



Almost Lost:

the ecological treasures of Cedar Hill Park



Quadra Cedar Hill
Community
Association
January 27, 2015



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In Recognition...



Red-flowering currant
(*Ribes sanguineum*)

Of the Lekwungen
(Songhees, Esquimalt)
and Saanich
(WSÁNEC) First
Nations, whose
ancestors have used and
cared for these lands for
countless generations.
Hych'ka!

Above right: my dear friend
Sellemah/ Joan Morris of the
Songhees Nation

Special thanks to:

- ❖ The Quadra Cedar Hill Community Association, and especially to Dr. Eric Higgs, President John Smuck, Peter and Susan Haddon. Thanks to all of you for the good work you do!
- ❖ Mayors and Councils of Municipality of Saanich, and staff of Saanich Parks & Recreation
- ❖ Robert D. Turner, my personal photographer and advisor; and Dr. Darcy Mathews for map
- ❖ Dr. Eric Peterson and Christina Munck of the Tula Foundation and Hakai Institute



Common camas and western
buttercup

And a tribute...

- ❖ In memory of Dr. T. Chris Brayshaw, botanist extraordinaire



Photo of Chris Brayshaw, Grant Keddie and Adolf Ceska, taken in 2004 by Agnes Lynn at Victoria Camas Day, Beacon Hill Park

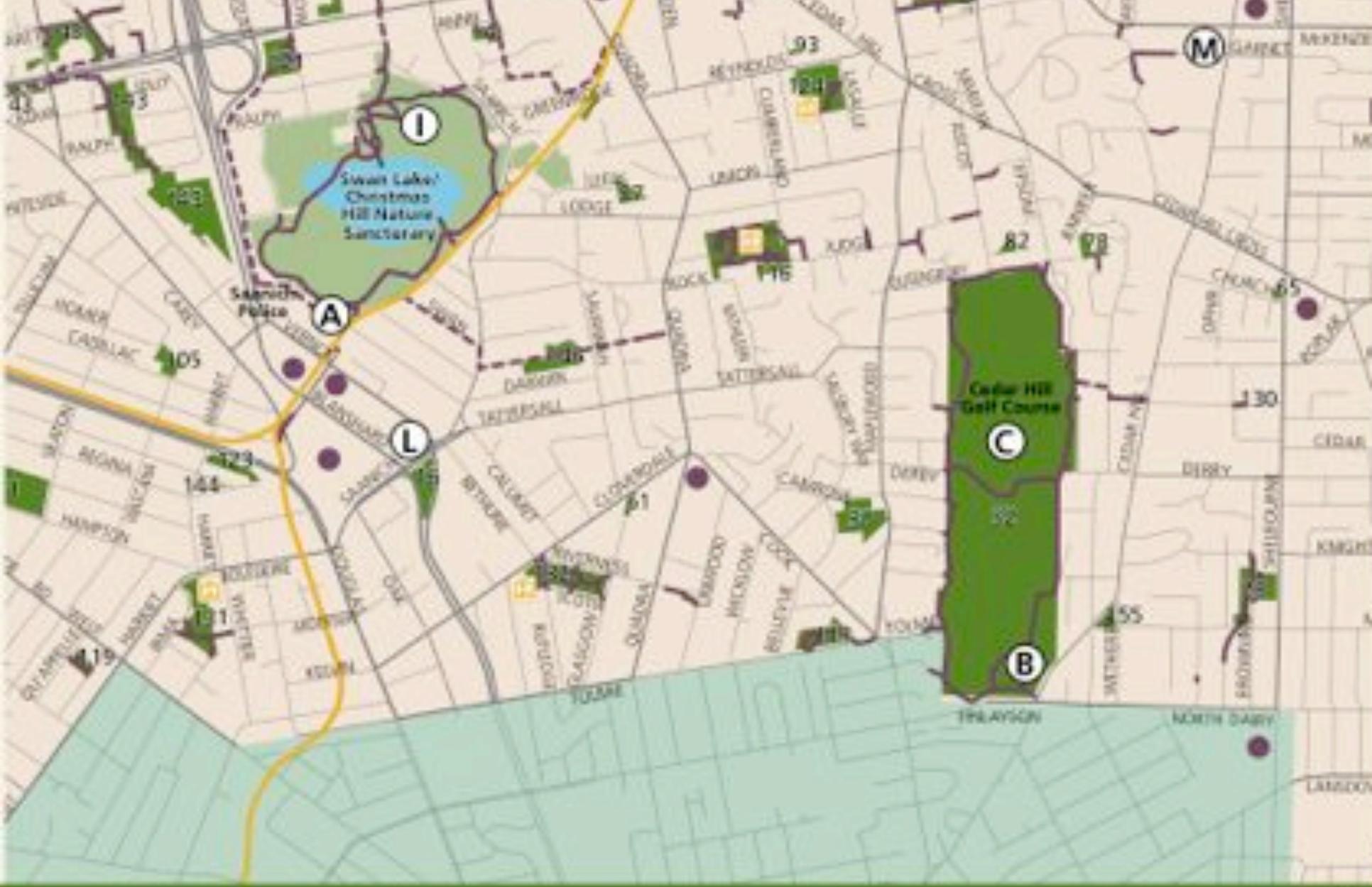


Cedar Hill Park, both typical and unique...

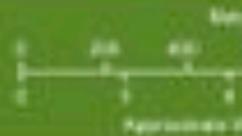
- ❖ Background, history
- ❖ Pre-European Environment
- ❖ Agents of Change
- ❖ Consequences of Change
- ❖ Renewal and restoration



Garry Oak, iconic tree of Victoria and Saanich

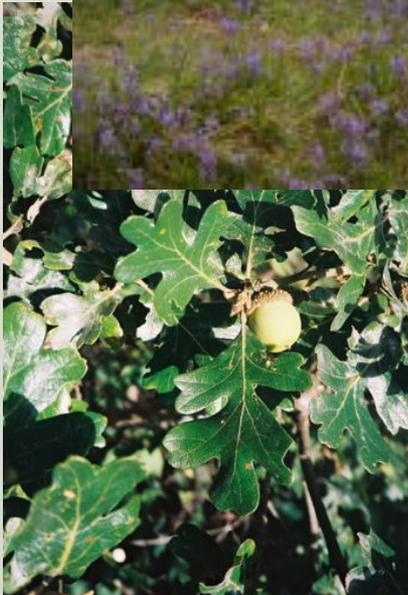


SWAN LAKE & CEDAR HILL Parks & Trails



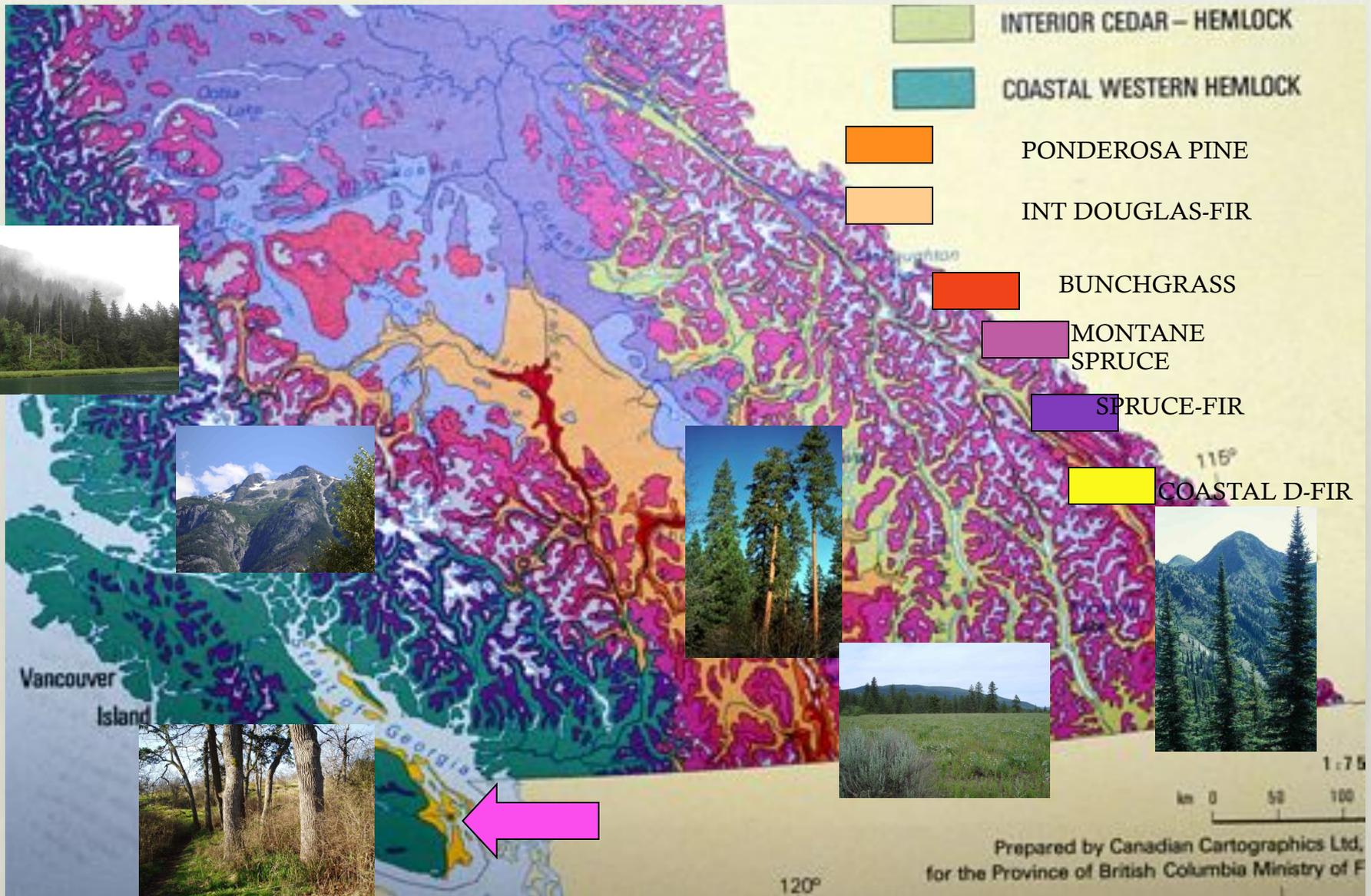
Typifies Garry Oak ecosystems of SE Vancouver Island

- ❖ One of the most threatened ecosystems in Canada; >5% remaining



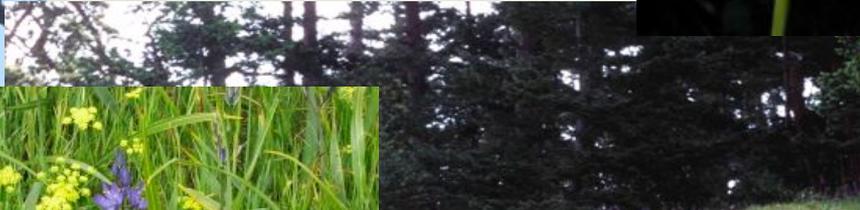
chəng'-étch

Ministry of Forests map 1998



The Leeward Side of Vancouver Island; a special vegetation zone

Garry Oak ecosystems: High biodiversity



Special because of its unique
situation; so little left!

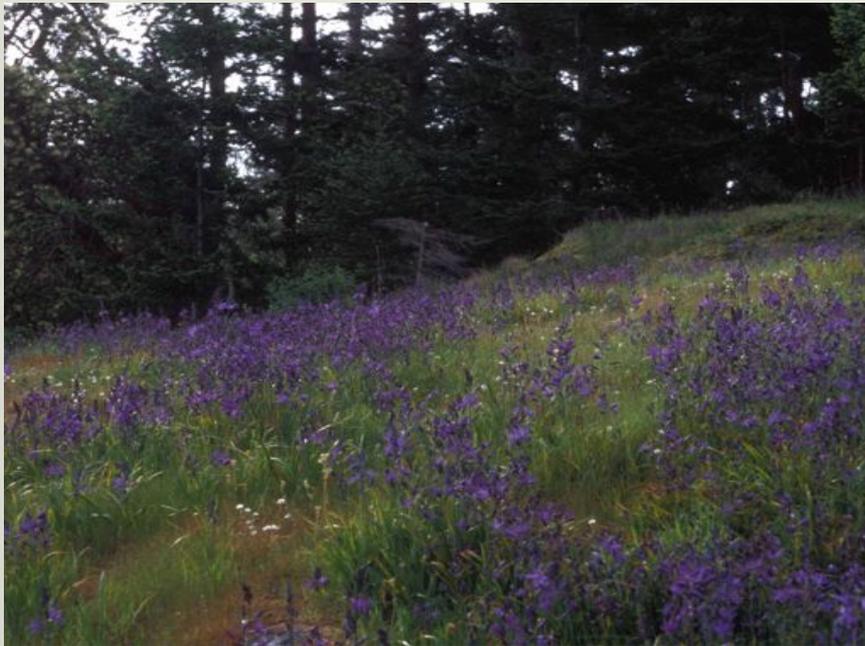


OAK BAY AND MT. BAKER, FROM VICTORIA.



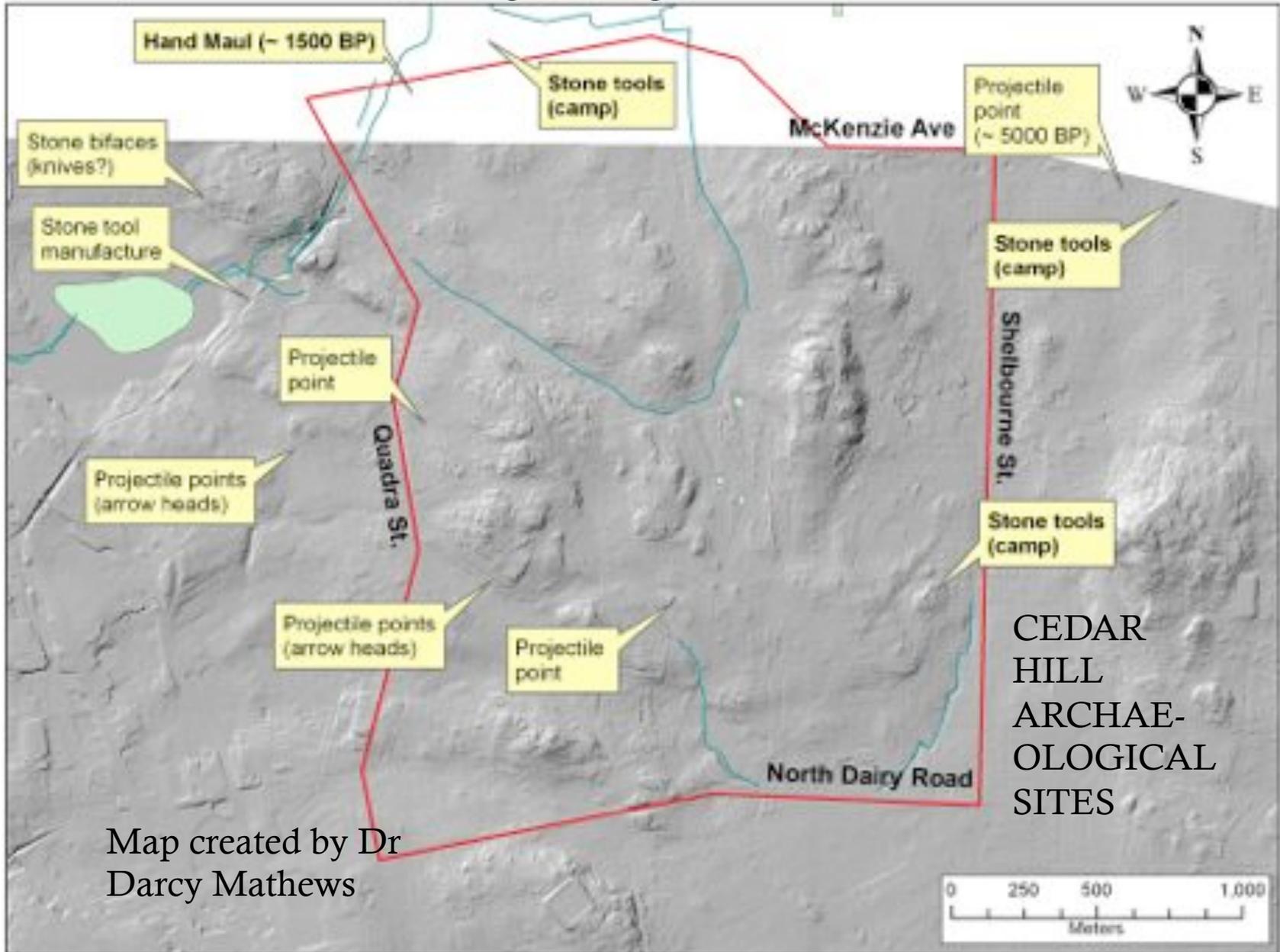
The way it was...

- ❖ Communities / villages of Straits Salish peoples living in villages along the coastline, moving seasonally inland and out to the islands, harvesting resources from the land and sea.



Dr. Brenda Beckwith photo

Long-standing human use...



Seasonal Round:

from the ocean to the islands, inland and back...



Spring: herring
eggs, salmon,
ducks & eggs;
camas & root
vegetables,
green shoots,
seaweed;
medicines



Summer:
berries
from many
places;
cedar bark,
basket
materials
cattails;
medicines



Fall: salmon, deer,
ducks & geese;
autumn fruits, root
vegetables; nettle
fibre, medicines



Winter:
hunting,
fishing;
clams; root
vegetables,
teas;
medicines;
preserved
food



A managed landscape



First Peoples of this area – the Lekwungen, and other Straits Salish peoples – played a profound role in creating and maintaining this landscape... over thousands of years



Clearing the land for camas...

“The way that the family group... would establish claim to a plot of land [for camas harvesting] would be by clearing it. Once a family cleared a plot, it would “just naturally” become their plot to use, ... clearing was done in the fall or spring before the gathering season, ... The plot from which the bulbs were to be gathered would be cleared of stones, weeds, and brush, but not of trees.” (Ethnographer Marguerite Babcock, from interview with Christopher Paul, Tsartlip, 1967)

1840s: The Newcomers arrive to Victoria: A perfect 'Eden'



“The place itself appears a perfect ‘Eden’ in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North...one might be pardoned for supposing it had dropped from the clouds into its present position.” (James Douglas to James Hargrave, February 5, 1843, G. P. de T. Glazebrook, ed. *The Hargrave Correspondence*, p. 420)

Beginning the transformation... 1846



- ❖ “about 160 acres are cultivated with oats, wheat, potatoes, turnips, carrots, and other vegetables, and every day more land is converted into fields...” (Berhold Seeman)

By 1848...

- ❖ 1848 Captain Courtenay, H.M.S. *Constance*, summer... “The [HBC] ...have 300 acres under tillage there, & a dairy farm of 80 Cows, together with numerous other cattle & 24 brood Mares... [under Finlayson]”



surveys & lots

Knockan Hill



Fort Victoria



Tl'ches



The lands of Victoria area, divided up for settlement: mid 1800s: “*diversified by Wood and Plains...*” James Douglas

Victoria, 1880s





CEDAR HILL FROM MT. TALMIE—NEAR VICTORIA.

Rural Saanich, around the late 1800s

Long story short...



The original lands were converted to orchard and dairy lands. The farm was threatened with subdivision, but the Municipality of Saanich created Cedar Hill Park in 1967. A municipal golf course was created over most of the property, with green turf grasses, watering system, berms, sand traps and ponds created... in the 1970s and '80s the perimeter trail was completed, running through remnant garry oak ecosystem distributed around the edges...

1986

- ❖ When Saanich Council considered a proposal to develop houses along the edge of Cedar Hill Park. “Never has the community been so fiercely divided,” said Mayor Frank Leonard



Almost all the neighbours around the park perimeter formed a coalition of protest and persuaded Saanich Council to retain the remaining land as a park, *in perpetuity*

Early '90s

- ❖ King's Pond cleared out in the early '90s and landscaped with native shrubs



Some culturally important species...



John Thomas,
Ditidaht Nation
with silverweed rts



Silverweed,
chocolate lily,
taper-tip onion;
camas



NOT giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), but related



Cow-parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*), edible stalks when young; NOTE: must be peeled; phototoxic

Edible blue camas... staple food and iconic wildflower of Victoria region – greatly diminished, but still spectacular in places



Camas field (Joseph Pallant photo), *Camassia quamash*, *C. leichtlinii*, and camas bulbs,





Camas bulbs from 1 square meter of garry oak savannah at the Somenos Garry Oak Preserve near Duncan (Kate Proctor's master's research)

Wild strawberries



Formerly much more common and productive; maintained by fire, like camas and other species of the open prairies

Woodland strawberry
(*Fragaria vesca*)

Other wild berries: trailing blackberries, thimbleberries, salmonberries





Saskatoon berries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*): **SC'I,SEN**

Bird Cherry (*Oemleria cerasiformis*) and black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)



Nootka wild rose (*Rosa nutkana*)



Attractive
fragrant flowers
blooming
around June;
bright red edible
hips that remain
on bushes all
winter

Fall Fruits

Pacific Crabapple (*Malus fusca*)



- important fall and winter fruit, stored under water
- Wood for implements
- Bark for Medicines



Fruit: **KÁ,EW** (qé7əx^w)

Tree: **KÁ,EWIŁĆ** (qəx^{wi}7-ilhch)



Many other useful and culturally important species...



Grand fir, trembling aspen, bitter cherry, Pacific willow, cascara



And many more...



Red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), waxberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*), rattlesnake plantain orchid (*Goodyera oblongifolia*)

Licorice fern (*Polypodium
glycyrrhiza*) – rhizomes
medicine for coughs, sore
throats





Glenn Bartley
photo

Wetlands and headwaters



- ❖ The **Kings Pond and Jenkins Pond** wetland area at the north end is the only remaining natural area within the headwater reach of the Big Barn Creek drainage. Downstream sections of the drainage basin have been culverted down to McKenzie Avenue, then flowing into Blenkinsop Lake wetland and, now ultimately to Swan Lake and Colquitz Creek.
- ❖ Headwaters of **Bowker Creek** at south end; NOT just a drainage ditch!
- ❖ Some key waterfowl: mallard, widgeon, ring necked duck, northern shoveler, wood duck, bufflehead, pintail, canvasback, hooded merganser, teal, Canada goose and common coot, rails, great blue heron, green heron, red-winged blackbird



Other native wildlife



Swainson's thrush (Glenn Bartley photo)

- ❖ Wrens, song sparrow, golden-crowned sparrow & others, thrushes, kinglets, pileated and hairy woodpeckers, flickers, nuthatches, towhee, barred owl, western tanager, great horned owl, brown creeper, ravens, crows
- ❖ Pacific garter snake, alligator lizard, turtle
- ❖ Little brown bat, occasional cougar, otter, muskrat



Salmon

- ❖ Water from this area does drain into fish bearing waters in the Swan Lake and Colquitz Creek drainages. [Paul Harder and Associates' report of 2002]
- ❖ Chum and coho salmon used to come up Bowker Creek as far as where the Cedar Hill Rec Centre is today



Bowker Creek (left); Chum salmon in smokehouse (above)

Increasing disturbance, loss of biodiversity



- ❖ Many introduced species, especially Himalayan Blackberry, English Ivy, English holly, Scotch broom, daphne-laurel, golden willow, English hawthorn and many exotic grasses (orchard grass, velvet grass, couchgrass)

Homogenization



- ❖ In our mainstream society, we have a tendency to treat organisms at the species level or above and ignore regional and geographic variation
- ❖ We tend to homogenize our environments and species - and suppress their differences - and we are doing this all over the world

Farmlands, Scotland, Okanagan, Fraser Delta

...could be anywhere, N or S
temperate zone



Extirpated: wild caraway (*Perideridia gairdneri*); cleared in trail construction



Chocolate Lily (*Fritillaria affinis*) – used to
be many plants on w side



Fire on west side, 1992: a story



Still: A Key Refugium...

Much has changed; some species, once abundant, can no longer be found. Nevertheless, areas like Cedar Hill Park remain as refugia for culturally important native plants. With ongoing restoration and cultural revitalization, many are being recognized once again as a vital element of First Nations' cultures and of Victoria's & Saanich's unique environment.



- ❖ White fawn lily (*Erythronium oregonum*); Kings Pond; Pacific crabapples (*Malus fusca*); Satinflowers (*Olsynium douglasii*)

Foothill sedge (*Carex tumulicola*)

- ❖ COSEWIC
Designation:
Endangered
- ❖ Found by James
Miskelly in Cedar Hill
Park (Colleen O'Brian
pers. com.) (collected by
T. C. Brayshaw; also
occurring at Playfair
and Mt Tolmie...)



- ❖ [http://
www.heritageseedlings.c
om/page_184_52/
carex-tumulicola](http://www.heritageseedlings.com/page_184_52/carex-tumulicola)

Almost lost...



Great horned owl (Robert D. Turner photo)

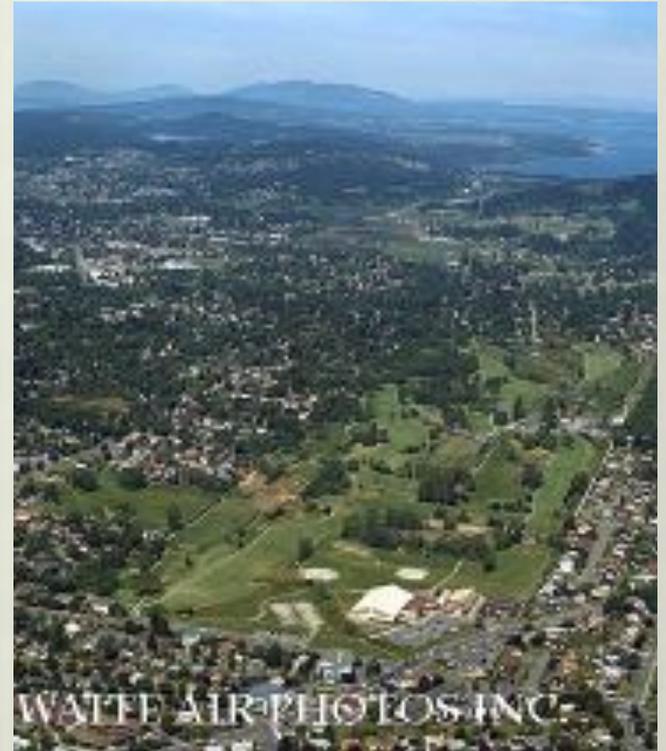


But still here, to be enjoyed, treasured
and cared for, for future generations.

What can we do now?

Steps for the future

- ❖ Recognize and celebrate the natural values and history of the park, and educate others
- ❖ Inventory the species and ecosystems of the park: what do we have?
- ❖ Accept the complexity of these ecocultural systems; face reality of the park as it is today and embrace its many values, in light of world trends and needs
- ❖ Identify what has been lost and plan to restore as much as possible, especially those species and habitats that are /were “typical” and those that are rare or unique



Thanks to Waite Airphotos Inc.

Make this an opportunity...

- ❖ To become better informed
- ❖ To appreciate and celebrate our special places & species
- ❖ To care for and contribute to these places
- ❖ To embrace learning, research, understanding
- ❖ To join **Friends of Cedar Hill Park**



Thank you!

