

A Rejoinder to Donald Mitchell's Review of *Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest*

BETH HILL

Professor Mitchell's assessment of *Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest* in *BC Studies* No. 28 is unbalanced and unjust. He writes: "As the introductory chapters and appended material are not central to the purposes of the volume, little will be said about them here. Informed readers will recognize the shortcomings of the very brief and selective discussion of Northwest Coast culture, while others will find their desire for background information better served by consulting the much larger, more balanced picture provided by Philip Drucker's *Cultures of the North Pacific Coast*." Professor Mitchell is wrong. The introductory chapters are important because the book was written not for him, but primarily for the people who pay his salary and support his ivory tower — the "ordinary" people. It was therefore necessary to include a simplified and condensed account of the prehistory of the coast, an extremely difficult chapter to write. I discussed these preliminary chapters with professional anthropologists and am satisfied that they serve their purpose. Surely Professor Mitchell would not expect a first survey of coastal petroglyphs to also provide the detailed historical survey he himself has not yet given us. It was my hope also that the interested readers would be led to studies of greater complexity, and to this end I referred to Drucker at least nine times in the text.

I cannot agree with Professor Mitchell that a book of petroglyphs is the place for a full discussion of the Archaeological Sites Protection Act. I have brought the Act into the relevant places in the book (9, 18, 88, 173), a more readable way of emphasizing the importance of protection. The presentation of the Act in the Addenda is incidental.

As for his specific complaint ("For each site . . . there should be a location map"), I am surprised that a member of the Archaeological Sites Advisory Board should fail to be aware of the board's view that the publication of specific site locations endangers the sites. Perhaps Professor Mitchell should consult the A.S.A.B. files to read my letter of February 8, 1974 to the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, with copies to the Provincial

Secretary, the Provincial Archaeologist, the Chairman of A.S.A.B. and others, in which I respond to a letter of concern from the Provincial Secretary and explain the care I will take to be vague about certain site locations. Possibly Professor Mitchell was absent from the A.S.A.B. meeting when these matters were discussed. He specifically mentions the site named North Return Channel. As the petroglyph boulders are portable at this site, I was particularly careful to avoid giving the location. My reviewer must know that the unpublished information is available in the site files at the B.C. Provincial Museum. I cannot understand his failure to grasp a fundamental problem. The publication of the world's rock art is justified because it is the inheritance of the world's peoples, not the private preserve of the professional archaeologist; but it is also necessary to protect it from vandals.

Certainly the book has shortcomings. As I explain clearly in the Prologue, some of the work was done under an L.I.P. grant by untrained people. However, the money provided by the grant was enough to initiate this expensive and time-consuming survey, and without it the petroglyphs would be almost unknown, as the professional archaeologists had certainly failed to undertake the task. The fact that we worked without pay made the survey possible. At his substantial salary and with his publications subsidized, it is easy for Professor Mitchell to deprecate the work of those without financial support. Finances also limited the book, which had to be published at a price under \$20 if the man in the street was to buy it. Thus Professor Mitchell's demand for site diagrams is unreasonable. I wonder how many paid man-hours were required for the excellent drawing of the Nanaimo River site (p. 108) done by the museum staff. The survey of the Cape Mudge site, done by engineers, could not be included simply because it would not condense into a two-page spread, and the cost of in-folded pages was excessive. Such information is available in the museum files. With regard to the site diagrams, I would also comment that we have observed that the location of petroglyph figures is related to the availability of suitable smooth rock surfaces, a totally random natural condition which would not be apparent in a series of site diagrams, the presumed "data" he requires.

Professor Mitchell feels that the more useful rubbings should have been used consistently — no photographs. He has apparently failed to read my explanation (p. 58) that certain petroglyphs cannot be recorded by this technique. Also, there were sites we did not reach (e.g. Hesquiat) for lack of funds; or we failed to find the site (near Carmanah Point drifted sand had recovered the carvings and we were unable to find them); or

we learned of the site after we had returned from our journeys (e.g. Nowish Island) when we could not spend time and money to return to make the rubbing. In such cases we used available photographs. Again, the reviewer's demands seem unreasonable and unfair.

However, it is the tone of the review which is perhaps most disturbing — the sneers and the damning with faint praise of: “. . . the interpretive chapters are a reasonably good start on the problem of petroglyph analysis even though the authors operate mainly at the common-sense or intuitive level.” (In fact, I do approve of both common sense and intuition!) If Professor Mitchell thinks it his duty to inflict pain, we are justified in closely scrutinizing his motives. Is it possible that he is expressing an academic arrogance directed towards a non-professional venturing into the archaeological preserve? Regrettably, this is the attitude of an archaeologist of a generation ago. A more enlightened policy would be to welcome the contributions that amateurs can make; A.S.A.B.'s new Warden System represents such a point of view.

“The petroglyphs deserve better than they received this time around.” His concluding statement is quite true, and surely no one would consider that a first general survey was a definitive work, especially when the coastal prehistory is not yet written. He is also correct in his opening statement, in part, for the book has been happily received elsewhere.