

The s7istken (pit house) at T'it'q'et

SITE #040101

GC1TTYX

Written & Researched by Wendy Fraser

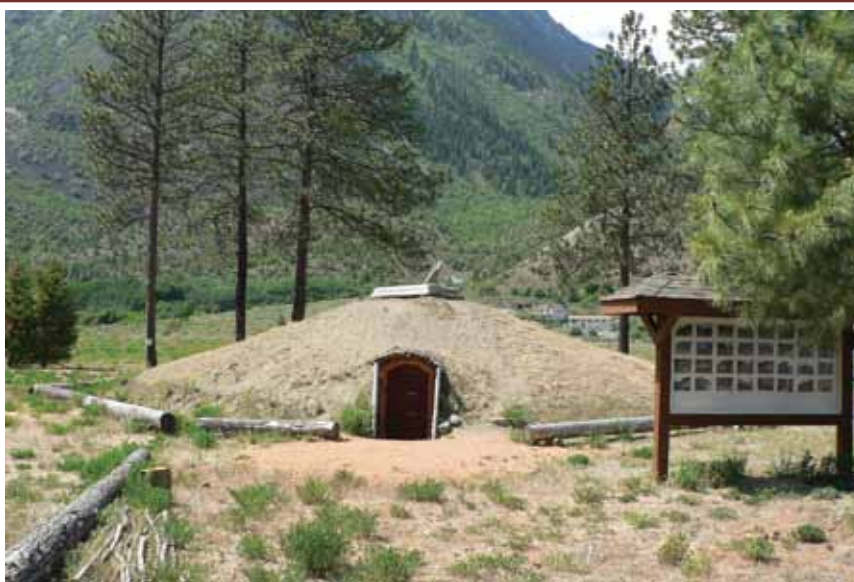
SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Lillooet, V0K 1V0
 Location: N 50°40.618'
 W 121°56.688'
 Parking: N 50°40.652'
 W 121°56.662'
 Geocache Location: N 50°40.591'
 W 121°56.717'
 Accuracy: 5 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page
 UTM: East 0574522;
 North 5614384 10U
 Geocache altitude: 284 m./931 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 1
 Terrain difficulty: 1.5
 (1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: 2006
 Ownership: First Nations Land
 Access: • Public Road
 • Year-round
 • Vehicle accessible
 • From Lillooet, follow Mountain View Rd. to Rancherie Dr.
 • You are on private, First Nations land, please show respect.

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:
 Gold Country Communities Society
 P.O. Box 933 Cache Creek, B.C. V0K 1H0
 Tel: 1-877-453-9467
 email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

For more site pages go to:
www.goldtrail.com or
www.GeoTourismCanada.com

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The aboriginal St'at'imc people inhabiting the dry bench lands along the Fraser River near Lillooet have lived here for thousands of years.

For much of the year, the St'at'imc traveled throughout their territory hunting, fishing for salmon from the plentiful runs that ascended the major rivers, harvesting edible plants and gathering medicines across a wide area. During this time, they lived in conical-shaped tents made of reed mats that could be easily erected and dismantled for travel. When the first snows came, the St'at'imc would tear down their tents, gather in villages and descend into the warmth of s7istkens, which were circular, semi-subterranean pit houses.

This replica s7istken is approximately 12 metres in diameter, spacious enough to accommodate four families in pre-contact times.

Traditionally, four main support rafters divided the s7istken into quarters or rooms, with a section for sleeping and a section for

storing food. One room in the s7istken was known as the 'hand room', because from this room, the hand of anyone ascending or descending the ladder was easily visible. The entrance was via a ladder through a square hole in the roof. A notch was made in the top of the ladder, from which moccasins could be hung before people entered the pit house.



Inside a traditional pit house, 1907

Photo: Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, IP24-06767

Dancing, feasts, simple social gatherings, games and story-telling were common winter activities. The men also spent part of the winter manufacturing spears, daggers and other weapons. It was painstaking work and it could take up to three hours to craft a single arrowhead. The women processed hides, cared for their families and completed other winter tasks.

The pit houses were built with the materials at hand, lodge pole pine poles, rawhide to tie the poles together, a roof of water-proof clay that was beaten and stamped firmly and 10-inches of pine needles and dried grass that acted as insulation. While the men were out getting the logs from the forests, the women of the village used woven baskets and deer shoulder blades to excavate the s7istken home sites.

What they did not already have, the St'at'imc traded for, using dried salmon, which was a recognized and valued commodity everywhere. Dentalia, small, slender, horn-

like sea shells, have been discovered in some Lillooet area s7istkens. Archaeologists found a whale rib that was used long ago as a knife at the Keatley Creek village site, located between Fountain and Pavilion on Highway 99 North.

The story behind the construction of this s7istken is a tale of community co-operation and effort. Members of the T'it'q'et Community and volunteers from neighbouring Lillooet joined forces to build the replica. Work on the project commenced in September 2006 and was completed the following spring under the leadership of Community Chief Bill Machell and with expert advice from Grand Chief Des Peters Sr.

The s7istken can be visited on a St'at'imc Cultural Experiences tour that includes a presentation on the St'at'imc way of life, a story performance by Bear around the s7istken fire and a meal featuring traditional foods.



Construction of Pit House, 2006

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

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