

The Story of the North Wind Weir

Beginning in 1916, Anthropologist Arthur C. Ballard (1876-1962) records and translates the Native American legend regarding the origin of the rocks in the Duwamish River known as North Wind Weir. Ballard collected several versions of the legend and the story presented here is a compilation:

In days gone by, there was once a war between the North Wind people and the Chinook Wind people. Chinook Wind was married to Mountain Beaver Woman, the daughter of North Wind. The people of North Wind village did not like the man and so they killed him and his tribe. The only one left alive was Chinook Wind's mother, an old woman who lived on a stone mountain down along the Duwamish River.

North Wind held the land under his power, covering it with ice and snow. He stretched a fish weir of ice across the Duwamish River. No fish could get past this trap, and further up the valley the people starved. The land was desolate.

It came to pass that Mountain Beaver Woman had a son, Storm Wind. Chinook Wind was his father. As the boy grew up, he was warned by the North Wind people to never go near the mountain. They knew that he would question the old woman, and that she would tell him how his people were killed.

Each day, the young man would hunt closer and closer to the mountain. One day, he got close enough to hear the old woman crying, so he went to her house. Inside, he found her weeping for her dead son. The ravens, who were the slaves of North Wind, perched above her, dropping filth onto her face. This, along with the tears on her cheeks, had frozen into ice. For her fire, she had only the tops of cat-tail rush, which would blaze quickly, providing no warmth.

Storm Wind listened to her story. He went and pulled up big fir trees by the roots, and laid them at her door for fuel. He also gave the old woman a bone pointed arrow to punch the ravens with. He resolved to fight the North Wind people for what they had done.

Storm Wind left to retrieve his mother. While he was away, the old woman wove baskets to capture the rain. Some were large and coarsely woven to hold large raindrops, while others were tightly woven to hold fine mist. She left them outside to capture the rain. Soon, Storm Wind returned.

The next day, the old woman emptied the baskets and flooded the valley. Storm Wind went down to the river. He tore up many trees and threw them into the water until they shattered the fish trap, turning it into stone. These stones can still be seen when water runs between them at low tide.

Storm Wind melted the ice and blew it north. The young man and his grandmother beat North Wind. Down the valley he ran, the land flooding behind him. If North Wind had not been chased away, we should all be cold and hungry all the time. As it is, we have a little snow and ice, but not for long.

The North Wind Weir can be seen where the Green River Trail crosses the Duwamish River at the end of 27th Avenue South.

Source: Arthur C. Ballard, "Mythology of Puget Sound," *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (December 1929), pp. 55-64.