Kalapuya Talking Stones

Whilamut Natural Area of Alton Baker Park

Eugene–Springfield, Oregon

The Kalapuya

Kalapuya people say "We have always been here." For many thousands of years before the onset of Euro-American settlement, the Kalapuya were the largest Indian group in what is now called western Oregon. It is estimated that Kalapuya people numbered 15,000 at the time of Euro-American contact. The traditional Kalapuya territory encompassed most of the Willamette Valley, from present-day Oregon City in the north to Yoncalla, in the Upper Umpqua valley. There were 13 distinct groups of Kalapuya people, speaking three dialects of the Kalapuyan language.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the Kalapuya were not nomadic. The people lived in permanent villages of wooden plank-framed houses which were located throughout the region. Temporary shelters of wood and brush were constructed at fishing and hunting sites. Dugout canoes were used to navigate rivers and streams, facilitating transportation and food gathering.

The Kalapuya were hunters of large and small game, subsisting on deer and elk, supplemented by a variety of fish. Time-tested plant gathering techniques provided a balanced diet for the people. The camas lily was a vital food — bulbs were roasted in stone-lined ovens and pressed into cakes for winter use. These camas-flour cakes also were used as trade items.

When the first explorers entered the Willamette Valley, they witnessed a yearly burning of sections of the valley floor by the Kalapuya. This was done to maintain grasslands, to concentrate game in certain areas, and also to roast seeds of the wild sunflower. These seeds were a food resource, and yielded oil for ceremonial use. Early settlers saw field burning as a dangerous practice and it was banned by the time the Kalapuya were removed to reservations in the mid-1800s. As a consequence, brush and weeds quickly encroached on farmland, and grasshopper infestations destroyed crops.

Shortly after 1850 the United States government began a treaty process with the Kalapuya people. The unratified treaty of 1855 ultimately removed most of the Kalapuya to reservations at Grand Ronde and Siletz, opening up the Willamette Valley to occupation by settlers.

Diseases carried by Euro-Americans soon decimated the Kalapuya population. Many died of smallpox, malaria and scrofula, an illness related to tuberculosis. But the Kalapuya have not vanished. Today, an estimated 300 to 400 Kalapuya remain, many of whom uphold the age-old culture and tradition of the ancestors.

About the Talking Stones

The Talking Stones were installed in December 2002 in the Whilamut Natural Area of Alton Baker Park. Quarried from a basalt deposit in traditional Kalapuya territory, the Talking Stones were designed to serve as educational and cultural reference points, as well as being beautiful art objects. The stones reintroduce words of the Kalapuya language onto land where the people once hunted, and onto waters that carried their canoes.

Now the land is part of Alton Baker Park, a primary open-space component of the Willamette Greenway. In September of 2002, the park's eastern 237 acres were given the name "Whilamut Natural Area" in recognition of the environmental ethics of this area's first people and their descendants.

Project Partners

Project Conception and Coordination:

- Citizen Planning Committee for the Whilamut Natural Area of Alton Baker Park
- Kommema Cultural Protection Association

Consultants

- Esther Stutzman and the Kommema Cultural Protection Association

Engravers

- Lisa Ponder
- Mark Andrew

Project Sponsors

- City of Eugene Parks and Open Space
- Willamalane Park and Recreation District

Publicity Assistance and Brochure Development

- Nearby Nature

Illustration by Susan Applegate

For an electronic version of this brochure, visit the Eugene Parks and Open Space website: www.eugene-or.gov/whilamut

Eugene

WHILAMUT PASSAGE BRIDGE

willamalane Park and Recreation District

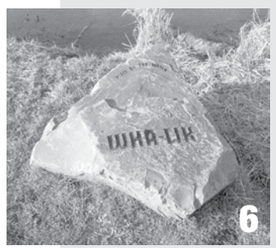
Ha-Yaba = *camas field*

Camafeema = *ferns on the ground*

De-Ha-Yaba = *near a camas field*

Illioo = *joyful*

Ga-Ach-Li = *peaceful in daylight*

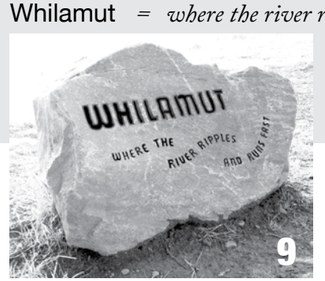


Wha-lik = *place by the water*

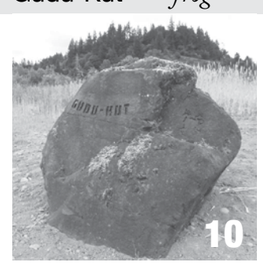
Li-Yuu = *prairie*

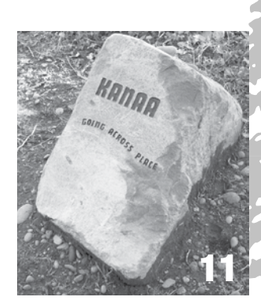
Hal-Ba = *downstream*

Whilamut = *where the river ripples and runs fast*



Gudu-Kut = *frog*

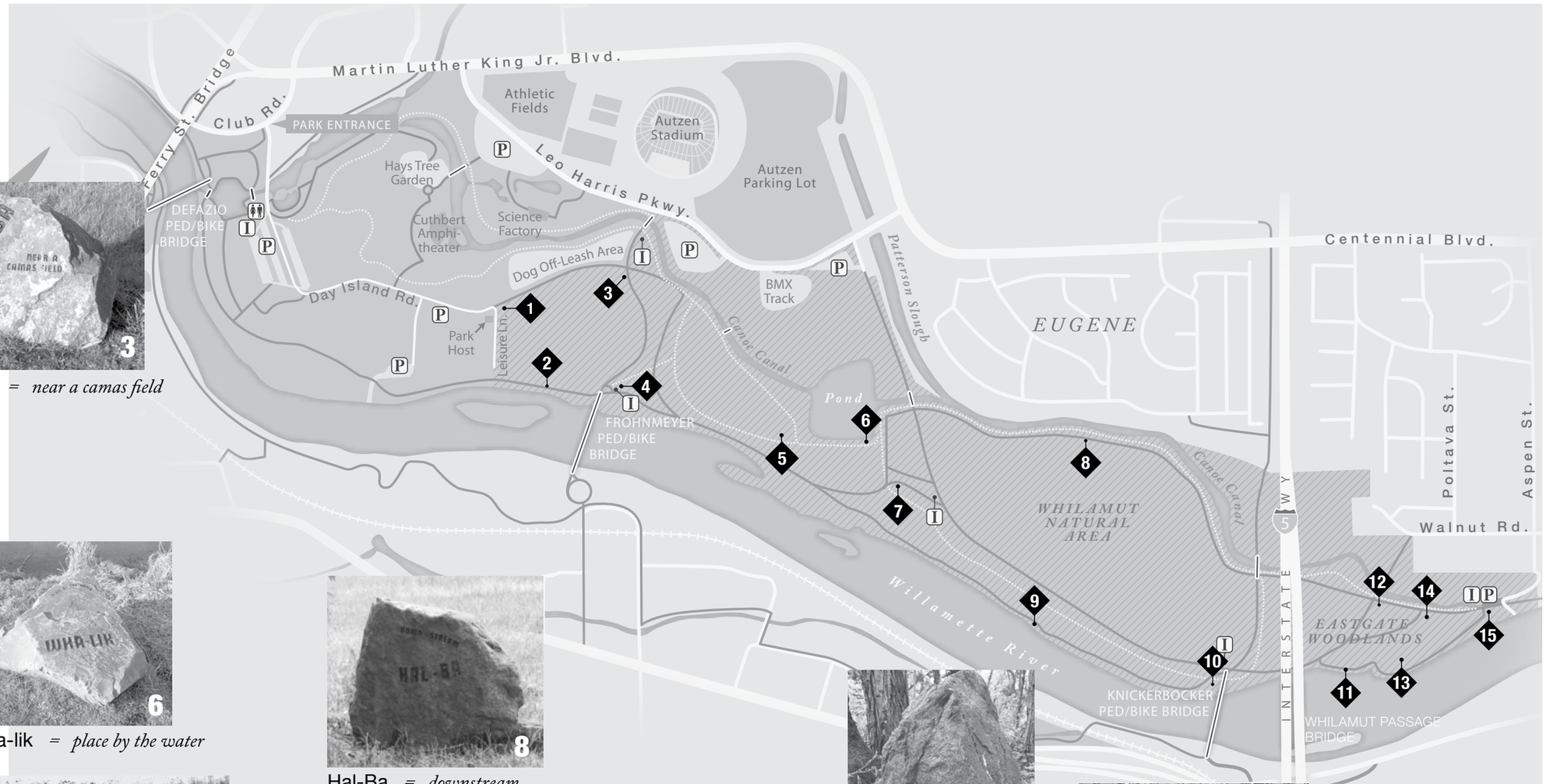




Kanaa = *going across place*

Duucu-Ba = *powerful place*

Gaw-Ni = *trail through the woods*

Hi-Dwa = *in a wooded area*

Lak-Mi = *near a fish trap*