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The History of the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe

By Leo Braun

Long, long ago, before there were any white people in the country, Pepstoats was the chief of the Sauk tribe. The land of the tribe is the territory from the junction of the Sauk and Skagit, up the valley on the West side, east up to the Summit at the head of the Sauk and hence along Glacier Peak ridge to the Summit at the head of the Suiattle River; the Suiattle River on both East and West sides. The Indians lived on the Sauk on both sides of the Sauk River, and on Sauk Prairie, and some people had big houses at Buck Creek and Tenas Creek on the Suiattle.

At that time there was a big Indian graveyard situated at Tenas Creek. There was another Indian graveyard just across the river from Sauk Prairie, near where John Olson lives now.

The Indian foods included: goat, deer, grouse, bear, elk, and salmon. They made their clothes out of goat wool and deer skins, and the huckleberry and blackberries and elderberries were their fruit.

The Indians were always very careful with fires in the timber, because the timber was the home of their game.

There was a big council house located at Tenas Creek. In this house there were a lot of Indian paintings. The Indians held their councils here and the chiefs and Indians discussed everything and made rulings concerning the game and the ways of living. The Indians preserved their game; there was

no waste. The game was not wild like they are now. Indians used the bow and arrow at short distances to kill the game. In this way game was always plentiful.

Chief Pepstoats became old so Wa Wilkin was made chief. The Indians had a council meeting and he was selected chief. Wa Wilkin did just as Chief Pepstoats. He held council meetings and told his young men how they should live.

During the good weather all the Indians came from all over, met at the Baquab, the Sauk Prairie to dig the different roots and herbs which the Indians put away for food in the winter. There were five different kinds of berries growing at the Baquab which are not found there any more. This is before the white people came.

Before Chief Wa-Wilkin died he asked his people to put up a new chief as he was old, so the people chose Wa-Wet-Kin. Chief Wa-Wet-Kin was chief a few years when the Indians received word that the white people had come to Mukilteo. This was in 1855.

Governor Stevens was making treaties with Indians at the Sound, but the Sauk Indians never went to the treaties, they had no part in it.

Help On Railroad Survey

In 1870 the railroad men from Bellingham came up to see this territory and

to make a survey. The Indians used their canoes to haul the supplies for the survey party. This party came all the way up the Skagit, then up the Sauk River.

The railroad men arrived at Sauk Prairie and found a large number of Indians living there. He asked who was the chief. The Indians said Wa-Wet-Kin is chief but he is over at Wenatchee now. His brother Jim is here. The railroad men asked Jim if he would work. Jim said yes he would work because he knew the country up the Sauk River up to the pass and down the Wenatchee side and to the Columbia River. The railroad men hired Jim and four of his men, because the Indians from the lower rivers could not navigate the rough river and wanted to go home.

The Indians took the railroad men up the Sauk River in canoes. It took several days until they arrived as far as canoes can go. This is the Bedal Camp grounds now. Now Jim Braun and his cousin Johnny Sauk walked up and across Indian Pass to get horses from the East side of the mountains. The railroad men asked Jim Braun how far he can get the horses from the east of the mountains. Jim Braun says he can get them as far as Indian Pass. The railroad men told him that he can decide on what to pay for the horses and men to take care of the horses, they wanted ten horses, as they wanted some for riding and some for packing.

The rest of the Indians went on foot and packed on their backs and they got to the summit, Indian Pass.

It took Jim Braun three days to walk over to the Indian settlement at Wenatchee. He paid \$1.00 a day for each for hire for the horses and \$1.00 a day for the man to take care of the horses. The horses arrived at the summit the same time the Indians got there. The Indians returned home from the Summit; the horses packed the supplies; the East of the mountain Indians did the work from there. The railroad men wanted Jim Braun to keep working while the other Indians went home.

They went on several days until they came to the Columbia River, at the mouth of the Wenatchee. From here the Wenatchee Indians quit work. The Railroad men asked if there were any Indians with horses across the Columbia. There was no way to cross the river except the Indian canoes. The Indians said: "There is Chief Moses with a lot of horses". The Indians took the railroad men across the river in canoes. One morning Moses brought a bunch of horses driven by young men. The railroad men bought four horses. There were only two men now, Mr. John Turner, and Mr. Lensen. And Jim Braun. Each rode a horse and they had one pack horse.

The next day the men asked Jim Braun if he knew of a way to get to Spokane. Chief Moses offered to lead the party on the Indian trail to Spokane. They came to San-po-elk, a place near Spokane on the Columbia River. Indians were gathered to get fish from this place.

From there the party bought an Indian canoe and one of the railroad men went in the canoe with two Indians down the Columbia River. The other man went on the horses through Idaho and down to Portland, Oregon. The party in the canoe came to the Chelans and to Lake Chelan. Here the party borrowed a canoe from the Indians. Jim Braun met Chief Wa-Wet-Kin at Chelan and together they and the railroad men explored the country at Chelan and up to the mountain summit. The party returned to Chelan where they left the borrowed canoe at the Columbia River; they went back to Wenatchee. Here the railroad men gave advice to Wa-Wet-Kin and Jim Braun that as soon as there was a chance their land should be surveyed so that the Indians would not lose it to the white people.

The railroad men told Jim Braun that when their railroad came up the Sauk valley they would receive pay for their land. Wa-Wet-Kin and Jim Braun returned home to the Sauk Prairie.

Protest Land Survey

After this time there was a party of surveyors working up the Skagit River, the Chief surveyor was Mr. Sheets. There was a little trouble with some of the Skagit Indians; the chief surveyor said to the Skagits – “I will send for the U.S. soldiers and you will be driven away.” This was during the survey for the white people’s homesteads.

The soldiers, fifty of them, came to the mouth of the Baker River. The chief of the soldiers said, “I want to see the chief of the Sauk and the Skagits”. The Skagit’s chief Johnny Cambell, the Sauk chief, Wa-Wet-Kin, went to see the chief of the soldiers. Wa-Wet-Kin took the whole tribe down; Johnny Cambell did likewise, to meet the soldiers and the chief surveyor. They came to where the soldiers were and they shook hands with them. The chief of the soldiers said to the chief of the Indians: “I have come to take the Indians away.” Chief Wa-Wet-Kin said: “I have brought my Indians, if you can pick out the men who made the trouble I will punish them and I will have no trouble makers.” We will stay on our land.

The chief surveyor viewed all the Indians. He could not see the ones who made him the trouble. Chief John said: “I have no trouble makers, they must have come from somewhere else.” From then on the soldiers let the Indians return to their homes.

The survey came on up the Skagit until they got to the Sauk. Chief Wa-Wet-Kin was sent for. Chief Wa-Wet-Kin went to the surveyors. Wa-Wet-Kin told the surveyors he wanted his land up the banks surveyed.

The surveyors surveyed the land for the Indians. The surveyors surveyed the Indian home sites all the way from the mouth of the Sauk to Sauk Prairie. The surveyors surveyed the Sauk Prairie. Here the Indian’s homes were. The chief Wa-Wet-Kin, Jim Braun and others.

Indian Land Surveyed

While the surveyors were surveying the land at Sauk Prairie, Chief Wa-Wet-Kin said to the Mr. Hunter from Washington D.C. “We will stay here on the Prairie and wait the men surveying.” Mr. Hunter wanted to go on the survey. So he went up, and there he met death in a fall on the steep slopes above the Prairie. The Indians carried the dead man and when they got to the Indian settlement on the prairie the Indians offered prayers; then they took him in a canoe to Mount Vernon.

Mr. Sheets, the chief surveyor, said to Chief John, “We have finished this survey. And this will always be your land.” The Indians worked on this survey for free because it was for their land.

Chief Wa-Wet-Kin and Jim Braun made no treaties with the government. All they wanted to have was their own land.

Maybe two years later a man from Puyallup came to the Sauk Prairie to hire the Indians to work in the hop fields. All the Indians went to work on the hop picking.

While the Indians were away there were four white men who were claim jumpers, they jumped into the Indian lands at Sauk Prairie. They burned down some of the Indian homes. Some of the houses they tore down and built homes of their own; they took blankets and cooking ware from the Indian homes.

When the Indians came back there were these white men living on the prairie. The white men had guns and threatened to kill the Indians. Chief John did not want any fighting so he and his people made their camp along the rivers, and there they lived. Many of the people were cold and they sickened and died.

Chief Wa-Wet-Kin was now old, and he was getting blind, so he said to the Indians to let someone else become Chief. So now his brother, Jim Braun, and Captain Moses

became the two chiefs for the Indians.

Granted Suiattle Land

In the year 1901 Chief Moses and Chief Braun held a council concerning getting lands for the people. They decided they would go to the governor at Olympia and make an appeal. They took Charlie Snooks for interpreter. They appeared before the Governor and they told him the plight of their people. The Governor asked them what land do they want; the two chiefs said: "We want to get some land up the Suiattle River, which was part of the original tribal land." The governor said: "I cannot grant you land, I will have to write your request to Washington D.C. In two months I will receive a reply. If the President will say No or if he will say Yes."

In two months in the fall a letter from Washington, D.C. arrived at Rockport, Washington. The land on the Suiattle was granted to the Indians. George Keeper was the allotting agent sent. The land was surveyed. All the Indians went up the Suiattle to take up land. The survey was six miles wide starting at Tenas Creek and on up the Suiattle valley. The Indians all got allotments. Men, women, all the children – so the children can have homes when they grew up.

In 1916 the Forest Service cancelled these allotments to the Indians. The Indians left their homes. They took a few things with them. They left their work tools like saws and axes, plows, their stones in the houses, blankets and food.

The Indians got jobs during the First War and rented homes from then on. Some of them are very poor now. Some fail to pay the rent and have to leave.

There are some of the Indians who got their land up the Suiattle and have homes up there.

The Indian graveyards at the present time are located: One at the Sauk Prairie, Chief Wa-Wet-Kin is buried at the Sauk

Prairie burial place. There is one graveyard now up the Suiattle. Many are buried there. Both Captain Moses and Chief Jim Braun are buried there.