GYETIM GAN: FACES IN THE FOREST

by

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Abstract

Something stirred in me the moment I saw my first Gyetim Gan (face carved in a tree). I learned that the aesthetic beauty and spiritual power of tree art is greatly enhanced by the forest context. That face in the forest is so anonymous and humble, so distant from gallery walls and so hidden from the view of the colonizer. Tree art is a mystery to most people, even though it has existed for centuries. Explorers, ethnographers, archaeologists, and forestry professionals have traversed a landscape where tree art was unimagined, and consequently it remained unseen. On the other hand, some First Nations Elders are keenly aware of tree art and its meaning. The theme of this thesis is our common journey across the First Nations landscape, stopping along the way to listen to local Elders discuss the tree carvings and paintings as markers of their history and culture. The journey has four stages: introduction and planning in Chapter One; having new eyes to interpret the intended meaning of tree art and the First Nations landscape in Chapter Two; travelling in Chapter Three; and reflecting on the journey around a campfire in Chapter Four. I conclude our journey at the campfire because it is a place of common experience for most cultures to tell stories, reflect on the journey, and ponder the future. I guide the journey from a First Nations perspective, and I provide complementary Western academic concepts to add depth and texture to the journey. I call upon adaawk (a Gitxsan term for oral history and stories) from the Gitxsan, Tsimshian and Carrier people to provide the cultural and spiritual context.

Campfire reflections at journeys’ end will examine questions such as: what are the purposes of tree art?; who is the audience?; why has tree art been so invisible to the colonizer?; how can tree art be protected?; and why were faces a common image carved in trees? I hope that readers will learn to appreciate tree art for its beauty and power and reflect on why the First Nations artists created these sacred markers.
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Research


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Writing

Antonia Mills, Jean Wilson, Jim McDonald and Charlene Levis.
Chapter One: The Long Way Around is Closer to Home

Hello, I would like to guide you, the reader, along the path of my learning journey. During the summer of 1995 I set out to learn about carvings and paintings created on living trees by First Nations people. I am mindful of a story told to me by Nick Prince, a Carrier writer and Elder as I embark on explaining what I learned.

Jimmy Burton and I went up north there, it was cold. We snowshoed all day, we wanted to get to this cabin. And we had to go around this big swamp about four or five miles long, in the pine valley it was swamp, all of it. There was a space in between and we crossed that, and the cabin is way down that end you know. Geez, I wonder if we can just go across there you know. There’s a place where there was a hole there [in the ice], it was melted you know. We go far enough around, he was doing all right ahead of me you know. I was walking about four feet from his trail. God dammed! I went down [through the ice]. Geez, son-of-a-bitch anyway. I was packing heavy too you know. He came, I said ‘Don’t get too close’. I said ‘Just go and get a pole’. It was about only a hundred yards from the bush. In the meantime I took my snowshoes off, I had to reach down and that stuff was warm. I untied my snowshoes, and leave that there. He got me out. And we went in the bush and made a shelter, and camp there all night. I changed my clothes, and it stink. ‘Well’ he says ‘we learned a lesson, we got to listen to the old people’ [Nick laughs]. Yeah, they used to say ‘the long way around is closer to home.’ That’s a saying of the old people, they used to say that you know. Yeah, there is a lot of things that we learn. Everyday was a learning process. We didn’t just go out there to trap, we went out there to learn. They were always teaching (Nick Prince, personal communication, November 6, 1995).

Nick said he had learned an important lesson that day when he took a short cut across the swamp and fell through the ice. The Elders taught him in his youth that “the long way around is closer to home.” 1 Conscious of this advice, I avoid short cuts when describing and assigning possible meaning to tree carvings and paintings encountered on our journey. My role as your guide is to avoid presenting meaning without knowing. In

1 “We would have gotten here sooner,” said the Lone Ranger, ‘but Coyote knew a short cut’” (King, 1994, 382).
other words, I must choose a path for our journey that avoids the swamp's thin ice, or else I may muddy the waters of First Nations history. Many Elders have said they would “only tell me what they knew,” nothing more. They were not comfortable in guessing or telling me second hand knowledge. The Elders respect their history. The Elders were also reluctant to discuss other cultures, out of respect for the different lived experiences of their neighbours. I will respect this wisdom by identifying the cultural perspective of people who have shared their knowledge with me, because their perspective may be quite different in some cases from other cultures.

My journey to learn about tree carvings and paintings was inspired by two events that occurred in 1994. My first inspiration occurred in the summer of 1994 while reading a paper by George F. MacDonald (1993, 78). He discussed Gitxsan territories, significant bridges, and main trading trails. He noted, “Trails and property boundaries were marked with clan carvings on trees...” I had never heard of carvings on trees before that moment. It was a natural curiosity for me since I am a professional forester and I am a Gitxsan artist. Later on that fall I asked my uncle, Walter Harris (Chief Geel), if he had heard of tree carvings. Walter is a gifted master carver. He told me that a forestry crew found a blazed tree on his territory a few years ago with a human form painted on the blaze. We walked over to his studio workshop and he showed me the painting that had been cut out of the tree (see Figure 1.1). I was fascinated. I had heard of petroglyphs and pictographs on rocks, but I had never heard of tree carvings and paintings. Why hadn’t I heard of tree carvings? This question was as equally intriguing as the tree images themselves. I decided at that moment to study tree carvings for my master’s thesis.

I am influenced by the Elders’ advice to avoid short cuts in developing an understanding of tree art and to respect their history. Additionally, my first discovery of a carved face in the forest (Figure 1.2) stirred a sense of responsibility in me because I felt a
strong spiritual power guiding me. The glance and gesture sculpted on the old hemlock
tree, created a face that stared at me down the old Gitxsan trail, from another era. The
glance stopped me dead in my tracks. I had never felt this power before, and there was no
doubt in my mind that I was looking at a living spirit. I felt excited by the opportunity to
learn more, and simultaneously, I felt the burden of responsibility associated with this
encounter. For I knew I must treat this gift with respect, especially because only a few tree
carvings and paintings have escaped the effects of industrial development. Some of these
old and wondrous creations still lay hidden in inaccessible pockets of the landscape.
Consequently, there is a paucity of knowledge regarding carvings and paintings on trees.
Only a few Elders can now recall the meaning and history of tree art. Investigation into the
history, meaning and significance of tree art will ensure that First Nations people can pass
on this important history about their land and art to the next generation.

My ensuing journey to find and learn about tree carvings and paintings was rich
with spiritual and cultural experiences. Rather than presenting only the ethnographic data
from my research, I have decided to guide you, as I retrace the path of my journey because
the journey itself was as important as the results. The journey has four stages:
introduction and planning in Chapter One; having new eyes to interpret the intended
meaning of tree art and the First Nations landscape in Chapter Two; travelling in Chapter
Three; and reflecting on the journey around a campfire in Chapter Four. I tell my story
from a First Nations perspective, and I provide complementary Western academic concepts
to add depth and texture to the journey. I made this decision based on a discussion I had
with Nick Prince. I asked Nick to explain how he chose a style when he wrote his
manuscript on the history of Carrier people. He said:

There is always a story, it is the Indian way of telling things. They don’t just say
‘Oh, I met so-and-so over there,’ they tell a story. It sticks with you that way.

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2 "Alberta’s father was a great believer in dreams... ‘It’s all forest right up until you get to the mountains...’
‘What do you do, Dad?’
‘Why, hell, you walk. That’s half the doing, the walking!’" (King, 1994, 255).

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However, I do not expect you to have the same experience through the story, but rather to share a sense of the journey. I also use oral history stories throughout the journey to reinforce First Nations perspectives.

My hope is to achieve a balanced writing style similar to those of Hugh Brody and Greg Sarris which appeals to the curious and contributes to reaffirming First Nations history and world views. Hugh Brody (1988, xxiii) describes his book *Maps and Dreams* as follows:

> It is a book of anecdotes as well as a research report, its structure being the result of an attempt to meet two different needs. The problem is one of audience; or an awkward tension between a wish to maintain a sense of universal concern without losing a feeling for a particular place. For writings that grow out of resistance to colonialism, this problem can be overwhelming. There is a need for scientific detail, evidence that must stand the test of scrutiny...

Greg Sarris (1994, 3) reflected in his book *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, "I kept wondering how I was going to write about Mabel's life." Mabel's advice to him after he told her of his quandary was as follows (Sarris, 1994, 5):

> 'I don't know about no theme.'
> I squirmed in my seat. Her hands didn't move. 'A theme is a point that connects all the dots, ties up all the stories...'
> 'That's funny. Tying up all the stories. Why somebody want to do that?'
> 'When you write a book there has to be a story or idea, a theme...'
> 'Well, theme I don't know anything about. That's somebody else's rule. Just do the best way you know how. What you know from me.'

The theme of this thesis is our common journey across the First Nations landscape, stopping along the way to listen to local Elders discuss the tree carvings and paintings as markers of their history and culture. I define the First Nations landscape as the physical and spiritual context of tree art: the physical and spiritual are at times one and at others are worlds apart. We will be traveling along old trading and trapping trails which wind through old growth forests. The destination of this journey is a place of shared experience and knowledge regarding tree carvings and paintings.
As your guide, I choose to start the journey from the same point Edward Said (1978, 25) started his book, Orientalism. He emphasized how important it was for him to provide the reader with a cultural inventory of himself, as the “Oriental” author of Orientalism, before he entered into his critical elaboration of how Western historical traditions portrayed the “Orient.” He wanted to clearly establish his cultural perspective for the reader, and thus the reader could interpret Said’s writing mindful of his perspective. Said’s critique made an impression upon my own mixture of academic and First Nations philosophy. Therefore, I would like to provide you with a cultural inventory of myself before I discuss my perspective or how I choose to interpret and communicate my study of First Nations tree art.

I am a graduate student in First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia, and a professional forester. I am a status Indian with the Gitannmax band in Hazelton, BC, and I sit as a guest of the Fireweed clan, Killer Whale House, at feasts. I am married and have a young son. I was born in 1961 in Smithers, BC. My father is Gitxsan and Scottish, and my mother is of Eastern European descent. I have two younger sisters. I spent my childhood years growing up in small communities in British Columbia like Telkwa, Topley, Bella Coola, Lowerpost and Summit Lake. I spent many hours playing in the local bush, berry picking, camping, fishing and hunting. My parents taught me to respect and enjoy nature because they grew up with nature in very small villages in northern British Columbia.

I began exploring my native heritage through art in 1986. I am a self taught artist; I like to express myself through painting, pen and ink, and photography. I have produced nine limited edition prints, and original works. I firmly believe that the spirit of my art has always been with me, and that it comes from my First Nations heritage. My spirit is attached to Earth Mother and I draw great inspiration from her. For example, I always take
the time to appreciate the plants, animals, light patterns, water movements, and to listen to the Earth’s messages when I am hiking. I also believe that First Nations culture is strong and it has survived despite the oppressive effects of colonialism. On the other hand, I do not believe that the culture can take the form it had prior to the influences of the European cultures. I have found a way to feel comfortable in the Western culture and in the Gitxsan culture.

I refer to my perspective as “ego-edgism” which I define as “a personal perspective or world view, in which ones’ ego is equal, but different among others.” Ego-edgism describes a conceptual model I developed to ensure that I present a balance between First Nations and academic ways of knowing. My ego is not central to this thesis: my ego is on the edge as I guide the reader to listen to Elders as local experts share their knowledge of tree art. Ego-edgism can be visualized by thinking of a group of people from First Nations and non First Nations cultures sitting around the edge of a circle sharing knowledge as respected equals. As the guide I have invited them to a forum for discussion and my ego can only influence the discussion to the degree that any other can. As we look at tree art, for example, from a variety of First Nations perspectives, I encourage you to explore your own views, and then to support others’ perspectives as being equally valid. Ego-edgism is not focused on deconstructing the centric qualities of Western Academia, but rather it is a forum for sharing knowledge - a two way exchange.

As anthropology matured, its modern day critics such as the postmodern author Edward Said (1978, 160) warned Western anthropologists and historians against studying for the sole benefit of European society.

...in a one-way exchange of knowledge: as they spoke and behaved, he observed and wrote down. His power was to have existed amongst them as a native speaker, as it were, and also as a secret writer. And what he wrote was intended as useful knowledge, not for them, but for Europe and its various disseminative institutions.
Said's two-way exchange of the philosophy of knowledge greatly influenced how I approached my study of tree art.

The Western scientific method has taught me to reduce the realm of possible truths to a probable truth, to hypothesize, analyze and conclude. Valdes (1992) suggests that multiple truths can exist simultaneously, which is a base precept of postmodern thought and of my ego-edgism perspective. I find this suggestion useful in attempting to present a First Nations perspective, because I believe there are many perspectives. In this early stage of developing knowledge about tree art I want to expand, rather than reduce, the realm of possible meanings because it will reflect the richness of First Nations culture. In the end, I know it will be my people who will judge whether my study is a shared endeavour for the benefit of First Nations and non-First Nations people.

I want to present a truthful perspective in respect for First Nations history and culture. Valdes (1992, 17) describes truth, from a postmodern perspective, as “statements that purport to be true, that is, claim to stand independent of the maker of the statement.” He emphasizes that truth is judged based on:

...our concept of how things are in the world as a valid representation; more often than not, most of us suspend judgment or give the maker the benefit of the doubt until enough evidence has been gathered to move us to make a judgment (Valdes, 1992, 17).

A particular First Nation will have a defined world view which will have both significant and minor differences as compared to other First Nations and non-First Nations cultures. These differences are fundamental to the different perceptions of truth. I have made every effort to avoid “universalisms” which could minimize cultural differences by linking specific beliefs, stories, or Elders with the First Nation of origin.

3 'I got back as soon as I could,' says Coyote. 'I was busy being a hero.' 'Thats unlikely,' I says.
I have learned that my own perspective will greatly influence the journey, and I also realize that there is no singular First Nations perspective. I have enlisted the help of Elders from many First Nations cultures through interviews and their stories recorded by ethnographers. My interviews with Elders about tree art are shared as commentaries along the journey. The recorded stories told by Elders generations ago are an important source of teachings. The Gitxsan word for oral history is “adaawk.” Many oral histories, or stories, were recorded by people such as Marius Barbeau (1973), Franz Boas (1902, 1955, 1970), William Benyon (1959), and James Teit (1906, 1909, 1956, 1973). I rely on recorded oral history as a valuable information source because the stories reflect the spiritual beliefs and values of Elders who lived in an earlier era. My rationale for presenting the stories is based on Claude Levi-Strauss' (1995, 84) suggestion that there is a link between mythology and ritual which “must be sought at a deeper level.” I think that there is a link between oral history and understanding the intended viewing context of tree art, as a manifestation of ritual. However, I am not following Levi-Strauss’ form of structuralism per se. I am seeking to discern the many First Nations interpretations of the meaning of tree art rather than trying to uncover unconscious structural relationships.

Paula Gunn Allen (1992, 241) compares “tribal literature” to a forest “in which all elements coexist, where each is integral to the being of others.” I interpret her meaning, from an ego-edgism perspective, to be that all beings in the story are equal, all have spirits, and none are purely heroic or evil. She explains that tribal stories have numerous points and elements that may come in and out of focus as your environment changes. Paula Gunn Allen warns the reader of tribal literature and oral histories to be aware that “as the old tales are translated and rendered in English, the Western notion of proper fictional form takes over the tribal narrative.” She says the imposition of “western tastes in story crafting”

‘No, no,’ says Coyote. ‘It's the truth.'
results in “a western story with Indian characters.” Marius Barbeau’s great unsung Canadian classic *The Downfall of Temlaham* is a good example of a Shakespearean-like presentation of his carefully researched and translated oral histories. This book accurately presents Gitxsan history and culture wrapped in a flamboyant Western style. Barbeau (1973, 247-253) lists the many Gitxsan Elders who told him stories in the period 1920-24. He translated and shaped these stories into his book. Unfortunately, at times, the style masks important elements of Gitxsan culture. I take heed of Paula Gunn Allen’s warning by presenting many versions of a particular story, and by including as much of the story as possible. My objective is to provide the reader with enough of a sense of the story to make her/his own judgments about the impact of the translation.

An oral history is analogous to a tree in the forest. The roots and branches of each tree intertwine in a forest of greater cultural meaning. I shall endeavour to present a forest of meaning derived from a set of related individual stories, rather than isolating stories from each other. I remind myself of the interrelated nature of stories by envisioning Elders telling a story each night to children, and patiently offering teachings by relating them to the previous night’s story. Often I have heard Elders recount a story told to them by their Elders, and they will end by saying something like “For years I think about what they says, and now it makes sense. They know what they were talkin about.” Here lies the enormous challenge of interpreting oral history, because there are no fast-food-like or take-out packages of knowledge. The complexity of oral history forbids its quick interpretation. Oral history presented in this thesis is as simple as my respect for its

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4 An interesting aside for me is that the book is catalogued as a work of fiction. I lean towards labelling this work as non-fiction.
5 I will often footnote information that I think may become very relevant to the understanding of tree art. First Nations epistemology is so highly integrated that it becomes difficult to draw clear boundaries around packages of knowledge.
6 “And here at this restaurant that you own,” she said, raising her voice a notch, “you serve dog?”
complexity will allow; furthermore, it is absolutely necessary to include it if I want to present a sense of the spiritual viewing context. I face a dilemma when presenting oral history since it is a highly interconnected art form, and it cannot be presented as snippets, or modern sound bites. The stories are meant to be understood as a whole. Therefore, I present one story and then allude to stories with a similar theme.

First Nations oral tradition is a verbal art form where symbols are created from breath, speech, and memory (Ruoff, 1990, 6-7). Verbal art is complementary and connected to visual art because visual art can act as a reminder or symbol for stories. For example, the recorded Iroquois oral history about tree spirits is a verbal art form which creates the context for visual art forms such as the Iroquois false face masks. The Navajo sacred chants or “Ways” are a combination of chants, sand paintings, and the ceremonial performance (Hausman, 1993, 15-16). The sand paintings are visual expressions of the healing chant. The verbal, visual and performance arts are one. The Elders' stories and commentary along our journey complement and enhance the visual experience of viewing tree art.

We will approach the journey from a First Nations perspective because the artists' world view and spiritual beliefs affect how and why they create tree art. For instance, First Nations cultures emphasize that all beings: animals, fish, insects, rocks and trees are physical and spiritual beings connected to Earth Mother. Thus I remind the reader of my emphasis on ego-edgism and preparing to accept, and get a sense of, different First Nations perspectives. I present three preparatory discussions in Chapter Two which will help the reader prepare to understand First Nations perspectives on tree art and the sacred tree. First, a discussion of the study and interpretation of art and First Nations art in general in this postmodern age will help us to understand the meaning of tree art. Second, I provide

'That's correct...It's a treaty right,' Latisha explained. 'There's nothing wrong with it. It's one of our
background literature research on tree carvings and paintings which calls attention to the impoverished state of knowledge of tree art. There has been no in-depth research on tree carvings and paintings on living trees and there are only a few scattered accounts of these trees by ethnographers such as James Teit. In addition, I will introduce related examples of First Nations art forms which are manifestations of spiritual beliefs regarding the sacred tree. I summarize how Iroquois, Dakota and Nootkan masks and carvings originated from beliefs in tree spirits. The third and final preparatory concept involves an examination of the important role of the sacred tree in First Nations spirituality, and how it relates to tree art since the sacred tree is the artistic medium for tree art. The journey and Nick's lesson motivated me to make careful preparations. Rather than striking out on a short cut to look at the tree carvings and paintings, we will be carefully preparing ourselves from a conceptual and spiritual point of view. In essence, by carefully preparing for our journey we will be taking "the long way around." I believe the preparations are necessary for undertaking the journey to explore First Nations tree art.

With preparations complete, in Chapter Three I will guide you to a number of tree carving sites. We will make about a dozen stops in British Columbia and the Yukon, and one in Manitoba. We will spend most of the time around Hazelton, BC. Other stops will

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7 I footnote examples of the Australian Aboriginal art forms in this and following sections because there are important spiritual similarities to tree art. Aboriginals paint masterful mosaics of their physical and spiritual landscapes (Dreamings) on the sand, which is a poignant medium to express their attachment to the land. Similarly trees are an equivalent medium of expressing attachment to the land.
include, Chilliwack, Phillips River which is north of Powell River, sites near Fraser Lake, Whitehorse, and Haines Junction in the Yukon. At each site I discuss how I found the tree, my first impressions, some important characteristics of the art form, and then with the help of some Elders, I discuss some possible meanings. At each stop I conclude with a discussion regarding the “second journey of meaning” which evolved from the artist’s intended meaning. The tree art takes on a second meaning as the intended viewing context is transformed by the affects of colonialism and industrial development. We will meet George at the first stop on the journey. He will help us understand the second journey of meaning, and he will also put a mirror up to reflect our perspectives.

At the end of the journey please join me in Chapter Four around the campfire while I tell of a Tsimshian story which will help us focus our reflections on the journey. As your guide, I will also reflect on the commentary given by the Elders, discuss the First Nations landscape, and explain the protection paradox. Finally, I will reflect on tree art from an artist’s perspective. It is here, at the discussion around the campfire, where I hope that you can reflect on your experiences of the journey. I conclude our journey at the campfire because it is a place of common experience for most cultures to tell stories, reflect on the journey, and ponder the future.

**Terminology and Definitions**

Before we begin the preparations I will standardize my use of tree art terminology. My focus is on carvings, etchings, paintings, drawings or writings done on the wood or bark of living trees by First Nations people. I use the phrase “tree art” to describe this practice as a whole and “tree carving” to describe a specific practice of incising. The term *arbriograph* (Eldridge, 1991,7) has been used to describe a painting on a tree, and *dendroglyph* (MacDonald, 1993, 78) has been used to describe a carving on a tree. I standardize the terminology as follows:

arbriograph: a drawing or painting on the exposed wood of a tree.
arboroglyph: a carved image on the bark or exposed wood of a tree.
arboroscript: written or printed text on the bark or exposed wood of a tree.

The Gitxsan refer to carvings of a human-like face in trees as “Gyetim Gan” which means “person in the tree or wood.” I occasionally use the Gitxsan term when I talk about arboroglyphs which are human-like faces.

I prefer the terminology “crest pole” instead of “totem pole” because First Nations people do not “pray” to a crest pole as a totemic god. The crest pole is created from a tree and the village is the intended viewing context. The intended viewing context of tree art is the forest. Consequently, crest poles are familiar, easy to find, and well studied; tree art is unfamiliar, hard to find and scarcely studied.

I do not discuss rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs on our journey, except for one story, relevant to a possible meaning of tree art, about a pictograph commissioned by a Tsimshian chief named Legaix in the 19th century. The literature is voluminous regarding painting, writing and incising on rock, and almost non-existent for the practice on trees. Battiste (1985, 9-10) provides a summary of Algonquian rock art which will serve as useful background information for our journey to learn about tree art.

For practical functions, Algonquian Indians used petroglyphs, pictographs, and notched sticks to communicate information and messages to friends and relatives of one’s whereabouts or of routes and directions taken or to be taken, to relate stories of the hunt, of battle or of individuals or heroes of ancient times, to enlist warriors into battle, or to record historical events ... Algonquian Indians were known to have used pictographs and petroglyphs for communicating with the spirit world or for conveying individual visions and experiences with the spirit world. In effect, the Native texts represented a Native theory of knowledge, predicated on the existence of spirits, power, or medicine. Plants, animals, humans, and spirits of the universe communicated in the spirit world as one. Thus many Micmac petroglyphs illustrate the journeys of Micmacs to the world beyond.

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8 However some unique types of rock art, such as the images inscribed on a rock by scraping away the lichen which are called lichenographics still need to be studied (MacDonald, 1995, personal communication, March 27, 1995).
Communication with the spirit world and its relation to the trees will be an important theme for our journey.
Chapter Two: Preparing For The Journey

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes” (Marcel Proust in Bartlett (1968, 907)).

Tree art is a mystery to most people, even though it has existed for centuries. Explorers, ethnographers, archaeologists, and forestry professionals have traversed a landscape where tree art was unimagined, and consequently it remained unseen. On the other hand, some First Nations Elders are keenly aware of tree art and its meaning. To see the unseen one must have “new eyes.” Hyemeyohsts Storm (1972, 78-80) tells a Plains Indian story of how Jumping Mouse gave one of his tiny eyes to the ailing Buffalo. The Buffalo recovered because of Jumping Mouse’s gift, and then Buffalo became a great gift for the Plains people. Hawk heard this story and he asked the chief why the mouse gave away one of his eyes, and the chief responded: “This Mouse, must give up one of his Mouse ways of seeing things in order that he may grow” (Storm, 1972, 80). As your guide, I encourage you to see in new ways and grow from this journey as I did. I hope to help you see with new eyes by introducing the artistic, historical, and cultural viewing context for tree art, and to help prepare your spirit by introducing First Nations spirituality. I place great importance on the preparations for this journey because it allows me to focus light on the layers of the colorful spectrum of meaning to be imparted by the Elders. I invite you to join me in careful preparation by mapping out a route “the long way around” because, as I discovered, the unprepared observer will be oblivious to the journey’s richness in visual experience and meaning.

The following three preparatory discussions will help the reader prepare for the upcoming journey, and to “have visions of the spirit worlds” and “grasp the dictates of unseen wisdom” (Barbeau, 1928, 198). The first preparation involves an examination of Western postmodern and First Nations perspectives on First Nations art. The second
preparation involves a review of the limited academic knowledge of tree art, and a look at how beliefs in tree spirits can be manifested in First Nations art. The third and most important preparation will help you to gain an appreciation for the First Nations perspective on lessons taught in oral history about the sacred qualities of trees and the forest. The adaawk (oral history) is an important container of First Nations epistemology. It is used to pass on knowledge of how the sacred and secular worlds exist and coexist.

These preparations helped me to see with new eyes. They provide a cultural stance to view tree art from, which was difficult for the early European explorers and researchers of First Nations life to appreciate. The visual image is a poignant quality of tree art, but the meaning of the image is equally important and it is deeply rooted in First Nations philosophy, which was unclear or unknown to most Europeans. The preparation process creates an understanding of the intended viewing context by preparing you for a visual experience whereby meaning is derived from your cultural stance. Remember that as you gaze upon the faces in the forest, the visual stimulation will trigger meaning based on your cultural stance or gaze as the observer.

**Preparation One: A Discussion on Interpreting First Nations Art**

I have chosen to treat tree paintings and carvings as an art form. Doreen Jensen, a Gitxsan artist and cultural leader, says “Art can be a universal language which helps us bridge the gaps between our different cultures. But attitudes towards Art reveal racism” (Jensen, 1992, 18). The Western and First Nations perspectives on art are different. As Doreen explains:

When the Europeans arrived, they found aboriginal Artists creating beauty, culture, and historical memory. Art built bridges between human life and the natural world. Art mediated between material and spiritual concerns. Art stimulated our individuality, making us alert and alive. It affirmed our cultural identities (Jensen, 1992, 17-18).
Art is thought to have been first created about thirty thousand years ago in the limestone caves of what is now France and Spain. In the beginning there was a strong connection between art and spiritual practice: “By combining the mystery of prayer with the miracle of graphic depiction man came to terms with his environment” (Bowers, 1987, 426). Antonia Mills (personal communication, August 8, 1996) suggests that “The dialogue was not between the artist’s creation and a secular audience but between the object and the spirit world and its human and animal viewers. ‘Art’ and music had their goals to connect the human and the spirit worlds in a sacred manner.” Although Bowers (1987, 430) goes on to say that the specific purpose of connecting the sacred and the human through art has dissipated over the centuries, especially in Western society. Doreen Jensen confirms that this sacred connection is still strong in Gitxsan art.

Until quite recently, First Nations art has been viewed as “primitive art” rather than “high art” by anthropologists and art-historians. Authors such as Larry Shiner (1994), Marianna Torgovnick (1989), Joan Vastokas (1986 & 1992), and H. Gene Blocker (1991) have all contributed to deconstructing the latent evolutionist view that First Nations art is “primitive.” Blocker’s (1991, 88) discussion follows very similar lines of thought:

But the very term ‘primitive art’ indicates the problem involved in any cross-cultural study -- that is, the problem of using ‘our’ concepts to study ‘their’ culture. It is a Western cultural perspective to suppose there is an evolution of cultures from ‘primitive’ to ‘advanced,’ and the concept of ‘art’ in the sense of ‘fine art’ is equally a Western designation and concept.

The meaning of First Nations art is deep rather than primitive.

**Postmodern and First Nations Artistic Perspectives on First Nations Art**

Art is a wonderfully amorphous word, a word that defies universal definition by the most able art historians, philosophers, critics, collectors, and theorists of aesthetics. The Gitxsan people, my people, do not have a word in their language for art. Doreen Jensen elaborates on the absence by saying “This is not because we are devoid of Art, but because
Art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life, we are replete with it” (Jensen, 1992, 17). Gitxsan artists, like First Nations people throughout the world, produce powerful, spiritual and aesthetically beautiful art. I am not going to define “art” because as an artist I enjoy the freedom resulting from its amorphous nature. This ambiguity stimulates creative discourse. But most importantly, artists try to push the boundaries of culture by redefining art; consequently, artists avoid being constricted by an imposed social construct. Art has the ability to transform itself into new meaning and shape, just when it seems to be defined. Bill Holm (1975, 108) describes the interpretation of Northwest Coast art as “the most dangerous game.” He warns that “Early anthropologists tried and tried to get interpretations from the artists themselves, but got widely differing interpretations from everybody. That’s all right.” Yes, I believe that a variety of interpretations of the meaning are all right. Let us look at postmodern views of art, and then at First Nations uses of trees in what others call art, before viewing the paucity of written records of tree art.

The influential French postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault (1994, 10) believes the meaning of a visual image can only emerge from the “grey” ambiguity of anonymous language, rather than from the false clarity of a taxonomic description. Foucault demonstrates the tension between language and the image in his description of a painting of a painter painting a painting of himself painting the painting. The painter is Velazquez, and the painting is Las Meninas. If one were to read Foucault’s discussion (Foucault, 1994, 5-16) on the painting of a painter at work, without the benefit of seeing the painting, his words would only seem to spiral into an infinite abyss of confusion. On the other hand, the conjunction of his ambiguous discussion with observation of the painting releases an illumination upon the painting and upon Foucault’s text. After all, the visual experience is colorful and aesthetically powerful.
Our journey is a combination of the grey ambiguity of text describing tree art and the rich colorful visual experience created by the photographs which will help you see the First Nations intended meaning with new eyes, if you are aware of your cultural stance or gaze. Foucault shows that the perception of truth is relative to one’s stance and position as an observer, and ultimately this gaze creates the discourse (Mills, personal communication, February 6, 1996). Antonia Mills (personal communication, August 8, 1996) summarizes by saying the gaze affects the interpretation of art “What it communicates depends not only on its own innate qualities, but also on the interaction with the viewer.” From an ego-edgism perspective, an observer from one culture would make an effort to understand and respect the gaze of an observer from another culture and vice versa.

Doreen Jensen eloquently reinforces this point below.

If we pay attention, First Nations Art will remind us of this basic rule for being a human being: When I diminish others’ “belongingness” in the universe, my own “belongingness” becomes uncertain (Jensen, 1992, 20).

Predominantly, Western academics write First Nations discourse while gazing at the "other"; hopefully, I hope my ego-edgism perspective on tree art breaks from this tradition. My desire to understand tree art has challenged me to know myself and my gaze, and to try to understand the gaze of others. I want to present First Nations perspectives of tree carvings and paintings to the larger public, who for me is the “other.”

During the journey I avoid classifying tree art into categories of meaning by assigning names based on a particular form, style or design because “it is in vain that we say what we see; what we never see resides in what we say…” (Foucault, 1994, 9). Foucault describes the relationship between the visual image and language as infinite. I see greater value in promoting a discourse on tree art rather than attempting to satiate the curious with concrete answers. Because, in the end, there is only one person who can

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9 Said defines discourse as a body of text which creates an academic tradition. Said (1978, 94) describes the power and influence of text, or “the bookish tradition”, in society as follows:

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attach complete meaning to the art -- the artist. Elders have warned me about creating meaning without knowing. They would not want me to create meaning for the sake of order when it may not exist. Foucault (1994, 251) describes the appearance of visible order as the “superficial glitter above the abyss.” Foucault suggests that neither words nor the visible image can be reduced to the other’s terms.

It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate...But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always overmeticulous and repetitive because too broad, that painting may, little by little, release its illuminations (Foucault, 1994, 9-10).

The French postmodern sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would point out that there is a tension between the image and the lived experience of seeing the faces in the forest, in addition to the tension Foucault describes between the image and text. For instance, there is a difference between observing *Las Meninas* being painted, and reading Foucault’s text about the completed painting. The reader’s experience during this journey of words would be quite different from their experience observing tree art within the context of a forest, or watching the artist carve the face in a tree centuries ago or today. Bourdieu (1977, 3) emphasizes the phenomenological experience, or lived experience, as a means to “make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world.” Interestingly, Bourdieu (1977, 1-2) turns to art early in his explanation of the limits of objective observations, by quoting Husserl.

To treat a work of plastic art as a discourse intended to be interpreted, decoded, by reference to a transcendent code analogous to Saussurian “langue” is to forget that artistic production is always...pure practice without theory...and it is also to forget that the work of art always contains something ineffable, not by excess, as hagiography would have it, but by default, something which communicates, so to speak, from body to body, i.e. on the hither side of words or concepts, and which pleases (or displeases) without concepts.

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*texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse.*
Joan Vastokas (1992, 17) views the artist as a performer and she describes art-making as follows:

The artist is a performer. Art-making is thus a process of performance, an engagement among self, product, and socio-environmental setting in all its dimensions. Art in any culture is not an artifact. Above all, art is not like language, not a 'text.'

Vastokas builds upon the work of the American philosopher John Dewey when she investigates the concept of art being an aesthetic experience “rooted in the sensate human body and its interactions with the natural and social environment.” Art is a “lived experience.” Vastokas (1992, 33) says “the very experience of a visual art work is in itself ‘performance’: the art work and the observer engage in an active dialogue, even, a dance.”

In Chapter Three I present a variety of First Nations perspectives from the Gitxsan, Tsimshian and Dene groups such as the Carrier, by citing first and second hand knowledge provided by Elders through interviews and recorded stories. I also weave my own perspective throughout as a First Nations artist, forester, student, and British Columbian. I emphasize the First Nations perspective on this journey because of its impoverished representation in Western discourse and because the art is created by First Nations peoples largely, for First Nations audiences. However Western postmodernism is used to assist in my interpretation because it values the ambiguity and complexity of the meaning of art. I also draw upon linguistic concepts to present tree art as a communication system in the following section.

Interpreting First Nations Art as a Visual Communication System

A common assumption about First Nations cultures is that knowledge is only passed on through oral traditions. Non-native researchers and First Nations peoples voice frustration because “there is no written record.” However, there are some examples of recorded portions of oral stories. For instance, Adams (1986, 1) contends the Gitxsan
crest pole "is a form of writing system based on a ritual language," and "every pole tells a story." A figure on the pole may represent the story of the acquisition of a *nox nox* crest, a clan crest or house crest. The placement of the pole figure is just as important as the selection of the form, style and design. Adams (1986, 10) calls the integrated system of crests and associated stories a language that represents the "magical geography." I refer to the magical geography as the First Nations landscape. The Ojibway, as another example, recorded portions of their Grand Medicine rituals as pictographic symbols on birch bark scrolls (Ruoff, 1990, 11).

The lingering notion that First Nations art is "primitive" has, perhaps, forestalled the perception of First Nations art as a communication system. For example, Garrick Mallery made a significant contribution by collecting and describing pictographs and petroglyphs found throughout the Americas in his two volumes entitled *Picture Writing of the American Indians* (1972). However, he assumed that American Indians, specifically the Maya, had only approached the use of "an alphabet or syllabary," and they "had proceeded no further." He exclaims that only "Topers of the mysterious may delight in such dazing infusions of perverted fancy, but they are repulsive to the sober student" (Mallery, 1972, 773). Coe (1993, 280) has recently disproven Mallery's diatribe by describing the Maya writing system as "a mix of logograms and syllabic signs; with the latter, they could and often did write words purely phonetically." Mallery's brash statement stands as a warning to researchers to avoid their ethnocentric assumptions about First Nations art. One should assume that art *may* be a visual communication system like a writing system. Even though further inquiry may disprove this hypothesis, at least it should be considered to be within the realm of potential possibilities. For instance a good example of Carrier tree art which functions as a visual communication system (reported by Father A.G. Morice) is discussed in the upcoming section which reviews ethnographic records regarding tree art.
Interpreting First Nations art in terms of a visual communication system can be a dubious process without an appropriate theoretical framework or appropriate methodology. Authors such as Boone (1994), Coe (1993), Morphy (1991) and Layton (1991) all seem to be using Saussurian semiotics and the notion of semasiographics as a basis for interpreting picture or visual writing systems. The purpose of the following discussion is to provide an overview of how these authors interpret the use of signs and particularly semasiographic signs rather than to give an in-depth discussion of the theories.

Morphy (1991, 143-144) provides the most useful description of Saussurian semiotics, and its application to the study of meaning in Aboriginal art.

The central idea behind the Saussurian sign is that it consists of two components, the signifier and the signified, each of which has an independent existence in its respective system of similarity and difference. The sign is the coming together of the elements from these two systems of difference; it is not the representation of an object that exists in the world outside. From a Saussurian perspective, the object comes into being through its encoding in a sign system and can then be used in communication by others who know the code. There is, of course, no limit to the number of codes that an object may be encoded in, but in each case it involves a conjunction between two different systems of similarity and difference. The importance of this Saussurian perspective to the anthropology of art is twofold. The first is that it does not give priority to verbal language over other systems of communication, but allows other systems an equally independent role in the encoding and transmission of objects and ideas. Second, it allows for the fact that different sign systems, by encoding things in different ways, may encode different things (or the same thing with different values) and may have different communicative potentials. The search for a medium to communicate a message, for a new conjunction of a set of signifiers with a set of signified, lies at the heart of much artistic and technological creativity -- the discovery of ways to say what had previously been unsayable.

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10 Morphy's (1991) analysis of Australian Yolngu aboriginal paintings highlighted two important points. First he stresses that the meaning of the paintings is dependent on the ceremonial context, the people, past ceremonies, and on "the set of iconographic and sociological meanings encoded in them" (Morphy, 1991, 140). Secondly he suggests that the spiritual power of a painting can be enhanced by aesthetics. For instance, he calls the shimmering effect of finely cross-hatched lines on paintings as representative of the bright lights of the ancestors (Morphy, 1991, 136). Artists can enhance the spiritual power of their work through their artistic finesse. Consequently, talented artists were recruited to create important tree art, masks and poles.
Boone (1994) examines visual systems of recording and communicating information in Pre-Columbian America. Boone (1994, 15) defines writing as "the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent visible marks." Within this definition of writing she uses Sampson's (1985, 26 & 17) glottographic and semasiographic systems of writing. Glottographic systems represent speech that includes phonetic and syllabic systems. Semasiographic systems "convey ideas independently from language and on the same logical level as spoken language rather than being parasitic on them as ordinary scripts are" (Boone, 1994, 15). For example, the international road-sign convention communicates with drivers independent of their native language (Coe, 1993, 19). The semasiographic system includes a set of signs, or visual marks, in which meanings are suggested, independent of words or sounds, which have been previously agreed to by the encoder and decoder (Coe, 1993, 19 & Boone, 1994, 14). Boone (1994, 16) describes two kinds of semasiographic systems:

1) conventional: meaning is indicated by the interrelationship of arbitrary (non-intuitive) symbols, such as mathematical notation.
2) iconic: an intuitive logical system of symbols such as road signs.

The semasiographic system does not constitute a written language since it functions independent of language. However, Coe (1993, 20) does give an example of a semasiographic system devised by an Apache shaman called Silas John. He derived a series of signs that were painted on buckskin and "read" in Apache, but they transmit no phonetic data. Wong (1989, 295) also describes a symbolic language that may be a type of semasiographic system used by Plains Indians in the late nineteenth-century to "read" autobiographies painted on robes, tipis and shields. Wong suggests that pictographic communication was commonly practised by the Plains people. Wong (1991, 297-98) describes the pre-contact pictographs as follows:

Such 'picture writing' was meant to record and to communicate rather than to please aesthetically. Before 1830 these pictographic narratives were a type of shorthand...One well-known example is the pictographic robe of Mah-to-toh-pa (The Four Bears), a Mandan chief. In 1832 George Catlin visited the Mandans and
reported that Mah-to-toh-pa wore a robe with ‘the history of all battles on it, which would fill a book.’

Wong focuses on the historic accounts and descriptions of pictographs rather than on interpretation methodologies. Therefore, although the Plains pictographs appear to be semasiographic, it is not possible to analyze the type of visual communication from Wong’s accounts. For example, it is not clear whether the pictographs can be interpreted independent of the Plains language. Daly (1993, 223-24) summarizes his approach to understanding the meaning of prehistoric Stein Valley pictographs as a visual communication system or “non-alphabetic literacy” as follows:

As in art, the rock writing imagery is mnemonic and acts as a prompt to human expression, both in the writer and the reader. Indeed, it is argued that early writing in Ancient Greece -- as it had developed by 700 B.C. -- supplemented traditional oral recitation, and only much later did it transform oral culture to ‘literate’ culture (Havelock, 1986). The units of such writings are pictures and notations that often possess common referents that pay little heed to linguistic boundaries. These images can unite people from different languages by means of visual cultural commonality, but unlike alphabetic writing, they do not unite a population linguistically.

He suggests that rock art is a common visual rather than linguistic communication system that can unite different language groups, since a decoder does not necessarily need to know the language of the encoder to interpret a semasiographic system (Boone, 1994, 17). Coe (1994, 43) suggests that knowledge of language is a prerequisite to deciphering a writing system. Salish Elder Annie York referred to the Stein rock art and a writing on a tree as “writings” in the book They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever (Arnett et al., 1993, 3). Her descriptions of dreams portrayed in the rock paintings provide essential information on the meaning of art; without her cultural insight the art would provide a visual and artistic experience for the viewer but the artist’s meaning would not be clear.

The semasiographic system is probably the most likely visual communication system a First Nations art researcher would encounter. Their use as a trans-linguistic system of communication may be likely. For example, Holm (1990, 602) groups the art of
First Nations in the Northwest into three major stylistic and conceptual divisions that were expressed in the nineteenth century:

1) Northern province: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Haisla, Haihais and Bella Bella;
2) Central Province: Kwakiutl and Nootkans; and
3) Southern province: Coast Salish, Chinnookans, and people of the Oregon Coast.

The languages within these groups are quite different. However, I believe the consistent stylistic forms may have functioned on a rudimentary level as a visual communication system for marking and establishing territory for trade and brokering power relationships. The relatively common intra-regional style and form of art could establish the pre-requisites for an agreed upon convention for signs. For example, crest symbols are understood by groups that cross trans-linguistic boundaries. It is crucial for clans and tribes to understand and recognize the power associated with a crest pole or house front clan symbol.

I have presented these suppositions to provoke broader inquiry into the meaning of tree art and First Nations art as a whole. Tree art’s primary function is as a communication system. The question is to whom does it communicate, what does it communicate, and for what purpose? For instance, the audience of tree art could be animal spirits as we see on our journey in Chapter Three, or a secular audience for the purpose of communicating territorial boundaries. Additionally, the meaning inherent within tree art as a communication system is probably highly dependent on the intended viewing context. For example, this relationship between intended meaning and the intended viewing context is similar to a map and the geography it represents -- the map makes sense within the geographic context.

However, it is important to appreciate that only seeing the faces carved or painted in the forest is not the same as understanding what the faces meant to their creators - the intended meaning. In order to help you understand this concept, I will try to link the
meaning First Nations makers and viewers give to tree art with the images themselves and
to suggest the intended audience for the communication.

Joan Cardinal-Schubert (1992, 19), a Canadian First Nations artist, describes a
story which I think reflects the infancy of understanding First Nations art as a
communication system:

When I was a child, my father showed me the signs on the trees, old messages
emblazoned in the bark and grown out of sight. Out of reach.....There was a
preciousness in these hidden messages, available only to those who knew they
were there.

She hints of a precious hidden gift. Gaining a First Nations perspective will help us
understand hidden messages and bring this gift back into reach - out of hiding. In
preparation number two we learn how little information was available for the Western
World regarding tree art, and therefore about its hidden meaning as a communication
system.

**Preparation Two: A Review of Academic Knowledge of Tree
Art and Related First Nations Art Forms.**

I would like to review two important topics related to tree art, which are: the limited
written knowledge on tree art in academic literature, and examples of how spiritual beliefs
in trees are manifested in other First Nations art forms such as masks. This preparation
will provide us with important background information on what has been written about tree
art and related art forms such as the Iroquois false face masks.

**The Written Record on Tree Carvings and Paintings**

Western discourse on First Nations art is practically barren of any accounts,
analysis or mere mention of the tree art form. As discussed in the first preparation,
Vastokas (1986, 7) points out that "As a field of art historical inquiry, native art of North
America is relatively neglected and underdeveloped.” Often art historians have dismissed Native art because they view it as a craft or a primitive expression. According to Vastokas (1986, 30):

...there is growing evidence that style transmits information about culture, and that form and imagery conspire together to communicate latent cultural meaning, even without the aid of written texts.

I suggest that early ethnographers and explorers did not view this art from a First Nations perspective, and therefore the meaning of tree art was unseen. There were also probable logistical reasons for their apparent lack of interest. For example, early explorers like Simon Fraser, Samuel Black, and Alexander Mackenzie travelled primarily by river and not along the forest trails. Therefore there were few early observations to spark interest. The following accounts were recorded as curiosities rather than as serious inquiries into the art form from a First Nations perspective.

My exploration of the written record moves through space and time from east to west, and from the earliest accounts to the most recent. I begin my review of the written record regarding tree art by starting with the earliest account from Eastern Canada, and then I travel west to British Columbia, and conclude with a recent account from Tok, Alaska. I remind you that my review of the written record does not represent the entire body of knowledge on tree art because it does not explore the unwritten knowledge of all Elders. Elders impart their knowledge in Chapter Three.

Batistte (1985, 9) introduced one of the earliest accounts of “trees bearing marks” originally recorded by John Cabot in 1497.

In 1497 John Cabot’s exploration uncovered “fallen trees bearing marks” which caught his attention.

We do not know the shape or meaning of these marks.
Garrick Mallery (1972, 213) in his comprehensive two volume book on Picture Writing of the American Indians discussed tree art.

The Living Tree, of the use of which for pictographic purposes there are many descriptions and illustrations in this paper. In addition to them may be noted the remark made by Bishop DeSweinitz(a) in The Life and Times of Zeisberger, that in 1750 there were numerous tree carvings at a place on the eastern Shore of Cayuga Lake, the meaning of which was known to and interpreted by the Cayuga Indians...The Abnaki and Ojibwa have been and yet continue to be in the habit of incising pictographic characters and mnemonic marks upon birch bark.

I was not able to easily discern from Mallery’s catalogue of pictographs which were on rock as opposed to on living trees. Unfortunately, he did not clearly label his “descriptions and illustrations” of pictographs on living trees. He does imply, however, that tree art was common.

I followed up on Mallery’s reference to De Schweinitz (1870, 160-62) for a more detailed account of Zeisberger’s trip to Cayuga Lake, New York, in 1750. Zeisberger writes:

Advancing now along the eastern shore of the lake, they forded numerous creeks, and came to a spot which their guide approached with proud steps and glowing eyes. It was the rude, but to him glorious, monument of the warlike deeds of his nation. The trees [oak and ash] all around were full of figures and curious symbols carved on the bark,- telling of battles fought and won, of scalps brought home, and of prisoners taken. He [a Cayuga Chief] led them to one tree in particular, and pointed out the history of his own exploits...Man, in every age, and in all states of civilization, is swayed by the same desire to leave to posterity the tokens of his renown...So in the remote wilderness, by the waters of Cayuga Lake, the trees of a primeval forest published the fame of its children. But while Egypt, Greece, and Rome still live in their memorials, broken though many of them be, and while the monuments of our times are viewed by admiring thousands, the oak and the ash, which recorded Cayuga greatness, have long since bowed under the white man’s axe, and the history which their bark unfolded, like the race that it concerned, is well-nigh extinct.

This passage provides an early record of tree carvings and a possible meaning of the carvings, and shows Zeisberger’s egocentric perspective by his use of words such as “rude,” “children,” and by prematurely declaring a race “well-nigh extinct.”

Most of Mallery’s references to tree art occur in his section on notices of direction, maps, and health of a traveller (1972, 329-357). Mallery (1972, 337) describes three
human characters cut upon large jack pine trees created by Ojibway people near Red Lake, Minnesota (see Figure 2.3 (a)). These figures indicate the direction a traveller took when leaving the trail. According to Mallery (1972, 341), a Micmac scout would warn of an approaching Passamaquoddy war party by drawing a notice on a tree which mapped the war party’s direction of approach and indicated their number (see Figure 2.3(b)). Mallery reports that the Abnaki people would blaze a tree near the butt to indicate the health of a traveller. For instance, a blaze on one side of the tree means that they have had poor luck in gathering food and blazes on four sides mean they are starving (Mallery, 1972, 347).

I have not found descriptions of tree art between eastern North America and British Columbia. James Alexander Teit, an ethnographer, provided some useful descriptions of tree art while travelling through Lillooet, Shuswap and Chilcotin territories in the late nineteenth-century as a member of the Jessup North Pacific Expedition.11

Teit (1906, 282) described carved figures on trees, in the Lillooet territory, carved by adolescent boys and girls as the “record of their observances.” He is presumably referring to the visions they experienced during their initiation to adulthood. He also cites two more types of tree carvings and paintings.

1. In some places persons passing for the first time would paint or carve figures on trees instead of rocks (Fig. 98). When a tree was to be painted, the bark was removed (Teit, 1906, 282)
2. Trees by graves were sometimes stripped and painted by the Lillooet (Teit, 1906, 273).

Teit implies, in the first description, that the carved trees are markers. I would not want to suppose any further and guess why the Lillooet chose to carve markers when persons are “passing for the first time.” I have reproduced Teit’s figure 98 in Figure 2.4. He suggests,

11 The expedition was directed by Franz Boas, and it was funded by Morris K. Jessup, President of the American Museum. They collected information on archaeology, linguistics, and anthropology (Suttles and Jonaitis, 1990, 76). Teit’s most detailed account was given in 1927 when he described the tree art created by the Thompson people. Teit married an Interior Salish woman and thus became a member of the Nation.
in his second description, that the Lillooet carved or painted images as burial markers. He did not describe these images or their meaning.

Teit (1909) gave his second account of tree art in his ethnography on the Shuswap people. He shows one example of a Shuswap carving on the bark of a cottonwood tree (Teit, 1909, 591) (see Figure 2.5(a)). He also wrote about the Chilcotin people in a later chapter of this book and he alludes to seeing tree art in both the Shuswap and Chilcotin territories. I reproduced Teit’s figure 281 here in Figure 2.5(b) which shows two human-like images carved on trees near Anahem (Anaheim) Lake, BC.

Rock paintings (Fig. 280) appear to be very scarce in the Chilcotin country, but carvings on the bark of trees may frequently be seen (Fig. 281). Those which I have seen differ a good deal in style from those of the Shuswap.

The most detailed account of tree art by Teit (Teit & Boas, 1973) is in his Salishan ethnography. His textual description is thin but he does reproduce a significant number of the tree art images in his Figure 25, shown here in Figure 2.6. His account below refers to the Thompson peoples and it is important because he describes how, in this particular instance, the tree art was practiced when a suitable rock surface was not available. Therefore he concluded the reasons for doing rock art and tree art were similar:

In connection with the training period, adolescents of both sexes made records of remarkable dreams, pictures of what they desired or what they had seen, and events connected with their training. These records were made with red paint on boulders or cliffs, wherever the surface was suitable. (Figs. 20-24) Rock paintings in their territory are plentiful; but I heard of no petroglyphs, except that sometimes figures of various kinds were incised in hard clay. Rock paintings were made also by adults as records of notable dreams, and more rarely of incidents in their lives. Pictures were also cut into the bark of trees, and some were burned into the wood of trees (Teit & Boas, 1973, 283-84).

The most significant point to be gleaned from Teit’s accounts is that he described tree art in the present tense. Tree art was a current practice when he observed it in the Lillooet, Shuswap, Chilcotin and Thompson territories.
Hamlin Garland, a novelist and poet, travelled along the “poor man’s route” to Alaska during the goldrush and wrote a book about his adventures. The 1898 Gold Rush Route or "Poor Man’s Route" snaked its way overland from the southern interior of British Columbia to the Klondike (Barbeau, 1958, 185-186). Garland (1899, 82) gave a relatively detailed account of the tree carvings he saw as he passed through the Bulkley Valley on his way to Alaska. Garland was traveling west between Burns Lake and Hazelton when he described tree carvings.

All along the trail were tree trunks whereon some loitering youth Siwash had delineated a human face by a few deft and powerful strokes of the axe, the sculptural planes of cheeks, brow, and chin being indicated broadly but with truth and decision. Often by some old camp a tree would bear on a planed surface the rude pictographs, so that those coming after could read the number, size, sex and success at hunting of those who had gone before. There is something Japanese, it seems to me, in this natural taste for carving among all the Northwest people.

Garland was quite impressed by these carvings. I have checked the journals of other explorers that have passed through the same area such as George Dawson and Peter Skene Ogden. They made no mention of seeing the carvings, or for that matter very few comments about First Nations culture. Garland, as a writer and adventurer, was probably more curious than a goldseeker or surveyor, and consequently may have paid more attention to tree art.

Father A. G. Morice established himself in the Fort St. James area, which is relatively close to the Bulkley Valley, in the late nineteenth century. He had a strong influence on the Carrier culture of the day. For instance, he introduced a modified form of the Cree syllabics writing system. Morice (1893, 210) describes the tree drawings he observed. I have quoted the entire passage and reproduced his Figure 197 here in Figure 2.7.

Fig 197 presents us with graphic signs used as means of communication between different hunting parties. They alone might be pointed to as the elements of native 'writing.' The two last are taken from rock inscriptions. They are now unintelligible to the Carriers. Here is the meaning of the others: -a, bird; b, lizard;
c, beaver; d, bear; e, lynx; f, cariboo; g, marten; h, canoe; i, woman; j, man; k, snake.

These are generally drawn in charcoal on trees or, by exception stones, and as such it must be confessed that they afford but very restricted medium of expression to the native mind. It has therefore to call into requisition any other material means which may be at hand, and it must be said that the use made of them is sometimes wonderful. I was lately traveling in the forest at a time when the yearly reappearance of the salmon was eagerly looked for. At a certain spot not very far from a stream we came upon one of those aboriginal drawings made by an old man who had no knowledge of the syllabic signs now used to write the Dene language. The drawing represented a man with a woman, a horse with a burden, the emblem of a bear with three marks underneath and a cariboo. Above the whole and hanging from a broken branch were four pieces of young bark cut out in conventional form of the fish. Now the message was instantly read by my companions and it ran thus: 'Such a one (whom they named) has passed here with his wife, and a good load of furs, after having killed three bears and one cariboo; and furthermore he captured four salmon two days ago. He is now gone in the direction that we follow ourselves.' This date could evidently not have been told had the Indian marked with charcoal the sign of the salmon. He was so well aware of this and was so much intent upon fixing the time of the first appearance of the fish that he had recourse to the pieces of bark, the relative degree of freshness of which he knew could be easily be determined by the experienced eye of his fellow Carrier.

Moric suggests that images on trees were more common than the “last two” images that were on rocks. Morice, as the inventor of a Carrier writing system, seems to acknowledge that his was not the first written communication system after observing the message tree. He suggests that hunters created images on trees to communicate to each other. The Carrier person created the “wonderful” image in the forest to announce the first catch of salmon for the season. The first catch was a very important event that marked the end of the winter, and often of the scarcity of food. I think Morice’s account is very significant because it casts a shadow of doubt over the common perception that First Nations would only communicate orally rather than through a symbol or writing system.

Marius Barbeau recorded a description of Indian signals through the native informant Arthur Hankin in 1923 (Hankin, 1951, Sec. 85). Hankin described how the Babine Lake Indians, whom he called the “Sekanis” used smoke signals as a “means to join his family or partners” and “to join him at a certain place,” or to signal for more provisions.
Hankin concluded his description of Indian signals by giving a brief allusion to tree paintings: “They also leave signs on trees by means of Indian paint.” Hankin said, “They readily understand the signals, with crests as signatures.” Hankin does not elaborate whether the crests were associated with the smoke signals or signs on trees. I assume he meant signs on trees. Either way Hankin reinforced the idea that some First Nations had developed non-verbal communication systems.

Harland I. Smith, a Canadian ethnographer, photographed two tree carvings in Bella Coola in 1920 (Figure 2.8) and in Kitwanga in 1926 (Figure 2.9). The archival description of the tree in Bella Coola is, “Eyes and mouth carved in a tree, south of Bella Coola that has since been cut.” This photograph is remarkably similar to the Gitxan tree carving I photographed near Hazelton at the Deep Canoe site shown in Figure 3.23. Smith’s archival description of the Kitwanga tree is “Human face carved on the trunk of a tree, about two miles south of Skeena River and Kitwanga, British Columbia.”

John McMurdo (1975, 12), an archaeologist, found a grave site on the Stewart Pack Trail near Van Dyke Island, north of Kitwancool (Gitanyow), in 1975. There were two poplar trees with inscriptions of names and dates that said the child of Chief Wee-lezqu of Kitwancool was buried here in 1891. The other names were of Wolf house members. This account is the only arboroscript account which confirms its function as a burial marker. The child was buried along the trail.

The previous descriptions are from the 19th century and southern and central BC. The accounts of Garland, Morice and Hankin were closely related geographically to the area between Prince George and Hazelton. I would now like to continue our journey through time and space by discussing an account by Dorthea Calverley. She was an important local historian for the Peace River area who lived in Dawson Creek. She willed
her voluminous collection of interviews and papers to the Dawson Creek Public Library. It was there that I discovered the following account (Calverley, nd, 7-8).

A curious story, however, makes one wonder how close the totem-makers came to our area. The late Mr. Allen Robinson of Bear Flat travelled with surveyors far up several of our Peace River tributaries. Far up the Halfway he made his way to a conspicuous clump of tall spruce in an area that had otherwise been burnt over, and covered with lower second-growth forest. In the centre, one ancient tree had been cut off sixty or seventy feet from the ground - far higher than any snowfall could have given a man footing to stand on. The top of the tree bole had been carved into an enormous totem-like face. It was weathered as if it had stood for many decades. Mr. Robinson could discover no tradition whatsoever - it had ‘always been there.’ Somehow it had escaped the fire...Mr. Robinson became crippled due to his World War I service, he could never go to these interesting finds...he continued to think about them for many years - wondering ‘Who got up to that incredible height to carve that totem-like countenance, and how and why? What unknown people inhabited our outer fringes? Where did they go?"

The Halfway River is north-west of Fort St. John. This area is Beaver territory. The intriguing element in Dorthea’s record is that the carved face seems to be quite high, as if it were meant to be seen from a distance. I assume that the carver had to make a great effort to carve the face and prepare the tree. It was, I am sure, a very important marker to warrant such effort. And yet, in the end, we are still left with the poignant questions in the closing of Dorthea’s record. I deduce that Mr. Robinson saw this very old tree carving which “had always been there” sometime just before he entered the service for World War I that began in 1914.

Our next stop will be at Joseph Patsah’s father’s medicine cross. Joseph the pseudonym of a Beaver Elder who lives on the Halfway Reserve in northern British Columbia, was introduced to me through Hugh Brody’s (1988) Maps and Dreams. Brody mentions the medicine cross occasionally throughout the book, and it becomes a touchstone-like symbol, a place of constant meaning on the changing landscape. The first account below is Joseph’s recollection of what he saw as a fourteen year old boy when his father created the medicine cross near Midden River. The family was searching for new hunting territory “after several years of struggle and near starvation” (Brody, 1988, 7).
Yet Joseph’s Daddy, along with the others, sought a confirmation of the new area’s potential. This was done by means of dream prophecy and the erection of a medicine cross. They stripped a tall straight pine of all its bark and affixed a crosspiece about four-fifths of the way along its length, then attached smaller crosses to the crosspiece -- one at each end. They nailed a panel, also in cross formation, close to the base of the pole. Even when its base was sunk into the ground, this cross, or set of crosses, was twice the height of a tall man. When it was in place, Patsah and others hung skin clothing and medicine bundles from the main crosspiece, and on the panel near the base they inscribed ‘all kinds of fancy’ -- drawings of animals that had figured in the people’s dreams, animals of the place that would make themselves available for the hunt.

The night the cross was completed, an augury came to one of the elders in a dream. A young cow moose, moving to the Patsah Camp from the Bluestone Creek area, circled the base of the cross, then went off in the direction from which she had come from. Two days after this dream, hunters discovered the tracks of a young cow moose, and, following these, recognized them to be the tracks of the dream animal...The dream prediction had been auspiciously fulfilled. The new area would provide abundantly (Brody, 1988, 8-9).

The medicine cross is made from a living tree, and inscribed with “all kinds of fancy” or drawings. I assume, based on the information in the book, that the cross was created about or sometime after 1914, when Joseph’s father arrived in the area. The meaning clearly originates from the spirit of Joseph’s dad, and his desire for good luck as a hunter. He is making an offering to the new land they wish to hunt; consequently, the spirits gave him permission to use the land by means of a dream. The accounts I have presented should only be interpreted as they relate to the culture of origin. I will return to Joseph’s medicine cross in Chapter Four, as a touchstone in the changing landscape along our journey.

Another account of tree drawings or aborographs was observed by Teit (1956, 140-141) in the Tahltan and Kaska territories as markers of dreams by youth on vision quests:

Pubescents only rarely made paintings of any kind. A few of both sexes made rude figures of animals etc., on blazed or peeled trunks. These had little meaning and it is said were made for show much in the same way as whites do who cut their initials, etc., on trees. A few of such pictures were representations of things seen in dreams, which the boy or girl took a fancy to illustrate in this way.

Teit attaches the images’ meaning to adolescents going through the initiation process.
The American frontiersman Addison M. Powell wrote a book about his ten years’ experience in Alaska beginning in 1898 (Powell, 1909). He observed cache posts or trees that had maps drawn on them with charcoal or lead pencil. Powell refers to the Indians who drew these maps as the Sticks or Ahtna’s along the Copper River. His reasoning for the purpose of these maps was as follows (see Figure 2.10 for a reproduction of his diagram):

This would mean that a man with a gun, a squaw, a little girl and a dog had left the bank of the river, when the moon was half full; that their first day’s travel will terminate on the bank of a creek, where they will camp on the near shore; that their next day’s travel will terminate on the bank of another creek where they will camp on the opposite shore; and that at noon of the next day, they will make their final camp at the foot of the mountain (Powell, 1909, 287).

Powell’s account is similar to Morice’s Carrier message and Mallery’s Micmac map example because the primary purpose for these examples is to function as a visual communication system along the trail.

I close my review of the ethnographic written record with an account of a tree painting (arborograph) which was observed near Tok, Alaska, in the 1950’s. The research on the Tok arborograph, by anthropologists Olson and Vitt, is the most detailed research on any arborograph or arboroglyph. They described the arborograph, which was in Tanana territory, as follows.

Mr. Sterling True, while lumbering at mile 93.2 Tok cut-off on the Glenn Highway, noticed a tree which had been blazed or the bark peeled off and the open area painted with pictographic type figures... The left half of the small human figure on the left, and the left end of the animal figure have been covered over not only with pitch and bark, but the new growth of the tree seems to have spread over and covered them partially (Olson and Vitt, 1969, 77&80).

They estimated the paintings were 122 years old. In other words the paintings were made in 1847 (Olson & Vitt, 1969, 80). The researchers made an effort to consult the Tanana Elders for possible explanations for the origin and meaning of the images. This is what they learned:

12 "The Map. Bursom loved the sound of it. There was a majesty to the name. He stepped back from the screens and looked at his creation. It was stupendous. It was more powerful than he thought. It was like
• He [Mr. Charlie David, Native informant] said that such paintings could be a message to other band members to let them know people were moving somewhere (Olson & Vitt, 1969, 81).

• Mrs. David said that she thought that the animal figure might indicate a dog packing a load. The two curved vertical lines arising from the neck region may symbolize a pack. Secondly, it was asked if the sign might have been made by a medicine person. Mr. David was sure that a medicine person would not leave his 'mark' on a tree. Both of the informants seemed sure that it was not done as a shamanistic practice by the medicine person (Olson and Vitt, 1969, 81).

• He [Mr. David Paul, Native informant] mentioned that in former times a painting of a human figure was made on a tree to indicate that someone had died. He said that the work could be interpreted either way (Olson and Vitt, 1969, 81).

The Elders gave the researchers a variety of possible meanings for the tree painting. They suggested that the images could be communications between band members or a burial marker. They were quite sure that the images were not made by a medicine person. I think the realm of possibilities presented is very helpful at this early stage, because it expands our awareness of the possible meanings of tree art. Traditional science may have judged this study as “inconclusive,” but I see great value in the researchers’ results because they consulted the Elders.

I make the following important conclusions from the preceding review of the written record. First, tree art existed across Canada and Alaska. Second, there seem to be a variety of purposes for the tree art, including:

• records of vision quests or dreamings of new territory for family settlement;
• records of war exploits;
• traveller’s messages along trails; and,
• burial markers.

Third, the purpose of the practice seems to differ from nation to nation. Fourth, and finally, my review of the ethnographic record shows that tree art was created in British
Columbia at least up until 1910 or 1920, however, later in Chapter Three we see more recent examples.

York, Daly and Arnett (Arnett et al., 1993, 10) have demonstrated that rock writings “have been made from ancient times into the present century.” I suspect the same is true for tree art. While a number of accounts regarding tree art were recorded in the 1890’s by Teit and others, the twentieth century is relatively barren of accounts. This void, or lack of awareness of tree art by the First Nations and non-First Nations community is an important signal or artifact regarding the effects of colonialism. I discuss these effects in more detail when we reflect on our journey and the meaning of tree art at our campfire discussion in Chapter Four. Let us now turn to consider analogous First Nations tree spirit art forms which have been recorded by the academy, before moving on to preparation number three which presents a more complete picture of First Nations appreciation of the sacred nature of trees. After experiencing some of the richness of the oral traditions in Chapter Two that refer to trees as sacred, and as the *axis mundi*, you, the reader, will be ready to travel with new eyes and see the faces in the forest.

**Art Forms Manifested from Tree Spirits**

Three examples of First Nations masks and dolls are discussed in this section to show how tree art could be manifested from spiritual beliefs regarding trees and the forest. The Iroquois medicine mask is the first example of a manifestation of tree spirit beliefs. The medicine mask is also known as the false face mask, but, I prefer the term medicine masks because it is truer to their meaning. There has been exhaustive academic study of these masks, most notably by Fenton (1987) and Parker (1923). The Iroquois, of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, have forbidden the public exhibition of the masks (Anon., 1995(a), 39). Therefore, out of respect for their wishes, I do not include images of these beautiful masks here. The masks are very expressive, with exaggerated mouths, chins and
noses. Each mask is different in character, the mouth being the most variable form (Fenton, 1987, 30).

Parker has documented the practice of carving the mask on a living tree, and then remove it after a ceremony and thus becomes a mask rather than an in situ tree carving. The earliest photograph of a person carving a medicine mask on a living tree was taken in 1905 by Arthur C. Parker (Fenton, 1987, 206). The more modern practice is to carve from seasoned wood (Fenton, 1987, 209). The masks were carved in living trees because they would subsequently imbue the life spirit of the tree; consequently, they were considered to be more powerful than masks carved from seasoned wood (Fenton, 1987, 206-209). The basswood tree was typically the tree of choice because “The absorbent quality of basswood for drawing out diseases and for healing wounds is well known in Iroquois medicine” (Fenton, 1987, 206). The carvers would offer the tree tobacco as part of a three-day ritual of selecting and carving a mask from the living basswood tree (Fenton, 1987, 206-209). The Iroquois also carve the masks from hardwood trees such as elm, cucumber and maple trees (Fenton, 1987, 128).

The oral history regarding the origin of the medicine mask is crucial to understand because it provides the spiritual context for the medium, the tree. I have presented Parker’s (1923, 399) eloquent origin of the power of medicine masks below.

Unfolding from the trunk of the basswood, the great face stared out at the spellbound hunter and opening wide its wide protruding lips began to speak. He told of his wonderful eyesight, its blazing eyes could see behind the moon and stars. His power could summon the storms or push aside the clouds for the sunshine. He knew all the virtues of roots and herbs, he knew all the diseases and knew how to apply the remedies of herbs and roots. He was familiar with all the poisons and could send them through the air and cure the sick. He could breathe health or sickness. His power was mighty and could bring luck in battles. Evil and poison and death fled when he looked, and good health and life came in its stead. He told of the basswood and said that its soft wood was filled with medicine and life. It contained the life of the wind and the life of the sunshine, and thus being good, was the wood for the false-faces that the hunter must carve.
Long the hunter listened to the words of the giant false-face and then he wandered far into the forest until the trees began to speak. Then he knew that there were trees there in which the spirits of the beings of which he had dreamed and that the Genonsgwa was speaking. He knew that now his task of carving must begin and that the dream-beings, the voices, the birds and the animals that he saw must be represented in the basswood masks that he must make.

Fenton (1987, 128) points out that “Not only are False Faces derived from trees, but they can disappear into trees.” The hunter’s spiritual encounter occurs in the forest where the supernatural being or false face unfolds before him on a tree. The face explains a medicine ritual to the ancient hunter, and thus he began to carve the medicine masks from the living tree. The hunter learned of the healing power of the tree spirit. The healing tradition that developed from this original encounter is explained by Fenton (1987, 27).

The faces of the Forest have also claimed to possess the power to control sickness. They have instructed dreamers to carve likeness in the form of masks, promising that whenever anyone makes ready the feast, invokes their help while burning tobacco, and sings the curing songs, supernatural power to cure disease will be conferred on human beings who wear the masks... Sick persons often dream of a particular kind of mask, and the range of variation reflects artistic license of individual carvers who sculpt the masks from single blocks of living basswood, or some seasoned substitute.

Parker explains that a secret society called the False Face Company was responsible for protecting and helping all living things. In return, the spirits of the Genonsgwa would give healing powers to the medicine persons (Parker, 1923, 400).

There are many similarities between the Iroquois face that unfolds in the tree and the Dakota Tree Dweller. The Tree Dweller belief manifests itself as an art form in the Tree Dweller dolls, which have a much more haunting quality to them as compared to medicine masks. Howard (1955, 169) says that the tree dweller appears in the form of a very small man, an animal or a bird.

He dwells in the forest or in lonely places and is sometimes encountered by solitary hunters or travellers. He is usually malevolent and often ‘loses’ people in the woods or hills. He sometimes appears to people in visions, however, and if he is secured by a person as a spirit helper in this manner he can be summoned to work for the good of the visionary by performing the proper ceremony. Shamans with
tree dweller power usually made a small wooden image of him which they kept along with their other medicines and paraphernalia (Howard, 1955, 170).

Like the tree face spirit, the Tree Dweller has the ability to grant “favored mortals the power to cure certain diseases, the gift of clairvoyancy, and luck in hunting” (Howard, 1955, 169). Iroquois hunters would leave offerings of tobacco to the faces in the forest because the spirits were feared if they were not shown respect, as is the case with the Dakota Tree Dwellers. These spirits were both friend and foe.

The Nootka people, more properly known as the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, people believed in tree and forest spirits, which manifested itself in art forms like masks. David Penney (1981) did a detailed review of the Nootkan “Wild Man” forest spirit and its role in a winter ceremonial called Tiokwallé. He suggests that the forest “functions as the common ground between human and spirit, a zone where the mythic and social worlds overlap” (Penney, 1981, 95). It is within this zone that anthropomorphic spirit beings live or come from their home in the mountains. There are two types of spirit beings: 1) Almequo, he can be dangerous to man and he can transfer power during the encounter; and 2) Puqmí, a former human who became lost in the woods and died, subsequently becoming a ghost who could not transfer power to humans (Penney, 1981, 95). Almequo is a supernatural being who partially enters the human world through the forest and puqmí is a human who partially enters the realm of the supernatural. Penney (1981, 97) describes how a Nootkan person could anticipate two types of encounters in the forest.

The human, when entering the forest, was aware of two possible consequences: that he would encounter a supernatural being, and, if he was spiritually prepared, he would return to the village strengthened with supernatural power—or that he would behave carelessly, be led astray by a puqmí, and lose his human identity.

Penney (1981, 99-107) describes some human-like masks which are common manifestations of these forest spirits. For example he discusses the Makah (Neah Bay) mask called Qualu bo quth (giant wild man of the woods), the Kwakiutl Bookwus mask
(wild man of the woods), Ts’onoqua (Cannibal Woman) masks and the Nootkan cedar bark ogre mask.

The medicine masks, tree dweller carvings and Nootkan masks have all originated from spiritual beliefs about the tree and forest. These examples open up potential interpretations for tree art, and add to the realm of possible meanings. They also contribute to our understanding of the intended viewing context of tree art by illustrating the spiritual nature of trees and the forest. A common theme in these examples is the spiritual encounters with supernatural beings who appear near “great trees” in the forest and either empower the human character of the story or bring bad luck in hunting.

**Preparation Three: The Sacred Tree**

The tree in a forest, the medium for tree art, symbolizes a spiritual attachment to earth in a very profound manner. The tree, as a medium of expression, is a fundamental element of the artists intended creation. First Nations art can convey power through its aesthetics, especially when it is viewed in the intended viewing context. The intended viewing context is simply where the artist envisioned his/her art to be viewed, and therefore the context contributes to the intended meaning. For example, an artist may create a dance mask which takes on meaning through performance. A museum goer cannot appreciate the full meaning of this dance mask if it is viewed in a static state behind the museum glass because it is not the intended viewing context. An artist can enhance spiritual power by paying attention to the aesthetics of form and style. The master carver, for example, has the ability to bring life to art work. For instance, a shaman could enlist the best carver to

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13 The Australian Aborigines express their spiritual attachment to the Earth in a beautiful and fundamental fashion through their sand paintings. The Earth is their medium. Geoffrey Bardon’s (1991) book entitled *Modern Art - Ancient Icon: A gallery of Dreamings From Aboriginal Australia*, displays the art within the context of the Aborigines’ spiritual beliefs and he describes their tie to the land as follows:
convey the spiritual power of his/her visions or travels between worlds. Tree art is a very powerful art form because of its contextual and aesthetic power.

The forest, as a context from which inspiration could arise, is also a fundamental characteristic of tree art. You can only understand the intended meaning of tree art when you view it in the intended viewing context, including the physical and spiritual worlds which I refer to as the First Nations landscape. Art manifests itself from the artist’s spirit. The artist, through performance, then creates the image (Vastokas, 1992, 17). My art originates either from dreams, experiences with nature, or inspirations from oral histories. Boas (1955, 349) concludes that art arises from the expression of emotions and thought. I would suggest the spirit is a source of emotion and thought, and furthermore, the forest context from which the inspirations arises also affects the artistic expression.

The sacred tree is an omnipresent symbol in cultures throughout the world. The “sacred” use their power to manifest themselves in the profane world in the form of natural objects such as rocks or trees (Eliade, 1963, 30). Mircea Eliade, in his study of world religions (Eliade, 298-300), refers to the sacred tree as the “Tree of Life” or “Cosmic Tree.” He says “The myths and legends which relate to the Tree of Life there often include the idea that it stands at the centre of the universe, binding together earth, heaven and hell.” 

For instance he refers to the Chinese miraculous tree at the centre of the universe called “Kien-Mou” or standing-wood: “they say that at midday nothing upright standing near it can cast a shadow” (Eliade, 1963, 299-300). Gupta (1980, 10) tells a story about Adam and the “tree of life.” The ailing Adam, the first man, sent his son Seth to ask the angel for a branch from the tree of life. The branch was planted on Adam’s grave and it grew into a

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"The association with the land is basic to Aboriginal spiritual belief, and his recall and heritage explains poetically his understanding of the land and nature" (Bardon, 1991,8).

14 First Nations do not have a “heaven and hell” concept in their cosmology, rather it is earth and the spirit worlds.
tree. Eventually the wood from this tree was used to make the Holy Cross. Gupta (1980, 23) also tells an old Celtic legend about the trembling aspen tree.

It is said that during Christ’s agony in the garden of Gethse [Gethsemanie], he was overshadowed by an aspen tree, which burst the fibers of its leaves on witnessing the supernatural agony of its creator, and from that time, in memorium, it trembles when even a breath of wind is not stirring.

Other cultural beliefs include the people of India saying that the Lord Vaishnu and other deities reside on the top of the most sacred tree called Peepal. The Japanese believe that the pine tree is a symbol of longevity (Gupta, 1980, 10&32). Eliade (1963, 281) says that sap-filled trees symbolize motherhood in Africa and India, “and are therefore venerated by women, as well as sought out by the spirits of the dead who want to return to life.”

First Nations such as the Dene believe they are protected against dangerous spirits if they sleep beneath a large spruce tree (Dene Wodih Society, 1990, 30). The Seneca creation stories tell of a great tree beside the great illustrious chief’s lodge in the Sky World or Heaven that bore corn for food (Thompson, 1967, 14). There are many First Nations sacred tree symbols such as the Five Nations Tree of Peace. The tree symbolizes a “Great Peace” between the Five Nations. Colden (1866, 58) quotes a Mohawk Chief as saying:

> We now plant a Tree who’s tops will reach the Sun, and its Branches spread far abroad, so that it shall be seen afar off; & we shall shelter ourselves under it, and live in Peace, without molestation.

This Five Nations symbol of peace and law has endured since its creation in 1684 (Parker, 1923, 431). The sacred tree is a power symbol for Gitxsan because it represents the law. Gitxsan Chief Gwisqyen described how each successive generation draws its strength from the land as a tree’s roots sink deeper and deeper into the ground.

> This is like an ancient tree that has grown the roots right deep...into the ground. It’s...sunk. This big tree’s roots are sunk deep into the ground and that’s how...our law is...The strength of our law is passed on from generation to generation and each generation makes it stronger right to this day where I am now (Rush et al, 1990, 1-2).
The sacred tree is all trees, because all trees have a living spirit. Many First Nations, such as the Carrier believe that animals and trees could talk to man a very long time ago and still do in vision quest experiences. The tree is a source of nourishment and power, a source of life (Bopp et al., 1984, 7). I will be exploring the meaning of the sacred tree by examining the spirit of trees. The tree is the artistic medium for tree art and the forest its context. Therefore I believe as an artist that one should understand the artistic medium and context to fully understand the art form.

Members of the Four Worlds Development project, based in Lethbridge, Alberta, worked in cooperation with numerous Elders, to create a book on native spirituality. The sacred tree is the main theme because “The Sacred Tree as a symbol of life-giving meaning is of vital importance to the indigenous people of the earth” (Bopp et al., 1984, 20). The teachings in this book inspired me to structure my discussion of the sacred tree around their four categories of meaning which are: wholeness, protection, nourishment and growth. I discuss these categories in the following sections: the spirit of trees, the supernatural tree, the sustainer of life, and tree growth. By exploring the sacred tree concept I hope we arrive at a place of better understanding of the sacred tree, tree spirits, the forest and ultimately the intended viewing context for tree art.

**Spirit of Trees**

*All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is a part of the single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else (Bopp et al, 1985, 26).*

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15 “Pardon me, says that Tree, maybe you would like something to eat. That would be nice, says First Woman, and all sorts of good things to eat fall out of that Tree. Apples fall out. Melons fall out. Bananas fall out. Hot dogs. Fry bread, corn, potatoes. Pizza. Extra-crispy fried chicken.

Thank You, says First Woman, and she picks up all that food and brings it back to Ahdamn. Talking trees! Talking trees! says GOD. What kind of a world is this?” (King, 1994, 40-41).
I am humbled by their presence, always, whether I am among the wise old Douglas firs that edge the ridge paralleling the Blackwater River in Carrier country, or the misty hemlock forests that protect Kuldo Creek in Gitxsan territory. Their spirits pulse through the old growth forests. Trees seem immortal, because humans can only wish, at best, to occupy a few centimeters of their ringed history. Perhaps it is their relative immortality that humbles me?

Can these thoughts really be those of a professional forester, who was trained to liquidate the negative mean annual increment of the decaying British Columbia old growth forests? Yes, I was, as many others were, drawn to forestry because I enjoy being in the forest for spiritual rather than economic pleasure. Unfortunately, this reverence for trees and the forest can be trained or persuaded away.

I begin once again with another poignant story by Nick Prince because it flips the western perspective to emphasize a Carrier perspective. Nick wrote a story called *How I Became a Dugout Canoe* (Prince, nd). Nick told me that the story is autobiographical (Nick Prince, personal communication, November 6, 1995). He made his first dugout canoe when he was a teenager. I do not reproduce the whole story, instead I present some relevant excerpts related to the tree spirit.16

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16 I use a two column presentation format for stories to remind the reader that the text is a translation of the oral tradition. I previously discussed how Paula Gunn Allen cautioned the interpretation of text based on oral history.
with the moose, grouse and bear brothers and sisters (Prince, nd., that fed around us. These 1).
animals, we also recognized as

Nick has written his story from the tree’s perspective as a living spirit. Nick has been a
trapper, carpenter, head sawyer and tribal chief. His range of lived experience could have
lead him to a variety of perspectives but he has chosen a very spiritual one. The story
proceeds to the point where the Carrier choose the cottonwood tree for their dugout canoe.

They pointed out the tree for the young boy who was with them, and told him the funny tree was
called T’soo, (Spruce) and they pointed at me and called Ts’i
tel, (Cottonwood). The young boy came over to me and spoke these words as he tapped on my
trunk with his hand; Nyun awhat’sunyudantam, (You, we have chosen)...The men returned [the following spring] at this same
time, only there were more of them than before. They all crowded around me and talked,
and I was proud to be so tall and straight. They made a fire, and camped away from us. We
noticed there were two families this time, and their children played in the woods around us.
Each day, the fathers of these two families would bring some water to throw on me, and they would
say some words to me. Somehow the water seemed different from what I had grown up knowing! They did this for
four sunrises, and each day they faced in a different direction after they had thrown water on me
(Prince, nd., 5-6).

When Nick tells this story to a group of people, at this point in the story, he will ask why the characters are putting water on the tree. The next passage answers this question.

On the fifth day they cut Ts’i tel down and ‘The following morning they came early. One
old man walked up to me, threw water on me, and said; Ts’i
tanleh. Ndi too buhol’eh, (You are going to become a canoe.
Become accustomed to this

Nick explains that they are introducing the spirit of the lake to the spirit of the tree. Nick’s
beautiful story is an example of what it means to have respect for the spirit of the tree.
My Elders have told me that the Gitxsan do not leave offerings to a tree when they harvest its bark or choose it to make a canoe, house or crest pole. Instead they would talk to the tree and explain why they would need its help. The Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en spiritual belief is described in the opening statement of their land claims case (Anon., 1987, 18-19).

The Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en believe that both humans and animals, when they die, have the potential to be reincarnated. But only if the spirit is treated with the appropriate respect. If the bones of animals and fish are not treated with that respect, thereby preventing their reincarnation, then they will not return to give themselves up to humans. In this way, a person’s actions not only interact with those of the animals and the spirits, but also have repercussions for future generations, deprived of the food that will ensure their survival.

Marius Barbeau (1973, 198) presented four precepts that a Gitxsan person observed, and the first one reflects how strongly the Gitxsan believe in the “spirits-selves” of all beings:

Do not abuse animals or ridicule them. Their lives are not unlike yours. Their spirit-selves, unless propitiated, stand over them in readiness for the deed of retaliation. Do not waste their flesh or scatter their bones. Above all, spare their broods, lest they visit wrath upon you and migrate from your hunting territories, leaving them barren and desolate for your own ruin.

Stanley Walens (1981, 116-117) suggested a similar Kwakiutl perspective on the reincarnation of the tree spirits. The beaver and humans both have the ability to cut down trees, and they have a responsibility to treat the tree with respect. Consequently the spirit of the tree is properly released and reborn into another being. He said that “The Kwakiutl see trees, especially cedars, as living beings with faces, arms, legs, and souls” (Walens, 1981, 116). Walens concludes that both the beaver and human share an important destiny “because they alone can ensure the survival of the forest” (Walens, 1981, 117).17

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17 Trees were cut down with stone adzes in the “old days” prior to the introduction of the metal axe. The Koyukon people used the “beaver style” method to fell a tree (Nelson, 1986, 35). John Brown (Brown, 1959, 775) a Tsimshian Elder recalled in 1927 that:

In the old days, the trees were cut down with stone axes, and the carvings were done with sharp bones, the leg bones of the bear or the caribou. As for the finishing touches, the carver would use beaver incisors tied together very tight, from beaver teeth lashed on a handle.

This passage from an oral history provides important clues to how trees were cut and carved. The passage also reminds me of Walens’ (1981) description of the close relationship between human beings and beavers as the only beings that cut down trees.
Reincarnation is an important characteristic of Gitxsan spiritual beliefs. Antonia Mills (1988, 45-46) suggests that Gitxsan and other shamanistic peoples believe that the soul or spirit can survive physical death and reanimate into another body through numerous cycles. Mills (1988, 49) queried a Tsimshian Elder, “Reincarnation must give you a different sense of self,” to which the Elder replied “It gives us a different sense to be in tune with spirit.” Mills (1994, 214) says that the Gitxsan watch for rebirth of their high chiefs in particular. She suggests that rebirth can occur in some cases within nine months after death. The Gitxsan belief in reincarnation manifests itself in everyday life through the respect shown for all beings whether a tree, lynx or human. The Gitxsan have a responsibility, as Walens describes it, to treat and care for the spirit so that it can continue its cycle of reincarnation. Trees are no exception.

The Sustainer of Life

The ancient ones taught us that the life of the Tree is the life of the people (Bopp et al 1985, 7).

The purpose of this section is to describe how important the tree is as a sustainer of life, and to highlight examples of certain First Nations sacred regard for all trees because they were guardians and protectors from birth, and could exhibit supernatural power. The tree also sustains life as a source of food such as the inner bark, and as material for baskets, canoes, crest poles, houses and fuel to name only a few of its uses. The tree was a great provider. The Stó:lō people, in the Fraser Valley, have a song about Hopai, the Cedar (Street, 1974, 72).

There was one good man.
To him K’HHal said:
‘You shall be a tree;
You shall be Ho-pai, the cedar;
You shall be houses, beds, ropes;
You shall be baskets and blankets;
You shall be a strong boat
In the flood that I shall send
To show this Tsee-o-hil
That there is One other than he
In Schwail, the earth.

The Stó:lo people still live by this ancient song. In a story about cedar bark a young Coast Salish girl (Stó:lo Sitel Curriculum Committee, 1983, 15) tells of her experience collecting cedar bark with her granny, and of how her granny chose a tree.

Then she spoke to the tree, 'We have come to honour you, mother cedar. We need your help. We need your bark to make our clothing. We thank you for the many gifts you give our people. We ask your help in the work ahead of us.' Then she lay down a small weaving she had made, her gift to the cedar tree.

The inner bark of the lodgepole pine and hemlock trees was an important food in the spring. Alexander Mackenzie (1970, 352) observed some “interior Indians” in 1793 eating a delicacy of the inner tegument of the bark of trees. He said that they used a thin piece of bone for stripping the bark. He also describes (Mackenzie, 1970, 366) the Bella Coola people eating the inner bark of the hemlock tree.

The dish is considered by these people [Bella Coola] as a great delicacy; and on examination, I discovered it to consist of the inner rind of the hemlock tree, taken off early in summer, put into a frame, which shapes it into cakes of fifteen inches long, ten broad, and half an inch thick; and in this form I should suppose it may be preserved for a great length of time. This discovery satisfied me respecting the many hemlock trees which I had observed stripped of their bark.

Garland (1899, 82) observed the same practice in June of 1898 while he travelled through Carrier territory.

Like the Jicarilla Apaches, these people have discovered the virtues of the inner bark of the black pine. All along the trail were trees from which wayfarers had lunched, leaving a great strip of white inner wood exposed.

'Man heap dry -- this muck-a-muck heap good,' said the young fellow, as he handed me a long strip to taste. It was cool and sweet to the tongue, and on a hot day would undoubtedly quench thirst. The boy took it from the tree by means of a chisel-shaped iron after the heavy outer bark has been hewed away by the axe.

There is a description of Carrier women harvesting shavings of the pine cambium in a "Carrier myth" recorded by Morice (1896, 22).
I have seen hemlock trees in the Kuldo area and lodgepole pine trees near Fraser Lake that have rectangles of bark removed for about one-third of the circumference of the tree (see Figures 1.3). Eldridge (1982) wrote an extensive paper on the topic of First Nations people harvesting the inner bark, or cambium, of a tree. Eldridge (1982, 26) supports the assertion that “Stripping for cambium is a logical interpretation of rectangular wounds on hemlock, spruce, pines, aspens, and cottonwood.” My observations are that the scars are about one to two meters from the ground, and the scarred trees usually occur in groups. She suggests that the cambium was a source of sugar, as a source of energy for traveling and the hemlock cambium could be a source of calcium for children and pregnant women (Eldridge, 1982, 24). Harvesting would occur in the spring when the peelability of the bark is high due to the increased flow of sap in the tree.

There are many more uses for the tree. Hilary Stewart (1984) has described many uses of the cedar tree, and Nancy Turner (1979) has published books of plant use, including trees, by British Columbian First Nations people. There are also a few more uses that may still be visible. For example, George Dawson (1891, 18) observed that the Shuswap people used ponderosa pine (yellow pine) bark chips as a source of fuel. The bark did not smolder for long; consequently, a pursuing war party would find “it is difficult to tell by an inspection of the embers how long ago the fire was made.” I have observed some Douglas-fir trees at the archaeological site between North and South Pender Islands that have had the bark chipped off (see Figure 2.2). This site may have been a layover spot where it was strategic to leave little trace.

George Dawson (1891, 14) also reported another unique use the Shuswap people had for the bark of the western white pine tree to make small canoes. He explained that “The inner side of the bark, stripped from the tree in one piece becomes the outer side of the canoe...” This case is somewhat unique because the canoe is made from white pine
bark rather than birch bark. The Okanagan people are well known for their birch bark canoes (Turner, 1979, 199).

Foresters and archaeologists refer to cedar trees, for example, which have been stripped of their bark by First Nations as “Culturally Modified Trees” Sophie Thomas, a Carrier Elder and healer, told me that the British Columbia Forest Service had long since prohibited their practice of harvesting the inner bark of pine trees as a source of food (personal communication, October 17, 1995). This is an example of the “clash” of cultures and the impact of colonialism on the traditional lifestyle of First Nations people.

The tree was a sustainer of spiritual and physical life. The results of First Nations sustenance harvesting activities are still evident in that the scars from harvesting the cambium and bark are still visible. Later I provide a brief discussion of the growth of a tree and how scarring can affect a tree. This discussion will help us interpret the First Nations landscape.

The tree was important to many First Nations throughout the cycle of their life. In the beginning a woman or a man, the mother or father of the newborn, would place the afterbirth in a tree or bury it at the foot of a tree. This widespread practice has been documented for the Sekani (Jenness, 1937, 54), Tahltan and Kaska (Teit, 1956, 101), Kwakiutl (Walens, 1981, 110), Alkatcho Carrier (Goldman, 1940, 273) and the Bulkley Carrier (Jenness, 1943, 530). Teit (1956, 104-105) gave a detailed description of a Tahltan or Kaska ritual associated with a male newborn.

There was a custom if the infant was male for the father to repair to the confinement lodge shortly after the afterbirth had come. He took with him a miniature bow and

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18 In fact, the tree is believed to be a “protector” of newborn children in many religions around the world. Eliade (1963, 306) says the tree can make the birth easy, and can also act as a guardian over the newborn. He says that “direct contact with embodiments of power and life can be nothing but favourable to the newborn child” (Eliade, 1963, 307).
arrows, the latter about five inches long. These he made as soon as he had learned his child was a boy.

Holding them in the infant’s hands, he made motions as if the infant was shooting the afterbirth with an arrow. Sometimes the arrow was actually shot at the afterbirth. At the same time the father prayed aloud, saying “May my boy be a good hunter and a good shot in after years.” He then wrapped up the bow and arrow and going to some tree in a secluded place (or any place near by, according to some) hung the package up in the tree or hid it in the branches of foliage...It was believed the conducting of this ceremony helped to make the boy become an expert and lucky hunter...

Walens (1981, 110) also provides a detailed discussion about the Kwakiutl ritual.

Normally the afterbirth of a child, which is considered a part of its living flesh, is ritually treated to prevent sorcerers from using it to bewitch the child. It is then buried at the foot of a live cedar tree, where its substance is absorbed into the tree. This ritual is believed to ensure the longevity of the child in three ways: first, the tree becomes the guardian of the child; second, just as the tree lives a long time, so too will the child; and third, since children are considered to have a very tenuous link to this world until they have been given their first name (at ten months), the absorption of their living substance into that tree helps establish a firmer link to life.

Goldman (1940, 273) suggests that the practice ensured easier childbirth in the future while Jenness (1943, 530) attributes it to ensuring fertility. Regardless of the particular reason, the tree spirit has the power to bring good luck in future activities such as conceiving, birthing, survival and hunting. My Great Aunt Sophia Mowatt told me that the Gitxsan would put the afterbirth of a boy in a tree to bring good luck in hunting and of a girl in a berry bush to bring good luck in berry picking (Mowatt, personal communication, July 24, 1995).

Simon Fraser (1960, 85-86) observed “many piles of sapin [fir branches] near the road,” and was informed by his guides that “they were birth places.” This observation was made at a place where the Thompson and Lillooet people mixed.

Many cultures including the Kwagulth (Dawson, 1887, 348-349 and Walens, 1981, 60), and the Bella Coola or Nuxalk people (Mackenzie, 1970, 387) placed their
dead in trees, on poles or scaffolds. Dawson (1887, 348-349) gave a detailed account of the Kwakiutl practice.

The graves of the kwakiool are of two principal kinds: little scaffolds to which the coffin-box is lashed, high upon the branches of fir trees, and known as tuh-pe-kh; and tombs built of slabs of wood on the ground... The trees used for the deposit of the dead are often quite close to the village, but when a tomb is placed upon the ground, it is generally on some rocky islet or insular rock... Graves in trees are generally festooned with blankets or streamers of cloth and similar appendages are affixed to poles in the vicinity of the graves on the ground. Roughly carved human figures in the wood are also often added. These sometimes hold in their hands wooden models of copper plates which are so much valued by these northern tribes of the coast.

It is not entirely clear, based on this description, where the carvings were done.

George Dawson (1891, 10) gave a similar but unfortunately vague description of carved figures at Shuswap burial sites.

Some years ago, carved or painted figures, generally representing men, were commonly to be found about the graves along the Fraser and Thompson. The posts of the enclosure were also not infrequently rudely carved and painted while kettles and other articles of property were hung about the grave or in its vicinity. Horses were in some cases killed, and the skins hung near the graves; but most of these objects have now disappeared, and crosses are frequently substituted for the old carvings.

It may be important to note that carvings of human figures or animals were used by some First Nations such as the Shuswap to mark burial sites.

Alexander Mackenzie (1970, 387) observed “the remains of bones” near or beneath large old cedar trees which sometimes measured “twenty-four feet in girth, and of a proportionate height.” Mackenzie surmised that the Bella Coola “natives may have occasionally burned their dead in this wood.” Walens (1981, 60) attaches the following meaning to the Kwakiutl practice.

A person who dies and is buried in a tree still resides in the world of humans; as his body decomposes or is devoured by scavengers, his material existence disappears, but his soul travels to other places in the world.

The theme I take from this passage is that the tree is a medium of travel for the spirit of the dead person. Many First Nations believe the spirit can travel to the spirit world. My Great Aunt Sophia (Mowatt, personal communication, July 24, 1995) told me that the
missionaries persuaded the Gitxsan to stop their cremation practices and bury their dead in the ground. She said that there was a short transition period where the dead were wrapped in birch bark, sat in bent boxes rather than coffins, and buried in a grave. I think the Gitxsan originally placed the dead, wrapped in cedar or birch bark, in trees before they were burnt. Boas (1970, 534) feels that Mr. Teit's version of the burial practice "seems more plausible, because it agrees with the statement contained in traditions." Teit observed that some First Nations removed the organs from the body before it was cremated, and "the body was preserved for some time before being deposited in the grave-box, which was placed on a tree." Burial posts or trees were commonly used as resting places for the body. A story recorded by Benyon reporting Tsimshian burial practices supports Boas's claim.

He placed her [the Chief's daughter] in a burial box which was the way people disposed of their dead in olden times. They did not bury them in the ground but put them on burial posts. Often guards were placed there to prevent the remains being tampered with (Cove and MacDonald, 1987, 7).

People with higher names may have been placed on burial posts and people of lower status may have been placed on trees. Perhaps lower status people did not warrant the effort of making a pole. The carvings and cloth on the burial box and nearby posts or trees may act as guardians to ensure the spirit is not disturbed while on its journey to the spirit world. For example, Jonaitis describes carved figures placed against the trees surrounding a Tlingit shaman's grave house. She attributes the purpose of these carved grave guardians to "protect the shaman's remains from evil forces" because the "power lived ever after his remains" (Jonaitis, 1986, 26-27). Barbeau's third precept (Barbeau, 1973, 198-99) summarizes the Gitxsan belief in the soul's journey after death giving rise to tree burials, as the axis mundi to the spirit world.

For the dead survive as ghosts, dwelling for a time in the air above their former habitations, and they may cause injury to the living. Mourn their loss, however lightly, cremate their remains and lay them on trees, that their souls may journey abroad and cross the river of sighs in the end.

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19 Mallery (1972, 409) shows an Australian native's grave surrounded by carved trees.
There is a close association of the tree with the life and death cycle. The genesis of First Nations peoples' sacred regard for all trees may originate with their association with birth and rebirth, the trees' ability to sustain life, and with power endowed to certain trees by supernatural beings. Any tree can have one or all of these characteristics, and thus some First Nations people respect each and every tree.

**Supernatural Tree**

*The Sacred Tree represents the Great Spirit as the center pole of creation... The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. These two are aspects of one reality. (Bopp et al, 1985, 23 & 27)*

Many First Nations people believe that all trees have spirits. Additionally, a sacred tree may also act as the *axis mundi*, "axis of the universe," which centers human communication with the sky world. Consequently, according to Eliade (1963, 300), encounters with supernatural beings can only happen near the *axis mundi* or "by means of it." The *axis mundi* theme as it relates to Sun Dance ceremonial poles is discussed in Jorgensen's (1974) classic study of the Ute and Shoshone Sun Dance. He describes the cottonwood tree centre pole, in the Sun Dance corral, as follows:

> The center pole and the other ritual items of the [Sun Dance] corral have several meanings for the dancers. At base, however, is the belief that the center pole is the medium through which supernatural power is channeled. The center pole is also believed to have supernatural power of its own. Power comes in the form of sun's rays, but need not come only in this form. Power can also be channeled through the pole at night, either through the moon or through the sacred fire (Jorgensen, 1974, 182).

The Sacred tree symbolizes the *axis mundi* or connection between the physical world and the spiritual world.\(^{20}\) I examine this theme in detail when I discuss the supernatural tree of

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\(^{20}\) Australian aborigines have an analogous belief. Morphy (1991, 199-120, 130, & 138) describes the djuwany post in the Australian Yolngu molk (initiation) ceremonial ground as a locus for the transmission of ancestral power through and place. The ceremony reenacts the creation of a river, where the ancestors chopped down a stringybark tree. When the tree fell it split into many pieces which became djuwany posts, and it also spread honey and bees across the land.
oral history stories. I am going to explore this theme in oral history stories, primarily of Gitxsan and Tsimshian origin.

The following oral history, recorded by Franz Boas, demonstrates the Tsimshian belief that the sacred tree can act as a ladder or connection between earth world and the supernatural sources of power who dwell in the sky world. Barbeau (1973, 185) describes how the sky world, or sky country, “rests on the blue vault a very short distance above the mountain peaks.” The tree ladder or axis mundi concept is similar to the Gitxsan perception of the role of a crest pole which is analogous to the tree.

[The pole] re-creates, by reaching upwards, the link with the spirit forces that give the people their power, while at the same time it is planted in the ground, where its roots spread out in to the land, thereby linking man, spirit power and the land so they form a living whole (Anon., 1987, 24).

Franz Boas recorded the following story about squirrels in his book Tsimshian Texts (1902, 211-216). The story presents the concept of the Gitxsan teaching of respect for all beings, the tree as a link to the supernatural, and the relationship between the tree and the shaman’s training. The entire story is presented below.

There were four children who were always shooting squirrels. They killed them all the time. Then they dried their skins and put away their meat. They did so at the foot of a large spruce tree--they did so for a long time all the year round. Then they had killed all the squirrels. Only the chief of the squirrels and his daughter were left. She was very white. Now, a boy went out and came to the foot of the great spruce tree. He looked upward, and saw a little white squirrel running round the tree. When it had gotten to the other side of the tree, behold, he saw that she was a young woman. The boy saw her. The woman called him. Then the boy placed his bow at the foot of the great tree.

The woman entered the house of her father, who was the chief of the squirrels. He was much troubled, as all his people were dead. Therefore he had sent his child to call the boy. The chief questioned his daughter, and she

replied, 'The boy is standing outside.' Then the chief said, 'Come in, my dear, if it is you who killed my people.' The prince entered and sat down. They gave him something to eat. After he had finished, the chief said, 'Why did you kill all my people?' The prince replied, 'I did not know that they were your people, therefore I did so.' 'Take pity on me,' said the chief to the prince. 'When you return home, burn the meat and the skins of all the squirrels. I will make you a shaman.' The chief did so; he made the prince a shaman. Now he was a great shaman. 'Your name as a shaman shall be Squirrel,' said the chief.

The prince lay down. Then the chief rose and put on his dancing apron. He painted his body red, and put on a crown of bear claws. Form his neck hung the skins of squirrels. He held a rattle in his hand and sang, 'Ia haa, ia nigwiahae! I become accustomed to this side; I become accustomed to the other side.' Then the prince became a great shaman. The chief of the squirrels did so a whole year. Then he sent the prince home.

The chief, who had lost his son, had almost forgotten him. Then one of his other sons went to shoot squirrels, and came to the place where his brother had been. He came to the great spruce tree. He looked up, and, behold, the skeleton of a man was hanging in the branches. The bones were held together by skin only. His flesh was all gone.

The boy returned. He entered the house and told his father about it.

The father sent the young men, who saw where the body was hanging. Then one young man climbed the tree, took the body down, and they carried it home. They entered the house. Now the chief’s wife took a mat. She spread it out and laid the body down on it. She laid it down very nicely. The young men placed his hands, his feet, and his head in the way they belonged, and laid the head down face upward. There were only bones. Then they covered the mat with another mat. They painted it red and covered it with bird down. Then they sacrificed. For four nights and days his father and mother did not stay in the home. They had gone to another place, to another house. Only four men, his most intimate friends, watched him. Then they sang 'Ae!' accompanying their song with batons. Then they spoke, singing. Then the body came to life again. The bones were covered with flesh. Then he sang. He invited the tribe of his father in and the people came. Then the prince said, 'Burn the meat of all the squirrels that I shot during the past years, and burn their bones and the skins, which I am keeping in many boxes.' The people did so. They burnt it all.

Then the great master of the squirrels was glad, because his tribe had come to life again. Then the prince sang, 'Ia heiahaa, heia’aya negwa iaha!' I become accustomed to this side; I become accustomed to the other side.' He stood there, and was a great shaman. Then he stopped. His name as a shaman was Squirrel. That is the end.

This story begins by telling of a young boy who did not respect squirrels and his resulting encounter with the Chief of the Squirrels, from the other side (the spirit world),
at “the foot of the great spruce tree.” It is common for the supernatural being to be a white animal, like the white squirrel that enticed the boy into the tree. The white squirrel transformed into the Chief’s daughter and led the boy to the Chief of the Squirrels.

Gitsan, Tsimshian and many other First Nations stories have examples of characters encountering supernatural beings at, or through the medium of a “great tree.” For example, Goldman (1940, 356-57) recorded a similar Southern Carrier story about respecting squirrels where the boy entered the sky world or spirit world by climbing a tree.

Tsax’Kaps sister liked him. Tsax’kap used to shoot squirrel all the time. His sister told him, ‘If you shoot at that squirrel and you miss your arrow will go way up.’ Tsax’kap shot at a squirrel and missed. The arrow started to go up. He climbed a tree to catch the arrow which appeared always a little bit ahead of him. The tree grew up higher and higher. In a short time Tsax’kap looked down. He saw like a smoke. Above he could see a hole in the sky. The tree was just a bit short so Tsax’ Kap climbed in [where the sky God lived].

Morice (1896, 22) translated a Carrier oral history about a jealous husband who followed his wife to a dead tree. She struck the trunk with a stick and “Soon a beautiful young man, white as daylight, came out of the top of the tree and played with her.” The reoccurring theme of a white, supernatural being appearing from a tree is replicated in this myth.

Charlie Mack, a Lillooet Elder, tells a Coyote story where Coyote tricks his son into travelling into the “upper world.” Coyote used his power to put dirt on a stump and then he called it an eagle’s nest. His son Yikw-OOSH-hin began to climb the stump to get the nest, and “Coyote made the tree grow a little higher” (Mack, 1977, 20).

Boas’s squirrel story also describes the training of a shaman, and explains how he lives in both worlds, “I become accustomed to this side; I become accustomed to the other side.” This phrase is one of the most beautiful and expressive explanations of First Nations cosmology. It describes the shaman’s ability to let his spirit travel between the two
worlds. The youth's shriveled body was hung on a tree by the supernatural Chief, and the youth came back as a shaman after the squirrel meat and bones were burned. The squirrel spirits were properly released; consequently, they could be reincarnated back into squirrel people. Diamond Jenness (1986, 65-70) recorded a similar story of Old Pierre, a Coast Salish medicine man. The story explains how Pierre was chosen to be a medicine man and his encounter with "the father of all trees."

My mind returned to my body and I awoke, but now in my hands and wrists I felt power. I rose up and danced until I fell exhaustive again and my mind left me once more. Now I travelled to a huge tree - the father of all trees, invisible to mortal eyes; and always behind me moved the same being as before, though I could not see him. As I stood before the mighty trunk, he said: 'Listen, the tree will speak to you.'

For a long time I stood there waiting. Finally the tree spoke: 'O poor boy. No living soul has ever seen me before. Here I stand, watching all the trees and all the people throughout this world, and no one knows me.

This tree was a supernatural tree, and it was the messenger between the spirit world and earth. The spirits used the tree as a connection. This tree played an important role in training the medicine man.

The Tsimshian story called Guell Hast (Robinson and Wright, 1962, 35-36) is very similar in the theme to Brody's (1988, 7) Beaver Indian story in the book Maps and Dreams about a medicine cross. In both stories a man sets out to find new territory because his people are starving. And, both stories talk of a spiritual marker. In Brody's case Joseph's father carved a medicine cross in a living tree, whereas in the following case
a single fireweed placed by a supernatural tree that made a sudden mysterious appearance.
In both cases the "great tree" serves as a messenger from the spirit world that confirms the right for the new family to use the discovered territory. Joseph's dad sought spiritual support by erecting the medicine cross on the new found territory and the Tsimshian chief also seeks support as described in the following excerpt.

Here he set his mark and claimed the land. 'This country,' he said, 'I take for the hunting grounds of my people, the men of Medeek. I take it that it may be used not wastefully nor with wanton destruction of the animals and the birds and the fish that dwell therein... Here for the night he stayed. His long ordeal was over. The time of self-denial was past. Taking such wood as came to his hand he prepared to light a fire and cook a little food. From under his blanket coat he drew a little pouch. In it he had finely shredded cedar bark mixed with powdered resin of the pine. Taking his firesticks of cottonwood roots he twirled until a spark appeared. With this spark he lit the mixture from his pouch and a fire sprang up.

Fed and warmed, he made his bed beneath a close-limbed spruce and slept until the break of day. Again he lit the fire. As he ate he looked around. Close by stood a giant tree. Strange! The night before it had not been there. And

at the foot of that tree grew a single haast, a fireweed. Tall and slender it stood, its leaves trembling in the breeze. A haast growing out of the snow? Surely some magic. Such a plant was far ahead of the season of its kind.

His curiosity was aroused. He left his food and moved closer to the plant. It was fresh and green. It still stirred with the breeze. Still closer and closer he came to it. At last his hand reached out to touch the foliage and as his hand came close the haast vanished.

Guell haast, the single fireweed, he called that place. To this day Guell Haast is the southern boundary of the hunting grounds of the Bear people. From that day Guell Haast, the single fireweed, has had its place on the totems to tell of the time of famine and how the people were saved from starvation (Robinson and Wright, 1962, 35-36).

Mary MacKenzie (nd., 222-228) presented the following story to the court during the Gitxsan - Witsuwit'en land claims case. William Benyon (Williams, 1952, #76) and Tens (Tens, 1952, #61) have recorded other versions of this story. This adaawk (oral history) is important to the northern clans in Gitxsan territory. A significant number of the tree carvings discussed along our journey are located in this area near the old village of
Kuldo (Qualdo). Therefore the following story provides some important context for our journey as well as some insightful meaning regarding crests, trees and spirits. I chose to present Mary’s version because she offers some important interpretations about crests as she tells the story. I have edited the court transcript version by eliminating the court’s interspersed questions and recording of administrative matters.

The adaawk of Gyluugyat starts at Gitan gasx. It’s a village, and to translate, the Gitan gasx is the village of wild rice. It’s been the oldest village up north. The location is near Bear Lake. In the House of Gyluugyat and Gitan gasx we have a warrior, and the name of our warrior in our House, Gyluugyat’s House, is Suuwigos.

There is another group of native people. They’re called Tsi Tsa wit, and they’re further up north. They came down to Gitan gasx, and they had seen that the people of Gitan gasx had quite a bit of land, so they decided to raid the village of Gitan gasx to get more of their land. Suuwigos had a brother by the names of Tsawaas.

While he was on the trapline, and after he was discovered that somebody had killed him, and this made Suuwigos furious, so he started a group. He asked for a group of people to go with him, to go to the Tsi tsa wit territory.

They raided -- they came upon a place where they only seen smoke coming out from the ground, and these were the people we call in Gitskan, Luu Tsobim Tsim yibit, and it means the people underground.

They had a very good idea of their location of this village that they came upon, so they returned, and Suuwigos prepared himself to declare war with these people, so he -- they killed a grizzly bear and they took the hide, almost a whole hide with the head and paws and everything on it. Now, they prepared this grizzly hide, they cleaned it, scraped all the fat off it. Now, they went and got pitch from the jack pine trees, and they rubbed it on this fur part of the hide, and they covered it with sand. Now, they had this -- had this hide out, and the people had bow and arrows. They shot at this hide. If the arrow goes through they have to put more pitch and more sand to it for it to be arrow proof, you would say. Now, when this was ready, Gyluugyat knew that this armour was ready for him, so they set off again and they went to where this village of the people that lived underground. Now, he advised his army that he -- they’ll sneak up to this place while he himself draped in this grizzly bear skin, and he walked down the opposite of the village, the adaawk goes like there was a gulley, a deep gulley, and this is where the grizzly bear with Suuwigos in it walked, and then the people of the underground seen this grizzly bear, and they went out, they want to kill it, so they did. Now, they took, all their arrows, they shot at the bear and they didn’t penetrate at all, so all their arrows were used up. This is when the force came and went into dug up the people, they killed them all. Now, this is how Suuwigos led
this group of people to fight off these Tsi tsa wit. Now, when this was over Suuwigos returned to Gitan gasx.

He returned to Gitan gasx. Now, he knew that he had to have someone with him to -- to help -- to aid him or to -- he was to have a brave person too, so that they would do more raiding, because they -- he knew that there were still more Tsi tsa wit in other places. He had -- now, this is not clarified to me, but I'll say it both. It's either Suuwigos had a lovely daughter or lovely sister, so he sent word out that he had a beautiful sister or beautiful daughter, and the men of the -- of other places, villages other than outside of the Gitan gasx came, and quite a few came. Suuwigos didn't think that there were -- he wasn't the man for his sister, so one day this man came, he heard about Suuwigos and he heard that he had this lovely lady. So he went -- he went into Gyoluugyat's House, and Gyoluugyat never turned, and this man by the name of Kuutkunuxws came, and he seen Gyoluugyat alongside the fire, so he went over to the fire, of course he was -- Suuwigos was laying alongside the fire putting the heat on his back.

Now Kuutkunuxws went and ruffled this fire, and there were sparks come out, and it fell on Suuwigos' back. He never turned, and again [Kuutkunuxws] made the fire flare up, more sparks. Suuwigos never moved. So Kuutkunuxws stepped back towards the door and he stood there. This is when Suuwigos got up with a club and he went to Kuutkunuxws and asked him what he was doing, and Kuutkunuxws never said anything. He said 'If you don't tell me what you're doing here', he said, 'I'll club you'. He raised his club, Kuutkunuxws never blinked, and that showed that he was very brave, and Suuwigos knew too that Kuutkunuxws was a very brave man. Right there he said to Kuutkunuxws that he was a brave man and that if he wanted to marry his sister or daughter he would let her marry him. Now, so the two, Suuwigos and Kuutkunuxws, travelled together, after he married, Kuutkunuxws married Suuwigos' lady. Now, they travelled together, and this is when our crests came. While going out looking for the Tsi tsa wit they came across a big tree, and they made their camp underneath this tree, and during the night they heard noises, and it was coming out from the tree that they were under. Now Kuutkunuxws went up and to get -- to see what he -- what was making this noise on this tree. And he seen this thing, it was a human being, but it was a giant human being. Now, he came down and told Suuwigos about it. Now Suuwigos went up to see this big human being. Now, this is when Suuwigos got to this figure, this human figure, the giant one. He took it and knocked it down and swung it to the ground. So they left, so when Suuwigos, before he left, he tell Kuutkunuxws (currently William Morrison of Kispiox) 'I will have that figure for my crest'. Now, this is why we have that figure for Gyoluugyat's house of Gyadim Lax ganit (the man of the tree) is our crest.

They knew that they were on the heels of some -- another group maybe, and they knew that they were near the place where they'll meet with other group of people, that there were going to have -- we say in Gitxsan wil digitxw
(when a group of people meet together and they have a war, or they have a fight amongst the two groups).

Now, again at nighttime they -- well, at dawn they go, Kuutkunuxws and Suuwiigos and the people that are doing battle, they camped again near a lake. Now, they -- Suuwiigos didn't know just how far ahead these people were from where they were, so anyway, he went down to the lake to get some water. Now, just when he got to the lake he seen shadows on the surface of this lake, and he looked, he stopped, and he watched, and he seen this movement, so he knew that the people they were after were up in the trees just above them, so he went back to his -- to Kuutkunuxws and to the other people and told them 'Our enemies are just above us', so this is how they went, and of course they fought the battle. Now then again, this is how Gyoluuyat received the crest of these shadows. Now, on our blankets and on our -- painting of our Houses we have these figures. They're a group of people, and they come in a zig zag way on our blankets. Now, this is 'Nii tsabim lax gan. The first one was Gyadim Lax ganit. Now there is 'Nii tsabim lax gan, when there's a group of people. And this is how we got our crest again. Now, this is the way that the Gitxsan people get their crests, is anything unique that they come across or they've seen they've taken it as their crests. Now, the people that travel, any more unique things happening you will find that in other House, Chief's Houses. Our Chief has more crests than the other House because they go out to look for these things so they will have a crest, and who has the more crests are the people it shows that they work together, and they make it very strong. And this is how these crest mean so much to us, is by looking for it, and to keep it as ourselves in on House. Now, in another House a Chief would have a crest. Now, we can't borrow crest from other Houses. What House belongs, their crest belongs to one House, is their property. Now, these are how strong these crests stand in the House of a Chief. No one can use other Houses, Chief's Houses’ what crests they have. If they do they -- there's embarrassment of the Chief. There has to be punishment. We go to the House of that whoever took another person's crest. So this is very firm in our laws even today, that we -- no one will use another Chief’s crest. That’s their title for that.

Mary describes how the braves encountered a large naked human in a tree, and the spirits (shades) walking along the canopy. The warriors claimed these beings as crests because of these encounters. Williams (1952, #76) in his version of Mary’s story describes the shadows that were encountered as follows:

They now went on, and arrived at a great lake. Gutkwinuhrs' [Kuutkunuxws] father-in-law, Tsilaerentk from Kiskagas, was also with them, and he was a brave warrior too. As they looked into this lake, the wind was blowing and they saw the shades of the trees in the lake. And they took these shadows of trees as a crest and
called them Qanhautsenrht, ‘Tree-shadow-of’, and they gave this crest to the Larhkibu (Wolf)...

Emmonds (1991, 102) explains the Tlingit view on tree shadows as “the shadow cast by the tree in the sunshine [was its spirit]...”

These encounters with spirits are called nox nox by the Gitxsan and other Tsimshian groups. Marius Barbeau (1973, 71) describes nox nox as encounters with spirits or “the spirits of nature, and the shades of our forebears.” He explains they are “unseen in daylight but ever present beyond sight” in places such as the sky and forest (Barbeau, 1973, 179). Robinson (1976, xvii) describes nox nox as follows:

Nochnochs were also real entities with tremendous powers. Boas call them nExno’x, helpers from Heaven, and points out that the term designates anything mysterious. As well as being supernatural helpers, they are also the whistles used in dances and the sleight-of-hand tricks of the dancer. Ken Harris says that they are either persons or animals possessed by known spirits and used by the Heavenly Father to punish or reward. The nochnoch, therefore, wields a large influence in the Northwest Coast peoples lives. Any action of a nochnoch is interpreted as either punishment or reward.

I like Robinson’s explanation because he illuminates the point that nox nox are beings that are “possessed by known spirits.” Sacred trees are beings which have the potential, at any time, to be possessed by the supernatural. Only those beings on earth that are being used by the supernatural are nox nox.

Marsden (1987, 45) explains that one of the ways nox nox and crests are acquired is while on a journey into battle. She says:

Tests of strength on the journey allow the warriors to experience their own power before it is put to the greater test. They can precipitate an encounter with a supernatural being. This spirit or being may be the ancestral power of the wilnat’ahl already embodied in a crest or it may be a new one. In either case it presents itself to the warriors before the battle as a promise of the supernatural assistance he can draw upon in the war itself.

Kuutkunuxws and Suuwiigos acquired their crests when they encountered the “man in the tree” and “shadows” nox nox while on their way to do battle with the Tsetsaut people.
The next set of stories are good examples of the relationship between purification, and the supernatural tree. The Gitxsan call purification Si’setxw, which can increase a person’s daxgyet or spiritual power. The stories Am’ala, Very Dirty (Boas, 1970) and Person of the Trees (Menisk and Benyon, 1987) both share the same theme. A young boy who has unclean habits is purified by an encounter with a supernatural tree and he gains great power. The boy Am’ala has such great power that he now holds the world up on a pole. The other boy, Guxla becomes rich by supplying his people with scarce firewood. I will present portions of the story of Am’ala (Boas, 1970, 117-121) and then of Guxla (Menisk and Benyon, 1987, 315-16).

The young man [Am’ala, (Very Dirty)] went to the bay south of their house, where a brook was running down. He was full of sorrow while going up the brook. Then he met a young man whose skin shone bright. He asked him, ‘Why are you so sad this morning, my dear!’ The young man answered, ‘O supernatural one! my three older brothers make fun of me and laugh at me, and they call me Very Dirty!’ Then the supernatural being replied, ‘What do you wish of me? I will grant you your wish.’ Then the young man said, You see that my skin is not clean. I want to be clean, and I want to be stronger than any living being in the country.’ The supernatural being replied, ‘Go over there and gather the leaves of the supernatural tree and bring them to me.’ So dirty went to the great valley and tried to find the leaves, but he could not do it. He brought leaves of all kinds, but the supernatural being refused them. Then the supernatural being went himself and brought a bunch of leaves of the supernatural tree. He said, ‘Let us go down to that pool yonder!’ They went, and behold! there was a good pond, and the supernatural being washed Dirty in the pool four times. He washed him with the leaves of the supernatural tree, and he became very clean, and was a fine-looking man, tall, and broad of chest... Now, all the animals heard that this young man was the strongest person that ever lived...When all the animals had failed, the strong trees came. First the Crabapple Tree came to his door and called him out to fight with him. He came out and pulled it out with the roots as one plucks out grass; and thus all the strongest and greatest trees came. He pulled them out and broke them to pieces...

Dirty, with the aid of his slave, defeated all the living beings and the strong mountain. The slave would rub the oil of wild ducks on Very Dirty’s sore back to rejuvenate his power.
Finally Am’ala won the right to replace the ailing Chief who was supporting the world on his chest with a pole.

Dirty is still holding the world on his chest, and his slave is also there. The oil of wild ducks is nearly gone now; and as soon as Dirty dies, the world will come to an end (Boas, 1970, 121).

The story of the boy named Guxla who has unclean habits describes his encounter with a supernatural tree and his resulting gain of daxgyet.

There was Chief who had a grandson. The boy used to emit noises through his hands that annoyed the chief. The chief thought that he was making a mess all the time. The boy developed that habit until he actually defecated without a stop. They chased him out of the house, and built a house for themselves at the end of the village. Both he and his grandmother stayed together. They had a little chopping axe.

He was now pretty well grown up, and strong. One night, a stranger came into the house. They did not know who he was. They placed a mat at the back of the house for him to sit on. The grandmother took a spring salmon and began to roast it. After that, she crushed some berries in a bowl. After she had finished giving the berries, she gave him highbush cranberries and soapberries.

When the man had finished eating, he asked the boy, ‘Have you not a chopping axe?’ The boy replied, ‘Yes, I have one.’ The man said, ‘Let me see it!’ The boy brought the axe, which was made of stone. The stranger looked at it. He took it, put it in his mouth, and pulled it out. They saw that the axe was sharpened. In the path which the people used to pack their wood was a great spruce tree. They had nothing to cut the spruce tree with. The man then said to the boy, ‘You will cut the big spruce tree, in the morning.’ He added, ‘Just before the tree falls, you must shout, ‘Amlan, wiliamlan!’ meaning that the tree will split itself in small fragments.’ The man said, ‘Do not leave a particle of this tree. Take it all, even if it requires all day taking it. My name is Giskyila. You must not leave a particle of that tree. Immediately after the tree falls, you must run to the top of it to the very end.’ After he had told the boy his name, the stranger went away. It was the tree itself that had come to him after taking the form of a man.

In the morning, the young boy got up and began to chop the tree. While he was doing this, the men of the village saw him and made fun of him, saying, ‘Does this boy who was always defecating think that he can chop down this big tree?’ The boy kept up chopping away, the axe not penetrating very deep into the wood. While he was chopping this tree to pack it away, the women saw him and laughed at him, ‘The young boy who was always defecating thinks that he can chop this tree down?’ All those that came by did the same thing, especially the women; he was the butt of ridicule, because
he messed himself and wanted to show off. The boy kept chopping and he was getting very discouraged. He was about to give up. Then the axe went right into the wood. It was rapidly chopping through the side of the tree. What was coming out of the tree was black, and different from what it should have been. Then the tree began to fall, and, as it was falling, the boy shouted, 'Amlan, wiliamlan!' just as he had been directed the night before. As it came down, it fell into pieces, as if they had been cut into fire lengths. He then ran along the top of the tree to the end. There he picked up a box. When he opened the box he saw that there was a garment in it. It was very red, and it was called Garment-of-Bright-Red on account of the colour. There was also another garment in there, which was the Garment-of-White-Hairs.

The boy Guxla, took these garments into the house where his grandmother was awaiting him. They began to pack the wood he had cut. They did not leave a branch, as they had been instructed. Now they had a big pile of wood in the house.

During the night, a huge snow storm came upon the country and buried all the houses. The snow was very heavy, and the people were unable to go and get their wood, because of the deep snow. The chiefs of the diverse Houses began to buy wood, paying with moose skins. This, from the boy and his grandmother. They had many moose skins, because of their selling of the wood. They were wealthy now, and he was becoming a chief.

He was now grown up, a young man, and the grandmother retained all the moose skins. After the snow was all gone, the young man said that he would have a feast. After his guests had arrived, he began to give them all presents. During this ceremony, he announced that he wanted to assume the name of Guxla, the name that had been applied to him in ridicule. He also assumed the name of the man that had been in to see him, Giskyila. At the same time, he exhibited the Garment-of-Bright-Red and the big box People-of-Tongues.

In these two stories the supernatural tree, or nox nox, gave Am'ala great power that manifested itself into strength and gave Guxla great power that manifested itself into wealth. The metamorphosis of a dirty boy into a powerful person was initiated by the supernatural tree's ability to purify the boys and give them daqyet. Again, I think a supernatural being passed on power through the sacred tree. In these oral traditions the tree symbolizes purification. There is a Tsimshian story called The Widow and Her Daughter (Boas, 1970, 172-177) which reinforces the symbolism: it describes the origin of the use of devils club as a purifier. Tsimshian hunters and trappers use devils club to purify
themselves before they go hunting. A young boy met his supernatural father in the forest one day, and the father said “I will teach you to obtain valuable animals by trapping them without shooting them.” The father showed the boy how to make traps and snares. The father then said “And you shall eat the bark of devils club” and taught him purification rituals. A year passed and the boy’s luck turned for the worse—he could not catch any animal. His supernatural father appeared again.

Early the next morning he went into the woods, looking for devil’s-club, but he did not find any. Late in the evening he came back home; and after he had washed his body, he went up a little hill, and behold! there was a large tree. He went toward it; and before he reached the foot of the large tree, a supernatural being came around to meet him. When he saw him, he said, “Is that you my son? Tomorrow you shall cut down this large tree, which will last you throughout your lifetime.” After he said this he disappeared. The young man went home, and early the next morning he went and found the large tree. He went toward it, and behold! there was a devil’s-club tree larger than any other tree in the whole world. He took a stone axe and felled the great devil’s-club tree... Then he started to wash his body with the bark of the devil’s club and its sap, and he ate some to purify himself. (Boas, 1970, 174-75).

The supernatural father appears from behind a “great tree” to pass on the power of the devils club. The boy became very wealthy because of his renewed trapping success, “He remained an expert hunter.”

The final oral history story is about Tsauda and his slave Halus. Henry W. Tate recorded this story and Franz Boas is the editor (1970, 297-306). This Tsimshian story, as presented by Boas, is a poignant classic. The initial passages describe how Halus the slave tricks Tsauda who is the son of a supernatural Chief-in-the-skies. Halus was to arrange a marriage between a beautiful girl on earth and Tsuada, but Halus married her instead.

Tsuada was very angry and he cursed Halus. Tsuada said “Everything that you do in the future will turn out badly, and you will be disappointed with your wife!” Tsuada then married the princess’s lame sister and exclaimed “she will have good fortune.” In the ensuing events Halus met with misfortune at every turn, when gathering firewood, fishing
or hunting. Tsuada’s wife gave birth to two daughters. Supernatural beings, such as Tsuada, have the ability to prevent a person from being able to succeed at hunting, fishing and providing for their family. Supernatural beings ability to affect luck is discussed later on when we look at some of the reasons why tree art was created. I will now present a couple of passages from a story where Tsauda’s daughters and their spouses had encounters with supernatural trees. I present more exerts from the story that relate to ancient copper smelting methods at the Phillips River stop along the journey.

When the elder girl was married, she told her husband that her father, Tsauda, told her of a good copper in the Copper Creek at the head of the Skeena River. Therefore the prince called his three young men to go with him to see the good copper at the head of that creek; and when they were going in their canoes up the river, they smelled sweet-smelling scents; and when they went farther up, they smelled still more fragrant odors; and they went on and on, and the odor was sweeter than ever. Before evening they camped, and the prince went into the woods; and as he went through the valley, he saw something standing in the middle of a nice plain, moving and waving. He went near it, and he saw that it was a live tree of odors. So he ran to it and embraced it, and all the branches of the tree also embraced him, and the living tree pressed him hard and squeezed him; and before he lost consciousness, he shouted, to call his men to come to his help. They ran quickly, and saw the prince and the living tree of odors embracing each other. The prince said to his men, ‘Dig away the earth from the roots quickly.’ The men dug away the earth quickly; and when all the roots were out of the ground and the branches were dead, the prince was released from the branches. All the branches let go of his body.

This is the tree of odors, or the live tree.

This prince was very successful, because he was married to the daughter of a supernatural being. He cut the tree into short pieces, and he also cut the branches and the roots, and he gave to each of his men one root; and his men filled their bags with the soil from the place where the tree of odors had been, and when they came back home, they sold them for a high price. Then all the chiefs from all the tribes came to buy one of the short pieces at a high price, and the princes and the princesses came and bought pieces of the tree of odors, and the prince became a great chief.

The preceding oral histories demonstrate how the scared tree can act as the axis mundi qualities whereby the tree becomes a locus of supernatural power. Human encounters with supernatural trees or nox nox result in the acquisition of daxgyet
manifested through a crest, purification and strength, medicine or good luck. All trees are to be treated as sacred, and some become the axis mundi, the link to the supernatural or spirit world, the bestower of power (Mills, Personal Communication, May 3, 1996).

**Preparations Completed**

Now that our preparations are complete, I hope that you will view tree art as more than a static artifact. Rather you might think of tree art as a tableau vivant - silent and motionless spirits arranged on the First Nations landscape to represent many things. The trees and tree art images are frozen actors on a stage in a moment in time. The story and context created in the frozen moment becomes the snapshot of history which is the source for the story of each tree along the way. A tableau vivant is created by actors, who appear lifeless to the audience because of their frozen gestures. The faces in the forest are tableau vivants staged upon the spiritual First Nations landscape. These faces are alive, they age as the tree ages, they gain power as the tree gains its power through Earth Mother, they embody the artist's spirit and they embody the spirit of the forest. Tree art is a dynamic art form and photographs of tree art are tableau vivants. This alternate perspective may help inspirit you to seek new layers of experience and meaning, and to see the unseen.22

22 "Is that a chicken hanging out of your mouth? says that GOD. No, no, says Old Coyote. It must be my tongue. Sometimes it looks like a chicken" (King, 1994, 69).
Chapter Three: The Journey

Langdon Kihn was an American artist who travelled to Hazelton, BC, in the early twentieth century. He painted portraits of Gitxsan chiefs and landscapes. He wrote a short article in 1926 about his experiences with the Gitxsan, and he offered an invitation to paradise.

I am neither a historian nor an ethnologist, just an artist pure and simple, and want to take my reader into an artist’s paradise. Not necessarily an artist’s paradise but any one’s paradise (Kihn, 1926, 170).

As your guide I would like to offer you a similar invitation to discover tree art and guide its impressions upon your spirit. Upon completing the journey I hope we will share a sense of tree art, the forest context, and the realm of possible meanings. This textual and visual journey across the First Nations landscape begins in southern British Columbia and continues northward to Hazelton, Fraser Lake, Tumbler Ridge and then to the Yukon. Finally, we will make a trip to Manitoba to complete the journey.

The knowledge imparted at each stop is meant to add meaning to the realm of possible interpretations: the Elders will add shades of color to our perception of tree art, for it is within the full spectrum that they exist. There is a story or history for each tree along the way. The story will be told from my perspective, and from the perspective of local Elders. Interviews with Elders, the verbal artists, in combination with photographs of the visual art and background research will construct the story, for each tree art example. These stories will encapsulate our knowledge of tree art at a moment in history, and I

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23 The paintings of Kihn, Emily Carr, A. Y. Jackson, Edwin Holgate and Annie Savage were used as illustrations in Barbeau’s Downfall of Temlaham. These artists all visited the Gitxsan territory to paint village life and the landscape.
sincerely hope that it will evolve and change with time -- the shades of muted meaning will wax as our awareness of tree art grows.

Through our preparations you have been introduced to the artistic, historical and spiritual context of tree art. Now I would like to begin our journey in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and introduce you to George at the first stop. George was also my first introduction to tree art. George changed my perspectives regarding living trees, spirits, art and artists.

**Lower Mainland**

**George**

George lives in the reception area of the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre, Sardis, BC. Richard Daly, co-author of *They Write Their Dreams on the Rocks Forever*, told me where to find George, and so I travelled to Sardis in the spring of 1995. I met Frank Malloway, a cultural advisor and a hereditary Chief in the Stó:lo nation. Frank is a humble and knowledgeable person, with strong spiritual beliefs. I spent a memorable day with Frank talking about George and his history.

George is very powerful in appearance. He was carved on a cedar hop pole circa 1920 (see Figure 3.1). You will learn more about George from my interview with Frank Malloway. Frank begins telling me about the hop poles and hop picking history, and then he describes George's genesis. I have interspersed my comments as the interview progresses.

MICHAEL: If you could just recount the history of George for me... He was on the Hulbert farm on a hop pole?

FRANK: Yeah maybe I could take you down to the hop yard later. They are like a bean, you know a lot of people are picking beans, say 'are these hops?' They stand
them up and string wires, the strings are attached to the wires down to the plant and
grow up to the top of the string. And the hops are hanging down there. And now
they cut them down and they lower the wires, or they use to, when they picked
them by hand, they lower the wires. But now they picked them by machine, they
cut them down and lower them into the wagon and take them to the kiln. There’s
no hand picking any more.

MICHAEL: So they pick seasonally?

FRANK: Yeah, Usually the second week in August until the end of September,
anywhere from 4-6 weeks. We were just talking about that the other day. About
the migration of people, they used to pick strawberries, they start picking
strawberries, they go to raspberries and then go to hops, and after hop picking they
would go to the Okanagan to pick apples. Some even went as far as California to
pick grapes.

MICHAEL: So was this the Stó:lo people?

FRANK: Yeah, it was the Stó:lo people, and all the people on the coast. You
know. It was sort of the fun part of it, not everyone wanted to make a million, they
wanted to socialize. A lot of marriages occurred. A place to meet people, beginning
a new life with somebody. Just the other day we were talking with the Elders. I
guess what brought it up, was that there are so many of our young people marrying
their cousins. They say, well, we don’t get to travel anymore. A long time ago we
used to travel to the States, we’d pick berries and then we’d come and pick hops,
then we’d pick apples you know. Meet people from a long ways away from your
village, you know, and you brought a woman home that was not related to you, but
now our people don’t do that anymore, you know. Now were finding out that a lot
of our young people are marrying their cousins. It got really bad up in the
Shuswap area. We have a girl working for us, she married one of our boys across
the river, she told me that the Elders got all the young people together several years
ago, too many of you are marrying your cousins. We want all you girls to go to
school somewhere else. When they entered high school in different areas in BC,
you know, a lot of them went to Victoria, Duncan, Campbell River, she said ‘I
came to Mission.’ And met her husband there, or Abbotsford. I am not too sure
which. She said the Elders put their foot down, too many people inter-marrying.
What brought it up was our longhouse you know. She never ever was to our
longhouse dances you know, one of my cousins told me about it.

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 are photographs depicting the hop picking era. Figure 3.2
shows the First Nations hop pickers, Stó:lo and many others. Figure 3.3 shows a
woman picking hops at the Hulbert hop farm. The history of the hop picking era in the
Chilliwack valley becomes important for understanding George’s historical context.

FRANK: But, uh, going back to George, this hop pole, I guess it is about 15 ft
long you know. He used to see this big knot in the pole and he could see a face in
there, and he used to talk to it you know. Nobody else could see that face so he
decided to get his little hatchet out and break the face out so everyone could see it.
So after that pole needed to be replaced the Hulbert family who owned that hop
yard, they took it down and planted it in their garden. When the hop yard was
sold, I guess they got attached to it, the totem pole, its not really a totem pole, the
face. They took it with them when they moved to Vancouver and put it in their
garden. I guess the lady who Reuben Ware interviewed about the hop yard, she
said she was worried it would deteriorate, she was very careful with it, she gave,
when she showed it and told him to take it back to Chilliwack. She gave him a quart
of preservative, ‘You brush this on George, and make sure you brush this on
George.’ Then we gave him a quart of that every year. George came home, he
wasn’t christened George until Rueben Ware in the history he got from this lady,
was that George Yutslick was the one that carved the face in this pole. So we just
dubbed him George because we didn’t have any other name, and that was about,
gee I must be getting old, it was 20 years ago. George came back, I think it was in
‘76, or ‘77. You know and it is ‘95 right now. So its quite a few years now, but
he doesn’t really have a permanent place to sit. That’s why the Elders were really
upset by it, he was laying in the longhouse, nobody really respected him, there was
so much change in staff here. The cultural centre was the one looking after him and
they put him in the longhouse. He was removed from there when we had the
opening for the new building. The elder said we had to have a permanent place for
him so. That the only history I know of George. George Yutslick carved the face
so everyone could see it.

MICHAEL: When you said you blessed it at the ceremony [opening the
Coqualeetza building, spring 95], what was the process?

FRANK: Well we have among the Coast Salish people, the Coast Salish People we
only have one mask, the swaihwe mask, at the ceremony we use the swaihwe mask
for a lot of for marriages, uh, funerals just before the burial they brush the casket,
they wave the spirit into the other world. Naming ceremonies, bless longhouses.
So when we opened the new building. We call it the new building but it was
renovated from the old hospital [tuberculosis], we bless it in our own way, so there
was no other way we could of done it, though our swaihwe mask. We had
thought it would do two jobs. And that was to name two children, with the name
St6:1(), they were supposed to be living markers of that day. So we just changed
the ending of their names, it was the female and this is the male, Stak: lia for the
female and Stak: alak for the boy. Stak: alak verifies that person being the male,
and Stalak:lia, or, something like that, I can’t remember. See that picture up there
up there it my wifes Aunt, she has the name Sta......my wife carries the name....So
her children. While they were blessing the children, Stephen Horn was saying we
should get George up here, he needs to be blessed too. So three things took place
at once. We blessed the building, we blessed the children, we blessed George. We
had a lot of mask dancers. They were all lined up, they did three jobs at once. It is
a great honour to be a mask dancer. It is strict. Not everybody can use it. You have
to belong to the mask family. We lost it for 150 years. And it just came back. But
that’s the early missionaries, they made you burn your masks, burn everything.
They gave them up. One we know of, we burned it, the others gave them up, or
the others hid them away. We just lost one a few years ago, one of our Elders was
moving from Laidlaw to Boston Bar to his daughter’s home. And they had it in the
back of the station wagon. It was so hot that day, they had the tailgate open. And
the mask was just inside there, they stopped at a restaurant and they went inside to
eat and they came out and the mask was gone. Someone reached in and took it. It
was one of the old carvings the old masks were not really fancy the way you see the
carvers doing the face masks now, it was what George looked like. They have
protruding eyes, a crooked nose and a protruding tongue. That’s what really
identified the swahwe mask, the protruding tongue. In our area they didn’t have
the bird as the nose. They had a great big nose. I didn’t see that mask, but Mark
seen it, he said that’s the old mask.

MICHAEL: What do you think of George becoming so important to the Elders,
what do you think it represents to them?

FRANK: I think it represents part of their history, as the hop yards, and keeps
them attached to the past. Like what we were doing with the children, like I
mentioned, we christened them, they are living markers. It’s their job to tell other
people what happened that day. I think George was representing the hop yard and
when you talk about the hopyard it brings a lot of memories back for the old
people, they start remembering things that happened. Like ‘Oh that’s were I got my
wife.’ Brings back happy memories. Its just like something that happened, you
respect it, also you take something that’s your own way. Like the man I was
asking he said ‘that’s our history, we’ve got to have George up here, we got to
show respect to him, we’ve got to put him in a place that everybody can look at
him. And then when people ask about it, like you coming along and asked about
George, and saying ‘well what is the hop yards?’ You don’t know anything about
the hop yards. Our kids here are like that here. They don’t know anything about
the hopyards. Because the last time they picked hops by hand here was in 1953.
So that’s 42 years. We’ve got kids that are 18 that never hear about it. So that’s
why I think its so important to our Elders, its just like a book you know. Oral
history, you ask questions about it, and a whole bunch of stories comes out. Its
like I was saying earlier that you respect things that you make, you don’t just cast it
aside. It has a certain life to it, then you return it to nature. George is not ready yet
to return to nature. He has still got a long life ahead of him.

MICHAEL: Important work ahead of him?

FRANK: Yeah, I think a lot of Elders are attached to things like that, it reminds
them of the past and the stories that come out of it you know. Like George
Yutslick, there are no Yutslicks left in this area they have all died away. You talk
about, well who made that, ‘George Yutslick’, well who are the Yutslicks? So that
where it will come out. There are descendants of the Yutslicks, but they do not
carry that name.

MICHAEL: When you talk about markers, what are the markers?

FRANK: Well, that’s the term that Steven Point first brought out, that was Arnold
Richie, he was the one who reminded me, you got to have a living marker. A
marker could be translated as an informant, somebody who remembers that day,
usually we call witnesses and they have to remember what took place, but we refer
to these children as living markers, they began their life as Stal: lak and Stalak:lia on
that day. You can’t take that away, as their new life. That’s the only way I can
translate it as what Arnold and Stephen referred to them as living markers.

MICHAEL: Do you think George is a living marker?

FRANK: I think he would be also, its the second journey that he’s taken, the first
journey was just coming back home. By waking up those stories, it came at a time
when a lot of our Elders knew the carver. A lot of the Elders in our area knew the
carver so they started telling stories about George Yutslick. But today even our 60
year olds don’t remember George Yutslick.
MICHAEL: So it sounds like it would be an important part of this research to get a picture of George Yutslick?

FRANK: Yeah maybe I could take you over to look for one...The Yutslicks originated in the Cultus Lake reserve. And some of them were living on this property when they surveyed the reserves. There was a village here along Lukakuk creek. One of the ladies at Nuksack, just passed away, she was the last one born here. Mamy Cooper, she was from this reserve. Harry Yutslick, I think he was the son of George Yutslick. He the last Yutslick that I knew of. His grandson and wife’s grandson I believe they raised him and put him through highschool. He married a lady from Shuswap, she’s the only one that carries the name Yutslick, through marriage. Mary Yutslick. She teaches a lot of her culture, the sweat lodge. She was working for the prisons for quite awhile. Medicine woman, putting them through their fasts. She was busy over the weekend. I went to see her.

George is a historical marker, an informant who wakes up stories for the Elders and connects them to their past. George was created by George Yutslick in the 1920’s. He remained on the Hulbert hop farm functioning as a hop pole and a garden marker until the Hulbert family sold their farm. They moved to Vancouver and took George with them. George returned to his rightful home in Sardis where he was blessed with cedar boughs and given the name “George” in the spring of 1995. This was, as Frank points out, his first journey. George Yutslick’s intended meaning was to unfold the spirit of the tree in the knot of the hop pole. He wanted to share his insight with the other hop pickers. George was a very good carver, and his carving reminds me of a False Face mask because of the exaggerated facial features. The intended viewing context for George was the hop yard, as shown in the old archival photographs. But, George travelled, sat in gardens and basements, and finally in the reception area. Frank calls George’s new journey as a historical marker in the reception area, the “second journey” of meaning. George is a historical marker, a memorial, and a reminder for Elders about stories of the hop picking era when marriages resulted from the gathering of many peoples. George has awakened faded memories, and the Elders are now passing them on in the oral tradition.

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24 A shopping mall was built on the Hulbert hop farm property.
MICHAEL: George is interesting, I guess as an artist it is interesting to see how a, how a piece of art goes through history, and picks up its own history and how people relate to it. George is coming back on a new journey. It’s a powerful carving, George Yutslick is a very good carver. Its powerful.

FRANK: I think it takes artists to appreciate it too you know, the ordinary people they come and look at it. You have to be an artist or have that feeling to appreciate it. I was walking by there the first week he was put there -- ‘Hi George.’ The receptionist was looking around, she thought somebody got by her.

I developed the notion of the “intended meaning” (first journey) and the “second journey of meaning” from my conversation with Frank. Both Frank and George taught me the importance of history and how the meaning of art is dynamic. The artist creates the intended meaning within the intended viewing context. The “second journey of meaning” develops over time through changing circumstances or changes to the intended viewing context. The hop yard was George’s intended viewing context, and the intended meaning was artistic and spiritual. Now the viewing context is the reception area of the Coqualeetza Cultural Center, and the second journey of meaning is as a historical marker. George’s role is the same as the two young children who were blessed along with George—to witness and preserve Stó:lō history.

George is an excellent example of the interconnected nature between verbal art and visual art. When George embarked on his second journey of meaning he awakened old stories through his presence. George symbolized an era and all the associated people. George helped the Stó:lō Elders recapture and pass on important history through their story telling.

I learned another important lesson from George and Frank regarding how I define the living tree as a medium for tree art. Frank mentioned that he said “Hi” to George as he walked by, as he would to an old friend in passing. The following discussion helped me define “living” trees.
MICHAEL: If you were to write a history of George, what things do you think would be important?

FRANK: The important things about, at the beginning is the spirit of the tree itself, how it comes out, and how the old man seen this and want everyone else to share it.

MICHAEL: The interesting thing about this one is, that from a Western perspective, that the tree is dead, it's just a board standing there, a piece of dead tree standing in the field. But George saw it as alive.

FRANK: Yeah. Well one of our teachings is anything that you make out of a living thing like a tree, like the canoe, you start using it, that piece of wood comes alive, even the paddles come alive. Maybe it's a teaching that was given to our people so they respect everything they own. I don't know, to the old people everything was alive. I was telling you earlier I went back to school in the 70's to get my grade twelve, and while I was in my biology class my instructor said you know this desk here is made of atoms, and you know those atoms constitute wood. It could be bullshit. Well that's the same thing that if someone says you know this log here is a canoe. Well that's the same thing that the biology teacher told me, you got to believe it.

MICHAEL: When I look at George I believe that he is alive. George Yutslick did a very good job.

FRANK: We lost a young boy a few years ago, we had a burning for him. We burned his belongings his clothes and stuff you know. His grandmother had a paddle, one of those bent paddles. She had it up on the wall. She said 'He made that for me, I want him to take it with him.' So he [a friend of the boy's] went outside. During the ceremony, there was a fire you know. He turned around, and the whole pile that was on there flipped over and the paddle came flying off. You know, and he picked it up, and then he said 'You know everything that we use has a spirit, and you know when we offered the paddle he took the spirit of the paddle, and kicked the paddle out, he took the spirit of the paddle, that's all he needed.'

The hop pole, like the canoe paddle, is a living spirit, which may not have water or sugar coursing through its veins, but nevertheless, George Yutslick unmasked the living spirit by carving George. Frank, in a traditional way, answered my belief that George is alive with the poignant paddle story. The paddle, as a wooden utilitarian tool, had a spirit. The deceased young boy took the spirit from the paddle as he began his second journey. Frank emphasized the respect the Elders show for their belongings, because they were made from earth’s gifts, such as the sacred Hopai, the Stó:lō cedar spirit. They would
care for their baskets, paddles and canoes until they were ready to return to nature. Their belongings had a spirit, “you got to believe it,” says Frank.

George was the first stop on my tree art journey and now it's yours. George and Frank taught me some very important lessons that guided me throughout my research. George fulfills an important role in this journey by reinforcing some of the important concepts I discussed in the preparation stages. For First Nations “art” is alive with spirit and spiritual meaning.

**Discovery Passage and Phillips River**

Phillips River flows into Phillips Arm along the west coast of British Columbia, north of Powell River. Somewhere along the River there is a tree carving as shown in Figure 3.4. It took me almost a year to track down this photograph. My search started when I was trying to locate the originator of an archaeological report regarding a tree carving in the Discovery passage (Borden number: EbSi-9). A Mr. T. Peterson filed a report in 1973 of a human face carved on a fir tree which “appears to be Indian.” The tree is located on Vancouver Island along the Discovery Passage. I took a chance and called the T. Petersons listed in the Campbell River area, and Thor Peterson was the first person I called. He had filed the report in 1973.

Thor told me of his find, but originally he thought I was interested in the Phillips River tree carvings. He had submitted an archaeological report on these trees, but the report was lost somehow. Once we cleared up the confusion over the two sites we began to discuss each one and how he discovered them. I spent a few days in May of 1995 looking for the Discovery Passage tree carving based on Thor’s recollection, but to no avail. I did, however, find a scar, created by human activity some time ago, on a large
cedar tree (see Figure 3.5). Bob Pollard of the Campbell River band assisted me in my search.

Thor also told me that he had visited the Phillips River site in 1973 as well. He flew in by helicopter with an old prospector named Bob Hart, who has since passed away. They were looking for an old Indian copper smelting site that Bob Hart had discovered along the Phillips River, near some big flat rocks. Thor remembers 8-12 carved faces in the trees around the old smelting site. Apparently Bob Hart cut into old scars and found the faces under the wood still in good condition, and there was a mirror image on the cut pieces. Thor said that Bob Hart had a theory about the tree carvings. Bob figured that tree carvings marked copper deposits or old smelting sites, and therefore he followed a hunch, as this was his successful prospecting style. Tsimshian oral history about Tsuada and Halus offered some insight to the Tsimshian perspective on copper as a salmon spirit, and how the smelting process could produce dangerous fumes. The Tsimshian are close northern neighbours of the Kwaikah people of Phillips River.

Then the younger daughter of Tsuada said to her husband, 'My dear, my father has told me that there is a good copper at the head of a creek;' and the husband of the younger one called his young men to go with him up there. The following day they set out and went up that creek, and night after night they camped. That young prince went walking along the bank of a River, searching for smooth copper pebbles; but he could not find any, because the time had not come yet. They travelled on many days, until they reached a place way up the River, and toward evening they camped there. There was not much water in the River, and they could not travel on by canoe, because three small brooks joined where they camped, and at this place the deep water ended. The young prince walked along the bank of the River. Then he saw many salmon. He hastened back to his men, and told them that many salmon were in the deep water there. Therefore he took his salmon-spear and went down again, while his men started to light a fire in the camp. He went down, and stood there ready. When he saw a large salmon come up, he struck it and took hold of it. He dragged it up the shore and clubbed it. Then he took out his dart and threw the salmon backward. So the salmon struck the smooth stones of the River bank. It sounded like copper. Then the young prince went to the place where he had thrown the salmon. He took it up again to see if anything was under it and behold! the salmon was transformed into copper. So he
took it up to the camp of his men and showed it to them, and they were all very happy. In the night they got ready for the next morning. They spent the whole night making a new pole and new darts to be used the next day. Before daylight they all went to sleep, and the prince took his copper and put it under his head as his pillow. Late on the following morning, when the sun was high in the sky, the steersman woke up and aroused his fellows; and when the breakfast was ready they called the prince. Then they found that he was dead. They wept over him; but the wise man said to his fellows, 'He died because the live coppers killed him. Let us burn it!' Thus said the steersman.

They threw the copper into the fire to be burned, took the bark of a dried spruce tree, and started a large fire, and the live copper was melting; and when the fire had gone out, the pure copper remained in the ashes like a pole. They saw that the copper was very good and soft. They took it and put it into a bark bag, took the prince's body down to the canoe, wrapped him in a new cedar-bark mat, and carried him in their canoe down the River.

When they arrived at home, and the prince's wife saw him dead and saw the melted copper, she felt very sad. She went into the woods weeping for her husband. While she was sitting at the foot of a large white-pine tree, she heard a noise on the tree above, and saw a shining light. There was a man who came down from the top of the white-pine tree and smiled at her, and said, 'My dear daughter, what ails you?' She said, 'My beloved husband is dead.' And Tsauda replied, 'Don't feel sorry for him! If you want him alive again, I will resuscitate him, my dear daughter!'

Now, Moon knew that her father had come down to visit her. Therefore she stopped crying, and said, 'Bring him back to life for my sake!' Tsauda said, 'Call out all the people, and I will bring him back to life.' So she went into the house. She sent out all the people. Tsauda came in and took the cold water of life from the spring and sprinkled his face with the water. He slapped the dead man on both cheeks with the palms of his hands, and said, 'Come back to life from death, son-in-law!' and the prince sat up, and his wife came to him and embraced him.

Then Tsauda said, when the young man was alive again, and when all the people had come into the house, 'Be careful of the living copper of that River! Let nobody go there, but my son-in-law and his descendants! I shall teach them how to kill the live copper and how to make costly coppers. Then he shall teach his children as I taught him!' thus spoke Tsauda to the people; and when his speech was at an end, he called his son-in-law aside, and also his youngest daughter, and told them how to kill the live copper. He said, 'As soon as you catch the salmon coppers or live coppers, make a large fire and throw the salmon coppers into it, as many as you caught in one evening at your camp. You must throw them all into the fire, and the fumes will not hurt you, but it will make you richer than any chief in the whole world; but if you tell these high commands to some of your relatives or friends or to your tribe, you shall become poorer than ever, and those to
whom you have told my secret shall become rich. Let nobody go with you to that River!— only you two, you and my dear daughter. She shall take them with you; and whoever goes there without your consent, he shall die by the fume of the live coppers."

After Tsauda had given this advice to them, he said to his favorite daughter, 'Now, my dear, go with me to the foot of that white-pine tree!' and when they reached there, he told his daughter, 'You shall eat the pitch that covers this white-pine bark as a medicine against the influence of your copper-work. You shall rub it over your hands and face before you take the live copper.' As soon as Tsauda said this, he flew up to his supernatural home.

Then the prince and his wife went up for the coppers. He did all that his father-in-law had commanded him to do, and he was the first copper-worker among the natives. He became richer than any chief around about, and his fame spread all over the country.

Chiefs from all different tribes came to buy his costly coppers with many thousands of costly animal skins, and canoes, slaves, boxes of grease, costly abalone shells, and all kinds of things. So this prince was great among all the chiefs. He gave away many times costly coppers, male and female slaves, elk skins, and all kinds of goods. At his last great feast he invited the chiefs of all the tribes, and they proclaimed that he should take his great grandfather’s name, Around The Heavens, and all the chiefs said that he should be the head chief.

The husband of Tsuada’s eldest daughter became powerful as a result of his embracing encounter with the “tree of odors,” as did Guxia when he encountered the supernatural tree that provided firewood. Tsuada’s youngest daughter and her husband became powerful because Tsuada gave them the protection of the white pine sap when they were smelting the live coppers. This protection allowed them to make copper and become powerful. I decided to present the entire reference to live coppers because it is important when I try to decipher the intended meaning of the Phillips River tree carving. The Tsimshian oral history about Tsuada and Halus offered some insight to the Tsimshian perspective on copper as a salmon spirit, and how the smelting process could produce dangerous fumes. The white pine tree offered protection from the fumes. The people who had the ability or talent to smelt the copper became very rich and therefore gained much much

25 The rocky mountain juniper (Juniperous scopulorum) is an aromatic tree still found in this area. For instance there is a small stand on the southern edge of Telkwa, BC.
power. Bob Hart's theory is certainly plausible. For instance, John Meares (1790, 247) made the following observation regarding native copper mining along the Northwest coast:

The pure malleable lumps of copper ore seen in possession of the natives convince us that there are mines of this metal in the vicinity of this part of the western coast. We once saw a piece of it which appeared to weigh about a pound, through which an hole had been perforated.

There once was a village at the mouth of the Phillips River where the Kwaikah (mainland Coast Salish) people lived (Assu, 1989, 14). They moved to Campbell River late in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century, and joined the We-Wai-Kum people (Assu, 1989, 16). They were mainland Salish (Assu, 1989, 14). The Kwaikah people were known to be warriors (Assu, 1989, 16). I suspect it was the Kwaikah people who carved the Phillips River arboroglyphs.

Even though I did not have the financial resources to look for the carvings on Phillips River, I have located photographs of the tree carvings. Additionally, I have interviewed two people who have seen the carvings. It seems as if there may be a strong link between the tree carvings and the copper smelting process, of which very little is known. Copper was an extremely important metal to most Northwest Coast people, and therefore the location of deposits and the copper smelting sites would have been very informative from a secular and spiritual point of view. Enough so to warrant tree carving markers, but for what reason may never be known. This site is extremely significant, because it could reveal not only the hidden secrets of the beautiful tree carvings, but it may also enlighten the impoverished knowledge regarding the mining and smelting of copper prior to contact. This site warrants a serious investment in time and money to unlock its precious history.

Before we move on to visit the face in the forest carved by Art Wilson in 1988 I will describe how a tree grows so that we can interpret scars and carvings on trees. Thor
mentioned that Bob Hart cut away old scars and found carvings underneath. Understanding how a tree grows and how a scar is formed will help us search for carvings hidden by the tree’s scar.

Once a seedling is established whether coniferous (evergreen) or deciduous it grows from the tips and adds girth (circumference) starting in the spring and finishing up in the early fall. The growth slows to a sustaining growth where the roots will be the only active growth in the winter months. There are three kinds of buds on a tree: the lateral, flower and terminal buds. The lateral bud produces the extensions to branches and the flower bud produces male, or female flowers called cones. The terminal bud bursts into a leader and grows from the previous years stem. Therefore, it produces an additional segment for the stem or trunk. This bud is responsible for the increase of height in the tree or the lengthening of branches. A professor in my first year forestry class put a cartoon up on his overhead projector of a cowboy sitting under a tree with a noose tied around his neck and then tied to a branch on the tree. He then asked us “How many years of growth will it take to hang the cowboy?” The answer, now that you know how a tree grows, is that the cowboy will not hang. The tree only grows from the tips. If you put a chalk line on the trunk of a tree 1 meter above the ground this year it will still be 1 meter above the ground 25 years later.

The tree puts on its circumference because the work of the very small but very important layer called the cambium. Energy created through photosynthesis and liquids containing minerals gathered by the roots travel up and down the cambium and inner bark, and this is why it was harvested as a food source. If we could travel from the outside of a tree to the centre we would go through the outer bark, the inner bark, the cambium, the sapwood and the heartwood. Note that softwood or conifers are the only species that differentiate between sapwood and heartwood, the heartwood being darker. The cambium
produces inner bark on the outside and sapwood on the inside. You can kill a tree by
girdling it or, in other words, by removing the cambium layer from the complete
circumference of the tree. However if you were to remove the cambium while harvesting it
for food and you only took a rectangle from the tree, what would happen? The remaining
cambium layer would start to grow over the scar from the edges, producing sapwood and
inner bark. Each year the scar becomes smaller and the tree girth increases. Many years
later the scar will be smaller in width and deeper because the tree grew in circumference
while the bare inner wood of the scar did not until it was covered by new cambium. When
the scar is completely covered by new wood and bark it is commonly known as a “cat
face.” The photograph in Figure 2.3 illustrates the progressive growth over a survey tag
that was nailed to a blaze on an aspen tree. The scar is roughly 20-25 years old. The scar
closed over the sign as if someone slowly pulled a drawstring around the edge of the blaze.

**Hazelton**

Hazelton, BC, rests in the shadow of the great mountain Stekyawden (Painted Goat
Mountain) at the junction of the Skeena and Bulkley rivers. I will guide you to a number of
tree art sites in the Gitxsan territory surrounding Hazelton. The first stop will be at a
carved tree where Sam Greene Creek flows into the Skeena River.

Art Wilson’s Tree Carving

Don Ryan, Chief Negotiator for the Gitxsan, suggested that I call Art Wilson about
his tree carving. I called Art, whose hereditary chief’s name is ‘Wii Muk’wilixw, in July of
1995 to ask him if he would guide me to the site of his tree carving. He graciously offered
his services, and we arranged to drive to the site on July 16, 1995. As I drove, Art
explained the history of the tree carving and how it relates to a blockade that was established by the Gitxsan in 1988 to stop logging in the Sam Greene Creek area. Westar, a forest company, applied for an injunction to stop the blockade, but the court upheld the legitimacy of the chief's request to suspend logging until the question of aboriginal ownership was addressed. Art is a Gitxsan artist and leader among his people. He created a print called _Precedence_ that tells the story of the Sam Greene blockade, and he also carved a face in a tree at the blockade camp (Figure 3.6, 3.7 & 3.8). My on-site interview with Art begins with his description of why he carved the face in the tree.

MICHAEL: Maybe you could start out by saying why you did the carving.

ART: I was mainly thinking about the sacrifice that we were doing at that time, and I was thinking like anything else, it has to be something that reminds us of what happened. I very reluctantly carved the face in this tree, the chances of killing the tree. I stood here and talked awhile, just letting the trees know I was very reluctantly doing it. We were brought up, we were taught that everything is alive, I guess it was part of the sacrifice. What I tried to signify was tears here, an expression of sadness of what was going on. Just like this tree, it sacrificed its life for all the trees across the road. So I guess between us and the tree, we have a sad story to tell. Anytime anyone comes along, they ask themselves, why is this face here, and find out who did it, and why it was done? I feel badly that the tree dies. Maybe it had a purpose I guess.

MICHAEL: Why did you choose a face?

ART: I chose a face because when people see a face it just naturally draws their attention. If I had to do this all over again I think I would have done a smaller face. The main reason I did a big face is because it would be hard to miss. This tree has made a very big contribution to educating people, just by surviving these last years.

MICHAEL: Have you ever done any other tree carvings?

ART: No.

MICHAEL: Have you ever seen any others?

ART: I saw one in the last Daggyet [a Gitxsan nation newsletter], I heard about the ones at Kuldo, but I have not seen them first hand. But I have been told about these carvings and why people do them. Most of the reasons are because it is like a memorial, remembering. There are probably other reasons, I don't know. This was the particular reason I did this one. People would ask me about it and why did I do it. Basically it, I thought at the time when the sap was starting to flow, put an expression on the face.

MICHAEL: Why were you here at the Sam Greene blockade?
ART: I was here to support the actions of the chiefs across the River there, save the land, sacrificed a lot of time in different fights about the land. It takes a lot of time to live it down and I think the public has forgotten now. It is a good thing that people have short memories.

MICHAEL: You say that this is a memorial for the sacrifice that people made here, what do you mean by sacrifice?

ART: Sacrifice, this tree basically, from my view, sacrificed its life to pass on the message on behalf of other trees. This situation is a sad situation, it deserves the attention of people so they can do something about it. That is partly what I was thinking.

MICHAEL: Why did you pick this tree?

ART: Well, I thought it was a tree that was in a place where everybody who came by would not miss it.

MICHAEL: How many people were at the blockade?

ART: It went down to three of us, and at the height probably about fifty. It was really amazing at that time, the people that were here heard some singing up in the bush there. Singing and drums. We ask at the time what do you think that was? The ancestors in the spirit world were happy with what we were doing.

MICHAEL: Do you think they asked you to do this carving?

ART: I don't know, I just felt compelled to do it. People will see it and ask questions.

MICHAEL: You heard people talking about other tree carvings and the idea of memorial, what do you mean?

ART: It is similar to the whole idea of totem poles I guess. I think some of the tree carvings from what I understand are significant to the other house groups. I think just seeing the actual carving will tell you something about it. This for example, it looks like a tear.

MICHAEL: It is a beautiful carving.

ART: For some reason I quit over here, for some reason I must of got distracted.

MICHAEL: How many years ago did you carve this tree?

ART: Eight years ago maybe, it might be that long, time goes so darn fast.

MICHAEL: I think it does its job, you notice it right away.

ART: I guess the other thing with this is the scars of the chainsaw. I wanted to do something that says something.

MICHAEL: To mark the period of history?
ART: To remind us that this kind of equipment causes a lot of destruction. Especially down the middle of his eyebrows. Just to say it is a cause of a lot of pain. It is getting there now. The Forest Practices Code. The forestry and mines. I actually went to forestry class at UBC, and told them what was happening and its time they practice what they learn, and things would be different. I don't know. At least I hope to hell they will be different.

MICHAEL: This was a successful blockade wasn't it?

ART: Oh yeah, yeah. I did a print on it called 'Precedence.' Fireweed [clan] on that side [Wolf on the other side of the Skeena].

MICHAEL: Are you happy with this when you look at it eight years later?

ART: Oh yeah, I am surprised it is kind of....

MICHAEL: Do you think it has taken on a different life?

ART: I think so, there is a better expression in his face. The weathering has done the final touches.

MICHAEL: Have you heard about people who talk about the living spirit of the tree?

ART: Oh yeah, anytime you go to get trees you have to talk to them first, and tell them why you are doing what you are doing. If it means that your life depends on it, and you have to stay warm. It is a good thing to let the trees know why you are doing it for whatever reason.

MICHAEL: Are there any ceremonies or offerings?

ART: The only thing that I know is that people say you make sure you talk to the trees. I think other tribal groups they do that, they go that one step further. It is possible we may have done that, I don't know. Be respectful that we are possibly killing a tree. That tree is not quite dead, it looks like there is some green on top. It makes me feel a little bit better.

Art created a historical marker for the successful blockade. The tree carving marks the location, and also acts as a memorial, to help people remember, or to spark questions from following generations. It was with great sadness that Art cut into the tree to create his marker because it went against his nature. Art chose to carve a face as it was a natural attention grabber to passers-by because a face with tears expresses sadness. 26

26 Art Wilson lives at Kispiox almost in the shadow of Mary Johnson's pole which shows the sister who holds a grouse, too late to nourish her brother who has just died of starvation. Tears stream down her face and the pole.
Art’s commentary on his tree carving provides useful insight to the reasons why an artist creates tree art, because there are very few examples of recent tree art. Most carvings are like the Phillips River example where the intended meaning is much more difficult to determine since the artist is unknown. Both of the recent examples, Art and George’s carvings, are memorials or historical markers. Art Wilson’s tree carving is *in situ*, in the intended viewing context. The intended meaning which Art attributes to his carving is highly dependent on the viewing context. Art’s tree carving is still on the first and intended journey of meaning but is gaining a secondary meaning; as he says the face has weathered and aged so it is less sad. The sacrifice made by the tree and Gitxan has contributed to highlight the need for the involvement of First Nations in land use planning and the establishment of the *Forest Practices Code Act*. The Act provides for protection of the heritage resource such as tree art. These provisions are discussed in Chapter Four.

Tree Painting on Geel’s Territory

I was convinced that tree art still exists on the First Nations landscape when Walter Harris, Chief Geel, told me of the tree painting that was found on his territory during the winter of 1988-89. While visiting Walter, we walked over to his Hiding Place gallery to see the cut out image from the decayed tree (see Figure 3.9). Walter knew little about the tree painting or its history. Eldridge (1991, 7), an archaeologist, summarized his impressions of the tree.

The tree painting or ‘arbogaph’ was located on a 1-m-diameter dead hemlock tree that leaned heavily to one side. The base of the tree was hollow, with only a thin shell of wood remaining behind the bark. The tree had been blazed on four sides, but three of the scars were completely overgrown. Tool marks in the bark indicated that, probably, a metal axe or adze had been used to remove the bark. The fourth side has a 70-cm-long open scar-face near the base of the tree with a 46-cm-long painting, in black, on the exposed wood. The pigment may be charcoal mixed with grease, although this has not been confirmed by laboratory tests.
The scar and the associated painting were made between 1826 and 1836 (Eldridge, 1991, 8), as discussed below. This was the approximate time of the arrival of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the area. The age was determined using dendrochronology (tree ring dating). Eldridge speculates that the arborograph may be an ownership marker for a trading trail (1991, 8). I asked my Great Aunt Sophia Mowatt (age 95) whether she knew of the tree. She said she knew of the tree and she thought it was a territorial marker (Mowatt, personal communication, July 24, 1995).

The Tsimshian and Gitxsan geopolitical system, or House and Clan territorial system, which was and still is governed through the feast, was in great turmoil from 1787 onwards (Marsden and Galois, 1995, 169-170). The early maritime fur trade economy created imbalances of power.” Chief Legaix took advantage of his coastal access to the European fur traders by monopolizing the access to interior fur supply areas, such as the Gitxsan territory. James McDonald (1985, 42) suggests that the Gitxsan were “already trading at inland markets with the Coastal Tsimshian for European commodities from American sailing ships when the Hudson’s Bay Company trader explorers reached them, arriving from the East in 1826. House chiefs realigned their connections with the more powerful coastal chiefs through marriage and conflict. One possible outcome of the flux in power was that house chiefs found it necessary to reaffirm their territorial boundaries or control over trading trails by using markers such as tree art. I will examine the geopolitical dynamic again in detail at the Kholkux tree carving stop in the Yukon.

Little is known about Geel’s tree painting except that it is unique. Arborographs are very rare because they are more sensitive to weathering than arboroglyphs. I have referred to the territorial meaning that Sophia attributes to the tree painting, but in the end, little will ever be known about this unique creation. However the very fact that it exists and was created in the early nineteenth century adds important depth to Gitxsan history.
Anspayaxw - Kuldo Trail Tree Carvings

The next leg of our journey is to view tree art along the trail which connects Kispiox (Anspayaxw) and the now deserted village of Kuldo. Kuldo was a thriving and important northern village in Gitksan territory. People still inhabited the village as the goldseekers rushed by in 1898. But the flu, the influences of the church, and the establishment of reserves all depleted the village to its abandoned self. However, it is still used in the summers when the Gitksan go there to fish. The trail between the two villages was used by Klondike goldseekers to access the Yukon along the overland route that Barbeau (1958, 185-86) calls the “Poor Mans Route.” Cattle were driven along the trail north to feed the goldseekers. Adventurers such as Hamlin Garland passed along the trail in the gold rush, and he wrote about the village of Kuldo:

There was a fork in the trail here [about three miles north of Kuldo Creek], and another notice informed us that the trail to the right ran to the Indian village of Kuldo...Turning to the right down a tremendously steep path (the horses sliding on their haunches), we came to an old Indian fishing village built on a green shelf high above the roaring water of the Skeena...There were some eight or ten families in the canon... (Garland, 1899, 121).

Barbeau (1958, 191) describes how the Gitksan people were enlisted to widen the trail to meet the needs of the goldseekers.

Jimmy Deacon, a wild and woolly woodsman, arrived at Hazelton from the south in the spring, with the news that the trails to the north must be cleared at once. He hired many Indians for the work. 'We started from our village here and improved the old Indian trail.' Gamanut [the Outlaw Simon Gunanoot], one of his Skeena men, still remembered well many years later at Hazelton.

The Dominion Telegraph trail was established in 1899 along the widened Anspayaxw-Kuldo trail. In 1961 the Forest Service constructed a forest road following the trail up the valley. Old survey markers can still be found beside the forest road. This trail is layered with history, but still the Gitksan purpose for the trail predominates because of the exquisite tree art creations that have the survived inroads of progress.
We begin our journey at Deadhorse Lake, our southern most stop along the trail. We then travel along the trail to Deep Canoe Creek and view a number of examples of tree art. Finally, we continue across Kuldo Creek where a few tree carvings mark the main and side trails.

**Deadhorse Lake**

Walter Blackwater, a Gitxsan Elder, told me of the tree carvings at the camp along Deadhorse Lake (Blackwater, personal communication, July 27, 1995). The camp is about 50 meters from the lake shore (Figure 3.10). There are numerous initials and messages carved and written on the surrounding trees (Figure 3.11). The dates on some of the tree writings were 1929, 1944, 1955, and 1977. The camp is about 30 meters off the Anspayaxw-Kuldo trail along a spur trail. The three carvings (Figure 3.12) are on two hemlock trees at the trail junction. They are rough carvings of faces and the single carving looks to be newer and done with an axe. There are a few old leg-hold traps still hanging from the trees in the area. I know nothing more about this particular site.

**Deep Canoe Creek**

The Deep Canoe site is about 5 kilometers north of Deadhorse Lake along the trail. During my initial research I discovered an archaeological site report (Borden number: Gk Ta-1) which Doug Anweiller had filed with the Archaeology Branch in 1991. The site description said there were nine trees, and each had a “face” carved on the trunk. My first trip to this site was on June 22, 1995, accompanied by Darlene Veigh and Russell Collier from the Gitxsan Treaty Office. We split up into two groups and started to look for the trail.
and the carvings. I worked my way up to the steep ridge along Deep Canoe, and I found the old trail. The trail is worn to a 30 cm depth in places. It appeared and disappeared through the windfall like a breaching killer whale. There were signs of the old telegraph wire, a telegraph cabin, blazed trees, old cavity traps in stumps and kindling trees along the trail (Figures 3.13-3.16). I felt the trodden history beneath my feet as I anxiously followed the trail.

I ducked under a windfall and started off again, and then I saw a glimpse of something -- a face! I was so excited I could hardly breathe. I walked a few more steps and there it was, a face carved in the trunk of a hemlock tree. I rushed back to find Russell and Darlene. They had found the trail and were making their way to my location. I showed them the carving (see Figure 3.17 & 3.18). This carving is deceiving in appearance because it looks like a rough carving on the bark, but it is actually carved on the overgrown scar of another carving. You can see the measuring tape in the photograph goes 10 cm in under the overgrown bark into the mouth opening of the original carving. Someone had recarved an old carving once the scar had overgrown the original.

We made our way further along the trail after viewing and recording our first find. Shortly, we all stopped dead in our tracks as we noticed a very powerful face staring at us from the trunk of an old growth hemlock tree (Figure 3.19). Its charcoal eyes fixed upon our arrival, as it had with generations of Gitxsan, goldseekers, and telegraph workers. You can see it as you walk up the trail. It was placed in an obvious place for a reason. We reacted with “Wow.” This word aptly summed up our feeling, “Wow.” I had not seen tree art, in situ, up until that memorable day.

I showed a photograph of this tree to Walter Blackwater, a Gitxsan trapper now in his seventies. He was born in Kuldo and he has travelled most of the Northern Gitxsan
trails as trapper. Walter begins the interview (Blackwater, personal communication, July 27, 1995) by describing some of the locations where he has seen the tree carvings.

WALTER: I know where this one is. This one here is where the telegraph trail is. I have seen this one. It is right on the telegraph trail. But the one that's up in the mountain, the Kuldo people, that's marking their trapline that goes up in the mountain. That's way up there. But the telegraph line that's down on the Skeena River. You see the flats right there, that's where the trail is. I will show you the pack trail. That's where they camped right there. They let the horses feed on the flats there. That's how I know this one here. I know its right on top of the hill, that's this one here. I know exactly where it is.

When you first asked me about this one, I could not figure it out. I thought you were talking about real totem poles. This is a different one. This is a totem pole, what do they call them, it's more like a Gyetim Gan, that's what it is. I forgot what it is. This one, you could see all the way. The other side Kuldo. What do you call that creek on the other side of Kuldo. You can see a whole bunch of them along side the telegraph trail, maybe about 20 of them. The creek runs this way and it goes up the hill. Right on top of the hill that's where they are. They call that place Smak la hant. And the other side, and you got that flat over there, they got a camp there. There's another one there. Full of them there. All over the place. And you go to Poison Mountain. You can see them there. The last time I was up there was 1958. The trail was still really good. The last time the government used that trail was 1936. That's the last time the government used that trail. You know that trail they call it the Telegraph trail. They take the horses up there and take the winter supplies up there for the lineman they call it. They drop the winter supplies at every main cabin. There is 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 cabin. Telegraph Creek supplies the other side. That's why I know this one. From the sixth cabin is our trapline to the 9th cabin about 30 miles. Like my own trapline goes up to 20-30 miles after this trail. Another creek goes running that way. They call it ...... There's no trees in there. Just once in a while you can see trees over there. That's where they camp. If you miss that one there is not another one for 15 miles. That's were they went to trap beavers in the winter time. You can see the Gyetim Gan in there.

MICHAEL: So why did they carve those?

WALTER: Just like in the olden days, you know. While just like the totem pole over there. The earlier people they gone ask the other people 'what does that mean?', the Gyetim Gan, you know the totem pole, they gone a say 'what does that mean?' Some of them gone to see that big eagle over here [he points to where a totem pole is located in Kispiox], what do they call that big eagle, Lax Muuxs, that's a big. This one is only the Gyetim Gan, the face of the man, they say that, Gyetim Gan. The totem pole is different. Some of them got the big canoe some of them down here. You can see all kinds of them in the village here. There are different meanings on each one of them.

Walter explains that the Gitxsan name for these faces in the forest is "Gyetim Gan." He told me the trappers would occasionally carve tree art for something to do and that they were not territorial markers. Walter implies that the location of a Gyetim Gan is
often associated with a camp. He explains how Gyetim Gan can be similar to crest poles (totem poles) because people will ask “what does that mean?” and there will be a story for each one. Adams (1986, 2) quoted a Gitxsan Elder as saying that “Totem poles are the Indian’s book about traplines.” The crest pole in many ways represents the house territory, the word “trapline” is also a modern representation of the territory. Some tree carvings were meant to act as a marker for a story, similar to the crest acquisition and ancestral journey stories associated with crest poles. Walter told me of a specific example of a tree carving which was recently carved to mark a trapline in the following excerpt.

WALTER: Past old Kuldo, there is really lots of them there, especially up on top of the hill there, talkin about that little creek on the other side of Kuldo. There’s a big creek coming down there, not the deep one. The deep one is a small little one, the other one got a flat, on one side the other side is flat. The one I am talkin about there is a whole bunch of them. There is a whole bunch of those. I know one they making one of them, related to Steve Morrison. They went with Pete Muldoe...

MICHAEL: Why did Steve Morrison carve that one?

WALTER: He was with Pete, they say that’s his trapline. I know its Giskasst territory. ...That ladies name Lay gum Slaks, Indian name hey, chief. That’s the one that owned that place. After that lady died, Pete went up there with Steve Morrison. Steve got nothing to do, you know they just carving them. That’s the funny looking one, funny looking Gyetim Gan. My mother is related to the old people, its written on the bottom, that’s his picture.

MICHAEL: That’s what it says?

WALTER: Yeah that’s what it says. Oh, its a really bad one, I told them you know.

MICHAEL: They carved right on the tree?

WALTER: Yeah they carve right on the tree. Written with who’s picture is there. The other one they call him my mum’s ‘u siwiks.’ They related to you guys, I guess, Walter Harris. That’s mums, that why they do that. That’s mums ‘u siwiks’ hey, they come out, they mark it right there, they put a name there. It had a big pipe in there. You know the old people had a pipe there. That’s how they draw, just like that, they carve a pipe right in there.

MICHAEL: Why did they carve his face in there?

WALTER: They make a mark, they cut in there, they had a limb like a pipe.

MICHAEL: That’s supposed to be Jay Powell?
WALTER: Yeah, that’s how I know about this one. And, this one was a really funny picture. There is no trail there. You can find a trail in the fall, its easy to find. You can see what I am talking about.

Walter described how Steve Morrison carved a Gyetim Gan to mark a trapline after a Chief had died. He said it represented someone called Jay Powell, his mom’s relative. The carving has a pipe in its mouth and writing below it explaining its purpose.

Walter turns his attention to the tree carving at our earlier stop (see Figure 3.19) and begins to explain how old he thinks the carving is based on a feather-like form above the forehead of the face. Remember that Art Wilson hinted that “I think just seeing the actual carving will tell you something about it,” and he went on to explain the significance of the tears on his carving. The form above the forehead is very significant as Walter explains in the following exert.

WALTER: This one here you know the old Indians had a feather on their head. That’s what it is this one here, its a feather, like that. Before that, they would make cuts in feather [in the wood] to make it look, but you won’t see that now because it is really old. That’s a Indian with a feather in its head.

MICHAEL: Why do you think they did that?

WALTER: It’s a, Indian styles you know. In the olden days, that one there, they had no clothing there. When they go up in the mountain they got their hides. They cover themselves. That’s before the clothing came around. That’s when this one, just imagine the people they are thinken back in the olden days. They say in the pictures in the olden days, like in the book there, that how I find out, this one. But this one here he just look like Am halait, but it is an Indian feather. This one here, it like a totem pole, but we still call it Gyetim Gan. That’s the older people that make it like it, but it is not dressed like an Indian. Do you understand what I am talking about?

Walter believes the carved form on top center of the head represents a feather, and therefore he thinks the carving is quite old since it was only the “Old People” who wore the head feather. Walter said this carving was done “way before the white man.” The second tree carving that Walter is referring to is just up the trail a few meters (see Figure 3.20). Walter is quite sure there is a story behind this carving.
WALTER: Some of them are meaning something. Like this one, it looks like horns. This Gyetim Gan they make horns over here. The older people can tell the stories as soon as they see the pictures. As soon as they see pictures of Gyetim Gan, they know all about the stories. And their meanings. But me, I can’t tell you anything, but I just say I don’t know anything. I did see this one, really good. I know this one.
But now I don’t even know where the trail is now.

MICHAEL: So that’s important, they are not boundary markers, and they are not like totem poles, but some of them have stories,

WALTER: Yeah some of them have stories.

MICHAEL: And the thing at the top that looks like a Am Halait, is actually a feather.

WALTER: Yeah, that’s a feather, yeah, its more like Am Halait, in Indian its...This is not an Am Halait. They call it ‘gustuu’, now I remember.

MICHAEL: All the peoples did Gytem Gan, Kuldo, Blackwater?

WALTER: Yeah, Kisagas too. You can see on top of the hill above the village there. You can see them all, maybe they fell down, or whatever. There’s lots over there. I don’t know if you are going to find a trail anymore.

MICHAEL: What village are you talking about?

WALTER: Kisagas. Now right across from Kisagas village. Old village. You ever see that village? 18 km from here, up the Salmon River road.

MICHAEL: Would people down here in Gitannmax and Gitanyow do carvings?

WALTER: Yeah, they do it on their own territory. They call that River towards Smithers, that trail that goes across the Bulkley, there is a creek running down that way. You can see those carvings there too. That’s the Hazelton territory. Not only us, its all over. Gitsugukla do the same thing, but we don’t know where they are. We don’t know where the trapline is.

MICHAEL: Now I am trying to summarize this. Trappers would do this right.

WALTER: Yeah some of them, and people traveling along them.

MICHAEL: Could you tell the difference between the ones done in Kuldo compared to Hazelton?

WALTER: No, they look the same.

MICHAEL: I have a theory that this is like the spirit of the tree, this is alive this Gyetim Gan?

WALTER: Yeah this is alive, that’s what it means, that’s alive. That’s living, you know what I mean it’s a spirit. That’s not only Kuldo that does that. I went up to
take my Grandfather to Skidims Lake, I seen some of them like that, but they were small ones. They are all logged off now you can’t find any now. It is in Kispiox territory.

According to Walter Blackwater, Gyetim Gans were common throughout the Gitxsan territory, and the style was similar enough that one could not discern any regional differences. He also suggested that a person would only carve trees in their own territory, probably on a trapline trail.

I also interviewed Sophia Mowatt about these tree carvings and she called them Gyetim Gan as well. Her daughter-in-law, Norma Mowatt, translated the conversation. This is what Sophia, age 95, had to say about the meaning (Mowatt, personal communication, July 24, 1995):

MICHAEEL: These are carvings, Sophia.

NORMA: [Interpreting the question]

SOPHIA: [She answers in Gitxsan and refers to the carvings as Gyetim Gan.]

NORMA: [Interpreting Sophia’s response] They carved trees and get the lynx to go over there so they could trap them.

MICHAEEL: Some of them have a human face. Was that part of it?

NORMA: [Interpreting the question and Sophia’s response] They carved it right in there, yeah. They carved the tree and it attracts the lynx. You can use a deck of cards too, Queen, Jack and King, that’s what she said. They like the color. It attracts them to the color.

MICHAEEL: Does the face attract?

NORMA: [Interpreting the question and Sophia’s response] Yeah, that’s what she called, it attracted them there, they scare off easy. They will stand and watch you.

MICHAEEL: So they were not boundary markers?

NORMA: [Interpreting the question and Sophia’s response] No they are not boundary markers. It is to attract lynx if you want to trap them.

Sophia is an Elder, age 95, who is respected in the Gitxsan community for her memory of the old times and people (Figure 3.21). She attributes the meaning of Gyetim
Gan to attracting lynx because lynx are curious. I was surprised by this explanation because it had not occurred to me that the intended audience for some Gyetim Gans were animals rather than humans. I asked Walter Blackwater about this practice and he answered as follows:

MICHAEL: Do you know about trapping lynx?

WALTER: That's a nice story for that one. They not going to make a Gyetim Gan, they make baby pictures, very beautiful and you put it in the back of the deadfall [trap]. And that's where the lynx get after it, they go around it and around it, before they get there, hey. And finally they get into the trap and they going to bite that thing. They got him. They want to get that, they don't eat it. He just going to take it away, like a pack rat. He just like the way the picture is. The people making the hair, on a doll. They paint it, they call it Mas. Like hemlock they got a big thing on the trees [fungus], the old people knock it off and put it in the fire. Burns all around and cooks right inside. They scrape it and comes out like a powder. There's no paint. Like a powder. And that's what they use to make the doll, its pretty, they dye the hair. The old people make basket for berries, they die that, they use that for die. Not only the red. They make a died mud and mix it with this one.

MICHAEL: These dolls would they carve them on trees?

WALTER: No, they carve it out of wood and put it in the trap. The lynx is going to get that thing, they goin to get it. They step on that thing and, that trap, they got it. They did not sold the furs, they eat it.

MICHAEL: They eat the lynx?

WALTER: They eat it, lynx.

MICHAEL: So they trap lynx before white man came?

WALTER: Oh, they trap the lynx because they say that lynx, "weex", in Indian language. It taste like rabbit they say. They don't sell that fur, they make a hat. That's why they do that. That's before the white man came along.

Walter had not heard of carvings on the trees to attract the lynx. However, he did know of the practice of carving little “dolls” heads and placing them in the deadfall trap to attract the lynx into the trap. Sophia, who is about 20 years older than Walter, says the carvings were done on the tree to attract the lynx to the trap. I believe that both reasons are correct because I have found references to both types of practices in other nations. Sullivan (1942, 99) interviewed a Tena Elder about lynx trapping methods.
‘That’s why,’ concluded Ambrose, ‘when they put out snares for lynx in the ‘old times,’ they make a little house and put bait in the middle, and then make some kind of doll cut out of rotten wood and put it on each side of the bait. They represent the two wives. Everytime they put snares, they do that.’

Nelson (1983, 155) describes how the Koyukon trappers from the village of Koyukuk, Alaska, draw faces on the blazed tree to attract the curious lynx to their trap. Nelson (1986, 228) made a similar observation for the Huslia Koyukon practice. The trappers desire to attract the lynx to his/her trap is the common connection in Sophia’s, Walter’s and Nelson’s accounts.

The Huslia Koyukon rely almost exclusively on visual attractants. Most commonly they draw a little face on a blazed tree behind the trap, or on a piece of wood that is put in the set.

Additionally, the lynx was central to the meaning of some Carrier tree art. I will discuss the Carrier practice and the spiritual significance of the lynx in detail at the Hallett Lake stop.

Now we look to a number of other tree carvings nearby (Figures 3.22, 3.23, & 3.24). Note how the scar tissue has grown over some, where only an eye or mouth can be still seen (Figure 3.22). This tree carving is a good example of the dynamic nature of the art form due to weathering and the growth of the scar tissue. The journey for this tree carving is almost complete as nature has all but refolded over the image.

Walter Blackwater recognized the carving in Figure 3.23 (nymph like). He said “I know this one, it was made a long time ago. Is this tree still standing?” I told him the tree was completely dead now. He said that it was dead when he saw it last. This example is also very similar to the one photographed in Bella Coola by Harland I. Smith (Figure 2.8).
Kuldo Roadside

Norm Larson, an employee of the Ministry of Forests and a long time resident of Hazelton, guided me to another two tree carvings along the Kuldo forest road. My wife and I followed Norm up the busy logging road that follows the trail. We arrived at the first tree just across the Kuldo bridge at about the 34 km mark of the Kuldo forest road. We walked up the road bank and into the forest. The tree carving is shown in Figure 3.25. It is carved on a hemlock tree, and it is right beside the trail overlooking the logging road, and the Skeena River. Norm shows great concern for protecting the trees since they are an important part of his heritage as he was born and raised in the area. As a non-First Nations person he shared the pride and concern of the Gitxsan people. The second journey for this Gyetim Gan has been to help young Gitxsan children learn about their heritage. Groups of children have travelled to this site to see the Gyetim Gan.

The next stop is up the road about five kilometers. Norm showed me this tree as well, and he said it had been found when the forest road was being constructed. The tree is about 5 m from the roadside. The carving faces the road, witnessing the push of development past its once tranquil setting (see Figure 3.26). This example was carved with the same finesse as a master carver would show carving a ceremonial mask or crest pole. The nose is finely sculpted since it is only millimeters thick at its finest point. This carving taught me two important lessons. The first lesson, was to be mindful of Art’s advice, “I think just seeing the actual carving will tell you something about it.” I visited this tree four times, but I did not notice the cross carved above the head (see Figure 3.28) until my Uncle, Walter Harris, pointed it out to me. This cross “tells something about it.” Walter suggested this carving might be a burial marker. The carving was created with great attention by a person with the abilities of a master carver, and thus the aesthetic power of
the carving could signify a headstone marker of an important person. Walter Harris is a master carver with great talent. He was impressed with the ability of the carver who carved this tree. If this is a burial marker, the carving was probably done shortly after the initial influence of the Church in the nineteenth century. My Great Aunt Sophia told me that there was a short transition period when the Gitxsan buried their dead, sitting in a bent box. The Church forbid cremation and encouraged “proper” burial in a casket and grave.

I learned my second lesson when I brought Walter to see the carving. During my previous visits there was an old growth hemlock forest on the opposite side of the road from the carving. But, as Figure 3.27 shows, the forest had been logged. The face on the tree seemed lonely. The forest and trees it had been facing for so long, had now disappeared in a few short weeks. This Gyetim Gan had just embarked on its second journey. It is a witness to the disrespect being shown to Gitxsan history and territory, and for that matter the history of all British Columbians. The first journey may have been a memorial for an important Gitxsan person, and the second journey, similarly, is a memorial for the sacrifice of the forest in Gitxsan territory. The second journey is similar to the intended meaning of Art Wilson’s tree carving. I will discuss the concept of new layers of meaning on the First Nations landscape and how that relates to the second journey at our campfire discussion in Chapter Four.

There is another Gyetim Gan about one hundred meters south along the trail (see Figure 3.29). The scar has all but covered this carving and it was very difficult to find. I found it because I was carefully checking every tree in the vicinity of the carving shown in Figure 3.26. The brush had grown thick around the base of the tree as can be seen in the photograph. I show this carving to stress how easy it is to walk by these carvings if you are not looking for them.
We are now travelling up to the headwaters of the Kispiox River, along the Xsi Wis An Skit tributary. Mary Johnson is a Gitxsan hereditary chief of the house of Antguulibix, Giskaast (Fireweed) clan. She testified as a witness in the Delgamuukw land claims case, and she retold an oral history about a compensation tree carving and the murder of Yal. The murder was resolved through the feast system by awarding compensation territory to the victims house by the offenders house. The new territory was marked by a crest on a tree along the new boundary. I have presented excerpts from her testimony below.

MARY: At the end of the Xsi Wis An Skit (Kispiox River) grandmother told me, and great, both of them, and at the end they climb the -- where the ridge is, and the ridge is their boundary, but the other side of the ridge is given to -- to the -- to both Antgulibix and Tsibassaa as a compensation because Yal is murdered on the ice where -- where Xsagangaxda runs into Skeena River, that’s where it happened...And I wouldn’t say it was in my grandmother’s time or great-grandmother, it happened thousands of years ago...And they climb after the end of Xsi Wis An Skit [Kispiox River]...And there was a ridge and on that -- the other side the ridge, they said there was a tree standing there and they -- they smear this tree with blood that’s their own paint, and there was a crest on the tree, a sun...Because it belongs to the Giskaast, that’s the crest. That’s the Giskaast crest, yeah, and that tree represents compensation that’s in exchange of blood and it won’t be taken back from us until the end of the world. It will be there. [italics added by author]

LAWYER: Now, did your grandmother or your aunt see this tree?

MARY: She said she sees it, that’s why she told me...I mean great-great-grandmother [saw this tree] (Johnson (a), V13, 800-01).

The lawyers asked Mary for some clarification about this compensation tree a short time later.

LAWYER: So the murder of Yal took place outside your territory?

MARY: Yes.
LAWYER: Now, can you tell me whether there is anything more mentioned in the adaawk of your House for the northern territory?

MARY: Yes, grandmother told me and great-great grandmother that at the end of Xsi Wis An Skit there is a hill and they climb the hill, and there is a ridge there, and on -- that's a boundary they said is the ridge. And on the other side the ridge, that's the land that they gave our ancestors compensation for murdering Yal. And grandmother said there is a tree standing there, and it's smeared with blood. And there is a sun on the tree, and that's what Giskaast crest, is the sun. So that shows the exchange of blood. And they won't take it back from the family crest until the end of the world... They just say he was murdered and they give the land as an exchange for blood. If they don't do that, they will return the blood... [Italics added by author].

LAWYER: So before the territory was given to Antgulibix as compensation for the murder of Yal, it belonged to somebody in the Village of Kuldo?

MARY: Yes.

LAWYER: Because your territory marked the boundary between Kispiox and Kuldo?

MARY: Yes, yes (Johnson (b), V14, 872-73).

Mary's testimony links the Antgubilix's adaawk to the creation of tree art. She testified that the murder of Yal happened thousands of years ago. Consequently, her testimony demonstrates that tree art is a very old art form, and in this case, the tree art is a boundary marker “till the end of the world.” If this were the case, it is conceivable that the image would be re-carved as the original tree carving rotted. The tree was also smeared with blood. It may have been real blood and perhaps later with “Mas” which as Walter Blackwater explained was a powder from a tree fungus or red ochre mud.

I will now explain the Gitxsan house system and how they mark and govern their house territories as it helps to understand the practice of compensation. The “wilp” or house is the primary biologic, political, geographic and economic unit of Gitxsan society. There are about 42 houses within the Gitxsan territory. Each wilp belongs to only one clan. There are four clans: Giskaast (Fireweed), Lax SkiiK (Eagle), Lax Ganada or Ganeda (Frog), and Lax Gibuu (Wolf).
Each house is lead by a hereditary head chief and one or more assistants or wing chiefs. The house name is usually based on the hereditary chief's Gitxsan name. However, traditionally the Chief's name and house name were different. Each house is responsible for one or more territories that are defined by boundaries such as lakes, creeks, mountains, rivers, trails, which are recorded and reaffirmed in the adaawk. Each territory has its own Gitxsan name. A house will also have access to specific fishing sites (Anon., 1991, 127-129).

There are very specific and strict laws governing the use of house territories. Olive Mulwain (1982 (a), 1-2), a Gitxsan Elder, explained the law to a land claims researcher in the following passage:

All these people knew which territory is theirs. They turned off at the proper trail, they didn't trespass on each others territory. They don't camp on someone's territory just because it is a good place, they go on...Our people of old days had a law, if a thoughtless person went to another territory and trapped/hunted it is considered stealing. He didn't get permission from the owner. The law of the ancient people is that they kill that thoughtless person, his blood is spilled on the ground. The reason they enforced the law is so that the thoughtless person doesn't set a precedent of trespassing, it also enable the owner to show his strength and discourage others from trespassing on his territory if they know the law will be enforced. Then follows another law, the law of 'Shiiisw' (territory settlement) the white people call it peacemaking.

She also explains that a person from another house "can pass through, but they don't camp on it, they just pass through to get to their own territory." Everyone knows each others boundaries and she says they are called 'Anliit'iiisxw' (blazing mark or post marking boundary of a territory)" (Mulwain (b), 1982, 1). For example, Stanley Williams (1983, 2), a Gitxsan Elder, talks about a pole with a rock on top of it which marked the boundary between the Gitxsan and Nisga'a people near Blackwater Lake. Richard Benson (Affidavit, 2) gave evidence of red blazes on trees which marked a boundary between two houses.
This Lake [Dam ansa Angwas] is a boundary, and only the east half of it is owned
by the House of Gylogyet. Two trees, on either side of the Lake, were marked
with Mas (red ochre) to show this was a boundary.

This Lake is very near the compensation tree site that Mary talked in her testimony. Olive
Ryan testified in the DelgaMuukw case that the Gitxsan marked trees for boundary
markers and they were called “an lay tix” (Ryan, Vol. 17, 1131). Clearly tree carvings and
blazes are a type of boundary marker, or corner post called "an lix tiks." However, I
cautions against assuming that all tree art is meant to be a boundary marker because there are
a wide variety of intended meanings as we have seen in Gyetim Gan along the Anspayaxw-
Kuldo trail.

The compensation tree carving’s intended meaning was to mark compensation
territory which was agreed to at a “Shiisw” feast thousands of years ago. Mary’s great
great grandmother was the last person to see the tree, and I hope to be the next. If I find
the tree, the second journey of meaning will provide additional evidence that the adaawk
can be linked to the existence and persistence of house territory boundaries. Chief Justice
Allan McEachern gave an opposing opinion that the Gitxsan did not have internal house
boundaries:

The weight of evidence is overwhelmingly against the validity of these internal
boundaries as definitions of discreet areas used just by the ancestors of the present
members of the various Houses (McEachern, 1991, 277).

The previous example of the compensation tree can be used to refute McEachern’s errant
view.

Wiiminoosik Lake Tree Carving

Neil John Sterritt, Madeegam Gyamk, has travelled across most of the Gitxsan
territory conducting Gitxsan place name research with the Elders. I interviewed him on
July 21, 1995, and he told me about two interesting tree carvings, or Gyetim Gans. The
first example he talked about is at a camp along the Telegraph Trail on the east side of
Wiiminoosik Lake, which is in the northern reaches of Gitxsan territory, north of the Kuldo village site (see Figure 3.30).

NEIL: The most recent one I saw was on the trail six miles east of Blackwater Lake. Was there about a month ago, our camp was there. We had a camp there, it was a former camp. Someone else had camped there, it was a very old tree carving. It was a stump, somebody had cut the tree down. The stump had a face on it. It was about a 3 ft stump, perhaps 15-20 inches in diameter. Years ago in the early fifties, there was one just this side of first cabin, right along side the road. It was actually called Green’s campsite, it appeared to have been created in the 20-30 years prior to then. I don’t think it is there anymore, I see a gravel pit in that area there now. And the creation of gravel pit may have led to its destruction. That was quite a good one actually. That’s about it.

The people we were with Blackwater: on the question of whether there is any significance to these, were they declarations of land, and they were born at Blackwater, these two individuals. Their name is Blackwater. They said no, not to their knowledge [is there any significance].

I am trying to remember if I took one [photograph] last month at Blackwater. I know I was going to, I think we were packing up and I wanted to get a photograph of that one before we left. I wanted to get a photograph of that stump. I can’t remember if I took one or not. I took one of the one my son did, with the Blackwaters standing around it...

There is another one [carving] right beside it [the one at Blackwater Lake]. My son carved it, Gyedim Gan, Wood man. Gan is wood or tree, Gyed is man. Gyedim Gan eh. Man of wood or tree (See figure 3.30).

Neil later sent me a copy of the photograph showing the new carving his son, Gordon, had carved at the east end of Wiiminoosik Lake in June 1995.27 There is an old carving on a stump about 15 feet from Gordon’s new one. Neil told me that he is not aware of any territorial significance to this old Gyedim Gan. He felt the carvings were more like an art form and people would just carve them for something to do at camp, as Neil’s son had done on their trip.

NEIL: The tree carvings that I have seen were along trails. Mainly a trail from Hazelton to Blackwater, and generally called the Telegraph trail today, and also the Kispiox trail, the trail from Kispiox to Hazelton. I seen others on trails farther in the bush. They are called Gyedim Gan. What they are at a campsite, what I have been told, by people who were there, is that they were made by people who were whiling away their time. Any of those along that trail, they do not have any spiritual significance.

27 The Gitksan name for “Wiiminosik Lake” is T’amuunmxswl. It gets its name not from the Gitksan name for Devil’s Club (as most people assume), but from a plentiful grub or larvae in the lake.
or territorial significance. And I have been advised that by several people who walk the trails and were there as much as sixty years ago.

The new Gyetim Gan carved by Gordon and Art Wilson, demonstrate that some Gitxsan still create tree art. My interview with Art Wilson indicates that new Gyetim Gan are probably created for quite different reasons than those that inspired the old faces in the forest. I did not get a chance to interview Gordon about his reasons for carving Gyetim Gan.

Neil mentioned a second tree carving along the Kispiox main forest road. I searched for it, but as Neil suggests, it was cut down when the gravel pit was constructed.

I would like to move on to the last stop in Gitxsan territory, at the northern border of Gitxsan territory. Here Neil tells us about a tree with “Chinese-like” symbols written on the trunk.

“Chinese-like” Symbol Tree
In the excerpt below Neil describes a tree which is in the middle of a swamp just north of Panorama Creek. This tree could provide some very significant information on inter-tribal boundaries, and on late nineteenth century writing systems.

NEIL: Somewhere up here, there’s a big swamp, I think you can see it on the 1:2500000 [map]. Somewhere in the middle of that swamp there’s a tree with a blaze, fairly large. And it had almost like Chinese writing on it, all over it. And my Uncle was told by his uncle that was kind a marker between the Tahltan and the Gitxsan. It was on a tree that was leaning, it was like in the middle of this swamp. Percy and his cousin were walking across the swamp and the ice was crunchy. It was almost like the whole swamp was moving, the water moved under the ice. They stopped under this big balsam and this was on it, it just like Chinese writing, like hieroglyphics. Walter Blackwater referred to the same tree.

MICHAEL: He said it was a marker between the Tahltan?

NEIL: Well he [Percy Sterritt and George Brown] told his uncle about it and his uncle said it was a boundary marker. Its not a face just Chinese-like writing.
MICHAEL: It might be syllabics used by the Dene and Father Morice in the interior. How old was the tree when he saw it?

NEIL: It was about 1930 when he saw it. He thought it was pretty old, but I do not know. Could have been syllabics.

MICHAEL: It would have been interesting to know if the Tahltan used syllabics.

NEIL: I don’t think it would have been the Tahltan, as you are going to find this out at my presentation. We think that the head of the Nass, the whole area here was occupied by the Long Grass band or people. And the Tahltan were down here. This group of people were here from 1830 and 1890. And there was tremendous battles during that period between us and them. And they moved to Fort Ware in about 1890. And then to Telegraph Creek after 1900 and in particular in about 1940, and then some of them went to Iskut. They are collectively called Bear Lakers, some of them were, and some of them from Kispiox. So the Long Grass people, in this period, these people came from Fort St. James, they came from, could have been by marriage, or could have been back and forth to Peace River. So you don’t have to look to the Tahltan to see if they were into syllabics. This was a mixed group, they were Gitxsan, Tahltan, people from the east, it is called the Long Grass people.

It is a long helicopter ride from here. It is a complex area there.

MICHAEL: It definitely sounds like syllabics.

NEIL: I never thought of that angle that people came from that way. Cause I was always thinking this way. And they were connected some of those people came this way. Fort St. James way, I never thought of that. And if that’s the case, there was a whole bunch of things that happened there. There was killing and compensation going on from about 1840 on. Some in Walter Harris’s house, some that Walter does even know about, and I told him about. I have no doubt that the territory came into our hands at the same time. They were part of the same incident. This is in Wolf side, Fireweed on the Skeena, Wolf on the Nass.

Neil is referring to the Long Grass people who occupied the land north of Gitxsan territory in the mid to late nineteenth century. The Long Grass people are a sub-group of the Sekanis (Sterritt, personal communication, July 21, 1995). Neil suggests that there was a lot of fighting between the House of Geel and the Long Grass people during this period. The tree in the swamp may be a territorial marker that marks compensation territory, to the benefit of the houses of Geel and Xhiliiyeemlaxhan. I suggested to Neil that the Chinese-like writing on the tree may be syllabics. Father Morice introduced a modified form of syllabics to the Carrier in the Fort St. James area in the later nineteenth century (Suttill, 1994, 4). Neil thought it was quite probable because some Carrier from the Fort St. James area did join the Long Grass people. Neil Sterritt (1996) authored Tribal
Boundaries in the Nass Watershed in which he discusses the history of the interaction between the Long Grass and Gitxsan people. Again, it would be helpful for the Gitxsan if the tree could be located because it may mark important boundaries.

This stop completes our journey through Gitxsan territory, and now we will travel into Carrier territory to the Fraser Lake area where Nick Prince will provide commentary on a tree carving near Hallett Lake and Carrier syllabics written on a tree near Klez Lake.

**Fraser Lake**

**Hallett Lake**

The story of how I found the carving at Hallett Lake is typical of how I relied on a combination of luck, persistence, and, most importantly, the help of other people to locate examples of these rare art forms.

The story of how a network of people is required to locate a tree carving begins with a conversation about my research topic with Dr. Bill Poser, a professor at the University of Northern British Columbia. He suggested I talk to Graig Hooper, Ministry of Forests, in Vanderhoof about the message tree at Klez Lake, which we will see at our next stop. During my discussion with Craig about the Klez Lake tree he said someone had told him there was a face carved in a tree at Hallett Lake. My father and I went to Hallett Lake in the fall of 1995 to look for the carving. All we found was a dilapidated cabin that was used by hunting guides. The hunters wrote, on the plywood walls, about their success, “One bull moose, November 1958, E. Fudd, guided by Ray’s.” I mentioned our search to my brother-in-law, John Thiessen, and he said that he would ask his friend Leonard if he knew who the Ray’s were. A couple of weeks later John called me and said that Leonard suggested that I call Stewart Ray, a retired hunting guide. I called Stewart right away, and he knew exactly where the tree was. He described the location in great
detail. The following weekend I set out for Hallett Lake accompanied by my friend Joey Himmelspach. We followed Stewart’s directions and walked through the forest along Hallett Lake for about an hour. We stopped for a moment to re-check the directions and at that moment Joey calls out “Here it is!” This story typifies the networking process that I relied upon to find the tree art. The carving is shown in Figure 3.31 and the forest context is shown in Figure 3.32.

I interviewed the Carrier Elder named Nicolas Prince, who I introduced at the very beginning of our journey, about a Carrier tree carving. I interviewed him at his island home on Stuart Lake on November 6, 1995. He is a spiritual person who has walked, snowshoed, canoed, and trapped throughout the Fort St. James area. He has also interviewed many Carrier Elders in the process of writing his book on Carrier history prior to 1793, when Simon Fraser “discovered” Carrier territory. Nick connects two worlds, like the footbridge that connects his island to the shore of Stuart Lake. Nick has lived a traditional Carrier lifestyle as a trapper and hunter for his family, and he has also been successful in the modern world as a carpenter, a tribal leader and a writer.

I showed him the photograph of the Hallett Lake carving, and he said he did not know why that particular carving was carved, but he did know about other Carrier tree carvings. My interview with him begins with a description of how the Carrier would inscribe a burial marker on trees using syllabics. He then discusses other purposes such as marking “meeting place” camps and carvings as apologies to the lynx spirit. I will present the entire interview and then I will provide a detailed explanation of the lynx as a powerful spirit.

NICK: When you see carvings out there on the traplines, while you are out on the traplines, someone will put a small carving like this, of a face you know. It is a message left that somebody died, you know, usually there is a name written in syllabics. Sometimes when the owner of a trapline dies, they carve, you see they have what they call a meeting place. Different areas of the country, for the
traplines, one family here, one family there. And one place where the invisible place is they call that the meeting place, ... , And that's the boundary you know, each camp you see north, south, east, west around it eh, in some points of that trapline they have these meeting places which is an invisible boundary eh, and each one of them has a carved face on it. See that supposed to be the guardian of your boundary eh, and everybody respected that. And the different marks that they put on there eh, you know like they left messages it meant a lot of things, they left sticks. They can put axe marks and drive a small wedge into the bottom part of it and leave a piece of birch bark with something written in syllabics about who died or what's happening. Its like passing on news to each other. You know and they use to be thought of as being sacred by all the people, not in a religious sense, but it is something done by the people with sincerity and people look at it being sacred in that respect.

MICHAEL: Who would carve that?

NICK: Well it would be one of the relatives, or whoever traplines that was left, one of his sons or uncle who was part owner of that trapline, like a company. Maybe two brothers would own a trapline.

MICHAEL: Was it a traditional practice?

NICK: Yeah its been in practice for many years. Like when I started up west of here near Sutherland River that goes right to Babine Lake, between here and Fort Fraser there is a River, that Sutherland River, that goes right to Lake Babine. That used to be a boundary of a guy who I used to trap with. We used to trap right along that River and there is two places that I know. One on the south end of his boundary and the north end you know, he has carvings there he said his grandfather made it.

MICHAEL: Would you be able to find them today do you think?

NICK: I don't know if they are even still standing there has been so much logging you know. I go through that area you know, of course I flew over that area in a helicopter one time I could not even find any landmarks. Everything is just about gone, even the meadows you know, meadows are drained out. Like in the spring they used to be flooded, but they are just meadows now, trees are starting to grow because they are not flooded. How are you going to find them 40 years later?

MICHAEL: Some were carved at meeting places as boundaries of traplines. When we are talking traplines, does this mean the before fur trade traplines as well?

NICK: Yeah, they were not called traplines, they were called, like they say “Khe yoh”, his country, Khe yoh. They use that word quite a bit, they would say that's the end of your grandfather's country. That's what use, it means they use that land for hunting they use that land for trapping they use that land for fishing. Anyway you look at it it's part of their livelihood.

MICHAEL: Maybe I will get you to write that word “Kye yah” so that I get it right.

NICK: See like they talk about that. See down the River, my grandfather's trapline is under chief Quaw's trapline. It has been in our family for all these years. Now we have it. They call it “sii anu Khe yoh,” your grandfathers trapline. They express it like that. It takes many years for them to say, in the Indian way of
talking, you really say right out, even if your grandfather has been dead for 20 years. They still say that is your grandfather's land. And it takes many years when you get older, now that I am getting older they starting to tell me 'your Khe yoh down there', your country. They always said to me your grandfather's country. The way I look at it you have to earn the right for it to be called your country for so many years before they actually say your country. They will tell my grandchildren that's your grandfather's country, for years.

MICHAEL: To be an Elder you have to earn the right for it to be called your country.

NICK: You see how it is, lands were given out by years ago by people like chief Quaw, Gwes was his name. That's a form of self government. They have the clan system, beaver, frogs whatever. Each one had a head person, maybe one of two, if they were a smaller clan they would have one. Each one is traditionally handed down to the next generation. You see Gwes was what you called the 'Ne za cho', the head of all the clans, leader of all the 'ne za', clan leaders. He was like a prime minister and the 'ne za' were like ministers. You see the form of government system that they actually had was copied. The same thing in the United States they copied the league of nations.

Gwes, or somebody high up, would allotted the land to different clans. Like east of here belongs to the beaver clan, and west it belongs to the grouse and caribou, and north it belongs to the frog. Different areas are bear and wolf. Each area was allotted to different clans. You know like boundaries were defined by the size of the family, like the Prince family have good strong generations following eh. They get traplines, Khe yoh. They acquire that line through the ne za.

MICHAEL: These meeting places would be meeting places of families between clans or within clans?

NICK: It does not matter, they could be right next door to another clan eh. But still it is their meeting place, they respect each others invisible boundary. Even if they had a camp where they meet, and their trapline is divided like this, but if they have a dinner camp here that's supposed to be in their boundary. These people respect their dinner camp. And maybe these other guys, and they can cross trails and go to their dinner camp.

MICHAEL: What do you mean by dinner camp?

NICK: Each camp that was put in there was given a name. There was a place where you sleep, camps where they have lunch, camps where they stop at night. Each camp was a half a days travel from the other one. Each one had a name, so if these guys had a trapline on that side and they had to go through to get to their dinner camp on your line. They had the right to go through and eat there you know. And go back this way because it better traveling to avoid a mountain or a swamp. So the dinner camp belongs to them, you can't use it. And you do the same thing, you got your dinner camp on their territory because it is easier to go around to your line. So that's the way they worked it eh.

MICHAEL: Would these carvings only be at the meeting place camps?

NICK: Yeah, just at the meeting places.
MICHAEL: They would actually meet there as families?

NICK: Yeah it depends, there might be two Lakes close together, one Lake down on their traline. Another family might be one days travel apart. When they are finished hunting over there, they might get together and spend two or three days socializing. Before they head for home. They share stories and they know how much each other has got, and what they left. Especially they talk about what they left, they did not go out and kill everything they see. Like they say in one place the family say 'geez we saw some moose, three or four moose feeding in that swamp or Lake.' They will kill one only. And they say we left that there.

MICHAEL: So they take pride in what they left rather than what they took?

NICK: Yeah, because they were more conservationist. They were the true conservationists. Today I do not know what the hell is going on.

MICHAEL: So would they pick any tree or just one near the camp?

NICK: They give the tree a name and that's the name of that camp. Each dinner camp or any camp that you go to has a name. You know I can name all the camps between here and Mcleod Lake. There must be 30 or 40 of them. I know each camp. I used to know each camp.

MICHAEL: What would be a name of a meeting place camp that you know of?

NICK: Well there is ...... which means the 'water runs right through the pines', that's one camp that they use in the winter, that's a winter camp. Or 'where the trail splits', one families goes there together, there is a camp there. Ok the family is one days travel from here. They go there in a wagon. They go there with a team of horses and that's were it ends, they start packing. That's why it means 'it splits.' You see, names like that is very important. You know because of if you were here and I am going out to check my lines eh, you know I will tell you, tomorrow I will be in 'Ba' nal yeh', that's a camp a day and a half travel from here. That's where I will be tomorrow. The next day you will know where I am, and every day that I am gone you will know where I am. So if somebody comes along and they say we got to see him, they got to see that person. Because maybe his mother or father died or something. Where do I find him. You know where he is, exactly.

MICHAEL: When they name that tree, is that like naming someone at a potlatch?

NICK: No, they just put a name to it, they think of a name, especially the Elders. They will look around and see what the country is like.

MICHAEL: Is there a ceremony giving the tree a name?

NICK: No, they just carve. They just carve it that is all they do. Unless they plant another tree beside it you know.

MICHAEL: Why would they do that?

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28 This story is an excellent comparison between the First Nations meaning of conservation and the Western notion of regulating how many animals are killed.
NICK: Second generation. You see if I find one of those trees now, on the traplines that I have been on, on the River. You know if there is another tree beside, which is fully grown, 30 or 40 years old, I would plant another tree beside it. The camp will still be there ninety years from now.

MICHAEL: If that tree fell down would they recarve it again on another tree?

NICK: No, they, what they do then, they just cut it off, dig a hole and stick it in the ground. They leave it there until that one rots before they, it has to be close by, they pick a tree where there is another tree close by you see. If that tree goes down they just carve it on the next one.

MICHAEL: Do they have trained carvers?

NICK: No, not really they, most of the carvings done around here in that time, in them days, were just rough. They were not artists like the northwest coast people, it was just rough carvings that they did. They used to have carvings on their little grave house. Even their smokehouses used to have a carving on it, to bring luck. To keep bad luck away, and stuff like that, any animal, a beaver or a crow. They put it up there to ward off bad luck.

When you go these camps, you look around, you’ll find carcass. I don’t know if you can find them now, there have been so many years since the practice has been abandoned, I think. You know you’ll find carcass of otters and wolverines and different things. And you will notice that each carcass is pointed towards that tree. It don’t matter which direction the carcass is. They either put it on the branches or on the ground eh, and they point it toward the tree. They believe by doing so, the spirits of their animals is going to come to you or your camp eh.

MICHAEL: Why would they carve a human face?

NICK: I think it is more or less it was meant to know it was done by their own people. I don’t know if it had any significance, except to use it as a marker. Sometimes they will put a name in syllabics on it you know, what camp it is. There is a lot of things that is dying out today.

MICHAEL: With lynx, my great aunt told me the Gitxsan would carve a face on the tree to attract the lynx to the area?

NICK: Yeah, well I don’t know. The story about the lynx is different in different areas, you know we have the same thing. But in our stories, people would put a face on the tree in respect to the lynx, ‘wasi’ they call it, they carve, you know like a caricature of a face you know, it would mean that a lynx was caught there eh. You know they are apologizing to the lynx by carving a face on that tree where it was caught. When the next lynx come along it sees these people they apologize for what they done. They say a lynx is just like a human being, you know he memorize everything he sees. If a lynx was caught right there in that trap, the lynx would know that and he looks around see that little face on the tree where it was caught, and he says ‘they apologize, I have no grudge against them.’ That’s their beliefs you know. That’s what we have in the Carrier stories. I don’t know about the Gitxsan people, it might be different.
MICHAEL: So a lynx gets trapped there and they carve a face there to apologize. Was the belief that the lynx spirit would come back into another lynx and then that spirit would see that they had apologized?

NICK: Yeah, it is the continuation.

MICHAEL: Like a reincarnation?

NICK: Yeah, their belief is that you never actually kill the lynx, the spirit is there, that's where the face, the spirit is in the face eh, an apology to the lynx. There is quite a lot of things that is interesting. It wasn't till I was about forty years old that I started thinking about these things. A lot of things are going to die out unless you start writing. [Italics added for emphasis by author].

MICHAEL: The lynx was a powerful spirit?

NICK: Yeah, he was a helper to E'istas, he is the Creator, in our stories and that lynx, Wasi he help him put people together. So he knows everything about people hey. They say he even knows whose gone nuts, people go like this [he points his finger, and laughs].

MICHAEL: I have never seen a lynx in the wild, or a wolverine.

NICK: You know my dad he caught a few of them in his trap, but some of them he caught in his traps eh, but some of them he caught in his snares he let loose, the ones in his traps he had to kill. The ones he caught in the snares there was no damage to them, it was around the neck. But there was something he had about his animal, that I can never understand. I never really understood what it was. You know, I used to trap, just a little kid you know, on the old telegraph trail they call it near Fort Fraser. We used to set snares for coyote and fox. Sometimes we caught a lynx you know, the lynx was still alive. But there was something I could not understand how he did it. He talked to the lynx and the lynx would lie down there while he loosened the wire around his neck and the lynx he would not move. I still don't know what he does because I tried and the lynx would scare the hell out of me, the claws would come right out. He would talk to it and walk right up to it, and turn it loose.

MICHAEL: Would they trap lynx on purpose of were they caught just by accident?

NICK: Well, lots of people trap it you know because it is part of their kill. My dad you know was one of them guys that never trapped lynx and never trapped wolf. Wolf was a spirit brother to my grandfather and lynx was his own spirit brother you know. They tried not to harm the animals. I never killed a wolf. I caught a lynx in my snares you know but I turned it loose after a struggle.

Nick's commentary is rich with meaning: as a verbal artist, historian and storyteller he connects the spiritual and physical landscapes. Although he did not know the meaning of the Hallett Lake tree carving, he provides an insight to the realm of possible intended meanings for Carrier tree art. He gave three possible meanings:
1. They are burial markers inscribed with a syllabic message.
2. They mark a “meeting place” camp which marks the invisible boundary between two families “Khe yoh.”
3. They are small carvings of faces that are apologies to the lynx spirit.

Eliade (1963, 1) alludes to the ambiguous boundary that separates the sacred and profane worlds, “as soon as you start to fix limits to the notion of the sacred you come upon difficulties.” Nick attributes multiple meanings to the meeting place tree carvings that acts as a congruence of the sacred and profane. The tree acted as a locus of spiritual power, and as the guardian of the invisible boundary. The carcasses of animals, like the otter and wolverine, were placed around the camp, on the ground or in the branches of trees. They face the tree carving so their spirits would “come to your camp” and go into the tree. Consequently this practice would ensure good luck in hunting and trapping. The tree was the spiritual centre of the camp, and it acted as the axis mundi for the animal spirits to return to the spirit world. The Carrier regenerated the tree guardian function over hundreds of years by planting a tree seedling beside the tree carving to make ready for the time when the tree returned to nature, and a new carving would have to be created. The Carrier trappers and hunters would always use the same spot as a camp, and thus it was necessary to keep regenerating the art form - by regenerating the forest around the camp.

Nick described how Elders gave the tree carving and camp a name, such as “water runs through the pines,” which reflected the physical landscape surrounding the “meeting place” camp. That name would become the name for the camp. The chiefs who testified in the DelgaMuukw land claims case and also Adams (1986, 2) suggest there is an association between the Gitxsan totem pole and the “trapline” because the oral history

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29 Sullivan (1942, 102-03) reports that if the Tena caught a wolverine they would prop it up in their cabin or camp and make offerings of food to it.
represented by the pole reaffirms a house’s claim to a trapline or territory. The meeting place tree carving acts in a similar way for the Carrier. The meeting place tree reaffirms the boundary between families’ territories or traplines called “Khe yoh.”

The lynx once again has been linked to the practice of tree art. The carvings which were apologies to the lynx acted in a similar way to the meeting place’s *axis mundi* tree. The spirit of the physically dead lynx entered the tree and travelled back to the spirit world, ready to be reincarnated. The other lynx would see this carving and because they have such good memories and they know humans so well they would realize that the Carrier had apologized to him. Consequently, the lynx would see this and forgive the person, otherwise the lynx would make the person very unlucky as a trapper. I am compelled to provide a survey, in the following section, of First Nations lynx spiritual beliefs because it has become a recurring figure in the study of tree art.

**The Lynx**

The lynx is a mysterious and powerful being. I am including a discussion of lynx because some Elders have associated the lynx with the intended meaning of some tree carvings. The lynx, or wild cat, hunts the hare at the night in coniferous forests throughout British Columbia, and boreal forests throughout Canada. The bobcat and cougar are close relatives of lynx. The adult lynx can weigh between 15 and 30 pounds and it has relatively long legs (Nelson, 1986, 225). Their partially webbed paws help them run on the snow. It has a fine grey-brown fur and long ear tufts which amplify the sounds of its prey (Anon., 1995 (c), 44&48).

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30 Carrier places names, as with most First Nations, reflect the landscape and its history, and this is one of the reasons why the language is so important in maintaining the connection to the land.

31 The British Columbia government implemented a trapline registration system in 1925. The system is patrilineal and it created a lot of confusion in First Nations communities because the definition of a trapline was not consistent with that of a house territory or family hunting and trapping area. The use of trapline and house territory are not synonymous, but they are associated.
There is a Gitxsan story about how lynx was given the tufts on his ears after he helped Wegyet (Big Man) free himself from a rock that had wrapped around his legs (Anon., 1977, 46).

We-gyet was giving up all hope of escaping from the rock when Lynx, who was always curious, came along. We-gyet knew that Lynx owned a tongue like a rasp. The Big Man decided to bribe the creature to use that rasp-like tongue to free him from the rocky trap.

'Help me, Great Lynx,' he begged. 'I will reward you with whatever gift you choose.'

Lynx could see that if he succeeded in freeing We-gyet it would happen only after hours and hours of tedious work. Therefore Lynx decided to ask for a payment that We-gyet might not want to give.

'I will try to set you free if you will give me the longest hairs on your body but not those of your head,' said Lynx.

We-gyet hesitated. Freedom, however painful was essential. We-gyet agreed to Lynx's price.

Patient Lynx began to lick the rock with his rough tongue. He worked day after day. Finally one of We-gyet's legs was free. Then the other leg. Then an arm. Then the other arm. Much, much later We-gyet's whole body could move out of the rock. Only his head was anchored. At last Lynx loosened it and We-gyet was free to travel again.

The delighted We-gyet kept his promise. He pulled his body hairs and stuck them jauntily on the ears of Lynx.

To this day Lynx walks with the hair standing out on his ears, a payment of gratitude from the Big Man of long ago.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1995) dedicated an entire book to defining the lynx within First Nations cosmology. He summarized one of his mythical perceptions of the lynx as follows:

Considered as a whole, the mythical field [of lynx] seems to be the locus of a double pendulum swing. One oscillation pertains to the sweat lodge—at times a supernatural mediator with a place in the pantheon, at others a hygienic practice whose legendary origin is narrated in one version. The other oscillation pertains to Lynx's character, which has varying connotations ranging from the negative mode (when he causes famine through fog, making it impossible to hunt, or when he imprisons all the animals, which amounts to the same thing) to the positive mode (as a creator of a new humankind and the arts of civilization) (Levi-Strauss, 1995, 15).

Levi-Strauss' work, although relatively comprehensive, did not include references to Haida, Tsimshian, and Gitxsan lynx beliefs. Additionally there is no mention of the lynx in Boas's Tsimshian Mythology or in Barbeau's manuscripts. Consequently, Levi-Strauss concentrated on Athapaskan, Nez Perce, and Salish beliefs. I surmise that the lynx
did not play as important a role in Tsimshian oral histories compared to the Carrier or Nez Perce. Levi-Strauss interpreted the lynx in Nez Perce legends as follows:

...Lynx appears as the master of the fog: he can bring it on and lift it at will. And it is yet another kind of fog, one that is beneficial rather than harmful, warm rather than cold -- namely steam -- that heals Lynx and gives him youth and handsomeness. To these paired elements the second version adds the earth oven, dug into the ground and heated with hot stones (like the warm water bath, thus replacing the sweat lodge also mentioned in this version). Fog, sweat lodge and the earth oven thus form a triangle in which fog, in the realm of nature, corresponds to the sweat lodge and the earth oven in the realm of culture (Levi-Strauss, 1995, 6).

In Western terms lynx has both positive and negative powers (First Nations people do not judge power relationships using this dichotomy). Lynx can create bad luck and heal the sick. These powers are quite similar to the Iroquois faces in the trees and the Dakota Tree Dweller spirits.

The Athapaskan and Salish cultures also have high regard for lynx's spiritual power. For instance, Richard K. Nelson (1983, 140) explains that the Athapaskan Koyukon people consider the lynx to be second only to the wolverine in spiritual power. The Koyukon people treat lynx with the utmost respect because "This animal can afflict a person with a more complete and lasting alienation than any other" which can result in sickness or they will "permanently lose their luck in catching this animal" (Nelson, 1983, 156). Nelson (1983, 156) includes a story about lynx and bear.

In the Distant Time, the bear and lynx were talking. The bear said that when humans began hunting him they would have to treat him

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Nelson (1983, 140) states that:

The most spiritually powerful of the predators is the wolverine, and it is followed by the wolf, lynx, and otter. Taken collectively, these animals are a greater locus of power than any other group of animals. Mills (personal communication, May 3, 1996) suggests that Nelson may be using the Western notion of a hierarchy of power; something she learned was not analogous to the Beaver Indians view of spiritual power relationships.
right. If he was mistreated by someone, that person would get no bears until he had gray hairs on his head. But the lynx said that people who mistreated him would never get a lynx again in their lives...

Father Morice (1893, 108-110) translated a Carrier legend about lynx to illustrate his point about how the Carrier respected lynx’s power. He tells of Carrier men lowering the carcass of a lynx through the smoke hole of the lodge. The lynx was only touched and eaten by men. The story begins as follows:

A young couple of Indians was living in the woods. One morning, as the husband was absent chasing large animals, a stranger of surprising beauty and apparently endowed with superhuman powers came upon the young woman. “Follow me: you shall be my wife,” he said to her. But as she was very much attached to her husband, she strove hard not to harken him. Yet such were the stranger’s charms and hidden powers that her mind was as if paralyzed in his presence. As she pretended that she had no provisions for the journey, he told her that the distance was short, and that he had plenty in his own place. Whereupon he seized her and she had to follow him. Now the stranger was no other than the lynx.

They arrived at lynx’s lodge, and the husband followed by tracking the trail of grouse feathers left by his wife. The husband and wife strategized over how they would trick lynx rather than fight him because he was so powerful. The wife told lynx she was having her menses, and he was afraid of her because he feared “you will throw a spell on my arms.” The lynx lost interest in the wife and the couple killed lynx while he slept (Morice, 1893, 109-110). Morice (1893, 94) mentions that lynx had two Carrier names, “washi” and “sunte” or “my first cousin.” Remember that Nick Prince (personal communication, November 6, 1995) told me the Carrier respected “wasi” because “he was a helper to E’stas, he is the Creator, in our stories and that lynx, Wasi, he help him put people together. So he knows everything about people hey. They say he even knows whose gone nuts.”
The Nez Perce story called “How Bobcat Found a Wife” is very similar to the Carrier story translated by Morice. The Nez Perce version tells of how Bobcat impregnated a girl called Pine Squirrel. He urinated on the same spot as she, and that is how she became pregnant. There was a great mystery in the camp about who the father was. The people discovered that Bobcat was the father and they became angry and killed him. His wife stayed after the people moved and resurrected Bobcat by placing his bones under her pillow and healed him in a sweatbath. A magpie told the people that Bobcat had “come back” and the people “went to see and apologize. They sort of repented him...They had happy days from then on” (Aoki and Walker, 1989, 541-542).

The Tena story of lynx is also similar in theme to the Carrier and Nez Perce.

Sullivan (1942, 97-99) retells a Tena story about lynx. This version begins as follows:

Once the lynx [who was a man at first] had two wives, and he stayed alone with them on a mountain. For many years they stayed there. He was trapping every day in the winter and the two women stayed at home. One time he went out again. Usually he would be out only during the day and come back at night. But this time he did not come back at night. When he returned the next day, his wife asked him, “What was the reason you stayed out?” “Oh, I was tired,” he answered, “and I couldn’t come back so I stayed out...After two or three days he went out to hunt again. That night he didn’t come back, nor the next...

Eventually the man leaves his two wives and boys for good. They try and follow him but he left no trail. Eventually a bird told them “Your husband has two wives back in the mountain.” The first wife found the husband’s new home in a valley. She tricked his new wives and killed them. She also tricked her husband into holding a hot rock and his hands and feet shriveled, and then his face.

He did it --and then he turned into a lynx and went outside. And after that the three boys were turned into lynx, young ones, and the two women turned into lynx too. That’s all (Sullivan, 1942, 99).

Sullivan (1942, 99) relates this story to the Tena practice of placing carved dolls on either side of a lynx snare. The Tena also observed taboos similar to the Carrier and Gitxsan.
For instance, women are not allowed to mention the lynx’s proper name “otherwise its yega [spirit power] would prevent any more lynx being caught by the men in the household,” and unmarried girls were not allowed to eat its meat. Sullivan (1942, 99) emphasizes that the lynx was an important food source and “they cautiously avoid doing anything that would make its capture more difficult or deprive them of it entirely.”

The Carrier, Nez Perce, and Tena stories suggest that lynx and bobcat will try and impregnate the women, and they must apologize to lynx or bobcat, otherwise he could use his power to create bad luck. The lynx has a good memory and will remember if someone has tried to harm him. Consequently, the hunter would not be able to feed and support his family: the family’s very survival was at stake. Nelson (1983, 26) suggests that a hunter’s good luck is based on the support or blessing of something or someone who “created the world.” Luck is not a fitting term because it is not a random turn of fate that a hunter has good luck, but rather it is with the spiritual support of the lynx that the hunter can support his community. The spiritual support results from the hunter’s respect for his environment. There are many Gitxsan stories which demonstrate the fate of those who do not respect the salmon people or goats, for example. The punishment is severe. Barbeau (1973, 198) warns in his Gitxsan precept number two, previously presented, that “Their lives are not unlike yours. Their spirit-selves, unless propitiated, stand over them in readiness for the deed of retaliation.”

The lynx were trapped for their fur and as a source of food long before the arrival of the white man (Blackwater, personal communication, July 27, 1995). Alexander Mackenzie (1970, 368) observed a patient being covered with a lynx robe and he showed

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33 Margaret Gagnon (personal communication, November 28, 1995) told me a story about the wolverine. She said if you tease or shoot the wolverine he will get back at you. She knew of a trapper that teased a wolverine and up to that point he had been very lucky in trapping beaver. But after that he did not get any. The wolverine sprang the beaver traps, pulled them up and pooped on them. It is common for wolverine to urinate and defecate on traps. Margaret described a remedy for this situation which involved
records of 6000 lynx skins being shipped to Britain in the autumn of 1798 (1970, 82). Father Morice (1893, 97) describes the Carrier use of a deadfall trap to catch lynx. The trap design is often specific to the animal such as lynx or marten. Figure 3.33 is a reproduction of Morice’s figure 81 which portrays the lynx deadfall trap. This design is very similar to the Gitxsan trap design for lynx described to me by the Gitxsan trapper Walter Blackwater.

Nelson (1986, 226-227) describes the trappers landscape and how it is interpreted when deciding where to set traps. For example, he points out that “Trap sites are usually associated with some geographic peculiarity that tends to funnel lynx through a certain place, such as a narrow isthmus of forest between open areas, or at the end of a forested point jutting out into a lake or meadow.” Nelson also suggests that the presence of a trail in combination of a natural feature of the landscape creates an important “crossroad” for the lynx’s routes of travel. The lynx, its power, and routes of travel are important clues to the placement of some of the Carrier, Koyukon and Gitxsan tree art.

**Klez Lake**

Klez Lake is about 8 km south of Fraser Lake, BC, and south of Dry William Lake. Highway 16 west passes by Dry William Lake. The Klez Lake arboroscript tree is shown in Figures 3.34 and 3.35 (Borden number: Ga Se-11). The tree was found by a forestry crew surveying pest damage in 1994. The archaeological site report says that the tree is on a spur trail of the Cheslatta Indian trail. There are syllabic characters written in pencil on the blaze of the tree, as shown in Figure 3.35. Dr. Bill Poser, Nick Prince, and Ed Kettle deciphered the message. Bill Poser’s translation is “Corpse there is, Pierre, Hello I am saying this, Antoine.” Nick Prince’s translation is “Body there is, at house, Hello I am saying this, Antoine.” Ed Kettle’s translation is “Trail there is, house, Hello I am saying washing the traps and hanging them in balsam smoke. She ended her story by saying "If you tease one wolverine, other wolverines will know, like all the family and they will all get mad at you."
this, Antoine.” The message was prefaced with the characters “1877” which appears to be the year. The site report says “Morice [Father] according to current info. did not introduce syllabics until 1885. Poser says that they are definitely Morice’s syllabics and not earlier 1847 Cree syllabics” (Suttill, 1994, 4). Suttill infers this may be a message regarding a death rather than a burial marker.

I have encountered a similar, more recent, example of a message about a death written on a tree. This arboroscript tree was at the Deep Canoe site and is shown in Figure 3.36. Neil Sterritt (personal communication, July 21, 1995) interpreted this message.

NEIL: You know what this is, its almost a message to get their stuff. May the 27th, he died on May 27th, he must of been trapping there. Somebody walked in there and on June 4th they told them to get their stuff and come to town. You read that. Chief Aleast died on May 27th, they sent a runner right away to tell them to come in. Grab your stuff and come to town.

MICHAEL: Oh, somebody from his house was out there trapping and they told them to come in.

NEIL: That’s what that message is, that is exactly what it is. Now what is this age 5 yrs? Maybe 75 yrs, doesn’t matter, that is what it is. They got there on June 4th, grab your stuff, that’s all you have to say. You know that if you have been in the bush. You know you don’t have to say much. That is what it is. Now, why the cat, there is a reason for the cat? ‘Oh no he I still alive chasing squirrels and girls.’ Did it look fresh to you?

MICHAEL: Pretty recent.

NEIL: They are making a joke about it, Chief Aleast is still alive. They would have taken a horse in four days. That’s my view of it.

The possible intended meaning of the Klez Lake arboroscript is a message to a hunter or trapper about the death of Pierre. Neil suggests it was common to leave written messages on trees for trappers, for instance. This tree gives us some insight to the life of a trapper and how connections to the village were maintained regarding important events. I have now finished the Fraser Lake portion of our journey so we will now travel to Tumbler Ridge in north eastern BC.
Tumbler Ridge

While researching the provincial archaeological records, I found the site report for a tree carving near Tumbler Ridge, BC (Borden number: Gg Rg - 1). Tumbler Ridge, a coal mining town, lies at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, about one hundred and seventy kilometers east of Chetwynd, BC. The site report was filed in 1976 just prior to the establishment of Tumbler Ridge. The site report included photographs of a face carved on a tree, and of the specific and general site. There was also a map showing the location of the arboroglyph. Figure 3.37 is a pen-and-ink reproduction of the photograph, and Figure 3.38 shows the site in 1995. I travelled to the site on three different occasions to look for the tree carving, but finally resigned myself to the fact that the tree had been removed. The Tumbler Ridge municipal campsite is located in the spot where the tree was reported. Unfortunately, the report designating the tree as an archaeological site was filed after the campsite was established.

I followed up with a phone call to W. Warn (personal communication, September 16, 1995), who was one of the original informants, in Dawson Creek. His first visit to the area was in 1937, and he saw the tree carving, two graves and Indian buildings on the east side of Flatbed Creek. They were about 50-100 meters from the steep hill along the creek. The carving was on a poplar tree about 10-15 meters from the creek bank.

The Flatbed Creek area would have been used by the Cree from Moberly Lake, or by the Beaver Indians. The carving there is a beautiful and well-carved piece, which is surprising because of the popular belief that only the Northwest Coast people had mastered the art of carving (see Figure 3.37). The carving seems to be looking downward, and it
was beside two graves. I did find a very roughly carved face on a snag along the creek shore (Figure 3.39), about a hundred meters from the reported location. This carving may be related to the original, as it may be a rough replacement.

The intended meaning of this carving is unknown. However, its unfortunate demise represents to me how these wondrous art forms have been all too often, and probably unwittingly destroyed. This sad history is the second journey of meaning for the Gg Rg-1 arboroglyph. A similar story will unfold regarding the Blanshard River tree carving at our next stop in the Yukon.

Yukon

Kholkux Tree Carvings

I found myself in the Yukon with my friend Joey Himmelspach after following up on leads from Mike Murtha, in Prince George, and Sarah Gaunt in Whitehorse. Sarah suggested that I talk to Ron Chambers, the Deputy Chief Councilor of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation. Ron lives in Haines Junction just a few hours west of Whitehorse, and this is the next stop on our journey. He is a First Nations artist, and a retired Kluane Park Warden. He is knowledgeable of the arts and the land, and he has taken a special interest in tree art.

I interviewed Ron about tree carvings, and he discussed two carvings (see Figures 3.40, 3.41, 3.42, 3.43, and 3.44) as described below (Chambers, personal communication, September 12, 1995):
MICHAEL: Maybe I will just get you to explain what tree carvings are for.

RON: What I kind of thought they were for, and my understanding of it, they are trail markers, and they are usually about a distance either from major crossing or a travel distance from each other of a day. I would think they would come to these certain markers, they already knew ahead of time what each one is. They get to a certain place and they see that marker and they knew something about it, and they go on to the next place and they see another marker with a design on it. They also again knew there was a certain kind of fish there, or it a good camp spot. Or they might be a day or so from another village. Or they also indicated the ownership of the trail. Chief Kohklux or Shartrich, from Klukwun, did most of the trading in the 1800's. It may be some of his symbols, clan symbols. These are definitely Tlingit trail markers. I think if the information gathered on them, the type of carvings for example. There would be some explanation of the symbols. Like I was saying, the two carvings, the one on the tree at Blanshard [Figure 3.42], and the one at Frederick Lake [Figure 3.40], the one at the parks office. The carvings, the style and the eyes is about similar. I would expect they were done by the same carver. The time is the same, on either one of those trees. They are not rotten trees, they are old trees. So the carver probably did it about the same time. I don't know how far back in history they do them. Once the fur trade came along it created a bigger spark between the interior. So it maybe started with the fur trade. While they pushed the routes even stronger. In the past they had contact they might have had contact, but a bits and pieces type of thing. Because they did not have to, other than moose hides and that type of thing. But once the fur trade started it was very important to mark your turf. That was done by the Tahltans as well.

MICHAEL: The people that they were trading with in the interior, what were they called?

RON: The southern Tutchone. The people down Tatensheni, there is a real mix of names there, Tatensheni-Alsek, they are called Gonenough, they traded with the Yakatak, but also with the Klukwon. There is a three way meeting place area there. So this is going towards Klukwon, Chilkat. The Yakatak did not go very far in the interior. The Chilkat Tlingits went all the way to Fort Selkirk. They sent Robert Campbell packing down the River. Did you hear that story?

MICHAEL: No.

RON: He was a Hudson's Bay trader, he established a trading post down on the Yukon River. While again you see how important it was to the Tlingit. That's about, gee I don't know what it is in distance, but I guess it is about 250 miles from the coast, they went all the way up, burnt the place down, put him in a boat, and sent him down the River. Now that's what I call taking care of your turf, am I right.

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RON: It's a hell of a long ways to go, and you ain't going for nothing. So that's how important it was. They did they sent him down the River, that's Robert Campbell. There's a Campbell River now, and a Campbell bridge across the street in Whitehorse, a Campbell this and a Campbell that. That's the same guy, but this Shartrich is the guy that sent him down the River. A Tlingit chief.

MICHAEL: Your feeling is when you find these trees is to leave them there eh?
RON: Yeah, I’d say leave them there, record everything you can, the area, photograph the whole dog-gone works. And if there is a problem with the tree surviving, then that’s the next question but up till them document them real well. Also we need to put them in a reference you know. Photos only do one thing, they show you it was there. Its something to see something in reality. If you have to move them, then have a place to put them. Like that one over at the parks, its an information, but it does not have any background or nothing. Its just a carving. What’s poor about that, people come look at and say ‘oh that’s neat’ and walk off. Its more than neat! There is a whole lifestyle to that.

Chartrich is Wolf, that’s important to note because it might affect what the designs are. That’s important to what you do there. If you go back to Hazelton, and you got those 20 some [carvings]. Find out who were the chiefs at the time, who were the leaders at the time and what were their clan symbols. Now with him being Wolf, I would almost wonder about that design, the raven or owl. I can’t remember what moiety the Owl is under, make a note to yourself, do you know what I mean. If it doesn’t fit in, I mean again I am just speculating. If he is Wolf and it has wolf indicator things in it, then he may not have a raven on the tree. If that’s him. And if he definitely has a raven then you say how comes that. But if this is an owl and the owl is tied in to that moiety, then it could still tie back to Chartrich. A bit of detective work.

MICHAEL: What do you guys believe about a tree, do you believe that a tree has a living spirit?

RON: Well, I don’t know for sure how powerful that would be. I could not tell. That’s one of those things, I would not want to speculate of something, if I was not sure. That’s the thing that does get me, some people would say ‘oh yeah it does that’ you know when they are not sure.

MICHAEL: The raven [or owl] one was found 10 years ago at Frederick Lake [Figure 3.40], and Paul Berkel was the Chief that cut it down.

RON: Yeah, if it was a raven.

MICHAEL: What would be the most important piece of advice for me when researching these trees?

RON: Well, the thing is to nail down more of why they were made, what the reasons are. If you learn the reasons. And the other part is to nail the common part of it. I mean that these two were so close together, If you did a study on these carvings you may find that they belonged to the same artist, the same carver. That’s important to get continuity. Rather than a tree carving is just a tree carving, while it’s not, there is more to it. So that and ah, the date. Because it is very important. We are theorizing that these were done by and for Chartrich, Kohklux. While if they are not that puts another light on it again. I suspect though it has his influence on it though. That would also indicate the differences in styles from place to place. Because he would have his carvers doing his signs, right. My sign, my carver. You go down the coast and you will find somebody in the Tahltan’s did the same type of thing. They have another carver, different style, different chief and clan symbols would show up. And right on down the coast, because these thing do have a common, same as these rock carvings you know. You go right down the coast and they have similar themes. The style changes a bit from part of the country
to part of the country. They have a lot in common in that aspect, the Northwest Coast. The style all the way up to Washington state and California even. You will find similarities, big change, but similarities. There is differences, but a good idea is a good idea, you know what I mean. So trail marker, maybe there is some in California for all we know. Totally different kind of carving, but the same principles behind it.

MICHAEL: Yeah, that's why I came up here to talk to you, because we need as many clues as we can get.

As an artist what do you think of these, as an art form?

RON: Well this guy, I mean that's a carver there. You know and the tools back then, he probably had some good tools with him. For him to carry, to come up on a packing trail with the big loads they carried, coming and going, they traded. You take stuff in you take stuff out. This guy is like bringing a photographer along on a mountain climb. I think he had to carry a smaller load than the next guy, because he had a purpose. That's important. The quality and the style and the ability. This is harder wood to carve than cedar. The tree is more dense. It's a spruce. These interior spruce is harder wood to carve, he had to of had good tools. They are not going to wait forever for him to carve. So the guy had to have a really good carving ability. I mean I would not even want to take that on in a few days. I mean if you give me enough time I could do a design like that. I can't do that in two days, this guy could more than likely. That tells me a lot, it tells me that there is a lot of thought behind what those are for. They didn't just bring anybody to hack away. They brought somebody in who was an intelligent carver who did that design. You don't do all that detail for nothing. You want to blaze a trail, you blaze a trail, you know. Three chops of the axe tells you something too. There is more to that, it's establishing a trail.

And the next step, here for example, they call it the Dalton trail. Dalton came in with a pack train and everything else. This tells you they were here before Dalton, well everyone knows that, it's history. The thing is if you go through this amount of trouble to show you are using the trail, it sure as hell is not a fly by night trail. So when they come along and put a name like Dalton's name over it, arbitrarily like, because he bought some horses over it. He used the same damn trail, to me I say you got you priorities backward. This guy went to a hell of a lot more trouble than Dalton ever did to think about the trail. Dalton did not ever carve a totem pole design on the tree. Ok, then I say lets put the importance of the trail back to where it belongs. And if you find it that this is Kohklux's symbol and design, you can call it the Kohklux trail, the trading trail, the Tlingit trail, the Tutchone trail. There is some concern about the Tutchone, and calling it that. There was some animosity between them and the Tlingit. But if that's what it was, that's what it was, its history. The Tlingit were notorious traders. You had to count your change after they left, you know. But that's their business, that's what they did. But the people up here they more or less lived off the land. They did not spend their time trying to squeeze the extra dollar out of you. They traded for what they thought was fair enough. Tlingits were pretty fast and powerful. But they did have respect for the people up here, they protected them. It was very important to maintain contacts here. By enlarge they treated the people up here not too bad. They had battles down south and made slaves of them. I don't know of any slaves from here. They valued their trading contacts.
Ron’s insightful commentary began with a discussion of tree art functioning as trail markers. He said the markers are about a day’s travel apart, and located at major junctions or water crossings. The traveller associated knowledge of the landscape, or hunting and fishing prospects with each marker. For instance, the fishing may be very good at a particular marker, or it may be a good river crossing site. Ron suggested tree carvings could also indicate trail ownership. The Tlingit Chief Kohklux, also known as Shartrich, from Klukwon, Alaska, was a powerful chief, similar to the southern Tsimshian Chief Legaix. Ron believes that the Blanshard River and Frederick Lake carvings were of Tlingit origin based on the style. The geopolitical consequences of the European fur trade strengthen the practice of creating trail markers to “mark your turf.” Evidently Chief Kohklux knew his territory very well because he drew a detailed map of it in 1869 for a visiting astronomer named George Davidson.

When asked by George Davidson, visiting scientist, about his travels, Kohklux and his two wives were able to draw a map for him, although they had never used paper or pencils. It is the earliest known map of the southern Yukon and the first known map to be committed to paper by a First Nations person in this part of the world...[and it] is a tangible symbol of the cultural links among the Tlingit of the coast, and the Tagish and Tutchone people of the interior (Anon., 1995 (b), 1).

Ron told a story about the ousting of the Hudson’s Bay trader Robert Campbell by Chief Kohklux. The Chief travelled 250 miles inland to Campbell’s post to assert his claim over the trading rights with the interior peoples like the Tutchone.

The Chilkat guarded the few mountain passes that gave access to the interior. The people of the Yukon were not allowed to come to the coast except under very special circumstances...Similarly, traders on the coast were not allowed access to the interior where they could trade directly for furs, thus bypassing the Chilkat (Anon., 1995 (b), 8).

As Ron stressed, “It’s a hell of a long ways to go, and you ain’t going for nothing. So that’s how important it was.” He told this story to emphasize how important it was to lay claim over trading rights, and therefore, it is conceivable Kohklux would mark his interior trading trail. Ron pointed to the high quality in style of the carvings, combined with
the difficulty of carving the spruce wood, as reasons to believe that there was an important purpose for the carvings.

That tells me a lot, it tells me that there is a lot of thought behind what those are for... You want to blaze a trail, you blaze a trail, you know. Three chops of the axe tells you something too. There is more to that, its establishing a trail.

I followed up on Ron's suggestion to research the Wolf clan's crest to see if the owl was a crest design associated with Kohklux. Emmonds (1991, 117 & 441) says that Chief Chartrich was chief of the Wolf of Klukwan and the owl is a crest of the Wolf clan. Thus, the association of the owl crest with Kohklux reinforces Ron's belief that Kohklux may have had the carving done.

Chief Legaix commissioned one of his artists to mark his trading route as shown in Figure 3.45. Barbeau and Benyon recorded an oral history story of the Legaix pictograph in 1952 from John Tate of Gispaxloats (Barbeau and Benyon, 1987, 64-65).

Suddenly a thought occurred to him [Legaix], and he called out his chief spokesman, 'Kawela, come here! I want to discuss with you something which I think very important. In Order to show to all my people and all the other Tsimshian that I control not only the Skeena River, but also the Nass, I am going to paint my picture on the sides of the cliff at Ktsiyamxl, now known as Ten Mile Point. This will show that I control this River, as well as knowing that I control the Nass.'...When they got to the place where he had chosen to be the place to paint his picture, he and his men climbed to the top of the cliff, and getting a very strong wicker-like basket, they lowered the man down in the basket. When he was at the right spot, he began his paintings of a face which was to symbolize Legaix and the twelve copper shields, each of which had a name and were very valuable...Then he spoke [at a later feast]. 'Chiefs, chiefs, and princes and chief women, and all the great spokesmen for the chiefs, and tribesmen of the chiefs! I have acquired greater power, now that my face is painted on the walls of the cliff which you will see as you go past (and he pointed to the cliff). This is to signify that I control these waters. Even though there are those among my own tribe who are trying to overcome me and belittle me, I can still overcome them. This place will be known from now as 'The picture place of Legaix.' It also shows my wealth... It is the name of this place to this day. Thus it was that Legaix overcame his enemies and put them to great shame.

Marsden and Galois (1995, 172) mapped out Legaix's trading route prerogatives in the period of 1787-1830. He was a successful trader because "he controlled three of the
four main routes by which interior furs reached the coast.” They also say Chief Shakes controlled the fourth route, the Stikine River. Chief Kohklux controlled the area north of Chief Shakes territory. Ron told me of how Chief Shakes scared Robert Campbell away after he fled from Kohklux at Fort Selkirk. These three Chiefs controlled fur trading with the European traders by restricting European access from the coast and the eastern overland routes, and by establishing trade protocols with the interior peoples regarding their access to the European traders along the coast. The oral history story tells of a feast that Legaix held to settle the internal and external strife. He asked the chiefs to come and witness the rock painting and thereby agree to the control Legaix was asserting through the creation of the painting. This example is important because it supports Ron’s theory that Kohklux was asserting his control of trails by carving trail markers on trees.

I know of a Gitxsan story, recorded by Barbeau and Benyon (1959 (a), #71), which exemplifies the creation of carvings to signify access and control. However, the access was restricted for more spiritual purposes.

Over towards the bridge [Kiskgas] at the other end, Meluleq had a carving of the Mawdzeks {eagle like bird, sometimes called hawk}, which he used as a charm. He, at that time, was a great halaeit [healer]. He made it a ruling that no woman was to go across the bridge when she was in her monthlies. And this was observed by all women...At one time, a woman named Qaspegwilarhaitu, the Wolf-howls-about-at-random, forgot this rule and stepped across. Meluleq heard the voice of his Mawdzeks {charm} warning him. It was not possible for the others to hear it, but only for him. The one {Mawdzeks} on the opposite side also spoke to him, saying ‘There is a woman in her monthlies going over the bridge.’ He found out who was that woman, and they summoned her to his house...There seems to have been two Mawdzeks carvings, one at each end of the suspension bridge.

It is not clear to me whether the guardian carvings were carved on a tree or on the bridge. However this example is a good reminder of the spiritual nature of First Nations
Legaix’s and Kohklux’s carvings may also be spiritual guardians of the trade routes, but I have no evidence that this is the case.

The Frederick Lake tree carving now resides in the Kluane National Park Interpretation Centre in Haines Junction (Figure 3.41). It was cut out of the tree circa 1985. Ron stresses that people don’t appreciate the carving in its current context, “What’s poor about that, people come and look at, and say ‘oh that’s neat’ and walk off. It’s more that neat!” He believes tree art should be left in its intended context because “It’s something to see something in reality.” I felt saddened by the sight of the Frederick Lake tree carving squeezed in between other displays in the centre. It was invisible because it did look like a tree carving - it was treated as an artifact. Consequently, I stress the importance of trying to understand tree art in its intended viewing context, which, in this case, Ron provided us through his verbal artistry.

The Blanshard River carving does not exist today. Ron feels it was removed or damaged when a bridge was located at the site in the 1950’s. The first photographs (see Figure 3.42 and 3.43) that I saw of this carving were in a set of photographs sent to me by Janet R. Klein. Frederica de Laguna (personal communication, June 7, 1995) remembered seeing a copy of Janet’s photographs and gave me Janet’s address. Janet kindly gave me permission to use the photographs from the Della Banks collection (Klein, personal communication, June 27, 1995). Janet estimates that the photographs were taken in 1944. The second photograph I saw was taken about ten years later (see Figure 3.44) in Julie Cruikshank’s book entitled Reading Voices (1991, 97). These two sets of photographs provide a poignant look into the history of this arboroglyph. They show the intended viewing context (1944) and then the disturbed viewing context at the bridge site (circa 1954), just before the tree was removed or destroyed. I am very impressed by the original
image of the carved person looking across the snow covered River through the old trees. This context sparks imaginations of the old ways and of Kohklux passing by as he heads up to Fort Selkirk to oust Robert Campbell. The second photograph instills a sense of nostalgic sorrow in me. I am very lucky to be able to piece together the story of this carving because it deserves a respected place in First Nations history.

Other Images of the Yukon

I was able to visit the sites of other tree carvings, or gain access to photographs of tree carvings because of the generous help of Mike McFadden, Willie Smarch, Larry Fault and Sarah Gaunt. I know very little about these examples, however, I have presented them in Figures 3.46, 3.47, and 3.48 for your enjoyment. The general locations of the carvings are provided in the photograph captions. These images conclude our visit to the Yukon, and lead in to our final destination, Manitoba.

Manitoba Kapuchihagan

This last stop is at Early Morning rapids on the Churchill River, Manitoba.

I want to complete our journey with an emphasis on the sacred nature of tree art. There is a face carved on a tree along the River’s edge upstream of the rapids (see Figure 3.49).

David Riddle, Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, introduced me to this site (Borden number: Gj Lq-1) and forwarded a photograph and his explanation of the carving.

The reassessment of the site at Early Morning Rapids (Gj Lq-1) confirmed the presence of a Kapuchihagan, or ‘Fart-Person’, being used by members of the Nelson House community. Here, near the head of the east side of the rapids, a zoomorphic figure has been carved into a tree. Such figures are votive objects, where gifts are placed to ensure safe passage past a dangerous rapid. Several hundred offerings, ranging from cigarettes to sparkplugs to coins, have been placed on and at the foot of the tree below the figure by travellers from Nelson House First Nation (Riddle, 1994, 9).
David's commentary on the photograph (Riddle, Personal Communication, January 27, 1995) is given below.

In case it is hard to see [the photograph], the cigarettes are in his mouth with the eyes and nose cut into the poplar above the mouth. There is a deep band cut into the tree above the eyes. As you can see much of the stuff surrounding the base of the tree in junk. However, money, nails and other things are also present. From what Felix Spence, aged about 38, from Nelson House First Nation told me it's more the giving of a gift than its value that is important.

Alexander Mackenzie observed painted figures on a rock, in the late 1700's, in close vicinity to the Early Morning rapids tree carving. Offerings were also left at this site along the Churchill River.

At some distance from the silent rapid, is a narrow strait, where the Indians have painted red figures on the face of a rock, and where it was their custom formerly to make an offering of some of the articles which they had with them, on their way to and from Churchill (Mackenzie, 1970, 122).

The practice of making offerings to ensure safe passage, at an offering site such as an arboroglyph or pictograph is a common practice for many First Nations. The Tsimshian made offerings of mountain goat fat by spreading it on the turbulent waters of rapids and whirlpools (Benyon, 1987, 22).

There were many abodes of monsters from the mouth of the Nass River right to the head, and the most feared was Skacol, which seemed to be angry at all times. When anybody approached, the water would seem to boil and the current was very treacherous and although the people always put much mountain goat fat upon these waters to appease the constant anger of this monster, many people would perish. Now there were other monster's abodes all along the Nass River, but these were not angry ones and they never caused any harm to the people and were always pacified when given offerings of mountain goat kidney fat (Benyon, 1987, 22 & 66).

Weisel (1951) gives a very interesting account of the Flathead people's practice of making offerings at a medicine tree called the Ram's Horn tree. The ponderosa pine (Yellow pine) tree is located on the east bank of the East Fork of the Bitter Root River, beside highway 93 in Montana (Weisel, 1951, 5). Weisel provides an account of a fur trader, Warren A. Ferris, in 1833.
...The tree is unusually large and flourishing, and the horn is in it some seven feet above the ground. It appears to be very ancient, and is gradually decomposing on the outside, which has assumed a reddish cast...The oldest Indians can give no other account of it, than it was there precisely as at present, before their father’s great grandfathers were born. They seldom pass it without leaving some trifling offering, as beads, shells, or other ornaments...(Weisel, 1951, 6).

Weisel (1951, 9) tells of Ellen Big Sam’s yearly visits to the tree, and her practice of leaving some of her hair on the tree to ensure she lived to an old age. The oral history tells of Coyote tricking a pursuing Ram, Mountain Sheep, and the Ram got one of his horns stuck in the tree (Weisel, 1951, 7).

I have presented examples of offering sites to show that they are common to many First Nations, and to suggest that tree art may function as sacred offering sites. The Early Morning site is a good example of the practice, and it adds to the realm of possible intended meanings of tree art. This example also reinforces the importance of interpreting the intended meaning based on the intended viewing context, which is beside one of the strongest rapids along the Churchill River.

Alexander Mackenzie observed the practice of leaving offerings at a pictograph site in the 1700’s, and, today offerings are being left at the Early Morning site. It is appropriate to end our journey with this site since it represents continuity of practice to the present, the sacred nature of tree art, and its relationship to the First Nations landscape. And now we retire to the campfire to reflect on the experiences of the journey and the teachings of the Elders. The campfire has been a central focus for storytelling for endless generations. The flames twist and turn, dim and flare, and court the mind’s eye to open the doors to many dimensions. The smoke curls and swirls from this world, through the smoke hole, to the world of the ancestors. What better place to reflect on the journey than the campfire?
Chapter Four: Campfire Reflections on the Journey

As I gaze into the flickering flames of the sparking campfire and reflect on our journey, I remember a Tsimshian oral history about a man who carved a wooden image of his lost child. Boas (1902, 86-93) recorded the story told by Moses. The story begins when a young boy is taken by a star. The boy’s father cried and sought help from a woman shaman. She told him the star took his son and tied him to the edge of his smoke-hole; consequently, the son was being burned by the sparks. A person gave the father the following advice:

“Carve a piece of wood so that it will look just like your child.” He gave to this person tobacco, red paint, and sling-stones in return for his advice. Then the person was very glad. The man made a figure of spruce, one of hemlock, one of balsam fir, and one of red cedar, and one of yellow cedar, all as large as his boy. Then he made a great fire. He built a pyre of slender trees, which he placed crosswise, and placed fire underneath. He hung his wooden images to a tree over the fire. He poked the fire, so that the sparks burned the body of the wooden figure. Then the latter cried aloud, but after a short time it stopped. Then he took it off, and took another one. It did the same. The figure stopped crying after a short time. He took it down. Then he tied the red cedar to the tree and poked the fire. There were very many sparks. The figure cried for a long time, and then stopped. He took it down and hung up the yellow cedar. It did not stop. Then he took the image of yellow cedar.

He went on, and came to a place where he heard a man splitting firewood with his wedge and hammer. His name was G·ix·sats’a’ntx·. When he came near, he asked him, “Where is the house?” At the same time he gave him tobacco. Then G·ix·sats’a’ntx· began to swell when he tasted the tobacco. (the people of olden times called it “being troubled.”) He also gave him red paint and sling-stones. Then G·ix·sats’a’ntx· told him where the child was. He said, “Wait in the woods until they are all asleep, then go up to the roof of the house.” The man went, and when he came nearer, he heard

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34 Boas gives the Tsimshian equivalent for a wooden image “g·sk Em ga’ng·ê,”. His literal translation is the “person of wood.” Note that this is very similar to the modern Gitxsan spelling “Gyetim Gan.”

35 Boas (1970, 161-166) recorded a similar story about a lost daughter that was found by her brother. He carved a spiritually powerful wooden eagle with “a body of red cedar; the head, and also the tail, of white pine; the legs and beak of yellow cedar; and the claws, of mountain goat horn.”
the voice of his boy, who was crying; but

as soon as the boy stopped, the chief
ordered his men to poke the fire until
many sparks flew up. When all the
people were asleep, the man went to the
roof of the house where the child was.
The child recognized his father and cried;
but his father rebuked him, saying,
"Don't cry, don't cry! They might hear
you in the house." The boy stopped and
the man took him off. In his place he tied
the wooden image to the smoke hole.
Then he went down. Early in the
morning the chief ordered his people to
poke the fire. The wooden image cried
while the man and his son were making
their escape. But the wooden image did
not cry long. Then it stopped. The chief
became suspicious, and sent a man to the
roof. He went up, and, behold, there
was a stick. The boy was lost, and the
wooden image was on the roof. The
chief said, "Pursue them!" The people
did so. The man heard them
approaching. When they were close
behind him, he threw tobacco, red paint,
and sling-stones in their way. The paint
was red; the sling-stones were blue.

The story is an important reminder of the sacred purpose and audience of First
Nations art. The audience for the wooden image was the stars. The father’s purpose was
to establish a sacred connection (axis mundi) to communicate with the spirits to ask for
their help in locating his son. Since Western society has strayed from the sacred purposes
of art, I feel it is important to be mindful of this story as we reflect on our journey to
understand and experience tree art. I reflect on the Elders’ commentary, questions
answered and born, and the future. Questions such as: what are the purposes of tree art?;
who is the audience?; why has tree art been so invisible to the colonizer?; how can tree art
be protected?; and why were faces a common image carved in trees? I offer my reflections
as a guide and an artist to my travelling companions as food for thought at the journey’s
end. As your guide I have chosen to begin by reflecting on the insightful commentary
given by the Elders at the tree art sites. The Elder’s knowledge imparted during the site
visits helped provide a sense of the realm of possible intended meanings. Next, I reflect on
the curious question as to why tree art has been hidden for so long and as a means to
answering this question, I discuss the concept of the First Nations landscape. I then
ponder over how a renewed appreciation of tree art, and a desire to protect it will change
the path of the second journey of meaning for tree art. Finally, as an artist, I reflect on tree
art as a uniquely beautiful and meaningful art form.
Reflections on the Elders' Commentary

The Elders have shared their wisdom regarding tree art and the First Nations landscape. I ponder their advice because it will reduce our risk of falling through “thin ice” by guiding our appreciation, interpretation and preservation of tree art along a wise path, guiding us to take the “long way around.” George, the hop pole carving, and Frank Malloway, a Stó:ló Elder, both taught me the importance of the second journey of meaning. George’s second journey inspires Elders to reflect on the hop picking era, and pass this history onto the next generation. The Stó:ló believe there is a living spirit in all belongings, materials, and tools made from trees. George Yutslick, who carved George, saw a living spirit in the knot of the hop pole. The pole was “living.” This is an important teaching about the First Nations perspective because it expands the scientific Western notion of a “living” tree. For example, there is a Gitxsan story about “stump” who tricks Wegyet the trickster and eats all his food (Anon., 1977, 58). George is a “living” marker recently blessed with a name. Frank introduced the concept of a marker as an informant or witness to the past.

Art Wilson spoke of his carving as a memorial to the Sam Greene blockade. Doreen Jensen (1992, 17) calls this type of art “historical memory.” Art hopes people will see his carving and ask questions about the carving and why it was created. The art form will help future generations access their history through the visual and verbal art forms. As an artist, he felt it was important to look for clues to the meaning of tree art by carefully observing the creation, because “it will tell you something.” Art’s advice helped me to understand the feather inscribed on one of the Deep Canoe Creek carvings and the cross on the Kuldo carving.
Walter Blackwater was careful in his explanation of Gyetim Gan because he wanted to tell me only what he knew. He teaches, through his own cautious approach, that it is important to avoid speculation as much as possible because it may muddy the waters for the next generation. Once again, that is why I have concentrated on presenting the realm of possible meaning and carefully differentiating between the intended meaning and the second journey of meaning. I have constructed the realm of possible meanings by acknowledging the amorphous nature of visual art and by building upon Foucault’s suggestion that text describing art has grey meaning. Translating this to faces in the forest, perhaps we should say that visual images evoke the whole spectrum of colours of meaning. I prefer to add grey tones, or new possible meanings, to the realm because I want to promote discourse on tree art. Additionally, I want to avoid relying on textual taxonomic classification of tree art because this would risk giving a false sense of clarity while teetering on the abyss of ignorance and risking falling through thin ice. Walter is careful to say that some carvings may have stories and are similar to crest poles while others may have just been carved by a trapper at a camp to pass time.

Walter knows and respects Sophia Mowatt’s knowledge, but he had not seen the practice of carving faces in trees to attract the lynx as Sophia had witnessed. However, he had seen doll’s heads carved and placed in a trap at the base of a tree to attract the lynx. Sophia is about 20 years older than Walter, and I believe the practice she describes probably pre-dates Walter’s experience, as she is keenly aware of the transitional practices that emerged as a result of early European contact. Additionally, I was able to show that the Koyukon trappers also created images on trees to attract the lynx.

Both Walter and Neil Sterritt confirmed that Gyetim Gan could be found throughout Gitxsan territory. They are particularly abundant along what is now called the Telegraph
trail. The style of Gyetim Gan, as Walter points out, was consistent as well. Walter, Sophia, and Neil all independently referred to human faces carved in trees as Gyetim Gan (person in tree or wood). Neil Sterritt told us how his son Gordon carved a new face beside an old Gyetim Gan; consequently the practice is regenerated. Gordon carved his image while on a trip sponsored by the Gitxan nation to retrace an important trail, and thus his Gyetim Gan is a historical marker for their trip. Art Wilson’s carving has recently contributed to Gitxan historical memory by marking a successful blockade. The Gitxan still continue to create Gyetim Gan, although the reasons for the contemporary markers are varied and reflect the Gitxan culture of today.

Nick Prince, through his vast experience as a Carrier trapper and historian, tied together numerous concepts. His “the long way round is closer to home” story acted as a motto because it reinforced the need for care and respect. I was given a gift when I saw Gyetim Gan for the first time, and I knew I must respect that gift. Nick offered a path for the journey. His story of the dugout canoe introduced the importance of perspective and how it influences the interpretation of meaning. He intentionally flipped the storytelling perspective by telling the story from the canoe’s perspective as a living spirit, rather than from the perspective of the young boy making the canoe.

Next, Nick expanded the realm of possible intended meanings with three important possibilities: 1) a burial marker, 2) a meeting place camp marker and axis mundi, and 3) an apology to the lynx. Nick was careful to qualify his commentary to the Carrier, because

36 “Apologize for what?” says Coyote.
“In case we hurt anyone’s feelings,” said Hawkeye.
“Oh, okay,” says Coyote. “I’m sorry.”
“That didn’t sound very sorry, Coyote,” said the Lone Ranger. “Remember what happened the last time you rushed through a story and didn’t apologize?”...
“Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry,” says Coyote.
he knew that other peoples may have different interpretations. I have been cautious as well regarding this point, and that is why, where possible, I always clarify what First Nations I am referring to in my research. A First Nations perspective is multidimensional. Nick’s commentary also reinforces the point that many First Nations created tree art, and this practice predates European contact.

Nick and Walter Blackwater, as verbal artists, create vivid images of the First Nations landscape. Both of these men know their territory, its meeting places, dinner, and lunch camps. The camps were in the same spot for generations, as trappers commonly used the same spot to avoid leaving their sign for the animals to discover. They both describe distances travelled in days rather than miles or kilometers. They know the names, in their own language, of the mountains, rivers, lakes, creeks and other families’ territories. They know the oral history about the migration of their ancestors across the landscape. First Nations names of places are reflections of the landscape, such as “water running through pines,” rather than the imposition of human names for posterity’s sake.

I will expand the concept of the First Nations landscape in the following section. Ron Chambers was also able to create this sense of landscape in his commentary. Ron eloquently lead us across the landscape by describing it as trails that weave the villages together. The Tlingit marked their association with important trading trails to the interior. Ron described the political economy of the Tlingit and Totchone people. He described how the political connections were marked with tree carvings to reaffirm economic access for both trading parties, and also to the exclusion of European traders, especially during the early phases of the fur trade. Chief Legaix marked his connections through pictographs in the same period. As an artist, Ron paints a picture of the role of the Tlingit artist as one of

“Okay,” said the Lone Ranger. “We believe you.”
marking the landscape communicating power and trading relationships. Ron had given a lot of thought to the meaning of the two tree carvings discussed. He knows the landscape, history and art form, and yet he points out that his theory is only learned speculation in the end. After all, the artist, from another era, cannot explain their intended meaning to us. I am, however, impressed with Ron’s theory as an addition to the realm of possible intended meanings of tree art. Ron appreciated the art form and admired the artist. And, in the end, I wonder if appreciating the beauty of tree art is the most important experience of the journey.

The Elders’ commentary and advice are invaluable because it marries the verbal art form with the visual to create meaning and provide a First Nations perspective. The concept of a First Nations perspective within the context of tree art evolved into the broader concept of the First Nations landscape. I use this concept as context to discuss the stories of Elders such as Ron Chambers in the following section.

A Curious Question

The concept of a First Nations landscape includes having new eyes for appreciating the viewing context for tree art, acknowledging the coexistence of the sacred and profane landscapes, and recognizing the effects of colonialism on First Nations people and their land. The discussion in this section addresses my deep curiosity regarding why so little is known about tree art, particularly in the colonial consciousness of British Columbia. I am drawn to the concept of the First Nations landscape over and over, regardless of my path of approach, because fundamentally, tree art is connected to the landscape and it is, simultaneously, a profound expression of the physical and spiritual landscape. Tree art is a First Nations landscape marker and it symbolizes the relationship between people and the land.
Rena Bolton, a Stó:lo Elder, advises younger generations to “go back into the history of your people to where your ancestors travelled on the River, and in the mountains” (Daly, 1993, xv). Rena advises the young people to travel across the First Nations landscape in order to understand their history. The trees and forest, rocks and mountains, are part of the physical or profane landscape. The oral history, Elder’s teachings, crest poles, and tree art, are forms of the verbal and visual arts that create the sacred landscape. During the journey’s preparation I concentrated on trying to describe the context of tree art through the use of recorded adaawk and an examination of the sacred First Nations perspective. The sacred landscape can be the sky world or underground world, the salmon people’s world or world of the squirrel people. The sacred and profane landscapes combine, coexist, interrelate, exist as one and at other times are worlds apart. To have a First Nations perspective one should be familiar with the existence of both worlds. A shaman, accustomed to both worlds, has mastered travel between the two landscapes. The axis mundi, as a locus of power, is a ladder between the two worlds, a connection where interaction between the sacred and profane occur. The axis mundi can take many forms including tree art, a hole in the sky, or a centre pole of a Sun Dance ground. Eliade (1963, 30) noted the sacred often manifests itself in profane forms such as rocks and trees. Yet the dichotomy or division into sacred and profane are part of Eliade’s perspective, not that of the First Nations viewer. Everything is not as it seems on the First Nations landscape. Barbeau’s (1973, 198) second precept, as passed down to the Gitxsan from the Chief-of-the-Skies says:

The man who never seeks restraint shall never know endurance and fortitude; he shall never have visions of the spirit worlds, never grasp the dictates of unseen wisdom.
In other words, a person who does not prepare her/himself spiritually, will not see the “unseen wisdom.” The First Nations landscape and tree art will not come into complete focus unless one has a First Nations perspective. Meinig (1979, 3), a geographer, says landscape is defined by our vision and interpreted by our mind. The interpretation of landscape is based on the viewer’s cultural perspective. The cultural geographer Lowenthal links history and cultural perspective as follows:

Today’s past is an accumulation of mankind’s memories, seen through our own generation’s particular perspectives. What we know of history differs from what actually happened not merely because evidence of past events has been lost or tampered with, or because the task of sifting through it is unending, but also because the changing present continually requires new interpretations of what has taken place (Lowenthal, 1979, 103).

Western definitions of cultural landscape stem from geographers such as Carl Sauer’s (1963, 333) definition of the cultural landscape.

The works of man express themselves in cultural landscape. There may be a succession of these landscapes of cultures. They are derived in each case from natural landscape, man expressing his place in nature as a distinct agent of modification.

Elspeth Young (1992) developed Sauer’s concept of a succession, or linear replacement of landscapes, into a concept of “layers” of landscapes. Young’s approach recognizes that each era of history does not subsume the previous era.

The landscape also consists of ‘layers,’ reflecting historical processes which have resulted in its continuous transformation, and which stem from changing economic, political, cultural, and demographic factors affecting a particular society. Visible evidence for the existence of these factors may almost be non-existent, and hence people tend to ignore their presence in the landscape (Young, 1992, 255).

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37 Young (1992, 264-266) gives an excellent example of how a sand painting of a Yurnipirli, Northern Territory, Australia, waterhole is interpreted as a Dreaming track and then she overlays it upon a Western territorial map. She shows how the art form reflects the Dreaming and how that compares to the Western perception of the land. The painting shows significant trees, a camp, a waterhole, and animal and human tracks.
The Western capitalist's industrial landscape is layered upon the First Nations landscape, and both are defined by cultural perspectives and vision. Young hints that the Australian Aboriginal landscape is ignored and therefore remains unseen. Young (1992, 259) contrasts the Aboriginal spiritual perspective of the landscape with the Western economic worth perspective of industrialized capitalist societies. Young (1992, 256) concludes "A major cosmological contrast concerns the perceived relationship of people and land." The First Nations landscape has become submerged below the capitalist colonial landscape because the colonizer's economic and political power has redefined the relationship between people and the land.38

Ron Chambers told a story of how the name "Dalton trail" came to be, as an example of how colonizers have redefined the First Nations landscape. Dalton brought his horses over Chief Kohklux's trading trail; consequently the trail was named the Dalton trail. Ron is frustrated with the name "Dalton trail" because he thinks that Kohklux went through "a hell of a lot more trouble [than Dalton]" to establish and mark the trail with tree carvings. The "Telegraph Trail" in Gitxsan territory and the Nuxalk-Carrier grease trail, now named the Alexander Mackenzie Grease Trail, are further examples of First Nations trails being renamed. First Nations people are concerned that more recognition is being given to "white" explorers rather than to First Nations history (Birchwater, 1993, 2).

First Nations place names help define First Nations peoples' relationship to the land. For example, place names such as "where the Rivers meet," "Lake of many

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38 "In a democracy, everyone gets a turn," says Coyote.
"Nonsense," I says. "In a democracy, only people who can afford it get a turn."
"How about half a turn?" says Coyote. (King, 1994, 327)
beavers,” “where the ancestors tied the canoe to the mountain in the flood,” or “Painted Goat Mountain” were created to reflect the physical and sacred landscape.39

Often, place names were not just labels but descriptions of features that would enable travellers to orient themselves. The mountain now known as the Three Guardsmen is called Nanda duiyakhache in Tlingit – ‘facing North the wind is to your back’ (Anon., 1995 (b), 25).

Actually, early explorers relied on the First Nations people as guides in a foreign land.40 I am reminded of a passage in Alexander Mackenzie’s journal where he meets a Native person near Alexandria who drew a map showing a route to the ocean.

I now proceeded to request the native, whom I had particularly selected, to commence his information, by drawing a sketch of the country upon a large piece of bark, and he immediately entered on the work, frequently appealing to, and sometimes asking the advice of, those around him...These people describe the distance across the country as very short to the Western Ocean...It occupied them, they said, no more than six nights, to go to where they meet the people who barter iron, brass, copper, beads, &c. with them, for dressed leather, and beaver, bear, lynx, fox, and marten skins (Mackenzie, 1970, 319-20).

Tuan (1991, 688), a cultural geographer, shows how European explorers have presumed the right to name geographical features in lands they have discovered, and thereby submerge First Nations place names. Tuan refers to naming geographical features as a creative power to impart a certain character to the landscape. Present day British Columbian topographical maps hardly refer to First Nations place names or trails anymore, and consequently the First Nations landscape is submerged below the colonial landscape.41 The Inuits in the Northwest Territories are reclaiming their traditional place names. This activity is sanctioned by the territorial government (Necheff, 1996, 15).

39 “My name is Glimmerglass, says that Lake. What’s yours? I’m Old Woman, says Old woman. And I am floating. It’s a nice day for that, says that Lake” (King, 1994, 391.
40 Alexander Mackenzie clearly alludes to his reliance on the Carrier-Chilkotin guides in his journal. “As for attempting the woods, without a [Indian] guide, to introduce us to the first inhabitants, such a determination would be little short of absolute madness” (Mackenzie, 1970, 337).
41 “It doesn’t look like an Indian dam,” said Hawkeye. “It doesn’t look like an Indian Lake.” Perhaps it’s a Coyote dam.” says Coyote. “Perhaps it’s a Coyote Lake.” (King, 1994, 409)
Until recently, as the cultural geographer Wagner (1994, 5) points out, archaeologists and anthropologists have neglected paying attention to the cultural landscape aspect of their study sites. For instance, James A. McDonald (1983, 27) has written one of the few descriptions of Tsimshian landscape and place names. Consequently, there is a paucity of knowledge regarding the First Nations landscape, as exemplified by the invisibility of tree art in archaeological and anthropological discourse. I believe these fields have historically had a “McKenna-McBride” resolution or perspective of the landscape.

The McKenna-McBride Royal Commission travelled throughout British Columbia from 1913-1916 determining the number and size of the Indian reserves (Duff, 1980, 68). My perception of their process is that they drew small boxes on a map around the location where they found the Indians, regardless of whether they were at their summer, winter, fishing, trapping or hunting camp. These small boxes, called reserves, redefined the First Nations landscape into a much narrower view. The commissioners did not seem to understand the great extent to which First Nations people travelled and modified the landscape. More importantly they had no concept of the sacred landscape. I believe anthropologists and archaeologists have usually and unconsciously adopted this narrow perspective of the First Nations landscape centered on the reserve or village site. Consequently, they had little exposure to the broader First Nations landscape and they never encountered tree art.

It was a revelation for me to discover how extensive signs of First Nations travel and use are in the forest, as I learned to interpret the First Nations landscape, while searching for tree art. A “land without history” came into focus as a landscape rich in history: I began to notice the deep trodden trails, trees scarred from bark harvesting, camps, deadfall traps, and tree art. I learned to look and see the “unseen.” I learned that
First Nations travellers followed ridge tops, hogsbacks, and trails that linked lakes and paralleled watercourses.

Ernest Hyzims, a Gitxsan Elder, describes the trailscape as an ancient connection, marked with blazes, between the village and the land.

We follow the trail, blazes notched out on the trees by our grandfathers and follow the trails to our trapping grounds, hunting grounds, berry patches. As a rule, if someone got lost on the trail, they would break twigs to show which way they went, they didn't notch out trees as not to scare away the animals (Hyzims, 1983, 13).

I define a trailscape as the system of trails that connects camps, villages, trap lines, and trading partners including the associated camps, markers, traps, food gathering sites and water crossings. MacDonald and Cove (1987, xii-xvii), Birchwater (1993, 3&13), (Anon., 1995 b), 15) describe Tsimshian/ Gitxsan, Carrier/Nuxalk, and Tlingit/ Tsoshone trail systems. Birchwater (1993, 24) quotes a Carrier Elder as saying, “Them old people had trails all over the place...People lived all over.”

Nelson (1986,183), one of the few anthropologists to study the First Nations landscape, describes how the Alaskan Kutchin peoples mark their trailscape.

Trails are often very easy to follow because they are clearly defined corridors through dense vegetation. In some areas, however, it is hard to find a trail in untracked snow without some kind of markers. In open spruce forests, for example, the trees are blazed at frequent intervals by chopping a narrow strip of bark from a tree trunk, leaving a white mark which is easily seen. Markers are very important at places where a trail opens onto a River, Lake, slough, or meadow, where travellers may have difficulty finding the trail’s opening when they reach the other side. Large blazes are used here if there are big trees at the trail’s edge, but the margins of Lakes and meadows are often fringed with scrub, so instead of making blazes the Indians often hang something like a tin can or shred of cloth in the brush.

Dorthea Calverley (nd., 4) observed “Today many of these old trails [Indian] are the routes of our railways, highways, and forestry roads.” Thus, the First Nations trailscape has
been submerged by the colonial road system. The road engineers probably found the First Nations trails convenient routes across the landscape.

So, for me, tree art symbolizes the lack of awareness of the First Nations landscape which still exists, pocketed by clearcuts, roads and seismic lines. Tree art marks the remnants of the trailscape, reminding us of the existence of another layer of history and perception. The signs can still be interpreted by younger generations. Elders who have lived on the First Nations landscape are still keenly aware of the physical and spiritual places and the associated stories. Some of them have helped us interpret tree art on this journey in the First Nations landscape viewing context.

Through my reflections I have partially satisfied my curiosity over why tree art has remained relatively invisible. First, the colonial process, through its many effects, has submerged the First Nations landscape below the capitalist colonial landscape. Additionally, the Western perception of the First Nations landscape is a narrow McKenna-McBride perspective. Second, to see the unseen, one must have the willingness to see with new eyes. As your guide I have encouraged you to appreciate the First Nations perspective; consequently, you may be able to bring the First Nations landscape into focus as the intended viewing context for tree art. I call this perspective “ego-edgism” because all perspectives of landscapes are equally valid, but different, and one cannot submerge the other.

At present the colonial landscape is layered upon the First Nations landscape. Consequently, the capitalist colonizer has transformed and submerged the artist's intended viewing context. This transformed and layered landscape becomes the viewing context for the second journey of meaning for tree art.
The Second Journey

Earlier in the preparation stage of the journey I established the medicine cross described by Hugh Brody (1988) as a touchstone from which to reflect on the transformed landscape. Joseph Patsah’s Dad established a medicine cross on a tree to seek spiritual support for the family’s new found territory. Brody (1988, 107) tells of his “pilgrimage” many years later to see the medicine cross.

The importance of the cross permeated everything that he and others had been trying to explain about their feelings for and use of the land...In fact, the cross had rotted at its base and fallen back to lean, precarious and dilapidated, into the pines that surrounded it...It would be quite easy to pass the cross, unnoticing, so nearly did it merge with the woodland around...Once noticed, however, its presence could be felt.

He knew that a logging road was scheduled to be built and “It would probably follow the trail that led us from the camp to the cross.” Moreover, because it was so inconspicuous it “would all too easily be bulldozed into the ragged brush piles that lie alongside new roads on the frontier” (Brody, 1988, 108). As they left, one of the Beaver members in the party remarked “Sometime we better put up a new cross. That one’s getting old now” (Brody, 1988, 108).

We have also witnessed how the Kuldo Gyetim Gan came to look across the road at the new clearcut only meters away (Figures 3.26 and 3.27), and the destruction of the Tumbler Ridge tree carving. Doubtless many examples of tree art have ended up in brush piles or the sawmill. I am sad because of the loss of these evocative art forms. Should tree art be protected? And, if so, how should it be protected? The cultural geographer Lowenthal offers some interesting discussion relevant to these questions.

Lowenthal’s protection paradox says that “To realize that something stems from the past is actively to alter it” (1979, 109). He recognizes the need for “reminders of our
heritage in our memory, our literature, and our landscapes” (Lowenthal, 1979, 125). But efforts to preserve artifacts and landscapes will affect the nature of the past by altering its meaning (Lowenthal, 1979, 124). I have named this altered state of meaning resulting from the preservation and appreciation of tree art the second journey of meaning.

Preservation includes three types of activity: 1) recognition and celebration, 2) maintenance and preservation, and 3) enrichment and enhancement (Lowenthal, 1979, 109). So, a paradox exists between protecting tree art without altering its intended meaning.

1) Recognition and Celebration

Tree art should be recognized and celebrated. Few First Nations people, and practically no non-First Nations people are aware of tree art. Tree art can teach us about its intended viewing context, and the First Nations landscape and its meaning. I debated whether or not I should publicize the existence of tree art because I was afraid of what may happen to tree art once people become more aware of its existence. I decided to carefully increase the awareness of tree art for two reasons. First, I believe the younger generations of First Nations people should have access to the knowledge the Elders shared with me about tree art. Ron Chambers comments on this point as follows:42

Oh somebody will come along and see it and say ‘Oh that’s that’, ‘Oh is that right’, you know all of a sudden they knew but didn’t know to say. And there it is now you know. That’s the other part of why you need that [information] out, because people can say, ‘Oh yeah’, somebody will know, but nobody asked. You didn’t know that they know, so you did not ask, it goes on like that (Chambers, personal communication, September 12, 1995).

Awareness of tree art may motivate younger generations to ask their Elders if they know of any other examples and their meaning. Consequently, this generation may be able to save the old examples of tree art and continue its practice if they so desire. Second, sharing this information may increase the awareness of archaeologists, anthropologists and forestry workers. These people are responsible for conducting and managing cultural and heritage

42 “Silly Coyote,” I says. “There are good points and there are bad points, but there are never all good points or all bad points” (King, 1994, 324).
site inventory. Consequently, they must be aware of tree art in order to identify it and protect it from logging.

First Nations people should be responsible for locating tree art by interviewing their Elders, especially Elders who know the landscape and trailscape well, such as trappers, hunters, gatherers of medicine, berries and other forest foods.

2) Protection and Maintenance

I have demonstrated that tree art can be found throughout British Columbia, the Yukon and Manitoba. Tree art can be difficult to see because the tree scar may partially or almost entirely cover the image. Archaeologists and Professional Foresters have an ethical responsibility to become aware of the tree art and its prevalence. Additionally, in British Columbia they have a legal responsibility under the Heritage Conservation Act and the Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act to identify and protect tree art from logging or other forms of destructive development. I encourage these professionals to learn about tree art and the First Nations landscape.

A date for when tree art was created can be established by using tree ring dating (dendrochronological) methods. I have not employed the use of these methods in my study to date because I had not secured permission from the appropriate First Nation. But I hope to date the tree carvings in the Gitxsan territory. Hicks (1976, 3) describes the tree ring dating procedure from an archaeological perspective.

Dendrochronology, in most archaeological areas where it is practiced, involves the construction of tree-ring chronologies through crossdating. Crossdating hinges on the presence of relatively small rings, compared to their neighbours, resulting from water deprivation to the tree in a given year. These patterns in a series of rings constitutes a distinctive 'signature' that can then be matched to the other like patterns in older wood. The process allows wood that has no reference to a cutting date to be dated by the cutting date of other trees.
Ron Chambers adamantly says tree art should be left, *in situ*, where it’s created. It should not be cut from the tree and put on exhibit. I agree with Ron because the intended viewing context is so important to the intended meaning of tree art. The audience for tree art is often the spirits of animals who live in the forests rather than patrons of art galleries or museums. Nick Prince said that the Carrier would maintain the meeting place tree carving by planting a new tree beside it in anticipation of the tree rotting and falling. We also observed a tree carving at Deep Canoe Creek which was recarved after the scar grew over the original carving. Some First Nations people, such as the Carrier, have regenerated trees to replace the decaying “meeting place” tree carving for instance, and therefore, it seems appropriate to continue the practice for future generations.

The *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* and *Heritage Conservation Act* together have provisions for the preservation of cultural heritage resources such as tree art. A requirement of the *Code* is that a forest company must do an archaeological assessment to determine if there are any cultural heritage resources, as defined in the *Heritage Conservation Act*, that could be detrimentally affected by a proposed logging plan. Section 51 of the *Code* also protects cultural heritage resources even after a logging plan is approved. If a person who carries out a forest practice finds an unidentified resource such as an arboroglyph, for example, they must modify or stop that practice in the immediate vicinity and then promptly advise the Ministry of Forests. Tree art, however, requires protection than is provided for under these acts because of its cultural importance and its rarity.

Additional protection of tree art and its intended viewing context could be accomplished by designating a cultural reserve around tree art sites. This can be accomplished through a number of mechanisms. For instance, the Ministry of Forests can recommend that ecological reserves be designated under the *Land Act* around unique or
rare forest ecosystems. The Ministry of Forests forest district manager could similarly designate the area around a culturally significant site as a “sensitive area” under section 5 of the Code because the argument can be made that the area should be treated differently from adjacent lands. Another protective measure is available under section 6 of the Code whereby the Chief Forester could designate the site as an “interpretive forest site.” Regardless of the legal mechanism the tree art sites should be designated and protected. I believe that a ten hectare area surrounding the tree art would be the minimum size necessary to protect the art and the important forest viewing context. Trail corridor reserves (250 meters wide) would also be appropriate, since tree art usually exists along trails and at camp sites.

3) **Enhancement and Enrichment**

I would advise against the enhancement or enrichment of tree art sites into tourist attractions. The forest context should be left untouched and low impact trails and signage should be used. Great care should be taken to preserve the intended viewing context. Awareness of tree art could be enhanced through other means such as publications or multimedia presentations which are less intrusive to the site.

**An Artist’s Reflections on Tree Art**

Something stirred in me the moment I saw my first Gyetim Gan. I learned that the aesthetic beauty and spiritual power of tree art is greatly enhanced by the forest context. That face in the forest is so anonymous and humble (see Figure 3.19), so distant from gallery walls and so hidden from the view of the colonizer. The forest, its context, connects the carved face to Earth Mother in such a profound way. This connection is similar to how the Australian Aborigines connect their Dreamings to the sands of the desert, or how Navajo artists connect, through their paintings on the desert sand, with supernatural
healing powers. Tree art connects us to Earth Mother through its roots, to the sacred world as an *axis mundi*, and to the past through stories. Gyetim Gan has witnessed tremendous change since the artist unfolded their spirit in the tree as guardians of territory, trails, or burials; as apologies to the lynx; as visual attractants to the lynx; as an *axis mundi* for returning spirits at the meeting place camp, or as historical markers. The second journey of meaning for all tree art, as introduced by George, regardless of the intended meaning, is to act as a historical marker, and a reminder of stories. In this way, tree art is similar to crest poles because both art forms are meant to be reminders of stories or visual cues for the verbal art form. The oral tradition or adaawk are the dialogue, the auditory and conceptual framework that gives meaning to the visual experience of seeing faces in the forest. This encounter echoes Foucault’s textual description of the experience of viewing *Las Meninas*. Foucault’s gaze is from the profane world while the First Nations gaze of tree art is sacred. The question of who the intended audience is allows us to differentiate between the profane and sacred gaze.

As an artist I ask “Why are most of the carvings of human faces?” Tree carvings, from the southern coast of British Columbia to the Yukon, seem to share an important characteristic, the carvings are of human faces. Art Wilson’s (personal communication, July 16, 1995) reason for carving a face as a possible answer to my question:

**MICHAEL:** Why did you choose a face?

**ART:** I chose a face because when people see a face it just naturally draws their attention.

Eliade (1963, 300) in his review of world religions found that some people believe that “The tree or bush is held to be the mythical ancestor of the tribe.” Many First Nations associate birth and death with the power of the sacred tree. Eliade (1963, 300) refers to this as the “mystical relations between trees and men.” I wonder whether the face is a
reflection and the tree a mirror of our own spirits? Yes, the face naturally draws our attention. There is a self reflective quality to the faces in the forest, similar to Velazquez's reflection in *Las Meninas*. Who is the intended audience for the faces of the forest? The story of the father carving a wooden image of his son reminds me that art is not always created for the human audience. In some ways, as an artist I was fascinated by the humble essence of tree art because it was never intended to be viewed by the masses, nor was it important for the artist to affix his/her name to their creation. This isolated quality makes the art very powerful for me. Yet, is tree art really isolated in the forest, or is the audience the forest and its spirit? I am not used to thinking about the sacred audience, but it is crucial to remember that in some cases the artist created the art for the lynx and its spirit, for example.

Who are these artists? Some may be master carvers employed by great chiefs to communicate ownership of important trails or territory. Some may be trappers apologizing to the lynx, or trying to attract a lynx to their trap. Some may be trappers who whiled away their time in their camp by creating human faces to attract a lynx to their traps. Some may be mourning a lost relative by creating a memorial on a tree. Some may be like Art Wilson who wanted to create a reminder, a marker, or a memorial of an important story. Finally, some may be like George Yutslick, who saw the spirit of the tree and felt great inspiration to share his vision. The artists were many and so were their motivations for creating tree art, yet all felt the living spirit of the tree.

I hope that people will appreciate tree art for its beauty and power. I believe I was given a gift. It was to play a role in making people aware of tree art and its teachings. We need to see with new eyes the sacred audience in the forest and to pay them more respect. The artists of long ago and a few contemporary First Nations artists have created these markers. Now the purpose of their second journey is to cause us to reflect on our perception of the forest and on how little respect we show its spirit. Tree art, was
unimagined by most people. Now that I have shared this gift I hope that more people will reflect on why the spirits of the forest chose this time to reveal tree art now to the colonial consciousness of British Columbia. Have they come out of hiding to signify their disappointment over the disrespect being shown by industrial society to the forest and its spirit? I am optimistic about the future of our forests and the future role that First Nations people will play in leading the industrial society into a balanced state with nature and her spirits. The Forest Practices Code was the first step towards responsible forest management. The next step is to show respect to the forest by acknowledging the spiritual qualities that First Nations people respect.

Our journey has now come to an end. As your guide I have shared my knowledge with you so that we can share a common sense of tree art. I have reflected on my own perspective, world view, and values, as I hope you have, my fellow traveller. That is all.

43 “It's a lot of work fixing up this world, you know,” said the Lone Ranger. “Yes,” said Ishmael. “And we can use all the help we can get.” “The last time you fooled around like this,” said Robinson Cursoe, “the world got very wet.” “I didn't do anything,” says Coyote. “I just sang a little...I just danced a little, too...But I was helpful, too...” (King, 1993, 416).

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Figure 1.1: Chief Geel, Walter Harris, holding an example of a Gitxsan arborograph.
Figure 1.2: Gitxsan arboroglyph near Deep Canoe Creek
Figure 2.1(a): Gitxsan bark harvesting scar on a hemlock tree.
Figure 2.1(b): Carrier bark harvesting scar on a lodgepole pine tree.
Figure 2.2 Bark chip scar on a Douglas-fir tree, Pender Island.
Figure 2.3(a): Ojibway figures drawn on jack pine trees (Mallery, 1972, 337).

Figure 2.3(b): Micmac map drawn on tree (Mallery, 1972, 341).
Figure 2.4: Teit's (1906, 283) Fig. 98 of a Lilloet carving of a human on the bark of a tree.
Figure 2.5(a): Teit's (1909, 591) image of a Shuswap carving on a cottonwood tree.

Figure 2.5(b): Teit's (1909, 789) Fig. 281 of Chilcotin carvings on trees in Anahem Lake. Left: height about 160 cm. Right: height about 60 cm.
Figure 2.6: Teit’s (1973, 288) Figure 25 showing Okanagan images incised in the bark of trees: a) girl, b) man, c) perhaps ribs, d) woman, e) perhaps an animal, f) perhaps a woman’s cap.
Figure 2.7: Morice's (1893) Fig. 197 showing images drawn on trees with charcoal or stone.
Figure 2.8: Harland I. Smith's photograph (1920) of eyes and mouth carved in a tree, south of Bella Coola, which has since been cut (MCC/CMC photo. no. 50151).
Figure 2.9: Harland I. Smith's photograph (1926) of a human face carved on the trunk of a tree about two miles south of the Skeena River and Kitwanga (MCC/CMC photo. no. 68485).
Figure 2.10: Powell's (1909, 287) reproduction of a map drawn on a tree.
Figure 3.1: George, a carving on a hop pole, Sardis, BC.
Figure 3.2: Native hop pickers, Chilliwack BC (Chilliwack Archives: photo. no. 3564).
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Figure 3.4: Carving of a face on a tree along the Phillips River taken in 1973 (courtesy of T. Dixon).
Figure 3.4(b): Carving of a face on a tree along the Phillips River taken in 1973 (courtesy of T. Dixon).
Figure 3.5: Scar on a cedar tree along Discovery Channel.
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Figure 3.7: Art Wilson's tree carving in the intended viewing context.
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Figure 3.9: Geel's arborograph in situ (courtesy of M. Eldridge).
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Figure 3.11: Initials in tree at Deadhorse lake.
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Figure 3.27: Kuldo roadside carving, October, 1995.
Figure 3.28: Cross above the face of the carving in Figure 3.26.
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