STORYING *SWÍ:LHCHA:*
Place Making and Power at a Stó:lō Landmark

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IN 1896, STUDENTS FROM the Methodist-sponsored Coqualeetza Indian Residential School had their photograph taken in the waters of Cultus Lake, south of Chilliwack, British Columbia.[1] In this image, dark woods shade a background that contrasts with a white sky and what appears to be bright mist in some places. The lake waters reflect these contrasts. On the right side of the photograph, water and sky meld seamlessly and brightly together so that the dark profiles of teachers and students are sharply visible. Most of their facial expressions, though, are too distant to be discernible. Some of the children appear awkward and stiff, while others, submerged up to their chins, seem to be enjoying a trip from the school to a place that was probably familiar

1   The people who today self-identify as the Stó:lō (which translates literally to "the River" or "People of the River") include twenty-four First Nations who reside in the region of the Lower Fraser Valley and Fraser Canyon. I use the ethnonym Stó:lō at times to refer to the community of The'wá:lí and other Indigenous peoples who hail from the *Swí:lhcha* area, the place now called Cultus Lake by English speakers. The Stó:lō call their traditional territory *S'óhl Téméxw* in Upriver Halq'eméylem. I use the name Stó:lō here because (1) it reflects a network of kinship ties and storied connections that draw The'wá:lí and other local communities together and (2) to avoid excluding people who did not self-identify as The'wá:lí but who were and are connected to *Swí:lhcha* and surrounding peoples through marriage relations and storytelling. The Stó:lō community that most closely associates with *Swí:lhcha* is called "The'wá:lí" (anglicized as "Soowahlie"), whose reserve, IR 14, is located about twelve kilometres south of the City of Chilliwack. When referring to the band or reserve, I use "Soowahlie"; at all other times, I use the community's Halq'eméylem name. When referring to the lake, I use either "*Swí:lhcha*" or "Cultus Lake," depending on the story being analyzed.

Figure 1. Group at Cultus Lake. Photo courtesy of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives, P5758, J.O. Booen, 1896.

to them. Some of the teachers appear delighted; smiles are visible on their faces. Most of them sit in the large canoe, and four stand in the waters with the children.

Although we cannot know the thoughts of the people pictured, this photograph marks an intersection of competing interpretations of a single landmark in a much larger, cross-culturally interpreted environment. The field trip took students and teachers to the lake, but it also took them to a place where many contested stories about place, belonging, and identity converged. If Christians, the teachers might have understood Cultus Lake as a gift from God, for humans to preside over and to enjoy. Like other settlers, they may have viewed the lake as a beautiful and important natural landmark, part of the attractive and "wild" geography of southwestern British Columbia. If so, they probably thought of Cultus Lake as an important place that people had a responsibility to preserve, protect, and enjoy. Indigenous students, though, may have heard other stories about *Swí:lhcha* – stories that defined it as a powerful and dangerous place. According to Stó:lō oral stories, a creature known as *stl'áleqem* lurks in its depths. Careless boys who tried to swim down to the lake bed to test their strength returned only as skeletons after the *stl'áleqem* consumed the flesh from their bones. According to other stories, underwater portals at the bottom of the lake have carried incautious swimmers to their deaths on faraway shores.

Possibly, teachers and students attempted to reconcile these different kinds of stories about the lake. Students might have listened to settler stories about its harmlessness and beauty, and the teachers might have heard local accounts of its dangers. Teachers might have taken students to an off-limits Stó:lō landmark to dispel what they considered to be superstitious notions of taboo.[2] We can never know. But however individuals experienced this field trip, the photograph is a window onto different stories about *Swí:lhcha*/Cultus Lake, which shed light on a critical and contested history of colonial interactions, and resulting transformations, in this environment and the Stó:lō world more broadly. Diverse voices and the experiences of Stó:lō people and newcomers here undergird different interpretations of this place and the various claims that locals have made to it. Power imbalances at colonial and local scales have determined which of these claims have held priority as stories produced and reinforced distinct local understandings of the environment and, in so doing, justified the exclusion and displacement of certain groups of people.

This study examines three kinds of Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō place-making stories about *Swí:lhcha*, or Cultus Lake: (1) origin stories, (2) trail stories about movement to and from the lake and surrounding lands, and (3) boundary-making (or keep-out) stories. All three types define local identities, designate access rights, make exclusions, and express claims to place. Both Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō narratives, which at times seem irreconcilable in content and tone, bear historical and contemporary comparison because they frame senses of belonging and ownership that have been central to cross-cultural and intra-community interactions and dispossessions in this environment. Stories about *Swí:lhcha* have defined their tellers as much as they have described this contested place.

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2   Keith Carlson writes of the Oblate missionaries from St. Mary's Residential School in Mission, British Columbia, taking students on field trips to forbidden or taboo sites like *Swí:lhcha* to facilitate the process of conversion and, in turn, to subvert Indigenous narratives of place. The Coqualeetza teachers may have been taking part in this same practice. See Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 189. Coqualeetza IRS also hosted an annual camping trip to the lake for students who did not go home for the summer, and, after his appointment as principal of the school in 1914, George Raley made regular requests to the Department of Indian Affairs for funds to host other summer camping trips elsewhere. These trips were part of what Paige Raibmon sees as "a thoughtful program based on wide-ranging initiatives" marked by an uncommon respect for Indigenous cultures that set the school, under Raley's leadership, apart from others. See Paige Raibmon, "'A New Understanding of Things Indian: George Raley's Negotiation of the Residential School Experience," *BC Studies* 110 (Summer 1996): 69-96. Whatever the purpose of the trip, it likely brought together more than one way of understanding – and storying – the *Swí:lhcha* environment.

Places, theorists from various disciplines tell us, are the constructed and legible products of human encounters with the physical world.[3] Philosopher Edward Casey argues that a "given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event." "Places not only are," he writes, "they happen."[4] In a short history of the 1924 draining of Sumas Lake, just fifteen kilometres west of *Swí:lhcha*, Laura Cameron explores the many ways in which the place called Sumas Lake (and now Sumas Prairie) has "happened." She suggests that stories about "shifting, 'messy'" places express the many ways those places are "shaped and encountered by living, experiencing bodies."[5] Further, any study of a place, as anthropologist Erin Gibson suggests in her study of the Cariboo Wagon Road, must attend to the "relationships that make it up – the actions and interactions of the human and non-human world."[6] Places are products of relationships. Crisca Bierwert, building on Casey's work, sees places in the Pacific Northwest as "containers, replete with animated beings, replete with signs."[7] Places like the *Swí:lhcha* environment not only contain the people who live in them but also the physical landmarks that, imbued with story, act as "signs," or reminders, of human relationships with (and in) the non-human world. Places like *Swí:lhcha* are inseparable from the human experiences, interactions, and storytelling that happen there.

Further, anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson suggest that place making is central to collective identity building and to difference making among competing claimants to a single place.[8] In a study of the

[3] Some important works of scholarship on space and place from across the disciplines include Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991); Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings,* ed. D. Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); *place/culture/representation*, James S. Duncan and David Ley, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993); essays in Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon, eds., *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996); and Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, eds., *Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
[4] Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso, 27.
[5] Laura Cameron, *Openings: A Meditation on History, Method and Sumas Lake* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 6.
[6] Erin Gibson, "Movement, Power and Place," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 25, 2 (2015): 418.
[7] Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 43.
[8] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, 1 (1992): 6-23.

Chilcotin plateau, historian William Turkel argues that people "make sense of the past, the world and their place in it and of their relationships to one another" through their "constant interpretation" of space.[9] Place making is essential to claiming places. As people at *Swí:lhcha* have defined themselves in relation to the lake, so, too, have they defined themselves as distinct from others, often using such distinctions as measures of the legitimacy of their claims to the environment. With Edward Chamberlin, I argue here that stories about place, and their power to make difference and support claims to place, are neither inherently Indigenous nor essentially colonial. Stories about *Swí:lhcha* have been central to both colonial and Indigenous productions of difference and power. Competing Indigenous and settler stories about *Swí:lhcha/* Cultus Lake sometimes appear antithetical, but the act of storytelling, and its attendant power, transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries.[10]

Attending to both Indigenous and colonial stories about a single place like *Swí:lhcha* can shed light on the shifting interactions that produce them as well as on the power dynamics they generate. Susan Roy's work on the Musqueam (Coast Salish) village called *cesna:m* (known to English speakers as the Marpole Midden, in present-day Vancouver) suggests that, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, stories embedded in a place and its material objects are essential to building identities and claiming control over that place.[11] In the case of *cesna:m*, nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial narratives of place "served to sever or distance Aboriginal peoples not only from their territorial lands, but also from their cultural and historical heritage" and became central to the legitimacy of non-Indigenous claims to land.[12] In the same way, colonial stories at Cultus Lake justified the displacement of local Indigenous peoples with long-standing connections to the area. Conversely, however, Stó:lō knowledge-holder Naxaxalhts'i sees stories embedded in *S'óhl Téméxw* as critical expressions of Stó:lō claims to places that are considered colonized.[13] Stó:lō stories about *Swí:lhcha* have been central not only in distinguishing Indigenous from non-Indigenous claims to

9   William Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 71.

10 J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004), 1.

11 Susan Roy, *These Mysterious People: Shaping History and Archaeology in a Northwest Coast Community* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 24.

12 Ibid., 150.

13 Naxaxalhts'i (Sonny McHalsie), "We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us," in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish,* ed. Bruce Miller, 112-15 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

place but also in differentiating one Stó:lō community's claims from those of others. Place-making stories about *Swí:lhcha* have made for the construction of "usable pasts," as Turkel calls them, in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous collective memory: stories that are employed to claim power over and in a given place.[14] As people invest places with story, they also "offer new content for history," which, in turn, often becomes evidence in defence of claims to ownership over places.[15]

This article's ethnohistorical approach to storytelling at *Swí:lhcha* brings the structural and cultural perspectives through which ethnographers have inquired about Indigenous storytelling to an analysis of settler-colonial stories at the lake.[16] At the same time, it subjects Stó:lō stories about *Swí:lhcha* to the historical discourse analysis that some historians have employed in the deconstruction of colonial place making in Canada.[17] Putting a local lens on the culturally situated nature of both colonial and Indigenous stories about place, while observing the specific historical implications of their telling, is an important way of addressing histories of power in shared and contested places. Such an approach may decentre colonial place-making knowledge that is often taken for granted as transcendent, while taking seriously the historical power and persistence of Indigenous storytelling about places. It might also prompt us to reposition histories of colonialism, thinking about them in terms of their fundamental entanglement with local Indigenous place making. Both need to be understood on their own terms, but the stories

[14] Turkel, *Archive of Place*, xxiv.

[15] Cameron, *Openings*, 78.

[16] Anthropologist Keith Basso argues that storytelling is a primary "ideational resource" by which Western Apache peoples embed places with cultural and moral meaning and thus define themselves. See Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). See also Fernando Santos-Granero, "Writing History into the Landscape: Space, Myth and Ritual in Contemporary Amazonia," *American Ethnologist* 25, 2 (1998): 128-48; and Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005). For discussions of turns in ethnohistory over the last two decades, see Keith Carlson, John Lutz, and David Schaepe, "Turning the Page: Ethnohistory from a New Generation," *University of the Fraser Valley Research Review* 2, 2 (2009): 1. See also Frederick E. Hoxie, "Ethnohistory for a Tribal World," *Ethnohistory* 44, 4 (1997): 595-615. These scholars suggest that understanding all our sources as stories, inseparable from their cultural and historical contexts and consequences, may help "to bridge the differences between peoples" (Hoxie, "Ethnohistory," 597).

[17] See, for example, Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Tracey Banivuana-Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*. I try to bring diverse stories into meaningful dialogue by also bringing the methods of these scholars into conversation with those of ethnographers discussed above.

explored here, and their contexts and outcomes, must be understood in relation to one another, since they are always told (and embedded in local memory) within the context of complex, changing, and often conflicted interactions. Indeed, as anthropologist Jeff Oliver writes, "the significance of land," and of settler and Indigenous interpretations of place, "cannot be reduced to one thing or another."[18] The various origin stories, trail stories, and "keep-out" stories that I analyze are a critical lens on what Oliver calls a "muddled" history of competing claims and changing power dynamics among multiple local Indigenous and settler communities in this environment. [19]

ORIGIN STORIES AT *SWÍ:LHCHA*: FLOODS, FRONTIER VILLAGES, AND LOCAL IDENTITY BUILDING

Telling origin stories is one powerful way to assert a claim over a place. These stories typically define peoples' relationships to the land and justify and explain their presence on it. Origin stories about *Swí:lhcha*/Cultus tell not only how the place came into existence but also how locals, both Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō, first came to relate to it. Further, the two names associated with the lake are directly tied to its origin stories and are invoked to make particular claims to it. Origin stories have been central to local community identity building and to the boundary making associated with it. By explaining histories of "what might have happened" through origin stories about *Swí:lhcha*, people have constructed usable pasts and transformed the lake into what Keith Basso calls a "possession to which individuals [and collectives] can maintain deep and abiding attachments."[20]

Stó:lō origin stories explain the Halq'eméylem name of the lake, *Swí:lhcha*, and point to an original claim to it by the community of The'wá:lí. Despite differences in detail, these stories always focus on a deadly flood from Vedder Mountain, west of the lake. On the floor of the basin that now contains the lake, there was once a settlement of several hundred people. When a young man from this village, who used to travel up the mountain to his bathing spot, noticed a crack in the rock wall damming the water, he returned to warn the others that

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[18] Jeff Oliver, "Harnessing the Land: The Place of Pioneering in Early Modern British Columbia," in *An Archaeology of Land Ownership*, eds. Maria Relaki and Despina Catapoti (London: Routledge, 2013), 175.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 75. See also Santos-Granero, "Writing History into the Landscape," 128.

the crack might burst and that they needed to evacuate. The villagers did not believe him, and when the crack did burst, water filled the basin and drowned everyone except the man and his family. The flood created what is now *Swí:lhcha*, and the surviving family resettled beside the new lake. Their settlement site became The'wá:lí. Linguists Brent Galloway and Allan Richardson suggest that the word "*Swí:lhcha*" is a direct reference to this origin story. "Swilylcha's" main root, "wiy-," they write, means "warn," and its suffix, "-elhcha," means "dirty water."[21] Some Stó:lō storytellers agree. In 1965, elder Albert Louie, from the nearby community of Yakweakwiyoose, told ethnographer Oliver Wells that the name meant "there wasn't any water there, and then pretty soon there was lots of water ... That's why they give it that name of *Swí:lhcha*."[22] The name is a reminder of the lake's origin and of The'wá:lí's original connection to it. Other versions of the same story expand upon this by explaining the origins of the Chinook jargon name, "cultus." In 1972, Stó:lō elder David Johnnie told the following origin story:

> There was just an indian [*sic*] village there, a whole bunch of Indians were staying there, and all at once one of them Indians seen a round sort of crack like this you see the ground crack and kept cracking getting bigger and bigger, seemed to come up like this and cracked, and something tells this Indians better tell your people to move away from there so he went to work this one Indian he went and told all his peoples. … They just laughed at him so he took his family and he moved them away from there, and sure enough not too long and where that crack was it just bust open like this exploded and it killed all the Indians that were living there and that's why it become a lake there the Cultus lake, that's why they call it Cultus lake there were hundreds of Indians.[23]

By referring to the lake as "Cultus," the Chinook word for "bad" or "worthless," rather than as "*Swí:lhcha*," Johnnie's story suggests that local people considered the lake to be bad because hundreds of people died there before the founding of the The'wá:lí community. This story of the name Cultus is a reminder of the destruction at the heart of the community's origins.

[21] Allan Richardson and Brent Galloway, *Nooksack Placenames: Geography, Culture and Language* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 117.

[22] Albert Louie, interview in *The Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors,* eds. Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway, and Marie Weeden (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 160.

[23] David Johnnie, interview with Tillie Guiterrez, transcript, 1972, Stó:lō Nation Archives, hereafter (SNA).

In both tellings, the story's power and potential meanings are layered. The story offers a reminder of the unpredictable and dangerous power of the non-human environment and indicates in turn how people are expected to relate to the lake, with caution and respect. It also reflects how people can be defined by what are often considered inanimate places. Indeed, the meanings and identities of places are "not a passive outcome of human action, but [are] instead … formed through an ongoing dialogue between the human and non-human world."[24] According to Coast Salish ways of knowing, the world is not easily divided into neat and distinct categories of "reality" and "myth" or "physical" and "metaphysical."[25] What might be labelled legends or myths by some are important components of Salish historical consciousness. Bierwert writes that, among Coast Salish peoples, all social life involves, "wholly and unequivocally," relationships to "other sacred beings that have agency in and of themselves[,] … including features of the land itself."[26] *Swí:lhcha* fits into this larger Coast Salish knowledge framework, in which humans and sentient non-human beings coexist in a living, unpredictable environment, where shifts and transformation are to be expected. In this kind of world, stories about places are, in a sense, a way for physical places to "speak to those listening, making themselves known over time" in order to help human beings "make greater sense of their relationship" to the physical environment.[27]

By relating the community's existence to the existence of the lake, the story explains the origins of The'wá:lí collective identity. According to a different but related origin story told by elder Amy Cooper, the village that became The'wá:lí came to be after the lone surviving woman of a devastating famine near *Swí:lhcha* married a Nooksack man who had travelled north after a disaster in his own community.[28] Historian Keith Thor Carlson argues that, "within Stó:lō historical consciousness, accounts of such devastating and depopulating disasters as floods, fires and famine explain and account for population movements and changes in

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24 Gibson, "Movement, Power and Place," 431.
25 Keith Carlson, "Orality about Literacy: The Black and White of Salish History," in *Orality in Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 56. See also Keith Thor Carlson, "Introduction," in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas,* ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 1; and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Plate 2, Stl'áleqem Sites: Spiritually Potent Places in S'óhl Téméxw," in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas,* 8-9.
26 Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 7.
27 Ibid., 70.
28 Amy Cooper, "Amy Cooper at Soowahlie 8 February, 1962," in *Oliver Wells Interview Collection (1961-1968)*, transcript, SNA, 81-82.

group identities." Amalgamations resulting from disaster, he contends, are central to Stó:lō community identities.[29]

Origin stories therefore exemplify the critical context of kinship relations upon which Coast Salish senses of self and claims to place hinge. According to anthropologist Brian Thom, we must attend to the "complexly networked social groups" of Coast Salish peoples "fluidly activating," in part through story, "their community and kin connections to a broad land-base within their wide network of kin."[30] Cooper's story explains why elders Larry Commodore and Bruce Sam emphasize that "we're all connected."[31] The name The'wá:lí itself, Commodore says, "is a hybrid word," a mix between Halq'eméylem and Nooksack, suggesting that the people of the community are a "hybrid" people. While the flood story provides the basis of the community's original claim to the rich and valuable lake, it also indicates the relational origins of The'wá:lí's collective identity, expressing remembered connections between The'wá:lí and Nooksack. The community's identity is neither static nor isolated; rather, it has always been part of a shifting network of relationships among people and storied places.

Other iterations of the origin story work to exclude certain other Indigenous communities from making claims to the area. In The'wá:lí elder Dan Milo's version of the origin story, the survivors of the flood and their drowned relatives were actually the "real Ts'elxweyéqw Indians."[32] According to oral histories, Ts'elxweyéqw peoples migrated south and west from their territory at Chilliwack Lake and along the upper reaches of the Chilliwack River, after a devastating landslide buried much of their population. As they relocated to more southern sites along the Chilliwack River, including near *Swí:lhcha*, they amalgamated with some of the communities with whom they came into contact, displaced others, and ultimately claimed dominance over a large area of southern *S'ólh Téméxw*.[33]

Milo's claim presents a Ts'elxweyéqw-centred interpretation of The'wá:lí's history and legitimizes Ts'elxweyéqw dominance over a space fraught with historical conflict. In this way, it overlooks stories, such as Cooper's, about The'wá:lí's hybridity. In 1965, elder Bob Joe

[29] Carlson, *Power of Place*, 87.
[30] Brian Thom, "The Paradox of Boundaries in Coast Salish Territories," *Cultural Geographies* 16, 2 (2009): 195.
[31] Larry Commodore, interview with Anne Janhunen, Dallas Posavad, and author, Soowahlie Reserve, British Columbia, 29 May 2013, SNA; Bruce Sam, interview with author, Soowahlie Reserve, British Columbia, 29 May 2013, SNA.
[32] Dan Milo, interview with Oliver Wells, in Maude et al., *Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors*, 90.
[33] See Carlson, *Power of Place*, 119-22.

explained: "long, long before the white race came into this country, the tribes at that time had their own boundaries … one tribe here, another tribe there."[34] These historical boundary lines have often held over time. Indeed, Carlson writes that "the arrival of the Chilliwack was a disconcerting development" for those already living in the places where they migrated.[35] The Nooksack-speaking people already living near the lake remained isolated from the new Ts'elxweyéqw residents, and Amy Cooper suggests that there was animosity between them. "There was a line there that they couldn't cross; and these people never talked to them."[36] Ultimately, however, the Ts'elxweyéqw claim to *Swí:lhcha* became dominant and the Nooksack community left the area. Still, while some community members emphasize the legitimacy and primacy of The'wá:lí's Ts'elxweyéqw roots, others contest the dominance and singularity of Ts'elxweyéqw claims to the area, remembering the now gone Nooksack people who also once lived near *Swí:lhcha*.[37] Not only does the origin story emphasize the importance of migration to Coast Salish histories and senses of place. It also reflects the contested nature of local claims to the *Swí:lhcha* environment.

For some Stó:lō people, the lake became Cultus when Indigenous locals sought to represent to newcomers the dangers it contained and to impress upon them its long-standing connection to The'wá:lí.[38] Yet the name took on a different meaning as it became part of settler origin stories about the lake and, more generally, about the Canadian west. *Swí:lhcha* could only be transformed into Cultus Lake after the making and reduction of Soowahlie Reserve (Indian Reserve 14). Surveyed in 1864 by William McColl under the authority of Governor James Douglas, the original Soowahlie reserve was surveyed at about 1618 hectares and provided the community exclusive access to the northern shore of *Swí:lhcha*. According to The'wá:lí elder Albert Louie, the "Cultus Lake people had pretty big land, you know, right up to the lake," within the original reserve boundaries.[39] However, the reserve was truncated to 279 hectares in 1868, then expanded by 182 hectares in 1879 by the Joint Indian Reserve Com-

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34 Bob Joe, "Bob Joe at Sardis, British Columbia, April 2, 1963," *Imbert Orchard Recordings and Transcripts,* transcript, SNA, 1-2.

35 Carlson, *Power of Place,* 120.

36 Amy Cooper, interview with Oliver Wells in Maude et al., *Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors,* 106.

37 Ibid. I noted these conflicting interpretations when revisiting recordings of interviews with former chiefs Larry Commodore and Otis Jasper. Their interpretations of The'wá:lí's ancestry differed from Bruce Sam's, who emphasized the community's Nooksack ancestry.

38 Otis Jasper, interview with Dallas Posavad, Anne Janhunen, and author, Sardis, British Columbia, 21 May 2013, SNA.

39 Louie, interview in Maude et al., *Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors,* 163.
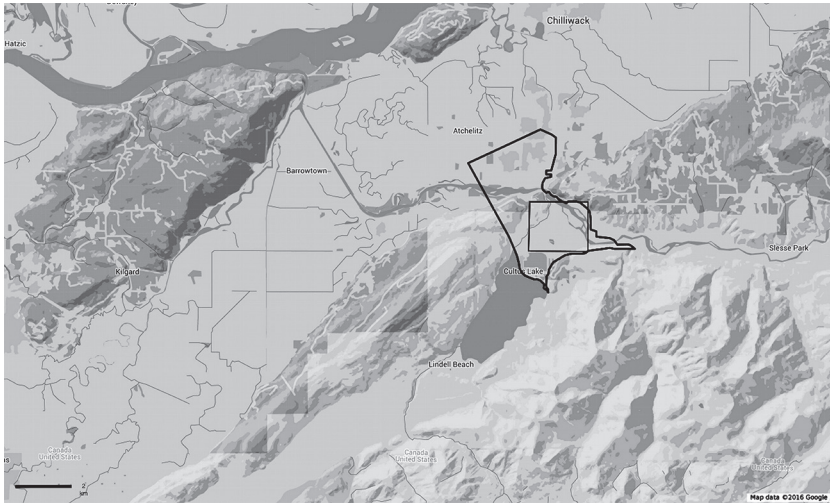
Figure 2. Comparison of the boundaries of the original, 1864 McColl reserve to those of the current Soowahlie IR 14.

mission. As a result, the current 460 hectare reserve remains physically separated from the lake. A through-road to the lake cuts through the northwest side, and a settler community adjoins its southwest corner. These reductions, according to Louie, were "a big benefit for the people who are running it [the lake and surrounding lands] today."[40]

Pioneer stories, a settler version of origin stories at Cultus Lake, typically celebrate a mythological past in which daring Euro-American/ Canadian, usually male, explorers braved the wilds of British Columbia's outback to free the land of inertia and superstition and open the way for Euro-Canadian uses of the land: permanent housing, agriculture, and, later, nature preservation.[41] Elizabeth Furniss argues that these kinds of pioneer stories have helped construct Canadian settler identities while legitimizing appropriations of Indigenous lands.[42] This was the case at Cultus Lake as settler stories claimed the area as part of a frontier wilderness that had been opened up and rendered productive by nineteenth-century pioneers. These stories validated newcomer claims to the environment, contrasting settler relationships to the lake with those

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Mia Reimers, "'BC at Its Most Sparkling, Colourful Best': Post-war Province Building through Centennial Celebrations" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2007), available at http://dspace. library.uvic.ca:8080/handle/1828/285.
[42] Elizabeth Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History," *BC Studies* 115 (1997): 8.

of local Indigenous peoples who, so the narrative went, no longer used or needed Cultus Lake.

Euro-Canadian origin stories about Cultus Lake focus on its remoteness and on the desirability of making it accessible to newcomers. They portray the lake as becoming accessible through the "vision, fortitude, loyalty and industry" of non-Aboriginal pioneers.[43] Community historian P.R. Jeffcott describes what he saw as the heroic efforts of cattle drovers who travelled from Washington through the Cultus Lake area to northern British Columbia to be the first to ranch in the province.[44] In her more recent community history, Marion Soutar highlights a series of "firsts" in the Cultus Lake community: the first farmers and long-term settlers, the first Park Board members, the first churches, and the first school building.[45] Such firsts were central to building a settler identity and constructing a usable past that laid claim to Cultus Lake and surrounding lands. Claiming "firstness" in the environment by equating agriculture with legitimate land use in this way had the effect of displacing The'wá:lí's claim to priority. This kind of story, like other stories Susan Roy sees operating in the context of cesna:m, have forwarded "colonial processes of alienation" in British Columbia by regarding places as abandoned or unused by Indigenous peoples who, in the view of newcomers, "did not have the capacity to utilize … [their] resources."[46] At Cultus Lake, the pioneer story overlooked the Stó:lō histories of floods and amalgamated villages, and it ignored the reserve cutoffs and settler-Indigenous interactions that made pioneer "firsts" in this environment possible.

According to the pioneer narrative, the place name "Cultus Lake" assumed new meaning and thus became evidence of the legitimacy of settler claims to the lake. According to Marion Soutar, "the Lake was an important place for spirit quests [for Stó:lō people] and its popularity led to the lake's spiritual power being used up," and so local Indigenous peoples stopped using it before pioneers arrived.[47] As a result, according to Soutar's story, the lake became "cultus" (worthless, or bad), and local Indigenous interest in *Swí:lhcha* dissipated, making way for a new settler-

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[43] Percival Jeffcott, *Nooksack Tales and Trails: Being a Collection of Stories and Historical Events Connected with the Most Northwest County in the United States, Whatcom County, Washington, and Depicting in Popular Style, the Pioneer Dys of the Formative Years between 1848 and 1895* (Ferndale, WA: Sedro-Woolley Courier-Times, 1949), dedication.

[44] Ibid., 187.

[45] Marion Soutar, *Cultus Lake: A Natural Paradise* (Chilliwack: Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society, 2005), 5-22.

[46] Roy, *These Mysterious People*, 10, 29.

[47] Soutar, *Cultus Lake*, 4.

Figure 3. Frontier town built at Cultus Lake. Photograph courtesy Chilliwack Museum and Archives, 1999.029.004.087, 1960.

colonial history of the lake. These narratives persist. More recently, in Cultus Lake Provincial Park's master plan and website, Indigenous relationships with the lake are described both as a thing of the past and as negative. The lake has the name Cultus, according to the Park Board, because it "was considered 'bad' in an ancient First Nations legend."[48] The power of the pioneer origin story, as Furniss suggests, was its "eventual colonization of popular consciousness" through the erasure of competing Indigenous narratives of place.[49]

The construction of a model frontier village on the north side of Cultus Lake in 1959 gave material form to such origin stories by representing and commemorating the lake's pioneer past. The narrative at the heart of the village contrasted pioneer pasts both with spreading urbanization in the Chilliwack area and with what was considered the long-ago (and therefore no longer relevant) past of Indigenous locals. According to the *Chilliwack Progress*, the frontier village, "complete with fort, Indian village and Boot Hill," was carved out of a "seven-acre wilderness" and

[48] BC Parks, "Cultus Lake Provincial Park," British Columbia Ministry of Environment, available at http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/cultus_lk/; BC Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division, *Cultus Lake Provincial Park Master Plan, 1980* (Victoria, December 1980), available at http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs/360977/cultus_lake_mp.htm.
[49] Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier," 8.

was one of five that an amusement park design company called Turner Productions built in western Canada.[50]

The "wild" appearance of the setting was intended to recreate a sense of remoteness that had been transformed because of the efforts of the area's "first" pioneers. Physical reminders of pioneer rural days were "redolent of earlier, often timeless notions" of a pre-urban past when pioneer families transformed a wilderness into usable, agricultural land.[51] Like the "archaeologized" material objects analyzed by Susan Roy, objects at the fort implied the pastness of The'wá:lí's claims to Cultus Lake. They also radically misrepresented Indigenous lifeways, signalling their presence with tipis, a housing structure in which Stó:lō people never lived (rather, they built semi-subterranean, semi-permanent pithouses and longhouses). The tipis, while presented by designers as part of the "authentic replica" of older ways of life at Cultus Lake, really represented settler interpretations of Indianness (and thus of otherness) in Canada. In such ways, Stó:lō inhabitants at *Swí:lhcha* were positioned as the precursors of pioneer exploration and settlement, but not as the legitimate "original" users of the land.[52] The pioneer story, on the other hand, was represented in fences and what designers claimed as the "authentic replica of a fort," which embodied the movement towards settlement, made possible through pioneers.[53] The "frontier village" emphasized the Cultus Lake environment's former remoteness and its transformation into a settled place.

Both Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō origin narratives explain the making of local communities and define their relationships to the lake. These collective identities are predicated on cultural and social difference, whether among Indigenous communities or between settler and Stó:lō communities. Origin stories at *Swí:lhcha* have been, as Roy observes in the Musqueam context, "translated as expressions of belonging, ownership and distinctiveness."[54] As such, these stories reinforce particular claims to the place. Stó:lō disaster stories describe how both *Swí:lhcha* and The'wá:lí came to be and who, ultimately, had a legitimate claim to the lake. Non-Stó:lō frontier narratives, on the other hand, situate local, non-Indigenous settlers as descendants of the conquerors of a rugged wilderness that Indigenous people supposedly no longer used.

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[50] "'Frontier Town' for Cultus?" *Chilliwack Progress*, 8 July 1959.

[51] Oliver, "Harnessing the Land," 179.

[52] The five-year lease granted to Ormonde Turner Productions was cancelled after just one year. While the commemoration of a pioneer identity of Cultus Lake Community had seemed attractive to the board, the need for more immediate capital gain won out.

[53] "More about New Park," *Chilliwack Progress*, 26 January 1960.

[54] Roy, *These Mysterious People*, 24.

TRAILS AND TUNNELS:
CONNECTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

If origin stories are about making claims to land, trail stories are about discussing, emphasizing, and remembering connections within and between places. Erin Gibson's biography of the Cariboo Wagon Road suggests that roads and trails are not just static entities linking one place to another, but also are "made up of memories, experiences and identities that form" as people and elements of the non-human world interact.[55] Similarly, the trails and tunnels in The'wá:lí territory have been "both physically and ideologically textured with the journeys and experiences of those who went before."[56] The movement of humans, spiritual beings, and material resources to and from the lake is a major component of both Stó:lō oral traditions and non-Stó:lō stories. Stories about movement have served as reminders of interconnectivity among the lake, The'wá:lí, Cultus Lake community, and other distant places.

Stó:lō narratives about ancient trails and underwater portals that lead from *Swí:lhcha* to the Pacific Ocean affirm familial and community ties across time and space, and over colonial boundary lines. Non-Stó:lō trail stories have helped to build a local pioneer identity at the lake and to preserve the lake as a public "nature space." Nineteenth- and twentieth-century stories emphasize the need for trails and roads to "free up" access to the lake for settlers and, later, vacationers. Both Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō stories connecting the lake to other geographies and distant peoples remind people of their spatially embedded and networked collective identities, and also reinforce claims to this place.

Stó:lō stories describe ancient trail systems that have helped maintain social networks informing The'wá:lí's collective identity in relation to *Swí:lhcha* and other, more distant Indigenous communities and places. A network of hunting and trading trails throughout the area surrounding *Swí:lhcha* has always tied The'wá:lí and *Swí:lhcha* to a larger Coast Salish world, including to Nooksack settlements south of the international border. One trail passes through what is now the backyard of former The'wá:lí chief Bruce Sam, who describes it as "a well-known route" used for "thousands of years" by travellers and traders.[57] The path runs from Seattle (Nooksack territory) northward through Soowahlie to Yale. Because of trails like this one, according to elder and former chief Larry Commodore "access would've been pretty easy between us and Sumas and

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[55] Gibson, "Movement, Power and Place," 418.
[56] Ibid., 431.
[57] Bruce Sam, interview, 29 May 2013.

us and Nooksack." For that reason, "we're all connected."[58] Commodore suggests that, because of the constant communication that takes place along this and other trails in the Stó:lō world, there is no pure The'wá:lí identity. By this account, smaller-scale local identities have never been either self-contained or restricted by artificial boundary lines drawn on Euro-Canadian maps. They are, rather, important parts of much "larger Coast Salish regional group identities."[59]

Knowledge-holders also say that this path is still travelled by the spirits of ancestors and other ancient travellers who speak what Sam refers to as "the old tongue," a version of Halq'eméylem incomprehensible to contemporary speakers.[60] Thus, trails and their stories remind The'wá:lí people that they and the *Swí:lhcha* environment remain connected through time, "wholly and unequivocally," with spiritual beings who still reside in the landscape. The'wá:lí's collective identity is connected with people and places not only through space but also over time. Trail stories point to a history of connectivity and to the story of the community's mixed origins.

Other stories about less visible routes of travel, *Swí:lhcha*'s two underwater portals or tunnels, also make and maintain connections between the lake and other places in *S'óhl Téméxw*. These special tunnels, also located in other bodies of water in Coast Salish territory, connect Northwest Coast settlements "that might otherwise seem far apart" on both sides of the 49th parallel.[61] The tunnels have been said to transport non-human sentient beings, like giant two-headed serpents (one of which resides near *Swí:lhcha*, according to some elders) from the ocean, throughout a larger Coast Salish world, but they are most known for their capacity to transport human beings. The connections they make situate *Swí:lhcha* as a focal point of social networks in the Stó:lō world. As Carlson argues, such features of *S'óhl Téméxw* are means by which Stó:lō peoples "continue to relate to, interact with, assert and exercise title to land outside of their reserves."[62]

For unaware or careless swimmers, transport through a portal might lead to death. According to elder Bob Joe, the portals in *Swí:lhcha* existed before the original basin was flooded. At that time, a small stream passed through the village:

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58 Larry Commodore, interview, 29 May 2013.
59 Thom, "Paradox of Boundaries," 188.
60 Bruce Sam, interview, 29 May 2013.
61 See Carlson, *Power of Place*, 7.
62 Keith Carlson, "Forum: Appraising Cole Harris' Making Native Space," *Native Studies Review* 16, 2 (2005): 134.

> Now this stream had an outlet in the ground and young men, they go
> to bathe or swim, they were told, "don't get too close to the mouth of
> that tunnel. You're liable to get drawn in." … "Oh yeah, man," he says,
> "that's not the first time we swim here. We're not bothered by it." Just
> a few moments and one of them got drawn in … so, a few days later a
> runner from … White Rock, "excuse me, we found one of your boys
> drifting between Point Roberts today and White Rock."[63]

Rivers in the original basin village contained dangerous tunnels, and
these tunnels marked the *Swí:lhcha* environment as spiritually powerful
even before the lake existed. Joe's story blends the physical and meta-
physical in a way characteristic of Stó:lō place-making stories, reminding
listeners of the complex relationships that define local senses of place. At
the same time, the story recalls The'wá:lí's origins. The story of the boy
who ignored wise advice to keep away from the tunnel parallels that of
the villagers who ignored the man's warning about an impending flood
before *Swí:lhcha* was formed. The story is a reminder to The'wá:lí both
of their old connection to this important place and of how they have
always been instructed to relate to it. As Rena Point-Bolton explains:
"We were always told never to swim there; the deep sea divers said they
would never, ever go down there again. And they said it was like there
was no bottom."[64] Tunnel stories spread and maintain knowledge about
the lake's power, reminding both locals and distant others why *Swí:lhcha*
is an important and dangerous place and establishing its particular con-
nection to the community of The'wá:lí. They carry local interpretations
of the lake throughout a larger geographical and social landscape.

Other stories describe portals as a source of power for the few who
know how to use them. Oral histories suggest that travel by underwater
tunnels could increase an individual's spiritual power. Thus, these
invisible travel routes were not only part of an ancient metaphysical
landscape but also routes to prestige in the Stó:lō social world. The ability
to use them set certain people apart from others. As a dangerous, but
sometimes crucial, means of transport, these tunnels transform spatial
distance and inform social distance at the same time as they help define
power relationships.[65] Stories about them indicate how Northwest Coast
peoples have constructed local identities both "in terms of intertribal
relationships" and in relation to other, sometimes distant, environments.[66]

[63] Bob Joe, interview in *Imbert Orchard Recordings and Transcripts*, 1-2.
[64] Rena Point-Bolton, interview with Dallas Posavad and Jamie Witham, Scowkale Reserve, British Columbia, 24 May 2013, SNA.
[65] Carlson, *Power of Place*, 11.
[66] Ibid., 87.

Settler trail stories have also been central to the making of pioneer identities at Cultus Lake by emphasizing its relation to other non-Indigenous settled places in Canada and the United States. As settler origin narratives suggest, early explorers and incoming settlers travelled by horseback and canoe and with the help of skilled local Indigenous guides.[67] Over time, the routes used by these guides became part of a larger non-Stó:lō network of pathways and roads. Roads throughout the Cultus Lake environment, like Gibson's Wagon Road, "had overlapping lives that became woven and interspersed in the lives of those who built, used and maintained [them]."[68] Stories about pioneer trails focused on their importance in transforming Cultus Lake from a remote "hidden gem" into a publicly accessible place and in making the lake environment "usable."[69]

One trail in particular has been storied as central to the pioneer history of this environment. In 1949, community historian P.R. Jeffcott recounted the story of two daring cattle drovers, Captains Roeder and Warbass, who herded cattle from Washington State to the Cariboo gold mines along Whatcom Trail, which had been established in 1858 and carried adventurers from the state of Washington towards the northern interior of British Columbia. He described their journey through nearly impassable wilderness lands, including along the treacherous stretch near Cultus Lake, as a "pioneer enterprise" during which the "endurance of those engaged" was tried "to the breaking point," until "some became disheartened and turned back."[70] Cultus Lake figured only briefly in the story, but, in so doing, became part of a larger environment that is remembered to have tested the bravery and perseverance of early explorers.[71] Pioneer trail making, according to these stories, became part of the process of transforming the Cultus Lake area from remote and rugged Indigenous lands into accessible settler places.

Later, Whatcom and other pioneer trails became part of a new kind of trail story. As the two Cultus Lake parks were developed between 1924 and 1948, older pioneer and Stó:lō trails were converted into new hiking and riding routes. These new trails and their stories further established the perceived remoteness of Cultus Lake. In 1927, one land surveyor suggested that recreational trails around the lake were evidence of locals' unique and respectful relationship to the land. "The people

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67 Soutar, *Cultus Lake,* 4.
68 Gibson, "Movement, Power and Place," 427.
69 Soutar, *Cultus Lake,* 6; Jeffcott, *Nooksack Tales*, 66.
70 Jeffcott, *Nooksack Tales*, 66.
71 Ibid., 187.

Figure 4. Cultus Lake from its north shore. Photograph courtesy Whitney Bajric, December 2013.

of the Chilliwack District," he wrote, "have cut a good horse trail 'free Gratis' to the mountain meadows. The trail goes up the crest of the Mountain with switchbacks, and in places where they have cut a look out a person has a beautiful view of country to the north, west and east."[72] The trails that residents had carved into the land, according to him, differed from those made by loggers, cattle drovers, and railway companies. Jeff Oliver's work suggests that colonial stories about place are not always and only at odds with Indigenous stories; rather, they are multi-layered and often at odds with one another.[73] McCullough's trail story distinguishes a certain kind of non-Indigenous lake-user from others. Rather than opening the land to resource extraction, the paths they had built led respectful visitors to admire the area's scenic beauty. They would help people appreciate the lake environment as "one of the most beautiful and accessible playgrounds on the Pacific coast," as a Cultus Lake Park Board chairman described it in 1931.[74]

In the transformation of Cultus Lake from dangerous and remote Stó:lō landmark to public recreation space, through-roads for vehicles

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[72] J.B. McCullough, Timber Inspector, to E. Walmsley, Agent of Dominion Lands, 27 July 1927, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA, 2.

[73] Oliver, "Harnessing the Land."

[74] Edwin A. Wells, Cultus Lake Park Board Chairman, to N.S. Lougheed, Minister of Lands BC, 13 July 1931, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA.

have become a source of contention in the cross-cultural history of the lake. Roads running through Soowahlie Reserve to the Cultus Lake parks have become symbols to the The'wá:lí community of colonial dispossession and power imbalances, and have been used as stages for Indigenous resistance. The two most-used roads to Cultus Lake were built with the support of colonial stories about the need to make the lake and its environment accessible. Initial requests to the Department of Indian Affairs for an allowance to build a public road through Soowahlie Reserve to accommodate increasing traffic to Cultus Lake were first made by non-Stó:lō locals in 1889.[75] A series of unilateral bureaucratic decisions to cut off reserve and traditional lands led to the construction of two through-roads on the reserve.[76] The main public access road, first named Mount Baker Trail and now called Cultus Lake Road, was built on 2.4 hectares of cutoff lands in IR 14 in 1934, with no compensation to the community except the assurance: "it is considered that this road is of sufficient benefit to the reserve to justify its transfer without compensation."[77] The road was viewed as necessary to making the land an accessible public "playground."[78]

People from Soowahlie, however, contend that road construction occurred with little to no interaction with the community itself. Referring to the lands cut off for the road, Larry Commodore says, "They took it from us. They said it was to our benefit but it was just because they needed access to Cultus Lake."[79] Referring to the effects of another road built in the original 1864 boundaries of Soowahlie, elder Pearl Commodore comments: "the land has been cut off."[80] These elders suggest that, though justified as a means for improved accessibility, park roads deliberately overlook The'wá:lí claims to land both on the reserve and in the area surrounding the lake, thus functioning to disempower and to exclude.

When the public Cultus Lake Road becomes heavily congested in the summer months, Cultus Lake vacationers often detour onto the reserve to use an alternate, private gravel road called Soowahlie Road. These drivers kick up dust and gravel and endanger pedestrians as they

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[75] A.W. Vowell, Indian Superintendent, BC, to P. McTiernan, Indian Agent, New Westminster District, 15 March 1889, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA.

[76] Soowahlie Band: List of Land Transactions Documents on file at the Soowahlie Stó:lō Tribal Council Office, 4 August 1988, 2-3, Soowahlie Band Council Office Records.

[77] Canada, Department of Indian Affairs Surveys, P.C. 2932, 19 November 1934.

[78] Wells to Lougheed, 13 July 1931.

[79] Larry Commodore interview with author, 28 May 2013.

[80] Pearl Commodore, The'wá:lí elders' meeting with author, Soowahlie Reserve, 28 May 2013, SNA.

drive through a residential area at unsafe speeds. The community has responded to trespassing by threatening roadblocks, charging tolls, and installing a locked gate at the south entrance of Soowahlie Road during the summer. In August 2014, the *Chilliwack Progress* quoted one angry road user who said, "I kept thinking to myself 'how can they charge us to use a road? They use *our* roads!'"[81] For some local settlers, roads and trails are a necessary part of making desirable places like Cultus Lake more accessible, and The'wá:lí's contestations of roads through their territory are considered unfounded. The angry "us-and-them" language of this newspaper article is part of a larger colonial narrative that labels places like the Cultus Lake environment as non-Indigenous places and that positions local Indigenous peoples as obstructions – roadblocks – to public accessibility. Yet these disputed roads also serve as political stages upon which the The'wá:lí community has challenged dominant stories in order to reiterate its own claims to the *Swí:lhcha* environment.

Trails and roads throughout the Cultus Lake environment, then, are far from unproblematic "static geographic entit[ies]."[82] Justified and defined through story, roads are laden with power. Both Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō trail and tunnel stories situate *Swí:lhcha*, or Cultus Lake, as a centrepiece of spatially embedded and connected identities. They also define belonging and ownership and highlight how communication routes and their stories can be a useful lens onto the "study of interaction in tensioned landscapes."[83] Trails, tunnels, and roads reflect changing relationships to the *Swí:lhcha* environment – and the shifting and uneven power relationships and conflicts that have preceded and resulted from them.

KEEP-OUT STORIES: *STL'ÁLEQEM*, WILDERNESS, AND BOUNDARY MAKING

What I call keep-out stories are told to exclude certain others from the contested environment of *Swí:lhcha*. Stó:lō stories about *stl'áleqem* imbue the lake with danger and mystery, a sort of taboo to fend off particular behaviours and people. By contrast, non-Stó:lō settlers have consistently described *Swí:lhcha* as a place of stunning beauty, a natural paradise, and a hidden gem in need of protection from excessive development. Exclusions from *Swí:lhcha*, expressed and justified through Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō keep-out stories, have reified local claims to the lake and, in

[81] "Opinion: Some Visitors to Cultus Feel Entitled to Trespass," *Chilliwack Times,* 6 August 2014.

[82] Turkel, *Archive of Place*, 93.

[83] Gibson, "Movement, Power and Place," 431.

so doing, have defined *Swí:lhcha*'s value and dictated who could make use of it. With the intent of "keeping out" other claims to this place, these stories have been important for defining who can justifiably call it theirs.

Oral histories about a dangerous creature called *stl'áleqem* express *Swí:lhcha*'s unapproachability and the lake's importance in the larger metaphysical landscape of *S'óhl Téméxw*. Stó:lō knowledge-keepers explain that these mysterious creatures lurk in the depths of *Swí:lhcha*, taking various physical forms (including an underwater bear and a giant maggot) and sometimes killing swimmers. Turn-of-the-century ethnographer Charles Hill-Tout made the earliest written reference to *stl'áleqem* in *Swí:lhcha*, recounting the story of the "shocking fate" of a young man who entered the waters with the wrong intentions and was "devoured piecemeal by the fish of the lake." "No one thereafter," he wrote, "sought to pay a second visit to the slalakums."[84] *Stl'áleqem*, according to this story, limited access to the lake's legendary spiritual power. Most oral histories suggest that only certain well-respected male leaders called *shxwla:m* ("medicine men") could travel to *Swí:lhcha* to gather spirit power. Younger men who went to test their own spiritual strength without the appropriate mindset or preparation suffered severe consequences, even death. In 1950, The'wá:lí elder Gus Commodore explained *Swí:lhcha*'s two-sided power:

> They wanted to see if they could conquer the lake. If someone could, he would become a pretty good medicine man. A lot of them tried it. They'd let him down on a rope, and wait for a signal on the rope to pull him up … they'd wait and wait, and there wouldn't be a signal. When they'd pull the rope up there'd be nothing but a skeleton.[85]

These stories suggest that *stl'áleqem* respond to particular human behaviours, indicating that Stó:lō social behaviour is defined in terms of balanced and respectful relationships with an often uncontrollable environment. In this way, such stories limit access. *Swí:lhcha* has always been a spiritually powerful place and, as such, access is not allowed to everyone.

Stó:lō elder Rena Point-Bolton's story about *stl'áleqem* mirrors Hill-Tout's and Gus Commodore's. Some time in the 1940s or 1950s, she remembers, two non-Indigenous soldiers from the former Canadian Forces Base (CFB) in Chilliwack went out on the lake, and their boat capsized.

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[84] Charles Hill-Tout, *The Salish People: Upriver Halkomelem* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), 3 and 57.

[85] Gus Commodore, "Gus Commodore Interview with Norman Lerman," in *Lower Fraser Indian Folktales Collected by Norman Lerman, 1950–1951*, transcript, SNA, 226.

"When the divers went in and found them," Point-Bolton says, "there was just bones left, and it was just a couple of days they'd been down." According to this story, the soldiers' drowned bodies were "totally eaten up." For Point-Bolton, this was both "strange" and recent evidence of the existence of *stl'áleqem* in *Swí:lhcha*.[86] These stories also suggest, though, that approaching the lake without attending to its stories and power can have deadly consequences for Stó:lō and non-Stó:lō people alike. Julie Cruikshank discusses what she calls the "social life of stories," her way of referring to the dynamism and flexibility of orality.[87] Oral stories, she writes, adapt in response to historical change, perpetuating cultural ties to places while also making sense of historical processes of change and loss. Local Indigenous peoples have reframed and adapted existing stories about *Swí:lhcha* to incorporate, interpret, and rationalize change within existing narrative structures. Point-Bolton's story is strikingly symmetrical to other *stl'áleqem* stories, but, in her version, the victims were not Stó:lō people: they were settlers, living on lands that were at one time part of the original 1864 Soowahlie reserve lands and were appropriated for the CFB. These men were still subject to *Swí:lhcha*'s dangers and rules, equally subject to Stó:lō forms of boundary making, despite a history of dispossessions and the seemingly dominant discourses storying the lake as non-Stó:lō space at the time. The story maintains the lake's distinctly Stó:lō character in the collective consciousness of The'wá:lí locals.

Narratives framing Cultus Lake as part of a "wilderness" in need of protection are a non-Stó:lō version of keep-out stories. Twentieth-century municipal and provincial park boundaries around the lake have operated in ways comparable to *stl'áleqem*, lending the environment a different sort of taboo or off-limits status. As part of a popular rural recreation space, Cultus Lake has been described as "one of the most beautiful and accessible playgrounds on the Pacific coast" and, at the same time, as a "natural gem" in need of protection from development.[88] Emphasizing the lake's natural beauty, and its centrality to a growing local tourism and recreation economy, wilderness stories undergirded settler boundary making to keep out particular people and behaviours and, in so doing, to protect the lake environment from spreading urbanism and resource extraction.[89] These stories preceded and justified the designation of almost 3,020 hectares of municipal and provincial parkland at Cultus

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[86] Point-Bolton, interview.
[87] See Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998) and Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*
[88] Wells to Lougheed, 13 July 1931.
[89] BC Ministry of Lands, Parks, and Housing, *Cultus Lake Provincial Park Master Plan*, 3.

Lake, with boundaries set and extended in 1924, 1932, and 1948. Such boundaries continue to define acceptable human relationships with the lake, explicitly excluding resource and commercial development and implicitly dispossessing Stó:lō people and their stories.[90]

Claims for environmental protection in this area early in the twentieth century set it apart as a sacred, but endangered, place. In 1924, a newly formed park board jointly administered by the Chilliwack township and city purchased twenty-six hectares of land at Cultus Lake for $6,000.[91] While the park thrived through the 1920s, the board was unable to protect other lands since exclusive rights to much of the area around the lake had already been granted to Westminster Mills Limited and the Vedder Logging Company. Seeking to differentiate their claim from that of resource extractors and to protect the environment from encroaching urbanization or further development, park proponents needed an argument powerful enough to trump economic development. They found it by storying the lake as an important wilderness. One inspector of lands said that, because the area was comprised of "considerable timber, fir, cedar, hemlock and balsam," it was especially susceptible to infiltration by private enterprise.[92] He called the land "a natural park of scenic beauty" that must be preserved "so that at some future time a private individual could not secure it and commercialize [it]."[93]

Indeed, the Crown had agreed to consider Chilliwack's request to transform the area into a park once lands monopolized by logging companies were no longer used for timber. When, in 1927, it became apparent that the owner of Westminster Mills Ltd. was planning to subdivide a former mill site at the lake to build residences, park proponents demanded that authorities carry out this promise.[94] Again, they stressed that the lake must be "preserved for the use of the public and administered solely by a public body and not be allowed to pass into the hands of private interests."[95] For some time, the commissioner of Dominion lands prevaricated over whether "the public interest would be best served in making these resources available for development or [in tying] them up

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[90] Julie Cruikshank discusses the colonial underpinnings of wilderness stories, and the dispossessions that are often the result of telling them, in *Do Glaciers Listen?* See also Jon Clapperton, "Desolate Viewscapes: Sliammon First Nation, Desolation Sound Marine Park and Environmental Narratives," *Environment and History* 18 (2012): 529-59 and William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *The Environmental Historian* 1, 1 (Jan. 1996): 7-28.

[91] Soutar, *Cultus Lake,* 34.

[92] McCullough to Walmsley, 27 July 1927, 1.

[93] Ibid., 2.

[94] Ibid.
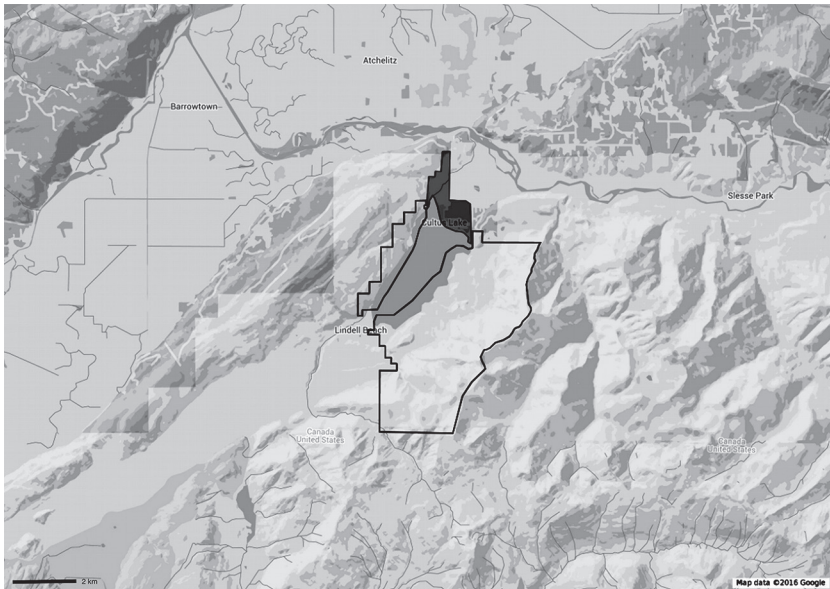
[95] Wells to Lougheed, 13 July 1931.

Figure 5. Approximate boundaries of the 1932 Cultus Lake Park (the shaded polygon north of the lake) and Cultus Lake Provincial Park (on the east and west sides of the lake).

for the recreation and enjoyment of the public."[96] Ultimately, however, wilderness stories won the day. In 1932, the board acquired 265 hectares of land, and the new Cultus Lake Park Act granted it substantial power to fend off unwanted claims to the scenic landscape. A further 1939 amendment to the act stipulated: "no person or persons shall within the park follow, practice, carry on or exercise any trade, occupation, profession, business or calling without written permission of the Board."[97] In 1948, a provincial park, encompassing another 655 hectares of land at Cultus Lake, was established to further protect "one of the few meccas in the province" from unwanted development.[98] Today, the Provincial Park covers 2,729 hectares of terrain around Cultus Lake. Provincial park officials in the 1940s and ʻ50s positioned the lake as an important but endangered place in need of special legislated protection. Intending to set the land aside for vacationers, nature lovers, and cottagers, they excluded private developers, who were considered the primary adversaries of park protection.

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[96] J. Martin, Commissioner of Dominion Lands, to E.H. Barton, Secretary of Chilliwack Board of Trade, 15 January 1931, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA.

[97] Chilliwack, British Columbia, *An Act Respecting Cultus Lake Park*, assented to 13 April 1932, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA; Chilliwack, British Columbia, *An Act to Amend the Cultus Lake Park Act*, assented to 1939, Cultus Lake Park Development Collection, correspondence, SNA.

[98] BC Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing, *Cultus Lake Provincial Park Master Plan*, 9.

Wilderness stories have also excluded pre-existing Indigenous claims to *Swí:lhcha* and led to conflict between lake visitors and the community of The'wá:lí. Wilderness stories could only begin to take shape after the 1868-79 Soowahlie Reserve cutoffs, which separated The'wá:lí from its access to the lake and set land aside for settlements. They are predicated on dispossession. Conflicts over through-roads to the park, as well as the restorying of the name "Cultus" to justify colonial changes and park boundaries, suggest that wilderness stories have been part of the process of excluding Indigenous peoples from decision making. Keep-out stories undergirding park formation have not only defined inappropriate non-Stó:lō activity in the Cultus Lake area, they have also often kept out pre-existing claims to the lake, disempowering Soowahlie residents and exacerbating The'wá:lí/settler tensions.

Keep-out stories – their telling and their applications on the land – are powerful. In the *Swí:lhcha* environment, they have defined and justified particular relationships to the lake and surrounding lands by making exclusions. On the surface, the tone and purpose of Stó:lō stories appear totally contradictory to the primarily non-Stó:lō language describing Cultus as a "natural paradise." Yet both kinds of stories can be understood as a means of boundary making. Just as *stl'áleqem* stories define *Swí:lhcha* as taboo, claiming it as a powerful and dangerous place accessible only to some, settler wilderness stories helped establish limits on the use of parklands and lake waters. These stories and the particular historical moments of their telling have been crucial to social boundary making. Aiming to keep others out, wilderness stories have expressed who is allowed in and, thus, have justified the physical expressions (like park lines or cutoffs) of relations of power in this place.

STORIES AND BELONGING

"The landscape and waterscape" of the Fraser Valley, Laura Cameron writes, are "full of … stories," and these stories are essential to defining the people who tell them.[99] In 1979, Edward Said observed: "when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative."[100] The stories explored here mark the importance of a particular physical environment to its various inhabitants and reveal

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[99] Cameron, *Openings,* 76.
[100] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: First Vantage Books, 1994), xii-xiii.

the ways its meanings have been contested. Through storying, people have made claims, explicit or implicit, to *Swí:lhcha*; built local identities; fostered community connections; and defined and reified hierarchies of power. *Swí:lhcha*'s stories have always been about situating people within a diversely valued environment and in relation to the others with whom the environment is shared. Indeed, conflicted ideas about what makes the *Swí:lhcha*, or Cultus Lake, environment home have undergirded and reflected power imbalances, while its many stories have often excluded people with competing claims.

The place-making stories of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this environment have developed and shifted within a history of dynamic and often conflicted interactions, so that no one kind of story can be understood in isolation from another. Colonial place-making stories justifying Indigenous dispossessions cannot be understood except in terms of their relationships to coexisting, often competing, Stó:lō stories. Similarly, local Indigenous stories must be understood on the "continuum of change" that has always been part of Stó:lō historical epistemologies, where "transformations are not only accepted, but are essential to [Coast Salish people's] understanding of how the world came into being and how it will unfold in the future."[101] Stories about the *Swí:lhcha* environment have been central to building local identities and claiming place, but they have also always been part of a history of diverse, competing claims to space and shifting interactions among peoples.

The 1896 photograph of Stó:lō students standing in the lake's forbidden waters may depict one such interaction. It also reflects the power imbalances that make the Cultus Lake environment what Chamberlin might call a bewildering place, a "nest of contradictions."[102] Perhaps schoolteachers' interpretations of the lake were expressed from a position of power, while Stó:lō students may have only silently remembered other stories told by their relatives. The interactions may have been, and likely were, more dynamic than my speculations have allowed. Were the teachers wholly dismissive of Stó:lō stories about *Swí:lhcha*? To what extent had the students absorbed stories about Cultus Lake as a playground? In such complicated and uncertain encounters of storytelling at *Swí:lhcha*, people have constructed their identities in relation to the environment and to other people. If, as Chamberlin suggests, storytelling about places is integral to people's understandings of self and other, then thinking about competing stories in one local place like *Swí:lhcha* may help us to better make sense of settler and Indigenous relationships to, and in, contested places in general.

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[101] Carlson, "Introduction," in *A Stó:lō–Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, 1.
[102] Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land*, 3.