

Theories abound on white rock's origin

Most of us know that White Rock is named after the huge rock on the beach, but there's a lot about the rock you may not know.

For example, in geological terms, it is known as a "glacial erratic." It was deposited here at the end of the last ice age, 11,000 years ago, and probably came from somewhere in the Coast Mountain range.

It is the inspiration for a legend describing the origins of the Semiahmoo First Nation people.

One version of the legend holds that a sea god in Cowichan Bay was angry after his father refused him permission to marry a Cowichan woman. He picked up a huge rock and threw it out to sea.

With his beloved in his arms, he followed the rock across the strait to Semiahmoo Bay. Arriving just as the rock landed on the beach, the young god declared that here they would start a new tribe, the Semiahmoo.

The rock is one of White Rock's three official municipal heritage sites, but that hasn't always earned it respect.

Former Surrey municipal engineer Claude Harvie claimed the white

rock was originally situated above the railroad grade on the bank, but not very high.

"A couple of sticks of powder were put underneath," Harvie told reporter Eileen Tuomaala, "and they got it to roll down the beach."

It has suffered constant graffiti for more than a century.

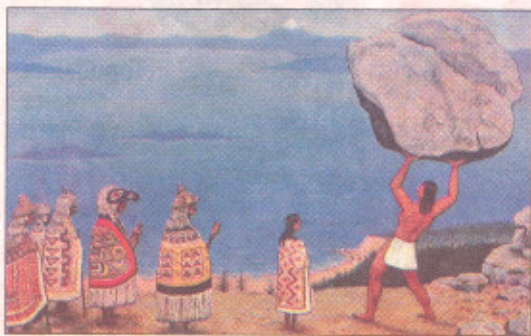
The height of indignity came one dark night in 1950 when it was painted entirely black. The next night, a white 'Skull and Crossbones' was added.

Although the culprit was never apprehended, police Chief Bill Moffat



White Rock Museum & Archives photos

Above, campers by the white rock around 1920. Left, a painting by local artist Lorna Holcroft depicts the legend of the rock. The Cowichan sea god is about to hurl the rock across the Salish Sea.



commented, "I intend to find out who painted the rock black, but I don't know what I could charge them with when I do."

The cost of restoration brought up the question, "Who owns the rock?" After suggestions of dynamiting the rock were shelved, local businesses and the board of trade co-operated to paint it white on a regular basis. The City of White Rock took on the job after incorporation in 1957.

In 1955, the White Rock Junior Chamber of Commerce thought it would be a good idea to move the rock to Memorial Park, just east of the train station. It was too remote where it was, they claimed, and could be better viewed and maintained in the park.

Thankfully, their plan never came to fruition, so that today you can see the rock almost where nature (or the gods) intended it to be.

And, as for who owns the rock... the City of White Rock, of course.

The Peninsula's best-known mother-and-son historians, Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood, are dedicated to preserving local history through the White Rock Museum & Archives. If you want to learn more about White Rock's history, or if you want to share your memories, call 604-541-2222, or email whiterockarchives@telus.net