

Traditional Territory: A Sacred Abundance

The people of the Bella Coola Valley have been welcoming visitors since long before Alexander Mackenzie's visit in 1793. To the Nuxalk First Nation (pronounced "Noohalk"), the traditional territory of the Central Coast region is a sacred landscape - steeped in tradition and rich in wildlife and lush forests, provided by the Creator to the people who descended the eyelashes of the sun many millennia in the past.



A Traumatic Past

This Sun Mask, the Nuxalk emblem, with its welcoming outstretched hands, represents the Creator and his four helpers. It recalls the four original villages as well as the four calamities that befell this people after European contact in the late 18th Century: Devastation by disease that reduced the population by an estimated 90%, relocation on a reserve,

loss of the potlatch governance system for nearly seven decades, and social disintegration under the failed Residential School Policy which removed children from their families in order to integrate them into the Canadian mainstream.



Photos courtesy James Taylor & Ernest Hall

Healing

"We must speak out to help our healing so we don't live in that dark world anymore." So reads a Nuxalk plaque commemorating the Residential School Experience. Today the band, which accounts for nearly half of the Valley population, is governed by an elected chief and council, and a strong role is played by a council of hereditary chiefs and elders. The Nuxalk people own a development corporation engaged in a number of enterprises including a saw mill and a flag-person's service.

In recent decades Nuxalk stories, dances and other art are witnessing a renaissance. Jewelry, weaving, carving, and painting can be seen in local shops and galleries and on tours of artists' workshops. Potlatches feature traditional songs, stories, and dances, and the entire Valley as well as "outsiders" are often invited to share in this age-old custom: not staged for spectators, but a genuine practice that reinforces social structure. Check local bulletin boards or ask at the Four-Mile band office to learn if a potlatch is scheduled during your visit.



Photo courtesy Ernest Hall

A "must-see" for visitors is the Nation-run Acwosalcsta School ("Place of Learning") which teaches the Nuxalk language (near extinction in the mid-20th Century) and fosters the Nuxalk culture. Check out the totem poles outside and the plaque commemorating the Residential School experience, as well as the lobby which houses artifacts from earlier times.

Traditional Territory: A Sacred Abundance is sponsored by:



Copper Sun Journeys is an aboriginal owned and operated company established in 2015 in Nuxalk territory, on the Central Coast in Bella Coola, B.C. Professional Nuxalk guides offer intimate tours of historic sites and an in-depth look at Nuxalk culture of past and present. Tours are offered daily by reservation from May - October.

info@coppersungallery.ca
(250) 267-6430



Copper Sun Gallery was established with the intention of providing a venue for Nuxalk artists to sell and receive fair prices for their work. Located on traditional Nuxalk territory on the Central Coast in beautiful Bella Coola, B.C., the Copper Sun Gallery carries all locally-made, handcrafted Nuxalk art.

442 Mackenzie St., Bella Coola
www.coppersungallery.ca (250) 267-6430