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Note: Based on a personal conversation with Loraine Littlefield on the description of the boat trip made with the Snunéymux[w] Elder to Gabriola to make these identifications, it is possible that *qwunus* may be the rock off the east side of Grassy Islet between Mudge Island and Link Island (http://www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp523.pdf p.4). This however is speculation only.

Coast Salish placenames on Gabriola

by Dr. Loraine Littlefield

Looking at a map of Gabriola Island and its surroundings, one cannot help noticing how many of its placenames reflect its history over the past two hundred years or so—the placenames are the names of pioneers, politicians, ships, and naval officers, or they are the choice of real-estate developers. This is the case for all of British Columbia. For the most part, placenames reflect post-contact history. Yet before this time, places had names that had been used for thousands of years by the people who lived here. So it is for Gabriola Island. The Snunéymux^w who fished, hunted, gathered, lived, and died on the island had names for all the places they used. Passed on from generation to generation, these names are part of their oral tradition, and reflect their history and knowledge of the land. Sadly, due to depopulation, alienation from the land, and more recently loss of their language, the use of these placenames is disappearing.
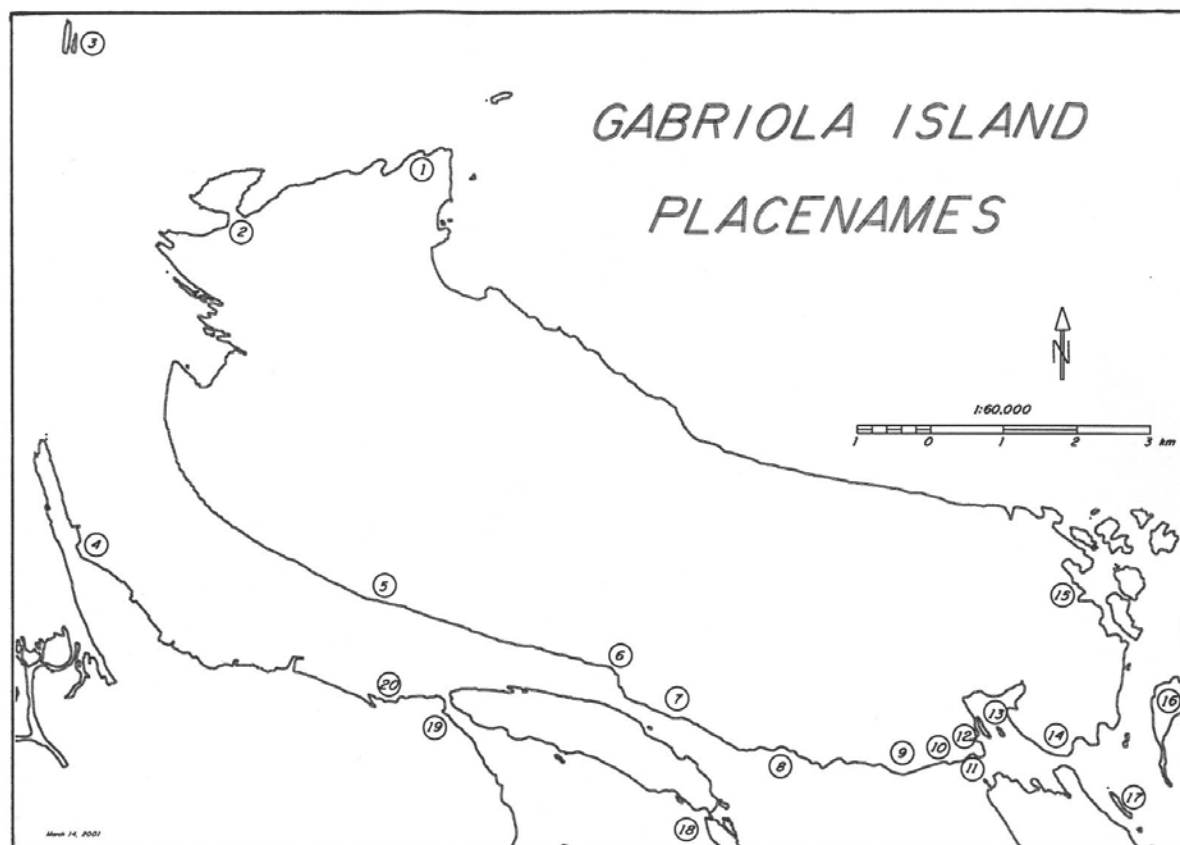
The placenames listed below were collected from Snunéymux^w Elders over the last decade.[1] Some of the meanings of the names have been lost, either because they are related to a story long since forgotten, or because the names are so old that the word is no longer used in the present language. Many of the names are related to resources found at that site and important in the economic life of the Snunéymux^w. Others describe geographic features that are significant to the area. Still other names are

linked to mythical times and events often told in legends. Many of these legends are about the deeds of Haals (*xexa:ls*), known as the transformer, who travelled over the land and transformed it to the way it is today. Two placenames included here also refer to places that should be avoided as they could harm certain individuals.

This collection of placenames represents only a small fraction of those that must have once been used. Even the names of villages shown on Spanish charts have now been lost. Midden, petroglyph, and burial sites are scattered throughout the island, not just confined to the coast. Many of the inland midden sites are small and may have been occupied for a short time, but at least one large and deep inland midden is known suggesting a substantial village site. Not only have the names of these places been lost, but also many sites themselves have now been destroyed. Both the Elders and the BC Archaeology Branch are nervous of revealing the exact location of some of these sites because they have been treated so disrespectfully in the recent past.

One, perhaps surprising, omission is a name for the whole of Gabriola Island. But then, one must remember that the Coast Salish went everywhere by canoe; the fact that this place, or that place was an island was not nearly so significant as it is today. That the sea was a highway is also revealed in the close relationship, including a shared language, between the people who live along the shores of southeast Vancouver Island and those that live along the Fraser River up to the lower end of the canyon.

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[1] The following Elders particularly: Late Tommy Anderson, Late Tom Jones, Bill Seward, Ethel Brown, Ellen Rice, and George Wyse. These Elders all remember spending significant time as children fishing and harvesting clams with their parents on Gabriola Island.

GABRIOLA ISLAND PLACENAMES

One notable exception to the lack of local aboriginal placenames is of course Nanaimo, the anglicized version of Snunéymux^w. This name is now among those whose origin and exact meaning have now been lost.

1. *xuwtluqs*

    Orlebar Point (Berry Point) across from Entrance Island

Sounds like *howt luks*. The word refers to a name of a person. This is a site of a fishing camp used in the early spring months to August. According to Snunéymux^w legend, Haals, turned a greedy man into stone with his head protruding out of a rock. Today, this rock has great power for it has the ability to change the wind if the right words are spoken. If the wrong words are spoken, or loud noises are made close to it, the weather will change to gale-force winds. Elders say that when they stayed at this site they spread mats and blankets over the stone man so that he would not hear them.

2. *x^{w}cumi:lucun*

    Twin Beaches

Sounds like *wh tsumiiletsen* (the colon indicates that the preceding vowel is held longer than usual). The word means, "close together", which pertains to the two beaches. This site was also a fishing camp in the early spring to late August where Snunéymux^w people caught spring salmon and bluebacks (coho). One Elder remembers a story about seven-foot giants who lived here and are buried close by.

xuwtluqs in his stone prison on Berry Point

Although probably unrelated, it is interesting that the name the Spanish chose for Nanaimo harbour in 1791 was a similar sounding *Winthuysen*.[2]

3. *x^w'ulhquyum*

    Snake Island

Sounds like *wh el kiyem* (the ' indicates a glottal stop, as in the casual English "mi'en" for "mitten"). The word means, "snake place". This site is linked to a legend about a young girl from Departure Bay who disobeys an important food taboo and eats too many ferns. She becomes pregnant and is put on the island where she gives birth to snakes. Her parents then rescue her leaving the snakes behind. There are many variations of this story, which is widely known and told by

Hul'qumi'num Elders as far away as Hope. These snakes, Elders say, are still there but you may not see them until you step on the beach when they will suddenly appear underneath your feet. The Snunéymux^w have a strong aversion to snakes and were told to never eat fish caught too close to this island for fear that they had been feeding on the snakes.

4. *sk^{w}ulec*

    narrow opening at the southern part of Jack Point peninsula

Sounds like *skwa lats*. The word means, "canoe pass". The Snunéymux^w used this pass to travel from the Nanaimo estuary to False Narrows as it was usually very windy and difficult to paddle around Jack Point. In the 1890s, the provincial government made a permanent portage, which was destroyed when Duke Point was developed in the 1980s. The Snunéymux^w have a legend that Jack Point peninsula

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[2] The Dutch (Flemish) name of a lieutenant-general, Francisco Javier de Winthuysen, who was in the Spanish naval service at the time.

was created by Spaals (Raven) so that women would have a long way to walk. Raven, according to Coast Salish mythology, is always nosy and tries to listen to what women say. That is why women are cautioned to whisper if they do not want Raven to hear what they say.

5. *x^{w}thiqun*

    high bluff near Hoggan Lake

Sounds like *wh thiken*. The word means, "loud voice place". People used to sing at this place and their voices were heard all the way to Nanaimo.

6. *šqule'lhelu*

    close to the brickyard at False Narrows

Sounds like *shkwle lelu* (š is an English "sh"). The word means, "container". This is the site of a rock facing north just before the brickyard. The rock is linked to a ritual to protect the health of newborn children. The Snunéymux^w believe that the first days of a child's life are very dangerous ones and many rituals have to be followed by both parents to assure the child's longevity.

7. *tle:ltx^w*

    False Narrows

Sounds like *tla alt*. The word means, "rich place" or "expensive dwellings". This site is the site of a winter village and large clam bed. Burial sites are extensive throughout this area. An important creation story is linked to this site. It is the story of Mink, the trickster, who lived here with his grandmother. At that time, people had no fire, so Mink, on the advice of his grandmother, sought out the Chief who kept guard over fire. By kidnapping his child and deceiving him into believing that many people lived at *tle:ltx^w*, Mink was

able to convince the Chief to give him his fire drill. From this time forward, the Snunéymux^w have had the ability to make fire.

8. *tlutsa*

    big round rock past *tle:ltx^w*

Sounds like *tlut sa*. The word means, "rock". This is the site of a large round rock that stands on the shore. A Snunéymux^w legend tells of giants throwing large round rocks at each other. One rock landed on Gabriola Island and the other just south of Campbell River. This site was the preferred site for steaming clams harvested at False Narrows.

9. *x^{w}k^{w}umlux^{w}uthum*

    Thompson Point

Sounds like *wh kwumlo whuthom*. The word means, "little roots". Roots, particularly camas roots, were an important food resource for the Snunéymux^w.

10. *qwunus*

    a rock west of Indian Point

Sounds like *kwun us*. The word means, "whale". This is a rock in the shape of a whale with its mouth open.

At one time there were many whales, especially humpbacks, in the Strait of Georgia. Commercial whaling in the strait started in the 1860s. In 1907, a whaling station was established at Page's Lagoon, Nanaimo, and a few months later, after killing 97 whales, they were all gone. Humpbacks were not seen again in the strait until 1976. Snunéymux^w people off the outer coast of Gabriola Island may have hunted whales, though the more usual large-mammal quarry was a sea lion.

Thro' the mist—houses on Indian Point in the 1930s

11. *thithmul*

   small bay facing out just before you get
   to Indian Point

Sounds like *thith mul*. The word means,
"icy place". Elders say that this bay is the
last place ice melts on the island in the
spring.

12. *thithwutqson*

   Indian Point, IR #5

Sounds like *thith wutsen*. The word
means, "fine gravel point". This is a
physical description of the beach at Indian
Point.

   $x^w qi'thulp$

   Indian Point, IR #5

Sounds like *wh ki thulp*. This is another
name for *thithwutqson* meaning "ironwood
place". Ironwood or oceanspray is a very
hard wood that was used to make digging
sticks for harvesting roots.

13. *male'q^we'*

   Indian Burial Island, IR #6

Sounds like *moula kwa*. The meaning is
"burial site". The Snunéymux^w burial
custom at contact time was to place human
remains in a box or canoe, above ground,
often on islands close to their village sites.

14. *sqac'su*

   Gabriola Pass

Sounds like *skat sa*. The meaning of this
word is "pass". A Snunéymux^w legend
tells of a monster that causes turbulent

water. In order to travel safely through the pass, children were cautioned not to speak or they would offend the monster who would then tip them over. This pass was often the start of the long voyage across the strait to the Snunéymux^w summer village on the Fraser River.

15. *kalaich'menup*

Silva Bay

Sounds like *kalach menup*. This is a Chinook word for the site of a wharf in Silva Bay where the Snunéymux^w tied up their canoes. The literal meaning of the word is "Indian woman (tie) up". One Elder remembers that when he stayed at Indian Point, they rowed over to the head of Degnen Bay and then walked along a trail to Page's store on Silva Bay. He maintained it was much quicker to walk this trail than to row around Gabriola Pass.

16. *x^{w}iyuw'sum*

Breakwater Island.

Sounds like *whiyow sem*. The meaning of this word is "great person". This site, like many others on the Flat Top Islands, was a fishing camp used during the summer months. An important fish in these deep waters was rockfish. This was also a good place to gather seaweed. The Snunéymux^w participated in the commercial harvesting of seaweed after the 1880s when there was a large demand for this food item by the Chinese community in Nanaimo.

17. *k^{w}un'ic*

Kendrick Island facing Dogfish Bay

Sounds like *kwun ik*. The meaning is unknown. This was a camping place used during the summer months. One Elder remembers his family had a longhouse built on this island facing a spring located

across the bay on Valdes Island. He also remembered that dogfish were plentiful in this bay.

18. *thu'netec*

gap in Link Island

Sounds like *the netses*. The meaning is "gap". This gap was a favourite place to set up deer traps. Hunters would start at one end of the island and herd deer into the traps placed along the beach.

19. *snuwulnuc*

Dodd Narrows

Sounds like *snawelnets*. The word means, "sheltered bay." This site was an important fishing campsite that was used during the summer months. An important resource here aside from fish was horse clams. Elders maintain that there are special volcanic rocks found on the beach that do not crack when used in the fire pits steaming clams.

"snuwulnuc" is the origin of the name "Senéwelets" incorrectly given in a Royal BC Museum memoir to the village at False Narrows.

20. *shxuxeyelu*

reef at the rapids at Dodd Narrows.

Sounds like *shehayellu*. The meaning of this word is "cry baby reef". This site was an important fishing site for salmon. It was taboo for men whose wives were pregnant to fish here, otherwise their child would cry.

There is a possible link here with the story of Mink at *tle:ltx^w* who pinched the kidnapped child to make it cry every time he passed a village. This enabled the Chief who owned fire to follow him to *tle:ltx^w*. ◊