

The Fraser Canyon Encountered

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According to the expedition journal, on 19 June 1808, Simon Fraser, explorer/trader for the Montreal-based Northwest Company and some of his men reached the native village of Nx'ōmi'n on the west bank of what he thought was the Columbia River, just above its confluence with a large, clear tributary entering from the east.¹ Fraser met some 400 people who, he noted, ate well and seemed long-lived.² From Nx'ōmi'n he was taken across the river where, near either the village of TûXEZÊ'p or Lkamtcî'n, he found "people . . . sitting in rows to the number of twelve hundred." He shook hands with all of them. The "Great Chief" made a "long harangue," pointing to the sun, the four quarters of the world, and to Fraser. An old, blind man, apparently the chief's father, was brought to Fraser to touch. Later Fraser named the clear river the Thompson, knowing that a fellow Northwester, David Thompson, was in the Cordillera and assuming that he had explored its headwaters. Next day, the dash to the sea resumed, but had not made many miles when a canoe capsized and broke up. Most of the men got ashore quickly, but one, D'Alaire, was carried three miles downstream where, eventually, Fraser found him. The precarious descent of one of the rawest rivers in North America by twenty-two tough, experienced employees of the Northwest Company and two native translator/guides had lost only a few hours.

But is this what happened? Who were these people? Is it possible, as one Thompson story has it,³ that Coyote, the old transformer, had come

¹ Much of this paper was read on 3 November 1990 at the B.C. Studies Conference at the University of British Columbia. It is based on research for the Historical Geography of British Columbia Project, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Cathy Kindquist's research assistance has been very helpful. Richard and Quentin Mackie brought their archaeological experience to the canyon.

² W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 86-92. Spellings after James Teit.

³ James Teit, "Mythology of the Thompson Indians," *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1912), vol. 8, part 2, 416.

again from the north, accompanied by Sun, Moon, Morning Star, Diver, Arrow Armed Person, and several others? Could it have been Moon who fell into the river? Did not Diver try to fish moon out while Arrow Armed Person fired lightning arrows, Sun sat on a rock and smoked, and the others danced? Did not Coyote say that Moon would never reappear and Sun say that Moon would, when dark came? Was not Sun right? When Moon came out of the river they all got into their canoes and paddled away, the only time that Coyote had been seen since the end of the mythological age.

It is hard to imagine two more different accounts of the same event, both told not very long ago. Time is telescoped in British Columbia; the place rests on a vast ellipsis. In Europe the equivalent of Coyote and his band are too far back in time to have any reality, and so, invented and abstracted, they appear as noble savages (Rousseau) or as members of traditional lifeworlds (Habermas). But in this new corner of the New World abstractions become realities, and the long story of emerging modernity, extending back through European millennia, is compressed into a hundred years or so. The ethnographers who, at the end of the nineteenth century, began to study the native societies of British Columbia, understood this. Since then, most of our scholarship has become more local; British Columbia tends to be studied on its own or in relation to the development of Canada. But to do so, as the best of the ethnographers knew, is to diminish the monumental and relatively accessible encounter — here, not long ago — of nineteenth century European culture with Coyote, Morning Star, and the others, an encounter that, in one way or another, underlies the world we live in.

Thoughts such as these have led me to my current work on the Fraser canyon (figure 1). However difficult a route, the Fraser was a huge source of food, and in the canyon, where fishing sites were abundant and excellent, it probably supported as concentrated and dense a non-agricultural population as anywhere in the world. Soon after Simon Fraser, these people began to participate directly or indirectly in the fur trade (Fort Kamloops, 1811; Fort Langley, 1827) and in associated provisioning trades. In 1858 they were caught up in a gold rush that brought thousands of miners to the terraces on which they lived. Soon, Royal Engineers were surveying townsites, the route of a turnpike road, and the first native reserves. Settlers arrived — many of them single Chinese men and most of the others people of various European backgrounds — and acquired land and water rights. Suddenly there were land laws and, behind them a colonial administration. There were Anglican and Roman

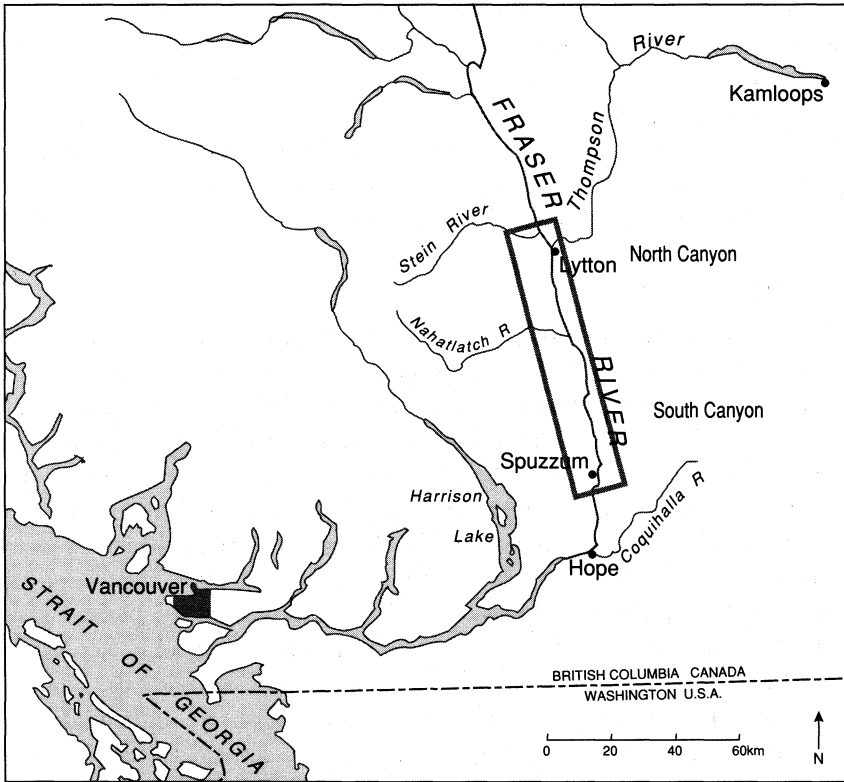


Figure 1. Fraser Canyon Study Area.

Catholic missionaries, and then, in 1878, an Indian Reserve Commission to regulate the “Native Land Question.” In 1881 the people of the canyon were enumerated in a federal census. Work was underway on a railway. Some thirty years later there was another railway, a slide that virtually destroyed the salmon runs, and another commission to regulate the Indian land question. In short, the Fraser canyon bore the concentrated brunt of much of what the nineteenth century threw at British Columbia. Were it possible to understand a little of what went on there, something of Coyote’s encounter with the other should come into focus and perhaps some particular insights about the shape of modernity.

Coming to the canyon as a geographer, it seems important to know, at different scales, where human actions have taken place; that is, where people have lived, traded, fished, farmed, and with whom, and over what distances, and by what routes they have been connected. Societies and the places and spaces they occupy constantly reshape each other and are,

at some point, understandable only in interrelation.⁴ In British Columbia, the spatial side of this equation seems particularly to the fore, partly because of the province's terrain, but principally because the sudden encroachment of the modern world has compressed a whole gamut of spatial changes into a few years. And so, I seek to situate canyon societies as well as I can, and this less for disciplinary reasons than because I think I will not understand very much unless I do.

The Canyon in 1808

I tried, for a start, to work out where, early in the nineteenth century, people lived in winter (when most people had returned from various resource procurement activities to a village). Even James Teit, who probably knew and wrote more about the nineteenth century Thompson than anyone else ever will, gave a sketchy account of their settlements in the canyon.⁵ It seemed to me, therefore, that the archaeological site surveys could well be the point of departure.⁶ If they yielded more sites than were inhabited at any one time, at least they would identify the range of possible habitation sites. And so, as shown on figure 2, we plotted sites where there is evidence of winter habitation (usually at least one house pit). As we did, the results seemed more and more ambiguous. Not all sites that other evidence (including field investigation) indicated had once supported winter villages appear in the site survey. Often the concentration of sites reflects the quality of the surveys; much of the west side of the canyon, for example, has received only the most preliminary attention. Such differential coverage means that, at least to some degree, the archaeological site surveys record the movements of archaeologists. This, plus the destruction of sites, plus the problem of dating, means, I think, that they provide the most preliminary guide to the pattern of settlement in the Fraser canyon in the early nineteenth century.

This conclusion led me back to the ethnographers, James Teit and Charles Hill-Tout,⁷ both of whom provide lists of villages, and to Gilbert

⁴ For example, Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); or, differently argued, much of the work of Michel Foucault.

⁵ Teit's main work on the Thompson is "The Thompson Indians of British Columbia," *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: 1900) vol. 1, part 4. On village locations see pp. 169-72. See also the mythology, cited above.

⁶ British Columbia Archaeological Site Surveys, manuscripts on file at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture, Archaeology Branch, Victoria.

⁷ Charles Hill-Tout, *The Salish People* vol. I *The Thompson and the Okanagan* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), 42.

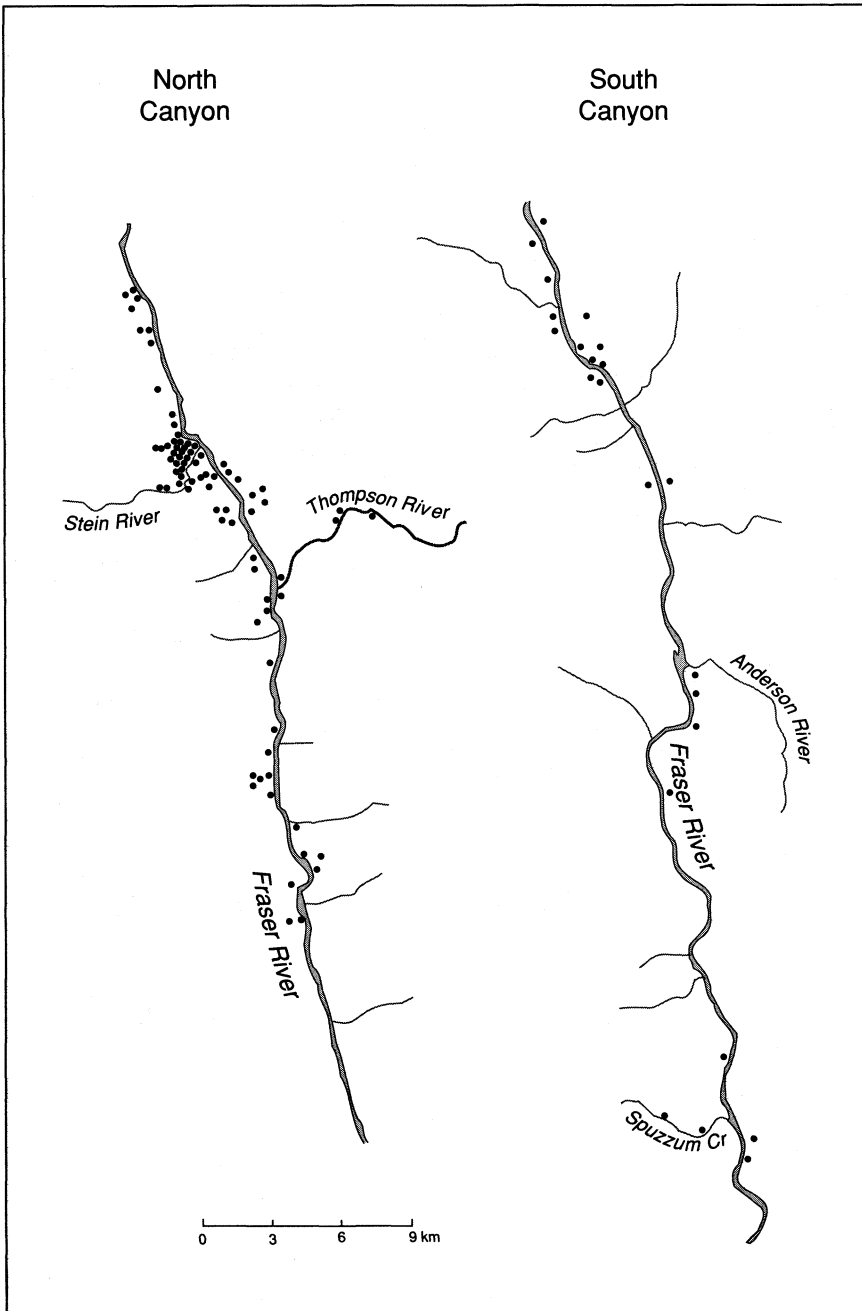


Figure 2. Winter habitation sites in the Fraser Canyon (after the Archaeological Site Survey)

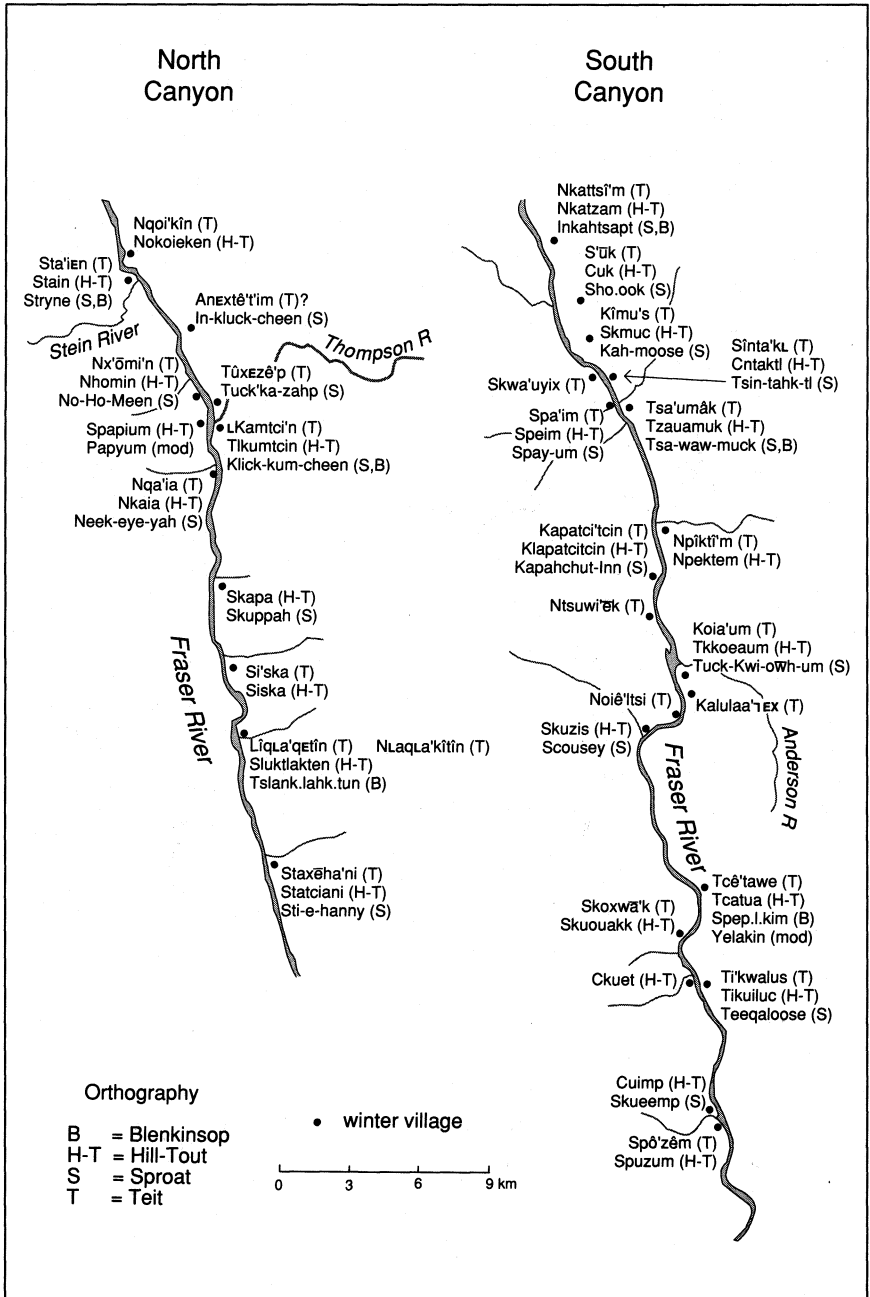


Figure 3. Winter villages in the Fraser Canyon, ca 1850.

Malcolm Sproat, the Indian Reserve Commissioner who worked in the canyon in 1878.⁸ By cross-checking their information in the field (with an archaeologist and with the archaeological site surveys), it is possible to create a map of villages that almost certainly existed at the location indicated in the early-mid-nineteenth century (figure 3). The unresolved question is how many village sites are missed. Several villages mentioned by Teit or Hill-Tout have not been tracked down, and isolated pit houses are not mapped. In most of the canyon, however, there are few enough possible village sites; figure 3 may not be far from the early nineteenth century mark. For now it serves as a starting point that will be modified as more information comes to light.

How many people lived in the canyon? Fraser did not see most of the villages, and the few population estimates he gave are probably not very reliable. He claimed to have met 1,200 people at Lytton, but it is not clear that they all lived there. Teit thought they had come down from the Botanie Valley where, at that time of year, many different Thompson groups went to gather roots.⁹ The first census of the canyon was completed at Fort Langley by the Chief Trader, Archibald McDonald, in 1830, and is based on information he obtained by questioning natives trading at the fort.¹⁰ Part of the census can be fitted to part of the map of villages, as shown on figure 4. According to the census, there were 930 men (some 3,000 – 3,500 people) along a twenty-five kilometre stretch of the river between Spuzzum and Kwi.ouh.um (at the mouth of Anderson River, just south of Boston Bar). McDonald, who had been down the Fraser two years before in Simpson's party and who as an officer in charge at Fort Langley had repeatedly questioned natives about the figures, thought they were reliable. We know that the final six miles of the canyon (Coast Salish territory) supported thousands of people from the lower Fraser and Strait of Georgia who fished there in August and September and lived on the catch for much of the year. There were equivalent fishing sites a little farther up-river in Thompson territory; there seems no reason why a large number of people could not have lived there.

⁸ Sproat's voluminous Letterbooks, Field Minutes, Minutes of Decision, and Surveys relating to the Fraser Canyon are in the Black Series of the Department of Indian Affairs, and there are photostats in the "B.C. Cabinet File," Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources, Surveys Division, 1550 Alberni St., Vancouver.

⁹ J. A. Teit, "Addenda" to "Salish Ethnographic Notes" American Philosophical Society, Boas Collection 31, 372, reel 4.

¹⁰ Archibald McDonald to Governor and Council, Northern Dept of Rupert's Land, 25 February 1830, Hudson's Bay Company Archives [hereafter HBCA], D.4/123 fos. 66-72 (reel 3M53); and published in Mary Cullen *The History of Fort Langley, 1827-96* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, 1979).

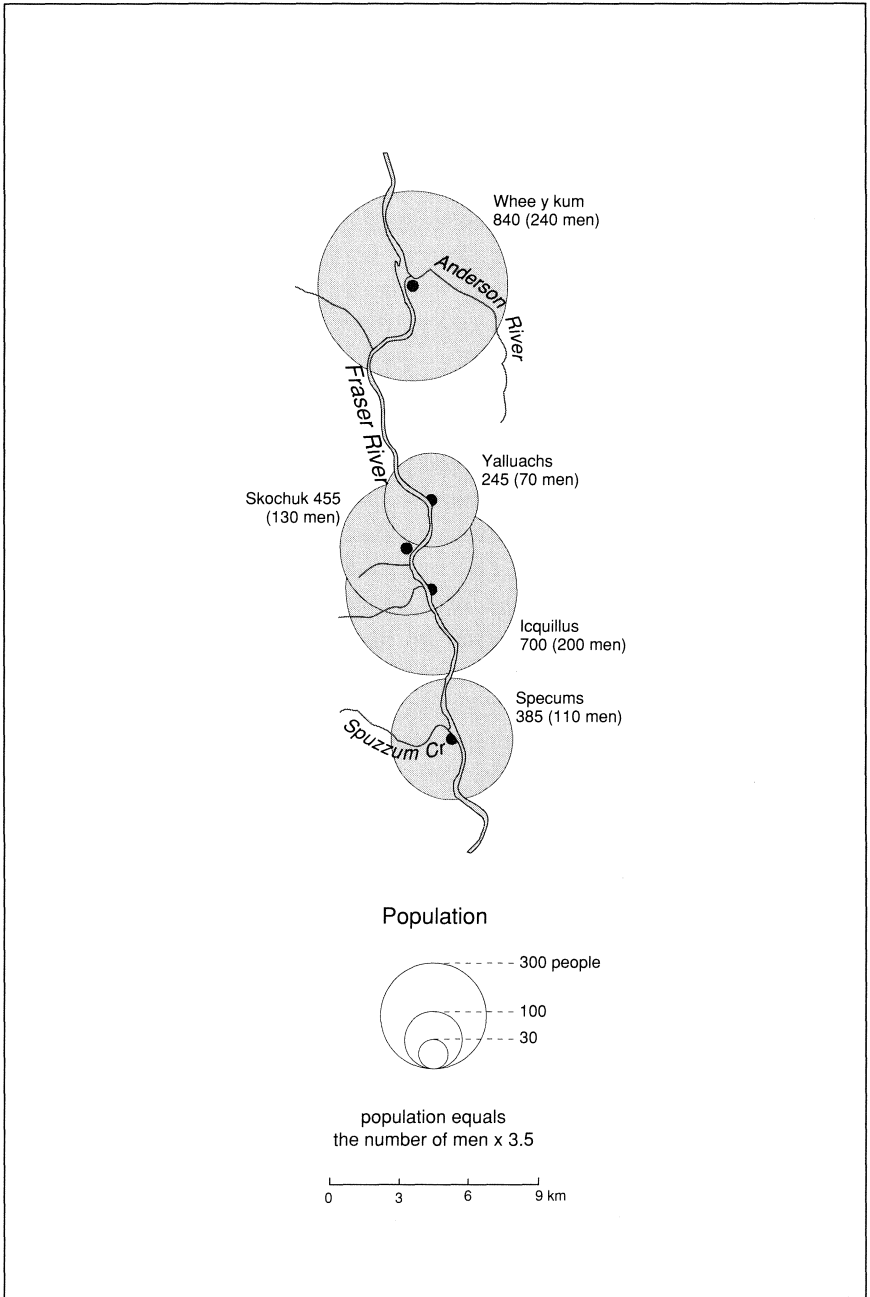


Figure 4. Population between Anderson River and Spuzzum Creek, 1830

The people in the canyon were far less mobile than the Halkomelem-speakers of the lower Fraser and southeastern Vancouver Island, most of whom lived within networks of kin and associated rights to resources that criss-crossed the Strait of Georgia and extended up the Fraser to the “falls” above Yale.¹¹ The falls were but the accessible lower end of a chain of rapids and superb fishing sites. From about six miles into the canyon these sites were not available to outsiders, partly because of terrain, principally because of the hostility of local, Thompson-speaking people living close to their principal resource. Even so, there was a good deal of seasonal movement, some of it altitudinal, some along the river to preferred fishing sites. Apparently the most southerly Thompson (Spuzzum to Yel.a.kin) tended to move north during the salmon runs to fishing sites in Black Canyon (just south of Hell’s Gate), thereby pulling away from the peoples coming to the lower canyon from the Strait of Georgia; while many people from around Kwi.ouh.um moved south to fisheries at or just above Hell’s Gate.¹² The many small villages in what Sproat called “the Boothroyd group” depended on fisheries in rapids nearby. Settlement patterns only become comprehensible as such movements are recognized.

Teit accompanied his discussion of Thompson cosmology with a Thompson map of the world (figure 5).¹³ It shows the junction of the Fraser and Thompson rivers and a few villages in a small territory surrounded by a lake from which, towards sunset, an underground trail leads to the land of souls and dancing ghosts. We know that many Thompson had larger world views. Some of them, Fraser reported, knew of the sea and of traders east of the Rockies; Lower Thompson traded cedar canoes (perhaps indirectly) to the Upper Thompson; and Thompson Indians (though not necessarily Lower Thompson) appeared at forts Kamloops and Langley shortly after they were built.¹⁴ Teit knew this, yet held that the peoples in the canyon villages between Spuzzum and Lytton had little to do with each other. If he were right, then for these peoples the Fraser was not so much a river as a local body of water that, seasonally, yielded enormous quantities of food. Its canyon peoples would have lived within very local, very intimately known worlds (as sketched on figure 5) in which the ex-

¹¹ On these movements see particularly the “Fort Langley Journal, June 27, 1827 – July 30, 1830,” British Columbia Archives and Records Service [hereafter BCARS]; and also Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia. Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir 1* (Victoria, 1952).

¹² These patterns are identified in Sproat’s Field Minutes and Surveys.

¹³ Teit, *The Thompson Indians*, 343.

¹⁴ James McMillan and John McLeod, “Thompson River Journal, 1822-3,” HBCA B97/a/2; also Fort Langley Journal.

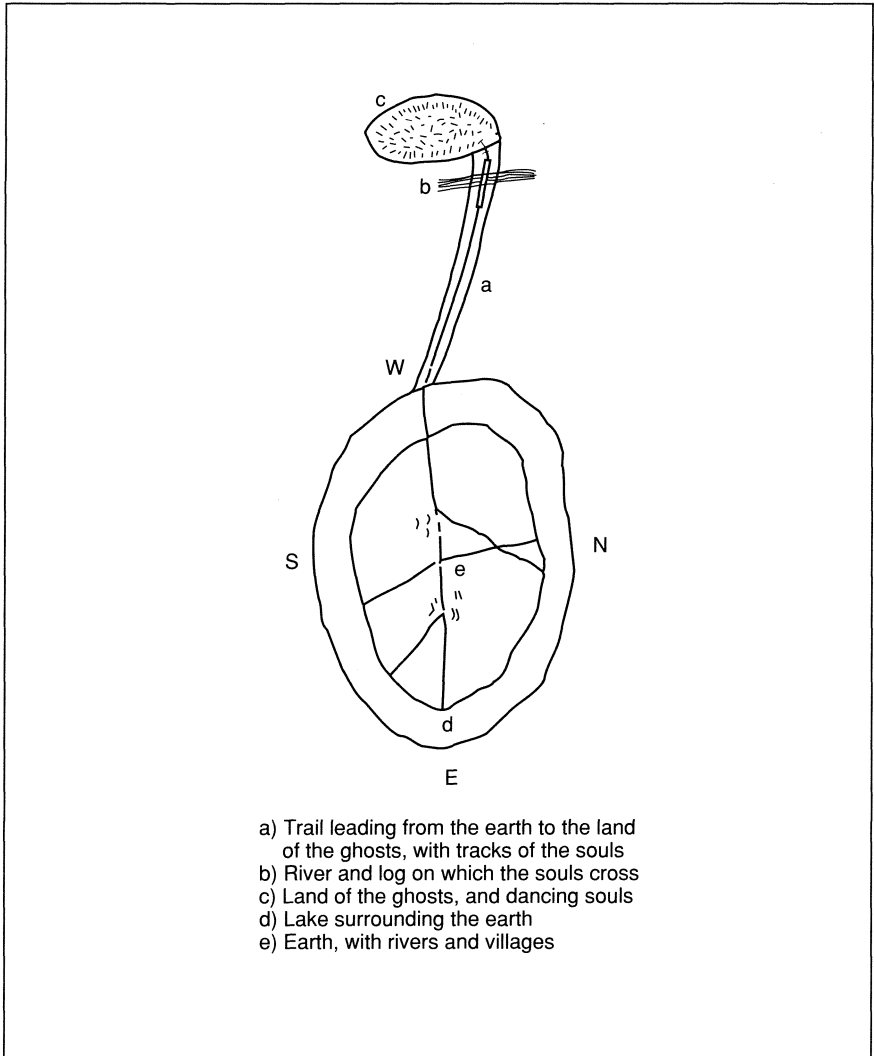


Figure 5. Thompson Sketch of the World

perience of one was, essentially, the experience of another, and personal stories intertwined with the creation stories. Here, as elsewhere, the young at puberty would have sought guardian spirits, and their subsequent lives would have been an unfolding sequence of relationships, often mediated by dreams, with these spirits and others: a spirit community interwoven with a social community, interwoven with the environment. It would be impossible, Habermas would say, to stand aside from the enveloping experience of such a lifeworld; events would be interpretable only within a framework of lived experience.¹⁵ Professor Ridington makes the same point in his impressive studies of the Beaver,¹⁶ and there is no reason to suggest that people in the canyon lived otherwise.

The Canyon in 1878

On 18 May 1878, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Indian Reserve Commissioner, and his party arrived at Spuzzum, the most southerly village of the Thompson-speaking Indians, near the south end of the Fraser canyon. Sproat's intention was to adjust reserves in the canyon to Lytton, then along the Thompson River to Spences Bridge, then in the Nicola Valley. He had intended to start the field season earlier but, receiving no support from the provincial government, had been forced to become "a record ransacker" in the land office in Victoria.¹⁷ It was pointless to go into the field without knowing what land had been conceded where, when, and on what terms. Sproat's salary was paid by the federal government, and he shared the opinion, apparently held in Ottawa, that the natives of British Columbia had prior title to land, but that the issue of prior title could be circumvented by the quick, generous allocation of reserves.¹⁸ The provincial government had no such views, and largely ignored Sproat's many requests for clarifications of its land policies. When Sproat arrived at Spuzzum he believed, incorrectly it turned out, that his decisions would be final. The natives were eager that he come. He had been im-

¹⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. II, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1989), 153-98; and see also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966), ch. 1.

¹⁶ Robin Ridington, *Little Bit Know Something: Stories in a Language of Anthropology* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990).

¹⁷ G. M. Sproat to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 6 May 1878, Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 75-79.

¹⁸ This point is repeatedly made in the Sproat correspondence. See, for example: G. M. Sproat to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 4 May 1878, Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 70-72.

portuned by the chiefs of the Lower Fraser Valley to visit their settlements.¹⁹ While, they said, natives were “quiet and obedient to the law,” settlers had been permitted to acquire land they had hoped to get. Similar pleas emanated from many parts of the province. Sproat hoped to survey the Lower Fraser Valley before the end of the year and asked that, meanwhile, the provincial government grant no land near the reserves, a request it ignored.

At Spuzzum, Sproat and his assistant, George Blenkinsop, recorded 107 people where, Blenkinsop noted, “a short time since” there had been 400.²⁰ As the commission toured the canyon, Blenkinsop continued the census, enumerating 1,622 people between Spuzzum and the Stein River (some eighty kilometres), approximately half the number that, forty years before, the McDonald census recorded between Spuzzum and Anderson River (some twenty-five kilometres). Most of the older settlements were still inhabited (figure 6), but populations were small: 285 at Klick.Kum.-Cheen (Lytton), 106 at Kanaka Flat, almost the same at In.Kaht.sahp (principal village of the Boothroyd group), 237 at Kwi.owh.um, 107 at Spuzzum, about 50 at most sites. Fifteen years after the event, Blenkinsop and Sproat recorded the legacy of the smallpox epidemic of July and August 1862. We know that in some houses everyone died, and that timber and sod roofs were collapsed on the corpses. We also know that Anglican and Oblate missionaries and government officials vaccinated many natives in the canyon in May and June, just before the epidemic struck, although we cannot yet say anything about the effects of their work or about the differential penetration of smallpox among the peoples of the canyon. Clearly, though, the Indian Reserve Commission travelled in the wake of a demographic disaster.

In 1878 the canyon’s population was still overwhelmingly native, but others, and the properties of others, were also there. Most newcomers were Chinese, single men who, Sproat found, seldom spoke either English or Chinook, and lived by mining and farming.²¹ Many were squatters; a few had pre-empted or purchased land and recorded water rights. Others, who still owned land in the canyon, had returned to China. The whites were a

¹⁹ G. M. Sproat to Forbes Vernon, 12 April 1878, Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 10-12.

²⁰ George Blenkinsop, “Census of Indian Tribes, 1876-1878,” Public Archives of Canada [hereafter PAC], RG 88, vol. 494.

²¹ “I did not find at Spapum Flats the Chinaman who can speak English (Ah Chung), and was therefore unable to explain the result of my inquiries as to the land question to Ah Yip who I saw . . .” G. M. Sproat to J. C. Barnes, Nicola, 26 Aug. 1878, Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 245-46.

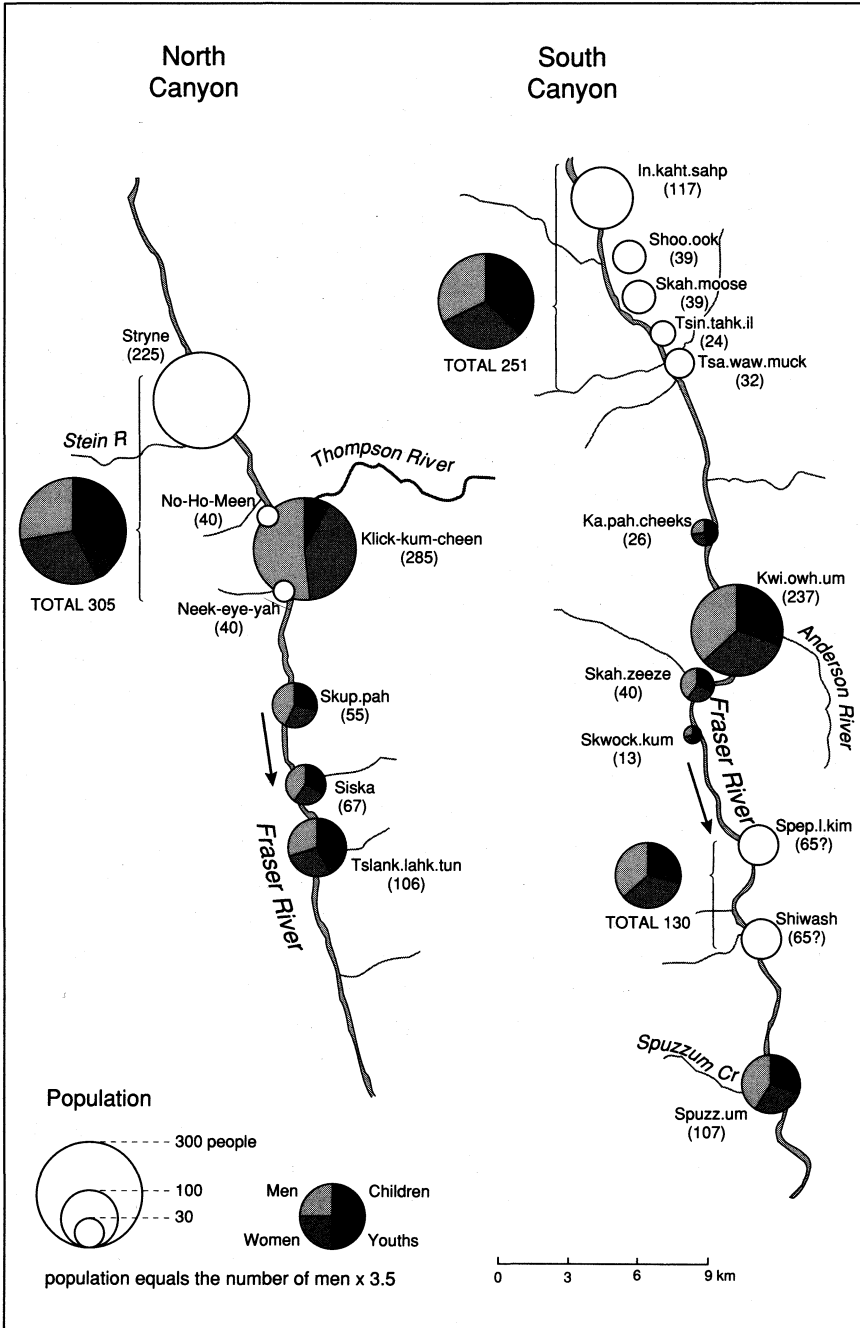


Figure 6. Native population in Fraser Canyon, 1878

varied few, and were not very fixed. The large-scale pattern of settlement is revealing. Boothroyds was named after a man who in the 1860s acquired a crown grant and water rights to some ninety acres of good land (the only such land in the area) along the wagon road, where he operated a road-house and a small farm. The property remained in his name in 1878 although Boothroyd had left years before. The only white who lived in the area, W. A. Jamieson (and perhaps his family), had pre-empted 160 acres and worked as a section man on the wagon road. Across the river, workings abandoned by white and Chinese miners had been re-occupied by “Chinamen . . . (who) will not allow Indians to share the water.”²² Otherwise, the Boothroyds people were natives. At Kwi.ouh.um the only water that could be used for irrigation was recorded by one Tim Ryan who, Sproat was told, “makes bad fences: Indian horses go through them and Tim makes the Indians pay for trespass.”²³ On the large terrace across the river from Kwi.ouh.um, Chinese had been working the gravels for almost twenty years (figure 7). A gold rush had come and gone, leaving a human remainder, part of the canyon in 1878.

Sproat was travelling through an extraordinary human landscape composed of many unconnected elements. There were still traditional native pit houses and conical summer lodges (if not always with traditional coverings), and also, in 1878, native log cabins. Native horses and few cattle grazed on small fields and open range. There were native potato patches here and there (the Second Superintendent of Indian Affairs sent packets of vegetable seeds, but without water they were not planted). Some native settlements had disappeared, obliterated by placer mining. Across the river from Kwi.ouh.um, the surface of the native cemetery stood two metres above the cobbled, recently-worked surface of the land. Although offered a good price, the natives had declined to let their ancestors be “washed up.”²⁴ From one end of the canyon to the other flumes and ditches, many now derelict, ran from small mountain streams to terraces along the river (figure 7). All terraces that such water could reach bore the effects of placer mining; in 1878 some small operations remained, worked by Chinese. The few white farms usually were also road-houses: a house built of squared logs or milled lumber with framed glass windows, pole or timber frame farm buildings covered with shake roofs, and fields

²² These various details of settlement around Boothroyds are in G. M. Sproat, *Field Minutes*, Boothroyd Group, 8 June 1878.

²³ G. M. Sproat, *Field Minutes*, Boston Bar Group, 1 June 1878.

²⁴ G. M. Sproat, *Field Minutes*, Boston Bar Group, 1 June 1878.

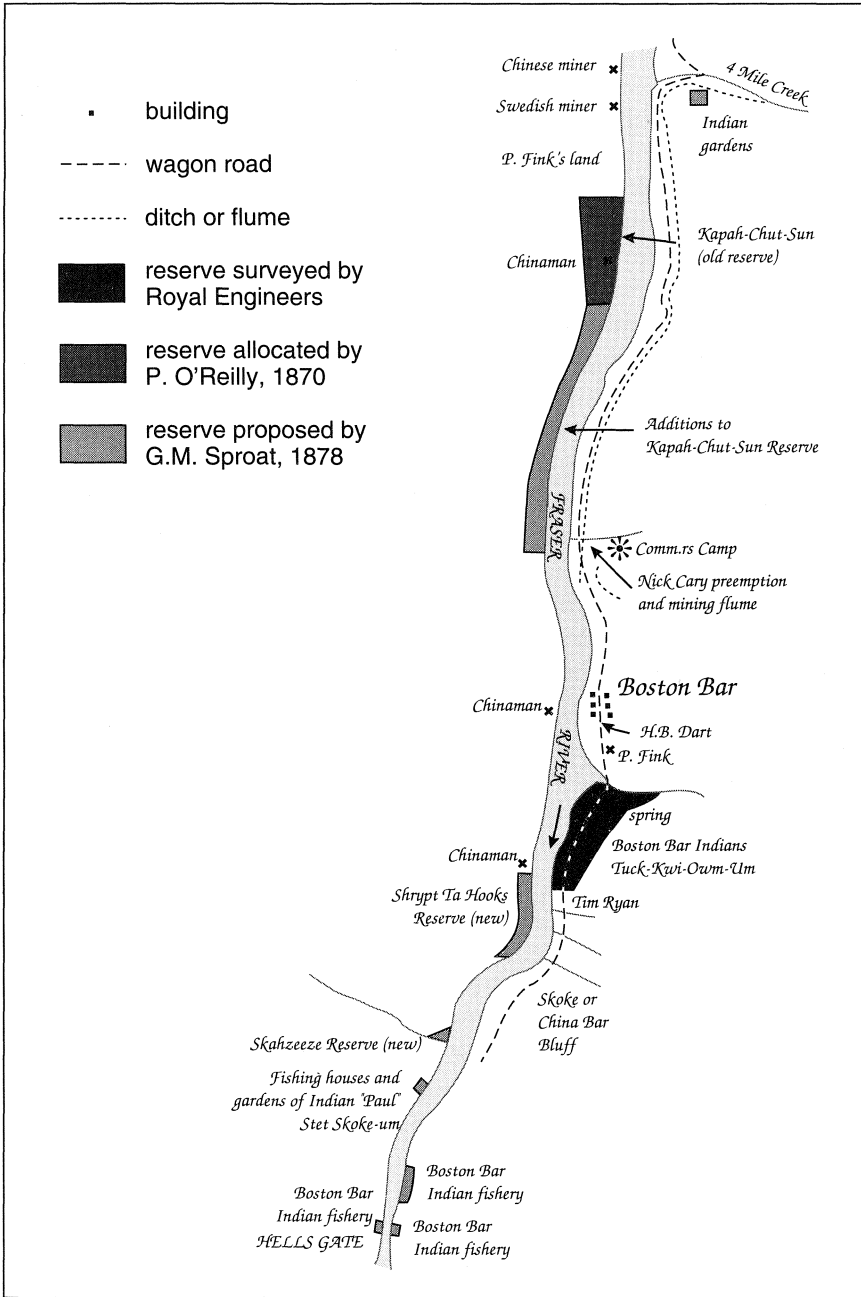


Figure 7. Country of the Boston Bar Group of Indians (after G.M. Sproat, 1878)

still dotted with stumps and surrounded by rough picket fences on either side of this cluster of buildings.²⁵ Through these patches of settlement in a depopulated valley ran the wagon road, seventeen feet wide, massively cribbed in places, blasted out of bedrock in others, by any standards an impressive feat of engineering. At the north end of the canyon, Lytton, named after Queen Victoria's Secretary of State for the Colonies, was a collection of shacks and log huts, an Anglican church with gothic revival elements, and a few other frame buildings on a grid of streets surveyed by the Royal Engineers.

Sproat, however, was there to consider the land question.²⁶ He found a few reserves of winter village sites, most only two or three acres, that had been surveyed by the Royal Engineers, and a good many more, larger reserves that had been laid out quickly in 1870 just before British Columbia entered Confederation, by Peter O'Reilly, Reserve Commissioner, acting on the instructions of Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for the colony of British Columbia. For twelve years, therefore, through a major gold rush, there were no Indian reserves through much of the canyon. When they were laid out, the best land was already taken and the accessible water already recorded. Whatever his intentions, O'Reilly had to shoehorn reserves into a prior pattern of alienated land. He recorded no water rights. Against the rhetoric about native agriculture was a simple reality in the canyon: in 1878 natives did not have enough water to farm there. Twenty-seven water records were granted in the Lytton area between 1861 and 1877, none of them to natives.²⁷ At No-Ho-Meen, where Simon Fraser met some 400 natives, Peter O'Reilly conceded a small reserve of bouldery land, three acres of which could be cultivated, on either side of No-Ho-Meen Creek. First water rights to No-ho-Meen Creek were held by Thomas Earl, whose farm was immediately north, and second water rights by Ah Wah, whose farm was immediately south, of the reserve. These two controlled the good land and virtually all the water that could be used for irrigation along a considerable stretch of the river.²⁸ Between Earl and Ah Wah, amid the boulders, lived thirty-five to forty natives. In most of the canyon, Sproat thought he found satisfactory

²⁵ For example, see the photograph of Boothroyds by Frederick Dally, BCARS 10232.

²⁶ For a general account of Sproat's activities and views at this time see Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 189-99.

²⁷ Water Records, Lytton Area, List Compiled by G. M. Sproat, Minutes of Decision, vol. 24, EMR numbered volumes, 101-03.

²⁸ Edward Mohun to G. M. Sproat, Lytton, 12 July 1878. Sproat, Minutes of Decision, vol. 24A, EMR numbered volumes, 128-39; also in the same volume G. M. Sproat, Extracted Field Minutes, 20 July 1878, 109-28.

ways through the tangle of property and water rights. In the Lytton area he simply did not know what to do; there seemed to be no solution.

By 1878 there was a considerable British Columbian land policy: crown grants, pre-emptions that were confirmed by certificates of improvement, mineral rights, water rights, grazing rights, as well as native reserves,²⁹ all of which Sproat had to negotiate as he moved through the canyon. Evidence of prior native settlement, he assumed, overrode any non-native claims, which should in these cases be revoked. Where there was uncertainty, the balance of doubt should favour the natives. Otherwise, for Sproat, property was property, title was title. He defended equally a native who had pre-empted land before it became illegal to do so, Chinese who had become naturalized and had acquired crown land, and absentee owners (though he was dubious about some who showed no signs of returning), as well as settlers. He believed in a regime of property and law.³⁰

Whatever their opinions on particular matters, so did virtually all white British Columbians. A concept of property that was less European than English was an implicit part of the province's political culture. In this tradition it was enough to enquire what gave one good title to property; there was no need to delve into the philosophical bonds between person and property or to worry about intrinsically satisfying work. Rather, the justification for property was extrinsic to the individual: private property was "an effective means to the end of efficiently exploiting the resources of the natural world, in comparison with any other system of rights and duties."³¹ It promoted a working, thrifty population, laying the basis for a good life for many and providing some assurance of subsistence for all. This was its sufficient justification in a tradition of English thought that ran from Locke to the Utilitarians, that dominated English common law, and that

²⁹ On these crucial elements of land policy see Robert E. Cail, *Land, Man, and the Law* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1974).

³⁰ Sproat's writings are filled with musings such as the following: "I do not know whether under the Old Colonial Regime persons holding free miner certificates could work on Indian Reserves: they certainly cannot do so under the very stringent Canadian Indian Act of 1876, and these Chinamen under that act would be liable to be summarily ejected and heavily fined. But on the other hand, if the Colonial government led these Chinamen to believe that they might work on the Reserve, and, if so, as appears to be the fact, the Prov. Gov't since 1870 have made water Records of these Chinamen at the Spot in question, it is possible that the Prov. Gov't might consider that these Chinamen had, in equity, some claim for compensation for the loss of their improvement and the disturbance of their business." G. M. Sproat to Peter O'Reilly, Boston Bar, 3 June 1878, Letterbooks 2, 140-41.

³¹ Alan Ryan, *Property and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 8. This paragraph derives from Ryan.

white British Columbians, including Sproat, accepted quite unconsciously. Sproat held that the reserves should be sub-divided into lots so that natives might become acquainted with the advantages of private property.³²

By 1878 a new regime of control, centred on private property, the law, and government administration — of which the Indian Reserve Commission was a striking symbol — was in the canyon, but the range of its jurisdiction and its capacity to enforce were far from clear. So much had happened so quickly over such a large area that neither the law nor the means of enforcement could keep pace with the rate and shifting geography of change. Sproat knew this, but kept raising awkward, fundamental questions: could mineral claims be held within Indian reserves, did laws of trespass apply where fence districts had not been designated, could reserves be conceded within land set aside in the railway belt? The government did not want such questions, the honest answer to which, usually, was that it did not yet have a policy. Some policy initiatives Sproat thought were absurd, and said so. When the federal government considered curtailing native net fisheries in the canyon (to protect commercial fisheries at the mouth of the river), Sproat responded that the land question in the canyon was trivial compared to the salmon question. In muddy water salmon could only be taken with nets. “The Government of England twenty-five years ago might as well have prohibited the cultivation of potatoes by the Irish.”³³

The natives, too, peppered Sproat with questions. Could they hunt on crown land? (Yes, but only in season). Were the canneries at the river mouth going to take all the salmon (No, as long as the spawning beds were protected). Other questions were more difficult to answer. What were the boundaries between “church” law and “Queen’s” law, especially in matters of divorce and child custody? Could an Indian work hard and acquire private property? Could Indians hire a teacher for their children, a white doctor for an Indian hospital? Some requests were poignant cries for help in changing, unknown circumstances. “One old chief with whom the Missionaries had been able to do nothing for 20 years told me that he was going to be a Jesus Christ man, now that his land questions were settled, and as proof he forthwith put away the ugliest of his three wives and she followed me for 100 miles to make repeated enquiries as to the

³² G. M. Sproat to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Popkum, 12 June 1879. Sproat Letterbooks, 3, 301-06.

³³ G. M. Sproat to E. A. Meredith, Dep’t of the Minister of the Indians, Cook’s Ferry, 30 July 1878. Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 193-97.

share of the Chief's land to which she was entitled."³⁴ A Spuzzum woman had raised her grandson after his mother died. Then the black father returned, demanded his son, and told the grandmother that if she did not give up the boy he would tell the authorities and she would go to prison. The grandmother could not evaluate this terrifying threat.

How are we to understand all this? I think we would have to say, with Habermas, that traditional lifeworlds in the canyon had been fragmented and colonized, at least to some degree.³⁵ The third wife who had been cast off, the grandmother who was threatened with prison, could no longer evaluate their circumstances entirely from within their experience. Totally unfamiliar systems of power had penetrated Thompson space (in Habermasian language, the systems penetration of the lifeworld); Coyote and his issue would not be able to tell an old woman in Spuzzum whether or not she was going to gaol. Others, of course, lived in the canyon with strands of former worlds: Chinese miners without families, without a surrounding regional Chinese culture, without China; English-speaking farmers who had left almost as much behind and lived on benchland farms amid alien peoples but did, at least, have the apparatus of government largely at their disposal — which is why, for them, government assumed such symbolic importance and was defended, as much as possible, on their terms. The varied landscapes of the canyon and the cries of their peoples catch, unless I am hearing things, something of the terror of the dislocated. And I think we would have to agree, with Michel Foucault, that the new power in the valley was diffuse and decentred, that, ultimately, it was cultural rather than political or economic.³⁶ It was not that Sproat "had it" or that the provincial or federal government "had it," but that wherever natives turned they encountered assumptions that were not their own. This cultural other impinged most insistently over land policy, but in the background of land policy was the pervasively devastating assumption that natives would not be natives, but would become the other, or disappear.

The white agenda was not quite the native reality. On 17 July 1879, seventy-one years after Simon Fraser, there was another gathering of 1,200

³⁴ G. M. Sproat to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, near Hope, 6 Nov. 1878. Sproat Letterbooks, 2, 324-28.

³⁵ Besides Habermas, see S. K. White, *The Recent Work of Jurgen Habermas: Reason, justice and modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³⁶ As analyzed, for example, in *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1977); or in *Power/Knowledge; Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

natives at Lytton. With tents, flags, and 1,500 horses, they made, Sproat said, “a pretty scene.”³⁷ This time they had come to elect representatives of the whole tribe and lay plans for its government. Sproat had been invited. As he approached a large building put up for the occasion (hoarded sides, a canvas roof decorated with greenery, and “a pendant crown made of boughs” above a platform at one end), a cannon, acquired from somewhere, fired a twelve-gun salute. Sproat made a speech, then retired to be available as needed as legal advisor. A Head Chief and thirteen councillors were elected for three years, subject to the Queen’s pleasure. Then, after two weeks of discussion, there were these proposals: the tribe would build a school at Lytton and hire a teacher of arithmetic and reading, paying for both from a school tax. It would hire a white doctor, paying him from a medical tax. There would be fines for drunkenness, potlatching, gambling, and animal trespass; villages would be “made to look well.” The duration of fish traps and hunting seasons would be regulated, useless dogs would be killed, women would not work in the fields while men idled. No one would be gaoled; punishments would be fines or confiscations. Everyone was to respect the Council’s decisions and help enforce them.³⁸ The list bears the hand of the Anglican missionary in Lytton, J. B. Good, and, indirectly, of the Indian Act of 1876 — but it may also reflect people trying, with assistance, to find a politically acceptable means of gaining some control over new circumstances. Sproat was enthusiastic about the meeting and the prospect of a measure of native self-government,³⁹ but the proposals produced howls of white indignation and came to nought.

The Canyon in 1914

During a week in November 1914, a Royal Commission on Indian Affairs (the McKenna-McBride Commission) visited the principal settlements of the Fraser canyon from Lytton to Yale.⁴⁰ The commission was there to make a “final adjustment” of native lands; to do so it could alter reserves but could not open the question of title which, the natives were

³⁷ G. M. Sproat to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Lytton, 26 July 1879. Sproat Letterbooks, 3, 361-62.

³⁸ Rules and Regulations formed by the Nekla-Kap-a-muk Council, Lytton, 17 July 1879, Sproat Letterbooks, 3, 347-51, 351-56. Black Series. RG 10, vol. 3696, file 1531b.

³⁹ Sproat’s response is summarized in two letters to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, both written in Lytton on 26 July 1879. Sproat Letterbooks, 3, 328-60, 361-62.

⁴⁰ For an introduction to the McKenna-McBride Commission see Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), ch. 7.

told, would be decided in the courts. At each stop the local chief addressed the commission. His remarks and the ensuing discussion were translated for the commissioners and recorded verbatim.

By this time there were two railways in the canyon — the Canadian Northern, just built, and the CPR, then some thirty years old. In a sense, the river itself had disappeared; it had never been a transportation route, and in 1914, after a slide at Hell's Gate during the construction of the Canadian Northern Railway, most of its fish were destroyed. Small railway stations had replaced road houses, a divisional point on the CPR (North Bend) had become the principal white settlement in the middle canyon, and the old Cariboo Wagon Road was impassable south of Boston Bar. The commission travelled by rail through territory that, in many ways, was well incorporated within a transcontinental nation-state. As part of the railway belt (a twenty-mile strip on either side of the CPR) most land was administered from Ottawa and, topography permitting, was to be laid out in a broad grid of ranges and townships (figure 8). Parts of the canyon had been mapped by G. M. Dawson for the Geological Survey of Canada. Post offices in several settlements served small, non-native populations. There were still a few Chinese. But, as before, natives were the majority of the canyon's residents. Government authority over them rested locally in an Indian Agent responsible for the Lytton Agency — which then included, besides the Fraser River Thompson, a ribbon of river peoples that included Halkomelem-speakers below Hope and Lillooet, and Shuswap-speakers above Lillooet.⁴¹ Most of the canyon Thompson were baptized Anglicans; those in the south were Roman Catholics. Denominational residential schools for native children were supported by ecclesiastical and government funds.

The commissioners who met representatives of these people in the fall of 1914 had a clear conception of "good Indians": those who cultivated land, sent their children to a residential school, and obeyed the Indian agent. The commissioners believed in their own authority. When a chief claimed that the Lord Almighty gave whites and Indians free use of the mountainsides, a commissioner replied that if the chief really understood his Bible he would know that "God placed men in authority — laws are therefore made for the benefit of us all and they must be obeyed by us all."⁴²

⁴¹ For a map of the Lytton Agency c. 1914 see: *Report of the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia* (Victoria: Acme Press, 1916).

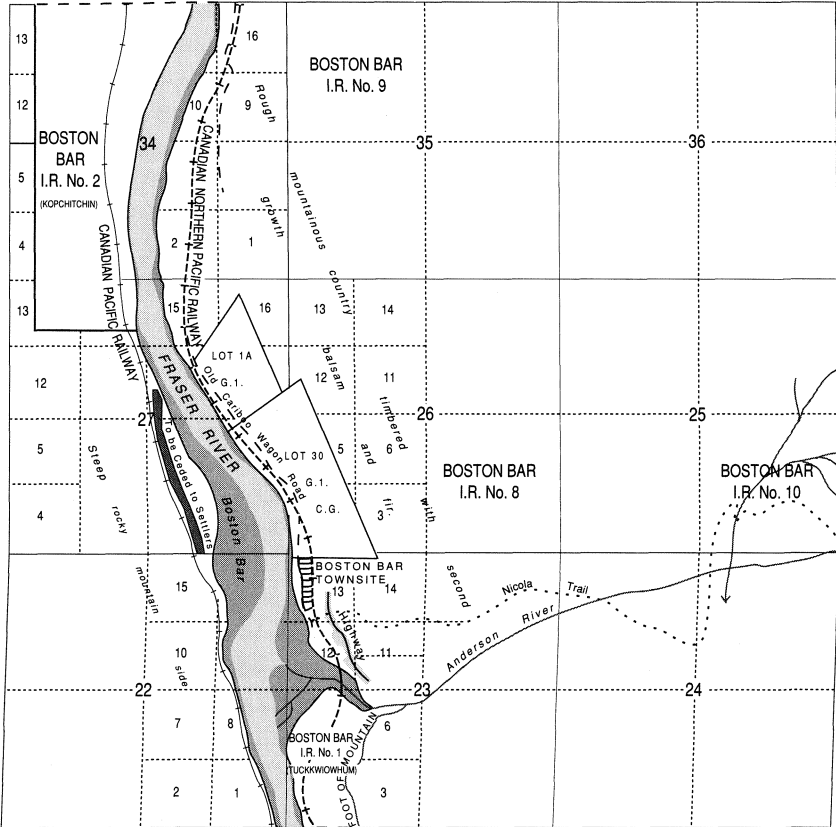
⁴² Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, Meeting with the Spuzzum Band, 18 Nov. 1914. The quotations and details in this section are taken from the transcript of this meeting and of one the day before in Boston Bar. Reel AW1 R5701:2.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Plan of N.E. 1/4 Township 10, Range 26, West of the Sixth Meridian

FIRST EDITION

SCALE 20 CHAINS TO AN INCH



Portion to be retained by C.P.R. coloured Red
 Additional R.w. required for double track coloured Blue

PHOTO-ZINCOGRAPHED AT THE SURVEYOR GENERAL'S OFFICE, OTTAWA, CANADA.

Portions to be ceded to Settlers coloured Green

Department of the Interior, Ottawa, 6th November, 1914.

Compiled from official surveys by

A.W. Johnson D.L.S. 16th November, 1904

P. Melhuish D.L.S. 20th November, 1912

A.E. Hunter D.L.S. 8th December, 1913

Approved and Confirmed.

Note: Distances are in chains. Bearings are reckoned from the astronomical meridian through the centre of the township. Areas in acres are marked on all lands surveyed, except lands that have been patented and are taken to the banks of the Fraser river. Legal subdivision numbers are shown thus.....8.

Surveyor General.

Figure 8. Plan of N.E. Township 10, Range 26, West of the Sixth Meridian.

The commissioners had not come to listen, but to establish whether they were dealing with "good Indians" and, therefore, whether or not each chief and his band were entitled to more or less land. Had they listened, a sorry picture of native life in the canyon would have unfolded before them.

There was still some agriculture: potato patches, chickens, tiny gardens (cabbages, turnips, and carrots), a few horses and cattle, but not enough water and not enough agricultural land. Some men worked in railway construction gangs, some families went to Chilliwack each season to pick hops, many had once worked in the canneries at the mouth of the Fraser, but no longer. There was not much work, not much agriculture and, in 1914, the fishery was threatened. After the slide caused by construction along the Canadian Northern near Hell's Gate, natives were not allowed to fish. They were angry. Chief: "Whose fault was it that I hadn't sufficient food to eat this year? Who was the cause of our poverty? It was not my fault that today we are poor. I was stopped from providing myself with food. No one should be stopped from providing themselves with food. When they came to stop me they told me that if I did not obey I would be put in gaol." A commissioner replied that slides had many causes and that fish must be protected. Chief: "The reason of this slide was caused by white men." Commissioner: "We are not here to discuss that." Poverty bordering on starvation and, on top of it, mangled reserves. "I have some trouble with the C.P.R. They want to take my land — that is, the land I have been living on for some years. They told me I would have to leave there because it belonged to them. The C.P.R. has moved their fence right up to my house, and they have taken in the principal dwelling part."

The chiefs were protesting against poverty and, even more, against the regulations within which they now lived and over which they had no control. Children were to attend school and parents were to send them back if they ran away. The Indian Agent was detested. Beyond the reserves were a host of laws (especially fish, game, and land laws), policemen, and gaols. In effect, the natives of the canyon lived as wards within the regulative environment of the modern nation-state. As regulation settled around them, constraining their lives more and more, native protest appears to have become more generalized and abstract. Gone were plans for native schools, hospitals, and a measure of native self-government. Native demands had become broader and more territorial. The whole Thompson people had always lived within four posts (a large area from Spuzzum to Lillooet and including the Thompson Valley to Kamloops and the Nicola Valley) "Christ ordained that we should live with this area, and we don't

want things changed until Christ returns.” Chief George at Boston Bar put the case as clearly as anyone:

God Almighty put me here, and gave us the birds and animals for our use; and he made these birds and animals for our food. He made all the things on the earth. He made this so that we would have sufficient to live on, and that we need never be in need nor want; and when he had made all the things of the world, he went back from here, and went back to his own home in heaven; and before God left he never meant to have any gaols or policemen to restrict us. So today we don't want any gaols or any policemen, because the policemen are always restricting us from going and using the things we claim as our own. They won't allow us to shoot, or anything else, and here everything is going to waste. The trees in our forest, we are not allowed to use them without permission. And I don't want to be stopped from fishing salmon in the River. God made those for our use, and it is from salmon that I make my living. Therefore, I wish everything to be free.⁴³

The Queen, however, rather than God Almighty, gave reserve land, promising, the chiefs claimed, that no white men would trespass on it. But they do “come in and take our land, and tell us we have no right to it. They take the water and everything.”

From Fraser to this in 100 years. Coyote had become Christ, but the Thompson had not become Europeans. The old lifeworld was violated, but not entirely destroyed. However depleted, the people of the canyon remained. Power over the canyon resided elsewhere. Arguments about power turned into arguments over land. An incoming white society appropriated most of the land; an indigenous native society was cramped by reserves and regulations. Figure 8 suggests the changed geographical reality.

Well, the Fraser Canyon encountered. I am fascinated by this work. It seems real and important. It poses every intellectual challenge. I know, too, that in this curious late twentieth century, distant places can be familiar, local ones passing strange. The Fraser Canyon, virtually at hand, seems one of the most remarkable and least discovered corners of the world. I feel back there with Fraser, though not so tough, not much of a canoeist . . .

⁴³ Meeting with the Boston Bar Band, 17 Nov. 1914, 252.