

## The History Corner

*Orcas Island Historical Museum in  
Eastsound, Washington*

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### Living Lightly on the Land

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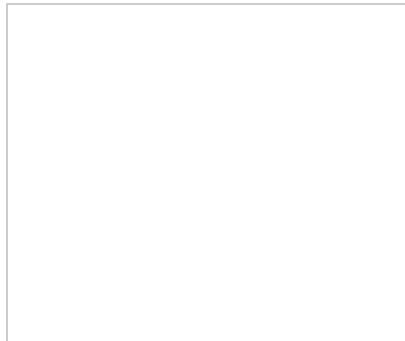
Native peoples living on Orcas Island and the surrounding islands were not year-round residents so much as they were occasional occupants taking advantage of the local seasonal bounties. Long-established tribal lore included knowledge of the salmon spawning runs, locations where they skirted the Orcas shoreline as the vast schools returned to the Fraser and Skagit rivers, and the most economical, labor-saving means of catching sizeable amounts of the nutritious fish. The First peoples knew the most efficient locations for driving the deer into killing pens, such as at Stockade Bay near Olga, or at Deer Harbor, and they knew where to find the best clam, mussel, and oyster beds near shore and available for ready harvest in the appropriate seasons.

First Peoples of the Northern Straits Salish, of which the Lummi, Samish, Semiahmoo, Saanich, and Songhee tribes are constituent members, had long-established boundaries with the neighboring tribes. Their 'living space' included our local islands and a portion of the nearby mainland, and the First Peoples roamed over this area, and these islands, in a seasonal ebb and flow dictated more by available foodstuffs than by other factors. Family groups would arrive as the wild fruit and berries ripened, harvest deer, salmon, and shellfish in season and according to their needs, and leave only their longhouses and shell middens behind when they departed.

With little need to compete for available resources, with plenty at hand in every direction on both land and sea, the local natives enjoyed a peaceful, adaptive lifestyle that rested lightly on the land. Their open and welcoming manner allowed the meeting, and eventual melding, of the white and native cultures to be accomplished peacefully at a time when other frontiers were the scene of violent clashes and conflict.

As Orcas Island becomes more populated and 'developed', there is increasing and widespread sentiment for the traditional ways of the First Peoples who occupied our island paradise for those thousands of years before the arrival of the first white men. While we observe the effects of man and machine on the island as we shape our modern society, we will do well to consider the benefits to all of 'living lightly' on the land, in the manner of our native predecessors.

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