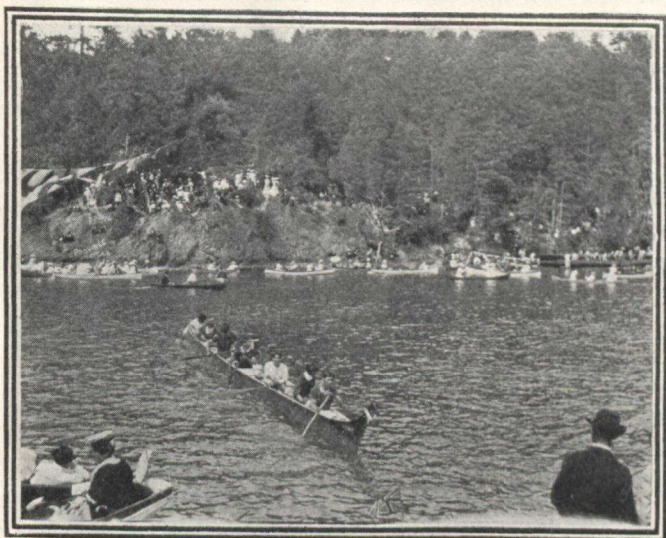
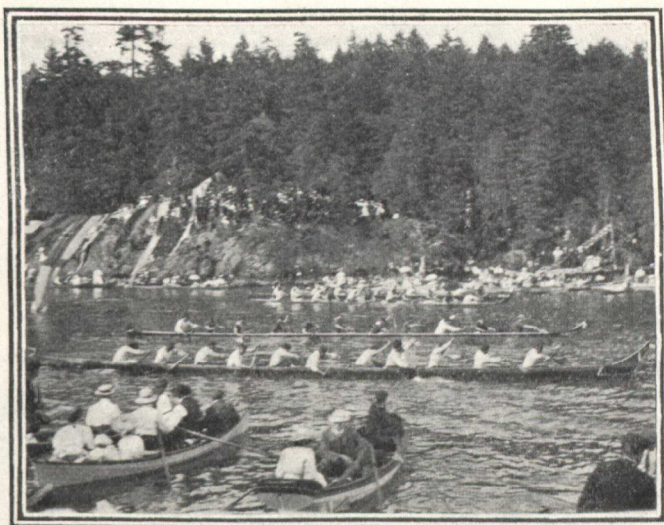




Valdez War Canoe.



Start of War Canoe Race.

Pacific Coast Native Sports

By BONNYCASTLE DALE

SITTING here on the rocky shores of the Gorge this bright May day where all is peace and beauty, it seems impossible to believe that the fathers of these same Indians we are now watching prepare for the races, were a short fifty years ago untamed aborigines. My host tells me that in the days when Victoria had but a stockade and a Hudson Bay post, he had seen these long, swift, cedar war canoes attack the American sailing vessels in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and that he was thankful they did so for he feared the vessels would enter the little arm of the ocean on the rocky shores of which a tiny hamlet was gradually conquering the tangled mazes of the forest and the inhospitable hillsides. He told me how when they entered this harbour of Victoria, Governor Douglass, meeting red man's deceit with white man's wiles, gave them a skookum paper—a strong paper—to carry to Fort Simpson. Always proud to carry "King George hyas skookum paper," the flotilla hurried off on its long journey up the Straits of Georgia—and by the time they returned the Governor had "hyas skookum" gunboats here.

To-day all is changed. The Indians are clothed after white man's style; the clutchmen (squaws) are blotches of brilliant red and blue, yellow and green. "Kla-how-ya" they call to one another in greeting as they gather around their really wonderful war canoes, canoes forty and fifty feet long—and some of the far northern tribes have them seventy feet long—canoes as true as if line and level had marked and built them instead of a common axe and a rude homemade adze. Here was a cedar beauty marked Valdez, clear unpainted cedar in the body, a black gunwale streak and grey painted inside, as straight as an arrow, as clear of knots as cedar grows, over forty feet long, a thing to conquer even the giant billows of the Straits.

Now through the throng of white men's boats these long swift craft creep, ten paddlers and a big Siwash in the stern to guide it. Not a word from these silent shoremen, but the West Saanich men knew that the Valdez had been victors of late and tribe feeling coursed hotly. Looking at them waiting beneath the starting flag, one sees the resemblance to the races of the Orient. Saanich strained on their paddles like hounds in leash. At the signal, both crews drew their paddles back as though each canoe were a great bird with strong, short wings, then the lifting forward motion, the paddle's splash—and the race was on. It was now low, steady, hard work, good clean paddling, despite the fact that they use sharp pointed paddles—it is the long, well rounded blade we use that gives the better grip on the water.

Away up the crowded course they go, clinging to one another like two giant centipedes afloat, the rhythm of rise and fall, the increasing but steady stroke a beautiful sight. Now we lose them behind a rocky bend, now they appear returning, side by side like catamarans, each fringe of paddles rising and falling as regularly as the wing-beats of a bird, as splashless as swift paddling in heavy canoes can be done. Now the Valdez let out a bit. The Saanich respond nobly. Again the Valdez spurt. This time they hold the lead and, working like demons, keep it, crossing the line in a mad rush a scant length ahead. Little talk is there, but the steersman is very soon ashore and has gathered in the prize money.

Again the canoes gather at the flagged line. Saanich, Valdez, Klem Klemaults and Quamachin, the last in new shapely canoe. Off they all leaped at the signal, steering a straight course up the narrow salt arm. Again the rhythm of rise and fall, now from four canoes, none less than forty feet, a glittering fringe of rising and falling paddles. Again on the return the Valdez draw ahead,



Finish of Clutchmen's Race.



Another view of Clutchmen's Race.

AQUATIC SPORTS AT VANCOUVER, B. C.

Photographs by Bonnycastle Dale.