

B.C. First Nations Studies

B.C. First Nations Studies

B.C. First Nations Studies



Kenneth Campbell
Charles Menzies
Brent Peacock

BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
VICTORIA, CANADA

Copyright © 2003 British Columbia Ministry of Education - BC 1201

ISBN 0-7726-4882-4

This textbook was developed for the British Columbia Ministry of Education by Pacific Educational Press, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, 6365 Biological Sciences Road, Vancouver, Canada V6T 1Z4.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Campbell, Kenneth, 1949–

B.C. First Nations studies

“This textbook was developed for the British Columbia Ministry of Education by Pacific Educational Press, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia”--t.p. verso

ISBN 0-7726-4882-4

1. Indians of North America—British Columbia. I. Title. II. Menzies, Charles. III. Peacock, Brent. IV. British Columbia. Ministry of Education
E78.B9C35 2003 971.1'00497 C2002-960256-4

Editing: Catherine Edwards and Barbara Kuhne

Photo Research: Kenneth Campbell and Barbara Kuhne

Design: Warren Clark

Front cover photos: background scene: Troy Hunter; Katzie First Nation canoe launch: Erin Culhane; Interior Salish woman with baskets: RBCM (PN 6632); totem: Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, photo by Barbara Kuhne. **Back cover photo:** Nass Valley: Gary Fiegehen.

Printed and bound in Canada.

03 04 05 5 4 3 2 1

Acknowledgements

Funding for this student resource was provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Education.

This resource was made possible through the support and contributions of the following: Sandy Anderson, Karla Gamble, Jane Gardiner, Elizabeth McAuley, Keith Regular, Lorna Williams, and the late David J.R. Williams.

Pilot schools: Caledonia Senior Secondary, SD 82 Coast Mountains; Carihi High School, SD 72 Campbell River; Elkford Secondary School, SD 5 Southeast Kootenays; Handsworth Secondary School, SD 44 North Vancouver; Mount Elizabeth Secondary, SD 82 Coast Mountains; Quesnel Secondary School, SD 28 Quesnel; Victoria High School, SD 61 Greater Victoria.

Reviewers: Jean Barman (University of British Columbia); John Elliot; First Nations Education Steering Committee; Philomena Fraser; Ramona Gus; Mary-Ellen Kelm (University of Northern British Columbia); Shirley Leon (Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre); Tim Low (Métis Provincial Council of B.C.); Lorna Mathias; Brian Matthew; Carol McAuley; Yvonne Mensies; Joe Michel; Robert Muckle (Capilano College); Bill Mussell (Sal'ishan Institute Society); Velna Nelson; Martina Pierre; Gwen Point; David Rattray; Chris Stewart; Dixon Taylor; Janet Townsend; Ellen White; and Jody Woods (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs).

CONTENTS

About This Book

7

Introduction

The Voice of the Land Is Our Language

8

by Carrie J. Reid

Part One

Relationships to the Land

16

Chapter 1 The Land

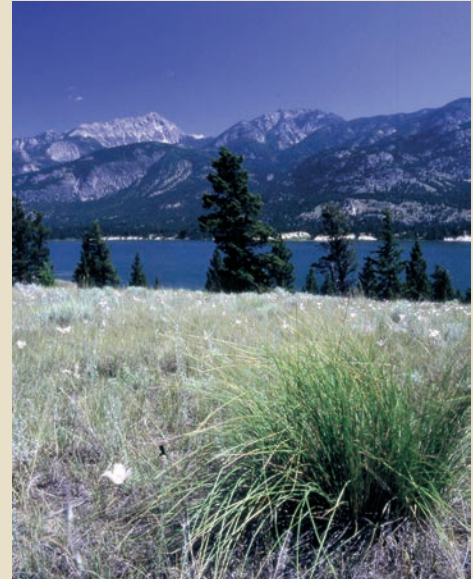
18

Chapter 2 Living on the Land

35

Chapter 3 Sharing the Land and Resources

48



Part Two

The Historical Journey

62

Chapter 4 The Fur Trade Era, 1770s–1849

64

Chapter 5 The Colonial Era, 1849–1871

79

Chapter 6 Canada Takes Control, 1871–1911

90

Chapter 7 Adapting to New Economies

108

Chapter 8 Organizing for Aboriginal Rights, 1912–1951

122

Chapter 9 Pursuing Justice, 1951–1997

134



Part Three

The Legacy of Colonialism

148

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Chapter 10 | Communities in Transition | 150 |
| Chapter 11 | Métis and Non-Status People in British Columbia | 161 |
| Chapter 12 | First Nations Society Today | 176 |
| Chapter 13 | Self-Government and Treaties | 195 |



Part Four

Cultural Expression

208

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Chapter 14 | Oral Traditions | 210 |
| Chapter 15 | First Nations Literature | 228 |
| Chapter 16 | First Nations Visual and Decorative Arts | 240 |
| Chapter 17 | Beyond Stereotypes: The Portrayal of First Nations People | 257 |

Epilogue

Throwing the Baby Eagle Out of the Nest

271

by John Borrows

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Glossary | 274 |
|----------|-----|

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Sources/Credits | 276 |
|-----------------|-----|

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Index | 281 |
|-------|-----|

B.C. First Nations Studies documents the history and cultures of First Nations and Métis people in British Columbia from before the arrival of Europeans to the present. It examines the historical foundations of contemporary issues and illustrates how First Nations cultures have adapted to changing world events and environments. Aboriginal people's contributions to British Columbia and Canada are highlighted, and important leaders and role models are profiled.

The introduction to the book, titled "The Voice of the Land Is Our Language," is written in a First Nations voice and provides you, the reader, with an opportunity to understand the values and beliefs that sustain contemporary First Nations cultures. By speaking from within the culture, the introduction expresses a message about the integrity of a world view that has much to offer the whole of society.

The book is organized into four parts and an epilogue. Part One explores the nature of First Nations cultures before the arrival of Europeans, and in particular Aboriginal people's relationship with the land. Part Two examines what occurred when the two groups met, how the forces of colonialism shaped British Columbia as it is today, and how First Nations have resisted those forces. In Part Three, you will come to understand how First Nations are working through governments and courts to redress the legacies of colonialism. Part Four demonstrates the creative spirit which is one of the foundations and continuing strengths of First Nations cultures. The epilogue by John Borrows offers an Aboriginal perspective on the challenges communities face as they regain their place as self-governing nations.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE TEXT

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Quotations and excerpts that express First Nations views about the topics and issues discussed in the text.

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

Excerpts from historical and contemporary documents pertaining to First Nations issues.

PROFILES

Biographical information about key First Nations individuals and organizations, past and present.

CASE STUDIES

More in-depth explorations of particular First Nations experiences on an issue. The Case Studies are designed to encourage you to develop parallel examples pertaining to First Nations in your local community.

Photographs and Maps

Selected photographs and maps from diverse sources contribute an important visual record of First Nations history and cultures.

Vocabulary

Definitions of terms and concepts that are important to understanding the text. A glossary at the end of the book lists the vocabulary for quick reference.

A word about names

In this book we use the terms First Nations and Aboriginal to refer to the original people who inhabited what is now British Columbia, and to their descendants. In the past the name Indian was mistakenly used, and it is still entrenched in our government, as in the Indian Act. The names Native, Indigenous, and First People are also sometimes used.

The term Euro-Canadian is used to mean the large segment of the early Canadian population with British and French ancestry. This does not imply that people from other cultural backgrounds were absent, but because the majority of early immigrants came from Europe, the newcomers are collectively referred to as Euro-Canadians.

The Voice of the Land Is Our Language

by Carrie J. Reid


First Nations people in British Columbia have enduring values and beliefs that are as relevant today as they were in the past. We have a great responsibility to protect not only our families, but also the land in which we live. Families are responsible for maintaining a connection to the land, to honour and respect the way we live today, and to remember our past. First Nations' histories impart a sense of belonging and a way of holding on to the values that sustain us. Instilled within our languages are the ties to land, family, community, and the great respect and honour we have for all nations.

Every culture has a world view that determines a people's basic beliefs of how to act in society. These beliefs are so fundamental that people usually do not realize that they have them because they form a piece of who they are. Traditional First Nations view the world as an integrated whole, balancing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. These beliefs make up who a person is and how he or she functions in society and within the environment. The life forces that exist in mountains, rivers, plants, animals, people, and spiritual beings are all interrelated. First Nations civilizations

recognize the importance of community—of people working together for the common good. The group is emphasized over the individual.

Our people live in an oral culture. Our histories are contained within the oral traditions of our stories and songs. Our recorded history exists through our crests, house posts, petroglyphs, baskets, blankets, and paintings. Children are taught at a very young age to



 Haida poles proclaim the importance of family histories.

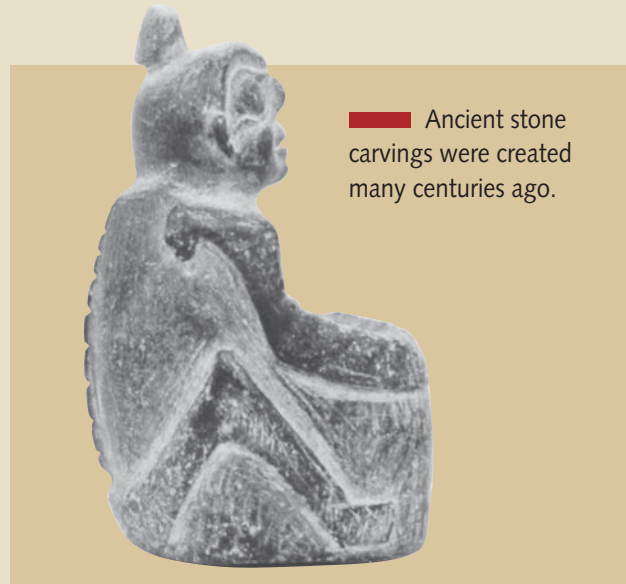
listen. They are taught to listen to stories as they weave, carve, and knit, and as they dance. The whole being of the child is involved in hearing the story. Stories are the primary teaching tool in our cultures. The stories have been told for generations and continue to be told today.

There are many significant pieces to oral traditions. While there is sometimes room for innovation and creativity, it is important that the people trained to carry the stories retell them accurately, in order to pass down the histories, traditions, laws, and the various technologies to future generations. The stories are not just stories. They are our foundation, our identity, and our culture. Oral history requires a total commitment to culture.

First Nations people have always existed on this land. Creation stories often speak of a being that combined both human and supernatural characteristics to bring order to the world and knowledge to the people.

Agnes Edgar, Nuxalk

Now I want to talk about the creation. In the beginning there was an ocean covering the entire [Bella Coola] valley. This was as Alquntam had planned it. But Raven didn't like it that way, so he changed it around so people could get around in the valley. You can still see mussels upriver at Stuiie. The ocean that used to cover the valley left them there. This place was ready for human beings after Raven changed it around. The river flowed then and Raven came poling upriver in his canoe. He put a good sign on Nuxalk. After he was done, he came drifting downriver playing with his pole. He was pretending to let the pole slide along side of the canoe. When he got to the mouth of the river he threw his canoe pole at the mountain. It's the upper part of that mountain that is still now called "used to be a canoe pole." (skukutll) ¹



■ Ancient stone carvings were created many centuries ago.

Among First Nations, stories carry different meanings as an individual journeys through the stages of his or her life. Stories also have many historical components. In stories we find references to ancient history, recent history, and modern times. Stories tell about the importance of the land and stewardship, as well as about leadership responsibilities and the philosophies of governance.

Governance

All First Nations cultures have organized governments with different governing systems, some hereditary and some appointed. In these systems, a leader is recognized for his or her ability to take care of the people through the stewardship of the land and its resources. The sharing of accumulated wealth raises the esteem of a leader and his or her group.

Every First Nations culture has a word that describes its own laws, and these words are generally complex, encompassing more than one concept. In Nisga'a, for example, the word is Ayuuk, and it refers to the system of justice that people must follow from birth to death. Within these legal dictates there is a constant goal of balance and harmony within the community. This is governance.

Spirituality

First Nations have an important tie to the land that goes beyond the need for food and shelter. The land and its forces contain the belief systems and world views of First Nations cultures. The relationship

■ A hat with
potlatch rings and a
crest-bearing Chilkat
robe signify
hereditary rights.



between the living world and the spirit world is vital in First Nations cultures.

Spirituality exists in every aspect of life—from stewardship to everyday practical matters. Prayer is not something one does at a certain time or that one needs to stop one's job to do. The concept of spirituality is to be always mindful and grateful for life and what it provides.

Feasting and extreme physical challenges accompanied by sacred rituals provide methods of connecting to the spirit world. These rituals are not taken lightly; specialists are trained in these fields from birth. First Nations cultures acknowledge that individuals can be trained to receive special power from animals, plants, the spiritual world, or other life forces.

In many First Nations traditions, dreaming is a connection to the other world. In Tahltan culture, for example, hunters often dream into the future in order to discover things about their next hunt. Dreams can contain messages from late ancestors, provide teachings, warn of danger, and bring together the many psychic realms of our existence.

Aku, of the Dunne-za culture

*One time I dreamed about a Trail to Heaven.
I went halfway up and someone met me.
The person gave me something white.
He was one of my relatives.
I knew him a long time ago.
I was worrying.
How could I sing as well as he did?
He sang this song to me in the dream.
The next morning I woke up.
I had this song.
I could sing it the way he did.²*

Aku talks about honouring and maintaining his relationship with his ancestors and learning songs that he will in turn teach to his children. He is humbled



Inside the walls of the longhouse, our crests record our stories.

and grateful in receiving his gift.

Cross-Cultural Protocols

Individual nations do not live in isolation. First Nations trade with neighbouring villages as well as with more distant nations. They trade surplus food and materials for items that cannot be locally obtained and



also harvest goods specifically for trading purposes. Relationships extend beyond simple trade to social interactions. First Nations people gather together for family meetings, winter dances, feasts, and potlaches. Sometimes they will gather at central locations to pick berries, gather wool, or to fish. Gatherings are greatly anticipated throughout the year and often bring together people from different nations for social or political reasons.

Gatherings often involve political resolutions or decisions regarding the environment. Other gatherings are based on enjoyment, where competitions are held and there is much laughter. Competitions may include races, challenges of physical strength, or gambling. In times past, lahal, also known as slahal, the bone game, or the stick game, was widely used for gambling. Even today, lahal is almost universal among First Nations cultures, and is used for gambling and for fun.

Many gatherings are associated with food

Women's hands create the finest of weaving and fabrics.



■ If we respect it, the salmon returns year after year.

harvesting. For instance, different Okanagan groups gather each year at key salmon fishing sites. These gatherings can last throughout the spawning season.

Other gatherings have trade as their primary focus. Every year St'at'imc, Tsilhqot'in, and Okanagan people journey long distances to Secwepemc territory where they harvest resources together.

The concept of family that is central to First Nations people extends beyond the nuclear family and, in many cases, transcends nations. A family is composed of sons, daughters, mother, father, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, all the people who live in your house and all the people who are in your clan, in your nation, and in other nations. There is a sense of responsibility to everyone in the community and towards allied communities. When people from different villages come together it is a time to reconnect with loved ones. People also interact culturally with their trading partners, exchanging songs, knowledge, expertise, recipes, and stories. Trading relationships can be strengthened through marriage, and gatherings

provide an opportunity to determine potential matches.

First Nations people believe in the individual's right and responsibility to make his or her own choices according to what will allow each person to function as a human being within society. Direction may be given but answers come from inside, not from someone on the outside. Knowledge is gained by example. In this way, protocols exist to ensure that people meet together in an acceptable and positive manner.



■ The copper is a symbol of wealth and power.

Chief Walter Wright of Kitselas

Excitement swept the men who stood on the shore.

Was all well, or was this a ruse?

But from the canoes came the assurance. "It is well. We come as friends. As friends we wish to stay and be your guests."

Dressed in his Cape of Ceremony, shaking his rattles, dancing his greeting, Loot-Quitzy-Ampty-Wich – Lightning – Head Chief of the Eagle Totem, came to meet his guests.

And here, as his honoured friends, the Kitselas and Tsimseans stayed for ten days.

Feasts, ceremonies, and dancing filled the days as the Eagles and the Crows lavished entertainment on their guests.

As the days sped a great friendship sprang up between the Eagle Chief and Neas Hiwas.³

Chief Wright illustrates how important protocol is in meeting guests and entertaining them. Because the proper protocols are followed, "great friendship sprang up" between nations.

Conflict Resolution

While trade is important, conflict is an inevitable part of life. In First Nations communities, each nation has its own way of dealing with conflict. The following is a common practice among the Tahltan.⁴

During parts of the year many people may live in the same dwelling, requiring them to find ways to get along and deal in healthy ways with disagreements so as to live in harmony with others. It is very disrespectful to disagree with someone else's point of view. To disagree is to tell them your view is better, devaluing the other person.

When there is potential for confrontation, people try to be passive in outward actions and inward feelings. They do not respond in anger. If they respond

in anger they are not being respectful to themselves or to others. To show anger is to show immaturity. The ability to be calm and not get angry is an important quality in many First Nations communities. Elders go to great lengths to teach youth not to respond in anger because it is believed that when one is angry one will hurt the spirit of another being.

Should someone say something disrespectful, the person who receives the disrespectful comments cannot respond. If he responds, he is being more disrespectful than the person who made the comment and is carrying on a second disrespectful action. If an Elder or someone else is present, it is their responsibility to politely stop the rude behaviour. If no one is present to stop the speaker, the person must politely listen, without commenting in a negative manner. The person may pray to the Creator for guidance on how to help heal the anger being displayed towards him, and it becomes his responsibility to establish harmony between them.

If one person is upset with the conduct of another, that person may talk about the second person to a third person. His "talking about" has clearly defined boundaries. The person doing the talking must do so in a culturally appropriate way. For example, if a man is upset about the conduct of a younger man, the older man may talk to friends about the young man's conduct, taking care that the discussion is not malicious or negative. The intent is to send a message to the young man that his behaviour is unacceptable and he needs to change to fit in with the expectations of the community. A good friend of the young man will relay the message to him and it now becomes his responsibility to respond appropriately.

If the advice is not taken, then one or more Elders from the community may visit and tell him stories, not directly telling him he is doing something wrong. They will tell him stories about similar cases and what the consequences were. It then becomes the young man's responsibility to listen to the stories and deduce the lesson to be learned. If the young man listens and

changes, then harmony has been established.

Should the young man not listen, the Elders need to make a decision. If the actions of the young man are not going to hurt the village they will let him learn from his experiences. If the young man's actions will cause harm, then the Elders have a range of options from which to choose. They could ostracize the young man so that no one is allowed to speak his name. When he is encountered in the village people will look the other way and he will become a non-person. This puts a considerable amount of pressure on him to conform to the expectations of the society in which he lives. If this does not work, he could be banished from the community. He will either starve or have to travel to another community and hope that they will accept him.

Stewardship of the Land

The land is a provider, sustaining life in its many forms; as such, it must be treated with the utmost respect. Many ceremonies, cultural values, and economic activities pay tribute to the land and ensure that people will not jeopardize the availability of the resources for the future. The concept of sustainability was, and continues to be, a characteristic of First Nations cultures. There is a sense that all life is equal. There is a sense of humility and appreciation for a land that is bigger than we are. There is a sense of wonder, humour, and history.

When First Nations people say land, we mean nature: rivers, oceans, mountains, valleys, and all the life that inhabits them. In the First Nations world view, people are integrated with the natural world, not separate from it.

Ruby Dunstan, Nlaka'pamux

In our language there are no words for environment because we have always been taught that it is part of our everyday living. Our everyday



■ The land heals us with its bounty of plants.

teachings from our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents show us how to look after the foods that we depend on and that are part of the environment, and that's also part of spirituality.

First Nations view the environment as a holistic natural phenomenon, where any action has an accompanying reaction. This principle underlies all physical and spiritual matters. Through having an understanding of one's environment, rules and patterns are established for living in a manner that best suits one's needs. This ensures that the bountiful harvest of the land remains intact for future generations, and all life will continue to live in harmony. The values and beliefs that emerge from this perspective guide the behaviour of the community in relation to the surrounding environment and in relation to each other.

Despite cultural differences within various First Nations, there is one principle that unites all people: a respect for the surrounding environment, from the land to the sky with its heavenly bodies, to the waters with their many creatures. Respect, created and maintained by social customs, rules, and beliefs, is prevalent throughout First Nations cultures.

Everything is connected and nothing exists in isolation. Consider, for example, gathering mountain goat wool. For it to be collected at the right time of the year, there must be a thorough understanding of ecosystems. If there isn't, then blankets aren't woven and people are cold. If people are cold, more wood must be cut. If more wood needs to be cut, more tools are needed. To build new tools takes time and resources ... and on it goes.

Knowledge of natural resources involves more than simply understanding a single piece of information. It is necessary to understand the whole and the interrelatedness of the parts. It is necessary to understand that all work is important and to trust that the community will come together for the greater good.



Traditional knowledge teaches the purposes of every plant.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Can you think back to an earlier time in our world? Can you think back far enough to imagine the lushness of the land, uninterrupted by highways and buildings? Can you imagine the silence that was possible? Do you think, that, even for a minute, when Maquinna met Cook, he thought that their values would be so different? Can you understand that First Nations people could not even conceptualize that “giving is wealth” was not a universal concept?

What happened next in our world has taken our people to places that were unexpected and at times unbelievable. The balance of this book will take you from our past into the present. Our history is ancient, abounding, and real. We have complex, dynamic, and evolving cultures that have adapted to changing world events and environments. We face new and varying conditions and circumstances yet retain key values and beliefs within our cultures. Our values and beliefs are diverse, durable, and relevant. They are eloquently expressed in our languages and through our ties to the land.

Carrie J. Reid is mostly Salish and works as a private contractor, primarily in the fields of justice and education. She lives with her son Xwulq'sheynum on lands reserved for Indians in Qualicum Bay.



Spindle whorls, the disks used for spinning wool, carry powerful images.

Relationships to the Land

The history of the First Nations people in British Columbia is as rooted in the land as are the great trees of the forests. Although the First Nations of the province are many and diverse, they have at least one thing in common: they have an enduring relationship with the land, a bond so strong that it defines who they are.

In general, Western society views the ownership of land and resources as an individual right. Property or land ownership is based on the right to purchase land, holding it in what is termed fee simple, that is, owning land that can be sold or passed on to inheritors. In practice, some individuals or corporations own land, while others who are landless pay land owners for the right to live on or use the land. In the traditional First Nations view, ownership of land is interpreted in a very different way. It is the extended family, the group, or the community that holds rights to the land, not individuals. There are no landless people in this system, as every member of the community shares in the rights and responsibilities of using and taking care of the land.

Through more than two hundred years of European contact and colonization, the differences in these two views have caused tension and conflict between First Nations people and colonists from other lands. The forces of colonization have threatened the integrated relationship the First Nations have with the land. The First Nations of British Columbia have seen their people marginalized and discriminated against;

they have seen oppressive laws attempt to assimilate them; and they have seen their land taken away from them without battle or treaty. Together they have worked to have their title to the land recognized and the loss of the lands compensated for.

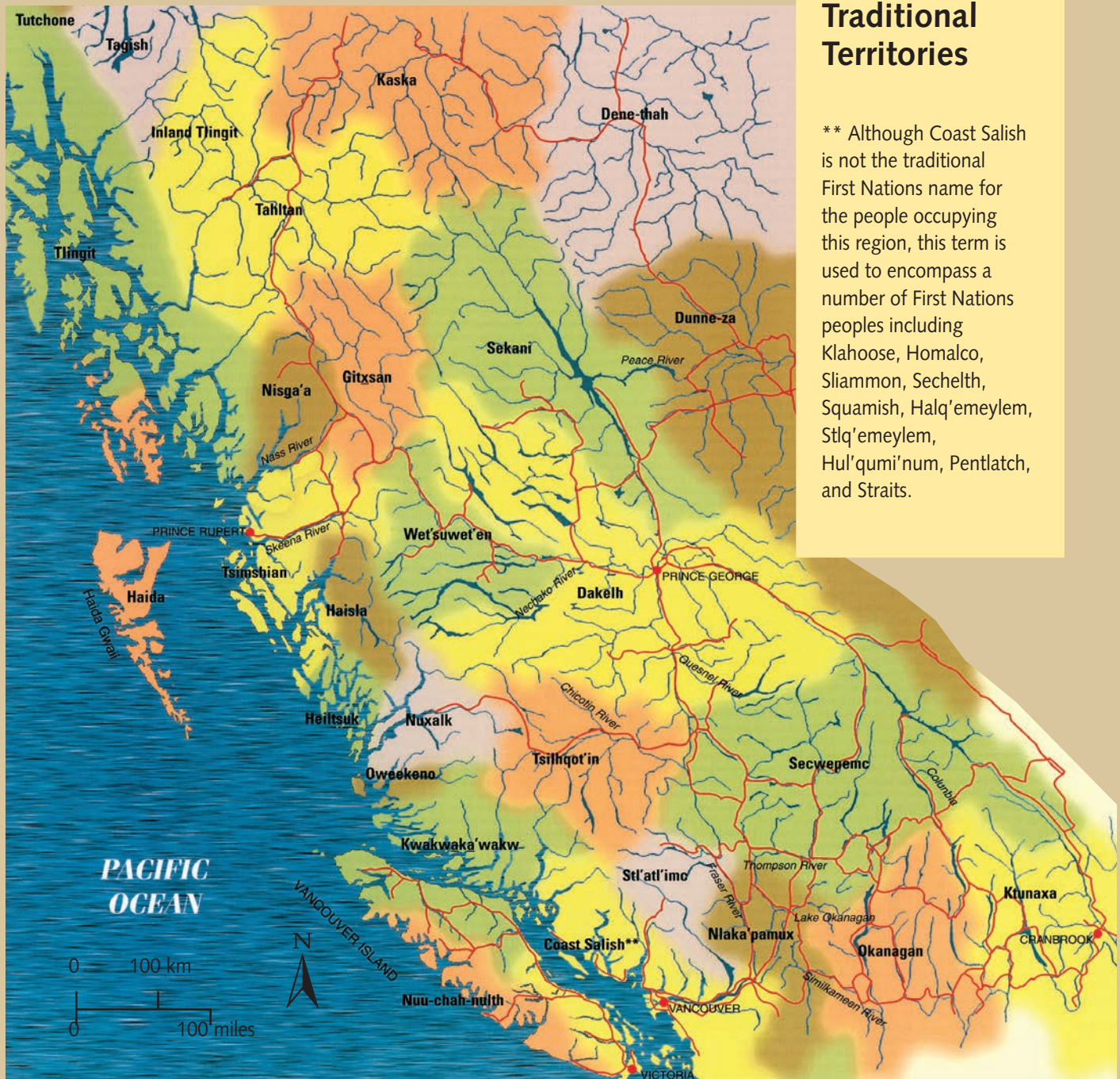
Today there are more than two hundred First Nations bands in British Columbia. The continuity of their relationship with their traditional territories has not been broken, despite the pressures put on them. Their oral traditions—the important narratives passed on from generation to generation—reinforce and remind First Nations people of their connection with the land. Today, this connection is still strong, and all across the province, First Nations people return to the land to harvest the same resources as did their ancestors. Of course, some of these resources no longer exist or have been depleted, some of the technologies of production have changed, and now people may travel by speedboat or skidoo to reach their territories. What have not changed are the ties to the land expressed in the oral tradition and verified by modern experiences.

First Nation

A community of Aboriginal people who identify themselves as a distinct cultural group and who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land that is now known as British Columbia. Each First Nation has a name for itself, such as the Stó:lō Nation.

Traditional Territories

** Although Coast Salish is not the traditional First Nations name for the people occupying this region, this term is used to encompass a number of First Nations peoples including Klahoose, Homalco, Sliammon, Sechelt, Squamish, Halq'emeyem, Stlq'emeyem, Hul'qumi'num, Pentlatch, and Straits.



— This map shows the traditional territories of the First Nations of British Columbia. The boundaries between the territories are not distinct, indicating that the territories overlap.¹

The Land

In the First Nations world view, people are integrated with the natural world, not separate from it. The land has great variety, and so the people are very diverse, for the land has shaped the people. It determines where and how they live.

In this chapter you will learn about the different regions of the province: the coast, the southern interior, the northeast, and the northern interior. You will discover how many types of geography have shaped the societies of many different First Nations. You will see that they have all adapted to the land in diverse ways, yet they all hold one thing in common: the land defines who they are as a people.

The Shape of the Land

The place which today we call British Columbia is a land of many different climates and habitats, but there is one constant: this is a province of mountains. The land is dominated by a series of mountain chains running roughly north-south, from the Coast Mountains in the west to the Rocky Mountains in the east. Between the mountain ranges lie valleys and plateau regions such as the Cariboo, the Okanagan Valley, and the Rocky Mountain trench. On the coast, the would-be valleys are flooded by the sea, forming islands and fjords.

If British Columbia is a place of mountains, it is also a place of water—of rivers, lakes, channels, and

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Chief James Wallas, Kwakwaka'wakw

The Transformer started off again down the coast and had not gone far when he met a man standing all alone on a beach. He asked the man, "What do you want to do with your life? What do you want to be?"

"I want to be something to help my people," answered the man.

"Then how would you like to be a big cedar tree? Your people could weave mats and clothing from your bark and use your wood for their lodges."

"No, I don't want to just stand there. I want to help my people in another way."

"Would you like to be a big boulder?" asked the Transformer.

"No! That's worse than a tree and doesn't help my people much."

"How would you like to be a big salmon in the bay that your tribe could catch and eat?"

"No, I do not wish to be a salmon."

"How about a river? Then the salmon would swim up the river and your people could catch them easily and live on them."

"Yes, that would be fine," said the man. "I would like to be a big river." The man suddenly found himself falling backwards. The Transformer had put his hand on the man's forehead and given him a little push. When he hit the ground he became a mighty river—the Nimpkish.

The people were really happy then, because every summer lots of fish came up the river to spawn—Sockeye, Coho, Spring—all the best salmon. Later on there was a large camp located at that spot. ¹



■ Columbia Lake, north of Cranbrook, is in Ktunaxa (Kootenay) territory in southeastern B.C.

a wide array of food sources, from large sea mammals to small molluscs. Rivers and lakes, too, offer a variety of foods, including fish.

This land and its resources shape the lives of the people who have lived here for thousands of years. The mountains create barriers for people, but they also act as landmarks and natural boundaries. Their peaks and ranges enclose many river systems, both large and small, and these watersheds are a logical way of defining territories. The territories of many First Nations of B.C. are based on the boundaries formed by watersheds.

For thousands of years, First Nations people have inhabited the valleys, plateaus, and coastline of this mountainous land, and they have adapted to the variations in climate, topography, and resources in different ways, resulting in a wide variety of societies. Separate First Nations languages are spoken by

distinct groups. Of the sixty First Nations languages in Canada, half are found in British Columbia.

Each First Nation developed a unique relationship with the territory it inhabited. To a large degree, this relationship dictated the social organization and governance system. Generally speaking, interior people

inlets. These waterways, formed by the mountains, define the land and its people. A large part of B.C. is drained by four major river systems: the Fraser, Skeena, Columbia, and Peace. These rivers and their valleys provide living space, transportation routes, and habitat for fish.

Many of the abundant resources found in the province come from the mountains, including forests, food plants, minerals, game, and fur-bearing animals. The waters are equally rich, especially with fish like the Pacific salmon and oolichan. The ocean provides

Watershed

All the land drained by a particular river or lake; a drainage basin.

shared many similar features of social organization, as did the people of the coast. Interior societies generally had flexible governing systems, while those on the coast had much more structured governance.

Interior societies were democratic and usually did not have a class system. Family groups associated together to form an identifiable group, sometimes referred to as a band. Their own name for this group usually referred to some feature of their territory. For instance, the Secwepemc people living near Skola'ten (Williams Lake) were the “People of Skola'ten.”

Interior groups had a head chief as leader, but usually he acted more as a father or advisor than a powerful ruler. He consulted with the Elders whenever important decisions were made. For some First Nations of the interior, this position was hereditary, usually determined patrilineally; for others, the leader was elected according to his abilities and held a temporary position.

The head chief was not the leader in all activities of the group. The person most qualified, or the one who had been specifically trained, was chosen to direct a particular activity. For instance, the best hunter would lead hunting expeditions; the bravest and most skillful warrior would lead warfare; the greatest orator would deliver speeches.

The people of the coast have many different characteristics, but they share some common features which people who study cultures call the Northwest Coast culture. These societies had strict social codes to follow, with a rigid hierarchy whereby chiefs were ranked in importance, and a class system was made up of chiefs, nobles, commoners, and slaves.

Elder

A person whose wisdom about spirituality, culture, and life is recognized. First Nations people and communities seek the advice and assistance of Elders in various areas of traditional as well as contemporary issues. As a sign of respect for First Nations Elders, the term is often capitalized.

Patrilineally

Based on kinship with the father or descent through the male line.

The Regions of B.C.

Many factors influence how people adapt to living in their chosen territories. The latitude, physical geography, climate, and altitude all affect the types of animal and plant resources found in a specific area. They also determine how people will harvest and use these resources. The relationship of the people with their natural world determines where they choose to live and affects how they organize their societies. B.C. can be divided into four broad geographical regions: the coast, the southern interior, the northeast, and the northern interior.

■ Skill, knowledge, and respect are required to harvest cedar bark from the coastal rainforests.





Geographic Regions of B.C.

The Coast

The First Nations people who live on the coast of British Columbia have adapted to a wet, mild climate influenced by the Pacific Ocean. The temperature usually stays above freezing in the winter and below 20° C in the summer. The annual rainfall in some locations is more than 400 cm a year. This results in many cloudy days, and fog often blankets the mountains.

This climate creates ideal conditions for the temperate rain forests which cover the mountain slopes, providing lush vegetation dominated by coniferous trees. The greatest of these trees, the

western red cedar, is considered a special gift from nature by First Nations. Its characteristics make it one of the most useful materials available. Bill Reid, the renowned Haida artist, once wrote about the cedar:

*If mankind in his infancy had prayed for the perfect substance for all material and aesthetic needs, an indulgent God could have provided nothing better.*²

On most of the coast, the mountains rise out of the ocean, creating intricate waterways that form a maze of channels, bays, and inlets. Hundreds of

islands, from tiny rock outcroppings to giant Vancouver Island, provide protection from the ocean winds. As well, thousands of rivers and streams rush down the mountains, flowing into the ocean directly, or combining into major rivers such as the Nass, Skeena, Kitimat, Kitlope, Dean, Bella Coola, Klinaklini, Homathko, and Squamish. These and other rivers empty into the ocean at the heads of long, narrow inlets or fjords. Most of these fjords have steep sides with little shoreline, but the head of the inlet flattens out to a floodplain built up of silt carried by the river. The estuaries formed at the juncture of fjord and river create rich habitats for a great deal of wildlife as well as living space for people.

The southern coast, the region that surrounds Georgia Strait, has a different climate and therefore a unique environment. This area lies in the rain shadow of Vancouver Island, including southeast Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Fraser Valley. Generally it has flatter land and a drier climate, and, consequently, different vegetation.

Resources on the Coast

The principal resources on the coast have already been mentioned: from the forest, the cedar, and from the ocean, the salmon and the oolichan. However, there is a great wealth of other resources available in the coastal environment. In the ocean are deep sea fish such as halibut, sole, cod, and red snapper. Herring spawn near the shore in spring, and their roe is considered a delicacy. Along the intertidal zone are shellfish, cockles, clams, mussels, oysters, and abalone. A dark green seaweed growing on exposed rocky shores, known to scientists as porphyra, is another important resource for harvesting. Crab, octopus, and sea cucumber add to the list of foods from the sea.

The thick bushes and shrubs that grow beneath the giant conifers offer a variety of plants, including berries like huckleberry, salal, and salmonberry. A wide range of medicinal plants come from the rainforest,



In the coastal forests, the plentiful cedar was easily split into timbers and planks for buildings, while the bark could be processed in different ways to make strong baskets or soft clothing.

from the licorice fern whose roots are chewed to soothe coughs to the formidable devil's club, which was used to cleanse and purify the body and soul.

The underbrush of the rain forest is an ideal home for fur-bearing mammals and deer. Their meat is a source of food, while their furs, hides, and bones are useful for clothing and tools. Most common are the black bear and the black-tailed deer. Smaller mammals such as river otter, mink, wolverine, and marten also

Oolichan

The oolichan (also spelled eulachon) is a small fish important for its oil. It spends adulthood in the ocean and returns to fresh water to spawn in the early spring. It was the first harvest of the year for the First Nations after the winter supplies had been exhausted.

Intertidal zone

An area which is under water at high tide and exposed at low tide.



■ The Pacific salmon is a key resource in British Columbia. There are five species: sockeye, coho, spring, chum, and pink. The salmon is hatched in the fresh water rivers and streams of the province, makes its way to the ocean where it spends its adult life, then returns to the fresh water to spawn, and complete the cycle.

inhabit the forest.

The region around Georgia Strait offers a drier and warmer climate, so a greater variety of plants and animals live there. One important plant which grows here but not in the rest of the coast region is the camas bulb. This plant is a member of the lily family, and its egg-shaped bulb is an important source of starch.

People of the Coast

The coast has the greatest number of distinct First Nations in Canada. Nine different First Nations live along the north and central coasts and on the west coast of Vancouver Island: Haida, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Haisla, Xai-Xais (Hai-Hais), Heiltsuk, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuxalk, and Nuuchahnulth. Along Georgia Strait, on Vancouver Island's east coast and



■ Salal, a member of the heather family, is one of the most common shrubs in B.C.'s coastal forests, in places forming a dense ground cover. It has evergreen leathery leaves and pinkish bell-shaped flowers followed by deep blue berries. First Nations people eat the berries fresh, boil them into a syrup, or dry them into cakes.



the opposite mainland, including the Fraser Valley, seventeen different First Nations live. All are members of the Coast Salish language group.

The abundant resources available to the First Nations of the coast and the mild coastal climate resulted in the development of highly structured societies. People had time away from resource gathering to develop complex social and artistic customs.

The First Nations of the coast adapted to their ocean-front environment by organizing in resource-use units, generally composed of extended families. Also known as a house group, each resource-use unit had a number of territories that provided resources throughout the year, including salmon fishing grounds, hunting territories, and berry harvesting grounds. Some groups also had oolichan camps,

Oolichan processing at Fishery Bay, near the mouth of the Nass River. Thousands of people gathered here in February and March to make the valuable oolichan grease. Oolichan was known as the “saviour fish,” because it saved people from starvation. Its rich oil or grease is extremely nutritious and valuable; it is eaten as an accompaniment to many foods, and used as a medicine and preservative.

Resource-use unit

The resource-use unit is the basic group which has stewardship over the resources in a particular territory. First Nations express this in different ways. For some it may be a family grouping; for others it may be a broader social organization such as a house group.

Extended family

The term extended family usually refers to a large family group of several generations who live and work together. Often it will include several siblings and their families living with parents and perhaps grandparents.



Salmon fishing on the Fraser River. The fisher sits directly above a pool and spears the salmon with the long three-pronged spear. The technology used to build this platform over the river was sophisticated, especially in times before the advent of European materials and tools. Date and location unknown.

which were usually shared by a number of families. These seasonal territories were usually close together, depending on local conditions. Each group had a hereditary chief who was responsible for his people and the appropriate use of their territories and resources. A number of these groups were aligned together in collectives often referred to in English as “tribes.” They lived together in one large winter village under the leadership of a head or village chief.

Most First Nations on the coast followed similar seasonal patterns, or seasonal rounds, when they moved from location to location as the resources became available. Winters were spent in large villages of as many as thirty cedar longhouses lined up in one or two rows facing the ocean. Feasts, potlatches, and winter ceremonies occupied much of the time spent here.

As spring approached, people moved to various spring resource camps. For many people, this meant congregating in large groups at oolichan processing camps. Many tribes gathered at the mouths of the major oolichan rivers, the Nass, Kemano, Bella Coola, Klinaklini (Knight Inlet), and Fraser. Major trading routes extended from these gathering sites across mountain passes into the interior. As well as oolichan camps, some people went to halibut and seaweed

Seasonal round

Also known as the annual round, this term refers to the pattern of movement from one resource-gathering area to another in a cycle that was followed each year. Spring, summer, and fall saw the people moving to a variety of resource areas while during the harsher winters they gathered in winter villages. The abundance of resources also determined how often people moved. In areas that had a greater abundance and variety, people could stay in one location for longer than in areas where resources were scarcer.

camps or seal camps. By June, the salmon were returning, so people spread out to their individual salmon camps. These were at the mouth of a river or sometimes on a lake. People remained at salmon camps until fall. Eventually the cycle was completed as everyone moved back to the winter villages.

This generalized outline of the seasonal rounds varied depending on the resources a group had within its territories. For instance, whale hunting was central to the Nuu-chah-nulth living along the west coast of Vancouver Island. The importance of this resource resulted in cultural patterns, seasonal rounds, and spiritual practices that were different in many ways from other coastal First Nations.

The ownership of each territory was inherited not by individuals but by the extended family group that formed the resource-use unit. Transferring the inherited territorial rights from one generation to the next was the principal purpose of the potlatch. This all-important public ceremony, which combined dances, songs, crest masks, and great quantities of food and many gifts, was the ultimate expression of the coastal people's relationship with the land.

The Southern Interior

This expansive region covers the southern part of the province, from the eastern slopes of the Coast Mountains to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Between these extensive mountain systems is a series of shorter ranges running parallel in a northwest direction, dividing the landscape into a sequence of valleys. Thus are the Okanagan, West Kootenay, and East Kootenay regions formed. A network of rivers and lakes fills the spaces between the mountains. Two great rivers, the Fraser and the Columbia, each have major tributaries such as the Thompson and the Kootenay, which in turn form networks of lakes and tributaries.

The varied landscape creates many different habitats, although most regions have a dry climate with a wide range of seasonal temperatures, making



■ Camas, a member of the lily family, has a blue flower and a sizable bulb that was traditionally a staple food item for First Nations people. Harvested from May to July, the sweet-tasting bulbs were traded as a delicacy.

the southern interior the hottest and driest region of B.C. Much of this region is forested, frequently with dry and open forest made up largely of pine, or in wetter areas, with broadleaf deciduous forests. Dry grasslands prevail in the arid lower altitude basins of the Fraser, Thompson, and Okanagan rivers, where it is too dry for trees to grow. In the southern Okanagan Valley the climate is dry enough to be classified as desert. In contrast, the climate and the vegetation on the western mountain slopes in this region are similar to those on the coast. Of course, the winters are much colder so there is more snow than there is on the coast.

Resources in the Southern Interior

There is a great diversity in plant and animal life throughout the southern interior due to the variability of the topography and climate of particular valleys or highlands. Plants were probably used more for food by the First Nations people of this region than in other

regions of the province. Some groups are believed to have had up to half of their diets provided by vegetable foods. Important plants, in addition to berries, were camas bulbs, “wild potatoes” (“Indian” potatoes, *Claytonia lenceolata* or Western Spring Beauty), and in the southern Okanagan, bitter-root (*Lewisia rediviva*). A variety of other plants were also used, such as tree lichen, which was cooked in pits; mushrooms; the inner bark of trees; and nuts like hazelnuts. Some plant products were important trade items, including bitter-root, camas bulbs, Indian hemp fibre, dried berries, and a local form of tobacco.

Salmon and deer were the major animal resources used by the people of the Southern Interior. All the rivers—even though they are hundreds of kilometres from the Pacific Ocean—have runs of salmon that make their way up the Fraser or Columbia River systems. Deer, elk, and moose supplemented the diet, and also provided materials for clothing.

People of the Southern Interior

Most of the First Nations people who live in the southern interior are speakers of Interior Salish languages. There are four such nations. Two, the Nlaka’pamux (previously known as the Thompson) and the St’at’imc (Lillooet) live in the transitional zone between the coastal region and the interior plateau. This mountainous area, in the rain shadow of the Coast Mountains, surrounds the Fraser Canyon and nearby tributaries. The Secwepemc (Shuswap) territory covers a large district from the Fraser River to the Rocky Mountains. The traditional territory of the fourth group, the Okanagan, occupies the Okanagan valley and extends south into what is now the United States. Previously an Athapaskan-speaking people, the Stuwix, lived in the Nicola Valley. Apparently they moved into the area generations ago, perhaps from the Tsilhqot’in. Today they do not exist as a distinct group, having been absorbed by their neighbours, the Nlaka’pamux and the Okanagan.

The Ktunaxa (Kootenay), who live in the southeast corner of the province, speak a language unrelated to any other language in the world. The traditional territories of the Ktunaxa Nation, like those of the Okanagan, existed long before the border was created between Canada and the United States, and extend into what are now the states of Montana and Idaho. Their territories also extended across the Rocky Mountains, and three or four times a year they travelled to the eastern slopes of the Rockies to hunt buffalo.

Because most plants were only ready to harvest at certain predictable times of the year, and salmon returned at about the same time each year, the First Nations of the southern interior had a well-defined seasonal round for resource gathering.

Spring was the time for gathering the green shoots of plants like balsamroot, fireweed, cow parsnip, and “Indian celery.” By June, Saskatoon berries are ready for picking, and the wild potato can be dug. In the past, this plant was one of the most important sources of carbohydrates. The round fleshy tubers, dug from shallow soil with a digging stick, grow at higher elevations in grassy slopes, but only in moist areas. People would gather in large numbers where the plant was abundant, such as the Potato Mountains near Lytton. Some First Nations people replanted their wild potato meadows to ensure a crop the following year.

By August, the salmon began to appear in the rivers, and families gathered at their various salmon camps to harvest and dry the fish for their winter supplies. Summer lodges were built of a framework of poles covered with tule mats. In the fall, hunting for deer, elk, caribou, bear, mountain goat, and beaver became the main activity.

Most winter villages were built in the lowlands beside major rivers or lakes, where it was somewhat

warmer than in the highlands. The people built unique pit houses, highly adapted to the land and climate.

The Northeast Region

The northeast region of British Columbia, which stretches along the Peace River, is separated from the rest of the province by the Rocky Mountains. Indeed, this area has more in common with Alberta to the east or the Northwest Territories to the north than with the rest of B.C. However, defined as it is today by the natural boundary of the mountains and the human boundaries of provincial borders, it is a unique region composed of three different, overlapping landscapes: the foothills of the Rockies, the muskeg of the north, and the prairies of the east. This region is a rich hunting ground for large mammals such as moose, elk, caribou, and deer.

The northeast region of British Columbia covers two different ecosystems, the Boreal Plains and the Boreal Taiga. The Boreal Plains district is the western tip of a large area of plateaus, plains, and lowlands that extends eastward across northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and the southern Northwest Territories. It is generally flat, except where large rivers have cut into the earth, forming steep-sided banks. The continental climate creates a wide seasonal temperature range, with summer highs rising to about 20°C and winter lows averaging around -20°C, although record colds have dipped to nearly -50°C. The Peace River lowlands region which takes in the Peace River watershed has a milder climate than the rest of the region, with less snowfall.

The Boreal Taiga lies north of the Boreal Plains. It is made up of expansive muskeg lowlands drained by



Elk meat is one of many animal resources that First Nations people rely on the land to provide.

the Liard River watershed, which eventually joins the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories. Here the temperatures are extreme. Cold Arctic air contributes to long, frigid winters. The summer weather is affected by the meeting of Arctic and Pacific air masses, and, while temperatures can get as high as 36°C, there can be unstable weather with a heavy cloud cover.

The rivers that begin in the Rocky Mountains etch

Muskeg

A swamp or bog, consisting of a mixture of water and partially decomposed vegetation, often covered by a layer of sphagnum or other mosses.

their way across the rolling hills and prairie. Three major tributaries of the Peace River—the Omineca, Finlay, and Parsnip rivers—are deep in the mountains, breaking through the Rockies in a narrow pass near present-day Hudson's Hope. The Pine River forms a more southerly passage through the mountains, providing an age-old transportation route for First Nations people. Today a highway and an oil pipeline cross through Pine Pass. Once the Peace River reaches the foothills and plains, it widens out and cuts into the earth. The northern section of the Boreal Taiga is drained by the Liard River.

Resources of the Northeast

The northeast region is laced with rivers and streams which join the Peace or the Liard river, but these are Arctic rivers and salmon do not live in them. The richest resource for people living here is the wealth

of large mammals. This area has the greatest density of moose in the world. Mule deer abound, as do caribou, elk, grizzly, and black bear. Beaver find the perfect habitat in the myriad lakes and streams of the muskeg. On the plains, wood bison once lived, though they no longer do. Many other smaller animals and fish species such as Arctic grayling, trout, whitefish, and northern pike add to the resources of the region.

People of the Northeast

The people who traditionally inhabited this region belong to the Athapaskan language family, which was spoken from Alaska to the southwest United States. Three Athapaskan-speaking groups lived in the northeast region. Farthest north was the southern limit of the E'cho Dene or Slavey people's territories. Their large territories in the Mackenzie River watershed included parts of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories,



■ A northern-style canoe on the Taku River.

and northern Alberta. The Dunne-za (previously known as the Beaver) inhabited the foothills and forests between the Liard and Peace rivers. In the mountainous regions to the south were the Sekani people.

The First Nations people of the northeast traditionally led highly mobile lives. Moose was their principal resource. The Dunne-za also hunted or snared rabbits, beaver, bear, muskrats, and marmots for food and furs. Other large mammals—elk, caribou, and wood buffalo—were hunted when available.

Birds like grouse, ducks, and geese added to the diet, as did fish. While meat made up a large part of their diet, a wide variety of berries such as chokecherries, huckleberries, and saskatoons were harvested, as were some roots.

The Northern Interior

The northern interior covers a large part of British Columbia, and also extends into the Yukon territory. The environment of the northern interior is similar to most of northern Canada, being part of the great Boreal Forest which stretches across the continent as



■ An abundance of fur-bearing animals in the northern interior led the people to develop skills in making clothing from furs. This young woman, photographed around 1897 in Hagwilget Canyon, is weaving lynx strips.

far as Newfoundland. Spruce and fir dominate in an area where the climate is cold and precipitation is low. Because the climate is harsh, there is less diversity of plants here and fewer people live in this region than in the rest of the province.

The land of the northern interior is made up of mountains and plateaus, interspersed with many lakes. Due to the low evaporation rate of water in the cold climate, the soil is often very moist where poorly drained, resulting in large expanses of muskeg or peat bogs.

The central area of this region lies east of the Coast Mountains and stretches from the rolling lands of the Chilcotin and Cariboo Plateaus to the southern two-thirds of the Nechako Plateau. This area has a typical continental climate with cold winters and warm summers. It lies in a rain shadow of the Coast Mountains. Two major river systems, the Fraser and the Skeena, drain this region, providing abundant quantities of Pacific salmon.

North of the central plateaus, the boreal region extends across the province to the Rocky Mountains and north into the Yukon. The plateaus of the southern sections give way to a more mountainous terrain, punctuated with a series of wide valleys and lowlands.

Resources of the Northern Interior

The vast northern interior, with its harsher climate, generally has fewer resources available than the more southern regions. Moose are the most widespread member of the deer family throughout the northern interior. Caribou are common in the northern areas, while mule deer occur in large populations in the southern plateaus. Cougars, black bears, coyotes, and wolves are also common. Many smaller fur-bearing animals are found, including lynx, fisher, muskrat, marten, and mink. Beaver thrive in the many ponds and lakes of the region and porcupines abound.

People of the Northern Interior

Most of the First Nations in the northern interior belong to the very large Athapaskan language family. In the Yukon Territory, seven languages from the Athapaskan family are spoken: Gwich'in, Han, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Upper Tanana. Inland Tlingit is spoken in northwestern British Columbia and southern Yukon. Tlingit, also spoken in this area, is very distantly related to the Athapaskan language family.

The Athapaskan-speaking people living in most of the northern interior are known as Yinka Dene, which literally means "the people on the land." In some dialects, the equivalent term Yinka Whut'en is preferred. The Dakelh people, who live throughout most of the central interior, are also known in English as the Carrier.

The Tahltan people live in the Stikine watershed. East of them, on the Upper Skeena River, are the Gitksan, who occupy lands that are transitional between the ecosystems of the northern interior and the coast. Their language and culture are closely related to the Tsimshian and Nisga'a. Their neighbours to the southeast are the Wet'suwet'en, who are related to the Dakelh people, but have also adapted many aspects of the Northwest Coast culture of the Gitksan.

In most of the northern interior, people adapted to the harsh climate and more limited resources by developing a very flexible society. The basic social unit was the extended family, which moved about during the year according to the season and the availability of game. Theirs was a mobile society, ready to hunt, fish, and trap to gather resources as they travelled throughout a large territory.

Dakelh society, whose territories extend across the central province from the Bulkley River to the Rocky Mountains, was more structured than some others of the northern interior. Its clan and potlatch system regulated Dakelh resource territories called *keyoh*.

CASE STUDY

How the Kwakwaka'wakw Adapted to their Environment

The Kwakwaka'wakw of northern Vancouver Island and the nearby mainland coast live in a rugged landscape of islands and channels, mountains and inlets. The climate here, like on the rest of the coast, is mild and wet. By looking at the way the Kwakwaka'wakw settled and used their territories, we can see how they adapted to their environment.

Kwakwaka'wakw people in the past did not need to travel great distances to obtain most of the food and materials they required. The mountains made it difficult to travel by land, so cedar canoes were the mainstay of life on the coast.

A wealth of resources from the land and the sea was concentrated in their territories. This region had beaches where shellfish, crab, seaweed, and other intertidal resources thrived. Seals, sea lions, and deep-water fish abounded in the ocean. Along the shore a wide range of trees, bushes, and plants offered wood, berries, shoots, and roots.

More than any other resource, however, salmon were the principal resource for the Kwakwaka'wakw people. Salmon runs in this region were prodigious. Half a million salmon spawned on Gilford Island alone. The Nimpkish River had runs of over a million sockeye and 300,000 coho. In most years people could harvest more than they required for basic subsistence. They stored food for over the winter and still had a surplus to trade. The readily available supply of resources was able to support a relatively high population. As well, it gave the Kwakwaka'wakw, like other First

Nations of the coast, the precious commodity of time, which gave rise to highly-evolved technologies and complex social structures.

Kwakwaka'wakw people living before Europeans arrived had strict laws to follow. First there were the laws of nature, which dictated the way they interacted with their land. Most of the resources became available at specific times of the year, so the Kwakwaka'wakw people adapted their lifestyle by moving to different sites depending on the season. Their settlement patterns included a variety of resource gathering sites which they returned to year after year.

The other set of laws was their social organization, which developed as an efficient way to manage the resources. Before European contact there were thirty tribes in the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. Each tribe was made up of a number of resource groups called numaym, meaning "one kind." The numaym is the central unit of Kwakwaka'wakw society, each with its own resource camps and hunting territories within the tribal territory. As well, each numaym has hereditary rights to its own crests and its own narratives, songs, and dances, which are performed at potlatches.

The organizational structure of the numaym allowed the resources to be harvested in an efficient manner. Tribal territories were divided into individual areas for each numaym. Most of the sites were concentrated within a relatively small range. For example, the Mamalilikulla tribe has traditional

territories at the mouth of Knight Inlet, including a number of small islands, sections of larger islands such as Turnour and Gilford, and the northern shore of Knight Inlet. From east to west this is a distance of about 70 kilometres. Within this territory were a variety of resource sites: halibut fishing grounds, salmon rivers, berry grounds, clam beds, and hunting and trapping areas. The Mamalilikulla tribe was made up of eight different numaym.

The Kwakwaka'wakw seasonal round had three major periods. First was the winter ceremonial season. About the end of November, members of a tribe's numaym gathered together in the tribal winter village. For the Mamalilikulla, this was on Village Island. Great cedar longhouses with painted house fronts and totems standing before them displayed the crests of the chiefs of each numaym. Each numaym had its own property within the village. At the centre stood the largest house, which belonged to the head chief of the tribe. These massive buildings provided both living space and the arena where potlatches were held. As well as participating in potlatches, people spent part of the winter months creating the many items that were needed both for the coming year's resource gathering and for potlatches. This was the time for weaving cedar mats or crafting bentwood boxes. Canoes could be finished and totem poles or masks carved.

Spring arrived, bringing the second period of the seasonal cycle. Most Kwakwaka'wakw people moved to



■ The distinctive house frame of the Kwakwaka'wakw people at Mamalilikulla.

oolichan fishing camps at the head of Kingcome Inlet or Knight Inlet. The Mamalilikulla travelled up Knight Inlet along with members of eight other tribes. They all lived in close quarters along the river banks where they trapped or dip-netted the tiny rich fish. Although the Klinaklini River is in the territory of one tribe, the Tenaktak, it was shared during oolichan season by the others.

People spent the greater part of the

year at their individual camps to catch and process salmon. From spring until late fall, the salmon dictated where the people lived. Usually this was at the mouth of a salmon river, where salmon could be trapped in intertidal stone traps or in wooden traps placed across the river. Other activities accompanied this major occupation. Food such as berries and roots could be gathered from areas near the salmon camps as they ripened. Fall activities included hunting and trapping. Much trapping was done along the shore and river banks, while hunting more often took men to the mountains for deer and mountain goat. You can see how the environment

shaped the lives of the Kwakwaka'wakw. The abundance of salmon and cedar supported a large population. The coastal geography dictated a canoe-based society, allowing people to be highly mobile on the water. The seasonal availability of foods meant people travelled to different sites throughout the year. To efficiently manage the resources, a highly structured political system developed, with the potlatch at its core. This system, hand in hand with the extra time allowed by the abundance of resources, created an artistic tradition that today is one of the most highly regarded in the world.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The great diversity in the geography of what we know today as British Columbia led to an equally great diversity of First Nations societies, each with a unique identity and relationship to the land. The province can be divided into four regions according to the topography, climate, and vegetation: coast, southern interior, northern interior, and northeast. The coast, with its mild climate, is characterized by many inlets and passages bounded by steep mountains and valleys blanketed with lush temperate rain forest. The southern interior, the hottest region in the province, is built from a series of parallel mountain ranges, lakes, and plateaus laced with a network of interconnecting rivers which eventually form the Fraser and the Columbia rivers. The northern interior, the largest region, has a sub-Arctic climate with broad expanses of boreal forest clothing its plateaus and mountains.

The northeast is the only region of the province east of the Continental Divide, meaning its rivers, including the Peace River, drain into the Arctic Ocean. The resources of these regions vary, but in all except the northeast, the Pacific salmon is a key resource. Large game animals such as deer, moose, and elk were also vital to the survival of most First Nations, especially in the northern interior and northeast, where moose abounded. People adapted their settlement patterns and the structure of their societies according to the places they lived. Coastal nations, who primarily depended on the salmon resource, developed highly structured political and social systems, while those of the interior, whose principal resource was the moose or deer, generally had more flexible and egalitarian societies.

Living on the Land

Although varied living environments created different settlement and life-style patterns, there are some aspects of traditional culture that are shared by all First Nations. Every group has a rich oral history which explains the origins of the people and their spiritual relationship to the land, which includes the responsibility of stewardship of the resources. Governing systems developed which ensured the stewardship was maintained from generation to generation.

First Nations people respect and co-exist with nature. The resources from the land and the sea which they use are more than just food or materials; they are viewed as gifts from the natural or supernatural realms. As a result, if you travel to any First Nations community, you are likely to find Elders who still do as their ancestors did, thanking the animals or plants for sharing their gifts with people. This is a different world view from that typical in western European cultures.

This chapter will examine how First Nations people harvested resources, the technologies they developed for preserving and using the resources, and how resource management was conducted.

Harvesting Resources

With such a diversity of people using an abundance of different resources throughout British Columbia, a wide variety of technologies were developed and used for harvesting and processing the resources. The rich and varied material cultures of the First Nations of B.C. show the high degree of skill the people had to effectively use the natural resources at hand.



■ The bark of red cedar is used for weaving baskets. Here, Gwen Point of the Stó:lō Nation is collecting bark.

Stewardship

Stewardship is the care and management of the local resources. It implies a responsibility to respect and protect the resources in return for using them.

Material culture

Material culture refers to objects that are made and used by a group of people. As a field of study, it includes the techniques for making objects, how they were used, and how they connected with the daily lives and beliefs of the people.

Gathering Plants

Plants were an important raw material for many aspects of First Nations' daily, ceremonial, and spiritual life. Hundreds of different plants provided food, as well as materials for medicine, tools, dyes, containers of all sorts, fuel, and fibre.

Most plants could be easily harvested by hand or with simple tools. Berries were picked and placed in woven baskets. Digging sticks were made to collect root vegetables and trees were felled by chopping with adzes or controlled burning around the base. In some areas, plants were tended to ensure a better crop; for example, on southern Vancouver Island, where camas fields were maintained by controlled burning.

Sometimes materials were harvested from living trees. One cedar plank might be split off a standing tree. Barks were gathered in the spring when the sap was running, making it easier to separate bark from wood. Cedar bark was pulled off in long, narrow, vertical strips, and in the interior, the bark of trees such as birch and pine was cut off in sheets. Long roots were dug and pulled from the ground.

Harvesting certain plants was often a group activity, especially when they had to be picked in the

short period when they were ripe, or were collected in large quantities.

The harvesting of plants usually involved a spiritual element. Many groups celebrated a First Fruit ceremony in which the first berry of the year was welcomed and thanked in a ritual. Whenever they took a resource, First Nations people thanked the plant for giving of its bounty. Today many First Nations people continue this practice when they gather plant materials.

Fishing Techniques

Many skills were required to catch and preserve a good supply of salmon, whether they were caught in the ocean, at a river's mouth, or in the fast-moving waters of a river canyon far inland. Usually catching the fish was a cooperative effort involving a family group operating a fish trap. People needed to have an intimate understanding of the ways of the water, to be able to read the tides and winds on the ocean, or the currents and eddies on the river so they could successfully harvest the salmon.

Some salmon were caught in the open ocean using trolling hooks or nets, but most were caught in the tidal waters near the shore. Beach seines were large nets set out parallel to the shore from a canoe. When enough fish had congregated between the net and the shore, men on the beach hauled in the net, pulling the fish onto the shore, where they could be gathered. In Coast Salish territory, off the shores of southern Vancouver Island, a reef net was suspended between two canoes with stone anchors holding it in place on the ocean bottom. At the right moment it was hauled up to the surface and the trapped fish were removed.

At river mouths and estuaries, where salmon wait before heading upstream, people used the tide to their advantage by building stone traps. At high tide, the

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Dave Elliot, Saanich

My people never killed a tree unnecessarily. Once in a while the need was so great they would cut a tree. When this had to happen they would speak to the tree. It had a sacred name. Every living thing had a sacred name—streams, lakes, trees, flowers, birds, everything. When your need was great you had no choice. You would stand before the tree and talk to it and tell the tree how sorry you were to take its life. When we took the life of a tree, we used every scrap, every shred right down to the last bit. We used it all. It was wrong to waste something that had been provided for us by this intelligence we didn't quite understand.¹

Adze

A tool for cutting away the surface of wood, like an axe with an arched blade at right angles to the handle.



■ Fish traps from the Hazelton area, showing a sophisticated technology, were lowered into rushing water to catch salmon.

salmon could swim over the circular stone walls, but as the tide went out, they were stranded and could be gathered by hand. The tidal flats or rocky shores at the mouths of most salmon rivers along the coast had such stone traps, and the remains of some of them are still visible today.

Different techniques were used once the salmon entered the rivers. Groups worked together to build and use weirs, fence-like structures which allowed water to flow through but blocked salmon on their

relentless journey upstream. Weirs could be built across a small river to stop the salmon, which could then be gathered by spears or dip nets.

More elaborate structures could guide the fish into traps. Basket traps were large, circular traps placed in the water that funnelled the salmon into the tapered end. More solitary methods using dip nets and spears were often used in faster water. Platforms and stages were built out over the river on rocky promontories. Still in use today,

these are usually built in precarious spots where it would be too dangerous simply to fish from the shore. Gill nets, which catch the gills of fish in the mesh of the net as they attempt to swim through, also remain in use today at age-old fishing sites on rivers. Another

■ This fishing weir on the Cowichan River on Vancouver Island was photographed about 1867. First Nations fishers tailored their weirs for specific locations.



method involved fishing at night from canoes using torch lights to attract the fish. One person held a burning torch over the water, while another speared the salmon or trout.

Many technologies were used for catching other varieties of fish. Oolichan arrived in rivers in such large quantities that they could be caught in long, funnel-shaped nets, in dip nets, or with rakes. These rakes were also used for herring. Halibut, which live on the ocean bottom, were caught with highly specialized hooks which were anchored in groups near the ocean floor. Two different styles of halibut hook were developed. On the south and central coasts, they were made of one piece of hard wood, usually yew bent with steam to form a U shape. On the north coast, two pieces of wood were lashed together to form a V shape. One of these pieces had an elaborate carving.

Freshwater fish were caught with similar methods to those used in the salmon fishery: hooks, spears, and gill nets. Ice fishing was common in the interior during winter, when fine fishing lines of sinew were dropped through a hole in the ice with a baited stone or bone hook attached. When a fish was caught it was hauled through the hole, or if it was large, speared first. The largest fish in B.C.'s rivers, the sturgeon, grows up to six metres in length and can weigh as much as 600 kg. Sturgeon were usually fished from canoes.



■ A collection of halibut hooks. Those from the north coast are more elaborate.

Sometimes they were speared with large, double-headed harpoons and sometimes trapped in a large trawl net.

Hunting

Moose, caribou and deer were the primary sources of meat for many interior people. Hunters required highly developed tracking skills, as well as an intimate knowledge of the vast territories where the animals travelled. They needed to understand animal behaviour so they could attract the animals using sounds that mimic those made by the deer or moose.

Sometimes individuals hunted these animals using bows and arrows, but more often, people worked together to hunt whole herds of caribou or deer. Some groups worked in hunting teams, where a line of men would close ranks and encircle the deer, allowing the best archers to shoot them. Some groups used fences or corrals. Fences were built along travel routes in the mountains, while corrals were built at small lakes, either in the water or on the shore where the deer would come out of the lake.

Deadfalls were used to trap other mammals, from large game like bears to mink and otter. These are traps which drop a heavy log when triggered by animals entering them. Some people dug pits along the animals' paths, covering the holes with light vegetation. The unsuspecting animal would break through the covering and be trapped in the pit.

Preserving and Using Resources

First Nations people developed highly efficient and sometimes quite sophisticated technologies to process the resources they harvested. Much of their labour was spent preparing stores of food for the winter. Many of the tasks requiring time to create a product, such as weaving a basket, making clothing or carving a mask, were done in the long winter months.



Hagwilget
Village was strategically located near Hagwilget Canyon on the Bulkley River. An abundance of salmon was harvested with nets and traps and preserved in these smokehouses. By the time this photograph was taken, the people had moved their dwelling to land above the canyon. The original longhouses had fallen or been adapted, but four totem poles remained.

Preserving Food

In the past, the most common way used to preserve the large stock of food needed to last through the winter was drying. Sometimes meat was dried by wind or sun, and sometimes by the heat and smoke from fires. The meat, whether it was from salmon, deer, or other animals, had to be expertly cleaned and prepared for drying.

Usually some kind of structure was built to dry or smoke the meat. In the Fraser Canyon, you can still see dozens of open air racks along the shores where salmon are hung to let the dry, hot summer winds remove the moisture. In most First Nations communities throughout the province you will find smokehouses, small structures used generation after generation to hang salmon or meat over a fire. From community to community methods of cutting and drying differ, with a variety of finished products. Sometimes salmon is dried completely, resulting in a light, nutritious food that is easy to store and to pack when travelling. At other times, it may be half-dried, letting the smoke do most of the curing.

People on the coast stored food in bentwood boxes beneath the raised floors around the sides of their longhouses. In the interior, where people were more mobile, raised caches were built. These were small storehouses built high above the ground so that animals could not invade them. In other interior villages, where people lived in pit houses for the winter, dried salmon, deer, and other foods were kept in underground pits.

Hides

The hides of animals such as deer, moose, and elk were valuable for clothing and footwear and were also used to make shelters such as tipis. Sometimes the raw hide was used, such as for making cord and drums, but frequently the skins needed to be tanned. Tanning was a complex technology, requiring a great deal of skill and knowledge. First, it was essential to skin the animal and scrape the hair and fat off without making any cuts or tears, and secondly, knowledge of the chemical process of tanning, as well as the critical timing of all the steps was necessary. A common



■ A dog team pulling a toboggan made from hide.

tanning solution was made from the brains of the deer or moose, which were boiled with bones and marrow. Part of the processing of hides could also include hanging them over smouldering fires to smoke them.

■ A collection of coiled baskets, photographed near the Fraser River, probably in St'at'imc territory, about 1902. Most of these baskets are in the Lillooet style. They are made from a root, usually cedar or spruce, which is coiled, first to form the bottom, then the sides. As each layer is built up, the root is wrapped with bark or grass, concealing the root. Designs are created with a technique called imbrication, in which dyed bark or grass is incorporated into the wrapping process. Typically, Lillooet style baskets have the major design on the top section of the basket.



Making Textiles and Baskets

Plant fibres were woven into clothing, mats, and baskets, and used in twine and rope. Women usually had the role of gathering and processing the necessary plants. They had specialized knowledge of where and how to gather the plant materials, and the skills to process them and create a finished product.

For example, making traps or nets for fishing took considerable time—sometimes as much as a whole winter—as well as resources. On the coast, the most common plant used to make nets was the stinging nettle; in the interior it was “Indian hemp” (*Apocynum cannabinum*). The strong fibres were removed from the stems of these plants and twisted into twine.

Other products made from plants required similarly sophisticated technology. Baskets woven from cedar bark, spruce roots, reeds or grasses came in many different styles depending on their purpose. Some were made watertight for carrying liquids, usually by weaving them very tightly, or sometimes by applying a sealant such as resin. Others were loosely woven to allow water to drain

■ A Haida woman making a spruce root hat, using techniques that are still practised today. In her lower lip she is wearing a decorative ornament known as a labret, a sign of prestige among many Northwest Coast First Nations.

out. Throughout much of the province, birch bark baskets were common. The waterproof and rot-resistant bark was sewn with spruce roots to form watertight containers.

Weaving and basket-making were developed into complex and highly sought-after arts, almost always carried out by women. As well as making utilitarian objects, women created fine textiles from both plants and animal hair spun into thread. These were most often made into robes that signified great power and social status, or had spiritual significance.

The expertise of Coast Salish women in creating valuable textiles was highly regarded. They raised a breed of dog especially for its soft hair, which was spun using a spindle whorl, a unique tool which helped the spinning process. The thread was woven using a special type of loom with free-floating roller bars.

Mountain goat wool was also widely used in weaving blankets. Because it was relatively rare and difficult to obtain, it was reserved for ceremonial robes of high-ranking people. On the northern coast, two types of ceremonial robes known as the Raven's tail blanket and the Chilkat blanket were created using complex weaving processes. The Coast Salish wove their own style of blanket from mountain goat hair.



Making Tools and Household Goods

Winter offered an opportunity to replenish the tools that would be needed for the coming year. Usually everybody knew how to make the tools they would require, and men and women were responsible for making the implements they used. In some cases experts might be called upon to make very sophisticated items.

Nothing was wasted: people made use of practically every part of the resources they harvested. For example, when a moose was killed, those parts that were not used for food could be used in other ways. The skin, of course, was tanned for many uses. The antlers were used as moose calls, imitating the sound of a moose rubbing its antlers against the trunk of a tree. They were also shaped to make knives and scrapers. Other bones were fashioned into tools such as awls and needles. Sinew from the muscles made a tough thread, while the stomach was cleaned and used as a bag.

A hunter's most important equipment was his bow and arrows, and the skill with which he could make

them determined, to a degree, the success of the hunt. Bows were made from a strong supple hardwood such as yew or maple, while the string might be made from sinew or the fibre from Indian hemp. The construction of arrows varied according to their purpose. One type might simply have the shaft sharpened to a fine point for small prey like birds, while others had large detachable stone points for killing large game.

Great expertise was required in using the materials. For instance, it isn't a simple matter to shape a stone into a projectile such as a spearhead or sculpted form like an anchor. To make a sharp projectile, you must understand the structure of the stone and know how shards will flake off when you strike it a certain way. To sculpt the stone, you must have the knowledge and the patience to grind, pierce, and smooth the material, creating a tool of great utility as well as beauty.

Woodworking, too, required great skill, and often men specialized in building large items such as canoes. One of the most useful household items made on the coast, but also traded into the interior, was the cedar bentwood box (sometimes known as a kerfed box). Highly sophisticated techniques enabled the woodworker to make the sides of a box out of one piece of wood, using steam to bend the wood after the corners had been carefully notched

■ A pit house located in the territory of the Nadleh Whut'en, about 130 km west of Prince George. These large houses, usually circular but sometimes rectangular, were excavated out of the deep soil, covered with a sloping roof of timbers and grass, bark, or pine boughs and topped off with a thick layer of earth.

or kerfed. The bent wood was joined with pegs or lashing and a tight-fitting lid and bottom were added to make a tightly sealed container. These boxes were made in many sizes and used to store any manner of goods, from foods such as dried salmon and oolichan grease, to fishing gear, to chiefs' ceremonial objects. They were also used for seating.

Creating Shelter

Most First Nations used different architecture for summer shelter than they did for winter. Many houses were light and portable, as people moved to different resource sites in the summer. In some areas, such as the northeast, tipis were the principal type of shelter, as they were on the Prairies. These tall conical tents covered with moose or caribou hides were light and easily transported.

The people of the southern interior developed a unique winter home that is usually called a pit house





■ A frame of poles covered with woven mats was a common form of summer housing in the interior, as it allowed for easy movement.

grooves. The Coast Salish houses used planks set horizontally. This construction made it possible to add extensions, and some Coast Salish houses truly were long, reaching lengths of 450 metres. The planks of the longhouse could be removed and transported by canoe to be used in the buildings at seasonal camps.

The longhouse was an important cultural entity. It was a part of the Northwest Coast social organization, and longhouses were named and decorated with crests. As well as providing daily living space, they were

used for all the important events such as potlatches.

Transportation

Throughout the interior, people usually walked as their main mode of transportation, until the arrival of the horse in the early 1700s. They developed extensive and well-maintained networks of trails. Where trails needed to cross rivers, people built bridges, usually simple log structures. However, the Gitksan developed a unique technology for constructing cantilevered bridges over deep river canyons. During the winter, people used snowshoes to travel between villages or to work their traplines.

Cantilevered

A cantilevered bridge is built with beams projecting out from the banks and supported by girders.

because a pit was excavated in the ground to create a living space. They were usually circular with a conical roof built of beams and posts. People entered through the central smokehole, which held a ladder made from a log. As many as thirty people lived in these structures over the winter. The earth acted as insulation, and the houses were comfortable and easy to heat.

Coastal people constructed a different type of house that suited their climate and social organization. They used the readily available cedar trees to construct large plank houses known as longhouses or big houses. Distinct architectural styles were used in different regions of the coast. Haida houses had six beams which projected out from the roof, while most other types used two roofbeams. In the north, the cedar planks forming the wall were placed vertically in



■ This suspension bridge built by the Hagwilget people across the Bulkley River near their canyon village is a marvel of engineering technology. This, the second bridge here, uses sawn timbers, but the first bridge was built entirely of poles lashed with cedar bark and rope.

On the coast, transportation was mainly by canoe. Cedar was used almost exclusively, except for some small river canoes which might be made of birch or spruce. The cedar canoes, which reached a size of eighteen metres, had a remarkable streamlined design, were able to travel great distances on stormy seas, and could carry a large cargo or as many as twenty passengers. Each one was made from a hollowed-out tree that was steamed to stretch the gunwales to a broader shape.

In the interior, where cedar was not so plentiful, birch bark canoes were the most common type. Dugout canoes made from cottonwood, cedar, or ponderosa pine were also used. Skin canoes were most common in the far northern reaches of the province, although they were sometimes used as hunting canoes in

the south. A frame of light wood was covered with the skins of caribou or moose, sewn with sinew, and sealed to make it watertight.

Gunwale

The upper edge of the side of a boat or ship. The name comes from when guns were supported there.



■ Constructing a canoe out of spruce bark. This photo was taken in northeastern B.C. in 1914; it is believed to be in the Nelson River region.

Managing the Resources

First Nations people's traditional way of life integrated social, economic, and spiritual elements, and the natural world and the human world were all one. It is important to understand what is meant by the spiritual to realize its significance in First Nations' relationship with the land and their views about resource management. The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples defined it clearly:

Spirituality, in Aboriginal discourse, is not a system of beliefs that can be defined like a religion; it is a way of life in which people acknowledge that every element of the material world is in some sense infused with spirit, and all human behaviour is affected by, and in turn has an effect in, a non-material, spiritual realm.²

One example of this view of nature is in First Nations' celebrations of the earth's annual rebirth. People showed their respect and appreciation for the new season by addressing plants and animals as living entities. They thanked them for sharing themselves, and also explained to them in what ways the people would make use of them. Further respect was shown for the resources, especially the major meat sources such as salmon or moose, by following certain rituals when disposing of the unused portions. Often bones and guts were burned or placed in water so scavenging animals could not eat them.

Almost every First Nation named the months after the major seasonal activity that was carried out during that time, or the actual resource gathered. For instance, the Tsimshian call June "Salmonberry Month" and July "Sockeye Month."

Special spiritual ceremonies often celebrated the arrival of key resources. These included First Salmon, First Fruit, and First Root ceremonies. Some were quite simple, showing reverence and thanks, while others were complex. For instance, the First Salmon ceremony of the St'at'imc people began when a special man, the seer, received the first sockeye from the fisherman who caught it. The seer and another Elder set the salmon on a bed of boughs, and they presented



Because of the importance of salmon as a food source, the beginning of the salmon season has traditionally been celebrated by many First Nations.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Rita George, Wet'suwet'en Nation

I am a strong believer in our Wet'suwet'en culture and customs, and the use of natural resources such as the harvesting and preservation of salmon, hunting, berry picking and gathering our natural herbs and medicines from the land.

This is what Aboriginal rights involve, and our lives are governed in the Feast Hall. The hereditary system of the Wet'suwet'en is based on maternal lineage, which means the children follow the mother's clan. I am part of the Bear Clan (Git dum den), so my children are also in the Bear Clan.

The other clans in the Wet'suwet'en system are Killer Whale (Lahk-san us-u), Caribou (lahk-seel-u), Beaver (Tsa-u) and Frog (Gihl-tse-u). The land and resources are divided according to the clan system through the potlatch system.

Because we live off the land we must also protect the land.³

CASE STUDY

The Dunne-za: Hunters and Dreamers

Before the modern world imposed itself on their lands, the Dunne-za (sometimes known as the Beaver) lived an extremely adaptable lifestyle that made the most efficient use of the land and the resources available in the harsh climate of northeastern B.C. They integrated the spiritual and economic worlds in ways that are difficult for us to understand today. By becoming aware of the world view of the Dunne-za, however, we can appreciate the diversity of ways that First Nations people related to the land.

The Dunne-za were, and still are, excellent hunters. Their principal food sources were large mammals, primarily moose, but also caribou and bison. Their lives were organized to be closely attuned to the behaviour of these animals, which could be unpredictable. Hunters had to be ready to follow the random movements of the game, and the whole community needed to be able to cope with an uncertain food supply. Thus it was essential to be able to track the animals, and to organize society in ways that could survive on limited food if necessary.

Families belonged to a loose association of relatives in a kinship group which could change its composition to adapt to the seasons and the available resources. A family group of thirty people was the optimum size for survival and would require, on average, one moose a week. People came together in larger groups in summer and fall when game was more plentiful, but at times when they knew they were more vulnerable to starvation, they separated into smaller groups.

As hunters in vast tracts of land, the Dunne-za had incredibly detailed mental

maps of the land and an internalized geographical sense that infused all aspects of their lives. The directions and the path of the sun were more than hunting guides, they were fixed points of stability in an otherwise flexible world.

For example, a hunter slept with his head pointed east, to where the sun rises. Beside him hung a medicine bundle, a source of spiritual power acquired from an animal he had contact with when he was young. As a boy, he went alone into the bush on a vision quest, where he encountered what is called his medicine animal, learned its unique song, and received instructions on how to make his medicine bundle. Now, as a man, the power of this animal helped him to dream about his hunt. He believed that dreams came from where the sun rises, and in his dream he travelled back to his encounter with his medicine animal, but at the same time he could see ahead to his future hunt. In his mind he travelled ahead of his tracks in the bush, and was able to see his future prey. In his dream he would kill the animal and then, the next day, he knew just where his path would cross that of his prey, and he would easily track it and kill it.

Such a dream kill did not necessarily happen at every hunt, nor could all hunters dream in this way. However, dreams were an important experience for all Dunne-za people. The songs that were discovered through dreaming were performed at gatherings, such as the summer meetings when several hundred people would come together.

The performances had a particular structure which reflected the people's relationship with the land, their society,

and their spirituality. At the centre was a fire, around which people danced in the direction of the sun's path. The dances around the fire were seen as a symbolic walk along the trail to heaven. People also paid attention to the directions when arranging the seating at a gathering. Men sat in the northern half of the circle, women in the southern half. Hunters sat in the eastern section of the men's side, so that their songs came from the east, just as did their dreams. At the west, where the sun sets, sat a specially revered man known as the Dreamer, whose dreaming ability was so powerful that he could see the trail to the heavens.

The social system of hunter societies such as the Dunne-za appears on the surface to be very simple, partially because they had little material culture for observers to see. However, even in this brief look at their society, we can appreciate the complexity of their spiritual culture, and how, still today, it is integrated with their relationship to the land.

to it a series of wooden rods which were individually marked and decorated. These rods represented the Elders of the village, and through the rods, each Elder was introduced to the salmon. Having been welcomed, the salmon was boiled and shared among the whole community. Everyone who took part in the ceremony later gave one salmon to the seer. These were all cooked and eaten by everyone during a feast that included dancing led by the seer.

The ways that resources were administered varied from place to place. Generally a band would hold certain territories in common, but other bands were permitted to share these areas. For instance, among the St'at'imc a family held rights to specific fishing spots, but once they had caught all the fish they needed, others were permitted to use the same places.

Hereditary chiefs were responsible for the prosperity and safety of their groups. They organized their group's economic activities, maintained its prestige and social position through feasts and potlatches, and acted as leaders of spiritual pursuits. However, they required the support of the resource-use unit's members. Decisions were made by consensus through a council of Elders and chiefs. All members of the group gave some of their labour and food and materials for the common good of the group, and the chief used this wealth in his potlatch. Thus it was required of everyone in the resource-use unit to manage the land and resources of their particular territories.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The First Nations of British Columbia have always had a close and special relationship with the land, which is marked by respect. It reflects a different world view from that of western European cultures, one that sees the natural world and human experience as integrated and unified.

The material cultures of the First Nations of the province reveal a multitude of technologies developed to efficiently and effectively harvest and process the plants and animals which made up the natural resources. A high degree of skill was required to make and utilize the varied technologies.

The way that people managed their resources influenced their social organization. Interior people, on

the whole, had relatively large and open areas within their territories, and travelled extensively to reach different sites. Their social organization was flexible and democratic, without a pronounced hierarchy or rank. Coastal people, however, divided their territories into smaller units which required less travel. Their seasonal rounds followed a strict pattern and a corresponding structured social organization was the result.

As you will see in a later chapter, as a result of land claims and a number of landmark court cases dealing with Aboriginal rights and resource base issues, today First Nations are reclaiming their roles as stewards of their territories.

Sharing the Land and Resources

The First Nations of British Columbia were self-sufficient and used the resources of their territories to produce the goods they needed. However, they did not live in isolation. They traded with neighbouring villages and with more distant nations, exchanging surplus food and materials for items they could not obtain locally. Through trade, people were also able to interact culturally with their trading partners, exchanging knowledge and ideas. Often, trade was strengthened through marriage.

This chapter looks at trade economies, the importance of the potlatch in sharing resources, and how First Nations education taught each generation the uses of the resources from the land.

Trade Economies

The First Nations of B.C. are believed to have been the most active and expert traders of their time in North America. A number of factors contributed to their highly developed trade economies, which have existed for thousands of years. The wealth created by the salmon harvest allowed many tribes to participate in trade. Because the resources available on the coast and in the interior were significantly different, demand for items unavailable locally led to trade.

The First Nations trade economy involved more than gathering the resources. Considerable labour went into many of the products that were traded. For example, cedar canoes, an important trade item for

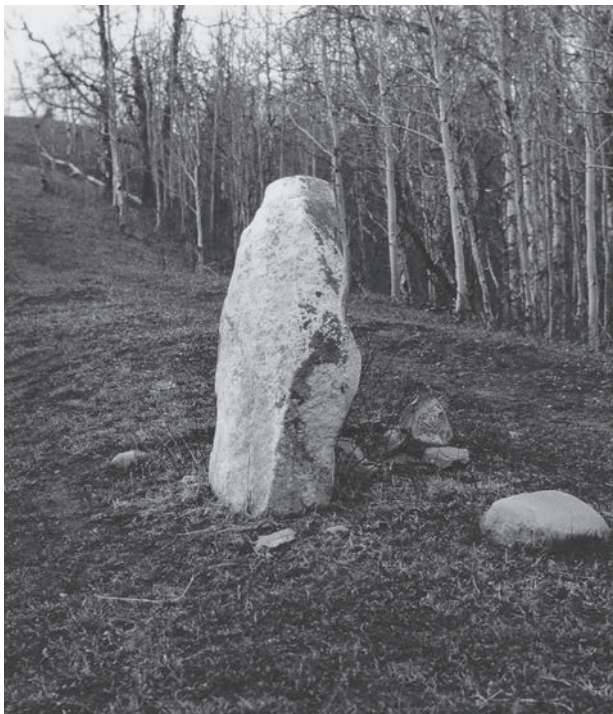


■ Oolichan fishery at Ts'im K'ol'hl Da oots'ip or Fishery Bay, on the Nass River, circa 1884. The Nisga'a and their neighbours have fished oolichans and processed oolichan grease here for untold centuries. Here the small fish have been caught in funnel-shaped nets and are being packed in large bentwood boxes and transported by sled to the cooking bins to be made into valuable grease.

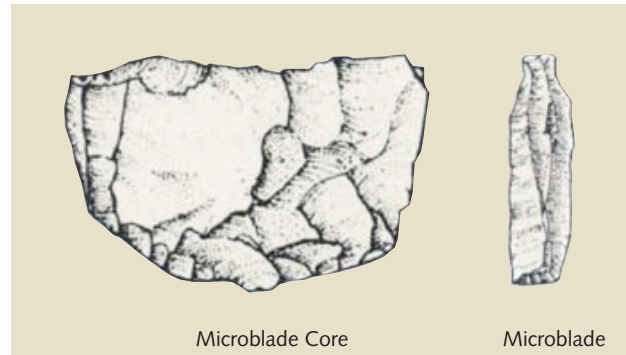
coastal people such as the Haida and the Heiltsuk, required a great deal of work from the felling of the tree and the steaming of the hollowed-out shape, to the finishing of the surface. Likewise, fibres were woven into baskets for trade, and furs had to be treated before they could be exchanged.

One of the most important trade items that was carried from the coast to the interior was oolichan grease, which was extracted from the fish in a lengthy process. Because of its importance, major trading routes were called Grease Trails. People travelled in large numbers over the trails to trade for the grease. In recognition of their importance, these trails were constantly maintained and were often two metres or more wide.

Goods were often traded from group to group through one or more intermediaries, so a product's final destination was often a long distance from its origin. For example, the Secwepemc who lived along the Fraser River south of Williams Lake were able to



Landmarks such as this “trading rock” near Hazelton marked places where First Nations people met for trade.



Microblades are thin, sharp blades created from obsidian, agate or other hard stone using a sophisticated technology. A chunk of the stone, called a core, was struck in just the right way to break off a thin wafer 2 to 3 cm long. This technique produced two extremely sharp edges, and was the most efficient way of making blades. The blades were set into grooves in wood, bone, or antler to make cutting tools or hunting spears. People stopped using microblade technology several thousand years ago.

produce a great quantity of dried salmon and salmon oil. They traded the salmon with neighbouring Secwepemc tribes who lived farther to the east. These people in turn traded the dried salmon with the Cree of the Plains.

One unique trade good, obsidian, helps us understand the age and extent of the trade economy. Obsidian is a glass-like volcanic rock which was highly prized in cutting tools. Tiny, razor-sharp pieces of obsidian, called microblades, were fixed in handles of wood, bone, or antler to make efficient knives and projectiles. What makes obsidian such a useful marker for understanding the past is that there were only three main sources of obsidian available to the First Nations of British Columbia. Two are in British Columbia: Mt. Edziza in Tahltan territory and Anahim

Obsidian

Obsidian is a volcanic glass, prized for its ability to be honed to an extremely sharp edge. It was used for knives, arrowheads, and other tools. Each obsidian source is unique, so scientists can identify the source of an artifact wherever it is found. Today it is sometimes used as the blade for a surgeon's scalpel.

Peak in the Ulkatcho. The third is in Oregon. Scientists can analyze obsidian samples and identify the source of obsidian found in archeological sites. With carbon dating, they can tell when the rock was traded and how far it travelled. The study of obsidian tells us that goods have been traded throughout British Columbia for 8,000 years.

Most trade was probably between neighbouring nations for items that were less accessible or unavailable in their home territories. For example, the Nuu-chah-nulth traded dried halibut, herring, and cedar baskets to the Coast Salish of Vancouver Island in exchange for camas bulbs and swamp rushes for mats. The soapberry or soopolallie, a common plant in the interior but non-existent on the coast, was frequently traded. The berries can be whipped into a froth that makes a treat sometimes referred to as “Indian ice cream.” The berry and other parts of the plant are also important herbal medicines. So soapberries were, and still are, traded by interior people for foods from the sea, such as dried cockles or herring spawn.

The plant called “Indian hemp” or hemp dogbane was the most important source of fibre for people of the interior. It was spun into a strong twine used for nets, traps, baskets, and many other purposes. It is not, however, a common plant. It grows in dry climates such as the Okanagan and the East Kootenay. Thus, it was a valuable trade item throughout the southern interior. The Okanagan people traded it with the Nlaka’pamux for salmon and animal skins and also made trading journeys to the coast where they traded the fibres for items such as seafood and dentalium.


Medium of exchange

A medium of exchange is something that people agree has a value and can be used to exchange goods and services. It allows people to trade without the limitations of bartering. Today money is the most common medium of exchange.

With such complex trading networks and diverse commodities, the process of trade among First Nations went beyond simple barter. In some situations, mediums of exchange were used as a standard for trade. For instance, on the North Coast and the Skeena region, groundhog skins and elk skins were a kind of currency. The shell dentalium was widely used as currency across what are now western Canada and the United States.

Trading for Status Goods

Trade goods can be divided into two types, items of provision and items of prestige or status. Prestige items required great wealth to purchase. While all

 Dentalium, shown here on a Haida blanket, is a small, cylindrical mollusc that only grows in deep water off the west coast of Vancouver Island. Because it is rare, it was highly sought after for decoration and as a form of currency.





Copper was the key symbol of wealth on the Northwest Coast. Shield-like objects called coppers, seen here in objects 1–4, were originally hammered out of copper nuggets. Later they were made from copper sheets manufactured in Europe.

goods that were unavailable locally had some prestige associated with them, there were certain objects whose value made them desirable as symbols of wealth. One such object was dentalium, a small tusk-like shell which is found only in sub-tidal waters on the west coast of Vancouver Island in Nuuchahnulth and Kwakwaka'wakw territory. For thousands of years it has been traded to people as far away as the sub-Arctic and the Plains. Dentalium was often strung on twine in two-metre lengths. Sometimes the whole shell was used as decoration, which would demonstrate great wealth. More often, the shells were sliced to make small beads.

Copper was a rare and extremely valuable resource because it is soft enough to be easily shaped. There was, however, only one source for B.C. First Nations and that was the Copper River in the interior of Alaska.

The Tlingit, who live on the Alaskan panhandle, were the intermediaries in the copper trade along the coast. The ore is called native copper because it can be taken out of the ground and used without being processed. It was used to decorate carvings such as masks. However, its most important use was for the large shield-like objects called coppers. These were the ultimate symbol of wealth for the Northwest Coast tribes. They were displayed and given away at potlatches.

Slaves were part of the highly structured societies on the coast. They added to the labour force and in many cases contributed to the wealth of a chief. They allowed the high-class members of a community more time for preparing for the many social activities such as potlatches, feasts, and winter ceremonies. Slaves were captured during warfare, and sometimes the slaves acquired this way were traded.

Controlling the Trade

Some groups became well known as traders rather than producers. They could spend less time gathering and processing food and materials than most groups. Those with access to large quantities of salmon had an advantage. This included most coastal people and some strategically located interior groups. For instance, the four Secwepemc bands who lived on the lower Chilcotin River had a very rich supply of salmon. Their key location at the border between Secwepemc and Tsilhqot'in territories gave them control of trade between the two nations. They developed a specialized role as intermediaries in the trading networks. They were also known as peacemakers between two groups when conflict threatened to disrupt the trade.

In some parts of the province, the trading systems became quite complex as certain chiefs gained control of trade routes. They were able to increase their wealth, power, and prestige by controlling the flow of goods. Sometimes this control meant that neighbouring people had to pay for passing through a chief's territory. In other cases, however, control was exerted by building an armed fort at a river canyon or mountain pass. Trade alliances were also formed, sometimes through marriage. In other circumstances, two tribes might agree on a trade monopoly. This was the case, for example, with the Tsimshian and the Gitksan. These two nations are neighbours who share the Skeena River watershed. The Tsimshian have territories on the ocean, near the mouth of the Skeena, and also along the lower reaches of the river. The Gitksan occupy the upper Skeena River in the interior. The most powerful Tsimshian chief, Ligeex, and his tribe the Gispaxlo'ots, held a monopoly on trade with the Gitksan. However, another Tsimshian group, the Kitselas, controlled a strategic narrow canyon

on the Skeena at the border of Tsimshian and Gitksan territories. Ligeex was forced to maintain a partnership with the Kitselas people to ensure his safe passage through the strategic canyon.

Education: Learning About Values and Resource Use

First Nations education was part of the fabric of the society through which values and skills for using and preserving the land and its resources were transmitted. Children were regarded as gifts to the community and keepers of the culture. In order for the whole community to prosper, it was a communal responsibility to pass on collective knowledge. The

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Matthew Johnson, Gispaxlo'ots tribe, Tsimshian

Well now, Ligeex he was the one who had the power all along the Skeena and there was no one who would go up the Skeena without first getting the permission of the chief Ligeex. Now it was the Gispaxlo'ots (gis-pac-lawts), Ligeex's tribe, who were the ones who could go up the Skeena. And if they did so they most certainly gave a gift to the chief for going up the Skeena. It was he who was the chief over all the Skeena River. And if any other tribe, any relatives of the Gispaxlo'ots tribe went in the canoes of the Gispaxlo'ots they first gave a passage fee to the chief. And when they returned then they gave a trading fee for anything they had been able to get while upriver. And if they didn't do so then Ligeex's spokesman went to demand payment. And all of the different tribes greatly respected the powers of the chief of the Gispaxlo'ots. Although there were many tribes living along the Skeena downriver from the Canyon, none of them had ever gone upriver beyond the Canyon, and there was not one of them who traded with the Gitksan. Only Ligeex. He was the one who made the law that he alone should trade with the Gitksan. And all the tribes knew this. ¹

community worked together to support each member, and thereby, the whole group.

As the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stated, “In Aboriginal educational tradition, the individual is viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. Each of these aspects must be addressed in the learning process. Holistic education is the term used to describe the kind of education traditionally used by Aboriginal peoples.”²

For First Nations people learning is viewed as cyclical and a life-long endeavour. Training begins at birth and proceeds through the stages of life. As people mature, they take on more responsibilities in teaching.

The extended family took responsibility for caring for children and encouraging them to discover and learn about life. In most First Nations societies, children were raised in an atmosphere of tolerance, without criticism or direct control of the child's behaviour. In this way, young children learned to think independently and become self-sufficient.

As soon as they were physically able, children participated in the activities of daily life, learning by observation and practice. As they grew older, more formal training might be given in specific skills and knowledge. For example, a child learned about trapping by being involved in the entire process. Play around the camp gave way to assisting in setting up and cleaning tools, then helping to scrape the skins. As soon as the child was ready, he or she accompanied the parents on the trapline and was trained to recognize the tracks and other signs of the different animals.

Youth was a time of apprenticeship when young people prepared to take on the jobs and responsibilities of adulthood. They learned their specific roles and understood the value of the unique contributions men and women made to the community. Having been active participants in daily life from infancy, they had by this time internalized the morals and behaviours

that were expected of them.

The transition from adolescence into adulthood was marked by special ceremonies and rites. An important step in the education of young people from most First Nations societies was the vision quest. Young men moved away from the community for days or weeks, surviving on their own and seeking spiritual guidance through visions or dreams. In many societies, the person on the vision quest acquired a spiritual guardian. Usually this was restricted to young men, but in some societies women could also seek a spiritual guide. More often, teenage girls received important teachings about womanhood when they began menstruation. They were secluded from the rest of the community at that time for several days or even weeks, while they were nurtured and instructed by their close relatives or Elders.

Young men faced rigorous and disciplined training for roles that required strength, stamina, and spiritual power. To be successful hunters or warriors, they learned to fast and follow the rituals that connected them with the spiritual dimension of their endeavour.

Another crucial area of knowledge for all members of a group was full understanding about the land and its resources, including which territories belonged to their family and which belonged to others. Along with this came the knowledge of who your ancestors were, and how their connection with the land was passed down. Children learned much about the land and resources by experience as they travelled with their families between the seasonal camps. This information was repeated year after year and was also reinforced through oral traditions, where Elders passed on the history of the extended family through stories.

People at the Borders

Borders between territories were not hard and fast lines in the way that national boundaries are today. There were regions of overlap and shared territories. For example, the Nlaka'pamux people of the Fraser Canyon and the Tait group of Stó:lō shared a frontier at the lower reaches of the Fraser Canyon. Each group had its own salmon fishing sites which could only be used by those families who inherited them. However, the mountainous areas looking down on the river were used by people from both nations. Even though they spoke different languages and had different cultural customs, the Stó:lō and Nlaka'pamux sometimes married each other. Some people were bilingual.

The customs in villages in the heart of one nation's territories and those at the borders were sometimes quite distinct, because the people at the borders usually showed the influence of their neighbours. The

St'at'imc, for example, occupied the mountains and the lakes on the eastern side of the Coast Mountains, north of the top end of Harrison Lake. Their neighbours were the Halq'emeylem of the lower Fraser and the Secwepemc of the interior. The St'at'imc people living nearer the coast had winter houses different from those living closer to the interior. The more interior villages used the pit house that was common throughout the interior, while those closer to the coast used a style of longhouse that they adapted to their needs. Coastal houses were large open spaces, with no permanent dividers. The St'at'imc did not have the feasts and winter ceremonials of the coastal people, so they didn't need the open space. They divided the space with permanent partitions.

Archaeological evidence shows that cultural sharing goes back thousands of years. One case is Namu, on the central coast in Heiltsuk territory. People

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

George Manuel, Secwepemc

In his book *The Fourth World*, George Manuel wrote about the role of storytelling in education.

Story-telling was often used among native peoples, not only for moral teaching, but for practical instruction, to help you remember the details of a craft or skill, and for theoretical instruction, whether about political organization or the location of the stars.

*One advantage of telling a story to a person rather than preaching at him directly is that the listener is free to make his own interpretation. If it varies a little from yours, that is all right. Perhaps the distance between the two interpretations is the distance between two human lives bound by the same basic laws of nature illustrated by the outline of the story. However many generations have heard the story before the youth who hears it today, it is he who must now apply it to his own life.*³



FIRST NATIONS VOICES

John Thomas, Nitnat

I come from a whale hunter's family so I'll talk about that kind of training. I was learning to make tools, hunting implements, bows and arrows, different spears—especially the whale spear which is part of our ancestral heritage. There is a lot to whale hunting. You don't just go out and catch a whale. You had to be physically and spiritually fit. You had to know what you were doing. One mistake could be your last so you were told over and over again how to perform certain rituals to get the power to go out and hunt the whales. To this end, we were taught how to make the tools, even pieces of rope. We learned what to say to the tree before cutting it down, which way to fall it. You didn't just cut it down. It took four days just to cut down a tree for a whale spear. You had to fall it toward the sun, just when the sun was coming up over the mountain. You treated it like a person coming home. You talked to it and you continued to talk to it even when you were using it to spear a whale. So things like this were part of it all. Every little piece of equipment was spoken to. You were old enough to go hunting when you finished the training.⁴

have lived in this bay for nearly 8,000 years. All that is left of the most ancient people are the remains of their stone tools. Archaeologists discovered that these people used two different technologies to make their tools. They used the microblade, a series of small blades set into a handle, and they also used leaf-shaped spearheads. Microblades were used mainly by the people of the north coast. The spearheads were only used on the south coast. But both types were found at Namu, suggesting that people living on the borders of two cultures were influenced by both.

Gatherings

Throughout the province, people gathered together at central locations to trade goods and ideas. Some gatherings were meetings of family groups who were related to each other; others brought together people from different nations. Gatherings were important socially and economically, and were usually festive and greatly anticipated throughout the year. Competitions were often held at these gatherings, including challenges of physical strength and races. Gambling was a major component. Lahal was the almost universal gambling game played. But the opportunity to exchange resources and objects and to share ideas and knowledge was most important. These interactions also gave young people the opportunity to meet each other and seek out future mates.

Often such gatherings were associated with food harvesting. For instance, different Okanagan groups gathered each year at a few key fishing sites such as Kettle Falls, Okanagan Falls, and Shuswap Falls. These gatherings could last throughout the salmon season, sometimes from June to October. As well as catching and drying the fish, people traded

and competed in games such as lahah and horse or foot racing.

Lahal

Lahal (slahal, bone game, stick game) is a game of chance played by many First Nations of British Columbia. Two bones are hidden behind the back or beneath a cloth. One is marked, the other is plain. The player brings his closed hands forward, a bone in each one. A player from the opposite side tries to guess which hand has the unmarked piece. Special sticks are used to keep score. A player who guesses wrong gives one of the sticks to the hider's side.

Teams face each other with the captain or guesser in the middle. The sticks are divided into two equal groups, half given to each team. Different people take turns being the hiders. The hiding side drums, sings, and tries to distract the guesser. In the past some people had individual gambling songs. There could also be a spiritual aspect to the game. In some cultures people believed their guardian spirit helped them win the game.



Today, some people still hold gatherings to share and build a sense of community. This is a gathering of Ulkatcho people in 2001.

Other gatherings had trade as their primary focus. Every year many different tribes journeyed long distances to Green Lake in Secwepemc territory, near where 70 Mile House is today. Here many Secwepemc

groups gathered, as did St'at'imc, Tsilhqot'in, and Okanagan. A similar event took place in Nlaka'pamux territory at Botanie Mountain. Both Green Lake and Botanie Creek are provincial parks today.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Chief Jimmy Stillas, Ulkatcho

In Tanya Lakes we'd get together with the people of Nazko, Kluskus, Ootsa Lake and Bella Coola for a few days. It was a time to be together to communicate and renew our friendships with each other. We'd catch and dry fish and play a few games. Mostly we played lahal. Though sometimes we had foot races, horse races or spear throwing contests. Sometimes we had to walk back home from Tanya Lakes after losing our horses in a gambling game to some Nazko

people. We had five different trails leading into Bella Coola. The first couple went down the Atnarko River. The word Atnarko comes from two words: Atna meaning Bella Coola people, and Koh, meaning valley. Once you hit the big timber, you respected the Bella Coola people. When you were in the jackpine country up top, you respected the Ulkatcho, Kluskus and Nazko people.⁵

The Potlatch

The potlatch integrates the spiritual, political, economic, and social dimensions of a community's life. It is a complex institution based on the idea of giving. In fact, the word potlatch comes from the Nuuchah-nulth word meaning "to give," which in turn was borrowed by the Chinook language. Each First Nation has its own word or words to describe its ceremonies. While different nations conduct potlatches in ways unique to their cultures, they have some common features.

A potlatch is always initiated for a specific purpose, usually to mark an essential milestone in the life of the family or clan, such as a boy's first kill, a marriage,

the completion of a canoe, or the raising of a totem pole. Depending on the purpose and the importance of the host and the guests, some potlatches included just the extended family while at others, one clan or kin group would invite all the others who shared the same winter village. The most impressive and costly potlatches were those where chiefs from neighbouring villages or nations were invited.

A potlatch is never an individual endeavour. Once a person has decided to hold a feast, he or she calls the kin groups, extended family, or clan which will assist. The host explains to the gathered relatives the purpose of the potlatch and asks for their agreement in going ahead with the event. Once they approve, planning and preparation begin. This may take several



Household and other goods are assembled in preparation for a potlatch in Alert Bay in approximately 1910. When a chief distributes gifts, he is publicly repaying his debts, while at the same time he is investing for the future. A chief who gives away resources can fully expect to receive the same value back with interest at another feast held in the future.

CASE STUDY

The Ulkatcho

The Ulkatcho region of the West Chilcotin is a place of marvellous diversity. The name means “fat of the land,” reflecting the variety of resources available in the different habitats found in the region. There are more different plants growing here than in most other regions of British Columbia. It is an ancient land. Some areas have been free from ice for 14,000 years, much longer than most parts of the province. Cultural diversity is significant here, too. The Ulkatcho lies at the borders of people from three different language groups, the Dakehl (or, as they are often still known, the Carrier), the Nuxalk, and the Tsilhqot’in. Today Ulkatcho territory is one of the remotest areas of the province. For centuries, however, it was the meeting place for many different First Nations. Major transportation routes called Grease Trails passed through, and it is home to one of two major sources of obsidian in the province.

The Ulkatcho people belong to the Dakelh (Carrier) language family, but their presence at the borders of the Nuxalk of the Bella Coola Valley and the Tsilhqot’in of the Chilcotin plateau has influenced them. Elements of the three different cultures have been incorporated into the Ulkatcho traditional lifestyle. Even the name Newchote’en, given to them by their Kluskus and Nazko neighbours, reflects this. It means “Carrier people mixed with Chilcotin.” Today community members have relatives in all three

nations and many of their customs blend ceremonies and ways of life from these nations as well.

The numerous river systems that flow through Ulkatcho territory create a network of travel corridors. Travel was a way of life for the Ulkatcho people. With a cold winter climate and short summer season, they needed to access a large area to find all the resources they required. They had to move frequently, so it was important to build and maintain good travel routes. As they moved, they came into contact with people from neighbouring cultures.

Each family had its own area where it hunted and harvested plants. The use of these territories was flexible, and they were shared with neighbouring families. At certain times of the year, individual families congregated, working cooperatively to harvest and process resources. One such location was Ulkatcho Village, on the shores of Gatcho Lake where people met in the winter. The village is near the headwaters of three rivers, the Blackwater running east, the Entiako going north, and tributaries of the Dean River to the south. Large groups of people worked together to hunt and process caribou.

The Ulkatcho shared territories with neighbouring tribes as well. For example, they had traditional salmon fishing sites within Nuxalk territory on the Bella Coola River. They made several trips a year to Bella Coola, a three-day walk from Ulkatcho Village along the

major grease trail. The Nuxalk, in turn, shared some sites within Ulkatcho territory, including soapberry grounds and salmon fishing spots. One important fishing place is called Salmon House Falls on the Dean River. Here Ulkatcho, Nuxalk, and Tsilhqot’in families gathered to smoke salmon.

Their first trip of the year to the coast, after the snow had melted from the trails, was to trade oolichan grease from trading centres at the mouths of the Bella Coola, Dean, and Kimsquit rivers. They exchanged grease for items such as buckskin, furs, obsidian, and caribou meat. On their return journey, people were laden with bentwood cedar boxes or tightly woven spruce root baskets containing the valuable oolichan oil or grease. They stopped at Ulkatcho Village, which was an important trading hub. Grease trails brought Dakelh from the north and the east, and Tsilhqot’in from the south. The Ulkatcho were the middlemen in the trading economy based on oolichan grease.

South of Ulkatcho Village is another feature that adds to the uniqueness of this territory and the complexity of the trading economy that operated here for thousand of years. Out of the rolling plateau land rise the Rainbow Moun-tains, and principal among them is Besbut’a (Anahim Peak). At the base of Besbut’a, the Ulkatcho excavated valuable obsidian. Blades made from Besbut’a obsidian have been found in Alberta, Washington, and south-central



British Columbia. As in every other interaction with the natural world, the people have a spiritual connection with the mountain. They show respect by introducing themselves when they approach, and give thanks for the use of this unique resource.

Some of the customs of the people of Ulkatcho illustrate the sharing of different cultures that was common for people living near borders. Many

gathering sites had a longhouse for holding potlatches. These were special feasting buildings, not used for living in. They were only used on special occasions. While winter villages on the coast were made up of many longhouses, here the people lived in smaller pit houses. The presence of potlatch houses in the Ulkatcho territory shows how ideas and customs were shared between the interior and coastal people.

■ Besbut'a (Anahim Peak) in the Rainbow Mountains south of Ulkatcho Village. In the Carrier language, Besbut'a means "Obsidian Hill."

weeks or months, or in the case of a memorial feast to a high-ranking chief, several years. The feast will draw upon the economic resources of the kin group, especially if the guests will include chiefs from other villages or nations. They pool the food and material goods which they have collected from their territories, or which they have earned in trade. (Today many family members contribute money as well as food.) The success of the potlatch and the esteem of the host and kin group will depend on the wealth that they are able to give away.

When the time of the potlatch is nearing, guests are formally invited. People are delegated to travel to the guests' homes, be they in the village or at a great distance. This is an important step with strict attention to protocol.

The form of the potlatch itself varies from place to place, of course, but usually a potlatch begins with welcoming ceremonies followed by a meal where food from the hosts' territories is shared with the guests. Following this, what might be termed the business side of the potlatch takes place. The hosts validate their inherited rights through dances, songs, and oral histories. Often names will be passed on or certain ceremonies related to the reason for the potlatch will be conducted. Speeches related to the purpose of the potlatch will be given in grand oratorial style by trained speakers. They will often tell what territories the different foods in the meal came from, and who provided them. Then the collected wealth of the kin group is given away to the guests in the form of material goods such as furs in the past and blankets today. Higher-ranking people receive more valuable gifts. The giving and receiving of gifts is a key event in the potlatch. Not only is the host group giving away its possessions, the guests are accepting them. By doing

so, they acknowledge the validity and correctness of the proceedings which they have witnessed. This is reaffirmed by concluding speeches made by the guests, who respond to the speeches, gifts, and food shared by the hosts.

There are many reasons why the potlatch is so crucial to the cultures which practice it. It can be a bank, life insurance, and a pension fund combined. Business is conducted in a very formal and open way and will be remembered by all who witness it.

The potlatch also serves a function in managing the resources of the kin group's territory by reinforcing its hereditary rights to use the various lands under its control. Stories and songs are performed about the group's connection with the land, and robes, masks, and dancing paraphernalia illustrate the stories and songs.

Potlatches also have a broader social purpose. They bring people together, strengthening the bond of unity between kin groups and their neighbours. They are times where food, humour, and deeply held cultural values and beliefs are shared, and the importance of this sharing is reinforced.

Conflict between Nations

First Nations people value their relationships with each other, but conflict among nations is inevitable. Wars were fought for preservation of traditional territories, to expand upon existing territories, and to acquire goods or slaves.

Every First Nation was prepared to defend itself with trained warriors and special battle gear. However, some groups were much more aggressive than others, and were greatly feared. The Haida were known to travel great distances down the coast in their large canoes to raid villages for plunder, revenge, and the capture of slaves. Some people argue that these raids were not truly warfare, as their motivation was obtaining wealth rather than domination. The southern Kwakwaka'wakw group, the Lekwiltok,

Protocol

The rules, formalities, etc. of any procedure or group; formality and etiquette observed on state occasions.

however, were definitely war-like, as they battled for territory with the Comox people, who originally inhabited central Vancouver Island from Salmon River to Cape Mudge. The Lekwiltok drove the Comox out of these territories, expanding southwards as far as Cape Mudge.

Before they went to battle, warriors often fasted and purified themselves, and while they were away, the women, children, and Elders supported their mission by keeping themselves pure, and in some societies, acting out a mock battle.

Wooden helmets and protective armour made of pleated elk skin, which was extremely resistant, were

worn by some people. Many groups built defensive sites as places of refuge during attack. These were sometimes erected on high banks along a river or ocean coast, on an island, or on a hilltop. Some were fortified with log walls and had defensive weapons such as rocks, spears, or logs which could be dropped on the enemy.

When peace was finally negotiated, in many nations, the one that lost the fewest people had to make reparation to the other nation. Upon their return home, warriors underwent long periods of preparation for peace. To be fully integrated into society again they had to be clear of the psychic energy required for war.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

First Nations groups used surplus resources to trade with other nations. Vast trading networks were established for thousands of years, utilizing trails that linked the coast with the Prairies and the sub-Arctic. Because oolichan grease was one of the most valuable resources carried on these trails, they were often referred to as grease trails. Through trade, people

exchanged not only goods, but also ideas, knowledge, and skills. The potlatch traditionally played a key role in resource distribution, as well as having broader social purposes. First Nations education was fundamentally about passing on values and teaching the skills for using the resources of the land.