



Hidden beneath the waters of Lake Roosevelt lies the massive Kettle Falls Fishery, once the largest fishery on the largest river west of the Rocky Mountains. Most of us know it is there, but until the evening of September 30<sup>th</sup>, few knew how it was used. On that night, Bill Layman, author of River of Memory and an earlier book, Native River revealed a collection of pictures of the falls and more exactly, what went on in various parts of it. The occasion was Noisy Waters, a presentation used to help finances at the Inchelium Cultural Research Center and the Kettle Falls Historical Center. The house was packed with supporters hoping to learn more about our history.

Underlying the Kettle Range is a layer of 27-million-year-old metamorphic quartzite. Laid down millions of years before the basalt in the Columbia Basin, it has been fused by heat and pressure from layers of sand into an extremely hard rock that even the mighty Columbia could not cut through. Because of its layered structure, it not only formed the steep drops of the falls themselves but also lent itself into being chipped into stone knives to clean salmon and spear tips to harpoon them. Building on this natural heritage, Native Peoples gathered to fish at the falls for 9000 years, twice as long as the pyramids of Egypt have existed. Local tribes have every right to consider them sacred.

In keeping with that heritage, the evening began with a prayer thanking the Creator for the falls, the salmon and all the people who thrived here. We were also reminded that the existence of the Inchelium Cultural Research Center is in large part due to the tenacity of Nancy Michel who found a location for it and gathered its original contents. She passed away on June 30<sup>th</sup> after dedicating the center on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Current descendants of the people of the falls, Patti Bailey and Shelly Boyd helped Bill Layman with the pronunciation of Salish place names. Bill Layman learned many of the details that he passed on to us from Martin Louie who experienced them before they sank beneath the waters behind Grand Coulee Dam in 1942.

The best fishing spots varied as the river rose and fell. There were both an upper and a lower falls and side channels besides fishing spots on both sides of the river. Different spots were best at different times and prolonged the fishing season. A Salmon Chief was drawn from the two tribes who controlled the fishing, the Skoyelpi who lived near the falls all year and the Sinixt who lived on Hayes Island during the fishing season. The Salmon Chief determined when enough salmon had passed upstream to sustain the fishery and to feed other native people further north. When the time came to catch fish for the year, the first one was caught and boiled in one of the “kettles” that gave the falls their name. Layman showed us a picture of that kettle. After everyone shared some of that first catch, the real fishing began.

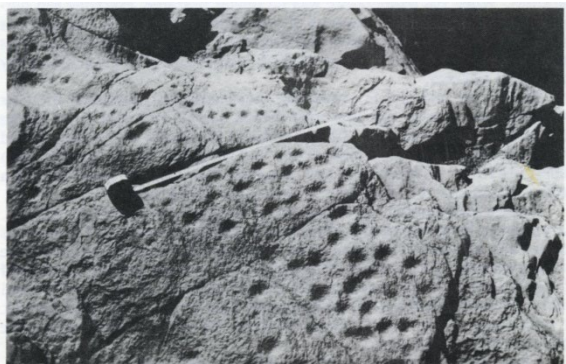
Estimates vary as to how many fish were caught in a day and over a season. Many people cite numbers above 1000 fish per day. In his book, People of the Falls, Archaeologist David Chance calculates that over a million pounds of fish were harvested in a season. He notes that each family would need over a ton or about 300 fish for themselves. The fish could weigh 100 pounds each and were known as “June Hogs”. Sometimes 50 fish would jump out of the water at a time. The Salmon Chief distributed fish to all tribes. The fish would be filleted and air dried, then packed in bundles to take back home.

The methods of fishing were numerous. Principle among them was the J-trap. Many pictures depict how the trap itself has a wood frame with the back laid against the falls and the bottom of the “J” formed by cordage into a basket. The cordage was wild hemp, a material very familiar to the Sinixt and other local tribes. They used it not just for these traps but also for making rope bridges across streams on “grease trails” that connected villages and other sites. (The “grease” in this case was bear fat, a standard commodity for exchange before Europeans arrived.) The hemp was incredibly strong. The Chief’s trap could hold 250 fish and collected 400 fish in a day. It was eight feet wide. When full, 2 men would get into the trap with the fish and club them, then pass the fish to people on shore. The whole system was made and suspended in the falls with hemp rope.

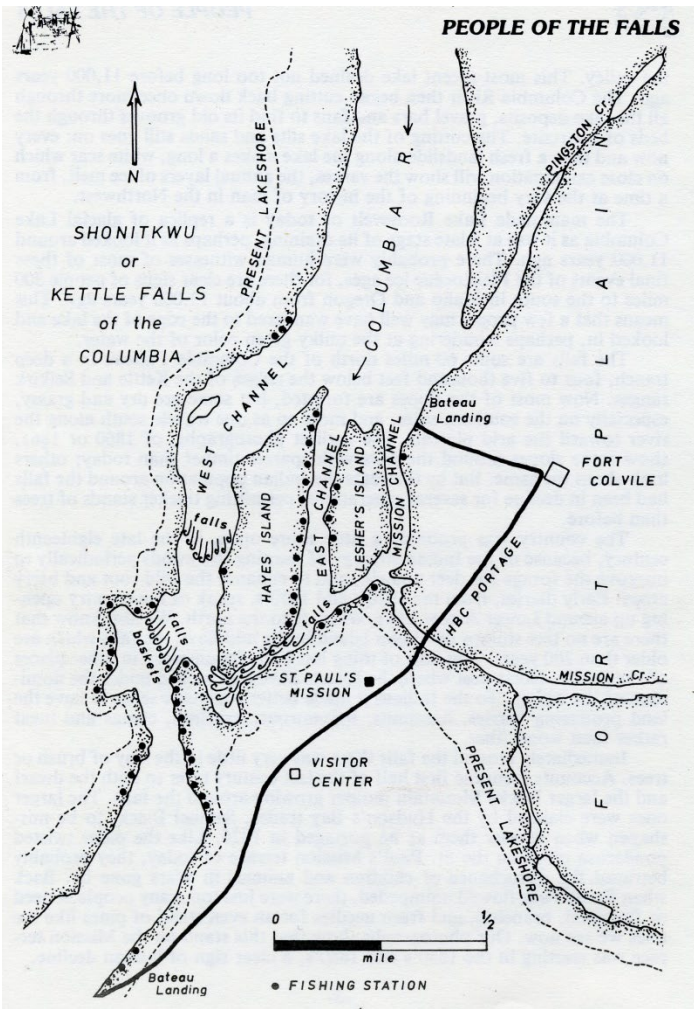
In a series of pictures Layman highlighted traditional points for fishing, logs that acted as bridges between falls and a rock where the salmon chief stood overseeing the operation. On the west side of the river was a cliff from which men could spear fish in the strong current. Bill referred to it as “cut-line rock”. That might sound off since they were spear fishing, but to protect the fishermen from the force of the big fish in a strong current at the end of a long pole, the spears had detachable spearheads and gaff hooks tied with hemp to the shafts. If the fish was winning the battle, the cords could be cut to save the fishermen.

A feature that Layman did not discuss but which David Chance does, were cup holes. There were thousands of little depressions chipped into the rocks at important fishing locations. The mystery deepens when Chance goes on to relate that *“Classically known to scholars as “cup-marks,” they occur near fishing places all the way from Ireland across the northern Eurasian land-mass to certain locations in North America, Kettle Falls being one of the outstanding examples.”* He goes on to remind us that the life-giving significance of the falls makes it the most important spiritual center on the upper Columbia.

The many stories, prayers and traditions surrounding Kettle Falls cannot be transmitted in an evening slide show. Bill gained much of his insight into them talking to Martin Louie and others. Martin who descended from both tribes, held the sacred responsibility of honoring and praying for the fish to return until he died. It was difficult for him to see the pictures without remembering how it felt and what was lost. That loss is now commemorated in the annual Ceremony Calling the Salmon Home. So much news and history today is packaged as entertainment. It is too easy to escape the pain of missing what was taken from the hearts and souls of those who are family.



Cup-marks in the bedrock overlooking the fishing stations in the lower falls, in 1970. A tape measure serves as a scale. Photo by the author.



# Kettle Falls

## Sxwənitkw "Noisy Waters"

Honoring the Indigenous  
Legacy of Kettle Falls

**Woodland Theatre**  
Kettle Falls, WA

6:00 p.m.  
September 30<sup>th</sup> 2023

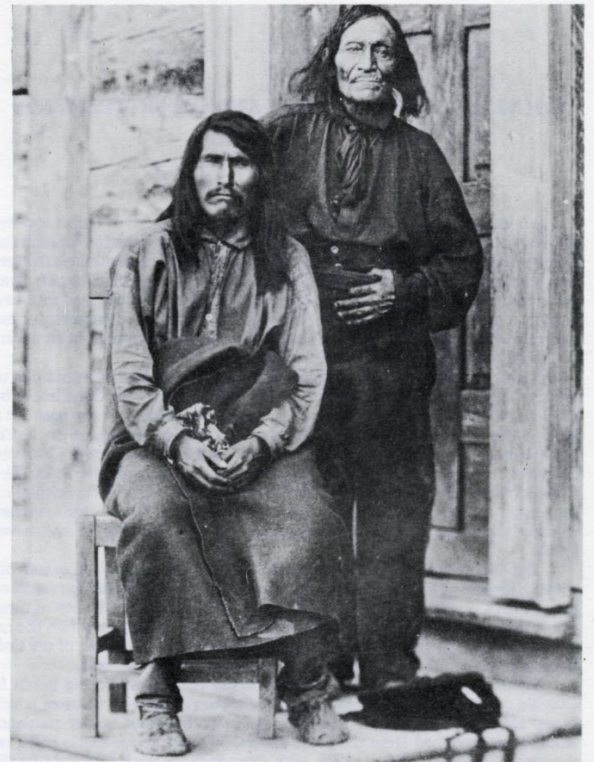
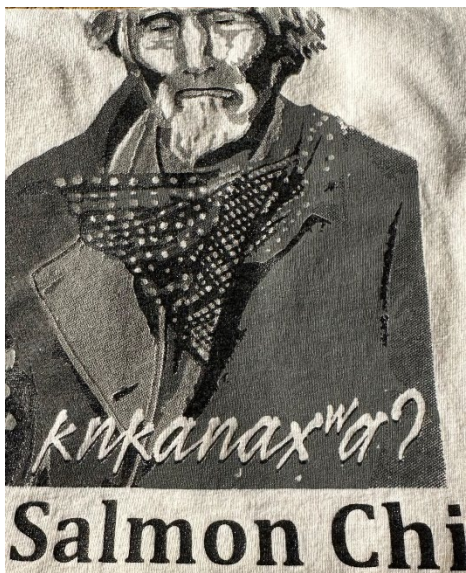
*Fishing Sites and Geographic Features*  
With Shelly Boyd and Bill Layman

A Benefit for  
Inchelium Cultural Research Center and  
the Kettle Falls Historical Center

Suggested Donation: \$10-\$40

ICRC KFHC  
Supported by  
WVMCC

Kettle Falls Historical Center



The Salmon Chief seated on a chair at Fort Colville, and Baptiste La Pierre, a builder of bateaux. The Salmon Chief is most likely Kinkinahwa. Compare this man with the blind Kinkinahwa of the 1890's, shown on page 107. Taken in 1861 by the British boundary surveyors. Courtesy of the Royal Engineers Corps Library, Chatham.