

**PETROGLYPHS**

**IN**

**BRITISH COLUMBIA**



**By C. F. Newcombe, M. D.**

---

Reprint from **VICTORIA DAILY TIMES**

**September 7th, 1907.**

( with additions and corrections )

---

MARGISON BROS., PRINTERS  
Oct. 17th, 1907.  
Victoria, B. C.

author

Petroglyphs - B.C.

# PETROGLYPHS

## IN

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

The excellent photographs made by Mr. H. F. Shepherd, C. E. of the rock carvings at Sprout Lake are of great interest. Dr. F. Boas described and illustrated them so far back as the year 1891 in an anthropological journal published in Berlin, and therefore not accessible to the general reader. The figure and a condensed account are also to be found in a paper by Colonel Mallory in the 10th Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, Washington 1893, in which Mr. Sprout's early notice of them is quoted. Mr. Sprout called attention to them in his "Scenes and Studies of Savage Life," in the late sixties, and they were examined and sketched by Dr. F. Boas in 1889. J. W. Laing also refers to them in his article on "Exploring in Northern Jungles," in the *Overland Monthly* for November, 1897, quoting Dr. Boas. The latter was of opinion that they were the work of an extinct tribe of Indians, who were known to inhabit the lake a century and a half ago.

Messrs. Bolton and Laing themselves illustrate a rock carving on Great Central lake, which was already well known at Alberni, but their picture shows a much smaller area of sculptured rock and fewer figures.

The West Coast, however, is not the only region containing these early works of art. At Nanaimo, near the mouth of the river, is a rock face, nearly horizontal, covered with the figures of fish and of various monsters in outline resembling wolves and liz-

ards, but with numerous appendages along the back that are unknown in any living animal. These were photographed and reproduced in plaster of paris by Harlan I. Smith for the American Museum of Natural History at New York, an illustration of them being published in the *Annual Report* of that institution for 1898.

At Yellow Island, too, near Comox, there is a very large surface covered with rock pictures, several of which had, unfortunately, to be removed by blasting, when the lighthouse was first established there.

The attention of the writer was called to them by the crew of the *Quadra*, and with the assistance of the then light-keeper, a set of castings was obtained for the American Museum and a few duplicates for our own museum at Victoria. The figures in this case are unlike any of the others, and, so far as can be made out, are intended to represent the sun, stars, whales, fish, birds and various supernatural creatures having some resemblance to human beings.

Higher up the east coast, at Fort Rupert, is a set of shallow carvings on the rocks between tide marks. According to the Indians some of these are of quite recent origin, having been made during the lifetime of people now resident there. They are reproduced by Dr. Boas in his well-known report on Kwakwaka'wakw Indians, and he states

that they represent the Cannibal Spirit of the tribe.

According to the late Mr. Hunt, so long attached to the Hudson Bay fort at this place, this carving was made in memory of an occurrence observed by himself and Mr. Moffatt in early days.

During the winter ceremonial a slave belonging to the Nannaimo tribe was killed and cut to pieces by members of the cannibal society, after which he was eaten by them on the spot where the carving now is. Another is the Iakim or gigantic sea-monster.

About a mile from Skidegate, on the site of a long-deserted village, the writer was shown in 1900 a boulder with shallow grooved carving, representing human heads, but the Indians could give no explanation of it. Similar carvings were also seen in the Haida country, just below Copper mountain, Alaska, a year later. These, too, had no interpreter, but resemble several specimens seen on the beach at Fort Wrangel. It is possible that they were made by the Tlingit also, as these people were displaced by the Haida within a century and a half or so, from the south end of Prince of Wales Island.

Similar works have been reported from Washington at Lake Chelan, at The Dalles, in Oregon (a specimen of which may be seen at the Museum of the Historical Society at Portland) and lastly from many places in California. It seems impossible to decipher these inscriptions satisfactorily as it is not likely that anyone except the makers and those living at the time the work was done, could tell what was meant by them. There are always to be found volunteers ready to supply a story, especially if payment is forthcoming for it, but unless means of checking and corroborating such evidence be found it is of no scientific value.

Nevertheless the short note made by the late Rev. F. Eels, a pioneer missionary amongst the tribes of the State of Washington, may suggest one of the ideas actuating the makers of these mysterious pictures.

He reported that there was at Eneti, on the Twana reservation, a representation of a thunder-bird, carved on a basaltic rock. The Indians told him that if the rock were shaken it would cause rain, probably because the thunder-bird was angry. The outline sketch copied from his figure shows a conventional head, the circles stand for the eyes and the wedge between them is the nose. A reference to the accompanying illustration of a thunder-bird on a totem-pole lately collected at Clayoquot, will show how this symbol has been derived.

One of the figures seen in the Sprout Lake set has, in some respects, a close resemblance to a mythical snake which is constantly associated with the thunder-bird in the minds of the natives of the West Coast of the island. It is called the Haltetik by the Clayoquots, and Hahektoak by the Neah Bay people. It is said that when the thunder-bird sees and wishes to kill a whale, he hurls the Haltetik at it, which spears the body of the whale like a harpoon.

This snake has many wonderful attributes which would occupy too much space if narrated in detail, but the following early notice of it, from the unpublished journal of the clerk or supercargo of the ship Columbia, written in the year 1791, while in winter quarters at Clayoquot, shows how strong a belief in its powers existed on the arrival of the sceptical white man.

Going off on a hunting expedition in a canoe, his man suddenly saw "a frightful monster near the shore, shaped like an alligator." The Indians knew all about it and described it as a long creature with huge mouth and teeth; in every other respect, like a serpent. They called it Haltetik, and said it was very scarce. They offered twenty sea-otter skins for a specimen, for "if they should have but the least piece of this animal in their boat they were sure to kill a whale, which among them is deemed one of the greatest honors. Indeed, a piece of this magic animal insures success at all times and on all occasions."

The accompanying illustrations will enable a reader to judge for himself whether or no the Sproat Lake artist intended to give a representation of this marvellous beast. A group of three similarly marked in the Nanaimo also closely resemble it. The outline sketch is from a drawing by the late Judge Swan,

The dotted design is copied from an etching of a haletik on the barb of a large whale harpoon in my own collection, having been used as a charm according to the superstition just recorded, and the last figure was copied by me from a design on a West Coast chief's hat at the Field Museum at Chicago, which could only be used by the members of a certain family. The upper two parts stand for the nose and mouth and were placed on the front of the hat. The lower part stood for the head, of which the eye and the hooked ear are the conspicuous features. In all of these figures it will be noticed that the ear is an essential part and in the highly conventionalized symbol last mentioned, it is as marked as in Haida drawings, the dorsal fin of the killer-whale, or the incisor teeth and scaly tail of the beaver.

Even if the above identification is correct, it is still a matter of doubt whether the carving was intended as a memorial, or whether it had something to do with the prolonged period of solitary probation through which candidates for admission into the secret societies had to pass, during which they sometimes had to illustrate, as well as they were able, the spirits with which they held communion, and which usually seem to have been those with which they had become acquainted by the tradition of their tribe.

The tools used were of the simplest description. The surface selected being usually of sandstone, it was not very difficult work to peck out any particular design with the aid of a pointed stone of harder material.

Before leaving the subject mention should be made of the pictographs found in all parts of the province, no-

tably at Nicola and Harrison Lakes. These are usually drawn with red ochre and details in black paint are sometimes added. An unusually fine specimen was reported to Captain Walbran a few years ago by the light-keeper at Pointer Island as existing on a vertical rock face on the north side of Port John, not far from Bella Bella. Captain Walbran visited the place soon after, and at his suggestion I also examined the paintings.

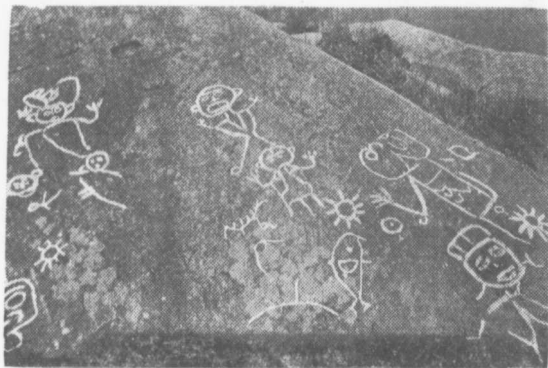
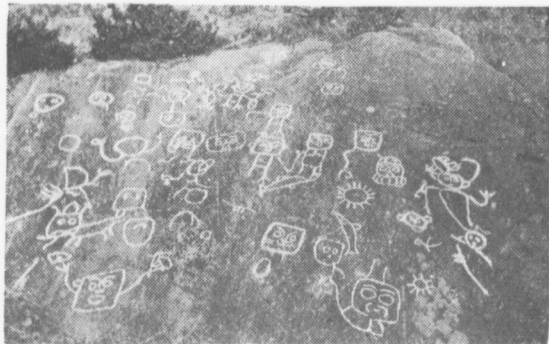
After climbing a very steep, narrow trail, which was artificially obstructed at intervals by rows of large, moss-grown boulders, we found an ancient burial place consisting of the naturally terraced cliff. Above the few human remains were a number of large figures painted in red. Some were thunder-birds, others were ravens and whales, while a larger part were of mythical beings. There was no standing room for a camera, so we were unable to do more than take a few sketches.



AT SPROAT LAKE.



AT NANAIMO.

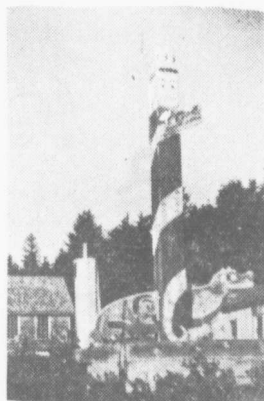


ON ROCK AT YELLOW ISLAND.





HAIETLIK, THE LIGHTNING  
SNAKE.



HAIETLIK, WINDING ROUND  
TOTEM POLE, CLAYOQUOT.



HAIETLIK, ETCHED ON WHALE  
HARPOON.



HAIETLIK, ETCHED ON WHALE  
HARPOON.



HAIETLIK ON CHIEF'S HAT.



HAIETLIK ON HOUSE POLE,  
CLAYOQUOT.



HEAD OF HAIETLIK.



BODY OF HAIETLIK.

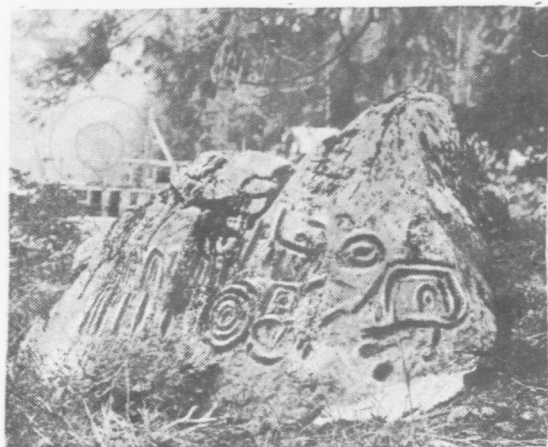
CLAYOQUOT BASKET DESIGNS.



THUNDER BIRD AT TWANA  
RESERVATION, U. S. A.



THUNDER BIRD AT CLAYOQUOT



AT COPPER MOUNTAIN, ALASKA.



AT SKIDEGATE.

