

Volkershau, Skulukt & Nusq'Ist

Volkershau

North American indigenous peoples have long been of great interest to Europeans, and Bella Coola's Nuxalk people are no exception. In 1885, nine Nuxalk men including Chief Tom Henry, were persuaded to travel to Germany for a year-long tour demonstrating their culture to the German public - an entertainment market thrilled by "human zoos" that were criss-crossing Europe showing off indigenous people from around the globe.



Photo courtesy Bella Coola Museum/Local Archives

This Nuxalk "Volkershau" performed in the show halls of Germany for a year. While the Nuxalk dancers made good money and (reportedly) were treated well, the show was a financial disaster because the German public wanted painted faces, feathered war bonnets and buffalo robes, so the producer set aside the genuine Nuxalk cedar masks, weasel skins, and abalone buttons, decking the dancers out in feathers and Chilkat (Alaskan) blankets,

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Skulukt

Long ago, just after Creation, Raven peeked between worlds and detected a flaw: The Valley was full of ocean water, making it unfit for human habitation. So, clever as always, Raven poled his Special Canoe down the Valley from its head, clumsily swinging his pole from side to side, pushing the sea water out. (Freshwater mussels are found in the Atnarko River to this day.) When Raven thought the Valley was long enough, he cast his pole to the Mountain declaring: "May this pole become many." The river canoe pole - necessary for propelling the spoon canoe through the currents and shallow river waters and very unlike the wide paddle of the Outer Coast - was created and became essential to the river way of life. Much later, this mountain, Skulukt, was renamed Mt. Fogner after Norwegian settler Ivor Fogner, the Valley's first schoolteacher and storekeeper.



Photos courtesy Ernest Hall

Nusq'Ist

Mount Nusatsum, with its pinnacle dominating the view up the Valley from the Townsite to Hagensborg, is the final resting place of the Sleeping Giant whose figure is seen on the skyline: lying on his back with his feet to the left (north).



Photo courtesy Ernest Hall

At 2,573 m (8,444 ft) in elevation, this mountain is higher than nearby Saloompt Peak from which the Giant rescued a canoe full of ancestors fleeing the Great Flood by hurling a huge rock. This raised the elevation just enough to give them an anchor, ensuring their survival, explaining the odd knob on the tip of Saloompt). The Giant lay down, hurling his huge green stone axe which shattered around Nusatsum's base. In the Nuxalk language, this mountain (like the side stream across the Valley) is Nusq'Ist, "The Place of the Green Rocks" - prevalent in the area and prized for tool making. The name has since been Anglicized to "Noosgutch".