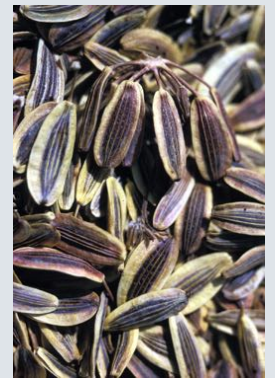
“ Once there were no seals and the people were starving; they lived on elk and whatever other game they could kill. Two brave youths said to each other, "Let us go and see if we can find any salmon." They embarked in their canoe and headed out to sea, not caring in what direction they travelled. They journeyed for three and a half months. Then they came to a strange country. When they reached the shore a man came out and welcomed them, saying, "You have arrived." "We have arrived," the youths answered, though they did not know where they were. They were given food to eat, and after they had eaten their host led them outside the house and said, "Look around and see what you can see." They looked around and saw smoke from *qexmin* [KEXMIN] (Indian celery) that the steelhead, sockeye, spring and other varieties of salmon were burning, each for itself, in their houses.”





Qexmín and the Origin of Salmon - II

“The youths stayed in the place about a month. Their hosts then said to them, "You must go home tomorrow. Everything is arranged for you. The salmon that you were looking for will muster at your home and start off on their journey. You must follow them." So the two youths followed the salmon; for three and a half months they travelled, day and night, with the fish. Every night they took *qexmin* and burned it that the salmon might feed on its smoke and sustain themselves. Finally they reached Discovery Island (*Ktces*), where they burned *qexmin* all along the beach; for their hosts had said to them, "Burn *qexmin* along the beach when you reach land, to feed the salmon that travel with you. Then, if you treat the salmon well, you will always have them in abundance.”



Tl'ches



Qexmín and the Origin of Salmon (Saanich) - III



“Now that they had plenty of salmon at Discovery Island they let them go to other places--to the Fraser River, Nanaimo, etc. Because their journey took them three and a half months, salmon are now absent on the coast for that period.

“ The coho said to the other salmon, "You can go ahead of us, for we have not yet got what we wanted from the lakes." That is why the coho is always the last of the salmon.



Qexmín and the Origin of Salmon (Saanich) - IV

“The young men now had salmon, but no good way of catching them. The leaders of the salmon, a real man and woman, taught them how to make *sxwala* (purse nets), and how to use *qexmin*. They also told the young men how their people should dress when they caught the salmon, and that they should start to use their purse net in July, when the berries were ripe. So today, when the Indians dry their salmon they always burn some *qexmin* on the fire (or on top of the stove); and they put a little in the fish when they cook it. Also, when they cut up the salmon, before inserting the knife they pray to the salmon, that they may always be plentiful. “ (Jenness, n.c.: 94)



Pacific willow (*Salix lucida* ssp.
lasiandra)

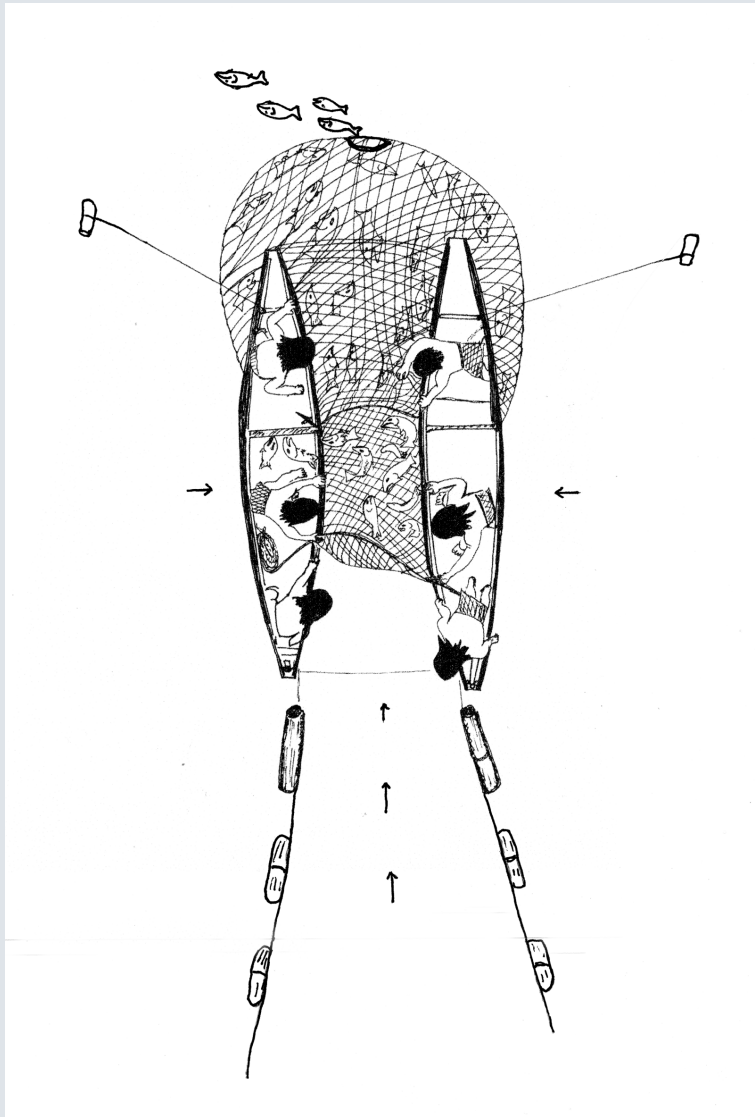


- Bark as main reefnet material
- original source of “aspirin”: “acetyl salicylic acid” – tea from willow bark used to reduce fever and treat pain

SX_ELE,İŁĆ (from **SX_OLE**, ‘reef net’) (sx^wəli7-ílhch)

Researched by Dr. Nick Claxton

Saanich Reefnet Fishing - a way of life



Courtesy Dr. John Elliott



The late Dr. Earl Claxton, Sr. showing reefnet sites around Gulf Islands

Plants to know for reefnet fishery



Western red cedar (anchors, lines, canoes), willow, Nootka rose, gooseberry (nets), American dunegrass (camouflage), bull kelp (habitat for salmon) (Elsie Claxton)

Thank you!



**Red Columbine
LA'MTEN - a
very special
flower; brings
luck to those with
respect and
goodwill**

