

## 6.2 Culture Heritage

### 6.2.1 Resource Assessment

#### Discussion

The stretch of coast between the northern tip of Vancouver Island and the southern end of the Haida Gwaii, is protected from the battery of the Pacific by an almost unbroken chain of small islands. The history of the Mid Coast comes alive as one gazes upon the ancient temperate rainforests and cruises in and out of a maze of waterways. One can almost see the ancient villages scattered on the distant shores. First Nations people have occupied and utilized this area for over ten thousand years, catching and preserving salmon, eulachon and other important food resources in the summer and socializing, potlaching, and feasting in the winter. Although hunters and gatherers like the tribes of the Interior, the coastal natives were able to establish permanent villages due to their abundant food supply. Their complex cultures were distinguished by an emphasis on wealth, a refined artistic tradition, and a rich spirit life. Travel along the coast was accomplished by dugout canoes that could be impressive in their length. A visit to this area cannot be possible without observing the powerful presence of the Heiltsuk, Oweekeno, Nuxalk, and Kitasoo peoples. Over time, Europeans arrived to explore, to trade in furs, to utilize the natural resources and to settle. Evidence of their history is apparent in a number of locations and their presence is very much a part of the cultural landscape of the Mid-Coast.

**Table 6.2-1: Regional SWOT Summary for Heritage/Culture**

<b>Strengths</b>	Quality of cultural resources, very high marketability, existing capacity for further cultural interpretation, low impact, non-consumptive activity.
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Although each culture is unique there is a repeatability of similar products along the BC coast, lack of artifacts and other visible evidence of culture and heritage to outsiders, level of support facilities and services; competition from elsewhere in the province
<b>Opportunities</b>	Education and interpretive tours, linkages to other products, infrastructure development.
<b>Threats</b>	Conflicting land uses

#### A Brief History

The traditional territories occupied by the **Heiltsuk** First Nation or Bella Bella people include the region adjoining Fitz Hugh Sound and section of the Burke and Dean channels. The occupation of this area dates back over 10,000 years. Their language is Oowekyala- Heiltsuk, which is related to Kwaikiutl and Haisla (all are part of the Northern Wakashan language group). In the past, they migrated seasonally to where they could harvest the abundant supplies of fish, shellfish and sea mammals. During the winter months they resided in semi-permanent villages, occupying their time by potlatching and holding ceremonies conducted by the intricate dancing societies. Outsiders prized

the canoes, boxes and utensils that the Heiltsuk produced. Society was divided into chiefs, commoners and slaves (who were mainly war captives). Like the majority of the First Nations on the Mid Coast, known contact first came with the Spanish explorers who plied the coast in the late 1700's. In 1793, the Alexander Mackenzie expedition and the Captain Vancouver expedition brought contact with the British. Mackenzie was trying to find a land route to the Pacific from the east and Vancouver was conducting a survey of the coast. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Heiltsuk became heavily involved in the Sea Otter trade and subsequently with the establishment of Fort McLoughlin on Campbell Island in 1833, intermediaries in the Fur Trade. The population of the Heiltsuk was at that time estimated at 1600 but the diseases that ravaged the majority of First Nations in the mid 1800's reduced their numbers to 204 and the five original tribes merged and settled at Bella Bella in 1890. The presence of Methodist missionaries and a trading post made the site attractive. Sometime in the 1890's the village moved to nearby Waglisla, where it still remains.

The **Kitasoo**/ Xai'xais people reside at Klemtu, on the east side of Swindle Island. There are two languages, Tsimshian and Kwa'kwala . Klemtu was founded in 1870 by Tsimshian and HaisHais (Heiltsuk) families in order to take advantage of the increasing steamer trade through the Inside Passage. Steamers passing through Finlayson channel that needed wood and supplies stopped at Klemtu. Before it was called Klemtu in 1902, it was China Hat. A salmon cannery operated between 1927 and 1968.

The **Oweekeno** occupied the area around Rivers Inlet and Oweekeno Lake and its drainage. Archaeological evidence dates back 9,000 years in the area and the Oweekeno people are thought to have once had the largest population of all Mid Coast nations. They speak Owekyala, similar to the Heiltsuk First Nations, they are also part of the Northern Wakashan language group. Unlike other coastal groups, the Oweekeno based their seasonal subsistence patterns on inland resources, although they did visit sites on the outer coast. Their society consisted of chiefs, commoners and slaves. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, canning and logging centralized the settlement of the Oweekeno village, called Katit, on the Wannock River at the head of Rivers Inlet. As a result of the areas high salmon migratory path to freshwater and proximity to the market it became a major canning operation, with over fourteen canneries opening up and employing the Oweekeno people. However, the last of the canneries closed in the 1950's and with today's sockeye stocks critically low and on the endangered list, the Oweekeno are struggling with unemployment and trying to find a new primary source for their local economy.

The **Nuxalk** First Nations traditionally occupied several permanent villages along the upper Dean Channel and the north and south Bentinck arms of the Burke Channel and up the Bella Coola River valley. They are part of the Salishan Language group. The area was so abundant in salmon and eulochon, plus herring and sea mammals and they didn't have to move around throughout the year as other groups did. Even mountain goat was used to provide meat, fat and wool for blankets. The Nuxalk culture was embedded in ceremonialism and was dominated by two secret societies. Despite the language barriers to the Heiltsuk and Oweekeno, who lived on two sides, much participation occurred in each other's winter ceremonies.

The Nuxalk and Carrier people established well worn Eulachon grease trails ( BC's first trade routes) through the rainforests and up and down steep passes to the open country of the interior. When Alexander Mackenzie arrived with his expedition in 1793 in search of a passage to the Pacific, they utilized the Nuxalk-Carrier grease trail. The Hudson's Bay Company traded in this area from 1862 until 1882. In 1883, missionaries arrived and began to transform traditional customs. Contact with Europeans and the ensuing epidemics reduced the native population. The epidemics which coincided with early European contact, reduced the native population to the point where relocation to a central village was preferred, and eventually they amalgamated into one village. This village is located at the mouth of the Bella Coola River.

Around the same time, on October 31, 1894, Reverend Christian Saugstad arrived with 120 **Norwegian settlers** from Minnesota and settled on agricultural land grants east of the Reserve and began to cultivate the land. The chronicles of the Norwegian settlement are detailed in letters and diaries which have been preserved to this day, as well as in 'Nybyggeren', a hand-written newsletter which was published monthly and brought from log cabin to log cabin. These early records tell of hardship in clearing land with tree trunks as big as a house, of how the Norwegians came to rely on native Indians for help, transportation and advice on living off the land, and of close encounters with local wildlife. The Norwegian settlement marked the transformation of the Valley economy from one based on trade (in eulachon grease and, later, furs) to one linked to the national monetary system.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the commercial fishing industry became extremely important and wage earning began to replace the subsistence economy in the entire region. Along with the boom of canneries in Rivers Inlet and Oweekeno was the emergence of canneries along the outer coast. Historical points of interest include an old salmon cannery settlement known as East Bella Bella, located across Waglisa, on Denny Island. Namu is another old cannery located at a traditional Heiltsuk village. Canneries provided employment to many First Nations who at one time comprised 90 percent of the commercial salmon fishery in BC. In 1884 they were denied commercial access to the fisheries resource.

After decades of institutional and cultural degradation there is a resurgence of traditional singing, dancing, arts and oral traditions. Sites such as the petroglyphs of Thorsen Creek in Bella Coola have spawned a physical link to the cultural renaissance. There are tremendous opportunities to bind the First Nations cultural renaissance with tourism, and to expose visitors to the region to the richness that is the First Nations Culture.

### **Culture and Heritage: Features**

The Mid Coast is rich in opportunities associated with the exposition and interpretation of its special culture and heritage. Heritage and cultural viewing are low impact, non-consumptive activities often associated with ecotourism. Cultural and Heritage viewing is increasingly becoming a primary activity in tourism. The two sub-products in this region are the First Nations and Post Contact (non-aboriginal).

### ***First Nations***

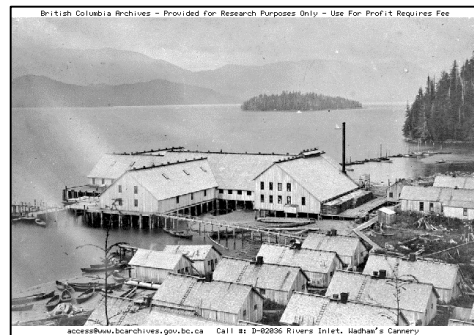
Most of the "ancient" cultural infrastructures, such as traditional longhouses and totems, have long disappeared. Built of wood the structures were easy victims to the harsh climate and invasive vegetation. *In this section only the most significant existing features are identified. The identification of the more specific First Nations cultural and heritage features lies entirely within the domain of the First Nations communities.*

- **Petroglyphs and Pictographs:** There are a number of petroglyphs and pictographs on the Mid Coast. The best known is the *Thorsen Creek petroglyphs*, a large petroglyph site, with more than 100 Indian rock paintings located located eight kilometres west of Bella Coola. The incised rock symbols on the canyon face resemble the Polynesian stone carvings on Easter Island.
- **Ancient habitation:** *Namu* has been declared the oldest archeological site on this section of the coast.
- **Culturally Modified Trees** are evident in the forests. These are not difficult to recognize.
- **Trade Routes** The *Nuxalk -Carrier Grease Trail* (Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail): Before European contact great quantities of eulachon grease were carried inland from the coast on this trail as trade items. Alexander Mackenzie used the trail to reach the coast.

### ***Post Contact***

- **Alexander Mackenzie Park** and a 420 km hiking trail commemorate Mackenzie's historic trip of being the first person to traverse the North American continent.

**Canneries:** There are few canneries still evident along the west coast. At the confluence of the Burke Channel and Fitz Hugh Sound is an abandoned cannery called *Namu*, meaning *place of high winds*, or whirlwind. Established in 1893 as a fish-processing plant and cannery, a fire levelled the community in the 1960s. The cannery was subsequently rebuilt and operations continued until the late 1980s, when high transportation costs and low fish prices forced the plant to close. You can still see structures built on wharves over the water, interconnected by boardwalk. A short trail leads to nearby Namu Lake, which has long expanses of sandy beaches and good fishing.



- **Abandoned Communities:** Located at the head of Cousins Inlet off Dean Channel, is the remote coastal community of *Ocean Falls*. Once a flourishing pulp mill town until closure of the mill by Pacific Mills in 1981. The town of Ocean Falls is virtually abandoned, and remains scarcely inhabited today.
- **Remnants of Norwegian Community:** The Norwegians were fine homebuilders. The Bella Coola Museum is housed in such a historical structure and offers a glimpse into the lives of these

settlers. There is also a heritage Norwegian house in Hagensborg. Tours of the museum and heritage house are offered to visitors during the summer months.

- **Lighthouses** include the manned lighthouses of Boat Bluff, McInnes Island, Ivory Island, Dryad Point, Addenbroke (built in 1914). All are scenic structures that appear to defy the ruggedness of the coast.
- **Highway 20 ("The Hill"):** Prior to 1953, the only way to or from Bella Coola was via a steep packhorse trail that led to Anahim Lake, and the start of Highway 26. In August 1953, the residents of Bella Coola celebrated a newfound and well-deserved freedom. For two long years they had donated their time, energy, equipment and money to develop the last portion of Highway 20 - the stretch of road has had a significant impact on the prosperity of Bella Coola.
- **Airport:** As with Highway 20, in the 1970s the local residents built their own airstrip, resolving not to wait for government support.

### **6.2.2 Market, Economic and Social Assessment of Heritage / Culture**

#### **Competition**

From our extensive work throughout British Columbia we have seen rapidly growing recognition of history and culture - both native and non-native -- as important tourism attractions. Many communities on the coast are now looking to their history and cultural traditions as ways to attract visitors, complement other tourism products, and foster economic diversification. Just a few examples include the following:

- restoration of the North Pacific Cannery in Port Edwards - this has achieved status as a national heritage site;
- tours of ancient Tsimshian village at Pike Island;
- cultural tours and native dance at Klemtu;
- revival of the E&N railway on Vancouver Island;
- restored mining community of Barkerville;
- festival dancing on Vancouver Island.

There are many more heritage or culture-based tourism initiatives throughout the province.

First Nation communities on the Mid Coast are either actively developing specific cultural tourism or are in the process of planning or evaluating specific cultural products for future development. For example,

- the Heiltsuk community in Bella Bella is planning and carrying out a feasibility assessment of a hotel and big house at McLoughlin Bay as major tourism attraction; and,
- the Kitsoo have developed a tourism strategy, and are now planning the development of an ocean kayaking business.

## Market Assessment

With the growth of the global ecotourism industry, there are more travellers seeking out new, enriching experiences as part of their holiday or travel plans. This is a departure away from the “old” vacation mindset of hedonism and consumption, and towards authenticity and education. “Ethnotourism” is booming worldwide, with more and more tourists seeking out cultural experiences in Africa, Australia, Asia-Pacific and North America. The benefits to aboriginal people is highly variable, however. In those communities where the aboriginal people have ownership and control over the delivery of the product, the revenues are significant and accrued entirely at the local level. But there are also many examples of indigenous culture being exploited as a tourism product, and where few benefits are realized by the aboriginal people in question - one such example is described in an article on the bushmen of South Africa in the February 2001 issue of *National Geographic*. Ownership and control of the product are key determinants of the success and sustainability of any culture-based tourism product.

A recent study of the European long-haul pleasure market shows that Germany, the UK and Italy have the largest potential for aboriginal cultural products. Altogether these three countries represent a total market size of 8.3 million aboriginal culture travellers to Canada over the next five years. While Germany has the highest number of visitors attracted to aboriginal tourism, a relatively small percent of the market (28 percent) indicates interest in visiting Canada during the next five years. Italy is a better prospect, accounting for 3.1 million potential travellers, while the US and Germany account for 2.7 and 2.5 million respectively.

A survey done on First Nation tourism in Canada identified BC as the destination with the best-perceived aboriginal cultural product to offer. On the Mid Coast, First Nations make up over half of the local population and the region’s First Nation communities have maintained a strong cultural identity. Language, philosophy, religion, customs, ceremonies, traditions, arts, crafts, dance, music, sites, artifacts, and values are all reflections of culture which can be an important component of the culture based tourism product.

First Nation’s culture as part of the tourism experience is popular among visitors to BC, particularly among European visitors. **Table 6.2-2** outlines the visitor participation rates in First Nations cultural sites identified in a 1996 survey of BC tourists.

<b>Table 6.2-2: BC 1996 Visitor Survey: Cultural Visit</b>		
	<b>Number of Total Visitors</b>	<b>Participation in Visit to First Nations Cultural Site</b>
<b>Long Haul US</b> (California/Hawaii, Mountain States, Central & Eastern States, and Mexico)	1,958,000	34%
<b>Regional US</b> (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska)	3,615,000	20%
<b>Regional Canada</b> (Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, NWT, Yukon)	3,706,000	18%
<b>Long Haul Canada</b> (Rest of Canada)	1,196,000	25%
• <b>Europe</b>	535,000	43%
<b>Asia/Pacific</b>	828,000	31%

Source: Tourism British Columbia



Bella Coola: photo by Warren Fox