

Upper Skagit Indian Tribe

The Meaning of Place

Upper Skagit ancestors constructed a large winter longhouse here in present-day Newhalem. They used trails through the Skagit Gorge to access hunting areas and fishing sites for salmon and steelhead. A legendary Skagit ancestor put Indian spirit power in the Gorge and named everything around. This place is dax^wálib (Newhalem), the Upper Skagit word for “thread,” made here from mountain goat wool for traditional weaving.

The Point Elliot Treaty (1855) established reservations in western Washington but the Upper Skagit refused to relocate. Over time, many Upper Skagit secured allotments in their homeland despite limited resources. **The Upper Skagit reservation was established in 1981**, providing the opportunity to build community infrastructure, improve the tribe’s ability to preserve its culture, and protect natural resources.

Archaeological records show that for at least 10,000 years, a flint-like stone unique to the Upper Skagit River Valley was made into tools. This **Hozomeen chert** was carried east of the Cascades, west and south to the Salish Sea, and north to the Fraser River. At the nearby Newhalem Rock Shelter, visitors can see where mountain goats, deer, and other animals were butchered and cooked over a 1,500-year period.

Contemporary Upper Skagit Indian people maintain an unbroken continuity with these ancestral lands and waterscapes. **They hunt, fish, gather, and practice their religion in traditional places.** They also co-manage fish populations in the Skagit River and consult with state and federal agencies on protection and enhancement measures for fish habitat, archaeological sites and traditional cultural places, mountain goat research, elk habitat, and environmental quality.



This life-size reproduction is a Cascade-style projectile point from the Newhalem area estimated to be 4,000–9,000 years old. Protein residue analysis revealed goat blood on the artifact which is fitting for this location.

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Today the **Upper Skagit Indian Tribe** has over 1,000 members. Like a teacher, dax^wálib passes on traditional meanings of place and heritage for Upper Skagit people and all who seek the meaning of place.



Walter Sam & Lottie Tom at their homestead along the Skagit River.