

# Klamath Tribes c'waam Ceremony

## First Sucker Ceremony

### Ethnography Information

In the late 1870s Albert S. Gatschet recorded in his journals that the Klamath practiced the First Sucker Ceremony. This is further supported by Leslie Spier in his ethnographic study of the Klamath Tribe.

### Klamath Tribes changed ceremony location

The Klamath Tribes changed the location from **wokstat** to the current location. The Chiloquin dam blocked **c'waam** from moving further up the river.

### GIVING THANKS

All Klamath Tribal members are asked to come together to pray for these fish. We give thanks for this fish, and pray for the waters and the fish to be restored to healthy status.



Figure 1 baby c'waam at ambodat Water Dept.



Figure 2 Captain Sky, Klamath qyoqs

- **Return of the c'waam Ceremony.**  
“In the place of the first salmon ceremony common among the Northwest Coast Tribes, the Klamath have an observance over the first sucker.

The locale is **wo'kstat** on the bank of the Sprague River near the settlement **gomeeksi** [cave place], south of Bray Mill. Above this spot is a cave styled the home of **gmok'am'c**, the culture hero. The first sucker is roasted and allowed to burn to ashes Those that follow

- must not be taken home but roasted there, or else no more will come. If the rite is observed, suckers will be plentiful.”

Reference:  
March 1990 *Klamath Newsletter* article

## EXTINCTION LIST

In 1988 the Lost River Sucker, c'waam and the Shortnose sucker, **koptu** were placed on the endangered species list. The Klamath Tribes responded by developing the Klamath Tribes Research Fish Hatchery.

### TRIBAL ELDERS REQUESTS FIRST SUCKER CEREMONY

In 1988, Tribal elders requested the First Sucker Ceremony be re-introduced. The Culture and Heritage (C&H) Department staff researched the ceremony. The C&H staff also consulted with tribal elders of the time and some of those elders could recall the ceremony from when they were children. Besides the Ceremony, they also recalled activities such as gambling, feasting, and racing and included other tribes, such as Molalla, Pit River, Warm Springs, Modoc, Takelma, Yahooskin and Klamath.

## c'waam STORY

Tribal members from **?iWLaLLoon?a** (Klamath Falls) had a second Fish Feast which was held at **niLaqs** (Barkley Springs) A third feast was held by the Modoc and was probably held at the foot of Olene Gap along Lost River. The first, however, was always held at **wokstat**.

When **c'oms?am skodas** (blanket snow-falling large feathery snowflakes) or fishblanket snow fell in the little finger month, **koptcha**, the Klamath knew the **c'waam** would be not be far behind.

The last ceremony was conducted by Lee Snipes, aka Captain Sky. Captain Sky was a Tribal member who practiced shamanism. This ceremony was conducted and held at **wokstat** around 1932.



Figure 3 baby c'waam from ambodat Fish Hatchery