

## OGOPOGO

N'ha-a-itk, commonly referred to as “Ogopogo,” is recognized today as a metaphor for sustainability. Known as the Sacred Spirit of the Lake, N'ha-a-itk lives in the water but can also move to the land and air. n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ reminds us to be mindful of our resources; if n̓xaʔx̓ʔitkʷ disappears due to pollution and misuse of the water, so do the plants, medicines, trees, and foods that sustain us.

-Chad Paul, Westbank First Nation

The myth of the Ogopogo is old. Before settlers came to the Okanagan Valley, the syílx / Okanagan people spoke of a lake creature they called n'ha-a-itk who was said to live in an underwater cave at what is now known as Squally Point, 20 kilometres south of Kelowna.

The syílx have a deep connection to the land and water. Through storytelling, children are taught to respect n'ha-a-itk and his home (water). All things have spirit and a teaching from which one can learn, so n'ha-a-itk was often prayed to for strength, wisdom, and guidance.

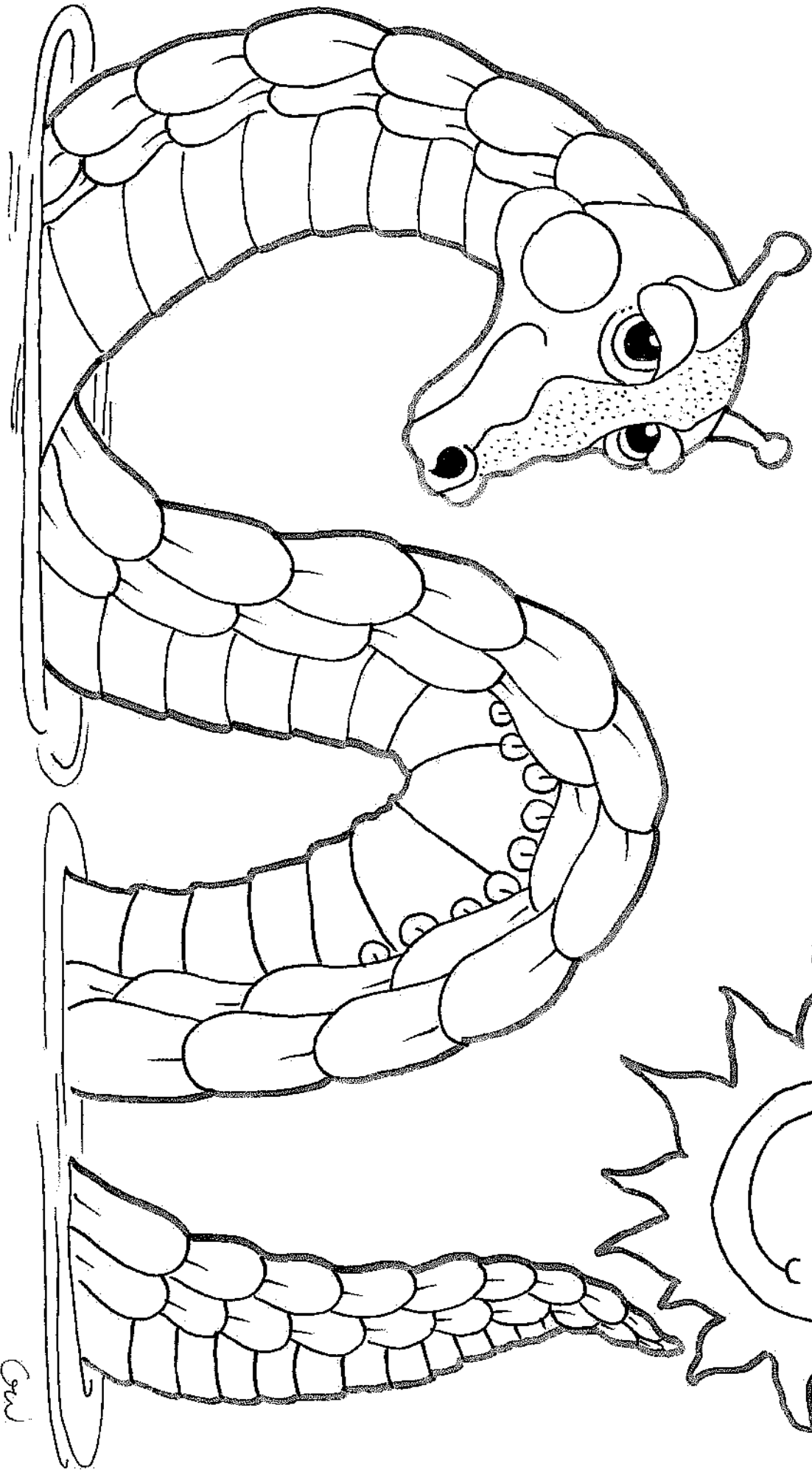
Over the generations, the legend was shared and there were hundreds of reported sightings. One instance tells of two horses swimming behind a boat and mysteriously being pulled beneath the waves; another of a girl and her horse getting the scare of their lives as a huge black serpent-like creature slithered off the rocks into the Lake.

In 1924, at a banquet in Vernon, a little song was composed and sung. From it a meaningless, vaguely exotic word – “Ogopogo” – caught on and has become as famous as Scotland’s Loch Ness Monster.

In the past thirty years, many reputable persons have seen “Ogopogo” but as most of the roads are high above the lake it is almost impossible to photograph anything one might see. Orchardists, looking down from the sheer slopes along the lake, regularly claimed to have spotted Ogopogo swimming on the surface. Boaters have recounted being mysteriously capsized by a dark, fast-moving underwater form. Six times a year, on average, someone reports seeing the creature. In a two-year period, twenty-one reputable citizens have seen our friendly lake monster. Descriptions vary, but certain characteristics have been repeated through the decades; Ogopogo is greenish in colour, with a snakelike body. It ranges upward to 25 meters in length. Some say the head is horse like; others that it’s reptilian, or goat like and well bearded. He may be traveling at a fast speed or lazily sunning himself. Many have photographed what they claim is Ogopogo, but the pictures—like those of its better-known counterpart, the Loch Ness Monster—have always been inconclusive.

# KELOWNA

Okanagan Valley, BC



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