

Lheidli T'enneh Background:

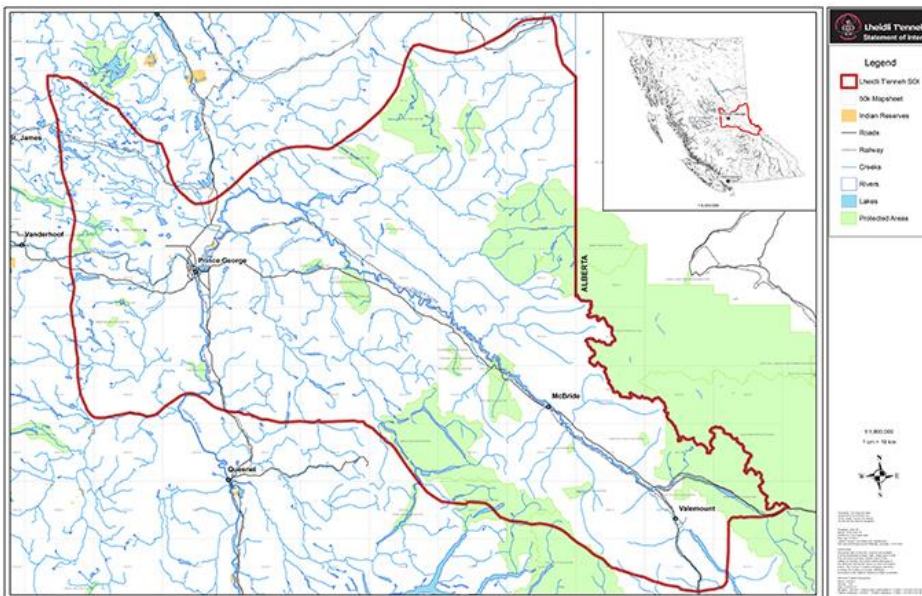
The Lheidli T'enneh belong to the Dakelh (Carrier) culture of indigenous people that have occupied the central part of British Columbia for thousands of years. The traditional way of life for the Lheidli T'enneh is rooted in their rugged northern environment.

The traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation stretches over 4.3 million hectares, from the impressive Rocky Mountains to the beautiful interior plateau, including the City of Prince George.

The city of Prince George is situated on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation. The word Lheidli means "where the two rivers flow together" and T'enneh means "the People".

For at least 9,000 years the Lheidli T'enneh have met the challenges of their environment and followed the rhythms of the seasons.

Over the last 200 years, with the arrival of the fur trade and settlers, all First Nations have faced cultural assimilation and have not only survived, but become a key element of Canadian Identity.



Dakelh:

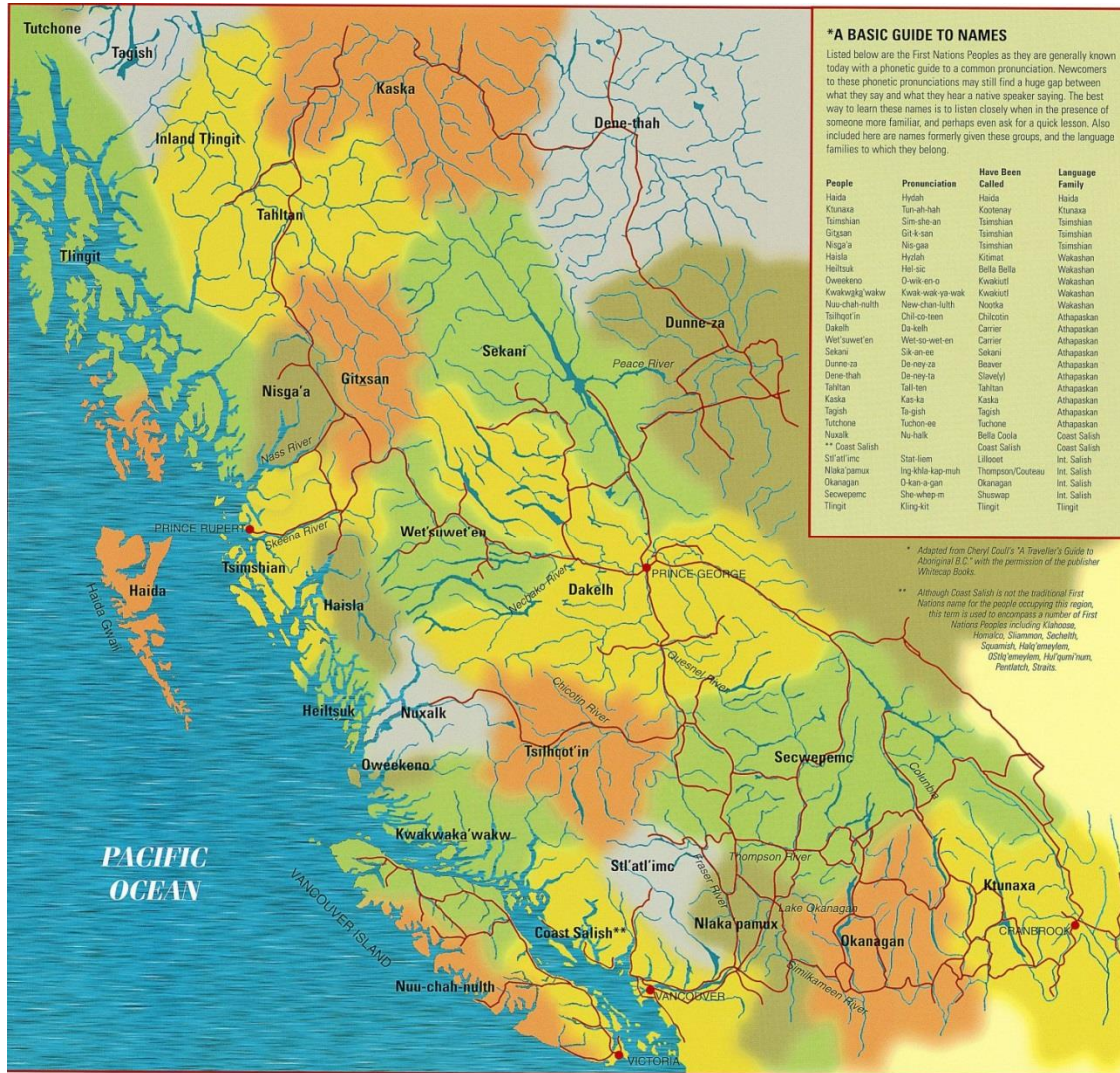
Dakelh, also known as Carrier, are Dene people of over 10,000 in north-central British Columbia.

Dakelh means "people who go around by boat" or "people who travel by water".

The Carrier name derives from the translation of the Tse'khene (Sekani) name for Dakelh people, Aghele. This term is said to be derived from the fact that when a Dakelh man died and had been cremated, his widow would pack around his ashes during the period of mourning. The first Europeans to enter Dakelh territory were members of the Northwest Company, led by Alexander MacKenzie in 1793,

who passed through Tse'khene territory before entering Dakelh territory and learned about the Dakelh from the Tse'khene.

Dakelh territory comprises approximately 76,000 square kilometers in the interior Plateau Region of British Columbia.



Seasonal Round: Using previously designed text and imagery

The Dakelh people follow a custom of having a special time to everything. They lived according to this custom.

Spring: Ch'abun (March-May)

Spring came slowly to the central interior. When the ice began to break up, families traveled to their traditional spring fish camps on the shores and islands of many lakes in the territory. After a long, cold winter, hunting beaver, small game and birds along with fishing were important survival activities.

March- Chuzcha'ooza (Moon of the Big Snowflakes)

April- Shin'ooza (Moon of the Bare Grounds)

May- Dugoos'ooza (Moon of the Big Suckerfish)

Summer: Danghan (June-August)

In early summer the earth is soft and it was the season to gather plant materials: roots and bulbs for food, willow and nettle to make twine for fishnets and rope, birch bark for baskets and roofing material, and trees and plants for medicine.

Fishing continued as the kokanee appeared, wild berries began to ripen and the abundant small mammals were snared and trapped regularly. In the late summer, days were dominated by salmon fishing. Large fish baskets and traps were used to catch salmon for the women to clean and prepare.

June- Dang-ooza (Moon of Summer)

July- Gesul'ooza (Moon of the Land-Locked Salmon)

August- Talo-ooza (Moon of the Salmon)

Fall: Dak'et (September-November)

When the nights became cool, families prepared for a long, cold winter by drying and smoking fish and meat, making hides, moccasins, gloves and blankets, repairing snowshoes and rolling "pounds" of babiche, a twine made from moose or caribou hide.

September-Bit'ooza (Moon of the Bull-Tout)

October- Lhoh'ooza (Moon of the Whitefish)

November- Banghan Nuts'ukih (Half This Time We Travel by Boat)

Winter: Khit (December-February)

In early winter, beaver hunting was important for survival. Beaver provided furs for clothing and blankets, teeth for knives and for sharpening tools. Beaver meat was a critical food source.

Winter was a time for socializing, games, contests, dancing and singing. It was also a time for the Elders to tell stories and pass on knowledge about survival and the proper way to live.

In late winter as the land begins to thaw, the cambium of pine trees is eaten and made into juice for nourishment. This is what creates culturally modified trees like the ones found on display here.

December- Sacho Din'ai (Eve of the Big Moon)

January- Sacho'ooza (Time of the Bog Moon)

February- Chuzsul'ooza (Moon of the Small Snowflakes)

The annual activity of the Dakelh people has remained surprisingly constant throughout almost 200 years of drastic social and technological change. Even today, summer is still the time to set net for salmon and gather berries, fall is the time to hunt moose, and spring is the time to trap small mammals and fish in smaller lakes. Trap line cabins are still utilized throughout the years by families, and the family keyoh is still the area in which many annual activities will take place for a family.

Baht'lats:

The governance system in the past was through the Baht'lats (Potlatch), a community involved process which provided for participatory decision making. Many Dakelh First Nations still practice this traditional system of governance today.

Upper and Central Dakelh have matrilineal clan and sub-clans that each have a male (Dune zah') and a female (Tseke zah') head person. The Lheidli clans are Frog (Lasilyoo), Grouse ('Utsut), Beaver (Tsa) and Bear (Sus). Each clan is associated with resource-use areas known as keyohs and fishing sites.

The Baht'lats provided a special forum for clan leaders and their members to meet in front of witnesses to claim and renew ties to the land, all of which affirmed their jurisdiction, roles and responsibilities.

All economic, social, judicial, and spiritual activities revolved around the Baht'lats. The system was inclusive of all people. From an early age children learned their rules and their roles within it.

Songs and stories as old as any spoken history accompany these events. These songs and stories are also memoirs of the land. Oral history was the means of transferring knowledge. The use of legends was very important to express past occurrences and to pass on information.

People belonged to their mother's clan and could not marry within their own clan. Elders say a clan's members are as brothers and sisters and must be treated accordingly. With all clan members as family, individuals could travel to any village and their brothers and sisters would welcome them and allow them to hunt, fish and pick berries. This structure became important when food was scarce in one area. According to one Lheidli T'enneh elder, the exclusive ownership by a village of land, water, plants or animals, is not part of the history of local Dakelh peoples. When a food source was scarce in one area, going somewhere else for a time allowed the depleted plant or animal population time to recover.

It is important to note that prohibitions against the Baht'lats system were first introduced in the 1880's with the Indian Act and were subsequently made stronger in later revisions. The Baht'lats remained illegal until 1951.

Dakelhghunek (the language of Dakelh):

Elder's say they are ten dialects of Dakelh language: Nak'azdli, Saik'uz, Cheslatta, Nad'leh, Abun tl'at, Takla, Lheidli, Stelat'en, Wetsuwet'en and Tl'azt'en.

The status of Dakelh varies considerably from community to community. The communities in which there are the most Dakelh speakers are typically the more remote communities.

Currently there are only a handful of fluent Lheidli dialect speakers, all of them elderly. There are a few younger people that speak the language less fluently and several more that are learning.

As the transmission of tradition and identity from generation to generation is so important to keeping First Nations culture alive, language loss is a devastating problem. Many First Nations languages across Canada have been all but destroyed by a history of colonization and cultural assimilation.

The revitalization of First Nations languages must be given high priority.

Residential Schools:

The introduction of residential schools operated by Churches in BC, beginning in the 1860s, affected many of the traditions of First Nations. The schools attempted to “re-educate” First Nations children in order to assimilate them into a Eurocentric notion of society. The children were isolated from their families, cultures and languages. In place of their culture, they were taught European versions of basic academic subjects, along with farming, cooking, sewing and cleaning. Residential schools broke apart many families, destroyed many languages and alienated many people from their heritage.

In 1917, First Nations children from North Central BC were sent to the Mission School at Fort St. James for ten months of the year. Missionaries running the School felt it was too close to the Nak'azdli Reserve and that parents were interfering in the retraining of the children. A site considered remote enough from First Nation's reserves and villages was chosen for the new Lejac School on the South shore of Fraser Lake. The new school opened in 1922 and remained active until it closed in 1976.

Conditions in the schools were deplorable with poor food, little health care and many horrific forms of emotional and physical abuse. The systemic abuse still has an intergenerational impact today on the children and grandchildren of former students.

Settlement:

Dakelh were semi-sedentary, moving seasonally between villages and hunting and fishing camps. They generally settled into temporary villages of pit houses during the cold winter months and travelled to collect food and resources during the warmer summer months.

Pithouses are semi-subterranean dwellings typically consisting of a circular depression a few metres deep and approximately 6-12 metres in diameter. After the depression was excavated, a pole framework was erected to support a roof made from poles, bark, tree boughs, and earth.

A hole was left in the centre of the roof to serve both as a smoke hole and for access. A slanting log with carved steps was extended from the floor through the hole. Some pit-houses also had side entrances.

Other common features include a central hearth for cooking and warmth, bark lined storage pits for food, and floors covered with tree boughs. Pit-houses were re-used annually. Generally there would be 30-40 related individuals, with 3-4 pit-houses in each winter settlement, making an average population of 100-150 people.

During the spring, summer, and fall months, Dakelh people generally travelled in smaller family groups between 10-30 people and lived in lodges. These lodges were usually constructed with materials that depended on circumstances: tree boughs, brush, or bark. These dwellings were not usually re-used although some of the materials might be made into new lodges.

Archaeology:

First Nations teach that their people have occupied this territory for a longer time than anyone can remember or trace. Archaeological evidence indicates that for at least 10,500 years BP, people have lived in the Interior of British Columbia. The number of sites within the province of British Columbia is well over 25,000 and includes a wide diversity of types, including pre-contact villages, rock art, and hunting and fishing locations. The earliest recorded site in North America was just found on the west coast of BC in traditional Heiltsuk Nation territory and dated back 14,000 years.

Currently there are 23 recorded archaeological sites within the municipality of Prince George and another 37 currently recorded within 5km of the city. There are over 2100 sites within 100 km of city limits not including those within city boundaries.

Dated archaeological material proves that First Nations people have been in what is now the city of Prince George for at least 10,000 years. It is likely that there are older sites within this area that have not been found because of low archaeological visibility or destruction due to natural occurrences and/or human activities and development.

FiRq-013

One site of particular importance within the City of Prince George is FIRq-013 on the Fraser River.

The site is 11,162 square meters and includes 69 cultural depressions representing food cache pits and a high density of lithic scatter. The site is central to the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh.

Less than 2% of the site was excavated and in total, 31,662 artifacts were recovered. Excavation proved that there were two components to this site. The earliest component was used 10,000 years BP and the second component was more recent and dated to the past 500 years.

This site pushed back the suggested date of initial human occupation for the region by approximately 5000 years. Further in-depth analysis of the material recovered should be able to provide us with a more comprehensive picture of what life was like for inhabitants of the northern interior over the past 10,000 years.



Trade:

The Dakelh-ne fished salmon from the Fraser and Skeena Rivers and their tributaries, trading their surplus with neighboring groups for items they may not have access to otherwise.

Spiritual:

In the past, there was also a medicine person that was held in high standing within the community. This person dealt with the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of the community members.