

SPECULATIONS ON PREHISTORY
OF THE SOUTHWESTERN PUGET SOUND REGION

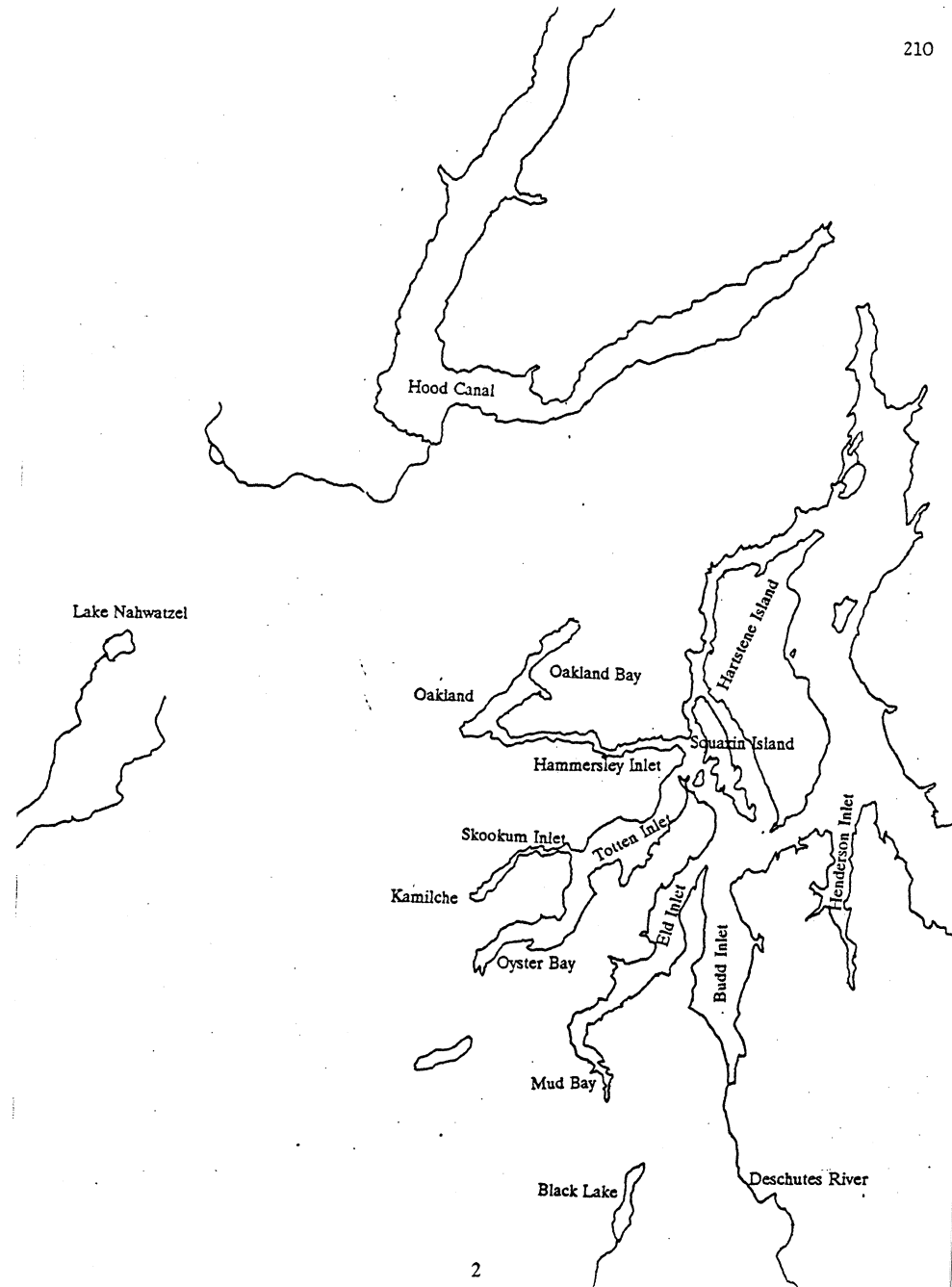
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The regions around the southwestern arms of Puget Sound between Olympia and Shelton are (properly) considered the region where the Sahewamish dialect of Lushootseed was spoken in early historic and prehistoric times. Yet there is evidence from place names in the region that this may not always have been so. The area (see Map) is characterized by long inlets (Budd Inlet--where the Deschutes River enters at Tumwater, Eld Inlet--terminating in Mud Bay, Totten Inlet--which splits into Oyster Bay and Skookum Bay, and Hammersley Inlet--which turns into Oakland Bay) separating long finger-like peninsulas, all protected by Hartstene and Squaxin Islands. Just to the north of this region is Hood Canal and Twana speaking territory; to the west across low hills were the Satsop (who spoke a dialect of Upper Chehalis) in the drainage of the Satsop River. To the east of Budd Inlet (which now has Olympia at its end) were Nisqually-speaking Lushootseed people, and (at least in historic times) the Upper Chehalis were to the south, across the Black Hills and the prairies south of Budd Inlet.

What I will attempt to show here is that evidence from a few place names in this southwestern Puget Sound region suggests the possibility that Upper Chehalis may once have been spoken here. It should be emphasized that this is quite speculative, and there is no historical documentation whatever to support it. Upper Chehalis (proper--i.e. excluding the Satsop) territory is usually taken to include the drainage of the Chehalis River from about Elma (specifically Cloquallam Creek) upriver to just above Rainbow Falls (near Dryad), where Kwalhioqua territory began. Tributary streams that were part of Upper Chehalis territory included numerous small creeks, Black River, Skookumchuck River, and Newaukum River. The closest access the Upper Chehalis had to salt water was Eld Inlet; I have been told by a speaker of Upper Chehalis that the dividing line between them and the Lushootseed on Eld Inlet was marked by a large boulder on the west side of the Deschutes River opposite modern-day Tumwater. A semi-historical story collected by Boas in 1927 indicates that the Upper Chehalis had close relations with the Sahewamish, and intermarried and visited among them; this story indicates that the two groups mixed heavily along the Black River, and that on this river the dividing point was somewhere just south of Black Lake. This same story suggests that the Upper Chehalis had not lived on salt water for some time, and were quite unfamiliar with gathering shellfish.

The place names throughout the southwestern Puget Sound region are predominantly Lushootseed, or at the very least possibly Lushootseed. That is, a number of place names that can be analyzed could be either Lushootseed or Upper Chehalis (or, for that matter, Twana). A large inventory of place names of southwestern Puget Sound (and elsewhere) was collected (perhaps around the turn of the century) by T. T. Waterman (ca. 1920, 1922), and many of them were re-elicited and confirmed by J. P. Harrington (1910). I collected Upper Chehalis versions of a handful of names in this region in 1960-61 from Silas Heck.

One of the most compelling reasons for believing that Upper Chehalis speakers once lived on southwestern Puget Sound is that their name for themselves and their language, q^way'áyił=q' (=q' 'language') is based on the name for Mud Bay, (s-)q^wayáit. This name is unanalyzable in either Upper Chehalis or Lushootseed. According to Waterman (ca. 1920) it refers specifically to a large creek at the head of Mud Bay, and he says that there was a "large and thriving village here". It seems improbable that a people would name themselves after a non-native village. According to Waterman, another site on Mud Bay is said to be Upper Chehalis. He gives the name as Xwiu³cid, meaning 'that on which one wipes the mud from his feet'; it applied to a point of land between two creeks on the east side of Mud Bay. The root here may be x^wik^wi- 'rub, wipe, scrape', but since it occurs in both Lushootseed and Upper Chehalis it is not diagnostic.



The second compelling reason for hypothesizing Upper Chehalis speakers in the area is Kamilche. Kamilche (k'amítči in Upper Chehalis, k'abíłči in Twana [Thompson 1979:62]) is the name of a community at the head of Skookum Inlet, and an earlier alternative name of Skookum Inlet. The name is analyzable only in Upper Chehalis, and in fact can be only Upper Chehalis. It is based on a root k'é-m- 'narrow, slender', with a linking suffix =it-, and the lexical suffix =či 'water'. This final suffix is directly cognate with Cowlitz =k'u 'water' (with further cognates throughout Salish); two other suffixes in Upper Chehalis underwent an identical shift of rounded velar to palatal affricate and high back vowel to high front vowel, a combined development not attested anywhere else in Salish. The descriptive name 'narrow water' fits Skookum Bay perfectly.

A third place name could put Upper Chehalis speakers even further north--on Oakland Bay near Shelton. Waterman (ca. 1920) identifies a creek at the site of the present town of Oakland (just northeast of Shelton) as Tsita'owi; Harrington (1910) gives tsátawé? for Oakland. Neither source offers a translation. The form is patently Upper Chehalis catáwi 'red cedar'. This is not as strong evidence for Upper Chehalis speakers in the area as the two previous names, however, because this form can be reconstructed to Proto-Salish; although this is not the form for 'red cedar' in either Lushootseed or Twana, it could be a remnant form kept for the place name after the tree name had shifted (to xpáy=əc in Lushootseed [Hess 1976:606] and q'ili in Twana [Thompson 1979:122]; note that the Lushootseed suffix for 'tree, plant' here is =əc, and is cognate with the final =i of the Twana word and the final j of the Upper Chehalis form, where it is no longer analyzable as a suffix). The only form for 'red cedar' reconstructible to Proto-Salish is *catáw=ay(?); its only attested reflexes occur in Bella Coola cactaw=ip (Nater 1977:20), Lillooet cétew=ež (Williams, et al. 1979:66), Tillamook datági (with initial reduplication; Thompson and Thompson 1986), Upper Chehalis catáwi, and Cowlitz catáwi? (the latter two forms from my own field notes, but found also in earlier sources).

Other place names can be taken as suggestive of Upper Chehalis origin, but are not in themselves sufficient to constitute proof. Lake Nahwatzel, a small lake approximately 11 miles west of Shelton, has an Upper Chehalis name (in spite of its Nahuatl appearance). It is from náwa-calł, a compound of náwa- 'big, old' and calł 'lake'. This lake, even though located relatively far north, is part of the drainage of the Satsop River, however, and may simply have a Satsop name. Oyster Bay is təpík'səd in Lushootseed (Hess 1976:491) and tapík'sn' in Upper Chehalis, but analyzable in neither languages. Olympia is ds-čətx'əd in Lushootseed (based on Waterman's transcription) and ns-čətx'n' in Upper Chehalis; both mean 'black bear place'. Two or three place names in the area mean (or are based on) 'wild cherry', which is plíla? in Lushootseed (Hess 1976:343) and palíla? in Upper Chehalis (otherwise only Quinault and Tillamook seem to have cognates for these forms; since it is in Tillamook, it probably goes back to Proto-Salish). One curious problem is in the name of the Sahewamish themselves. In Lushootseed they are called səhí'wəbš (Hess 1976:703), and in Upper Chehalis s-?ahíw=amš (this form from Boas 1927). Boas also gives ?ahíw as a place name (location not specified; he implies that it referred to the general area). The form without s- as a prefix does not occur in Lushootseed, however, where the s is part of the root. Does Upper Chehalis have the older form here, or has it been reanalyzed?

What all this means for earlier population locations and movements is unclear. If there were Upper Chehalis speakers on the southwestern shores of Puget Sound, were they also then in the Chehalis River valley? Did the Sahewamish move in from the north or from the south? Were the Twana north of this area at that time, or did they move there from the upper reaches of the Nisqually and Cowlitz Rivers, as suggested by Gibbs:

I have been informed that the Tsemakum and Toanhūch once lived on the upper waters of the Niskwalli and Kowlitz Rivers, and the Satsop and the Satsall upon the south fork of the latter; but the Indians who made this statement declared that their own people, the Staklamish, had never moved. (1877:224)

(The Toanhūch are the modern-day Twana or Skokomish, and the Satsall are the Black River Indians, a subgroup of the Upper Chehalis; Staktamish--the] is an error--is what the Nisqually Indians called the Upper Chehalis.) The only pre-contact population movement discovered by Elmendorf's studies had to do with movement along or in the region of Hood Canal (Elmendorf 1960:271). Answers to such questions about prehistoric population shifts in the area may never be answerable. The cultures of these closely related groups are probably too much alike for archaeology to shed light on which group was where. Perhaps other place name investigations will yield further clues.

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