

Origin Myth of ni·shaiw^{exs} and ni·sdax^g. of the gitsal^{as} tribe. In effect, it is a history of this tribe from the gisp^{wudwada} point of view. Narrated by Walter Wright (ni·sdax^g.) to William Beynon in 1926. (Wright told the same story in somewhat more detail to Will Robinson of Terrace, B.C. in 1936, and the manuscript "Men of Medy^{ee}k" is in the files of the National Museum. A few details have been added to this account from "Men of Medy^{ee}k".)

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Temlaham

In former days the gisp^{wudwada} people lived in a large village at Temlaham, and ni·shaiw^{exs} was their head chief. Some laxkibu^l lived there too.

The mountain
Goat's Feast

One day the children tormented a young mountain goat until it was near death. One youth rescued it and nursed it to health and set it free. Soon after, messengers came and invited the people to a feast. They were led up Stekyawden (Rocher de Boule Mountain) to a large house, and entertained by a dancer wearing the costume of a one-horned mountain goat. After the dance the goat people led them out of the house, and all except the youth fell to their deaths. The youth was guided down by the goat he had saved. From this revenge of the goats comes the crest g.alkmati^l and the place name wil·lulgita^t mati "where the mountain goats had a feast".

Grizzly Bear
of the Lake

Some time later the girls of the village again showed disrespect for the animals by making head-dresses from trout skeletons. A supernatural grizzly bear emerged from the lake at the foot stag'dn, crossed the river to Temlaham, and wreaked havoc in the village. From this incident the grizzly (madi.g.əm dzao'taks) became a crest, as remembered in a dirge.

Famine

Still later a man showed disrespect to the first salmon of the season. No more salmon came up the river, the animals disappeared, and the people suffered famine. A nephew of ni·shaiwe'xs

The Single
Fireweed

underwent a long purification ritual and set out to find new hunting grounds. He discovered the Zymoetz River, and there one morning saw a huge fireweed growing out of the snow. On his return the single fireweed (gilhe's) was assumed as a crest. Because of the famine, the people decided to migrate downriver.

Migration

They migrated down past Kitwanga to gitwən ləkstət, where the laxski·k chief qəx had his village. Conflicts over hunting grounds led to open fighting in which a nephew of ni·shaiwe'xs was killed, and the people fled downriver.

Conflicts with
Wolf and
g.anha'də

Settle in
the Canyon

They came down the north bank to klu'iyu "hiding place" (now Usk), where laxkibu' under kstiya'ox and ganha'də under xpilaxε' shared a village. Here they stayed until more conflicts developed. t̄mnu'ə nx, a brother of ni·shaiw ε'xs was killed by the laxkibu' and his body impaled on a stake. The gisp̄wudwa'də moved once more down the river to the canyon, and there on a flat place called ts̄m̄miyao on the west bank they made a village.

At that time a large dam blocked the river at the mouth of the canyon, forming above it a lake which abounded in beavers. Below the lake, salmon could be caught in great numbers. The men explored the rich hunting grounds in all directions, and up the Zymoetz River they even found old camps they had used in Temlaham days. They settled here on the canyon and became the gits̄la'sə people.

ni·snawε and
the gilodza'u

Not far downriver lived the giludza'o. The laxski'k chief of that tribe, ni·sg.amdzi.s, married a niece of ni·snaw . ni·sgamdzi.s gave a feast and relinquished the chieftainship of the gilodza'u to his son, and in this way a branch of the house of ni·shaiw ε'xs became dominant in that tribe.

To avenge the murder of t̄mnu'ə nx the people attacked klu'iyu. The Wolf chief kstiya'ox was

Attack on
klu'iyu

driven away to the Nass River and the g.anha'd
chief xpilaxε' to the canyon of the Kitsumkalum
River.

Raid to
the coast

The gispawudwa'd became proficient at making
canoes and decided to raid other villages down on
the sea coast. Ten canoes (Robinson says twenty)

Kitlop

set out and eventually reached kitlop, which they
burned and plundered. A nephew of ni.shaiwε'xs
returned to the burning village for more loot and
was killed, but the raiders could not catch any
more kitlop people to retaliate. The raiders con-

Bella Bella

tinued down the coast to Bella Bella. They
encountered first a group of girls undergoing their
puberty initiations in underground shelters some
distance from the village. These were being
supervised by a high-ranking woman who had a
small son. After taking the girls captive, and
on the way to attack the main village, one of
the raiders pointed to the boy and demanded his

gunaxnu'tk

name. The woman answered uksgwanaxnutkəl gex
"the raven's voice re-echoes from out of its nest".

This is the origin of the name gunaxnu'tk. The
watsta did not fight but ransomed their people,
and the gispawudwa'd started homeward with much
wealth.

The Name
g.amhaiyε'm

Kitkatla

ni.swε'xs
and the
ginadε'iks

Revenge on
the Eagle Chief

They were met by a fleet of Tsimshian canoes, and when they stopped to parley, they were told they were just imitating the Tsimshian in making such raids. To avert a fight, ni.shaiwε'xs took the taunt and assumed it as a name: 'umhaiyam "imitator" (also g.amaiyε'm). They proceeded on and near the mouth of the Skeena came to a large village of the gitxa'ta. (Robinson says they followed the Tsimshian canoes back to Kitkatla). Here they stayed in peace for some time, and some of the young men, impressed by the wealth of the sea coast, decided to stay (tsyebasε' and ce'ks, according to Robinson). The gitxa'ta chief was lutkudzmti, laxski'k., and he later relinquished his rank to tsyebasε'.

On the way up the Skeena, ni.swε'xs was impressed by the riches of the ginadε'iks valley, and stayed to found another house there. Home at the canyon, ni.shaiwε'xs assumed his new name g.amhaiyam.

To get revenge on the upriver chief qox, they built a great excavated house with a heavy door called miyεskan "ribs of monster". When the upriver guests arrived they were ushered into the house one at a time, ducking under two successive grizzly skin doors, and struck down.

Only one escaped and reached home. Two years later the new qox came to the village, negotiated for peace, and asked for a daughter of g.amhaiyam as his bride. On the way back to his village he burned her alive. The next fall, g.amhaiyam went upriver to lax^hntkiⁱis to visit his daughter.

g.amhaiyam
killed

qox entertained him, then attacked and captured him. g.amhaiyam was killed by being crushed under the huge board, and his body was thrown in the water. His nephew ~~and~~ (successor) escaped and reached home.

Revenge on
Kitwanga

Many years later the new ni.shaiwε'xs led a revenge raid and destroyed the village of qox at Kitwanga. The latter escaped across the river and up the Kitwancool valley to the round hill which was the fortress of nexq, g.anha'da. The raiders pursued him here and made negotiations for a final peace.

The gitxo'n
Eagles from
Kitimat

One day while they were still living at tsamⁱiyao, strange men appeared in the village. They had come overland from Kitimat, and were laxski^k. They were welcomed and invited to return with more of their people, which they did the following year. Their chiefs were kwan^hx and skil^hasklεs (a Haida). (Robinson adds gitxo'n, and

these were certainly the gitx^o/_n group of laxski^o/_k).

The site of tsm^o/_{iyao} became too small, and the people moved across the river to gitaos (site of the temporary Kitselas City). Here new people from the coast joined them. These were g.anha^o/_{da} under g.^o/_m. ni.shaiw^o/_{xs} married a woman of the laxski^o/_k group, had a son, and formally relinquished his chieftainship of the tribe to him. In this way the Eagle house of gitx^o/_n became foremost among the gits^o/_{la/s}.

Breaking the
Beaver Dam

A long time after this, kwan^o/_{ax} was killed in his sleep by a strange bone arrow (Robinson says ni.snagw^o/_{lk}). His nephews invited everybody to a feast to see if they could identify the arrow. Two strangers near the door said "this is the arrow of bal^o/_{mgε}", and took it away with them. They were pursued to the lake, where they dived in and became beavers. The people decided to destroy the huge beaver dam across the canyon and drain the lake. (Robinson says as a self-imposed punishment for alienating the beavers).

The gits^o/_{la/s}
split up

They split up into two groups; kwan^o/_{ax} (ni.snagw^o/_{lk}), ni.sdax^o/_g, and sedzan crossed

Origin of
Beaver Crest

to the west side; and gitxɔ'n, ni·shaiwε'xs and g.ɔ'm remained on the east side. The dam was broken and the beavers were killed as they came through the opening. The last to appear was bɔ'lmgwε, the supernatural beaver with a human figure on its back. It was harpooned by sɛdza'n, g.anha'dɔ on one side and a laxskik of gitxɔ'n's house on the other. sɛdza'n's harpoon came out, and the Eagles retrieved the monster beaver, which they have since used as a crest.

Recent
Movements

The people moved away from their villages in fear. Those on the east side went upriver and became the gitlaxtsɛtε "people on the edge of the lake" (since abbreviated to gitxtsɛ'xt.) Those on the west side moved to the top of a hill and made their village laxg.alwɛlp (right above the first tunnel on the railroad). Later all of the people moved to a flat place below the canyon. Here the beavers dug under the village and men fell through the surface and were drowned. This place was ɔ'ndudu'n. The two groups moved again, the gitxtsɛ'xt up above the canyon to ktsɔm'nahu'sk, and the others to the top of a precipice above the

canyon, called gitw_llm_ε'x "people of falling leaves". Still later, to protect themselves from raiders the two groups moved back into the canyon. On the west side gitx_o'n, ni·shaiw_ε'xs, g._om and their people moved on to the rocky knoll known as the ts_ol_m t_odzep "beaver fortress" and became known as the gitlaxdz_o "people on the edge of the precipice", On the east side ni·snagw_εlk, ni·st_ox_o'g, and szdzan moved back to their earlier site.

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Goat's Feast

One day the children tormented a young mountain goat until it was near death. One youth rescued it and nursed it to health and set it free. Soon after, messengers came and invited the people to a feast. They were led up Stekyawden (Rocher de Boule Mountain) to a large house, and entertained by a dancer wearing the costume of a one-horned mountain goat. After the dance the goat people led them out of the house, and all except the youth fell to their deaths. The youth was guided down by the goat he had saved. From this revenge of the goats comes the crest g.alkmati and the place name wil·lulgit t mati "where the mountain goats had a feast".

Grizzly Bear
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Some time later the girls of the village again showed disrespect for the animals by making head-dresses from trout skeletons. A supernatural grizzly bear emerged from the lake at the foot of the mountain, crossed the river to Temlaham, and wreaked havoc in the village. From this incident the grizzly (m dig. m dzao'aks) became a crest, as remembered in a dirge.

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Still later a man showed disrespect to the first salmon of the season. No more salmon came up the river, the animals disappeared, and the people suffered famine. A nephew of ni·shaiw xs underwent a long purification ritual and set out to find new hunting grounds. He discovered the Zymoetz River, and there one morning saw a huge fireweed growing out of the snow. On his return the single fireweed (gilh .s) was assumed as a crest. Because of the famine, the people decided to migrate downriver.

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