Totem Pole Restoration on the Skeena, 1925-30: An Early Exercise in Heritage Conservation

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Between 1926 and 1930 the federal government and the Canadian National Railway restored thirty totem poles along the Skeena River of British Columbia. Done at considerable cost, the work represented the first achievement of preservation of these native monuments in their aboriginal location.

Northwest Coast wood sculpture, large or small, had long been of interest to Europeans. Virtually every visitor to the area, from Baranoff, Perez and Cook in the eighteenth century to the most casual tourist, missionary and official of the twentieth, collected examples of it. The totem pole represented the most monumental example of the indigenous life and art of the area. It became a symbol of the Northwest Coast Indian. James G. Swan secured Haida poles for the U.S. Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia and from then on no international exposition and no anthropological museum seemed complete without at least one pole. In the "museum age" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the totem pole became for ethnological exhibits what the tyrannosaurus was to a paleontology display.

As prize exhibition articles, poles were sought after, but they were not easy to obtain. They often stood apart from transportation routes and, even when accessible, were awkward and costly to move. Negotiations with their owners were usually long and complicated. Nevertheless, an increasing number flowed to private and public collections in Chicago, New York, Seattle, Milwaukee, Berlin, London, Sydney, Montreal, Ottawa and elsewhere. Dr. C. F. Newcombe of Victoria bought and shipped dozens of poles to almost as many institutions, as well as collecting a number for the B.C. Provincial Museum.

Those poles not sent to museums were at the mercy of natural processes. Although red cedar, from which most were carved, is remarkably durable, it was not impervious to the dampness and vegetation of the coast. Rot at the base was the usual initial agent of the poles' destruction. Once fallen,

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constant dampness ensured rapid decay. When standing, the poles were victims to mosses and plants which took root in them. Some were destroyed unnaturally — by man, often Indians, who might use them as firewood or clothesline poles or, in bursts of inspired religion, destroy them as relics of a pagan past.

By 1920, as a result of private and museum acquisition, natural decay and wanton destruction, the totem pole had become an endangered specimen. The largest remaining clusters of poles were at abandoned and isolated villages on the Queen Charlotte Islands and along the Skeena River, which had been made accessible only by the war-time completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway, now the publicly owned Canadian National Railway.

While there had long been some individual concern about the disappearance of the poles, it was not until the early 1920s that any concerted outcry was heard in Canada. The spectacular removal of a group of poles from Alert Bay by unnamed individuals — who allegedly had plied their native owners with drink — was a cause célèbre. The press berated the public and government for sleeping soundly while Americans stole the country's heritage by fair means or foul.[1] Public bodies such as the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the Prince Rupert Board of Trade and the Royal Society of Canada urged the provincial and federal governments to prohibit the sale and export of historical poles.[2] Private individuals, not always Canadian, urged the same in letters to the government and the press. One of the most prominent "foreigners" who wrote to the Department of the Interior to plead for British Columbia's totem poles was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who suggested the implementation of the same kind of legislation recently passed to prohibit the export of poles from Alaska.[3]

Federal agencies were alarmed at the rapid disappearance of the poles. Harlan I. Smith, archaeologist with the Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa, wrote his chief, Dr. Edward Sapir, that regulations which forbade export or at least required reporting should be passed. Moreover, "steps should be taken to save *in situ* or guard until that can be done totem poles at Kitwanga, the best on the CN route or they will go as did those

[1] See, for example, "Are We Sound Asleep?", *Saturday Night*, 5 January 1924, p. 3.

[2] Public Archives of Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, R.G. 10, vol. 4088, file no. 507,787 (hereafter cited as D.I.A.), resolutions of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, May 1923; the Prince Rupert Board of Trade, 7 September 1923; and the Royal Society of Canada, 5 October 1926 (copies).

[3] D.I.A., Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to the Department of the Interior, 30 June 1924.

at Alert Bay, the best on the steamship lines."[4] Sapir was already urging a ban on exports as well as private purchase of poles. He even suggested the outright purchase by the museum of all standing poles. With the consent of the Indians, these might either be left on their present sites or removed to Canadian museums.[5] While the idea of wholesale purchase was briefly considered, at least for the Skeena district, implementation would have been costly and likely to encounter serious opposition from Indian owners. C. Marius Barbeau, an ethnologist at the museum whose scholarship and fieldwork was most particularly concerned with the Skeena district, also favoured the preservation of the poles on site, either by the federal parks branch or by the Canadian National Railway.[6] Barbeau, whose claims to primary responsibility are plausible, interested J. B. Harkin of the Canadian National Parks in an "Indian National Park of Temlaham," embracing both the modern pole sites and the legendary home-village of the Skeena Gitksan.

What is remarkable about these ideas was the serious proposals to preserve the poles on site. Poles had often been displayed out-of-doors, but never in their original location. Even the famous Sitka "Totem Walk" consisted of poles purposely moved there. The recent railway access to the Skeena River valley not only put the poles in danger of sale and export, but allowed for the conception of an outdoor, on-site totem museum or park. The campaign (if it might be so called) to preserve the totems of the Skeena rested upon the firm foundations of heightened perception of endangered heritage and the possibility of commercial tourism.

The Skeena poles were recognized as representing a unique expression of Canadian native art which would be completely lost to future generations unless something was done to preserve the few specimens left, and it was now appreciated that they lost much of their interest and value when removed from their natural associations with the native villages and individual families whose history they concerned.[7] They were also becoming of increasing interest to the travelling public and were therefore assuming considerable commercial value as tourist attractions. It was largely the tourist consideration which dictated the selection of the Upper Skeena as the principal focus of preservation interest.

[4] National Museum of Man, Canadian Ethnology Service, Edward Sapir Papers, Harlan I. Smith to Edward Sapir, 10 June 1923.

[5] *Ibid.*, Sapir to Charles Camsell, 16 April 1923.

[6] National Museum of Man, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, C. M. Barbeau Papers, Jenness to Barbeau, 10 December 1923.

[7] D.I.A., Department of Interior to A. Conan Doyle, 29 August 1924.

As one of the chief carriers of the travelling public the Canadian National Railway had a vested interest in the preservation of totem poles. Some of the best examples of poles still standing were to be found in the villages along the Canadian National route between New Hazelton and Prince Rupert, with the greatest collection at Kitwanga, which the *Montreal Gazette* claimed as the showplace of northern British Columbia and, next to Niagara Falls, the most photographed spot in Canada.[8] The railway was as well aware of the increased tourist value if the poles there were preserved. Few travellers, an internal memorandum pointed out, were concerned about totem poles on Vancouver Island, for there was little tourist traffic there, but Kitwanga was a big attraction as the only convenient spot on the line where poles could be seen in their original location.[9] One of the foremost campaigners for the preservation of British Columbia's totem poles was R. W. C. Lett, the Canadian National Railways director in charge of the natural resources department for the western provinces.[10]

The Canadian National considered that the best solution was for the railway or the Department of Indian Affairs to buy or lease poles along the Skeena, especially at Kitwanga, and to restore them *in situ*.[11] The railway official who discussed the matter with Ottawa enjoyed a receptive ear. The preservationist interest of the Indian Department in the poles as examples of Indian art and that of the Victoria Memorial Museum as ethnological specimens were quite compatible with the tourist interest of the railway. That the railway was a publicly owned corporation made co-operation with it by government departments all the easier. Dr. Charles Camsell, deputy minister of mines, was urged toward preservation by his subordinates in ethnology, yet wrote of his desire to see the Skeena poles preserved "in the interests of the National railways and in consideration of the necessity of preserving these poles to encourage tourist travel."[12]

Camsell took the lead in June 1924 by convening a meeting in his office of representatives of the museum, of the Department of Indian Affairs and of the Parks Branch. This "Totem Pole Preservation Committee," as it came to be called, chose Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, as chairman. The other members were J. B. Harkin of Parks, and Sapir and Barbeau of the museum.

[8] *Montreal Gazette*, 25 May 1925.

[9] D.I.A., unaddressed internal memo of Canadian National Railway, 26 June 1923.

[10] *Ibid.*, undated newspaper clipping, *Edmonton Journal*, May 1925.

[11] *Ibid.*, CNR memo, 26 June 1923.

[12] Barbeau Papers, Camsell to Barbeau, 5 September 1924.

The committee's main decision was to send Barbeau to the Skeena district with instructions to take a full inventory of all totem poles in the area and to suggest the best means of preserving them. It was anticipated that the actual work of preservation would begin in 1925 on a modest scale involving a cost no greater than $2,000.[13] It was thought that work in the district would require several years, but the 1925 beginning would come none too soon as American museum agents had already begun to turn away from the depleted coastal areas in search of poles. The Anglican missionary among the Skeena Indians warned the Indian Department that in the last few months of 1923 alone, Americans had purchased and removed several poles from the area.[14]

Barbeau's survey was begun after his own ethnological fieldwork was completed. He spent part of October and most of November in Kispiox, Hazelton, Hagwelget, Kitsegukla and Kitwanga, then returned to Ottawa to write his report. The committee received the report of his Skeena investigation in January 1925 and voted unanimously that his suggestions be adopted in the preservation work to begin later that year. Barbeau had been encouraged that the Indians of the Skeena, the Gitksan, were far more conservative than their coastal brethren and would therefore be more interested in the preservation of their poles.[15] They were also less willing to sell their poles: the earlier proposal that the poles might be bought or leased from their Indian owners appeared to be impractical as the Gitksan considered it unworthy to sell these memorials to the dead to strangers, or even to the government for conservation purposes. Barbeau also noted the marked suspicion of whites entertained by the Gitksan and their lack of confidence in anything to do with the government.[16] His recommendation was therefore to leave the Indians as owners of the poles, yet persuade them to allow the government to preserve them *in situ*. He thought this was possible as most of the Indians were fairly friendly as long as one was patient and tactful with them at all times. Provided that the consent and co-operation of the Indians was maintained and the authorization of each chief and owner secured before any work was begun, he felt confident that the majority would be glad to see the government

[13] D.I.A., internal memo, Department of Indian Affairs, 17 February 1924.

[14] *Ibid.*, Reverend T. D. Proctor to the Department of the Interior, 10 June 1924. See also Proctor's letter to the editor of *Saturday Night*, 26 January 1924, p. 2, entitled "Save the Totem Poles."

[15] *Ibid.*, Barbeau, "Report on the Totem Poles of the Upper Skeena and Their Contemplated Conservation," Ottawa, 20 January 1920 (hereafter cited as Barbeau Report), p. 2.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

strengthen their poles and re-erect those which had fallen or were in danger of falling.[17]

As to technical aspects of restoration, Barbeau's principal recommendation was for the provision of cement foundations and of metal or cement tops.[18] This would protect the most vulnerable parts of the poles: the top, where the end grain was exposed to rain and frost, and at ground level, where the wood was constantly damp. Before re-erection it was recommended that the pole be given a protective coating with a colourless glue or varnish and then painted. In order to ensure that the paint work was restored according to the ancient local technique Barbeau rather naively recommended the use of red and yellow ochre rather than commercial paint and suggested a number of Gitksan natives who could act as technical advisers to supervise the work.[19] In this way it was hoped that the restored poles would be compatible with traditional native practice rather than give the gaudy hybrid appearance of the recently erected and commercially painted pole at Jasper.

Barbeau had recommended that the restoration work would be best begun at the village of Kispiox, which boasted the greatest number and largest total footage of totem poles of any of the five villages in the Skeena district.[20] Barbeau found the natives there to be the most friendly and the best disposed to the proposed work of preservation. Hazelton and Hagwelget he put down as the next two locations and Kitsegukla and Kitwanga the last.

In implementing the project, the committee agreed that the actual work of preservation was to be financed and supervised by the Indian Department, with Dr. Scott in general charge of the entire project.[21] The Canadian National was contacted and it agreed to provide free transportation for the men and materials involved in the project as well as the services of one of its bridge engineers, Mr. T. B. Campbell, to supervise the mechanical work.[22] The Victoria Museum was to provide the services of Harlan I. Smith, who would act as liaison officer between the Indians and those doing the work and assume overall charge of the project in the field,

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] D.I.A., internal memo, Department of Indian Affairs, 17 February 1925.

[22] *Ibid.*, Sir Henry Thornton (President of CNR) to Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott, 12 April 1925.

reporting to Scott.[23] Why Sapir charged Smith instead of Barbeau can only be conjectured. Perhaps, as a field archaeologist, he was considered more adept at mechanical supervision, perhaps he was more willing to sacrifice his own field summers, perhaps it was merely Sapir's acknowledged personal preference for Smith over Barbeau. Smith's assets were long years of field experience among a variety of Indian groups, most recently the Bella Coolas, and thus his understanding, as Harkin put it, of the "peculiar mental operations" of the Indian.[24]

Totem poles of the Skeena by village

(from Barbeau report)

	Totem poles	*Fallen, to be re-erected*	*Total footage*
Kispiox	23	1	953
Hazelton	7	3	282
Hagwelget	4	—	190
Kitsegukla	18	1	710
Kitwanga	19	3	623

Despite Barbeau's recommendation that work begin at Kispiox, the interests of the CNR determined Scott's instructions that Smith begin at Kitwanga and Kitsegukla. Kispiox was some twelve miles from the railway line, Kitwanga and Kitsegukla directly on it. Smith was told to use his discretion, but "it is the aim of our committee to preserve the poles and other objects that will be of interest to tourists."[25] From the outset, the interests of tourism and the CNR were predominant. Smith accepted this without question and did all he could to bolster the tourist interest of the country and to aid the CNR.

Smith went west in late May and surveyed the poles with Campbell, the CN engineer. He found the railway more than helpful, as were the local Indian agent and Campbell, whom he described as "a splendid, sympathetic and enthusiastic helper."[26] The Indians too were co-operating. Smith had received a telegraphed invitation from the "president" of the

[23] *Ibid.*, Sapir to Camsell, 25 April 1925.

[24] *Ibid.*, J. B. Harkin to Arthur Gibson, 17 February 1925.

[25] *Ibid.*, Scott to Smith, 8 May 1925.

[26] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 6 June 1925.

Kitwanga Indians to come and begin work soon.[27] He had quickly secured definite permission to work on four poles and "supposed" permission to work on many more. He found, however, that the scale of the work was formidable when compared to the operating funds he had been allocated. Scott had impressed upon him that under no circumstances was he to exceed the $3,000 budgeted by the Indian Department for the season's work.[28] Smith confessed that he anticipated it would take a long time and much money just to restore the seventy-one totem poles, let alone the 400 grave houses recommended in Barbeau's report.[29] He calculated that he would be lucky to restore ten poles a year, and this at an estimated cost of $240 per pole.[30] He recommended that it was not worth doing all seventy-one poles, but only those in sight of the trains.

Actual restoration began in Kitwanga on 1 June 1925. Smith found that three poles had already fallen since Barbeau's visit and that most of the remaining fifteen had rotted at the base and were in danger of falling. The poles that had rotted at ground level were cut off at their bases and bolted to new well-seasoned uprights which were then creosoted and set in concrete.[31] The concrete base was stopped short of the surface by a couple of inches and covered with sand and gravel so that no cement was visible. Each restored pole was repainted. It was this task that presented the greatest difficulty. Although it was accepted that the colours should conform to those originally painted on the poles, it was not always easy to find agreement on what these colours were, as only the oldest members of the tribes could remember the former appearance of the poles. Moreover, there were no Indians available who were able to reproduce old colours. Toned-down commercial paints were used, but the result was still a bright and unpleasant contrast to the mellow colours of the unrestored poles. Smith was confident, however, that a year or two's exposure would weather the gaudiness. Seven totem poles in all were restored in this fashion.

The securing of the owners' permission to restore decaying poles and the re-erection and painting of those poles did not of themselves complete the process of conservation. There was still nothing to prevent the Indians from selling their poles after preservation.[32] The Department of Indian

[27] *Ibid.*, President of Kitwanga Indians to Smith, 29 May 1925.

[28] *Ibid.*, Scott to Smith, 15 June 1925. Scott also telegraphed Smith, 20 July 1925.

[29] Sapir Papers, Smith to Sapir, 29 June 1925.

[30] *Ibid.*, Smith to Sapir, 25 July 1925.

[31] D.I.A., Smith to Scott, 11 November 1925.

[32] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 6 June 1925; 11 November 1925.

Affairs was already under pressure to control the export of poles and, now that it was paying for their restoration, it was all the more anxious to prevent the sale and removal of restored poles, particularly to foreign interests. While in the field Smith received a request from the Clintonville, Wisconsin, Park Commission for the purchase of one of the restored Kitwanga poles.[33] An amendment to the Indian Act, drafted by Scott in consultation with Diamond Jenness, who had succeeded Sapir as anthropology chief at the museum, solved this problem. The amendment provided that no Indian artifact could be acquired, removed, mutilated or destroyed without the written consent of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. Although applying only to reserve land, practically it covered all remaining poles. The amendment halted wholesale removals and provided sufficient protection for the preservation project by removing a serious obstacle to the permanence of the latter's achievements.

The preservation work of the 1926 season proceeded satisfactorily with a further nine poles restored at Kitwanga, an increase Smith attributed to the improved relations with the Indians and hence fewer delays suffered.[34] Only two poles remained untouched at Kitwanga and for these the native owner, Chief Semideck, had refused to give his consent. In order to give better access to the poles for tourists and to prevent ladies getting their shoes wet and dirty in inclement weather, he recommended the laying of a gravel and cinder path between the railway station and the village.[35] Mrs. Smith had already informed the Indian Department that her husband had planted clover and grass to stop the loose sand around the poles from blowing into the faces of visitors.[36] Smith helped Pathé Motion Pictures with a promotional film advertising the CNR as the railway to totem pole land.[37] In a seven-page report he outlined further ways in which the railway could maximize the tourist value of Kitwanga.[38] He suggested that information on totem poles be conspicuously displayed in each railway carriage or on the back of the dining car menus and that the CN and the Victoria Museum should co-operate in preparing an illustrated guide book. To draw attention to the poles, slow signs should be erected along the route and a sign, bearing the legend "Indian Totem Poles," should

[33] *Ibid.*, Wallis A. Olsen to Smith, 5 April 1926.

[34] *Ibid.*, Diamond Jenness to Scott, December 1926 (synopsis of report by Smith on 1926 season's work).

[35] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 8 July 1926.

[36] *Ibid.*, Mrs. Smith to Scott, undated personal memo, received July 1926.

[37] *Ibid.*, Jenness to Scott, December 1926 (synopsis of Smith report).

[38] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 22 January 1926.

point to the poles. Trees which obstructed a clear view of the poles should be topped. He was also anxious to encourage a local souvenir industry for the tourists. He reported to the museum that souvenirs were sadly lacking, restricted as they were to postcards sold at the local Anglican mission.[39] The kind of items he had in mind were not only the usual bracelets and earrings but also plaster casts of individual pole figures which, he felt certain, would be valuable advertising motifs for the ticket offices and railway depots of such places as Chicago and New York.[40] With an eye to the possible future development of Kitwanga as a tourist resort rather than merely a tourist attraction, he emphasized in his report the superb scenery of the area, with the proximity to lakes, hot springs and waterfalls, and the availability of flat land for golf links.[41]

With all but Semideck's two Kitwanga poles restored by the end of the second season, Smith proposed to shift to Kitsegukla. He reported that he had permission to work on eight or ten poles within sight of the railway there.[42] The third year's work, however, ran into troubles that put the whole project into serious difficulty. On his arrival in Kitsegukla he was forbidden to touch any poles and told by Joe Brown, representing the Kitsegukla chiefs, to remove his outfit by the following morning.[43]

It was difficult then to ascertain what was wrong at Kitsegukla and even more difficult now. As Barbeau had emphasized, the people of the Upper Skeena were conservative and their attitudes toward their poles remained much the same as in the past. Moreover, the Gitksan "are markedly suspicious of the white men in their dealings with them; and they profess utter lack of confidence in the Government administration."[44] Barbeau had felt that with patience, friendliness and understanding, the Indians' attitude toward their poles could be used to promote the preservation scheme, but that "past animosities may easily be aroused again, and further collaboration about totem poles be rendered embarrassing, if not sterile."[45] Smith too was conscious of the unfavourable disposition of the Indians to whites generally and government officials particularly. At the end of 1926 he had reported:

[39] *Ibid.*, Smith to Sapir, 22 July 1925.

[40] *Ibid.*; also Smith to Scott, 22 January 1926.

[41] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 22 January 1926.

[42] *Ibid.*, Jenness to Scott, December 1926 (synopsis of Smith report).

[43] *Ibid.*, General Meeting of Indian Chiefs of Kitsegukla to Smith, 8 May 1927.

[44] *Ibid.*, Barbeau Report, p. 3.

[45] *Ibid.*

There were many grievances they could cite, some no doubt real, and some imaginary. The white men had settled on their land and were pushing the Indians more and more to the wall; they had built canneries on the coast that were destroying all the fish; they were cutting all the best timber in the country so that within a few years none would remain for the Indian; they sold whisky in Government liquor stores and put the Indians in jail when they drank it. A few years ago, they had prohibited the erection of totem poles; why did they wish now to preserve them? Much tact and patience were necessary to answer these and other objections the Indians raised to any interference with their poles, but in the end most of the difficulties were happily overcome.[46]

A foretaste of the 1927 difficulty had occurred late in the 1926 season when Smith reported that Tom Campbell of Hazelton refused to let Smith touch his two fallen poles. Campbell's attitude seemed to prevent other Indians from granting their permission. Campbell was aggrieved, Smith reported, because provincial road crews had cut down one of his poles and never paid him for the damage.[47]

With previous permission to work on the poles, Smith arrived in Kitseguklas on Sunday, 8 May, and proceeded to take down a pole. The Indians reacted immediately, handing him a protest petition, interfering with his work, and subsequently hiring a lawyer to protest to Scott. T. B. Campbell and the local Indian agent suggested a withdrawal, to which Smith consented.

Six days before Smith and his party arrived at the village from Hazelton, the Kitseguklas chiefs had met and drawn up a petition, signed or marked by fifteen of them. The petition protested that no one should touch any of the poles because each was valuable to each family and were "the only honerable [*sic*] property that remain in our Hands."[48] Obviously this was not sufficient reason for the Kitseguklas' opposition. Edgar Hyde, the regional Indian agent, said in a confidential report to Scott he could not understand the apparent dislike toward Smith unless "it was through the propaganda spread by Tom Campbell of Hazelton Indian Reserve." Tom Campbell, he wrote, alleged that the government intended to move villages and give the old ones to the railway, "and other such nonsense."[49] In a list of reported reasons for the Indian opposition, Smith also listed

[46] Canada Department of Mines, National Museum of Canada, Bulletin no. 50, *Annual Report for 1926*, Ottawa, 1928, p. 81.

[47] D.I.A., Smith to Scott, 9 September 1926.

[48] *Ibid.*, Kitsegukla Indian Chiefs to Smith, 8 May 1927.

[49] *Ibid.*, Hyde to Scott, 25 June 1927.

Tom Campbell as a troublemaker who "stirred things up." Smith listed several other causes: (1) too much home brew; (2) the land question; (3) broken promises by an earlier photographer; (4) white jealousy at not being hired for the work; (5) a missionary's opposition; and (6) the Indians' fear that the government would own the poles if it spent money preserving them.[50] Any one of these, added to the general suspicion of white government, was probably enough, though it could have been as petty as Smith not arranging to rent Chief Martha Malkan's house.[51] Once the Indians resisted, Smith probably did not help his own cause very much. "The Indians of these parts," Hyde reported to Scott, "are very suspicious of a person who tries to tell them what the Government was doing for them and in my opinion Mr. Smith does talk too much."[52] Moreover, he made the mistake of bringing some of his Indian labour with him, instead of hiring the entire crew from Kitsegukla.

Smith abandoned Kitsegukla and "slipped down" to Kitselas Canyon, a place where no one had expected work to begin for several years and so no minds had been "poisoned." He quickly secured permission to restore the poles along the rail line there. Smith seemed satisfied with the location — the fifteen poles could be seen from passing trains and he was happy to be on with the work.[53]

Kitselas Canyon had not been one of the locations covered in Barbeau's report. The reason for the exclusion is not entirely clear. It may have been that the Indians there were not Gitksan, but Canyon Tsimshian, and thus outside Barbeau's immediate ethnological interest. Certainly he did not approve of Smith's move to the Canyon of the Skeena. From Prince Rupert in July, he informed Scott that it was his considered opinion that the appropriation for the season's work was being wasted, for the Kitselas work was of only marginal importance and Smith had no right to move there. There was not a single good pole on the railway side of the river and only one good one on the opposite side. The only redeeming feature of the location he could think of was that it was much appreciated by the CNR.[54]

Barbeau had not expressed this disapproval directly to Smith. He visited the Kitselas site on several occasions that summer, but actively avoided a

[50] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 11 June 1927.

[51] *Ibid.*, Barbeau to Scott, 21 June 1929.

[52] *Ibid.*, Hyde to Scott, 25 June 1927.

[53] *Ibid.*, Smith to Scott, 11 June 1927.

[54] *Ibid.*, Barbeau to Scott, 8 July 1927.

meeting with Smith and conferred only with the engineer, Campbell.[55] Smith wondered if Barbeau was meddling and hinted at his suspicions to Jenness, their chief at the Anthropological Division.

Smith's suspicions were not unfounded. Barbeau was, for whatever reason, feeding Scott reports that undermined the latter's confidence in Smith's judgment — already weakened by Hyde's confidential report over the Kitsegukla imbroglio. The crisis came in late August when, having exhusted the $3,000 appropriation, he could get no answer from Indian Affairs (Scott was away from the office) to his request for another $2,000 to finish the season's work.[56] Finally a subordinate refused the request[57] and Smith, on museum authorization, left Kitsegukla.[58] When Scott returned to the office, he authorized further funds to continue the work,[59] but by that time Smith had already decided to leave for archaeological research of his own in the Prince Rupert area.

Campbell, the engineer, continued at Kitselas, despite being told by Smith to close down. By the end of October eight of the fifteen poles had been successfully treated and re-erected. He informed Scott that he had kept going in the interest of the CNR co-operation and "in accordance with your instruction to me at our last meeting . . . pending your reply which I trusted would be favourable."[60] Moreover, he had been encouraged by Barbeau, who had now advised him that closing down when so much had been done would be criminal. Campbell's confidence and Smith's lack of confidence that further financial support would be forthcoming would seem to reflect how much the Indian Department confided in each. Smith had evidently not been privy to Scott's wishes in the matter. He assured Jenness that had Scott not wired and written more than once in 1925 not to overrun the estimate he would seriously have considered continuing with the work until he heard from him in person.[61] As it was, when Scott's reply did eventually arrive, it was "awfully vague as to what

[55] Public Archives of Canada, Geological Survey of Canada, R.G. 45, vol. 19, file no. 144A1, Jenness to Camsell. Letter is undated but must be sometime during 1927 as it refers to the removal during the year of operations from Kitwanga to Usk (near the Kitselas Canyon site).

[56] D.I.A., Smith to Scott, 4 August 1927. Smith sent telegrams to Scott August 24, 26, 29, September 1, 2, 3.

[57] National Museum of Man, Canadian Ethnology Service, Diamond Jenness Papers, Jenness to Smith, 9 September 1927.

[58] D.I.A., Campbell to Scott, 12 September 1927.

[59] The first advance of $500 was received by Campbell on 12 September 1927.

[60] D.I.A., Campbell to Scott, 12 September 1927.

[61] Jenness Papers, Smith to Jenness, 16 September 1927.

[Smith] was to do, although making it clear what Campbell was to do."

Smith was becoming well aware of the Indian Department's marked preference to work through his subordinate Campbell rather than through himself. His correspondence to Jenness bewailed the miserable position in which he saw himself. In the task of getting permission to restore totem poles he felt that absolute field control was necessary to "sidestep and jump and do things on one second's notice."[62] In dealing with Indians one had no time to keep writing or telegraphing for permission. He clearly did not enjoy this kind of control. His influence and authority with the Indians and his own work party had been seriously undermined, he felt, by the intrigues he attributed to the Totem Pole Committee in general, and to the Indian Department and Barbeau in particular. He confessed that he was never quite sure whether he was on the Totem Pole Committee or only a prisoner of it.[63]

Smith received full backing from the museum — Jenness, his chief, and Dr. W. H. Collins, the director. Jenness, to strengthen the museum's position on the committee and, presumably, to get Barbeau off it, secured Collins' agreement to be the museum's sole committee representative. "One thing I am quite sure of," Jenness wrote to Smith, "— you will have the fullest backing, much stronger backing [from Collins] than I could ever give you." Collins would insist that Smith have full field authority to discharge subordinates if he had trouble with them.[64] If Smith agreed to continue he would be responsible directly to Collins, who would then negotiate with Scott for funds; by removing any direct dealing between Scott and Smith it was hoped a repetition of previous troubles would be avoided. The Barbeau-Scott intrigue would no longer be a serious problem. Jenness tried further to comfort Smith by telling him not to stick too closely to budgets in future and above all not to worry; "you have the Director right at your back and he is a fighting Scotchman."[65] Smith, however, was fed up; he was formally superseded by Campbell for the 1928 season's work.

These field differences were clearly apparent in the Totem Committee, now composed of Scott, Camsell, Harkin and Collins. Harkin expressed a want of confidence in Campbell, but Scott felt satisfied with his carrying on the project, at least until all poles in the vicinity of the railway were finished. Camsell stated that since Smith was now superseded by Camp-

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid.*, Smith to Jenness, 7 October 1927.

[64] *Ibid.*, Jenness to Smith, 9 September 1927.

[65] *Ibid.*

bell there was no need for Mines (and the museum) to be connected with it. Indian Affairs should carry the entire responsibility. Both Harkin and Camsell referred to "Smith's treatment," but Scott disclaimed any desire to reflect on Smith's work.[66] Although Scott opposed the abolition of the committee and urged that the museum continue its co-operation at least in a consultative capacity, the committee never met again. Henceforth the work was carried on entirely by Indian Affairs and the CNR, with Campbell in charge of the field-work.

The difficulties encountered by the Skeena preservation project did not disappear with Smith's removal from the scene. The 1928 season was the least successful for the project to date. Only $1,276 was expended on preservation compared with the $4,498 of the 1927 season and the $2,748 and $3,063 of the previous two seasons respectively.[67] The main cause of trouble remained the steadfast refusal of the Kitsegukla Indians to allow work on their poles, but there was also trouble at Kitwanga.

Campbell was no more successful in his dealings with the Kitsegukla Indians than Smith had been. The old chiefs, Martha Malkan foremost among them, were still very bitter, and had the additional grievance of a reported $200 in legal fees that the 1927 incident had cost them.[68] They instructed Campbell to keep away from their poles[69] and they again hired legal services to lodge a formal protest with the Indian Department.[70] After further discussions Campbell found that the chiefs might be willing to allow the government to restore their poles at a price.[71] Campbell refused and instead decided to leave Kitsegukla for Kitwanga until the young Kitsegukla Indians returned from the season's work at the canneries. He was confident that the younger generation appreciated the advantage of paid work that restoration would entail;[72] they would surely overcome the opposition of the old chiefs and ask him to return.[73] In the meantime Semideck's two poles remained unrestored at Kitwanga and he was anxious to complete the job there. Moreover, the completion of the work at Kitwanga would make the opposition at Kitsegukla realize

[66] Geological Survey of Canada, R.G. 45, vol. 19, file no. 144A1, Totem Pole Committee, minutes, 7 February 1928.

[67] D.I.A., Scott to Hon. Thomas G. Murphy, 31 January 1931.

[68] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 5 June 1928.

[69] *Ibid.*, Kitsegukla Indian Chiefs to Campbell, 26 May 1928.

[70] *Ibid.*, Williams, Manson and Gonzales to Scott, 27 August 1928.

[71] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 28 July 1928.

[72] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 21 June 1928.

[73] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 11 September 1928.

the folly of its perversity.[74] His optimism proved unfounded. The work at Kitwanga itself caused difficulties and provided additional cause for continued resistance at Kitsegukla.

The chief difficulty at Kitwanga had been to secure permission to work on the poles from their owner, Chief Semideck. He had refused to grant this since 1926 when the Indian Department, using the threat of the pending amendment to the Indian Act, had prevented him from selling his poles to the North-west Biscuit Company of Edmonton.[75] Now, however, Campbell approved an agreement between Semideck and the local manager of the Hudson's Bay Company that one of the poles be restored and re-erected in front of the latter's post at Kitwanga in return for a $300 "gift."[76] The removal of the pole from its usual resting place on Indian reserve land and its re-erection in front of the Hudson's Bay post, located on land leased from the CNR, brought Campbell into conflict with the local RCMP, for the amended terms of the Indian Act quite clearly had been violated.[77] Indian agent Hyde too was incensed by what he considered to be Campbell's high-handed action.[78] The Indian Department, however, recognizing a fait accompli, stood by Campbell. While Scott admitted that no action should have been taken to purchase and remove the pole from the reserve in the first place, he agreed under the circumstances to give his approval.[79]

Campbell denied that the $300 involved in the matter constituted a purchase. The amount, he maintained, was rather a "gift" to secure the old chief's goodwill in the matter of restoration.[80] However, the "gift" may have had serious repercussions upon prospects for future restoration work at Kitsegukla. Agent Hyde lamented that Campbell had undone the little he had accomplished in winning over the Kitsegukla Indians and warned his Department that he anticipated demands for payment now by most of the owners in Kitsegukla before they allowed their poles to be touched.[81] Barbeau dismissed the affair as unimportant, saying that

[74] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 2 May 1928.

[75] *Ibid.*, Scott to North-west Biscuit Company, 22 July 1926.

[76] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 20 October 1928.

[77] *Ibid.*, RCMP (Kitwanga detachment) report to Scott, 21 October 1928.

[78] *Ibid.*, Edgar Hyde to Scott, 31 January 1929.

[79] *Ibid.*, Scott to Col. Duffus (Assistant Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa), 9 January 1929. Scott sent a similar letter to Hyde.

[80] *Ibid.*, Campbell to Scott, 21 June 1929.

[81] *Ibid.*, Hyde to Scott, 31 January 1929.

Hyde had a grievance against Campbell.[82] Yet the transaction, whether a sale or a gift, was anomalous and certainly illegal. Attempts made during 1929 and 1930 to interest the Kitsegukla Indians in restoration were without success. The new Indian agent at Hazelton, G. C. Mortimer, reported at the end of 1930 that preservation was still a very difficult issue. One Indian who was anxious to have his poles restored had been threatened by the others, who informed Mortimer that the CNR would have to pay $1,000 for every pole on the reserve before they would agree to restoration; they were convinced that the railway was the main beneficiary of restoration work.[83]

At Kitwanga, where all poles had now been restored, a similar sentiment emerged. A village committee notified the museum "that the C. N. Ry. Co. is getting all the successful benefit out of it and us people, the sole owners, get nothing." The Kitwangas, alluding to the Semideck incident, asked for money for electric lights and farm implements for their past favours to the CNR and museum.[84]

After five years of frustration at Kitsegukla, the projected restoration was abandoned. With that decision the Skeena valley restoration officially came to an end.

In all, the Skeena project had been responsible for the restoration of thirty poles between 1925 and 1930 at a total cost to the Indian Department of $15,698.16.[85] The CNR's costs were probably nearly as much. This fell far short of the initial aim of the Totem Pole Committee, which sought the preservation of all the seventy-one poles Barbeau had recommended in his report. In fact only eighteen of those seventy-one poles were restored, for Barbeau had not recommended the restoration of the twelve poles at Kitselas Canyon. Although the CNR had good reason to be satisfied with the results, the project at best had enjoyed only a very limited success. As a co-operative venture certainly it experienced serious problems. It had suffered within from dissension and petty intrigue and without from the resistance of the Indians. Campbell's approval of the "gift" of $300 to Semideck was no less responsible for encouraging the Kitsegukla Indians to refuse restoration without payment than Smith's inept behaviour had helped alienate them in the first instance.

[82] *Ibid.*, Barbeau to Scott, 21 June 1929.

[83] *Ibid.*, G. C. Mortimer to Scott, 3 December 1930.

[84] *Ibid.*, Village Committee to Museum, 19 October 1931 (copy). Barbeau's advice was not to answer one way or the other "and they will forget their demands after a while." Barbeau to Scott, 23 November 1931.

[85] *Ibid.*, Scott to Hon. Thomas Murphy, 31 January 1931.

Nor were the positive achievements of the project as successful or as permanent as the Totem Pole Committee had sought. The work could be, and was, criticized as aesthetically unsatisfactory. The poles were re-erected rather unimaginatively in straight lines and were so gaudily painted that a provincial museum curator in 1930 lamented that they were hardly recognizable as some of the finest pieces of native art in the province.[86] Emily Carr, who saw the restored poles in 1928, felt they "lost so much of interest and subtlety in the process." She appreciated the difficulties as well as the value of their preservation, "but that heavy load of all over paint drowns them."[87]

Much of the work was undone during the Skeena flood of 1937. The first row of Kitwanga poles were cut down by the Indians to save them from the rushing waters, but were then stored without due care; the concrete foundations were washed away.[88]

As it turned out the actual methods of restoration and preservation were not completely successful. The cement bases constructed were neither wide nor convex enough to shed all water and so to prevent weeds and fungi from growing at the foot of the restored poles. The result, as a study by Philip Ward has shown, was that the newly planted uprights themselves rotted at ground level, and indeed rotted more quickly in their concrete setting than they would have done had they been planted directly into the ground.[89] An additional weakness was that the bolts fastening the poles to their new uprights created a line of weakness and increased the danger of the pole splitting vertically. Ward found that several poles, which had fallen for a second time at Kitwanga after their new supports had rotted, had split lengthwise along the lines of bolts and were subsequently ruined beyond repair. By 1962, according to Wilson Duff, several of the Kitwanga poles had been destroyed by fire or had fallen down again, and few were sound enough for further restoration.[90] All the poles at Kitselas were decayed beyond hope of further preservation.

[86] *Ibid.*, C. F. Newcombe to S. F. Tolmie, 25 January 1930.

[87] National Gallery of Canada, Emily Carr to Mr. and Mrs. Eric Brown, 11 August 1928.

[88] D.I.A., Mortimer to B.C. Indian Commissioner, Victoria, 10 August 1937. See also Benyon to Barbeau, 15 November 1938.

[89] Philip R. Ward, "Some Notes on the Preservation of Totem Poles in British Columbia," unpublished paper delivered to the second conference on South-east Alaska Native Artifacts and Monuments, Alaska State Council on the Arts, Anchorage, Alaska, 17 November 1967, p. 6.

[90] Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia: The Impact of the White Man* (Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir no. 5; Provincial Museum of British Columbia, Victoria, 1964), p. 84.

The most serious limitation of the Skeena project lay in its assumption that re-erection completed the work of preservation rather than marked the acceptance of a continuing responsibility for maintenance. The subsequent fate of the Kitwanga and Kitselas work demonstrated that restoration and re-erection are only the first stages of the preservation process and that regular maintenance afterward is no less important. As it was, the Kitwanga Indians themselves were left to restore some of the flood damage of 1937 and there was no official attempt to tackle the work again on a comprehensive scale until the Skeena Totem Pole Restoration Society was established with provincial government assistance in 1969, by which date most of the poles were beyond repair. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, and there were many, the first Skeena project of 1925-30 did represent a significant step in the right direction.[91]

A number of things stand out in this episode. The internal problems of the scheme revealed tensions within the Ottawa departments. Indian Affairs and the museum often had differing viewpoints and responsibilities in dealing with Indians since one department was an administrative bureaucracy, the other scientific. They had, for example, quite contrasting views of the potlatch law and on one occasion Sapir forbade Barbeau to communicate with Indian Affairs without department consent since he feared museum identification with Indian administration.[92] This kind of tension was evident in the 1927 difficulty when Scott drew his information from his Hazelton Agent as much as from Smith, and Smith felt betrayed by a lack of communication and trust. In between was Barbeau, apparently in closer communication with Scott than with his colleague Smith or his chief, Jenness. Barbeau's role, instrumental in the project, lapsed into unhealthy, perhaps jealous intrigue which caused difficulties for both Smith and Jenness — and cost him his seat on the Totem Preservation Committee.

Secondly, the impulse to preservation came from concerned whites appreciative of the commercial or heritage value of the poles and not from the natives who owned them. Barbeau probably correctly stated that both government and Indians had an interest in conservation "though from different standpoints."[93] These two standpoints were reconciled at Kitwanga and Kitselas. They were not at Kitsegukla or at any point off the CNR line. From the white view, the poles were artifacts and monuments,

[91] For a summary of pole restoration on the Coast, see Edward L. Keithahm, *Monuments in Cedar* (Seattle: Superior Publishing, 1936), ch. 12.

[92] Sapir Papers, Sapir to Barbeau, 16 July 1920 (copy).

[93] D.I.A., Barbeau Report, p. 3.

above all tourist attractions, the value of which was quite unrelated to the Indians who unfortunately owned them. The natives were obstacles to be overcome — by appeals to self-interest, by employment, by purchase or "gift." Smith, reflecting Indian Affairs' policy, did hire native labour and he hoped for some economic spin-off to Indians from the tourist trade. Yet the Gitksan were undoubtedly correct in their belated perception that only the CNR benefited economically from the restoration and that they, the owners, ought to have a piece of the action.

Finally, while restoration was seen as valuable in itself, the factor which moved it was tourist promotion. Restoration of poles on Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlottes was desirable but, being off the main line of the travelling public, that was never seriously considered. Smith did intend to restore poles at Kitwancool, thinking that this would help relations between that "forbidden" village and the government, but he never had the opportunity and it is unlikely that the CNR would have been as co-operative as at Kitwanga and Kitselas. In the end, only poles directly along the CNR were restored and the railway took advantage of the restoration in its publicity, utilizing information on the poles compiled by Smith and others.[94] This priority brought disadvantages. There was, as Emily Carr quite fairly judged, "too much catering to the 'beastly tourist'. Things have to be made so blatant to please them and the subtle beauty disappears."[95] In the 1920s, as today, heritage preservation campaigns were most likely to succeed when they were connected with tourist promotion and commercial gain. Avarice and aesthetics, profit and preservation, were inextricably connected.

[94] See "Totems of Kitwanga and North Central British Columbia," a well-informed pamphlet published by the CNR in the 1920s. T. B. Campbell's copy is preserved in the McCord Museum, McGill University.

[95] National Gallery of Canada, Carr to Mr. and Mrs. Eric Brown, 11 August 1928.