



OUR FOOD

FINAL REPORT ON THE 4TH ANNUAL 2011 Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network



A great two days of learning, feasting, talking, meeting new friends...

Thanks go to the people of Wei Wai Kum First Nation (Campbell River Indian Band) Wei Wai Kai First Nation (Cape Mudge Band) for being welcoming and generous. Our hands are also raised to the many people, from so many places, who helped make this conference an amazing experience.

This was the fourth annual Traditional Foods conference. It has been growing in the level of interest and participation since the first one at Snuneymuxw First Nation in 2008.



This year, more than 200 delegates from throughout the Island registered before the conference and many more signed in on Sept. 29 as the doors opened at Thunderbird Hall.

The next two days were filled panel discussions, workshops, cooking and great feasts as knowledge was shared amongst Elders and other learned community members as well as leading modern scientific researchers.

PANEL TOPICS

- Language, Food, Media and Youth
- Harvesting Our Gardens (root and clam)
- Health, Nutrition and Safety
- Traditional Medicines and Foods (Elders)

WORKSHOPS

- Soapberry spoon making
- Traditional medicine bath salts
- Cedar and sweetgrass baskets

The second day at Cape Mudge village began at daybreak with a pit being dug on the beach for slow baking of root vegetables and shellfish. Meanwhile, salmon was being prepared for barbecuing and smoking in Tom Wilson's backyard.

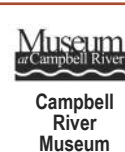
As the food was cooking, delegates stopped by the community hall for breakfast before heading out to learn about traditional cooking methods.



Some even got their first opportunity to learn to paddle a canoe.

Later, everyone ate their fill of another feast. The annual Vancouver Island Foods Champions awards were passed out. The Champions are the great people who work to keep traditional food knowledge and practice alive in their communities.

Our hands are raised in thanks to all the partners, sponsors and participants who helped make the 2011 event unforgettable.





The day began with a river cleanse

Day 1 Agenda

- River Cleanse
- Welcome, Hereditary Campbell River Chief Dan Henderson; Elected Campbell River Chief Bob Pollard; Elder Sophie Hanson, prayer; Introductions by John Rampanen, Curtis Wilson and Conference Coordinator Lavern Henderson
- Language, Food, Media and Youth
 - ✓ Uuathluk Traditional Foods Tool Kit and cookbook – Norine Messer and youth
 - ✓ N.W. Indian College Traditional Foods and Medicines Programs- Elise Krohn
 - ✓ Campbell River Youth Traditional Foods Project – Kara Henderson
- Harvesting our Gardens – Community Gardens, Root Gardens, Clam Gardens
 - ✓ KDC Community Gardens
 - ✓ Uvic students – Leigh Joseph – Rice Root/Root Gardnes
 - ✓ Dee and Shirley Johnson – Clam beds and fishing weirs
- Health, Nutrition and Safety
 - ✓ Peter Ross – Scientist Fisheries and Oceans Canada
 - ✓ Karen Fediuk – First Nations Nutrition and Environment Study.
- Elders Panel: Traditional Medicines and Foods: Reflections and wisdom for the next generation
- Prayer and Feast Dinner
- Cultural Events and Storytelling

The language of food

The subject of the first panel discussion by Kara Henderson could have been the theme for the entire Traditional Foods conference.

'Reviving Our Traditional Ways' was the name of the Campbell River youth traditional foods project coordinated by Kara. "It put together awareness from our elders to incorporate into lesson plans that we can use for years to come."

The year-long project began in September 2010 with lessons learned about preparing for the winter ahead. The salmon fishery was studied as were hunting deer and elk as well as canning and the smoke house.

Later in the winter, Kara said: "We went to the carving shed with Bill Henderson and he taught the youth the meaning of the wood and the different stories behind making artwork."

Other topics included traditional regalia, drum making, button blankets and cedar bark collecting.

Summer time was all about food including fishing (cleaning, cooking and the fish boiler) as well as berry picking and harvesting shellfish.

"It was very successful," Kara said. "We had a large group of our youth and the elders felt honoured to teach our children their knowledge."



Restoring traditional foods

An exciting Traditional Plants and Foods program is taking place around Puget Sounds in Washington. To explain it all was herbalist, educator and author Elise Krohn from Northwest Indian College.

She said that the traditional foods program is guided by seven principles:

1. Traditional foods are whole foods;
2. Eat a variety of foods and eat with the seasons;
3. Traditional foods are local;
4. Wild and organic foods are better for health;
5. Honour the food web/chain;
6. Cook and eat with intention
7. Food is at the center of culture

Elise also discussed the many ways that tribes around Puget Sound are restoring native foods.

They include community/family gardens; teaching the next generation; restoration projects to rebuild ecosystems; and increasing awareness that native foods are good for individual health and also for community healthy and for the land.



"They have incredible cultural wealth," Elise said of the communities with which she works. "But often times, they have simply forgot it. We will be talking about something like huckleberries, and suddenly I will see someone just light up and they will share their stories and what have learned from their elders."

"You can see something come back to them, and that's what's so special. That is what we're after."

Learning, eating... digitally

At the 2010 conference, the Digital Storytelling was a great success. This year's conference heard more from the people from the 14 nations that make up the Nuuchah-nulth Tribal Council. This time it was about the *Traditional Foods Toolkit*.

Norine Messer spoke about the about the Uu-a-thluk toolkit and cookbook.

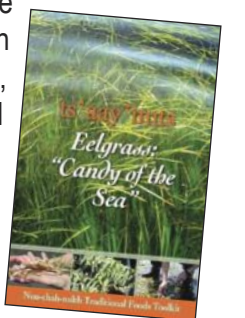
Uu-a-thluk means "taking care of" in the Nuuchah-nulth language and is also the name of the tribal council's fisheries department.

The Uu-a-thluk team consists of people working on capacity building, communications and biology, all led by elders and traditional knowledge holders.



The new digital project was sparked by a presentation at a previous Traditional Foods conference. It was seen as a great way to pass along all the ingredients for food sovereignty through the use of traditional knowledge which teaches self reliance, nutrition, pride for one's heritage, and sustainability.

The series of six booklets contain exclusive content for harvesting, preparing and eating traditional foods found on Vancouver Island's west coast. These foods include sockeye salmon, herring spawn, goose barnacles, sea urchins, chitons, wild roots, and eelgrass.



Access to Info

Read more about what's going on around Puget Sound at:

- NWIC Cooperative Extension www.nwic.edu/content/community
- Feeding the Spirit blog <http://feedingthespirit.wordpress.com>
- Puget Sound Food Network blog <http://psfn.org/blog/2011/03/muckleshoot-tribal-cooks-retreat>

Elise Krohn,
Herbalist, Educator
ekrohn@nwic.edu



More about the *Traditional Foods Toolkit*

<http://uuathluk.ca>

Learning and feasting... a great combination



Garden project grows up!



The garden has become a great place to network.

"We see families working together side by side. It's especially nice to see several generations in there at once as well."

That's Patricia Wilson telling the story of Kwakiutl District Council Health's community garden at Cape Mudge. She told how it grew over an abandoned tennis court and former sawmill site into a unique centre with an emphasis on both traditional and modern plants.

The project is now three years old and is growing in more ways than one. More than 50 green-thumbers are tending the plants and learning important lessons.

She said the garden provides many things including:

- ✓ A better diet;
- ✓ A sustainable space;
- ✓ Physical activity;
- ✓ Greater environmental awareness; and
- ✓ Stronger community bonds.

The addition of traditional food and medicine plants has taken the garden to a new level, Patricia said. "We created language signs, placed on cedar sticks, explaining the use of traditional foods."

Restoring an estuary



Estuaries were once like supermarkets, providing us a diet rich in nutrients, proteins and healthy fats to

Leigh Joseph is a Masters' student at UVic. Her work is focussed on restoring the Northern rice root to the Squamish estuary. Extensive networks of highly cultivated gardens in estuaries around our coast. Root vegetables like the rice root were valued source of complex carbohydrates, proteins, fibers and healthy fats.



"They were sustainable for generations," Leigh said. "But it went unnoticed. European settlers arrived, they looked and saw a landscape that looked like it was being wasted."

She said the disappearance of estuary gardens was marked by a sudden shift to very processed foods that were high in sugars and saturated fats. "Those are causing diseases that were never present before in our communities."

Leigh also spoke about other estuary garden plants including the Pacific silverweed and a lupine root that was eaten fresh.

Trapping fish and gardening clams



A classic example of a clam garden

A four-year study of fish traps and clam gardens in Laich-Kwil-Tach territory revealed sophisticated practices up to 1,000 years ago in the Campbell River area. Anyone who thinks that aquaculture is a new thing better think again!

"They were built in strategic places and in specific formations to maximize catch," presenter Dee Cullon said. And there were lots of them.

"Virtually anywhere where it made sense for clams to be growing... these clam gardens were being built.

"Rocks were removed from the beach and placed at the very low tide line. In the process, a wall was built and over the years sand and shell moved into the inside of the wall and the beach leveled off."

The research project found more than 240 clam gardens in the area. The ranged in size from just a few meters to a kilometer in length.

"There is still a huge amount of territory to go out and survey."

Hundreds of fish traps were also identified in the territory. Series of traps were found on a sandbar near Campbell River and in rocky shorelines near Black Creek.

"One trap at Black Creek shows continual use for 700 years and then abandonment about 1,000 years ago. That was about the same time that Comox Harbour became more intensively used."

Both fish traps and clam gardens showed that a large range of technologies were used, over centuries, in order to harvest food from the sea.

Dee said that evidence of estuary root gardens was also discovered during the search for gardens and traps along the coast.



National food study a first

There have been many studies done to understand changes in diet and assess environmental safety of foods among the general Canadian population. But only now is a comprehensive study being done to understand the total diet of First Nations.

Karen Fediuk, a familiar figure at past conferences, is a dietician and nutritionist. She gave a report on the First Nations Food, Nutrition & Environment Study.

In addition to total diet, it is looking at the nutrition of traditional foods as well as their environmental safety. Along the way, it is also answering important questions such as:

- ✓ How well are people eating?
- ✓ What kinds of traditional and market foods are people eating? and
- ✓ Food Security: What does it mean?



An ongoing concern

The first Traditional Foods conference was a direct result of a pioneering study by a group of scientists who were asked about the level of contaminants in the seafood eaten by First Nations people.

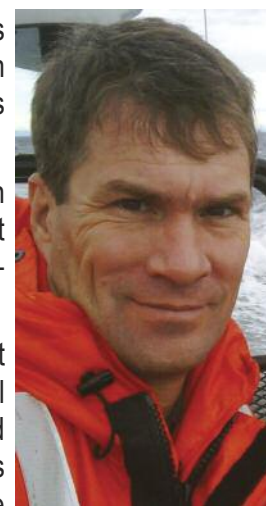
One of them – Dr. Peter Ross, a marine mammal toxicologist with the Institute of Ocean Sciences in Sidney – joined us for the fourth year to discuss the work.

He spoke about implications for coastal First Nations from things such as PCBs, dioxins and other contaminants.

Although PCBs have been banned, they are persistent and represent an environmental concern.

But the good news is that PCB levels in traditional foods have declined dramatically since the 1970s and the no one should be afraid to eat nutritional traditional foods.

"The benefits largely outweigh the risks," he said.



Access to Info

Wea Wai Kai

www.wewaikai.com

Wei Wai Kum First Nation

<http://www.crband.ca>

Interview with Leigh Joseph

<http://seatoskyreport.wordpress.com/tag/northern-rice-root/>

Rice root photo

www.flickr.com/photos/thehartfords

Laich-Kwil-Tach Treaty Society

<http://www.lkts.ca>

Food, Nutrition & Environment Study

<http://www.fnfnes.ca>

Environmental contaminants in traditional seafoods study

<http://www.indigenousfoodsvi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2008-final-report.pdf>

Reflections and wisdom from the Elders

I remember being a little kid and this older woman had arthritis really bad. She asked me to go get some of those stinging nettles and devil's club. She said, "I'll give you some money." And I thought, 'Holy smokes, that sounds good' so I went and I didn't know what they were, but I found out when I went to take them!

My hands were stinging... but I wanted the money. So I took the whole roots out.

As a little boy I was really curious what she was going to do with it. She said that would take away the pain and she showed me how. It was awesome.

I remember looking at my grandmother's storage shed; all the rows on top. The first row was for the salmonberries, the second row was for the blueberries... rows of blackberries and apples. They were used throughout the year.

The trouble in our communities, even with myself; I have become too commercialized, to easy for the access of food. Eating too much of this or too much of that. But I realized how important it was for me, at least once or twice a week, to have some of our traditional foods.

It begins in your family. Teach your children about how things were done a long time ago.



James Quatell

We used to get together as families, cutting fish and hanging it. All family members got their share. These things are diminishing, so it's up to me to say 'Okay, what are we going to do in our community?'

We had our own medicine. We had our own way of healing. But now it's so easy for our people to get so-called medicines. Doctors perscribe everything. We once just used the medicines that were in our territory.



Susan Pacquette

Sometimes it meant going a great distance, with buckets and buckets, so that we would have enough food for the winter.

We had our own root cellar. We had no backhoes; it had to be dug by hand... There was no electricity, no power saws, everyone had their job to do, without question. Everyone in our village had to work.

There are still some who carry on with the old methods because they do not have running water, electricity or central heating. To all those families who are able to maintain our traditional foods 24/7 and 12 months out of the year, my heart goes out to you.

Sometimes the old ways are the best way.

The future is always good. Things change, but we have to do our best to keep some things from our past in our present.



The first day ended with an amazing exhibition of woven blankets (inset left) and dancing. But the day was too long for some, like Curtis Wilson's son (inset right).

A Cape Mudge welcome



Salmon... the good way

At the far end of Cape Mudge village, cedar stakes were being split, salmon was being filleted and a fire started for the barbecue. A steady stream of visitors came to learn about the traditional way of preparing and cooking fish and the nearby smokehouse was fired up to show another way of preserving fish for the winter.

At The Pit

As the tide was dropping, the second day of the conference began just after dawn on the shoreline at Cape Mudge. When the wood fire had burned to hot embers, stones were placed in the pit along with salal and skunk cabbage leaves. As the root vegetables were cooking, water was poured into kelp tubes to keep the food steaming.



Day 2 Agenda

- Pit Cook Preparation
- Breakfast and Registration
- Opening of the day and welcoming to the community- Chief Ralph Dick
 - ✓ Smokehouse tour
 - ✓ Salmon stick making
 - ✓ BBQ Salmon Cook
 - ✓ Bentwood Box demonstration

- Keynote talk - Joan Morris and Thiago
 - ✓ Storytelling-Daniel and Sophie
 - ✓ Museum tour available (including petroglyph rubs)
 - ✓ Canoe Journey
 - ✓ Traditional Plants workshop- June Johnson
 - ✓ Cedar Basket Making- Wayne Bell
- Opening of the Pit
- Prayer and Feast

- Community Food Champions Awards
- Melody Charlie- Traditional Foods and Heart Health presentation
- Museum Tour (petroglyph rub)
- Traditional Foods Fear Factor
- Medicine Balm Workshop - Elise Krohn
- Community Garden tour
- Traditional Modelling Project
- Joan Ryan- Sweetgrass basket workshop



Chief Ralph Dick was interviewed by APTN



Many learned to paddle for the first time in the Pulling Together workshop



The feast at the community hall



Workshops and displays for every interest



Joan Morris of Songhees spoke about ethnobotany



The Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network had a great display (above) while local school children (below) learned, and ate, a lot.





Community Food Champions of 2011 were honoured as the conference came to an end. Champions dedicate time, passion and energy to Indigenous foods, the land and their communities. They are the roots that mature the growth of the branches and leaves of the future.

Pictured (from left) are: Cindy Inrig, Patti Wilson, Sandy George, Raven Hartley, Wilfred George, Jen McMullen, Deb Thomas, Earl Claxton Jr, Della Rice Sylvester, John Williams, Lavern Henderson and Mary Henderson.

Other Champions include Gary Ardron, Joan Morris, Erin Rowsell, Kathleen Power and Corey Frank.

Our apologies to anyone not mentioned.



Fiona Devereaux and Earl Claxton Jr.

Fear Factor

One of the most popular (and yucky!) events at every conference is the Traditional Foods Fear Factor. Young people competed to consume (without choking) a variety of often strange looking and tasting foods. Elders and other experts were on hand to give guidance and support.



About the T'eq'wa logo

The wonderful T'eq'wa (octopus) logo that was used for the conference was designed by Curtis Wilson who also played an active role throughout the event as a speaker, singer and drummer. As well as being an accomplished artist, Curtis is serving his third term on the Wei Wai Kum council.



Traditional Food News

We have come far since April 5, 2008 when we gathered at Snuneymuxw First Nation to celebrate our traditional foods at the first conference. Today, more and more communities along our coast are showing the way to others about good food, good nutrition and good times!

Growing at Halalt



Lorraine Thomas reports that the Halalt greenhouse has been completed. Many of us gathered for a work day in early 2010 to raise the frame. We are glad to hear that a variety of vegetables were grown this past season. "Thank you to one and all who helped with the greenhouse frame raising," Lorraine says.

Good practices

In late November, K'omoks First Nation hosted a two-day training session entitled *Good Agricultural and Collection Practices*. The first day was all about gathering herbs, spices and other foods. More info at <http://www.firstnationswildcrafters.com>

Horticulture

The horticultural therapy certificate program is again available in Vancouver at VanDusen Botanical Garden starting in January, 2012. More info: <http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/vandusen/website/adultEducation/hortTherapy>

Healthy eating

"Healthy Eating and Food Security for Urban Aboriginal People Living in Vancouver" is the title of a recent report at <http://www.culturalcompetency.ca>

Hands raised in thanks

This conference would not have been possible without the hard work, and good hearts, of people from throughout our communities, especially those from Wei Wai Kai and Wei Wai Kum. The Coordinating Committee for the conference included: Gary Ardron, Ben Badgero, Marion Atkinson, Fiona Devereaux, Lavern Henderson, Mary Henderson, Cindy Inrig, Noreen Messer, Brody Naknakim, Kathleen Power, Kim Roberts, Peter Ross, Erin Rowsell, Debbra Thomas, Lynda Unterthiner and Patti Wilson. Thanks also to Mark Kiemele for this report and Sarah Cormode for the conference blog.



Kathleen Power and Lavern Henderson

Stay in touch through the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network (VICCIFN).

One of VICCIFN's main aims is to build collaborative approaches in addressing issues of traditional food access and security. We intend to research, document and share this deeply-rooted knowledge for future generations. Join the listserve at viccifn@gmail.com



www.indigenousfoodsvi.ca