

Eulachon Grease Trail

What would you do for a good pair of shoes?

Trading Items

We used what we had to make clothing and bags. In the valley, we wove blankets from cedar. On the plateau, the Ts'ilh'qot'in (Chilcotin) used hides to make gloves, jackets, and moccasins.
Canadian Museum of History, Harlan Smith Collection, 50117.

Sluq'alh

Eulachon Grease

"Eulachon grease, or *sluq'* is a valuable commodity. We traditionally caught *sputc* (eulachon fish) at the mouth of the Bella Coola River, processed them into grease, packed it into bent-wood boxes, and carried it up the mountain on the *sluq'alh*, or grease trail, to *Tl'ina Tl'ina* (Kleena Kleene), the place where grease was traded.

If that seems like a lot of work, it was. So why do it? Two words: healthy feet."

Good Shoes

"As you walk down to the river or along the trail today, imagine what it would be like to do it barefoot. When we fished on the river or picked berries in the forest, we needed to protect our feet from rocky riverbanks and prickly undergrowth. The local materials for clothing were cedar bark, hemp, or sometimes animal fur — not great for making shoes.

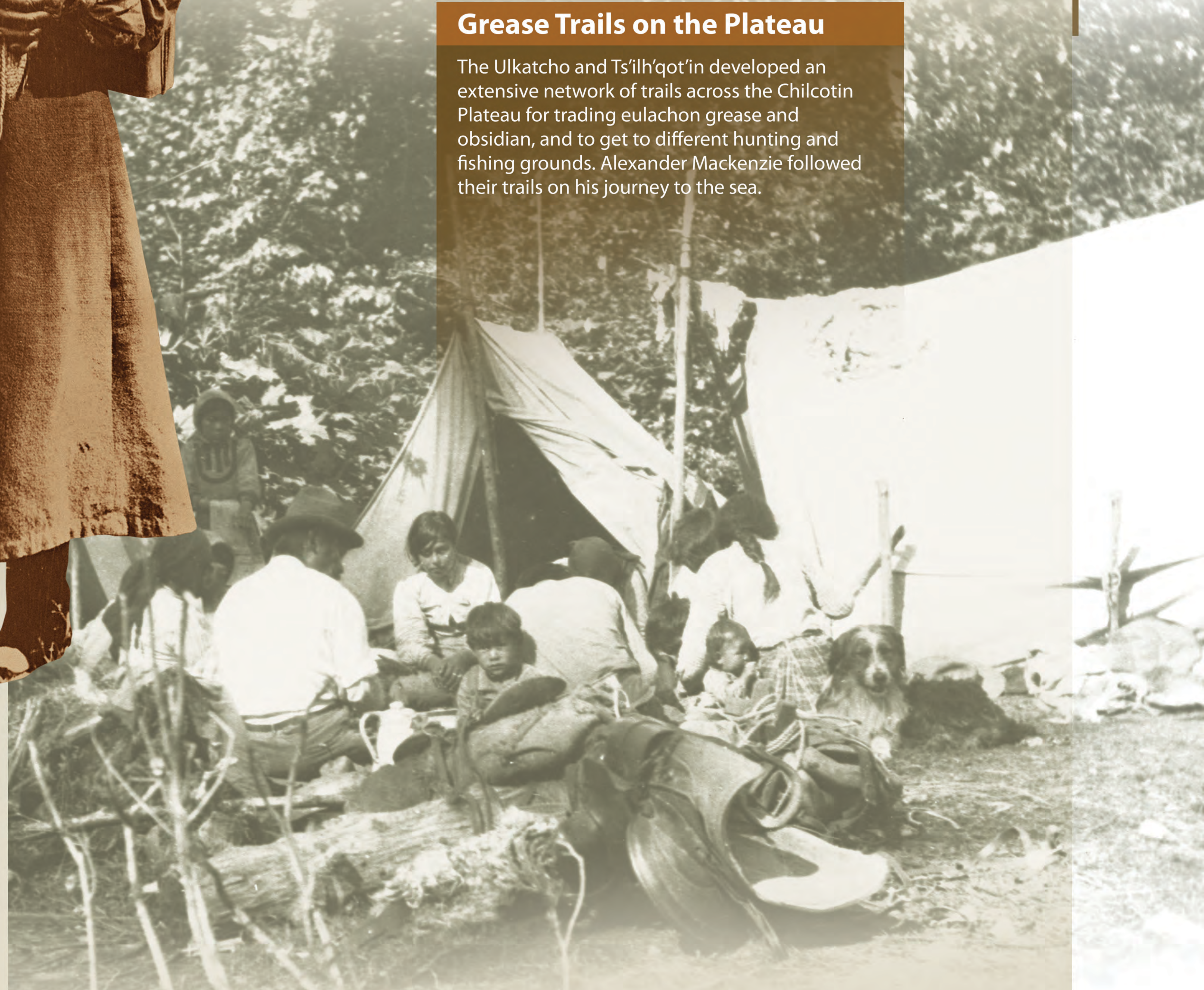
Meanwhile, up on the plateau, the Ulkatcho and Ts'ilh'qot'in hunted deer, moose, and caribou, which made fantastic moccasins. The best thing for tanning the hides was eulachon oil. A little trading would help everybody. Of course, other things were traded, too. We brought salmon and other items from the sea up the trails. The Ulkatcho came down the trails with dried moose meat, hides, and obsidian."



On the Trail (Above)
Mrs. Lucy Clallamin with a pack box supported by a tumpline on her forehead, carrying a berry basket.
Canadian Museum of History, Harlan Smith Collection, 55715.

Grease Trails on the Plateau

The Ulkatcho and Ts'ilh'qot'in developed an extensive network of trails across the Chilcotin Plateau for trading eulachon grease and obsidian, and to get to different hunting and fishing grounds. Alexander Mackenzie followed their trails on his journey to the sea.



Ts'ilh'qot'in (Chilcotin) camp, 1924.
Canadian Museum of History, Harlan Smith Collection, 61868.

A Future for Eulachon?

"Eulachon are important for more than just trade. They were essential to our diet and ceremonies. Since 1999, the eulachon runs have been too small to harvest for food or oil. Every spring, we conduct a ceremony to honour the eulachon. We hope that restoring our spiritual balance with the earth will allow the fish to return."

— Snxakila, with thanks to the Elders and knowledge keepers of the Nuxalk Nation.

Carrying Gear
Two ways to carry trade items: a Nuxalk bent-wood box, and a Ts'ilh'qot'in (Chilcotin) basket, 1920.
Canadian Museum of History, Harlan Smith Collection, 50121.



Photo: Michael Wigle



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