

Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
28 Jan. 2021

Proposal to Rename Higgins Bridge in Missoula as  
**Bear Tracks Bridge**

In 2020, the Missoula County Commissioners approached the Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee to discuss the possibility of renaming the Higgins Avenue Bridge, which is now in the process of being reconstructed. Led by Commissioner Dave Strohmaier, the Commissioners were interested in a new name for the bridge that would help foster greater awareness and respect in the community for the long and continuing importance of the Missoula area to the CSKT. The effort has the support of both the County Commission and the Missoula City Council, and was welcomed by the CSKT Tribal Council.

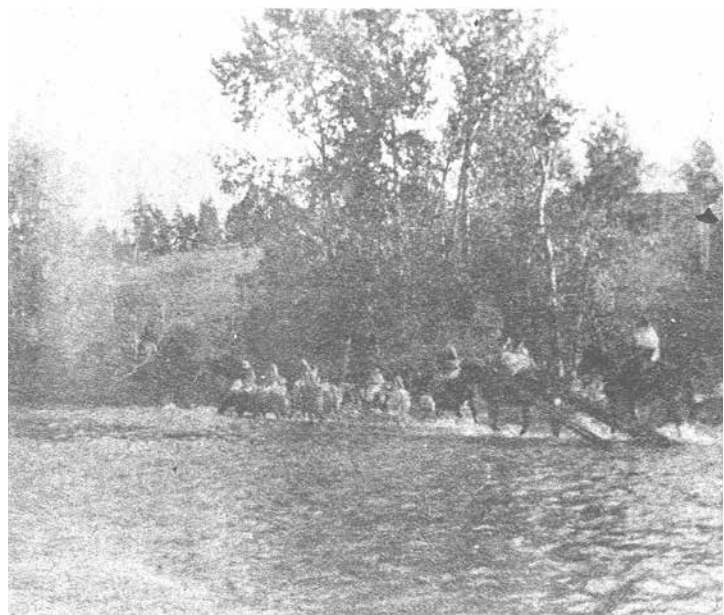
Since that time, the Séliš-Q̓lispé Elders Advisory Council and Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee staff have considered the issue, conducted extensive research, and held meetings to discuss potential new names. In June 2020, SQCC provided Tribal Council with an initial background paper, offering four or five possible names that emerged from that process. The name that has finally been chosen, however, did not appear on the earlier list.

On Wednesday, January 27, 2021, SQCC elders reached unanimous consensus on a new name: Bear Tracks Bridge. This name honors to Louis Vanderburg and the Vanderburg family, and also the Salish people as a whole.

Bear Tracks is a name not only steeped in tribal history and culture, but also of direct relevance to the site of the bridge. In October 1891, during the U.S. government's forced removal of some 300 Salish people from the Bitterroot Valley to the Flathead Reservation, the Salish were organized in three groups. One of them was led by sub-chief Louis Vanderburg, a highly respected leader among the Salish people. The party crossed the Clark Fork River on or adjacent to the Higgins Bridge. A new bridge was under construction at that time, and the old bridge was rickety and dangerous. So it appears that while some of the party may have used the bridge, most forded the river, something that the Salish people were highly skilled at and accustomed to doing. Regardless, it is clear that during our "Trail of Tears" from the Bitterroot to the Jocko, many Salish people passed this very spot.

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This blurry photograph is the only known image of some of the Salish Nation fording the Bitterroot River during the forced removal in October 1891. (Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum, image S4-143389).



The great stature of the Bear Tracks name is best understood by touching upon its history. Louis Vanderburg's father was Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe, meaning Grizzly Bear Tracks. In English, Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe was usually referred to simply as Bear Tracks, and that became the “real” English name of the Vanderburg family. Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe was himself a sub-chief and warrior who signed both the Hellgate Treaty in July 1855 and the Judith River Treaty in October 1855. Gustavus Sohon, an artist and translator during the treaty negotiations, noted that Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe was “a very brave and daring man.” Sohon wrote that “decision is written in every line of his countenance.”

Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe was also a medicine man whose powers were of crucial importance to the Salish people in both hunting and in battles with enemy tribes. His powers were so great, and came to be so widely known and respected among all tribes, that if an enemy was considering attacking a Salish camp but discovered that Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe was present, they would abandon their plans. Sx<sup>w</sup>ix<sup>w</sup>uytis Sm̄xe died in the 1880s, when he was over 90 years old.

According to both tribal elders and numerous written sources, Louis Vanderburg's Salish name was Lk<sup>w</sup>ut Sm̄xe (Far Away Grizzly). (Lucy Vanderburg, phone 27 Jan. 2021; “Returned from Washington,” *The Weekly Missoulian*, 14 Mar. 1884, p. 1; “A Great Banquet,” *The Helena Journal*, 6 Nov. 1889, p. 2; Peter Ronan, *Historical Sketch of the Flathead Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: Ross & Haines, Inc., 1890), p. 71)



Sx<sup>w</sup>ixuytis Sm̄xe — Grizzly Bear Tracks, May 1854.  
(Portrait by Gustavus Sohon. National Anthropological Archives.)

Lk<sup>w</sup>ut Sm̄xe (Far Away Grizzly — Louis Vanderburg) was the trusted sub-chief to Salish head chief S̄m̄xe Q̄<sup>w</sup>ox̄qeys (Claw of the Little Grizzly — Chief Charlo). Mr. Vanderburg was a key participant in numerous negotiations with the government, delegations to Washington and Helena, and other efforts to protect and defend the sovereignty and continuance of the Salish nation. He stood with Chief Charlo through decades of resistance against the government's attempts to force the Salish nation to leave the Bitterroot Valley. Recognizing the importance of the Salish remaining unified, Mr. Vanderburg also stood against entreaties from other tribal members that would have divided the people and undermined Chief Charlo. As Louis's son Čicnmtú (Victor Vanderburg) related, “Several of the Indians made offers to my father, Louis Vanderberg [sic], to lead the people over to the Jocko. He turned them all down and said that Charlot was the chief of the Bitterroot Salish and that he [Louis] would not go until Charlo went.” (Victor Vanderburg in J. Verne Dusenberry, “Samples of Pend d’Oreille Oral Literature and Salish Narratives,” in Leslie B. Davis, *Lifeways of Intermontane and Plains Montana Indians*, Occasional Papers of the Museum of the Rockies, no. 1 (Bozeman: Montana State Univ., 1979), pp. 116-118.

During the Salish struggle to remain in the Bitterroot Valley, Louis Vanderburg also stood with Chief Charlo in fighting false allegations that the chief had signed the so-called “Garfield Agreement” of 1872, which set terms for the relocation of the Salish to the Flathead Reservation. Chief Charlo, backed by Vanderburg and other Salish leaders and warriors, steadfastly refused to put his hand to the paper,

despite James Garfield's threats of violence. Before Garfield departed for Washington, he wrote to the Montana Superintendent of Indian Affairs, J.A. Viall, saying "I have concluded, after full consultation with you, to proceed... as though Charlot, the first chief, has signed." When the Commissioner of Indian Affairs published the agreement for official review by the U.S. Senate, an "x" mark was placed next to Chief Charlo's name. The forgery was finally confirmed in 1883 by Senator G.G. Vest, who had the Secretary of the Interior track down the original field copy, on which, as Vest wrote, "there was no signature by Charlo...it was manifest that the signature of Charlo had been forged to the instrument." (1872 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indians Affairs, p. 115; G.G. Vest, "Charlot: Chief of the Flathead Indians: A True Story," *Washington Post*, 26 Jul. 1903, p. A11.)

In 1889, as conditions for the Salish reached a truly desperate point and as US Army General Henry Carrington arrived to force the issue of removal, Louis Vanderburg did offer his respectful advice to Chief Charlo. Mr. Vanderburg told the Chief that for the survival of the people and the nation, they should now consent to move north to the Flathead Reservation. As Chief Charlo's son and successor as head chief, Martin Charlo, related, "One of the leaders of the Salish, Vanderberg [sic], asked my father to take us over [to the Jocko]. He said that the time had come for us to go." So highly did Chief Charlo value and respect Louis Vanderburg's counsel that Martin Charlo recalled it was only at that point that "My father sent word that we would move." (Martin Charlo in Dusenberry, *ibid.*, 118-120.)

Louis Vanderburg died in August 1923 at the age of either 106 or 108. A month earlier, he attended the Čulay Ešyapqéyni, the July celebration or powwow, in Arlee, where he and many members of the Vanderburg / Bear Tracks family gathered for a large multi-generational family photograph.

Members of the Vanderburg / Bear Tracks family have continued to play prominent roles in the Salish community. Louis's son, Čicnmtú (Passing Someone on the Trail — Victor Vanderburg), was also a prominent leader among the Salish who served on numerous delegations to Washington, D.C. under head chief Martin Charlo. Victor was married to prominent Salish cultural leader Čłx<sup>w</sup> m̄x<sup>w</sup> m̄šná



1884 delegation to Washington. Back row: Hand Shot Off (John Hill), Peter Ronan, Nk<sup>w</sup>u? Sx<sup>w</sup>i (One Man Walking—Michel Revais). Middle row: S̄q̄leps Sk<sup>w</sup>als̄i (Sandhill Crane's Necklace—Antoine Moiese), Šm̄x̄e Q̄<sup>w</sup>ox̄qeys (Claw of Little Grizzly — Chief Charlo), Lk<sup>w</sup>ūt Sm̄x̄e (Far-Away Grizzly — Louis Vanderburg. Front: Reddish Beard or Red Arm (Thomas Abel Adams). (Montana Historical Society, photo 954-526).

(Sophie Moiese), for whom the Missoula County Commissioners named the public hearing room in the Missoula County Courthouse in 2018. Victor's son Jerome, and Jerome's wife Agnes Adams Vanderburg, were among the most highly respected cultural teachers of the community, and Agnes was one of the founding members of Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee. Their children, Eneas, Joseph, Annie, Vic, and Lucy, have also been prominent members of the Salish community and important cultural teachers. Today, Lucy Vanderburg—who served as Director of the People's Center, and before that as the Salish Language Specialist for the Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee—is an active member of the Séliš-Q̓lispé Elders Advisory Council, as were her brothers Eneas (1926-2019) and Joe (1937-2020).

Just as the Bear Tracks / Vanderburg family has long stood at the center of Salish history and culture, so the site of the bridge, and the surrounding area, also sits at the center of Salish-Kalispel territories. In proposing the name of Bear Tracks Bridge, we offer something to remind all travelers of the rich history of this place, and its continuing important to the people of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.



Lucy and Joe Vanderburg, Jocko Valley, October 2018. (SQCC image).

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Lemlm̓tš — thank you — to members of the Séliš-Q̓lispé Elders Advisory Council for their careful consideration of this issue and for the cultural, historical, and language information that is the foundation of the proposed name, Bear Tracks Bridge. Current members who helped in this include Stephen Smallsalmon, Lucy Vanderburg, Sophie Haines, Mary Jane Charlo, Vi Trahan, Max McDonald, and Rita Adams. SQCC also thanks Bob Bigart for his publication of many relevant documents in recent books from Salish Kootenai College Press, including: *To Keep the Land for My Children's Children: Documents of Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai Indian History, 1890-1899*, ed. Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2020); *"You Seem to Like Your Money, and We Like Our Country": A Documentary History of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai Indians, 1875-1889*, ed. Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2019); Peter Ronan, *"A Great Many of Us Have Good Farms": Agent Peter Ronan Reports on the Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana, 1877-1887*, ed. Robert J. Bigart (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2014); Peter Ronan, *Justice to Be Accorded to the Indians: Agent Peter Ronan Reports on the Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana, 1888-1893*, ed. Robert J. Bigart (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2014); *"Sometimes My People Get Made When the Blackfeet Kill Us": A Documentary History of the Salish and Pend d'Oreille Indians, 1845-1874*, ed. Robert Bigart and Joseph McDonald (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2019). And finally, lem̓tš — thank you — to Dave Strohmaier and the Missoula County Commission, and the Missoula City Council, for providing this opportunity to restore the landscape a recognition of the Salish people.