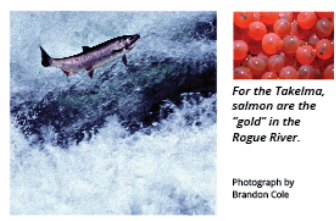




George Baker sits on the Story Chair in 1933.  
Photograph by John Peabody Harrington

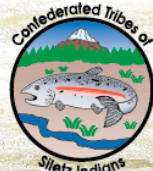


For the Takelma, salmon are the "gold" in the Rogue River.

Photograph by Brandon Cole



Salmon cooking on redwood skewers at the 2012 Salmon Ceremony. Photograph by Rory Hinney



Hear Grandma Aggie's blessing from the Story Chair.  
GoldHillWhitewater.org

## The Salmon Ceremony at Ti'lomikh Falls

The Takelma, which means "People of the River," had a village here. According to legend, Ti'lomikh (Te lo meekh) is where Daldal, the Great Dragonfly, brought the Salmon Ceremony. Although the date of the first ceremony is unknown, the People of the River have celebrated salmon here for thousands of years.

During the Salmon Ceremony, an elder of the Takelma sat in a stone seat called the "Story Chair" to net the first salmon of the spring run. To allow salmon to pass upstream to spawn, that first salmon was carefully prepared and divided, as a sacrament, among the people. To ensure that the salmon would always return, divers returned the bones and skin of the first fish to the pool below the falls. Only then did the fishing season begin.

Salmon ceremonies managed the fishery until 1851, when gold was discovered. A brutal war broke out, and in 1853, a treaty was signed ceding the Rogue Valley to the U.S. with the promise of a permanent reservation. A temporary reservation was established near the Table Rocks, but war continued. In 1856, the surviving Takelma and other tribes were marched north to the Siletz Reservation and the Grand Ronde Reservation.

Mining, overfishing, logging, farming, dams, and urbanization decimated the salmon runs. Hatcheries were built to compensate for the loss of wild fish and habitat; nevertheless, current salmon runs average only about ten percent of the pre-settlement period.

The Ceremony and the Story Chair might have been forgotten, but in 1933, Takelma elder Gwisgwashan (Frances Johnson) and family including George Baker traveled here from Siletz with John P. Harrington, who recorded the story for the Smithsonian Institution.

In 2007, Grandma Agnes Baker Pilgrim, the oldest living Takelma, came to Ti'lomikh with a photograph of her father, George Baker, taken by John Harrington. The Story Chair was rediscovered, and the Salmon Ceremony was restored to the ancient site. Since then, three dams have been removed on the Rogue River, and the salmon runs have improved.

In 2012, "Grandma Aggie" took her seat on the Story Chair and blessed the water. "We are all water babies," she said. "We are all people of the river."



Grandma Agnes Baker Pilgrim, 89, was brought by raft to the Story Chair by an international team of Olympic athletes, July 1, 2012.  
Photograph by Rory Hinney

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