



Heritage Branch

BC Geographical Names Office

Heritage Branch, Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, and Sport

Genevieve Weber, Manager of Programs and Services

Geographical Names Day: November 13, 2023

Introductions

British Columbia
Geographical Names Office
(BCGNO)
Heritage Branch
Ministry of Tourism, Arts,
Culture and Sport

Trent Thomas,
Provincial Toponymist

Avalon Suriano, Project
Coordinator, Toponymy

Toponymy – the study of
toponyms (place names)



Introduction

"A place name is a reminder of history, indelibly stamped on the land. To enquire about a name is to reawaken memories of the history that produced it, and to write about it is to retell some of that history."

-Wilson Duff, RBCM Curator 1950-1965

BC Archives I-15350
Log Bridge, Naikoon Provincial Park
Queen Charlotte Islands



21988

BC Geographical Names Office

- ▶ Provincial naming authority:
 - ▶ Natural features (rivers, lakes, mountains, etc.) and unincorporated communities
 - ▶ Administrative boundaries through legislation, and structures (roads, highways, dams, etc) by owner or municipality
- ▶ The Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (TACS) is responsible for naming geographical features in BC, under the Land Act. The Minister delegates this responsibility to the BC Geographical Names Office (BCGNO) within the Heritage Branch.
- ▶ In accordance with the Geographical Naming Policy and Procedures
- ▶ BCGNIS holds all official names – just over 41K

BC Archives I-21985
Waterfall in Cameron Park



Place Names and Society



- ▶ Fundamental for everyday life
- ▶ Used as reference for navigation
- ▶ Over 40,000 official names in British Columbia
- ▶ Majority of names have an origin story with varying degree of significance to the land and its people, usually depending on the naming process

BC Archives I-05015

The importance of place names

Everyday life and identity



Navigation and emergency response



Reflects heritage values and tells a story



History of naming practices in BC



Historically, many names were applied to features with minimal consultation or consideration for the interests, values, or history of British Columbians.

- ▶ Very little respect for Indigenous perspective or traditions
- ▶ Many features took their name from nearby, prominent features
- ▶ British Columbia has a long history of Indigenous and commemorative names

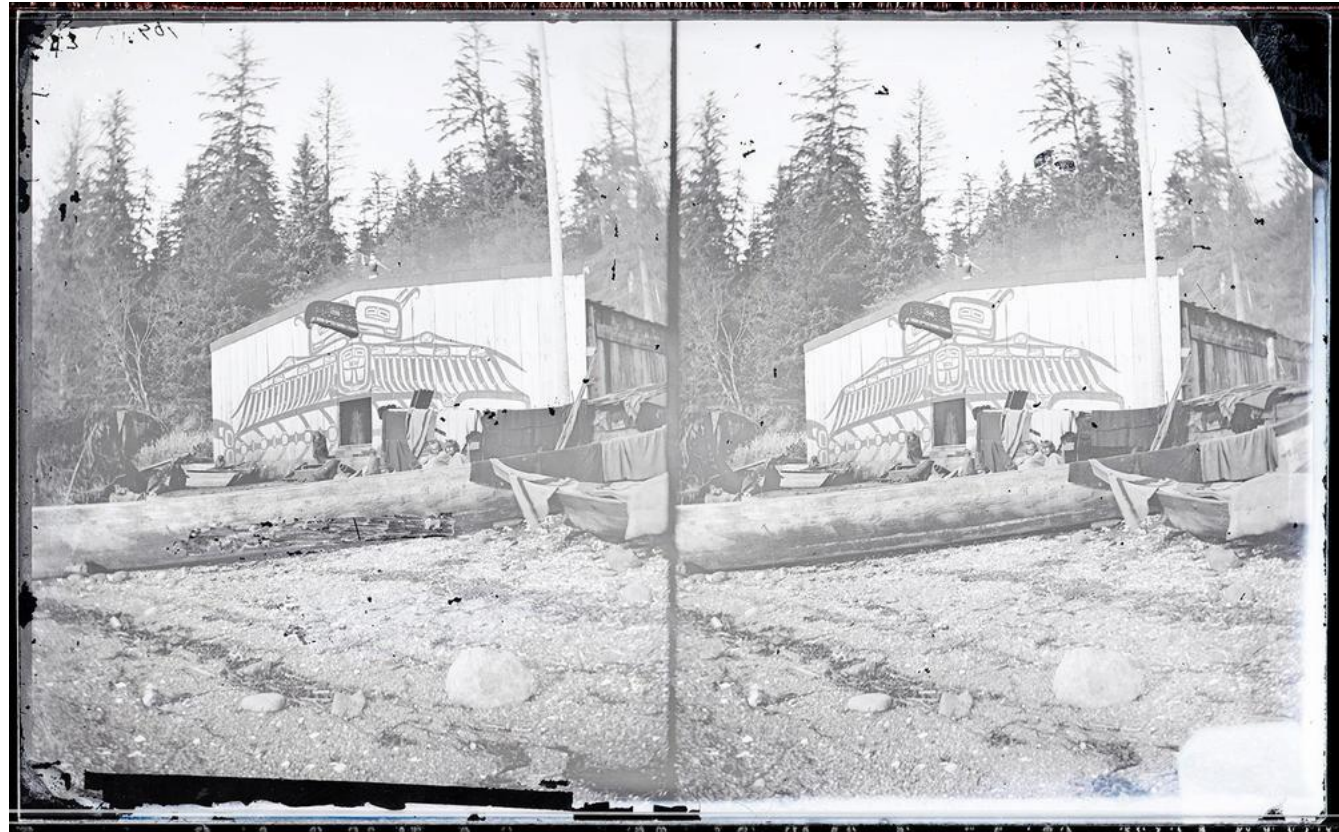
BC Archives C-07563 -
Glacier Lake, Stikine River

BC Geographical Names Office

- ▶ *“Place names ...embody a sense of belonging to a place, coexistence with the natural world, and the longstanding relationship between a people and their place – they anchor the past to the present.”*

- Bob Joseph, Gwawa'enuxw Nation,
President & Founder of Indigenous
Corporate Training Inc.

BC Archives J-04194
Alert Bay (Yalis)



History of Naming Practices in BC

Early Indigenous Naming

- Translation and/or origin often not recorded or inaccurate
- Arbitrary words from Indigenous dictionaries (created by early colonizers) applied to features as surveyors seemed fit – didn't have much significance to local Indigenous communities
- Anglicized Indigenous names - often were interpreted poorly and applied to a feature which the name was never intended for

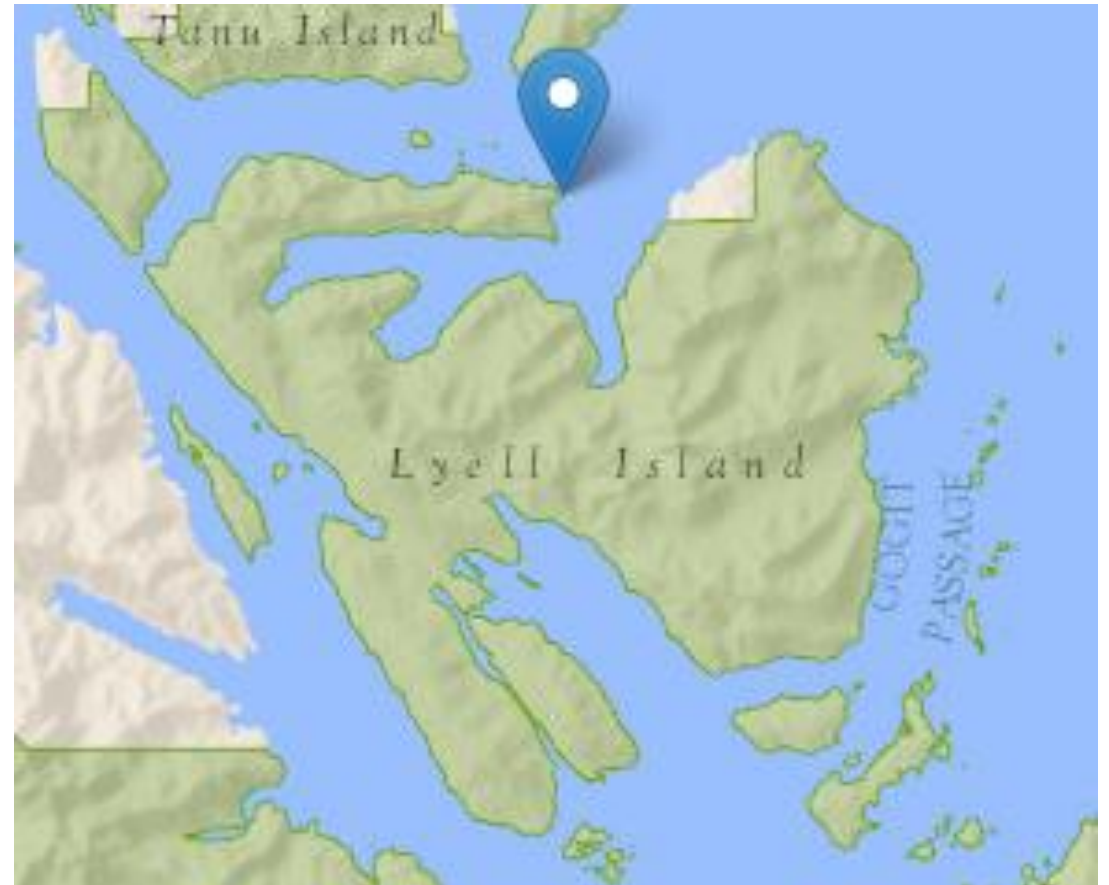
Early Indigenous Naming

Tsinga Point, located on Lyell Island,

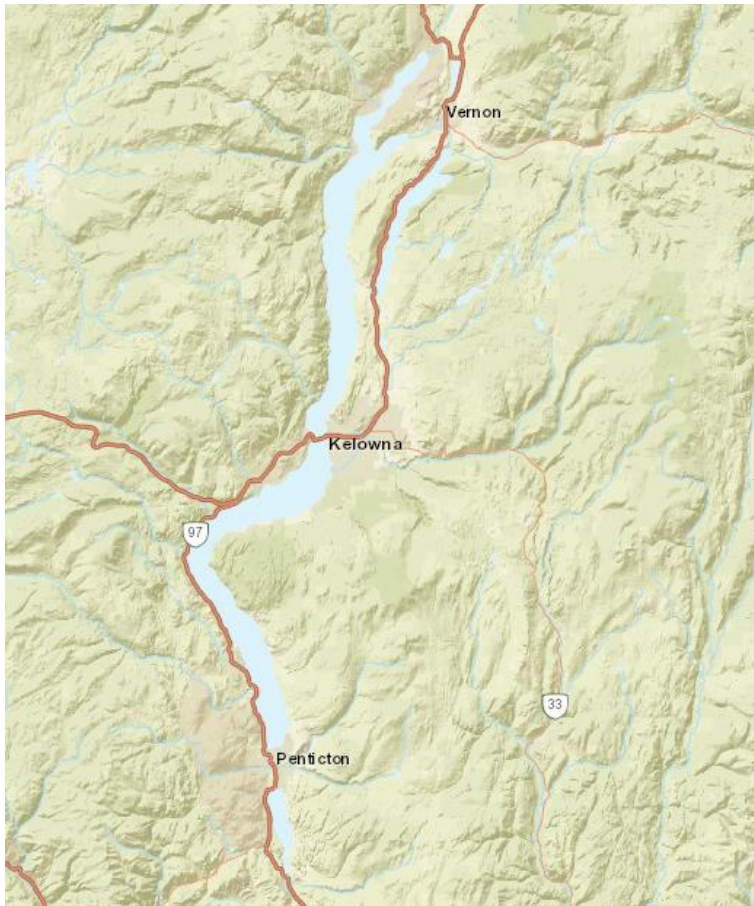
Haida Gwaii

Adopted: August 1, 1957

Origin: Named by the Hydrographic Service in 1957 for its tooth-like shape on the chart. Tsinga is an adaptation of the Haida word for tooth, taken from the vocabulary list in George Mercer Dawson's 1880 monograph "On the Haida Indians of the QCI."



Early Indigenous Naming

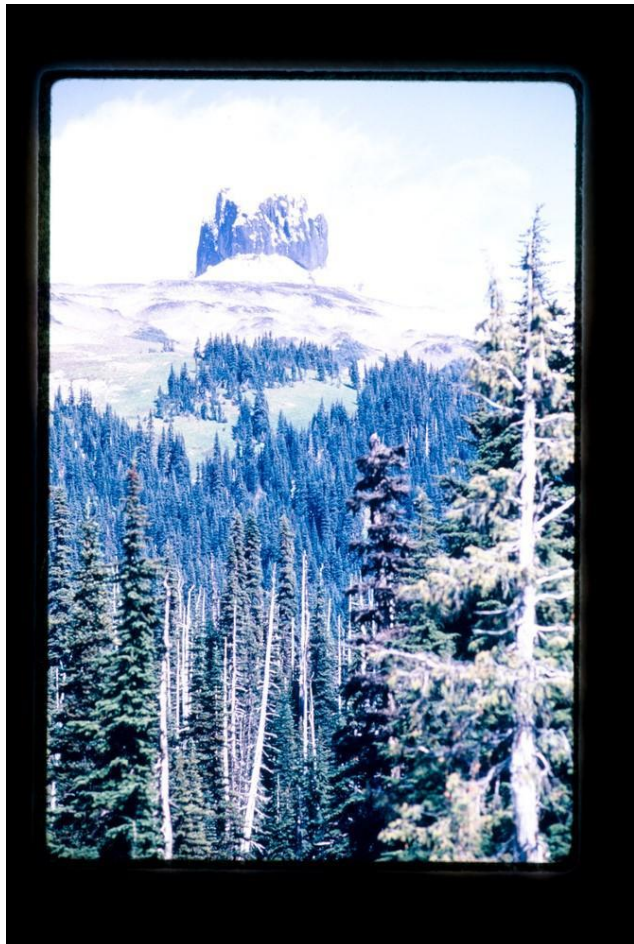


Kelowna

Adopted: May 4, 1905

Origin: Augustus Gillard, one of the first European settlers in the area, who was described as “a husky, hairy Frenchman” that lived in a “primitive hut,” was nicknamed Kimach touche (kemxtús, nsyilxcen for brown bear) by the local Indigenous peoples - later the name was applied to the area. When the area was being incorporated as a city, it was decided that “Kimache Touche” sounded too harsh, and they decided to change the name to “Kelowna” based on kiláwna?, nsyilxcen for grizzly bear instead of brown bear.

Commemorative Names



Early Commemorative Names

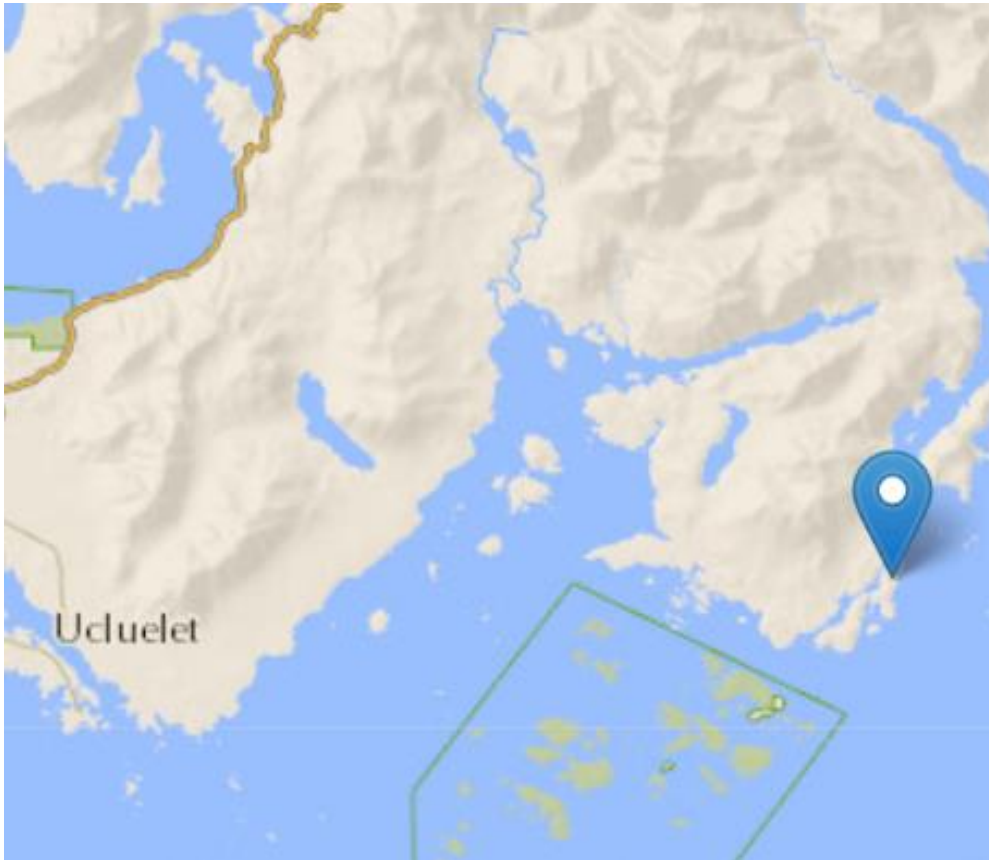
- ▶ Names used to recognize/celebrate an individual, place, or thing
- ▶ Many features were named for people or things that were very important to a decision maker - people they admired (Mount Garibaldi), family members (Moresby Island), ships (Queen Charlotte Islands), places from their home country (Newcastle Island)
- ▶ After World War II, it was a very common practice to commemorate war casualties

BC Archives I-15889
Black Tusk, Whistler-Garibaldi

Commemorative Names

- ▶ Now, commemorative names are only considered if:
 - ▶ they have wide spread community support
 - ▶ are for individuals who have significant contributions to B.C.
 - ▶ acceptable to the public beyond a single or special interest group
- ▶ Much less common than in the past

Commemorative Names



▶ Alma Russell islands

- ▶ NW side of Imperial Eagle Channel, Barkley Sound, Barclay Land District are for individuals who have significant contributions to B.C.
- ▶ After Alma Russell, assistant librarian and archivist of the Provincial Government, and president of the British Columbia Historical Association, circa 1933. Russell died 6 February 1964.

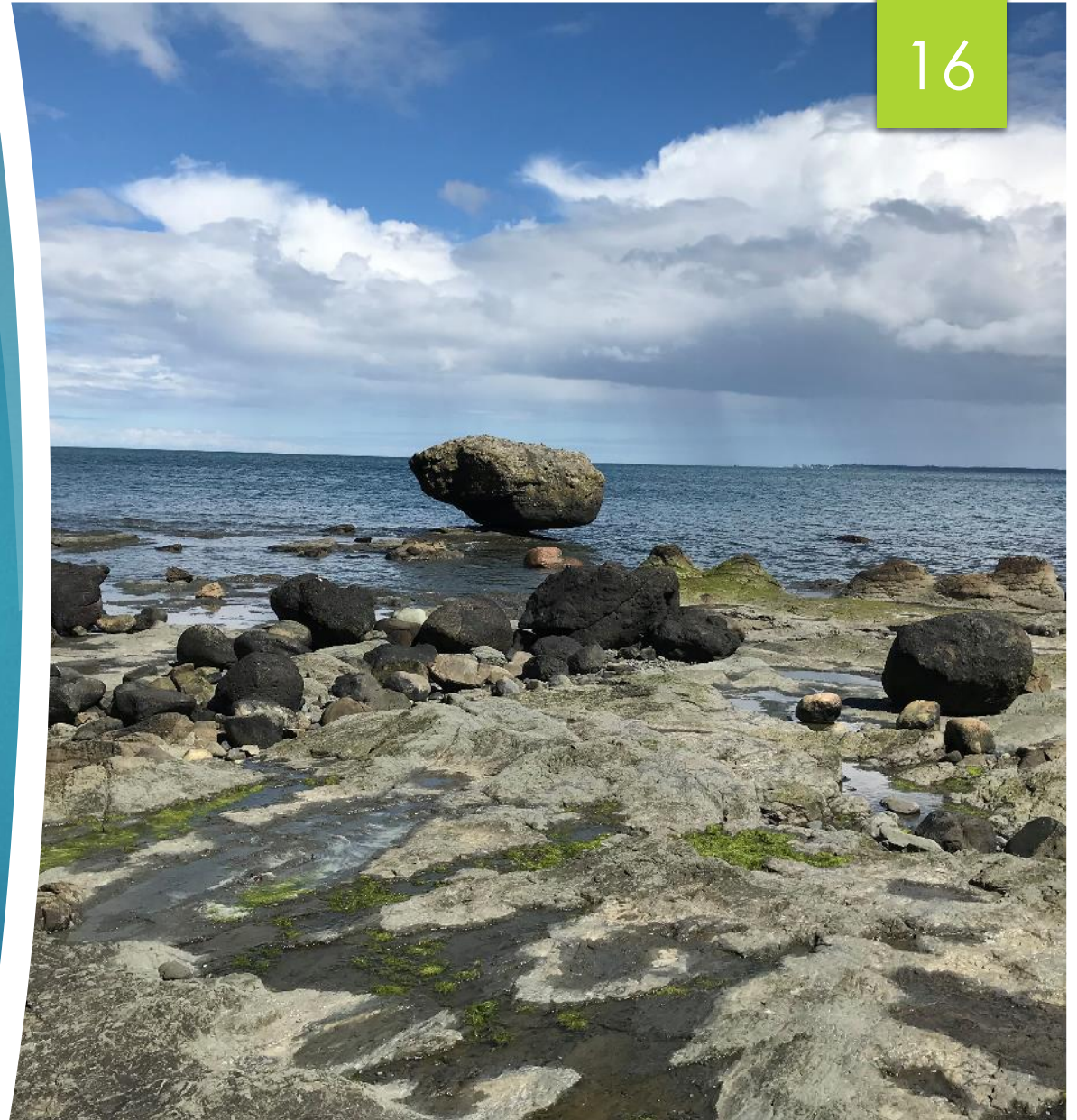
UNDRIP – Article 13

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to **designate and retain their own names for communities, places** and persons.

States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

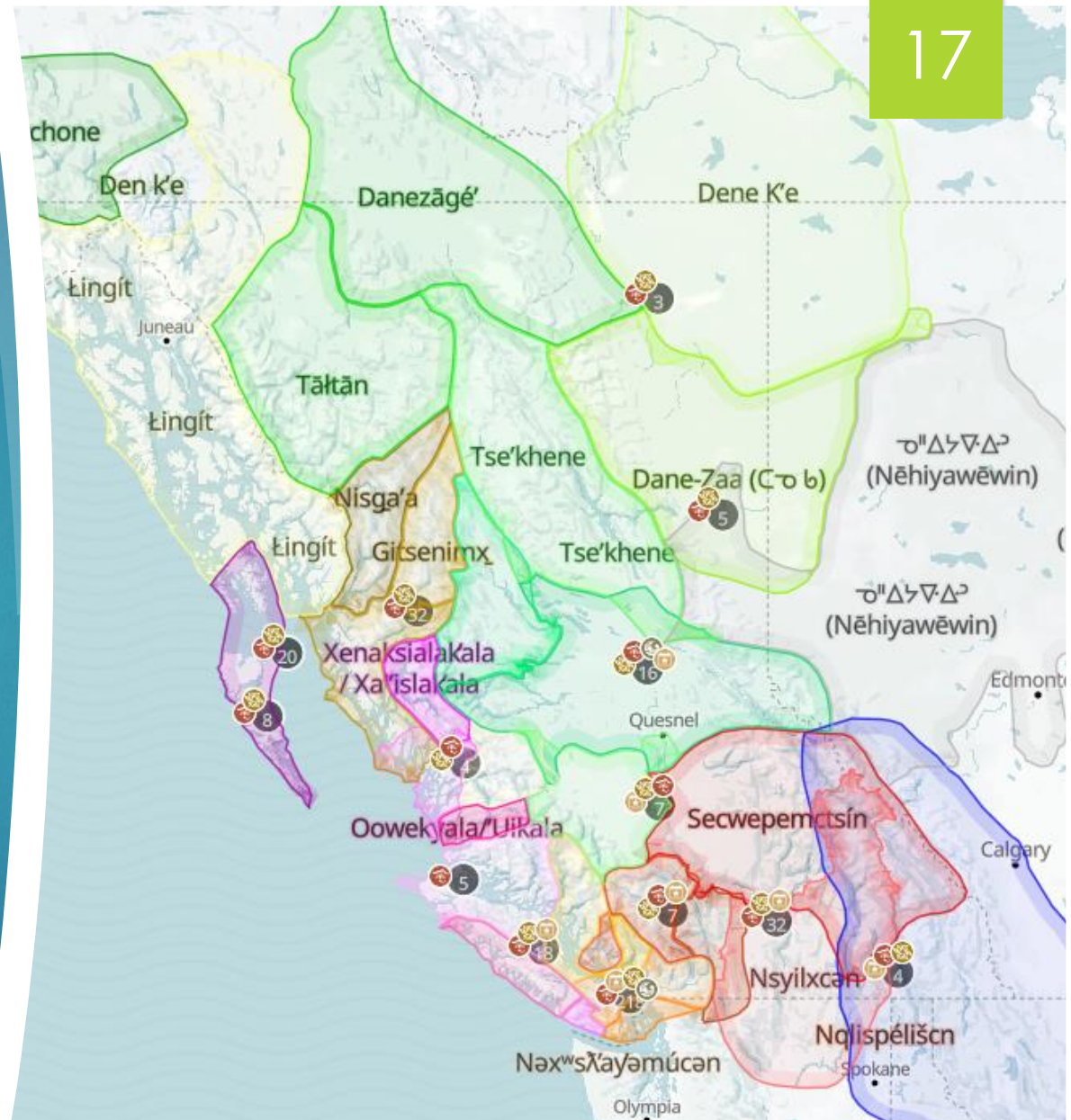
Indigenous Place Names

- Original names
- In original languages of the land
- Reflect deep history of the land
- Specific to the place/being/route
 - Can hold detailed information



Indigenous Naming and Indigenous Languages

- BC is home to 34 distinct languages and 90+ dialects



Proposing Name Changes

- The BCGNO does not initiate name changes
- The BCGNO initiates an engagement period to request comments from Indigenous and local governments whose territories and boundaries a feature is within, and from organizations impacted by a proposed name change (e.g., search and rescue groups).
- Governments and organizations are requested to respond on behalf of their communities and members.



K'iyán Mountain, BCGNIS

Rescinding derogatory names

- Directed to rescind names by the Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat
- Engagement process same as with proposed name changes
- Names are not being replaced but will no longer appear as official names
- A record of the history of the name is maintained in the BCGNIS



K'iyán Mountain, BCGNIS

BC Geographical Names Information System (BCGNIS)

Official Names database

Multi-component system

Publicly accessible

Over 3 million users per year

Thanks to GeoBC

BCGNIS Web App

K'iyán Mountain

Feature Type: Mount - Variation of Mountain: Mass of land prominently elevated above the surrounding terrain, bounded by steep slopes and rising to a summit and/or peaks. ["Mount" preceding the name usually indicates that the feature is named after a person.]

Status: **Official**

Name Authority: [BC Geographical Names Office](#)

Pronounced: KEY-yawn

Relative Location: W side of Atlin Lake, W of Mount Hitchcock and Black Mountain, NW of Atlin (community), Cassiar Land District

Latitude-Longitude: 59°56'26"N, 133°54'02"W at the approximate centre of this feature.

Datum: WGS84

NTS Map: 104N/13



BCGNIS Web App

22

Origin Notes and History:

"Mount Minto" adopted 31 March 1924 in the 18th Report of the Geographic Board of Canada, as labelled on Geological Survey sheet 742, Atlin Mining District, 1902. Re-approved 6 May 1947 on 104NW, and 4 October 1951 on 104N. Official name changed to K'iyán Mountain 22 March 2023 on 104N/13 as requested by Taku River Tlingit First Nation. K'iyán is the traditional and ancestral Tlingit name.

Source: BC place name cards & correspondence, and/or research by BC Chief Geographer & Geographical Names Office staff.

K'iyán Mountain is the Tlingit name for this mountain, which translates to "Hemlock grows around the bottom", which describes an unusual natural feature of the mountain as hemlocks do not normally grow in this area. Hemlocks are a culturally significant resource, and were traditionally used to make clan houses of the Tlingit people, particularly the Yanyeidí (wolf) clan (advice from Taku River Tlingit First Nation, 2016).

Source: BC place name cards & correspondence, and/or research by BC Chief Geographer & Geographical Names Office staff.

For more information, please visit the Taku River Place Names website: <http://trt.geolive.ca/map.html>.

Source: BC place name cards & correspondence, and/or research by BC Chief Geographer & Geographical Names Office staff.

Using Geo Names in Archives

- ▶ Confirmation of official place names
- ▶ Includes history of people and places
- ▶ Adds to our understanding of a place, including Indigenous history and knowledge
- ▶ Opportunities to include Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge to archival research
- ▶ Naming policy aligns with archival naming projects ongoing around the province and country

Useful Links

- ▶ BCGNO website - <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/celebrating-british-columbia/historic-places/geographical-names>
- ▶ BCGNIS Web App - <https://apps.gov.bc.ca/pub/bcgnws/web/>
- ▶ First Peoples language map - <https://maps.fpcc.ca/>
- ▶ First Voices - <https://www.firstvoices.com/home>
- ▶ The Relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Place Names: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/the-relationship-between-indigenous-peoples-and-place-names>
- ▶ Interactive webmaps published by Nations
 - ▶ Taku River Tlingit map - <https://trt.geolive.ca/>
 - ▶ Squamish Atlas - <http://squamishatlas.com/#>



Thank you

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