

## Midnight Spearing with the Kwakiutls

By Bonnycastle Dale

"CHAH-KOIS-KUM pish," called O'poots (come let's go and take fish).

"After kilpsun" (after sunset), said Fritz—he was learning Chinook, but clumsily.

"Ah-ha" (yes), grunted the guide.

"It's a pity sir, you can't learn the native tongue," said Fritz, leering over at me.

"Ya-ka wau-wau pish," laughed the Kwakiutl to me—(he talks like a fish). "What's that he said?" inquired the boy. "Oh something about the fish," I answered laughing, "anyhow we'll go—they are spearing to-night in the low tide by canoe fires and it will be well worth seeing." So we returned to examining the block house. Who would think that within sixty years our forefathers on this Northern Pacific Coast had to build block houses to protect their families against the marauding Indians—see the hand cut shingles—"shakes" they call them, note the long portholes for firing through. See the date, 1857.

"Here comes chief Ku-on of the Skagits, he'll tell us all about it," said Fritz.

"Would you take a 'devil fish'?" I asked the old chief.

"Ah-ha," he answered.

"We took a big one at the creek mouth this morning, you may have it." "Mah-sie" (thanks)—notice this corrupted French word in this Chinook jargon. "Tell us why they built this log fort Ku-on," I asked.

"The Hiadas come," he simply answered—true, the warlike tribe from the Queen Charlotte Islands harried this coast some sixty odd years ago, scalping and beheading natives and whites alike. "Yes, chief," I told him, "we were at Masset (the Hiada village) this summer—they don't scalp any more, all good men now, white man's missionaries and white man's rifles tame them."

"Come," said the old chief in English, "I show you something." Over the rude trail formed by myriad animals in many centuries—just like Broadway—first a wild animal trail, then a cow path, now a human trail. "All roads look alike to me," sang Fritz and we followed the old man—he was not far from the century mark this ancient withered Coast Indian—his palms were worn quite pink, his bare feet were knotted and calloused into great ridges, four wives this old chief had buried—all blind at death—a very odd fact—he lived with the fifth one now, an ancient hag withered as a last year's butternut.

"Hyas canim (big canoe) he pointed to a forty foot cedar log canoe, a thing of beauty. "Chope son" (grandson), pointing to the boy standing beside the long shapely craft.

"That's the boy who was in the canoe when the chief's son and his sloopman were killed," whispered Fritz—true, I remembered it all now, they were crossing the mouth of the Skagit, three men, a woman and a boy, two men and a boy only returned and the little lad told of the death of his father and mother, the judge gave the two villains fifteen years each.

Fritz, a born newsgatherer, tried to pump the little lad, but I bade him cease, the subject was too painful—as I noticed the great brown animal eyes fill with tears as soon as my boy spoke of the fatal day.

These old folks just seem to live for ever—I know of several that must be well over the century mark—look at this old Cowichan and his child—I have been in this cold, Oh! so cold Pacific, with the "old folks" bathing, when the water was so icy it made a chap all over goose pimples, but did they mind it? not a bit! and it's only the old folks that are pure minded enough to bathe together—I tell you the innocence of some of the native tribes, when first the white man met them, is a sharp contrast to some of the bathing scenes of the highly civilized whites in the Atlantic—where I also have paddled about.

All the day long Fritz and I wandered about this United States Indian reserve.

The tribe possessed but few carvings and a little basketry, some axe heads of flint, a few jade arrowheads, some obsidian chipped into spearhead forms, all else had been bartered off to the whites for vile whisky. It is really most dreadful the way these poor natives are exploited—while they are the wards of both the U. S. and Canada, the emigrant Danes and Swedes and Icelanders, not even citizens of either country yet, bitterly declaim against them being allowed to hold even the little bit of land left to the descendants of the tribes, who once possessed the whole coast.

We wandered over to the "Island of the Dead," across the now dry tidal sands. Oh! what a world of meaning there was in some of the rude structures that held the mortuary boxes. One poor chap, building better than he knew, had installed a clock over the top of the tiny cedar board shack that held all that was left of his little brown-faced babe—truly time had ceased for her, another was decorated, shall we say, with all the old clothes of the deceased, a truly extraordinary sight as they flapped in the wind on an ordinary clothesline, another was all blanket-wrapped and set in the crotch of a tree far up from the ground, others in the frenzy after the death of the loved one had torn out all the doors and windows of the home and piled them over the mortuary box, finally we came to a great crevice or cave piled with tokens so weird and terrifying, that Fritz and I returned swiftly to the mainland—just in time too, as the sun was sinking and the chief had our evening meal all ready.

On a platform in the Potlatch House, on a clean grass mat, was laid the cups and plates—the old Klootchman (squaw) passed along the first dish—if there is one thing more than another we both despise it is native clams with lots of the native sand in, these were most plentifully sanded. I gobbled mine somehow with the aid of an ashcake, but I had to smile and say, "No! thanks," most emphatically, when the chief passed me a dish of our own devil fish nicely boiled—not a bad looking mess either, a sort of gristle boiled soft, but we had taken the repulsive but harmless thing. No! I simply tucked into ashcake and more ashcake and again was forced smilingly to decline smoked salmon of a most fearful odor, all soaked in rancid whale oil—"more ashcake, please!" Fritz was gobbling down Pilot bread as if his very life depended on it—we did not wish to hurt our hosts' feelings but our noses and eyes rebelled at the unusual food. Well we were forced to pass up raw sea urchins—"more ashcake, please," and finally, after copious drinks of water, the most uncomfortable meal I have ever sat down to came to an end—we both felt awfully that we could not tuck in, but as Fritz said later "My! that was smelly."

The moon set at eleven as we left the beach, leaving the scene dark and fearsome. The sea lions howled in the estuary, wailing like dogs baying at the moon, striking the water loud "thwacks" with their flippers, that sounded on the dark calm air like small cannon blasts.

"Look at that beast!" cried Fritz, as we struggled along in our canoe in the wake of the Indians. "Look! Look!" he cried out again—there was no danger but certainly a great skull-like sealion with drops of blue phosphorescent flame dripping off nose and ears—like some weird animal fire-eater—was out, to say the least, cheering. Then we ran aground in the estuary tideflats, and we both had to step out into the dark crab infested waters and lift our craft over the sandbank. "Ouch! Ouch!" screamed Fritz when something grabbed a tender pink toe. "Look! Look!" he called again as a host of spawning salmon tumbled over one another in a very riot of blue fire—all about us—the ripples on the kelp, the salmon, the dogfish—really small sharks, the wake of the canoe all, all was clearly outlined in the strange weird phosphores-

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