



## ORIGIN OF THE LILLOOET AND BRIDGE RIVER PEOPLE

*(Called respectively, Se'tLamux and Nxo'istEnamux (from SetL, the name of Lillooet; and Mxo'isten, the name of Bridge River) They are SLa'tLemux or StatLemux-oL)*



When speaking of the Frog Clan, James Alexander Teit reported; It is said that long ago no Lillooet lived on the Fraser River except one band at SEL, the present Indian reservation near the town of Lillooet. They are believed to be descendants of a mythical personage who transformed the Frog people. Some of them claim descent from the Frog people themselves. The Bridge River people are off the same clan, - a branch of the SEL, who migrated east to the mouth of Bridge River and beyond. Some say that a small clan originated among them, claiming descent from a man who lived with bears.

The Fountain people are said to be descended from the Coyote, who was a Shuswap, and the original inhabitant of that region. Through intermarriage the Frog clan was introduced among them.<sup>1</sup>

*The Journal of American Folklore: Vol. XXV – October – December, 1912 – No. XCVIII. Traditions of the Lillooet Indians of British Columbia* shares with its audience, James Alexander Teits retelling of the Origin of the Lillooet and Bridge River People. Teit states;

Formerly, there were no people who lived at Bridge River and the Fountain; but a number of people lived near a spring close to where the present Indian village of Lillooet [SetL] is situated. They were Lillooet, and lived principally on deer-meat. Lower down, between them and the Fraser River, at another spring where white people are living now, dwelt other people who were called Frog-Mouths (**Pape'tatcin**) because they ate frogs. They lived all together in an underground house and never held intercourse [interaction] with the people who lived above them. They subsisted principally on frog-flesh; but they also ate snakes, lizards, and all kinds of reptiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Teit, James Alexander. (1906 – 1975 [Rev.]). *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Vol. II, Part V – The Lillooet Indians.* (253)

In those days the frogs and toads were as large as buffaloes; and the Frog people called the, "the animal," in the same way as the Indians of the present day designate the grizzly bear. These people made all their clothes and blankets of frog and toad skins. Their dress consisted of shoes, breech-clout, and robe. They hunted the frogs with spears similar to beaver-spears, and carried home the meat at night.

*(Some say they also hunted at night)*

Among these people were two marriageable girls whom the young men of Setl were very anxious to marry. The young men repaired to the underground house to obtain the girls; but each one, in turn, was overcome by the smell of frog-fat when the people cooked, and died inside the house. Their bodies were carried out, and left on a bench near by. Thus all the young men of Setl met their death; and their bones whitened the bench near the house of the Frog-Eaters.

Only one young man was left, and he repaired to the mountains to train himself. He took the back-fat of four deer with him, and lived on that during the four years he was away training. At the end of that time he had learned all the "mystery" of water, lake, swamp, mud, spring, and river. He had also learned all the "mystery" of the animals that inhabited or lived near them, such as frogs, snakes, and lizards. He could eat all these animals, and their flesh did not harm him. Being complete in all the magic required for his purpose, he returned home, and told the people he intended to go and obtain the daughters of the Frog-Eaters. The people said, "Don't go! You are sure to be killed, and you are the only young man we have left." After swallowing arrows, snowshoes, and a dog, he went to the Frog-Eaters' house, clad only in breech-clout and leggings. A Frog-Man was sitting at the ladder striking one foot against the other, and seeing him coming, he said, "All your friends have died by coming here. Don't you see their bones on the bench? Why do you court death? Have you had no lesson?" The lad answered, "I wish to obtain your two daughters, and am prepared to die." The man struck him on the legs as he went down the ladder, but he paid no attention. Reaching the bottom, he went aside, and sat down with his back to the wall. The people were all lying down; but when he entered they said, "Cook some meat: we have not eaten since morning." Then they began to boil and roast frog-

meat, and the smoke from the fat filled the house. The people ate, and, when the smoke cleared away, they saw him sitting in the same place. They said to one another, "He does not die as quickly as the others did." After a while, the people said, "We will cook again;" and this time they roasted the intestines and inside parts of the frog. The house became so filled with smoke from the burning fat, that the people could not see one another. When it cleared away, the lad still sat alive, and the people wondered. When they went to sleep, their chief said, "The lad has vanquished us, and seems to be able to live with us. He may have our daughters." He [staid] with his wives that night, and they covered him with a frog-skin blanket, which smelled horribly.

On the next day the people said, "Let us hunt! We are nearly out of food." They all went and hunted over the mountains back of Lillooet, returning by the mouth of Bridge River, without seeing any game, for the lad made all the frogs leave their usual haunts. The people all returned home, the lad being the last one, and some distance behind. He felt thirsty, went to a spring called Kelamu'lax, and, although knee-deep in mud, he drank, pushing aside the dead leaves which covered the surface of the water. To his surprise, he beheld a huge frog looking at him. It was nearly concealed by the dead leaves, water, and mud. It was early winter, and the frog had probably gone into his winter quarters. The lad said, "I am not afraid of you," and drank his fill of the water. Then he hurried home to the house, as it was getting late.

He was wearing frog-skin shoes, and his legs were all covered with mud. When he entered, the people noticed the mud, and said, "Our son-in-law must have found a frog! He is a great hunter." His wives pulled off his shoes and leggings, and hung them up to dry. He told them where he had seen the frog, and they said, "We will go to-night and kill it." They all went to the place, and, after spearing the frog and killing it, they began to roast the meat. The place where they had their fire and roasted their meat may still be seen near the mouth of Bridge River. Then they carried the meat home, and ate again when they reached there.



The lad did not eat any frog-meat. He told his wives he was going to hunt, and bring in a different kind of meat to eat. Early next morning he went out, and vomited the dog he had swallowed, sending him to round up deer. Then he vomited his snowshoes and bow and arrows, and put the snowshoes on, chased the deer into a gulch, and shot them all. He cut up one, took some of the meat home, and, when he found his wives out washing themselves, he persuaded them to eat some. They thought they would die; but after waiting a long time, and finding no bad effects from the meat, they were glad.

The lad said, "I will change the food of your people to-morrow." He brought some deer meat to the house the next day, but the people were afraid to eat it. On the fourth morning he went to the gulch, roasted the whole carcass of a deer, and brought it to the house and dropped it down the hole. The people were afraid of such a mysterious object. He told them, "You must eat this meat, and I will eat with you. It is good, and will not harm you. I shall transform any one who does not eat of it." The people at last ate of the meat, and, finding that they did not die, they declared it to be good food. Three of them would not eat of the meat.

Then he sent his wives and all the people to bring in the deer from the gulch. When they had left, he took all their clothes, blankets, skins, and meat of frogs outside the house, and burned them. When the people returned, he said, "You are already in my power, and I can do with you as I like. Having eaten of venison, you are now like my own people." He told them to strip naked, and burned all their frog clothes. Then he showed them how to tan the skins of the deer they had brought home, and make themselves deer-skin clothes.

When they were all clothed, he told them to sit down on the edge of the bench where the skeletons were, and watch what he would do with them. He said, "You killed these people: now I will make them alive." He jumped over the skeletons, one after another, and immediately each one became alive. They stood up, and he ordered them to walk around and mix with the Frog people. Then he transformed into "water-mysteries" the three Frog-Eaters who would not eat venison, and threw them into a

creek near by, saying, “You shall remain there as “water-mysteries,” and shall howl like dogs. If a person happens to see you, you may do them harm, if their time has come to die” (*The sight may cause them to die.*) then he conducted all the Frog-Eaters up to Setl., where they lived thenceforth, and the two people s intermarried.

After they had amalgamated, some of the people moved, and settled at the mouth of Bridge River: therefore the Bridge River and Setl. or Lillooet people are the same. Many of them claim descent from the Frog-Eaters and their ancestor who changed the Frog-Eaters. The other Lillooet nicknames them “Frog people,” or “Frog-Mouths,” because of their origin and ancestry. They used to impersonate their ancestors at feasts and potlatches, and wore masks resembling frogs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Teit, James A. (1912). Traditions of the Lillooet Indians of British Columbia. The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 25, No. 98 (Oct. – Dec., 1912), (361- 364)