

Statement of Significance

Xá:ytem Longhouse

Xá:ytem

35087 Lougheed Highway
Mission, British Columbia

Description

Xá:ytem is located above the north banks of the Fraser River in Mission, British Columbia and is a traditional gathering place of the Sto:lo. It is a Coast Salish site of spiritual significance to the Sto:lo people because of its Transformer Rock – sometimes called Hatzic Rock.

This beautiful site features the Transformer Stone, 2 contemporary skumels (pithouses), a contemporary longhouse interpretive centre and gift shop, an artisan shelter and gathering areas. It has been the site of numerous archaeological digs that confirm thousands of years of occupation. The site is now marked with interpretive signage.

Heritage Values

Xá:ytem is an important cultural landscape in the District of Mission and is valued for its historic, cultural, educational and spiritual significance.

Historic:

Xá:ytem contains evidence of the oldest permanent settlement in British Columbia. Artifacts found in the geological layers on the site indicate that there was continuous occupation here circa 1,000 BC and calibrated radiocarbon dating indicates occupation as early as 3,650 BC.

The site contains archaeological evidence, features, and artifacts in close proximity to the sacred Transformer Rock.

The Friends of Hatzic Rock Society was formed in 1991 to counteract a potential development threat. The Society was registered in record time, and the Speak of Me concert and art auction organized in just 3 weeks raised \$13,000 to support the preservation efforts. Through non-confrontational negotiations the District of Mission with the Sto:lo bartered a land trade with the developer to ensure that the property was preserved.

In 1992, Xá:ytem was commemorated as a national historical site because of the age of the Hatzic Rock habitation, an early village of the Sto:lo people, and its close association to the Transformer Rock, or Kath'aq Sma:lt, a site of cultural and spiritual importance to the Sto:lo people.

The Province of British Columbia transferred the 18 acre property to the Sto:lo Heritage Trust Society in 2006.

Cultural:

Xá:ytem offers residents and visitors the opportunity to visit an authentic Sto:lo site and

learn about Sto:lo spirituality, history, archaeology, and traditional life.

Xá:ytem is valued by the people of Mission as an example of a positive collaborative problem-solving approach that brought together people of all cultures to protect an ancient and vital site.

Educational

The site has always been a centre for learning. Traditionally, Sto:lo adults and elders taught the younger generations the skills and values of their culture. With the agreement of Sto:lo elders in 1993, the site was developed as a teaching centre open to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Xá:ytem is the only First Nations interpretive site in the lower mainland and receives thousands of visitors from around the world each year. Annually, hundreds of children visit Xá:ytem on school tours. The site is a training centre for trades and university disciplines including teacher training and archaeological studies. It has been a source of pride and inspiration to aboriginal youth, volunteers, and staff to connect to their culture, to gain skills, and to go on to higher education

Archaeological work continues on site. Xá:ytem is a source of knowledge and scholarly confirmation of aboriginal habitation and lifestyle.

Xá:ytem is an important reminder that the history of people in this area goes back to time immemorial. The on-going educational focus fosters respect for a different world view and for the oral history and wisdom of the Sto:lo.

Spiritual

Within the Sto:lo community, the Transformer Rock is perceived as a physical manifestation of Sto:lo spirituality. Sto:lo believe residual life forces within the Rock can be heard and can still teach us today.

The Transformer Rock at Xá:ytem represents the age of transformation that informs the basis of unity within Coast Salish Tribes. The Transformer Xa:ls came to Earth to put things right. During part of His journey, He turned people into stone as a reminder to others to share.

It holds significant spiritual power experienced by many people; the power within the rock attracts visitors to touch, to lean on it, to listen for the voices within. Artists and song-writers have been inspired by their experiences here.

The Transformer Rock at Xá:ytem is the only transformer site that the Sto:lo Elders and leaders allow the public to access in order to share the knowledge.

Character-defining Elements

Natural elements include

- large open field in proximity to the Fraser River with views of the valley to the east and west, and to the mountains beyond

- an unimpeded view of Mount Cheam which underscores the connection with other transformer sites
- of immense significance is the Transformer Rock, its material form and location, and a grove of trees that have grown from ancient seeds unearthed by the excavation.

Man made elements include

- evidence of archaeological digs,
- the national historic commemorative plaque,
- traditional cedar structures, 2 skumels (pit houses), the artisan centre
- administrative offices and parking area