

to wetlands and estuaries. For example, Penn introduces one section with a poignant scene that depicts a dead mother giant Pacific octopus washed up on the beach, a creature few of us even know is an occupant of the Salish Sea. Through her whimsical storytelling, she educates us about the life cycle of the octopus and reminds us of the issues of pollution and conservation that are critical to our survival.

No review of this book would be complete without a commentary on Penn's illustrations. These are relatively simple but elegant hand-annotated pen-and-ink sketches, which Penn says were designed (in the newspaper versions) to be copied, coloured, and otherwise embellished by schoolchildren and anyone else wanting to enjoy them. This is interactive art, and it fits Penn's style to perfection. One of my favourites is her wonderful illustrated rendition of the Twelve Days of Christmas, complete with: 12

woodpeckers drumming, 11 otters sliding, 10 deer mice leaping, 9 eagles watching, 8 whales a-breaching, 7 widegeons swimming, 6 crossbills laying, 5 goldeneyes, 4 dark-eyed juncos, 3 Pacific loons, 2 buffleheads, and a ruffed grouse in a fir tree.

Although the book is entertaining, there is a serious undercurrent to the stories Penn tells. Despite the light-hearted tone, there are some ironic, disturbing, and outright heart-breaking aspects to these stories. For me, as another local observer who was raised in the vicinity of the Salish Sea, Penn touched on many of the topics that have been of deep concern: the alarming trends in growth and development of the region, the introduction of aggressive exotic species, pollution, and habitat loss.

This treasure of a book is not just another local nature guide. Its lessons are serious and should be heeded by all of us who care about the future of the Salish Sea.

### *Whales of the West Coast*

David A.E. Spalding

Madeira Park: Harbour, 1999. 211 pp. Illus., maps. \$18.95 paper.

By Mark Forsythe

*CBC Radio One Vancouver*

**A**FTER A SEVENTY-FIVE YEAR hiatus, Makah whaling harpoons again found their mark in 1999. Live television coverage of Native whalers in a dugout canoe chasing and killing a grey whale rendered news crews speechless. The Makah served notice they were reclaiming a cultural and spiritual

heritage dating back hundreds – if not thousands – of years. They argued that greys had been removed from the endangered species list and that their right to a food hunt was firmly entrenched in an 1855 treaty with the US government. Response from around the world was swift. Conservationists and animal rights activists

attempted to stop the hunt on the water, anonymous death threats were aimed at some Makah leaders, and the public attempted to make sense of a hunt considered by many to be unnecessary and barbaric. In the span of a single generation, public opinion on whaling had shifted from indifference to righteous anger.

In *Whales of the West Coast* naturalist David Spalding puts the hunt into a historical context. He notes that it is part of a continuum in a long, complex relationship between humans and whales. West Coast Natives hunted whales for centuries; British, French, and American whalers later sailed from bases in San Francisco, Seattle, and Victoria. Whales were prized for their oil and a multitude of products made from their carcasses – from buggy whips to perfumes and dog food. One whaling station at Coal Harbour on northern Vancouver Island took almost 23,000 whales over fifty-six years. Japanese and Russian factory ships were known to kill that many in one season alone; grey populations were under siege. Former Coal Harbour whaler Harry Hole remembers the hunt thirty-five years ago: “You didn’t question either ethics or conservation – it was just what you did. These were the days when you could go out and see 100 whales at a time. We hunted as far down as the US border and as far as the Charlottes.”

It’s difficult to fathom now, but in 1959 the Department of Fisheries and Oceans positioned a machine gun over Seymour Narrows to shoot orcas because BC fishers thought whales were cutting into fish stocks. Spalding points out that there wasn’t a word of protest: “In the end the machine gun was never fired. Nevertheless, many fishermen and others shot at orcas; a quarter of the orcas later captured for

aquaria had bullet wounds. Imagine public response if the government set up a gun today!”

*Whales of the West Coast* includes a natural history of orcas, greys, humpbacks, and lesser known whales, and it is packed with whale trivia that is sure to amaze and amuse (the loudest whale is a blue, recorded at 188 decibels; a right whale’s testicle can weigh one ton). His first-person accounts of whale encounters in the wild are engrossing; Spalding is truly in awe of these warm-blooded, social creatures. He brings a unique perspective, having eaten whale steak as a child in England and later worked at a museum in a historic whaling port. After a career with Canadian museums, Spalding moved to Pender Island, where he now delights in strolling to the beach to watch orcas surface. Today tens of thousands of people travel from around the globe to the West Coast for much the same experience. A \$6 million guided whale-watching industry has emerged in the waters between Alaska and Oregon. Spalding believes that whales have found a place in mainstream culture: “Their images appear everywhere in West Coast design from business logos to tattoos. Interest in whales extends into the elite culture of paintings, prints and sculptures, and an extensive nonfiction literature.”

We’re introduced to numerous “whale people”: fossil hunters Jim and Gail Goedert of Gig Harbor, Washington, who have searched out 400 whale specimens; animal psychologist Paul Spong, who has brought new understanding to the behaviour of resident and transient orcas and has campaigned for whales in the wild; and John Ford, curator of marine mammals at the Vancouver Aquarium, who, for twenty-five years, has been

conducting groundbreaking orca acoustics research. Whaling historian Joan Goddard, whose grandfather managed BC whaling stations earlier this century, comments, "I'd like to write about how we are going to relate to whales in the next century – about use of whales with respect." Spalding muses that whale people are "as fascinating as the whales themselves."

*Whales of the West Coast* serves as a useful handbook for newcomers to

whale watching as well as seasoned observers. Its 200 pages include details on whale parks, museums, hotlines, research and conservation agencies, and information on when and where to view whales in the wild. Spalding thinks that our growing fascination with whales can only pay dividends: "If closer association with whales can help us develop a new more intimate, friendly relationship with nature, we surely need it."

*Since the Time of the Transformers:  
The Ancient Heritage of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Ditidaht,  
and Makah*

Alan D. McMillan

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999. 252 pp. Illus., maps. \$85 cloth.

By Donald Mitchell  
*University of Victoria*

**I**N AN IDEAL WORLD of archaeological scholarship, definitive regional summaries and interpretations would be offered once basic data recovery had passed some threshold of adequacy. There would have to be studies reporting the results of excavations at sites that are collectively representative of all categories of sites from all periods of human occupation in all distinguishable sub-regions. We will not even approach such a daunting ideal on the Northwest Coast for many generations to come. Meanwhile, there is a place for less-than-definitive publications, describing what is currently known and outlining at least an interim reconstruction of past forms, events, and processes. Studies of this sort are a kind of stock-taking, informing us of the present state of

investigation and defining and clarifying the problems still to be resolved.

Such a work is *Since the Time of the Transformers*. The territories of the South Wakashans (Nuu-chah-nulth, Ditidaht, and Makah) delimit the region – an area in the very early stages of investigation, with large portions still archaeological terra incognita and with substantial segments of time as yet unrepresented. The core body of data for reconstructing the region's prehistory comes from major excavation projects: Ozette and Hoko River on the Olympic Peninsula, the Toquaht project at Barkley Sound, Shoemaker Bay at the head of Alberni Inlet, the Hesquiat Harbour project, and Yuquot at Nootka Sound. McMillan's Toquaht archaeological project – and