

X. Native River: The Columbia Remembered

(William D. Layman, 2002)

53. Legend of Kettle Falls

Adapted from Ruth Lakin, *Kettle River Country*, 1987

Told by Aeneas (Eneas) Seymour, Lakes to Goldie Putnam I am Coyote, the Transformer, and have been sent by Great Mystery, the creator and arranger of the world. Great Mystery has said that all people should have an equal right in everything and that all should share alike. As long as the sun sets in the west this will be a land of peace. This is the commandment I gave to my people, and they have obeyed me.

My people are sɔ̃ːiʔyiɫpx and snʔickst Indians, who lived near the Kettle Falls. I gave them that Falls to provide them with fish all their days. The Falls was surrounded by potholes in which my people cooked their food. When the Hudson's Bay people came they called it the "falls of the Kettle." The traders of the North West Company called it La Chaudiere.

Many generations ago my people were hungry and starving. They did not have a good place to catch their fish. One day while I was out walking I came upon a poor man and his three daughters. They were thin from hunger because they could not get salmon. I promised the old man I would make him a dam across the river to enable him to catch fish, if he would give me his youngest daughter as my wife. The old man agreed to this and I built him a fine falls where he could fish at low water. But when I went to claim the daughter the old man explained that it was customary to

give away the eldest daughter first. So I took the oldest daughter and once again promised the man I would build him a medium dam so he could fish at medium water if I could have the youngest daughter. The old man explained again that the middle daughter must be married before the youngest, so I claimed his middle daughter and built him a fine falls where he could fish at medium water.

Shortly after the father came to me and said he was in need of a high dam where he could fish at high water. He promised me his youngest daughter if I would build this. So I built him a third and highest dam where he could fish at high water. And then I claimed the long-awaited youngest daughter as my wife.

And now, because I had built the falls in three levels, my people could fish at low, medium, and high water. I had become responsible for my people, and I saw that the fish must jump up the falls in one certain area where the water flowed over a deep depression. I appointed the old man as Salmon Chief, and he and his descendants were to rule over the falls and see that all people shared in the fish caught there.

54. Hell Gate (xəl'ál'st)

By Joe Covington, Sanpoil

Hell Gate's name reflects its challenge to voyageurs and others passing through this section of river. Anthropologist Verne Ray learned that its Salish name, nɔ̃ːərɔ̃ːərú's, meant "Deep Eyes," possibly due to pot holes or kettles that looked like eye sockets, formed by the swirling waters. Coyote was said to have visited here during a long upriver journey. Joe

Covington, a Sanpoil elder, shared this story of the origin of Hell Gate:

Coyote was traveling up the Columbia, distributing Salmon. He got to Hell Gate and decided to build a falls here. Even though he was given a young woman, he got mad, so he never did complete the falls, he kicked them in three places and these are the three channels through which the Columbia used to flow here.

55. Whitestone Rock

Lieutenant Thomas W. Symons, 1881

About eight miles farther on we come to the Whitestone, a noted landmark consisting of a gigantic grayish-white rock 500 feet high, standing perpendicularly up from the water on the left bank of the river, partially detached from the rocks to the rear. It is split down the middle by some great contusion. The Indians have a legend concerning this rock of which skunk is the hero.

It would seem that in the long ago a skunk, a coyote, and a rattlesnake each had a farm on the top of the Whitestone. These were the days before the skunk was as odorous as he is now, but was esteemed a good fellow and pleasant companion by other animals. As in some other small communities, jealousies, dissensions, and intrigues arose in this one.

The result was that the coyote and rattlesnake took a mean advantage of the skunk one night when he was asleep, and threw him off the rock, away down into the river. He was not drowned, however, but floated on and on, far away to the south and west, until he came to the mouth of the

river, where lived a great medicine man and magician. To him the skunk applied and was fitted out with an apparatus warranted to give immunity from, and conquest over, all his enemies.

Back he journeyed along the river to his old home, where he arrived, much to the surprise of the coyote and rattlesnake, and commenced to make it so pleasant for them with his pungent perfumery apparatus, the gift of the magician, that they soon left him in undisputed possession of his rock home, which he has maintained ever since.

56. Water-Monster

By Louie Pichette, 1978

A Sanpoil winter village named snqilt above the rapids was located a short distance up the Columbia. In 1978, Louie Pichette recounted the following legend about the turbulent waters of the Spokane Rapids.

There was a Water-Monster who used to kill people in the rapids at snqilt. He lived under the water and he killed people by pulling them down in a whirlpool. Coyote knew this. He had a plan to beat this monster; he got a long tamarack tree and caused it to float sideways down the Columbia River.

When they reached the whirlpool, both the tamarack and Coyote were sucked down into it and then swallowed whole by the Water-Monster. Inside, Coyote could see all the animal people and the things that the monster had swallowed. Coyote took his knife and cut at the Water-Monster's heart, but the knife broke, so he cut again.

The monster died; as he did so, he opened and closed his anus, which allowed all the animal-people to escape through it. Because this Water-Monster had been killed, it became safe to travel through the rapids at snqílt, although care had to be taken, and it was necessary to use the channel on the west side of the river. XI. Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 15, 2002
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