

# Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park: A living Museum of Cultural and Natural History

## Pictograph Information

The continuity of the culture and heritage of the Nlaka'pamux People constitutes the primary cultural feature of the park. The Lytton First Nation would like to share the rich legacy with those visiting the land, but make the special request that visitors to the valley act with the utmost care and respect.



Many Nlaka'pamux creation legends tell of supernatural beings known as 'transformers' who traveled the land when the world was new and accomplished heroic and creative feats. Reminders of this mythological age are visible today in the valley as certain rock paintings.

An important aspect in a youth's development was the quest for a guardian spirit. The youth would travel to a prominent peak or ledge, light a fire, and sing and dance until dawn<sup>1</sup>. Eventually they would collapse from physical exhaustion. Spirits would be

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revealed in the youth's dreams that followed in the form of a bird, an animal, or other a natural being that spoke and sang<sup>2</sup>. This song would become important to the youth later in life such as being used to summon his or her nature partner<sup>1</sup>. By allying themselves with a guardian spirit, the youth could then enter in a powerful altered state known as "hah-hah" and attaining special attributes such as endurance and strength, immunity to danger and the ability to change into other forms<sup>1</sup>.

The most visible evidence of rituals in the Stein Valley are pictographs distributed throughout the lower valley. The Rock Paintings are drawn in red paint made from a mixture of powdered ochre and water<sup>2</sup>. These rock



paintings or pictographs are found commonly in places of highly regarded power known as 'power spots' where spirits resided such as caves, peaks, high ledges, waterfalls, and lakes)<sup>1,2</sup>.



Interpretation of pictographs is difficult as they normally reflect one person's dreams or experiences<sup>1</sup>. These paintings, often representing guardian spirits, were painting on rock surfaces along a route or trail where evil or enemies might approach. Paintings may also represent significant occurrences or historical events<sup>1</sup>.

***The paintings of birds, animals, and natural beings are some of the guardian spirits witnessed in the dreams of shamans long ago.***



Archaeologists and the Lytton First Nation have discovered no less than 13 rock painting sites in the Stein Valley ranging in size from a single painting on a boulder to one of the largest rock paintings in Canada with almost 200 paintings<sup>1</sup>. There was a decline in the practice of rock painting around 1860's and archeologists believe that the majority of the rock paintings in the Stein Valley were created between 1800 and 1860<sup>1</sup>. This rich cultural history which is preserved in the valley

reminds us all of the past when humanity lived close to nature and depended on it sustenance and spiritual well-being<sup>1,2</sup>.



1. York, Annie, Richard Daly, Chris Arnett. 1993. *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever*. Vancouver: Talonbooks.
2. White, Gordon. 2008. *Stein Valley Wilderness Guide Book – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. North Vancouver: Selcouth Publishing.