



syilx
Okanagan Nation Alliance
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THIS LAND

SALMON FEAST

Sponsored annually, the third week in September.

Legend:

Okanagan oral traditions tell that, in the beginning, Coyote, "*Sen'k'lip*", brought the sockeye salmon up the Columbia River and its tributaries. First, *Sen'k'lip* offered the salmon to the "*syilx*", or Okanagan People, who lived on the Similkameen River, in exchange for a wife. They refused, and no salmon swam into their river. Because the *syilx*, living along the Okanagan River, gave *Sen'k'lip* a wife, the sockeye salmon have been swimming up the Okanagan River ever since.

History:

This is a culturally significant site for the Okanagan people, and historically, was an important traditional fishing camp, gathering place and trading site. The sockeye salmon (*Onchorhynchus nerka*) was a primary food source for the Okanagan people. In late summer, large fishing camps were set up at Okanagan Falls where the Okanagan people celebrated the beginning of the sockeye fishing season with the First Salmon Ceremony. Led by the Salmon Chief, they honoured the sockeye and gave thanks for its abundance, then distributed fish to all members.

Today:

Annually, the Salmon Feast draws people from the Okanagan, both *syilx* and non-native, from around the province and other parts of the world. Traditional fishing for the sockeye no longer occurs. However, the *syilx* people still honour the salmon by celebrating the Salmon Feast. The event raises awareness of Okanagan history and culture, as well as the efforts to revitalize and restore sockeye numbers in the Okanagan River.

Sockeye, and limited chinook, are the only remaining anadromous (born in fresh water) salmonid populations in the Okanagan River system. Sockeye spawn in the natural or unchannelized portion of Okanagan River, south of McIntyre Bluff.

For more information please contact the ONA.