

Nabas Oral Literature Documentation

October 17th 2011 – September 30th 2012



A collaboration research study with the Yunesit'in Government (Stone Band) and the Xenigwet'in Government (Nemiah Band)

Final Report to Terralingua

By Linda R. Smith

A key feature of Aboriginal spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation which has been passed down as law for thousands of years.

Jens Korff

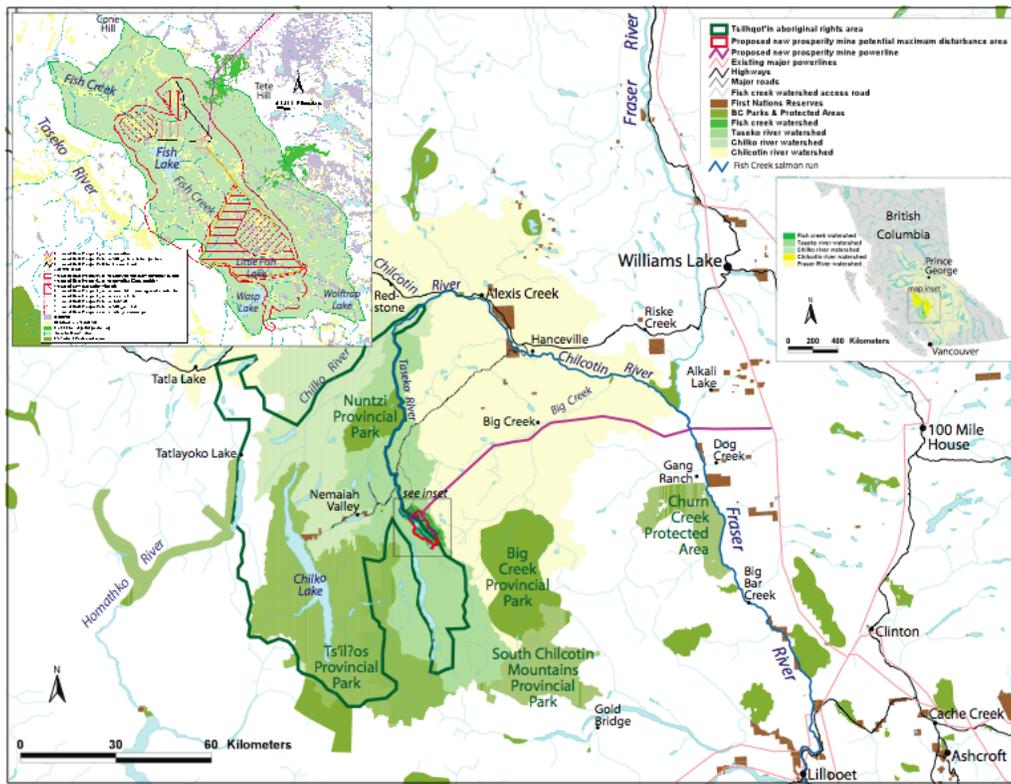
Introduction

The Yunesit'in Government (Stone Band) in collaboration with the Xenigwet'in Government (Nemiah Band) of the Tsilhqot'in First Nation (south central British Columbia, Canada) recorded Tsilhqot'in knowledge about the area known as Nabas (Anvil Mountain, Fish Lake, Little Fish Lake, Wasp Lake, Onion Lake, Red Mountain, Wolf Track Lake), which lies within the Yunesit'in and Xenigwet'in traditional caretaking area. The whole area of Nabas with its old graves, cremation sites, gathering places for fishing and hunting, historical cabins, and archaeological sites is threatened by Taseko Mines Limited, and it is an area already chosen by the provincial government as possible sites for new mining, and oil and gas explorations. Therefore, it was considered a priority for this project study. Our nation wishes to preserve this territory in its present semi-pristine state, with a view to utilizing the land for a community settlement, ceremonies, school cultural camps, gatherings and the like. To accomplish this we began with recordings of present elder knowledge about the area.





Relief map of the Chilcotin region of south-central British Columbia, Canada, a plateau and mountain area on the inland side of the Coast Mountains on the west side of the Fraser River.



Map of the Chilcotin, showing in the inset the Nabas area threatened by the mining development, including Fish Lake (Tetzan Biny) and Little Fish Lake (Yanah Biny).

Who We Are¹

I was raised by elderly Tsilhqot'in speaking parents. My mother, originally from Xení (Nemíah), passed away this year at the age of 95. She was an extremely hard worker by anyone's standards, and she



really did live by her ancestral traditions and values. While studying, I often reflected on my ancestral culture and the differences in my own life. The depth of knowledge and the absolute fluency my mother had with the language were exceptionally rich. In my mind, she truly had the best education in the world. The education passed down by Tsilhqot'in ancestors is based on systematic observations of the environment. The people had access to the most efficient laboratory: intact and virtually untouched nature and specialized guides from the universe. The inherited traditions have been time-tested and re-experienced time and time again from generation to generation.

We use two names to identify ourselves, “Nenqayni” which means “people of the earth” and “Tsilhqot'in” which means “people of the river.” It is often the case among Indigenous peoples that the group name they use to identify themselves with also signifies that they are a part of the land. Although Tsilhqot'in means “people of the river”, I prefer “people of the lakes” because I spent most of my childhood near lakes.

I am deeply appreciative that my ancestors have practiced outstanding management systems in caring for our lands. I am also most grateful that they have handed down to us their pristine lands along with their powerful language and their traditions. Pristine land, mountains, vegetation, water, traditional food, ancient stories, knowledge on ways of life, and generally any details about culture are all precious to Tsilhqot'in, and even more

¹ Much of this text is based on excerpts from the 2010 submissions to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA), Hearing Documents, Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine Project, 17th February 2012 <http://www.ceaa.gc.ca/050/documents-eng.cfm?evaluation=44811&type=4> (Accessed 2010).

highly valued because they were handed down since the beginning of time by Tsilhqot'in ancestors.



In my lifetime, these places I learned to love have been permanently altered by clearcut logging. My mother and I wept for weeks after seeing this intentional slaughter of our forest; we saw this as a

massacre. In fact, all the lands cherished by the Yunesit'in have been destroyed. The only pristine area left on the Yunesit'in side of the river is Nabas, and Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) is part of that.

We experience a spiritual longing to be out on the land. My worldview, the holistic way I view the world, and the cumulative grief I have inherited, and experienced during my extensive research, make it very challenging for me to remain positive in the present time with all that is happening. Our past is embedded within the clearcuts; the broken landscapes hold our most cherished memories. But, it is the disfigured land we see first, it is the emotional pain we experience first, and this anguish overshadows what was there before. Now, we must build upon these layers, and create new visions on the land. But, it is impossible to obliterate the horror on the landscapes and see past this, to the purity and the cultural wealth that was there before. How can a Tsilhqot'in create new life and new memories upon what was butchered, and bring new life upon what appears to be dying?

In my mind, everything is connected. We are Nenqayni, and Tsilhqot'in have been connected to their lands for many generations, and Tsilhqot'in elders would say this connection has been there since time began. The land is what makes us complete; it is an extension of our body and our soul; it is what gives us joy; it is what gives us security; it protects us; it feeds us; it comforts us; it heals us; it is Our Mother. We love our land and its life forms. Like an infant away from its mother, most Tsilhqot'in feel lost elsewhere, and we miss our landscapes. It was difficult for me to be in Victoria for six years. Very few Tsilhqot'in students complete their studies because of this spiritual and physical disconnection.

The soul of Tsilhqot'in, that I know, is spiritually connected to our ancestral lands. Our people are always drawn to familiar places or yearn to be on the landscapes in all seasons, constantly weaving their thoughts and physical selves from present fixed places to remote ancestral places. Without our land we have no culture. Our rootedness to familiar land is cultivated through personal memories and the strong bonds to strange places are instilled through stories.

This pull from afar, this incessant yearning, this need to be on the land is all-encompassing. Our very being enforces this attachment to places. We are compelled from within our souls, from within our bodies and our mind to be in specific places during each of the seasons. Our flesh, our heart, our stomach, and our brain make it known where we belong. An aged grandmother's inconsolable sorrow at the realization that she can no longer ride in the mountains again, and a dying grandfather's tearful farewell to the landscape that he revered throughout his life, are examples of this great spiritual bond.

This is not necessarily just an Indigenous experience, as there are others who have such memories and attractions and need to frequent their own choice sites. Our sensory organs are embedded in special places drawing us back to a time long ago. A wind today may bring memories of another windy place of the past, and the smell of blueberries, whether in jam or in a special tea, will bring us back to our youth to a favorite remote meadow of our childhood. Hank Wesselman (2010, Electronic Document) goes on to describe this connection to the land in "Australian Aboriginal Wisdom":²

This is an authentic spiritual path with heart that many of us experienced spontaneously as children through our contact with Nature--a path that may bring us as adults into direct connection with the spirits of nature as well as with the World Soul... Often, this may be sensed as an immanent and user-friendly presence that makes us feel good. Some of us experience it on the golf course, some on a fishing trip or weekend camping expedition. Sometimes it's a walk in the park, or a hike through the woods, or a visit to the zoo, a trip to the beach. Through such experiences, we may sense that

² In: Australian Aboriginal Wisdom by [Hank Wesselman PhD.](http://www.sharedwisdom.com/article/australian-aboriginal-wisdom), April 6th, 2010
<<http://www.sharedwisdom.com/article/australian-aboriginal-wisdom>> (Accessed 25 September 2012).

Nature is aware of us, and that it may express itself through... 'the spirits'. ...
As we mature spiritually, we are given more pieces of the puzzle to understand, and we eventually become aware that we have entered into communion with the Infinite.

There are some who spontaneously feel a deep connection to a new landscape and feel like they have finally come home. This bond cannot be undone or erased. It is strange that even senility cannot blot out the yearning to return home or to return to certain places on the land. The old continue to have visual experiences about familiar places and about previous activities and have a need to get out on the land.

From our perception, our bond with our land existed since the beginning of time. It is the ancient connection to ancestors and the sense of oneness with nature that Tsilhqot'in currently search for, long for, and seek out when they go out on the land. Tsilhqot'in ancestors have walked on the many trails which connect to the landscapes within and beyond their territory. They have fished at numerous lakes, hunted practically every land mammal, gathered food and medicine, and made sacred the areas of their hearths. Even though few of us had the privilege of physically living with our ancestors, and few of us have the ability to see their present spirits upon the land, we are certain during our many travels that the old ones continue to exist in these places. We know this from our oral literature. They have a presence on the landscapes today and will exist into the future. We know this from personal experiences through our senses. Our ancestors continue to walk in places, which to some of us are new landscapes within our traditional territory. They revisit old places. They exist through the seasons.

After the many years of cultural deprivation, the mourning experienced by being separated from our territorial places is constant, and this can only be remedied by continuing to go back upon the land. Sometimes, our destination is specific to the seasons. Like a longing for comfort food which is initially introduced because of a family tradition, we must partake again and "feast" upon the land – a wholeheartedly soulful feast. Our reconnection to our ancestors, our need to be in the places where they frequented, to re-experience the energy there, is to fulfill one's spiritual hunger. It is to regain what was lost, to continue to be part of the ancestral life way, to be healed by nature's power, to be inspired by the old and the new. The activity is as important as the

destination. For some, the journey is more significant in terms of connecting to the land, the path, and the energy. Greeting with the gaze, the species, the vegetation, and the landscapes, is a profound experience. It is a visionary feast which temporarily massages and satisfies the soul.

The modern culture restricts our time, our travels, our traditional activities, our learning... Time now being spent upon our traditional land seems to be mostly confined to hunting, fishing, and gathering, whereas our great-grandparents were out there twelve months of the year and remained part of the whole.³ During our busy lives and modern schedules today, we must find the time to find balance by going out upon the land to nourish our souls. The sense we feel of being upon the land and the continued involvement in a traditional cycle in tune with the seasons, nurtures all the aspects which make us who we are. To hunt, fish, or gather in another country does not fulfill us in the same way. Places are not only distantly separated, but they are foreign in their vegetation. A walk in a beautiful park in another province or country is an awesome experience, but a walk or a traditional practice carried out on our own land is much more profound, and it is vital to our being as a human species in order to continue to be Nenqayni.

The land speaks eloquently; it fills the void that we feel; it feeds our totality; it permeates us with the feeling that we are one. We share the same air as our ancestors. We cannot belong anywhere else. This fact cannot be undone or changed. We live because of the land and this is our birthright. To have to live elsewhere will bring us suffering beyond endurance and we will be beyond healing. We cannot exist as foreigners upon meaningless land.

³ Typical of hunting and gathering societies, the seasonal movements of the Tsilhqot'in were generally dependent on places rich in food and basic resources, and people historically traveled to these areas on foot and canoes or rafts, and later with horses and motor powered vehicles. For example, my grandfather mentioned that people carried spruce root baskets, and in their travels, children also packed necessary items, as did the dogs. My great-great-great grandmother said that heavily packed spruce root baskets were carried hanging from straps across the forehead and the foreheads of newborn babies were shaped to accommodate this. Before horses, people used to run 100 miles in twenty-four hours: for example, one man ran from Gwetsilh (Siwash Bridge) to Farewell Canyon and back in twenty-four hours.

The land is a sacred entity which renews itself on a daily basis; it nurtures all that exists; and even the air is purified continuously. Upon it a multitude of species exist which regenerate time and time again. How can we not give thanks to the earth? How can we destroy a part of it? How can we disrespect that which we cannot reduplicate in its entirety? We depend on the land, the life upon it, and the seasons. The respect for and the preservation of all life is our way – it is the essential foundation of Tsilhqot'in traditions.

To carry on our spiritual, mental, and physical heritage on our land is an essential requirement for life. Our land is as crucial to us as food is to all life. It balances us, it fills our spiritual void; it makes us who we are. If our land is harmed beyond repair, then we are harmed beyond repair. We cannot belong anywhere else. We will always be Nenqayni and we will always be Tsilhqot'in. Our very being cries out to be at one with our ancestral lands.

This heritage is necessary for survival and was transferred down the generations. The ancestral spirits are in the lands that they have given us, and the ancestors are also within the generations - in the genes and in the souls. They are just a thought away. The ancestors, their inheritance, and their descendants are spiritually intertwined. And in turn, it is a sacred and fundamental duty to preserve and to pass on their inheritance in their purity and totality.

There are so many discussions Tsilhqot'in need to engage in, and the vast amount of Tsilhqot'in knowledge to document and understand, and throughout all this, Tsilhqot'in are grieving the many losses of their people, their culture, their language, their heritage, their land. There is simply not enough time to adequately prepare documents towards protecting our land and heritage. It would take hundreds of volumes to describe our relationship to our land, to explain Tsilhqot'in culture, and to make clear the impacts to our connection and our rights to our land. We want to document what existed before the trauma; see what we had before European contact; and to look back not just for guidance, but for our own sustenance and healing.

The Ancient Philosophy

Tsilhqot'in ancestors have handed down numerous laws, protocols, restrictions, and rules based on the need to preserve, sustain, and show respect for all species, resources, and the lands. One ancient Tsilhqot'in philosophy is to leave no footprint. Tsilhqot'in ancestors have left few clues and tools, yet, have successfully maneuvered themselves through major climatic periods, shifting geographies, unpredictable food resources, catastrophes, and have maintained their ways of life to this day despite steady colonizing efforts.



The Tsilhqot'in people packed only utilitarian materials which did not preserve well in soils, and have left numerous sites seemingly untouched, thus, many significant sites have escaped archaeological excavation. McGhee (1996)⁴ noted the Dene value of carrying only necessary items when traveling:

...The Dene peoples of the northwestern Canadian forests, involve pride in being able to live with a minimum of material items. An axe, a knife, and a kettle are enough for ideal Dene to make a comfortable living from the forest they know so well. Even the knife can be replaced by a sharp flake knocked from stone and discarded after use, and a temporary kettle can be quickly fashioned from birch bark. Home is a temporary brush shelter....

One makes a living by applying knowledge and skill rather than by using manufactured tools. Not surprisingly, the Dene leave little behind for archaeologists to interpret: a patch of ashes, a heap of decaying brush, and a scatter of animal bones that are soon dissolved by the acid soil beneath the spruce forest. Dene history is not very amenable to archaeological analysis, and indeed is very poorly known.

It is not unusual that Nabas appears “unused” and “lacking” in historic and traditional value. The Tsilhqot'in philosophy and lifestyle which initially helped towards the preservation of their lands, their traditions, and their many generations has been good in

⁴ McGhee, Robert 1996 Ancient People of the Arctic. UBC Press, Vancouver.

the traditional sense, but has been limiting in proving aboriginal rights and title. This conservative position has left scarce evidence, as evidence is measured in the European sense, of Yunesit'in occupation and use of Yunesit'in lands. But irrefutable evidence of early Tsilhqot'in occupation is real as offered in the oral and tangible evidence for the occupation and the use of lands in the selected areas. Tyhurst (1995)⁵, an archaeologist, stated, "It is reasonable to assume from archaeological evidence that First Nations occupation at Fish Lake is extensive and continuous dating back to at least 7500 BP."

The ancient Tsilhqot'in perspective has been that the earth is too sacred to inflict with negative impacts and other contaminants in the form of negative energy or chemicals. There are many ritual observances to prevent land, resources and trapping/hunting/fishing gear from being affected by negative human energy and adverse impacts. As an example of a spiritual impact, Elders share that a forceful and physical impact to the ground such as a human accidentally falling to the ground could bring dire consequences to the individual. It seems that this simple blunder is a grave offense to the earth. How much greater is the impact inflicted upon the earth from logging, drilling, and mining. Such basic Tsilhqot'in values are intended to prolong all life and preserve land and resources for future generations.

Suwh-ts'eghedudinh is a Tsilhqot'in word with no easy translation into English. As Tsilhqot'in one's connectedness comes through the ancient stories, influencing one's interactions with others in the community, respect for ancestors, and sustainable interaction with environment. The most powerful of these stories is the "the Bear Who Married a Woman" and the concept of *niminh* is central to its theme. Told by one Tsilhqot'in elder, the story is full of the richness of ancient words, terms from the bear's language, and vivid illustrations of ancient ways. This period, set out originally by mammals and fish to ensure that people continue to prosper and maintain respect for all life forms, is preserved in the Tsilhqot'in term *suwh-ts'eghedudinh*.

⁵ Tyhurst, Robert 1995. Fish Lake Heritage Resource Study: Report on the 1993 archaeological survey of the Fish Lake mine project and access corridor in south central British Columbia. Report on file, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Victoria.

The term *suwh-ts'eghedudinh* 'preserving oneself; self-care' takes into account the concepts of care, specifically, care of the physical self, others, the handling of food resources, and keeping resources and lands pure. This observation of self-care follows two of Ernesto Alvarado's principles of three commandments in life which are essential to living a spiritual life (Freke 1999).⁶ Alvarado, Gavilian Mexican-Apache, is a shaman and has a doctorate in Psychology. The first law, he says, is "to take care of Mother Earth" [and its inhabitants]. The second, which is the prerequisite for physical health, is "to take care of our bodies". In a roundabout way the Tsilhqot'in principles of *suwh-ts'eghedudinh* set out guidelines to preserve and protect all life.

Suwh-ts'eghedudinh is an umbrella term which includes the principles of *niminh*. *Niminh* itself includes eight related themes: (1) ancient Tsilhqot'in stories, (2) categories of *niminh*, (3) preserving one's wellbeing and those of others by observing *niminh* restrictions, (4) *niminh* proscriptions for subsistence resources (hunting, fishing, and trapping resources and the related gear), (5) respect for wild animals, (6) respect for domestic animals, (7) preventative care of plant food, and (8) participating in *niminh* ceremonies. These are the things which keep Tsilhqot'in spiritually grounded and connected to their ancestors.

To note additional Tsilhqot'in guidelines for natural resources, one must not be wasteful, but to take only what one needs to survive and to take only what will be used, and leave the rest for the future. My grandfather, Samuel William (Xeni Gwet'in, born in the late 1800s), by adhering to ancient customs showed the importance of offering a prayer request and offering a gift prior to harvesting a resource. When one takes, one must always give something back. Chief Sil Canim (elected leader of Yunesit'in and Xeni), born in the 1800s, stressed that branches are not to be broken needlessly, because trees must be respected and allowed to live and enjoy their surroundings unless there's a dire need to use them. Plants are believed to be living spiritual beings along with the earth and all its life forms.

⁶ Freke, Timothy. 1999. Shamanic Wisdomkeepers: Shamanism in the Modern World. Godsfield Press. New York.

Success, in Tsilhqot'in culture, implicates having wealth, youthfulness, and good health, besides being surrounded by family, and having the necessary food and household possessions. The ancient guidelines for continual survival and good health are given in the overall Tsilhqot'in term, *suwh-ts'eghedudinh*, and this entails many observances. During my mother's youth, "wealth" meant simply owning a horse – having ready access to her environment. Nancy Turner (2005: 24-25)⁷ defined wealth as follows:

...Wealth – real wealth – is found among people who have a sound sense of their place in the world, who link their own actions and thoughts with those of others, and who are strong, vigorous and cooperative actors in their communities and ecosystems. Rich are those people who balance the benefits they receive in life with the responsibilities they assume for themselves, their families and communities and their environment. Wealth dwells in people who know about, appreciate and respect the other life forms around them and who understand the importance of habitats for people and all living things.

When life is held sacred and the Tsilhqot'in cultural principles are observed, the individual and collective rewards are youthfulness, good health, continuity, and balance.

Possible Impacts from the Proposed Mine

The loss of Nabas would create not only a loss of land, but a vast loss of Tsilhqot'in cultural heritage. The essential elements of Tsilhqot'in culture will be destroyed by the proposed changes of Nabas and its destruction. Intense and widespread harvesting of resources like clear-cutting and mining, with serious land alterations, take away not only cultural and historical evidence, but also deny Tsilhqot'in the right to use and plan future uses for these areas and structures. For example, the historic cabins such as those used by Seymour, George Myers, or Jimmie William may in the future be turned into Heritage Houses. There are prehistoric and historic trails in and around the area that connect to other landscapes far and near, which may serve as hiking trails for future generations. Among other impacts, the residual impacts from the proposed mine project could include the reduction of bear, deer, moose and grizzly habitat. The area of Nabas is known to be

⁷ Turner, Nancy 2005. *The Earth's Blanket: Traditional Teachings for Sustainable Living*. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre.

ideal moose habitat. There is a migration route for deer, moose, and mountain sheep which goes through Nabas, and grizzly bears travel through this area. The whole Mine Project Area has creeks and underground water and swamps, which likely seep into Taseko River.⁸

The destructive impact of the Prosperity Project alone will likely cause serious mental health concerns and physical deterioration of health among Tsilhqot'in. The grief over the unnecessary destruction of land is likely far more painful than losing family members, to people who have been caretakers of lands for thousands of years. Memories invoke images of the past, and it will be impossible for Tsilhqot'in (present and future generations) to enjoy and cherish the same mental images after the landscape is severely altered. It is likely that the destruction of the land will cause trauma which will overshadow any lingering memories once held for these places, and this could lead to severe emotional stress and deterioration of human health to anyone who loves the land and those who consume the fish downriver. The close proximity of Fish Lake to the mine could bring contaminants to the surrounding plant life and wildlife, thus endangering the health of Tsilhqot'in who continue their traditional subsistence occupation. Recent resource extractions are essentially extinguishing Tsilhqot'in right to use, respect, and see their ancestral sacred places.

It is not a Tsilhqot'in approach to be negative. It was shared that the language and communication style is gentle and this is true for the customs as well. For generations, Tsilhqot'in have walked gently upon the earth. The tradition has been, for thousands of years, to be exceptional stewards of the land and to leave pristine lands to future occupants.

Considerations for Nabas in Regards to the Proposed Mine

Fish Lake and all other Tsilhqot'in cultural sites are highly sacred sites due to the nature of the reverence that was held for life, survival, and the earth in general, so that one could

⁸ The waters of the Taseko River ultimately flow into those of the Fraser River and into the Pacific Ocean in British Columbia. The Fraser River watershed is one of Canada's great watersheds, and is critical to the migration cycle of Pacific salmon.

say confidently that all the cultural sites are places of reverence or even places of worship. Today, around the world, historic consecrated places are known internationally and such sites are protected and revered. To demolish such places in the Chilcotin is the same as tearing down a village of cathedrals. Sites like Fish Lake, considering their prehistoric, historic, and traditional uses, are held in the highest regard by Tsilhqot'in. How does one set a price for compensating Tsilhqot'in for destroying one of their "landscapes of cathedrals"?

Any other land, mountain, water, food, story, or culture cannot take the place of the precious places the ancestors have handed down. Sue Carlson, David Williams, Gordon Hognlund, and David Diether explained to the CEAA Panel (2010)⁹ this spiritual reality in a way that makes sense:

I was thinking about what gives something value. An item may be valuable because the thing itself is made of something expensive, like gold or diamonds. Maybe there's a piece of art, like a painting or sculpture, and its monetary value is high because it was done by a famous artist who is no (2588) longer living, it can't be produced anymore. Other times something is precious to us only because it comes from someone special and has memories attached to it that are uniquely ours. Teztan Biny [Fish Lake] has all of those characteristics. The land itself holds something of value. It was created by the master artist. It cannot be reproduced. And the deep memories of the area belong to the Tsilhqot'in. Any substitute offered in exchange for destroying the real thing cannot measure up. (Sue Carlson, Hanceville, pp. 2588-2589)

And I have lived and worked on the land all my life, hunted and fished and walked many trails, slept out in all weathers. Nevertheless, I feel sometimes that my connection compared to theirs is simply tenuous. Teztan Biny is part of their land. Its loss and all the other material losses caused by the construction of this mine -- of water, of fish, plants and animals -- will be as nothing compared to the sense of spiritual loss the people of this valley will experience should that place be destroyed. (David Williams, p. 2322)

In essence, the land is their church, the place where sacred and essential ceremonies and rituals take place. If you desecrate the land, you disrespect

⁹ CEAA = Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. The CEAA's 2010 report mentioned here was the outcome of the CEAA review of a gold and copper mining proposal submitted by Taseko Mines for the Nabas area. In 2010 the CEAA rejected the proposal, but Taseko Mines resubmitted an only slightly modified proposal in 2011, which is again under CEAA review.

the people by destroying evidence of their heritage. (Gordon Hogle, 100 Mile House, p. 1325)

Dave Diether, Property Owner (100 Mile House) spoke at length to a similar spiritual connection to land:

As someone said earlier, my church is this Earth. Wild places are in my soul and I don't believe I can live without them. You cannot know me and I cannot know myself without understanding my attachment to Mother Earth. I didn't ask for this. It's not something that's come by lately at all. In the beginning, as I say, I didn't pursue this thing. It's so central to my being. But when I look back at my life beginning at the time of young childhood play, I see how clearly this sense of wonder, this love, this passion, this interest in the natural world developed.

I don't present myself as a perfect environmental citizen. Far from it. But still I feel compelled to speak my thoughts and feelings on behalf of this part of the province, this cherished earth that I'm deeply connected to. (Dave Diether, p. 1372)

To open up in the Nemiah Valley, the territory of the Xeni Gwet'in people, to a one-generation, although I think I heard when I asked the question earlier that this may in fact be a two-generation operation, it would seem to me it would be similar to the severing of a limb of Mother Earth.

This special affiliation in my heart for nature was probably passed on to me by my father. When he spoke of the Nemiah Valley, it was as if he was speaking of a magical place. (Dave Diether, pp. 1372-1373)

We also learned through the 2010 Panel Hearing process that one old Yunesit'in woman lived at Teztan Biny, and her favorite food was rainbow trout. No one remembers her name. Any knowledge about her has vanished with the Elders who might have known. The only detail that was shared during an interview was that her husband gave her an offering of dried rainbow trout which he placed with her before her burial (Cecelia Quilt, Yunesit'in Elder). It is said that six sisters are buried in Teztan (Joseph Case, Tsi Del Del). Catharine Haller shared her knowledge about a woman who lived on the island:

The island on Teztan Biny has a sacred traditional pit house where a healer lived. The elder rancher talked to me and told me the healer was a woman. Three days later I went on the island, just me and Jimmy. He told me how to offer tobacco. He taught me before we left the shore on the other side of the sacred island. We went across to the island. Jimmy told me to brush off with juniper because we hit the sacred grounds. I could feel the spirit. He told me to brush with juniper in a traditional way so we didn't get hit and that was true

because I could feel it. I felt the woman's, the healer's spiritual spirit power. He said he could see it. I couldn't, but I could feel it. (pp. 2631-2634)

There are people that live there, our ancestors, where we live, where they live, and what they taught is what makes us Tsilhqot'in. Our grandmothers brought this back. That's the reason our land and our teachings guide us back to where we belong. (2639)

The powers up there, that woman is up there, that woman that has that pit house. It's not just a pit house. She left some stuff there and she appears there. If you are a healer, if you understand being a Tsilhqot'in, if you understand any healing that has to happen, you will see her. You will see her in the sweat houses. You will see her in the healing ceremonies. You will see her if you call for her. (pp. 2641-2642)

I pray when I step out on the earth. I always pray in the water. I always pray to the earth. These are my traditional healing resources that I really believe in through my heart and my mind. It's all because of Teztan Biny. It's just like we're respecting an Elder that's sitting over there. That's how I feel about it. That Teztan Biny is just like an Elder sitting there. And just like the traditional woman that is still seated on that south island. People go to Teztan Biny to do ceremonies, prayers, all night long, sweat lodges, and medicine baths. It's a traditional way of doing things. We have our own songs and our own rituals and we do these every year. People do these things when they go to Teztan Biny for their traditional fishing and hunting. It's how we prepare. (pp. 2642-2643)

Tsilhqot'in Elders know of additional graves within the proposed mine site and more graves within the proposed corridor, which will be affected by the proposed project at Fish Lake. A number of graves will be destroyed by the proposed mine as they are located in Teztan; six on the island, one on a hilltop, and one along the creek below (Agnes Haller, John P Quilt, Yunesit'in). There are a number of cremation and burial sites in other areas around Teztan as well which were missed by archaeologists (Inez Setah, Xení Gwet'in). Three other graves are located in the area of the campground (Orrie Hance, Tl'etincox) and in the area that will be covered by the proposed tailings pond. One of the grave belongs to someone from Tl'etincox, and one is Tsilhqot'in, but the names of the individuals are unknown (Alice William, Norman William, Xení Gwet'in). Joseph Case (Tsi Del Del) indicated that his grandfather (deceased 1918) is buried in Teztan but indicated that he did not know the location of his grave.

There are a number of unlisted cremation and burial sites in the access corridor that may be directly or indirectly affected by the development of a power line. I have heard many stories about Tsilhqot'in who have traveled to the mountains in search of medicine to heal their ailments. Many of them did not return likely because their conditions were too far advanced. These Tsilhqot'in are buried in the mountains. Cecelia Quilt's six relatives are buried below Nabis (also Nabas; Anvil Mountain) (Christine Cooper, Tl'etinqox; Joanna Haines, Yunesit'in), specifically near Fire Creek (Agnes Haller, Yunesit'in), and it has not been determined whether these sites are situated within the proposed mine or not. Atažl-Hedaysh (where Atažl lives) is a place where there are six Yunesit'in graves. Other graves which may be under or near the proposed corridor are situated in the area of Churn Creek area where Yunesit'in people are buried on land used by Agnes Haller's paternal aunt. Mulis Beqiyex (Mulis' Fish Camp) and Etsi Beqiyex (Grandfather's Fish Camp) are places that have Yunesit'in graves. Hungry Valley has one grave surrounded by a log structure (documented in "Gang Ranch" by Judy Alsager). Historically and more recently, trips have been taken by Tsilhqot'in members to Graveyard Valley to meet with the Shuswap and the Lillooet, and this significant landmark also contains grave sites. Tsilhqot'in customs dictate that historic human remains be untouched and undisturbed. A grave is sacred in itself and no Tsilhqot'in will touch a grave nor agree to remove the human remains therein to another location. The destruction and/or removal of the grave would be extremely appalling and would greatly distress Tsilhqot'in.

There are many descendants who have yet to see the areas where their grandparents have spent their lives. Within the living memory of elders, there are those who have lived and traveled practically everywhere in the Chilcotin. My grandfather's cabin served as a temporary living space and also as a storage place for his tools. Some have also camped at the shore of Wasp Lake. The future descendants of such people have yet to discover other places where their grandparents may have camped, hunted, trapped, and gathered traditional resources, and this research is dependent on further studies with living Tsilhqot'in elders and a search within intact landscapes.

There is a declining number of areas to gather plants and berries. The places not yet logged are mountains, canyons, steep slopes, and the Xenit area. So, Teztan has become

more important to those who want to gather uncontaminated plant resources, and for those who want to camp in a pristine location. Two Tsilhqot'in Elders have indicated that plants gathered in high elevations are more powerful and this is generally known among other First Nations Elders:

That area [Teztan] was a special place to pick these medicinal plants. (Minnie Charleyboy, Tsi Del Del)

The roots from plants that grew on those spiritual mountains are the best medicine we could ever have. I still use those medicines for my aches and pains today. (Dinah Billyboy, Tl'etinqox, p. 3383)

In general, documentation on Tsilhqot'in Prehistory, History, and Culture is so scarce that the numerous and significant archaeological finds at Teztan Biny beg for substantial follow-up studies.

In his explanation for his high scientific significance rating for one site at Teztan Biny, Tyhurst (1995:27) noted Stryd and Lawhead's (1983:49)¹⁰ remark regarding a similar site in Highland Valley. Due to the number of characteristics occurring together, the Teztan Biny site is "one of the most significant archaeological sites in southern British Columbia."

Both Tyhurst (1995) and Terra Archaeology (2008)¹¹ rated this Teztan Biny site as being rare and having very high scientific significance, because it contains evidence dating back to 5500 BP. This important site is situated at the edge or inside of the proposed mining pit. Tyhurst (1995:26) described the site as having very high scientific significance due to the rare occurrence of finding "microblades within a rectangular lodge structure." According to Tyhurst, who excavated three house depressions at this single site, there were a number of similarities with the Stryd and Lawhead (1983)

¹⁰ Stryd, Arnoud and Lawhead, Stephen 1983. Bethlehem Copper Corporation Lake Zone Development Heritage Mitigation Study. Report on Permit No. 82-19, British Columbia Archaeology Branch, Victoria. Cited in Tyhurst (1995) (see ref. in fn. 5).

¹¹ Terra Archaeology 2008. Archaeological Survey Unit (ASU). In: Taseko Mines Limited Prosperity Gold-Copper Project Environmental Impact Statement/Application, Volume 7, Appendix 7-2-D.

documentation in Highland Valley and with a third rare site in B.C. located in Anahim Lake (Wilmeth 1979)¹².

The Tsilhqot'in people will need to save large sites like Fish Lake for later interpretation centers, to preserve evidence of ancestral lifestyles and to safeguard access to sites containing culture in situ for the Tsilhqot'in generations to come. Fish Lake is a feasible site to preserve as a heritage site, to allow cultural experts and Tsilhqot'in elders to assess sites for other cultural uses.

The public significance of Fish Lake is higher than is presently rated. It is difficult to say whether there is another place with so many archaeological sites and a site surrounded by so many harvesting areas. There is a Forest Service picnic and campsite on the north shore of Fish Lake. The pristine environment, scenery, mountain visibility, and remoteness of areas will certainly attract more people and tourists in the future, increasing the economic and public significance of the area.

Fish Lake has the potential of becoming the hub for a Tsilhqot'in cultural interpretation site for local schools and Thompson River University for its First Nations courses. It is a site ideal for the creation of a pre-1846 typical Tsilhqot'in village of pit houses, seasonal activities, recreation, and ecotourism or\and a health resort (healing centre) for revitalization of Tsilhqot'in puberty rituals because of the safety feature of the island and the pristine nature that lends itself to Tsilhqot'in spirituality. The aesthetic quality replete with vistas of snow-capped mountains, hundreds of varieties of plants, a pristine lake, almost unequalled in British Columbia because the lake is devoid of housing and commercial development, and yet is within easy traveling distance of urban areas. Fish Lake is a spiritual sanctuary; a spiritual centre of the Tsilhqot'in and yet, also a place where outsiders can come.

¹² Wilmeth, Roscoe, 1979. Anahim Lake Archaeology and the Early Historic Chilcotin Indians. National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper No. 82. Ottawa.

Nabas Oral Literature Documentation: Research Work Completed

We initially focused our project interview questions on what the elders know about Nabas: for example, who used the area (pre-historically, historically, contemporary); what people did; what personal stories of life at Nabas they remember; why it should be left in its pristine state peripheral sites and activities and the spirituality of the place. We included information about the trails to and from the site, grave sites, cremations sites, travel stories, visitors and their stories, and ceremonies. The questionnaire on Nabas consisted of 107 questions, and at the end of this documentation project, when it came down to categorizing which of the questions were of a spiritual nature, ninety-five per cent of the questions fell into this category, even though at first glance, some of the questions seemed to be more historic than spiritual. From a Tsilhqot'in perspective, historic memories are of a spiritual nature, as they bring together ancestral knowledge to the land, birth and death ceremonies, and so forth, and the documentation process allows for personal reconnections with highly spiritual relatives. The people who lived in Nabas were spiritual people who knew their traditions and were spiritually in tune with their environment, so the ceremonial aspects covered would have been practiced wherever the people traveled and lived.

It was interesting to read a previous study on Teztan Biny (Fish Lake), in which the responses to a question about “Why is Fish Lake sacred?” elicited the same responses as the question “What did people do at Nabas?” There is no Tsilhqot'in word for “spirituality”, likely because this is intertwined with everything—just as the air exists everywhere, thus there's no word for “air” either. Why give a name to something that is so obvious and exists right around us? We added the section on ceremonies as an afterthought because we were concerned that, since we do not have a term for “spirituality”, it might be difficult to convey this to elders and have them share this knowledge with us.

25 elders from Yunesit'in, Xení, Tl'etinqox (Anaham), Tsi Del Del (Redstone), and Tl'esqox (Toosey) participated in this project:

Community	# of Elders	Audio Recording	Video Recording
------------------	--------------------	------------------------	------------------------

Yunesit'in	6	12.5 GB	11.3 GB
Xeni	8	15.3 GB	
Tl'etingox	7	18.1 GB	
Tsi Del Del	1	2.54 GB	
Tl'esqox	1	8.51 MB	

Highlights of This Study

We have recorded a tremendous amount of information. Interviewers learned a lot about Tsilhqot'in spiritual knowledge. We had elders talk about ceremonies and rituals practiced throughout the stages of life. This documentation is going to be very valuable to prepare to share with communities. The section on ceremonies is an absolutely precious part of this project, to be able to learn everything we need to know about our ceremonies, to preserve this information and to maintain the old traditions. It has been mentioned that learning significant parts of our tradition is a healing experience and ceremonies will be an invaluable contribution in this respect.

The small historic community of Yanah Biny (Little Fish Lake) is a place that many people wish to return to live permanently, and others want to build traditional earth homes on the shore of Teztan Biny (Fish Lake). One elder said she would like to move back to Nabas to be able to live the old life, away from modern conveniences, the noise, and away from the influence of drugs and alcohol. She felt that Nabas offered all that was necessary to live a full and contented life. Not enough was shared with the 2010 CEAA Panel about these plans in people's thoughts. Yanah Biny is right in the middle of the proposed tailings pond, a place that elders fondly remember for its big salmon-sized rainbow trout and abundance of moose and grizzlies.

Teztan Biny has been described as a "one-stop-shopping-place" – a place where a multiple of resources exist: game, fur-bearing mammals, fish, berries, food plants, and medicines. People frequented places where there were potential harvests, including the trail to Lillooet and Seymour's trail. Our future generations will want to know more about these landscapes to give them a sense of how large the areas are that hold the presence of past activities, and about areas that have been consecrated by the presence of

their grandparents. This in itself will help future Tsilhqot'in to bond with this very beautiful and spiritual place and will inspire many who will pass through these places.

Most of the elders from our interviews enjoyed a childhood with very knowledgeable grandparents who passed on as much knowledge as they could. They were immersed in their traditions and learned their ways while living on the land. These are great privileges. They were very articulate in their ancestral language and this was inspiring in itself – that we have captured a vocabulary that will be valuable for generations to come. We heard numerous words and amazing descriptions which would otherwise have been lost. This resource will greatly benefit future language learners.

We learned a number of details about the building and maintenance of traditional earth homes, methods of outdoor storage, and some elders made drawings of structures for us, so this will enable us to replicate traditional structures in the future. We captured information about tools, weapons, trapping methods, and dyes for snowshoes.

There are approximately 88 hours of recordings to transcribe and translate for the upcoming CEAA Panel Hearings.¹³ Much of the knowledge gathered can be applied to revitalization of the culture in the Nabas area and also to preserving the sacred lands of Nabas from encroachments by clearcut logging and mining. Alice William (Xeni Gwet'in) already needed details from this work to use for touring officials in the area this past summer. The project literature will also be used to create teaching manuals for language classrooms, for use in the cultural, healing, and revitalization programs and for title and rights cases. This completed work will support such future initiatives by providing raw footage and audio recordings of culturally significant work to revitalize the Tsilhqot'in language and culture and document ancient Tsilhqot'in land use. Tourism centers will be facilitated in key cultural areas of the Tsilhqot'in territory, and Nabas has been mentioned repeatedly for such sites. Traditional earth homes and traditional temporary shelters have been discussed for key tourism sites.

¹³ The new CEAA Panel Hearings established after Taseko Mines re-submitted their mining application for the Nabas area in 2011.

We hope to revitalize more of our culture and share what we are learning so that more of us will be able to pass this knowledge down to our youth. A Tsilhqot'in elder once said, "By learning what I have to teach you, you will be able to perform as I did in the future, thereby, keeping me alive into the future."

Future Oral Literature Documentation

First Nations are uncovering the wealth of information about traditional knowledge in their fight for land and resources, but this alone will not recover the encyclopedic knowledge carried by their Elders. The Tsilhqot'in traditions are at risk of becoming useless if there are no places to practice them.

There is much more research to do on intangible Tsilhqot'in heritage¹⁴ in order to adequately assess culturally important sites. For one example, it has been mentioned by Tsilhqot'in that people painted their faces with red ochre as a ritual done prior harvesting food from the land. It appears that this custom of using red ochre existed since ancient times because it is mentioned in the story of "The Woman Who Lived With a Bear". The significance of this custom is lost to the younger generations of Tsilhqot'in, except for the placename "Tsish-t'ad" which refers to red-ochre. Apart from this loss of knowledge of this sacred traditional custom, if food harvesting was perceived as such a highly sacred undertaking, that one was moved to use red ochre before entering a forest or a harvest area, then it could be assumed that all such areas were consecrated by this custom. It is

¹⁴ UNESCO has an elaborate definition of cultural knowledge: The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity."

(<http://portal.unesco.org>; Accessed 10 May 2009)

likely that the same sacredness was placed upon other traditional tasks such as hunting, trapping, fishing, plant gathering, etc.

There are other Tsilhqot'in ceremonies besides puberty rites and cold water baths, which are carried out while fishing, harvesting plant food and medicine, hunting and trapping, and occasional ritual cleansing of hunting and trapping tools. Therefore, it would seem likely that the abovementioned consideration would extend the areas marked as significant sites in Nabas, beyond areas of traditional use sites, creeks, lakes, and the island. The island was likely the most important site for vision quests and puberty rituals.

Yet to be documented are the most likely sites for:

1. sweat lodges, hunting cleansing, offerings (hole, rocks, near habitation; fire at hunting site)
2. puberty lodges (isolated – likely no fire)
3. daily water rituals (from each pit house site - was likely done in the lake or Fish Creek, depending which was closer)
4. hide tanning (near habitation site)
5. food and medicine harvesting, ceremonial treatments of plants (berry patch, root field, near plant medicines; shoreline of creek or river, and near habitation site)
6. cremations
7. seasonal camping
8. social gatherings

It would be worthwhile to document these types of stories and attempt to locate graves, and in general, record more Tsilhqot'in Elders' knowledge and laws in regards to the respectful treatment of the dead. First Nations show reverence for remains, whether it is from humans, vegetation, animals, or other forms of life from the natural environment.

Research on Tsilhqot'in culture is very important, not just for this generation, but more for the generations to follow. Tsilhqot'in are very fortunate that they still have Tsilhqot'in speakers and Elders on whom they can rely for cultural information. In doing research, Tsilhqot'in must think ahead to the generations following and leave as much Tsilhqot'in knowledge and resources as possible for them so that they can learn their language and culture. As it is now, it is sad to realize that our language is near extinction. There are practically no Tsilhqot'in children learning the language fluently at this time, but many want to learn their language and culture now and others will want to do so in the future. According to three presenters at the 2010 community Panel Hearings, the Tsilhqot'in language cannot exist without intact land and vice versa:

Without the land, you can't teach the language. Without the language, you don't have the land. ... In certain areas, such as berry picking, medicinal plant gathering, Labrador-tea gathering, you actually have to go out on to those sites and teach the children what you're picking. You can't do that in these areas anymore because of the devastation of logging practices. (Orrie Charleyboy, Tsi Del Del, p. 3961)

Being on the land is very important to teaching the Tsilhqot'in language. It's survival skills that we always pass on to the children. And what my parents pass on to me, I pass it on down to my kids and especially in my work area, that's very important. Because we're going to continue to live off the land. (Susie Lulua, Xení Gwet'in, pp. 2184-2185)

We were and still are very spiritual. At Tsilhqot'in, Nenqayni, all First Nations have a language that is tied to the lands. A lot of the language if, without the language, you would have a hard time as to where you're coming from. Language has been important to us. Very important. Without language, part of you is going to -- is missing. Because language is also spiritual. The language, the land, the environment, earth, it all works together as one. We are the children of Mother Earth as Tsilhqot'in People. If you separate those, then part of you is going to be -- a bit is missing here. And that's what we do not want. We are connection. We are in connection with our land. Our territory. We are one with the land. We are one with the environment. (William Billyboy, Tletincox, pp. 3390-3392)

Videotaped and recorded interviews and fieldtrips are crucial resources to future generations who may want to learn the language, and visual representations will enable them to see people speaking the language. It is quite difficult to learn the language by listening to words on cassettes, because listeners sometimes need to see the actual voicing of words to learn. Tsilhqot'in have a difficult time trying to make sense of parts of ancient stories, because Elders often speak too fast and use ancient language. There are many words that have complete histories of their own. The Tsilhqot'in language is very rich in its description of ancient ways, and altogether the culture offers a unique worldview.

Keeping language extinction in mind, there are many things Tsilhqot'in need to consider in documenting their research on the various species that exist, and at the same time, consider that these species may be endangered and be heavily impacted by imposed resource extraction practices. Different Tsilhqot'in Elders and people may know more about certain species, for example, one person may be more knowledgeable about the names of species or may be better able to describe species, and another may know specific details on the preparation of certain plants, and different families may have carried down other knowledge about species.

Traditional knowledge is very important to Tsilhqot'in. In general, knowledge aids in recapturing and establishing pride in one's heritage; it is healing and empowering; it

provides a sense of belonging to ancestors, land, and culture; and it enhances connection to other people.

More documentation is required to describe the connection Tsilhqot'in have to the many cultural areas not yet documented along the proposed corridor and other areas significant to Tsilhqot'in. It is possible that the access road is literally covered with significant historic and cultural sites. There are cultural areas in at or near lakes, mountains, along the Big Creek road, near Tete Angela, and along the proposed access road which will go through ranch lands, fishing sites, and through historically used land. This research has not been done.

Protection of the watersheds is necessary to Tsilhqot'in survival and to the practice of their spiritual way of life. A number of Tsilhqot'in individuals and Elders voiced this during the Panel Hearings:

We use the Chilcotin River for healing ourselves, too. Whenever we don't feel well, and we are in pain, we go into that river. We stand in there or dip ourself into that river for healing and it helps ease our pain. And we use that river for spirituality. Because we are the River People and the river knows that. He helps us get our medicine of whatever we ask of him or her. The river is our life. He or she is our blood. (Dinah Billyboy, Tl'etinqox, pp. 3247-3446).

She said the water we use as medicine. This Chilcotin River here that's running right over here, just a little ways from us. She said they use, they drink it. They bathe in it. They use it for medicine. They fish there. She said if the mine comes in, it is all going to get wrecked. We won't be able to drink it. We will not be able to use it as a medicine. It's not going to be pure anymore. And we will not be able to bathe in it. (Susan Alphonse, Tl'etinqox, p. 3411)

Prehistoric data and cultural research are important contributions to human societies, and much more studies need to be done at Fish Lake. Since the area has likely been continuously occupied for over 5000 years, and since the area is so vast, it is reasonable to assume it has only begun to reveal its archaeological treasure. The ancient Teztan Biny village site is too valuable to ignore or destroy. The infrequency of such finds in the Tsilhqot'in territory and the scientific significance given to it elevates the site's overall significance in Tsilhqot'in Prehistory.

More excavations are needed over the entire mine footprint, considering that so much archaeological data was found, and the fact that a stone pipe bowl was found on a chance shovel test, leaving one to wonder how many other undiscovered artifacts lie buried under the surface. Pipes are generally known for their use in healing ceremonies, peace talks, divining the future, and it is possible that Tsilhqot'in smoked a pipe before making important decisions or during meetings. So little is known about pipe use by Tsilhqot'in,

and this alone makes this find highly significant. The location of a pipe stone quarry within Tsilhqot'in territory is known by a few Tsilhqot'in individuals and it would be interesting to compare this find with those which can be found at this quarry.

As well, many historic Tsilhqot'in, because of their traditional upbringing and being called as medicine people, built sweat lodges near their place of residence; and it is very likely they did the same near their campsites. There could be remains of sweat lodge sites along the proposed access road; some along lake shores, including on the very site of the proposed Headwater Channel which will go right into Wasp Lake; some along the northern stretch of Fish Creek; and one within one of the archaeological sites.

My heart is heavy with the inadequacy of my words. But let me say by way of conclusion that this work scarcely begins to introduce who we are, what we treasure, our spiritual angst at the thought of this insane proposal by Prosperity Mine. I have done here what Tsilhqot'in rarely do: bared our soul to the outside world. If Teztan Biny is destroyed, we Tsilhqot'in as a distinct race and culture are destroyed. We stand in the midst of a long line of ancestors from whom we have inherited our land, and of our yet unborn descendants to whom we must pass our heritage. I speak for those to come who cannot speak for themselves.

The landscapes, vegetation, and its creatures do not have voices to oppose contamination and destruction, thus, this duty remains with people. I recall my mother, who then was in her early 70s, expressing her concern about the well-being of squirrels when logging first began in the Chilcotin. The smallest of creatures are respected and this goes back to distant times and is reflected in ancient Tsilhqot'in stories. Tsilhqot'in consider all life forms as perceptive beings to be respected and this is depicted in our language and customs. Life comes from one source or energy and all have the right to live in pristine environments as they have been for thousands of years.

Appendix I

Alice William & Family's Memories of Nabis¹⁵

I have been reflecting on places where I grew up to try to come up with answers to the question, “What does Teztan mean to us?” We have never been without the land and have never had to think about providing answers to such a question. I had to think long and hard to put into words our people’s feelings about this special place which is close to the essence of our soul. How does one translate the incomprehensibility of sacredness in mere words? It is likened to being asked, “What does the earth mean to you?” or “What would your life be like without the earth?” Teztan, Yanah Biny, Biny Gunchagh, Jididzay, Dadilin-yex, Nabis, Tchaikazan, Chilco Lake, Tatlayoko, Yoietta, etc. is the earth to us. Probably the best way to approach this challenge is through the stories of the families who called this area home. There are hundreds of family stories to tell, but here are a representative few.

My mother, Amelia Char, was born at Tsi Del Del (Redstone) and was orphaned at birth. She was adopted by her uncle Seymour and his wife Elizabeth, then lived with her great grandmother as is the custom. Together she and her grandmother led an idyllic traditional life. They traveled on foot through the mountains leading one old horse to pack their belongings. They camped in Lillooet, Big Creek area, and back to Fish Lake. They cached food in trees close to home around Fish Lake, and cached others along the way through Big Creek and back. These are the landscapes that my mother grew to love. She fondly told us stories about her travels in the mountains. This country was home to her.

My father, Jimmy Bulyan (Jimmy William, Xení Gwet’in), was first a trapper, fisher, hunter, and outdoor survivalist. He was also a horse trainer, rancher, horse breeder, and big game guide. He was a traditional family man who provided for a family of twelve. He built log homes, told us numerous stories, and he was a friend to all. He was most known for his warm heart, dedication to hard work, easy going nature, and easy to laugh. He loved life as did those who lived before him.

My paternal grandparents along with their grandparents were camping south of Taseko in the Mountains and harvesting food in the fall of the year and it was here that my great-great-great grandfather received a vision that there was a flu epidemic in Xení. His Spirits

¹⁵Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA), Hearing Documents, Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine Project, 17th February 2012. Excerpts used from the submissions of Mary Jane William, Theresa Stump, Doris William, Norman William, Joanne William, and Tasheena William.
<http://www.ceaa.gc.ca/050/documents-eng.cfm?evaluation=44811&type=4> (Accessed 2010)

told him not to return until such time that it was safe to go home. My uncle, who was born after my father, was born there at that time in the month of November. It is Spirit that took care of them then and it was Spirit that shaped my parents and fashioned my worldview.

Our people were segregated from the white society back in the early 1900s and even up to the 1960s. They were told to stay on a reserve and not leave and were not allowed to go to public schools or restaurants, or own land or businesses. My great-uncle bought land and was made to disown his native status and his heritage. Tsilhqot'in were made to feel inferior and had to work hard for other people and sometimes they had only enough money to provide the basic necessities. I remember my father couldn't even buy a cowboy hat until much later on in his life -- family came first for him.

Times were hard, but the Tsilhqot'in had purpose and the stamina of athletes in those days. They had long-term endurance which helped them work hard and walked long distances. The present Tsilhqot'in elders used lean-tos - a small A- frame log structure - which allowed them the comfort of sleeping by campfires during their long treks along trap lines. They rode and walked to other territories and back again. My father knew the surrounding country like all the people before him and the Esghaydam (the Ancestors). He traveled to the coast with other men from Xení on foot and sometimes on snowshoes. He traveled to Quesnel, to Ashcroft, and to Lillooet on horseback and this was his preferred mode of travel. He would saddle up a horse on a whim and go to Tesuniah Lake to visit or to Mountain House (near Henry's Crossing) to visit his uncle. He was always riding around on horseback or walking and hunting on the land.

Tsilhqot'in did not keep to one specific trail or area for hunting or trapping. Our trapline covers the area from Fish Creek up to Nabis and down to the end of Taseko Lake. When hunting or trapping we used the whole area for our needs. Some trapping areas are given a rest while other places are used. Some animals prefer only certain areas as habitat and these could include streams and riverbeds. Moose, deer, Mountain goat, California Big Horn Sheep can be anywhere in the Nabis area. They prefer not to make themselves visible to people.

On one of his spring rides, my father came upon a cow moose that had given birth on a hill. The cow moose had gotten herself in a predicament. Its calf had slipped down the hill and into some trees and there the calf stayed. It couldn't get up or go anywhere, and the cow moose stood by watching helplessly. My father got off his horse a safe distance away and he walked closer to the calf. The cow didn't seem to mind -- she was too worried about her calf. He crept closer, got up close to the calf, and lifted it off the trees and brought it to safety, all the while keeping a close eye on the mother in case he had to flee. The cow stood there and let him handle her calf. This was an uplifting experience and a day's accomplishment.

Tsilhqot'in families built the first cabins in Yanah Biny (Little Fish Lake) in the 1800s to the 1920s to be in an area surrounded by traditional resources. Christine Cooper told me that her father had built his cabin around 1928, and John Baptiste built his home a little earlier. Seymour lived there with his wife as well and he had just started his cabin when unfortunate events prevented him from completing the building. It is said that this small community was to become part of Stone Reserve, but circumstances and events did not unfold as planned.¹⁶

My sister, Mary Jane, remembers hearing stories of people who came from miles around to get together at Teztan to fish, visit, build sweathouses, and have sweat lodge ceremonies. Together, they shared whatever food they had. They fished and shared the fish they caught. They told stories, sang drum songs, and danced. This was the kind of social celebrations they enjoyed way before European contact and after contact. Most of the Tsilhqot'in of that period received their own songs and these songs still exist today -- thanks to the modern recorders.

Our own parents used to visit Seymour and his wife Elizabeth at this place when my brother, Joseph, was just a baby. So, my father was familiar with this community and he was willing to move up there when the time came, and this time came 12 years later. We moved to Yanah Biny in 1947 or 1948 (Mary Jane).

We picked blueberries, strawberries, soapberries, kinnikinnick, Saskatoon berries, raspberries, and crowberries in and around Wasp Lake and Nabis area. We ate some and dried some for winter use. The *nu wsh* (soapberries), we boiled and spread onto straw, allowing it to dry. As it is drying, we heap more mashed soapberries on top of that layer until it becomes a nice dried block. In the winter we soak a piece of it in water and whip it up, add sugar and we eat it like ice-cream (Mary Jane).

My sister, Doris, recalls that there was an abundance of wildlife in and around Little Fish Lake. We saw wolves, coyotes, foxes, muskrats, beaver, lynx, fisher, otter, moose, deer, wolverine, squirrels, and weasels. There were lots of rabbits across the lake at Yanah Biny. My father set up snares across the lake hoping to catch a few rabbits. Doris put on

¹⁶ Tsilhqot'in claimed residency at Nabas/Williams Homestead in the early 1900s and have used the area continuously, and are planning to continue to occupy the area, including improvements to the area for agriculture. The former chief of Stone, Louie Quilt, attempted to create additional reserves for his people. Two reserves mentioned are at Nabas. One on the Williams Homestead and the other is east, closer to Tete Angela. The Tsilhqot'in people, at the time of such undertaking, spoke very little English, so were likely unable to express the problems they encountered while living at the second village at Nabas/Anvil Mountain. It is said that local ranchers burned their cabins to prevent the Tsilhqot'in from permanently establishing residence at this site. In fact, according to members of Stone, one of the Tsilhqot'in died in this fire, and as a result, the village site was abandoned.

snowshoes too and checked the snares to collect the rabbits that had been caught. An owl sometimes helped itself with a rabbit or two. Our family trapped and ate lynx, beaver, cougar, muskrat, rabbit, and ptarmigan to supplement our food supply of meat, dried roots, dried berries, and basic store-bought dried goods. Our family never had to buy meat. They lived off wild meat all year long. We trapped along Taseko Lake and Taseko River; Onion Lakes, Chita meadows, back to Fish Lake and the surrounding area. Sometimes Doris would take over looking after the traps when the men were gone for a week.

One other time, Joanne says she went for a day hike from Wasp Lake (Biny-Gunchagh), and came upon a cow moose giving birth to a young one. This was a nice surprise. She stayed hidden until the cow moose had her calf, and then left. Not many people witness such a wonderful event. Our family was blessed having lived in this area.

She remembers our father used to take the whole family in a wagon to Teztan for a few days to do some fishing. It was a good family time. Teztan is a great fishing lake for kids and elders alike. There are plenty of unique wild rainbow trouts in this lake. My sister Doris and I blazed a trail from Yanah Biny to Teztan so we could travel back and forth between the lakes on horseback leading packhorses. This was the best time of my life, living out there at Dadilin-yex (Taseko Lake), the Bullion meadows, Nabas, Teztan, Yanah Biny, and Jididzay (Onion Lakes). The family fished at Teztan every summer and fall using fishing rods. My sisters Minnie, Mary Jane and Doris used to take my brothers Adam and Norman fishing when they were old enough to sit on the back of a horse. In those days the lake shoreline used to be swarming with fish. At one time, Joanne says that we counted thirty eagles, and it was just in one small area. The eagles gather here when the fish are spawning in the creeks between Little Fish Lake and Big Fish Lake. My older brother Marvin made rafts, and he and his wife Ernestine used to put homemade fishnets in the lake and get a few fish to dry for the winter. Our mother dried enough fish to last all winter.

Norman noticed that the grizzly bears use the creek between Big Fish Lake and Little Fish Lake. He says it is their trail and the grizzlies also fish in the creeks in the spring. There is an old Sleigh trail that my father used and there are grizzly bear claw marks all over the trees through there.

There are red listed and blue listed falcons at risk in the area. There are blue listed Great Blue Herons and fishers. Where are they going to go? The European countries are running out of pristine wilderness, and coming to our country to see this area. It is inconceivable to them that we Canadians would destroy what nature we have left.

Norman believes the Spirits of our ancestors are still on the land. He says sometimes you can hear rifle shots at the Yanah Biny settlement when there is nobody around. My

mother and father are still out there around Fish Lake, Nabis, and the meadows. They love the land and they will never leave it. One day, my older sisters and I were fishing at Yanah Biny and we were all standing on this little log raft enjoying ourselves. We heard a stampede of horses and we looked up on the hill and into the trees and we waited to see if horses or riders would show up. The sound was coming from the area around the cabins, but we didn't see anything. So, we think the spirits of the Tsilhqot'in who have passed on are letting us know they are still on the land. There are numerous unmarked graves. If the mine is approved they will be digging up some of our people including the two graves at Yanah Biny.

My great-niece, Tasheena William, wrote in a letter saying, "What we have out there is something you just can't find anywhere. It's something in all of our memories. Either we've been there to experience what life is really like to live in such wilderness, or our elders have told us stories about their memories there. When I listen to my Grandma talk to me about her childhood out at Nabis, it melts my heart because I see now that Taseko Mines Ltd. is trying to take that away from her. Not just for a couple months or years, but forever. Fish Lake is love to us; it's what puts a smile on all our elders' faces because it's a place where they call home."

We are not greedy. We do not want the gold. We just want clean air, clean mountain streams, clean rivers, clean lakes and intact land. We have been pushed and shoved so far since the time of the Tsilhqot'in warriors who gave their lives for their families and for this land which we are fighting for yet again, and we cannot tolerate much more.