

# KALISPEL

## INDIANS

John M. Anderson

*[Late 1980's History Project]*

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The Kalispel Project This research program was funded by a grant from the Blanc family, formerly of Sandpoint. It brought Kalispel speakers to the Sandpoint area in 1989 to speak to educators and public groups about their cultural heritage. Speakers included Francis Culloyah (Kalispel Reservation), Ron Therriault (Flathead), and Joanne Bigcrane (Flathead). Materials from this project were made available through the East Bonnner County library and the Bonner County school district Curriculum Center. They include research findings by John Anderson, who was the project director. Anderson wrote a text on Kalispel history featuring the Sandpoint treaty.

The Kalispel Indians once occupied a long and narrow territory, which stretched from the Flathead lake of Montana, through Idaho, and into nearby Washington state. And the Kalispel were also part of Canada, like many of their linguistic relatives, since a small part of their western lands extended north into the Salmo river of what is now southern Canada.

## Montana Kalispel

The Kalispel of Montana lived in the uppermost reaches of the greater Kalispel river drainage. Today, the major lake of these easternmost Kalispel is called the Flathead lake whose southern shores are controlled by the Flathead Indian Reservation where the eastern Kalispel live.

The river draining west from the lake is called the Clark Fork river. The Montana Kalispel were called the Upper Kalispel by some American historians, because they occupied the upper drainage of the greater Kalispel waterways.

## The Idaho Kalispel

Lake Pend Oreille of northern Idaho, was the homeland of the Idaho Kalispel who were called the Lake Kalispel by some American historians.

All of the Kalispel living on Lake Pend Oreille and nearby streams were exiled from this region, after the signing of the Sandpoint Treaty of 1887. Some of the Lake Pend Oreille Kalispel families went into exile upriver, and their descendants now live on the Flathead Reservation. Other families went downriver, and their descendants now live on the Kalispel Reservation near Usk. And a third faction went south to join relatives on the Coeur d'Alene reservation, where the people speak a closely related Salish language.

## The Kalispel of Washington State

The waters that drain from the big lake in Idaho called Pend Oreille, flow westward into the nearby state of Washington. The Kalispel living in Washington are called the Lower Kalispel by some American historians, because they occupy the lower drainage of the ancient Kalispel nation.

Many of the Kalispel of this region live on the Kalispel Indian Reservation, which is located across the river from Usk, Washington. See [Usk](#) for further information on this segment of the Kalispel population.

The Spokans, southern neighbors of the western Kalispel, were intermarried with the them and were close allies as were their Salish-speaking neighbors to the west such as the Kettle and Okonogan tribes.

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**BITTERROOT** The Salish speaking peoples who lived in the southeastern area of the upper Kalispel river drainage, were sometimes called the Bitterroot Valley Indians. But most often they were simply called The Salish or the Flathead. In ancient times, this valley was mostly Kalispel

in population. But after the French began supplying rifles to the Algonquain rivals of the Kalispel, the local Kalispel invited more and more downriver Salish relatives to join them in this valley, which served as the 'gateway' into the Buffalo Plains of Montana. Only by traveling in large numbers, could the Salish dare to hunt on the buffalo plains. By the second decade after the first American intrusions into this region, this population was very mixed with large numbers of newly arrived Salish speaking immigrants from as far away as the Okonagons. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Bitterroot peoples were intermarried with the Sahaptin ( the Salish name for the Nez Perce).

CLARK FORK RIVER The part of the greater Kalispel river drainage that is located just upstream from Lake Pend Oreille is called the Clark Fork river by the Americans. The uppermost reaches of this drainage are called the Flathead and Missoula by the Americans.

FLATHEAD An American term, used to refer to Salish speaking peoples generally. The term refers to the practice of some western [coastal] Salish speaking peoples of flattening the forehead. When the first Europeans visited the western Kalispel and their allied Salish-speaking neighbors in the Bitterroot valley, they called them Flathead because they spoke a Salish language [and reminded the Americans of their linguistic cousins on the Pacific coast, who flattened their heads]. The Kalispel and Bitterroot Salish did not flatten their heads, but the American nickname persisted among bureaucrats, so that the modern reservation in Montana is called the Flathead Reservation.

KALISPEL A Salish speaking people who occupied the greater Kalispel river drainage, prior to the expansion of Americans into the region. The Kalispel are typically divided by American historians into the Upper [Montana] and Lower Kalispel [including the Lake Kalispel living in the area of Lake Pend Oreille, and the Calispel Valley (including Chewelah) subdivisions. The border between the Upper and Lower Kalispel is generally located by scholars at Horse Plains (Montana).

KALISPEL: EASTERN The eastern division of the Kalispel, often called the Upper Kalispel by American scholars because they lived in the upper regions of the greater Kalispel river drainage. See *Kalispel Upper* for related discussion.

KALISPEL: WESTERN The western division of the Kalispel, often called the Lower Kalispel by American scholars. They occupied the lower regions of the greater Kalispel river drainage. See *Kalispel: Lower* for related discussion.

KALISPELL A large town in Montana, named after the Kalispel Indians who once resided on that part of the Flathead lake.

LAKE KALISPEL The Kalispel who lived on the Pend Oreille lake in northern Idaho, and nearby drainages in Montana and Washington states. They were a subdivision of the Lower Kalispel. See *Calispel Valley* for the other major subdivision.

LOWER KALISPEL The Kalispel who lived downriver from Horse Plains (Montana), in the region that is now Montana, Idaho, and Washington State.

SALISH A large language family of native Americans, who lived in the American Northwest and nearby Canada.

UPPER KALISPEL The Kalispel who lived upriver from Lake Pend Oreille, in the region that is now the state of Montana. Their largest lake is now called Flathead lake, and the reservation on its southern shores is called the Flathead Reservation by the Americans. Most of the Montana Kalispel live on this reservation, which they share with the Kootenai Indians and the Salish speaking Indians from the Bitterroot valley of Montana who were called the Flathead by early American explorers.

USK The westernmost Kalispel reservation is located near the American town of Usk, Washington. It therefore has come to be called by the nickname the 'Usk reservation' by many Americans.

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# **The Kalispel Indians of Montana**

## **The Flathead Lake Region**

All of the upper reaches of the Kalispel river drainage (including the Clark Fork, Flathead, Missoula, and Bitterroot rivers) were occupied by the Kalispel in ancient times. The great valley now called Flathead, where the Flathead Indian Reservation is located, was once a population center of the Upper Kalispel. See [Flathead](#) for a brief history of the Flathead valley.

## **The Bitterroot Valley**

The valley of the Bitterroot river is located south of Missoula, Montana. It was an ancient Kalispel area, but by the time of the first European contacts it had become a center of a pan-tribal coalition of Salish-speaking peoples. The Americans called them the Salish (and also by the nicknames Flatheads and Bitterroots).

Salish immigrants from much farther downstream, as far as Idaho and Washington State, had moved to this large valley so they could be nearer the Buffalo Plains of eastern Montana. As a result of constant warfare with the non-Salish tribes who tried to drive them from the Buffalo Plains, the Salish confederation invited large numbers of Sahaptin (Nez Perce) Indians to join them in their hunting expeditions. As a result of their long-standing alliance, many Kalispel and Bitterroot Salish families became intermarried with the Nez Perce.

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## **The Hell Gate Treaty**

By 1854, the American army was sufficiently strong in the region to impose a treaty between the Siksika (Blackfeet) and the Kalispel of Montana (plus their Salish and Kootenai allies). This treaty took place at Missoula, next to the Hell Gate pass which was a militarily strategic 'gateway' in and out of the Bitterroot and nearby Flathead valley.

One of the reasons that the Kalispel alliance was willing to sign this treaty was their desperate need to end the bitter fighting with their bitter enemies the Siksika. Among the Sahaptin attending this treaty conference was a young man named Looking Glass, who would later distinguish himself as military leader of the Sahaptin.

## **The Nez Perce War**

When fighting between the Sahaptin (Nez Perce) and the United States army broke out in 1877, the Sahaptin fled over the Lolo Trail into the Bitterroot Valley of the Salish-speaking peoples. These residents of the Bitterroot valley were called the Flatheads by the Americans.

The Sahaptin, under the leadership of Looking Glass and Chief Joseph, were desperately seeking military assistance from the Salish. But only the Kalispel living in the area of the modern Flathead Indian reservation offered military assistance. The pan-Salish coalition living in the Bitterroot valley remained neutral, causing Chief Joseph to decline the Upper Kalispel offer of assistance. In between the fleeing Sahaptin and potential Kalispel reinforcements were well-armed American miners, who had seized the Kalispel lands now called Missoula and were determined to resist any Sahaptin/Kalispel alliance.

For the Montana Kalispel, Chief Joseph's decision to escape southeast instead of directly north was a military blessing. Chief Joseph and his followers were eventually defeated by American troops near the Canadian border, far from the Flathead valley and thus saving the Kalispel from the massacre that resulted in the Bear Paw Mountains of central Montana.

## Contemporary Montana Kalispel

Many of the Kalispel of Montana now reside on the Flathead Reservation, which they share with the Salish (Bitterroot) and Kootenai Indians. Many contemporary families have relatives among not only the Salish and Kootenai, but also the nearby Blackfeet and even the Iroquois who first visited the Montana Kalispel with French trappers.

The Flathead Indian Reservation offers many programs important to the Montana Kalispel including education, housing, environmental protection, and social work. *Salish-Kootenai College* for further information on higher education on the reservation. You can write the college administration at: Salish-Kootenai College, P.O. Box 117, Highway 93, Pablo, MT 59855 (tel: 406 675-4800). You can reach the Salish & Flathead Cultural Committee at St. Ignatius, Mt 59865. See [Powows](#) for current information on public dances and other ceremonial events.

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### Terminology

Eastern Kalispel See *Upper Kalispel* for discussion. Flathead The first Salish speaking peoples encountered by the Europeans were coastal peoples of Canada and Washington State. These people flattened their foreheads, so the Europeans called them Flatheads. When the first Americans encountered the Upper Kalispel and other Salish-speaking peoples in the Bitterroot Valley, they called them Flatheads even though they did not flatten their foreheads. This nickname persisted among American bureaucrats into modern times, when the great lake of the upper Kalispel in western Montana is called the Flathead lake. And the large reservation where the Kalispel, Salish, and Kootenai live is now called the Flathead Reservation.

Bitterroot Valley A large valley located south of Missoula, Montana. This valley was the home of a pan-Salish coalition, at the time of early American contacts. The Bitterroot Indians called themselves the Salish, to reflect the fact that they were a mixed group of Salish-speaking peoples including Kalispels, Kettles, Okanogan, Lakes, Spokanes, Couer d'Alenes. Due to severe military losses against the Blackfeet and other rivals on the Buffalo Plains, this coalition took in increasing numbers of Nez Perce, who joined them for annual Buffalo hunts by traveling across the Lolo Trail from nearby Idaho.

Horse Plains An American name for a major horse grazing valley, used by the Upper Kalispel as a safe grazing area away from possible raids by the Blackfeet and other rival tribes from the Buffalo Plains of central Montana. The Kookoosint pass protected this river valley, from attack.

Nez Perce See *Sahaptin*

Sahaptin A large tribe of Indians who lived in Idaho, and used the Lolo Trail to cross the mountains to join forces with the Kalispel and other Salish in annual Buffalo hunts. Chief Joseph

is the most famous Nez Perce, who fled from Idaho through the lands of the Upper Kalispel in 1877. The Sahaptin spoke a language related to the greater Penutian language family that included their neighbors such as the Umatilla.

Saint Ignatius The location of the Catholic 'mission' among the Upper Kalispel. This site is now located on the Flathead Reservation. See *Sinielmen* for further discussion.

Sinielmen The Kalispel name for the valley located south of the Flathead Lake, which is now the site of the St. Ignatius Catholic 'mission.' Also spelled *Snia'lemenex*, *Snia'lemenic*, *Sniyelemen* (Teit). Davis translates this name to mean 'a gathering place', i.e. a place of rendezvous.

Upper Kalispel The term used by American scholars to refer to the Kalispel who lived in the upper reaches of the Kalispel drainage. This region of Montana included the Clark Fork, Flathead, Missoula, and Bitterroot rivers.

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# **The Kalispel Indians Of Idaho**

## **Lake Pend Oreille Was the Heartland**

The large lake in northern Idaho called Pend Oreille was the heartland of the Idaho Kalispel, prior to the invasion of the Americans into this region. The Kalispel from this region were called the 'Lake Kalispel' by some American historians.

## **Idaho Kalispel Exiled**

All of the Kalispel living on Lake Pend Oreille and nearby streams were exiled from this region, after the signing of the Sandpoint Treaty of 1887. Some of the Lake Pend Oreille Kalispel families went into exile upriver, and their descendants now live on the Flathead Reservation. Other families went downriver, and their descendants now live on the Kalispel Reservation near Usk. And a third faction went south to join relatives on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, where the people speak a closely related Salish language.

## Lake Sites

The Lake Kalispel called the sandy point located where the Pend Oreille river drains west from Lake Pend Oreille, *Qapquape* which means 'the sandy place'. Today it is called Sandpoint by the Americans, and it is the county seat of Bonner County, Idaho.

The [unratified] [Sandpoint Treaty](#) was signed in 1887, setting the stage for the forced removal of all native residents from the Lake Pend Oreille drainage by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Indian Meadows The American name for the Kalispel site called *Nacemci*. It is located at the mouth of the Clark Fork river and Lake Pend Oreille, near Denton Slough. *Nacemci* served as a major pan-tribal ceremonial center in the summer and fall, when the flood plain was covered with grasses ideal for grazing horse herds.

Nakamep The Kalispel name for the town site located at the southernmost end of Lake Pend Oreille. This site was renamed Blackwell Point by the Americans. *Ncame'p* means 'the doorway' or 'gateway' (Smith 1985; page 198), presumably because this end of the lake served as a doorway into the lands of the Kalispel's neighbors called the *Schee Chumsch* (whose French nickname is Couer d'Alene).

In the 1830's to 1840's, Catholic priests visiting *Nakamep* used the nickname Bay Indians, to refer to the *Nakamep* community. The *Nakamep* lands were eventually claimed by the U.S. military, which built the Farragut naval base on this site. This base was closed and the lands converted into the Farragut State Park. See [Navy](#) for a *Sandpoint Magazine* article on this military base.

Pend Oreille The French nickname for the Kalispel Indians. It means hanging earrings, and refers to the distinctive shell ear rings worn by many members of this tribe.

## History of the Idaho Kalispel

An excellent overview of the history of the Idaho Kalispel can be found at [History](#). This article by Jane Fritz appeared in a 1997 edition of the [Sandpoint Magazine](#). I would consider this web page a 'must read' for anyone interested in the Pend Oreille Indians.

## The Role of the Kalispel In Contemporary Idaho

The Kalispel Indians continue to play an important role in modern Idaho society, in spite of the fact that they no longer have a reservation anywhere in the affiliated Lake Pend Oreille drainage.



In the last decade, Kalispel from the Usk, Couer d'Alene, and Flathead reservation have come to Sandpoint and other Idaho towns to speak about their ancestral heritage to school children and public groups. They have also traveled to attend meetings of government agencies responsible for protection of Kalispel archaeological sites and for environmental protection.

See [Natural Resources](#) for information about the role of Lower Kalispel (see Kalispel Reservation near the town of Usk) in environmental protection programs. Related web pages on Kalispel support [from the Couer d'Alene reservation] for state and federal environmental protection programs include [Lake Couer d'Alene](#) and [Lake](#). And see [High Country](#), a native American magazine, for commentary on the sacredness of north Idaho lakes and their waters.

## The Mythweavers

North Idaho is fortunate to an active local organization dedicated to presentation of authentic Kalispel history and culture. This group is called the Mythweavers, and its members include both Indians and non-Indians. Kalispel tribal elder Francis Cullooyah has been an active member of this organization, speaking before local elementary students, environmental organizations, Panida Theater, and other public forums. The Mythweaver's "Idaho Keepers of the Earth" audio-cassette series is available through the Sandpoint library. See the link (below) called *Kalispel Speakers Program*, for further information. [J. Anderson, July 1999]

Albani Dam This site was called *Shawewhy* by the Kalispel, referring to the waterfalls, fishery, and cove located at this site. *Shewe'wi* means 'portage' (Teit 1930, page 313), referring to the fact that all river traffic had to portage around the *Shawewhy* falls, which served as a defacto border between the Lake Kalispel and their downriver relatives (the Lower Kalispel, who now live on the Kalispel Reservation near Usk).

Bay Indians See *Nakamep*.

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# The Kalispel Indians Of Washington State

The waters that drain from the big lake in Idaho called Pend Oreille, flow westward into the nearby state of Washington. The Kalispel living in Washington are called the Lower Kalispel by some American historians, because they occupy the lower drainage of the ancient Kalispel nation.

Many of the Kalispel of this region live on the Kalispel Indian Reservation, which is located across the river from Usk, Washington. See [Usk](#) for further information on this segment of the Kalispel population.

The Spokans, southern neighbors of the western Kalispel, were intermarried with the them and were close allies as were their Salish-speaking neighbors to the west such as the Kettle and Okonogan tribes.

[Fisheries Issues](#) The Kalispel business council works closely with the Northwest Power Council to ensure the health of regional fisheries. For additional information see [Power Council](#)

[Dave Winebrenner On Governor Bigsmoke](#) "We really enjoyed your article on the Kalispel Indians. My father-in-law, Otto Dutch Wilmer, operated the ferry at Ruby, WA on the Pend Oreille River for a number of years before and after 1920. He was a good friend of John Bigsmoke who was chief of the Kalispel Indian tribe in the area.

Otto named his first son John after John Bigsmoke. My brother-in-law still has two pairs of beautiful Indian gloves which were given to Otto and his bride when they were married in 1930."

[email to J. Anderson, from D. Winebrenner, Feb 2, '2000 ]

[Relocating the Saint Ignatius Mission from Usk](#) Donald Ellersick provides a very interesting and sometimes provocative web page, featuring his assessment of the Catholic Church's decision to relocate their 'mission' from the Usk area of eastern Washington [state], upriver to the Flathead reservation area of Montana.

In this 1994 analysis, the author speaks of the western Kalispel's "struggle for identity, recognition, and justice." He documents the socio/political pressures placed on these Salish families who faced stubborn federal resistance to their landclaims in the states of Idaho and Washington. He also provides insights into the tensions that characterized the relations of these traditional Salish with the Catholic church. "The Kalispel did not regret and initiate the lifestyle imposed on them by the missionaries which subsequently led to near starvation." See [Ellersick](#) for related discussion.

*This web page presents the views of the author, and does not necessarily represent  
the views of the Kalispel Indians, either individually or as a group.*

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