

Nisga'a Hobiye

By the oral tradition, the information as contained in this document is by no means conclusive. Nonetheless, this documented information is about a very significant aspect of our Nisga'a way of life which by our Ayuuk – customs and laws – is to be treated with RESPECT.

To the young ones, be careful in how you use or interpret information when you hear it. Ensure that you fully understand what is being transmitted to you. Know that this particular information belongs to the Nisga'a nation.

Aamhl Sayt-K'yoolims Gatgurñ gans dip ñisimñ.

May we be one / united as a people.

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Nisga'a Hobiye

The following information on *Hobiye* is based on various sources:

Sim'oogit Minee'eskw, (the late) Rod Robinson's recollections as shared by Sim'oogit Wii-Gadim Xsgaak, (the late) Eli Gosnell. This information was verified by the daughter of (late) Eli Gosnell, Sigidim Hanak', Hgluwilksihlgum Hlbin, Emma Nyce.

Incorporated as well, are other parts of the *Hoobiye* information as shared by Hlayim Wil, Chester Moore; and information heard by Sim'oogit K'eexkw, Herbert Morven from Sim'oogit Hleek, Dr. Joseph Gosnell and confirmed by Sim'oogit Gakw'ihlheen, Hubert Doolan.

The month of BUXW-LAKS (February) is the beginning of the Nisga'a New Year.

This used to be the coldest part of the year in K'alii-Aksim Lisims – the Nass Valley.

The extreme cold weather makes the needles on the boughs of trees brittle, and is easily blown off and scattered about by gusts of wind, part of Nature's way of preparing the trees for the coming spring. This is the reason for our name for the month of February, Buxw-laks.¹

Also in this time of freezing weather – when the snow tops on the ground were hardened by the cold – the food gatherers ... the hunters – stored away their snowshoes after repairing them for the next winter season.

¹ *Buxw* means "to blow away from, on, at (something/somebody); to be blown away or about (e.g., by the wind);

laks are the "needles" of coniferous (cone-bearing) trees like pine or spruce trees.

The Simgigat – Nisga’a Chieftains – in past centuries studied the celestial heavens. They were knowledgeable in the behaviors of the stars in proximity to the moon which forecasted the weather patterns. They studied astrology not from text books but by years of observing the heavens.

These were the Simgigat whose responsibility it was to properly manage the resources on their lands in order to sustain Nisga’a existence. A Sim’oogit adept in management practices was also able to meet the required form of Nisga’a payment for receiving specialized instruction in the Halayt discipline.

The Halayt is often referred to as a spiritual leader, medicine man or doctor—the *Swaniskw*, or *Swanisgwit*; some were also described as “having the ability to forecast the weather” hence astronomers and astrologists, the *Guxw-Hloksit*.

The Simgigat who could afford to, undertook the higher/or highest levels of spiritual-scholarly training – the *Halayt* attainment, the PhDs by Nisga’a standards.

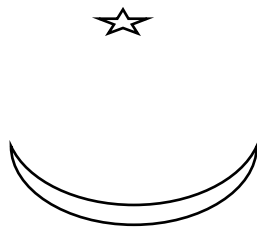
The *halayt* initiates specialized in different areas of enlightenment as gifted to them by the Great Spirit. As in all cultures, the “spiritual” component of our lives has always been an integral aspect in all areas of learning and enlightenment for the Nisga’a.

The Halayt-Simgigat studied the *Buxw-laks* moon, the moon of February, and they made note of the different shapes leading up to the full moon. Over time,

they observed that whenever the first crescent moon (thin-shaped) is in the shape of the *Hoobix* – the bowl of the Nisga’a wooden spoon with the ends pointing upward, this meant abundant resources in the harvesting seasons to follow in K’alii-Aksim Lisims (the Nass Valley). The oolichans would be plentiful, the salmon ... berries ... and various other resources important to the Nisga’a; all in all, a bountiful year predicted.

The oolichan, *Saak*, was the first food resource to arrive just at the time when winter supplies were near depletion. For this reason, the arrival of the *Saak* is of great significance in the Nisga’a way of life, and is also the reason *Saak* has always been referred to by the elders as “saviour” fish, *halimootkw*.

And so the Nisga’a say, “*Hoobiyee* means, *the spoon is full.*”



Another explanation adds that when the crescent moon is in the shape of a *hoobix* and it appears as if “a star is sitting in the centre of the crescent moon, *ii luu-t’aahl bilist ahl ts’im hoobix,*” is a sign of abundance in Nisga’a culture.²

Hlayim Wil adds that the thin crescent moon is visible at nightfall . . . before it

² Different positions of the stars around the moon also forecasts deaths and births, they say.

descends behind the mountain. In his time, the grandfathers kept watch of the February moon.

Just as soon as the *Hobiyee* moon was sighted, the grandfathers would immediately throw their arms up into the shape of the “hobiyee moon” and run out into the village hollering, “Hobiyee! Hobiyee!” And always, the children would be right behind, copying the grandfathers.

Hlayim Wil witnessed this in the village of Gitwinksihlkw around 1940, when suddenly a loud voice would be heard outside, hollering, and immediately, the entire village was in motion. A senior member in the Wilp of Baxk’ap had sighted the *Hobiyee* moon and consequently carried out the traditional act of informing the villagers.

Hobiyee is derived from the phrase, “*Hoobixis hee!*³ / meaning that, “It is in the shape of the *hoobix*, guys!”

As stated, *hoobix* is referring to the bowl of the spoon—which indicates that “the bowl of *K’alii-Aksim Lisims* is full.” And that the moon of *Hobiyee*—when it appears, signifies a good season for oolichan harvesting, including in the seasons to follow with abundant riches to be obtained from our lands and rivers—was indeed, cause for great celebration.

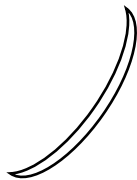
Before he passed on, Sim’oogit Gitxhun, Paul Clayton, shared that

³ “*hee*, or *hoo*,” is an expression uttered only by the male-folk, to another male-person. For example, when one greets another male person, you hear, “*Ŋit hee!*”... “*Oo, nda wilaa wilinis, hoo?!/Oh, why did you do that?!*”

the Nisga'a had a ceremony for the first feed of oolichan. He could not remember the song, only that it was called "*Limx Wi'idim Saak* / song for roasting (the first feed of) oolichans." The performer donned special ceremonial gear—in particular, special coverings for his arms; he danced, and he sang as he roasted the first feed of oolichan over the open fire.

We also have a special story about the *Simgigadim Saak*/the Oolichan Chieftains which is part of the *Txeemsim Adaawaḱ*, and also, an account of how the oolichan and spring salmon taunted each other as they passed each other in *K'alii-Aksim Lisims* ... a brief but interesting story illustrating our belief in being one with nature....

As time goes on in the annual celebration of *Hobiyee*, memories will be prompted, and more information added to the *adaawaḱ* of *Hobiyee*.



Finally, it is also to be noted that the thin crescent moon positioned somewhat side-ways, with “no star” sitting in it, indicates a poor year in resource harvesting for the Nisga'a, such as we had in 2006.

Amaa Sii K'uuhl As Nisim!

May “you all” have a prosperous New Year

In the Spirit of Sayt-K'ílim-Goot ↔ One Heart ... One Path ... One Nation

Limx Hobiye

Hobiye is about the point in time when the *gal-ha'ink* /cedar bentwood boxes of the Nisga'a are near empty of their winter preserves, and they have begun to ration the last of their provisions. The Nisga'a are hoping and praying for a bountiful season of oolichans . . . and a fruitful year.

The following composed song starts with Nisga'a holding up their hands in prayer to K'am Ligii Hahlhaahl (/or K'am Ligii Ahl Ha), our God, praying for the "Hobiye" moon.

The dance groups start the song by chanting the following verses in prayer ... chanted twice over:

Hobiye-ee Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ii Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ee Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ii Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ee Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ii Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ee Hee Hee -Hee

Hobiye-ii Hee Hee -Hee

The Director then yells out,

Hlaa ksi-gwantkwhl hloksis, hoo-oo!

And everyone yells: **Hobiye! Hobiye!**

The Director yells again: **Hlaa ksi-gwantkwhl hloksis, hoo-oo!**

And everyone...: **Hobiye!** **Hobiye!**

The drumming and dancing begins, with everyone singing in celebration:

Hobiye Hee-Hee	Hobiye Hee-Hee
Hobiye Hee-Hee	Hobiye Hee-Hee
Hobiye Hee-Hee	Hobiye Hee-Hee
Hobiye Hee-Hee	Hobiye Hee-Hee

The above is sung to a dancing tune as many times over as desired when rejoicing a bountiful season of the *Saak /Oolichan*.

In the spirit of *Sayt-K'ílim-Goot*, this song was composed in 1990 by Hlayim Wil, Chester Moore, for the Nisga'a Nation, to be used in *Hobiye* celebrations, he said.

T'ooyaksim̓ ñiin, Sim'oogit.

Huxwdii t'ooyaksim̓hl hlagats'uusim̓ t an agwii-yeet'inhl ganwilxo'oskw tguna ahl hli ga-hlgim̓.

Si'aamhl Wilsim̓!

The Oolichan and the Spring Salmon Taunt Each Other

The following anecdote is an excerpt from a 1982 interview with (the late) James Samuel Gosnell, as he spoke to the entire team of consultants and fieldworkers in the Land Ownership and Occupancy Study orientation workshop:

The Oolichan Season occurs two months in the year ... normally ending at the end of April.

About the last week in April, or the first week in May, the spring salmon arrives. When we hear the robin singing, ^ʃ*Gigyoohl milit* ... ^ʃ*Gigyoohl milit* ... then we know there's salmon in the river ... and the oolichans are up around Sandy River – that's approximately ... in the area known today as Kseadan Camp. *Saxwhl Ksi Gililxis* is what we call it, where the oolichans spawn.

And that's when the big Spring Salmon come around ... and they pass them you know ... And the little oolichans holler out to the Spring Salmon:

“Ado’osim hee-ee! Hlaa hliskw dip dilimootkwdiidis!

/Go on, you big spring salmon, you can go swim up the river! We saved them from starvation already!”

The big Spring Salmon yell back, chuckling:

“They’re not going to get full eating you guys! You’re too damn small!

Just my fin is the same size as one of you!”

The oolichans snap back:

“We may be small ... but there’s so-oo-oo-oo many of us, millions of us! And there’s only a few of you!”

...the oolchan says to the Spring Salmon.

I want this recorded because sooner or later science is going to uncover the secret of the communication of these fish in the river.