

1975-10

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND CULTURE HISTORY IN THE  
KITWANGA - MEZIADIN HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

by: John McMurdo  
Archaeological Sites Advisory  
Board of B.C.

October 14, 1975

## KITWANGA - MEZIADIN HIGHWAY CORRIDOR AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

### IMPACT STUDY - A SUMMARY

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The following report and maps detail the results of a study carried out by Mr. John McMurdo for the Archaeological Sites Advisory Board during the summer of 1975. This study was initiated by our office in response to a proposal by the British Columbia Department of Highways to upgrade the Kitwanga - Meziadin route.

This overall environmental and socio-economic impact study is being co-ordinated by the Lands Service and the Secretariat to the Environmental and Land Use Committee. The archaeological aspect of the study was financed through the regular vote of the Archaeological Sites Advisory Board.

The terms of reference for the archaeological resources aspect were as follows:

- (1) to observe, identify, and record all archaeological and historic sites present in the Kitwanga - Meziadin Corridor area;
- (2) to place these heritage resources in the context of the known regional cultural historical framework;
- (3) to provide information to the Kitwanga - Meziadin study team and the Department of Highways regarding the location and nature of the heritage resources in the study area; and
- (4) to recommend mitigation procedures where there are potential conflicts between heritage resources and proposed highway construction.

The methods used for the archaeological aspect were guided by the terms of reference described above. A preliminary reconnaissance of the study corridor in 1974 and a considerable amount of archival research aided in locating and identifying heritage sites in the corridor area. Secondly, an intensive archaeological survey carried out by foot travel along the proposed highway

route allowed the recording of heritage sites on or near the right-of-way. Finally, a very valuable contribution was made to the archaeological study by the participation of members of the Kitwancool and Kitwanga Bands.

All together 27 heritage sites were located and recorded in the field (See McMurdo, 1975 for detailed description of sites). Of these, 17 heritage sites are in no apparent danger of being disturbed or destroyed by highway construction and/or associated land altering activities. However, 10 sites are in potential conflict with the proposed development. A description of these conflicts and proposed mitigation procedures follows.

#### Site 1 - Kitwanga

No direct evidence of prehistoric occupation was recovered in the vicinity of the Kitwanga bypass. However, an archaeologist recommended by the Provincial Archaeologist's Office should be retained for the duration of construction in the area between the outskirts of the village and the approach to the bridge.

#### Sites 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15 , 22

The above sites, either campsites on the Grease Trail or seasonal activity areas, are situated in close proximity to the highway right-of-way. While no specific conflicts with the route location were noted, the integrity of standing structures and their immediate surroundings should be protected from associated clearing and construction activities. The Kitwancool tribe was specific in their desire to have these locations maintained in their original state.

#### Site 13

The proposed southern alternate in the vicinity of Cranberry junction threatens the integrity of structures and cultural deposits at Gax-bak-skid. The close proximity of the route location also increases the likelihood of vandalism. Danger to the site can be nullified by re-routing the highway a short distance north of the presently proposed location. The visible surface features of the site should preferably be hidden from the new right-of-way by a tree cover zone.

Site 24, Burial

The proposed route location lies within 300' of this grave mound. Every effort should be made to protect it from construction and related activities.

General

All the non-renewable archaeological and historic sites described in this report should be protected against use as borrow pit locations, vehicle and equipment depots, skid camps, or other land uses ancillary to highway construction.

In the cases of direct conflicts between heritage resources and construction activities, mitigation should take the form of (1) altering the highway route to avoid damaging sites; or (2) having our office conduct salvage excavations where avoidance of sites is impossible due to engineering constraints. Where heritage resources are not in direct conflict with construction, but are near the highway route, access and visibility should be minimized until such a time in the future that the heritage resources can be protected by misuse and vandalism.

Our office expects that these recommendations will be followed in order to conserve and protect the non-renewable heritage resources of the Kitwanga - Meziadin area. We are prepared to co-operate with the study team and the B.C. Highways Department in every way possible to follow up on our recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Paul G. Sneed  
Assistant Provincial Archaeologist  
i/c Cariboo and Skeena Regions

## INTRODUCTION AND RECENT HISTORY

The Gitksan share with other tribes of the northwest coast a unique position among the native cultures of North America. Throughout the world, the development of highly advanced societies has almost invariably been linked to the establishment of an economy based on agriculture. Among the Gitksan, however, salmon provided the stable food supply and indirectly the increased leisure time necessary for cultural development beyond the subsistence level. In the resource rich environments of the Skeena and Nass Rivers they developed complex cultural systems. The intimate and intense relationship between the people and the land was reflected in the evolution of elaborate ceremonialism and a masterfully executed art-style. The interdependence characteristic of the art, culture, and economy, tended to make the socio-cultural system very fragile. This was particularly evident during the period of European contact and settlement.

Trade items introduced in the nineteenth century were welcomed by the Gitksan. However, the trading system required that they provide something of value to the trader. In this instance it was fur. Consequently, winters, which had at one time been devoted to the development of art and ceremonials, were now spent on the trapline.

The introduction of fire arms, alcohol, and previously unknown diseases, contributed to a rapid decline in population. In the sixty year period between 1835 and 1895 the Tsimshian suffered a loss of almost sixty percent of their people.

Perhaps more through a lack of understanding than a will to destroy Indian culture, early missionaries considered the observance of Gitksan rituals and ceremonies incompatible with their efforts to create Christians. One of the more blatant examples of ethnocentricity was the destruction of whole stands

of totem poles which were considered pagan idols. By 1904, ninety per cent of the Indians of the Province had been converted to Christianity. (Duff, 1964:87).

The economic self-sufficiency provided by the traditional network of tribal territories was also undermined as the people were gradually relegated to reserves too small to support their customary life style. The Skeena Rebellion led by Hanamuk of Kitwanga was typical of Indian resistance to this encroachment on aboriginal territory.

The final blow to an already fragmented and dying culture was the outlawing of the potlatch in 1884. The potlatch had embraced almost every significant aspect of Gitksan culture.

In the short space of one human generation, the near total destruction of a culture was witnessed by what was for the most part an indifferent society.

Today, in the light of more liberal influences, interest and concern with native traditions and arts is again being revived. The Ksan project at Hazelton is only one example of the steps which have been taken in the long process of cultural revitalization. Archaeological sites, as representations of pre-contact culture and adaptations to the land, are essential to the process of cultural and historical reconstruction.

In the northwest region economic expansion and related construction activities are taking place at an increasingly rapid rate. This poses a serious threat to the non-renewable historical resources. In order to place the archaeological sites observed during this study in a contextual framework, and at the same time point out their historical significance, a brief synthesis of existing archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic data is presented.

#### AN OVERVIEW OF GITKSAN PREHISTORY

The language of the Gitksan, spoken primarily on the upper Skeena above Kitselas Canyon, is a dialect of the Tsimshian language family. Other dialects included in this linguistic group include Niskae, spoken on the Nass River, and Coast

Tsimshian, spoken on the seaboard from the mouth of the Nass River in the north to Klemtu in the south. The two interior dialects are mutually intelligible to each other, but not to the coastal form. Recently, however, it has been ascertained that the three language groups once formed a homogeneous unit. Through the various techniques of historical linguistics it has been determined that the three dialects probably diverged from a parent stock about 2,000 years ago (Rigsby, 1968-1969).

It follows that these groups in addition to sharing a common linguistic heritage also share a common culture. MacDonald (1968:6,7), in fact, has drawn much broader parallels between cultures of the northern coast, linking the cultures of the Tsimshian, Haida and Tlingit as a single areal co-tradition. In comparison to other coastal groups this triad forms an extremely close knit unit sharing convergent developments in social organization, marriage and inheritance patterns, rank systems, political organizations, material culture, architecture, art styles, and mythology.

The fact that Tsimshian culture on so many levels parallels that of the Haida and Tlingit, suggests a long period of insitu coastal development. This in turn represents a serious challenge to early archaeological models of Tsimshian prehistory which postulated a lengthy period of inland development culminating in a relatively recent migration to the coast.

From other accumulated evidence it now appears likely that several groups, which later became known as the Gitksan and Nisga'e, gradually moved inland from the coast.

An early period of coastal evolution is clearly demonstrated by archaeological excavations at Prince Rupert which have indicated continuous occupation of the harbour region for more than 4,000 years. A sudden influx of interior peoples to the coast would surely have been marked by the introduction of new

tools and technological skills. This did not occur. At Prince Rupert Harbour all artifacts relating to subsistence activities reflect a continuous related sequence from the earliest to the latest cultural deposits.

On the basis of radio-carbon dates obtained from excavations at Kitselas Canyon, the Tsimshian are known to have occupied the Lower Skeena for at least the last 3,000 years. There is further evidence to suggest that sometime during this period they expanded in the direction of the upper Nass and Skeena Rivers, perhaps displacing or absorbing Athapaskan speaking peoples. While the reasons for this expansion are not entirely clear, the archaeological record by 3,000 B.P. shows a cultural system highly adapted to the environment. The development of complex economic systems to equitably distribute resources to people had apparently already occurred. However, as the population grew as a result of an increasingly efficient adaptation, the need for an expanded resource base also increased. The logical direction for expansion was the upper Skeena - above Kitselas Canyon.

During the postulated period of expansion Tsimshian influence on various Athapaskan groups is known to have been extensive.

Among the Carrier to the east, the Tsimshian moeity-potlatch pattern was adopted and eventually Gitksan influence was felt as far east as the Fraser River. (Steward: 1955, 175). The fact that Gitksan terms for animals indigenous to the upper Skeena are Athapaskan rather than Tsimshian in origin indicates the process of acculturation was in some respects a reciprocal one.

As the Tsimshian expanded north to the headwaters of the Nass and Skeena they displaced or acculturated additional groups. The Gitksan, for example, are known to have waged several wars with the Tse-tsaut, a now extinct Athapaskan group. These wars resulted in almost total decimation of the Tse-tsaut and may have been the primary motive in their migration west to Portland Inlet and Kincolith on the



coast and north to a third reported location near Cariboo Hide on the Stikine River. (Boas 1895:259 and Duff: 1959, 32).

The influence of the Niskae was at the same time being felt among the Tahltan. (Teit (1912) reports that:

"...around the headwaters of the Iskoot, in former days the Tahltan occasionally came in contact with parties of the Niska Indians from the Nass River (p. 339)"

and that:

"...other bands on the Lower Stikine suffered severely by frequent raids of the Niska...."

It is interesting to note here that archaeological evidence from the Stikine indicates a major technological shift in the period between 1,000-5,00 B.P. (Smith: 1971). This may reflect a change in the subsistence base influenced by intrusive Tsimshian groups from the South and/or Tlingit groups from the west.

Upon reaching the headwaters of the Nass and Skeena the Tsimshian expansion halted. As Adams ( 1974: 22) notes:

"The process of enculturation of Interior peoples had reached the natural barrier of a mountainous watershed beyond which the salmon do not spawn and the winters are considerably colder."

During the period of expansion the Gitksan had consolidated their population in several villages on the Nass and Skeena, and along several smaller rivers within these drainage systems. Five of the villages: Kitwanga, Kitwancool, Kitsegukla, Kitanmaks (Hazelton) and Kispiox are still occupied today. The populations of two other villages, Kisgegas and Kuldoe, gradually dwindled after white settlement of the Skeena with the end result that the former tribe amalgamated with Hazelton and the latter with Kispiox.

In addition to the above areas of settlement, the archaeological survey revealed a much more extensive network of permanently occupied village and seasonally utilized activity areas. A number of historic sites located in the course

of the survey are also considered pertinent to the study. These sites are described in the following synthesis of survey data along with those currently occupied villages containing archaeological deposits.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC SITES

##### Mile 0 - 10

1. Kitwanga - ("people of the place of rabbits"). It is said that Kitwanga was founded after the traditional flood by the few remaining survivors of a once great tribe living at Git-tlu-sek ("Man of drawing town"). The latter village, traces of which have long since disappeared, was located at the foot of Wish-ge-nisht, the highest mountain on the opposite side of the present town. According to local tradition the Raven and Eagle phratries, who later joined the original settlers, once occupied a village called Git-shullk which was located opposite Kitwanga on the east bank of the Skeena. During the days when oolichan oil was a prized commodity among the Gitksan, one of the famed Grease Trails ended at Kitwanga contributing to its importance as a trade centre for the upper Skeena district.

Kitwanga was recorded as an archaeological site by the National Museum of Man in 1972. However, recent investigations indicate that few archaeological deposits remain. The banks of the river have eroded inland to the front of the old house row which has now been reduced to outlines in the ground.

2. Ta'awdzep ("The Fortress"). A steep-sloped knoll, the dimensions of which are approximately 200 x 150' is the only visible remnant of a once imposing fortress. According to local informants there were at one time three large houses on the hill built to protect the inhabitants from the frequent raids of a war-like coastal people. During a particularly terrible seige, the people of the Fortress cut the logs loose from the roofs of their houses in a last desperate attempt to save themselves. The heavy timbers tumbled downward, crushing the invaders and saving the villagers. The name of the chief who led the people in battle was Ach haht meaning "no heart - crazy".

Surface features which can be observed at the site today include two house depressions and sixteen rectangular pits. Projectile points are reported to have been illegally removed by local collectors.

3. Historic Mill and Cedar Pole Camp - Eight buildings including log cabins, plank houses, and other mill related structures, are believed to be associated with the first lumbering venture in the Kitwanga valley, pioneered by Reverend A.E. Price in the early 1900's.

Mile 10-20

4. Kitwancool - Kitwancool remains the most culturally conservative Gitksan village. Its people have consciously sought to retain many aspects of traditional life and customs and until ca. 1950 the village could only be reached by the Grease Trail joining the Nass and Skeena Rivers. Because of its position on the trail the villagers became intermediaries between the Niska and Gitksan, and inter-married and potlatched with both groups. Kitwancool is known to have had the greatest number of old totem poles of any Tsimshian village. Less than twenty remain.

Analysis of stratigraphic profiles at the village site revealed a black culturally deposited stratum 6-12" in thickness capped by 3" of humus and overburden. Inclusions of ash and fire-cracked rock are further evidence of prehistoric occupation.

5. Historic Mill - Three mill related structures are all that remain of the first logging enterprise initiated by members of the Kitwancool tribe in the early part of the century. An abandoned and obviously old cabin, belonging to Chief Gwasslam of the Frog phratry also stands nearby.

6. Git-an-yow - An old and at one time large village is located on Kitwancool I.R. 3A at the south end of Kitwancool Lake. This was the location of the original village of the people who now live in Kitwancool. During the frequent wars with the Tse-tsaut Indians many of the villagers were slain. After the final battle in which the Git-an-yow people were victorious, they changed the name Git-an-yow to Git-win-lquol which refers to the smaller number of people living there. Because white people have difficulty pronouncing this name it is now

pronounced and written Kitwancool.

Six historic cabins and a smokehouse now mark the spot where the village was once located. Any culture bearing deposits which may have existed have now been obliterated by farming and other associated activities.

Mile 20-30

7. Seasonal Activity Area - The Grease Trail lies a short distance east of this cabin which in former times served as a base for the hunting and fishing activities of Chief Wee-kha of the Wolf phratry in Kitwancool. More recently the location was utilized as a cedar pole camp.

Mile 30-40

8. Seasonal Activity Area - The location was at onetime an important base for the hunting and fishing activities of the Wolf phratry in Kitwancool. According to informants, the site was often visited by oolichan packers on the Grease Trail. An intensive investigation of the area failed to disclose any evidence of prehistoric occupation. However, a spur road running directly through the site may have removed any previously existing cultural deposits.

9. Grease Trail Campsite - An important camp site on the Grease Trail is reported to have been located at the north end of Hal-Pac Logging camp. Again, bulldozing and construction activities have destroyed any visible evidence of the former occupation.

10. Burial - Before the turn of the century, a man from Kitseguekla is reported to have taken ill and died here while packing oolichan oil down the Grease Trail. While it is said that he was cremated and buried near this location, recent logging has seriously disturbed the area making visual identification of the grave site impossible.

11. Grease Trail Campsite - This area was used as a campsite by grease packers on the trail to the Nass. A log cabin, probably constructed during the fur trading years now stands at the location.

12. Ksin-ser-atis - Ksin-ser-atis, "place where they make adze handles" was an important base for Wolf phratry fishing, and hunting activities. At the same time it served as a temporary campsite for travellers on the Grease Trail, and was an important source of the wild crabapple wood used in the manufacture of adze handles. A cabin and tree cache were the only remains observed at the site.

Mile 40-50

13. Gax-bak-skid - The historical significance of the small village of Gax-bak-skid is recorded in the history of the lands belonging to Chief Neas-la-ga-naws and in the history of Mah-ley and Ak-Gwen-Dasqu of the Wolf Clan. According to these histories, the various houses that now form the village of Kitwancool were once separate entities, the chief of each claiming titles to individual territories. It was at Gax-bak-skid that two of these chiefs, Mah-ley and Gwass-lam joined together and became as brothers, eventually moving to the large permanent village of Git-an-yow (now Kitwancool).

The area is still in use today as a base camp for trapping activities. Four cabins are located in the series of adjoining meadows which form the site. A rich black cultural deposit ranging from 4-8" in thickness testifies to considerable antiquity.

14. Git-an-gwalq - Founded by the high chief Mah-ley, the old village of Git-an-gwalq is situated on the Kispiox River about one mile west of the Ma-gan-geest River (Nangeese). This was a fishing village for many years until Mah-ley and his people abandoned it to live with Gwasslam, first at Gax-bak-skid and then at Git-an-yow. An important aboriginal trail between the Kispiox and Cranberry River valleys joins the two latter villages.

Mile 50-60

15. Grease Trail Campsite and Historic Homestead - Informants report that this was the traditional campsite at Mile 54 on the Grease Trail. Pat Colnin, the first white settler and rancher on the Cranberry, pre-empted this location around the

turn of the century and trapped and farmed the area until his death. One cabin and a foundation can still be found at the site.

16. Historic Cabin - The cabin located here was at one time the base of operations for a trapline registered by Cliff Weeks and John McCabe in the early 1930's. The line was trapped for several years without much success and eventually reverted to the Kitwancool tribe, who claimed aboriginal rights to the territory.

17. Ks-gay-gainet ("Upper Fishing Station") - Although at one time this traditional village supported a large population, many people, including Chiefs Low-khone and Gam-lak-yeltqu, were killed during wars with the Tse-tsaut Indians. Because of these recurrent hostilities the village was eventually abandoned as a permanent settlement. Nevertheless the site continued to be occupied on a seasonal basis by members of the Frog phratry. While today, the only visible surficial features are four large clearings and a deserted cabin at the western extremity of the site, pictographs and a burial ground were reported by informants in Kitwancool.

A cultural deposit, ranging from 20-30 cm. in thickness indicates that the site was occupied in the prehistoric period.

18. Seasonal Activity Area - Two cache pits are located on the first terrace above the Nass east of Cottonwood Island. The absence of well-defined stratigraphy and the paucity of surficial features indicates that the area was occupied on an irregular or temporary basis, probably during the summer fishing season.

19. Wens-ga-lgoal ("Narrow Place") - This ancient fishing village is frequently cited in the oral traditions of the Kitwancool, most often in the history of the totem pole Ha-ne-lal-gag, and in the history of the wars with the Tse-Tsaut.

Cultural features which define the boundaries of the site are strewn liberally over an area approximately 4500' in length and 1500' in width. The most common of

these features are circular cache pits averaging about 3' in diameter. These are concentrated primarily on the perimeter of the terrace which forms the site. At the southern extremity of the site are two areas which show definite signs of semi-permanent to permanent habitation. The first area is a small meadow (50 x 50 yards), situated about 50 yards inland from the river. While the location of surface features was hampered by dense bracken growth, soil profiles indicate the presence of a shallow but definite cultural deposit. About 25' south of the meadow under the protective covering of several large hemlocks, an historic cache was discovered. The dimensions of the enclosure were approximately 4' x 4' x 5'. It appeared to have been raised on 4 poles about 4' high and 9" thick. The wood used in the structure had been adzed in the traditional fashion. A hand hewn log ladder was found nearby and presumably facilitated access to the raised cache.

Approximately 140 yards east of the meadow, a second clustering of historical and archaeological features was discovered in an open treed area. Amongst the debris were found several artifacts of traditional design and manufacture, all in a remarkable state of preservation. These included two large steam bent cedar boxes, a wooden cradle, a carved wooden adze handle, numerous hand split planks and a cache built of hand-split timbers. The total area covered by surface debris of this nature was about 1000 square feet. Twenty feet north of this area four large rectangular depressions (6' x 9') and two circular cache pits were located.

According to informants the site was last occupied in 1928. In that year a fire destroyed the smokehouses along with the winter's supply of salmon. In desperation the people here moved upriver to the site of Aks-na-galga where they lived on the charity of their tribal brothers.

#### Mile 60-70

20. Seasonal Activity Area - Several notable cultural features including two log cabins, five cache pits, and a traditional smoking device were observed at this location. According to informants, the cabins belonged to James Weegett of

Kitwancool, serving as a base camp for his trapping operations. The area is apparently still in use judging from the fact that a small aluminium trailer is located a short distance west of the cabins.

21. Seasonal Activity Area - Two clusters of cache pits were located near the Stewart Pack Trail on the upper terraces of the Nass River. While no evidence of stratigraphy or permanent habitation was recovered, it is likely that the site was occupied at least sporadically through the years in the fishing season.

22. Seasonal Activity Area - A badly deteriorated wooden cache was located near the Stewart Pack Trail in the vicinity of Brown Bear Creek. While an intensive search of the area was made, no further evidence of historic or prehistoric occupation was found.

23. Aks-na-galga ("River of Poor Water") - This site is located near the first large stream above Brown Bear Creek. The village of Aks-na-galga holds a prominent position in the oral traditions of the Kitwancool, particularly in the history of the totem pole Ha-ne-lal-gag. The histories recounted by the Kitwancool indicate that the village was occupied through many generations during the spring and summer fishing season.

24. Burial - A grave was discovered on the Stewart Pack Trail near Van Dyke Island. Consisting of a small mound about 5' long, 4' wide, and 1' in height, the grave is marked by two medium sized poplars in which names and dates have been inscribed. The child of Chief Wee-lezqu of Kitwancool was buried here in 1891. Other names inscribed in the trees are those of Wolf phratry members.

#### Mile 80-90

25. Seasonal Activity Area - A summer fishing camp is located in the vicinity of Moore Creek on the Stewart Pack Trail. The meadow forming the site is approximately 2,000 square feet in area. Although the location of surface features was hampered somewhat by thick bracken and nettle ground cover, five cache pits were discovered.



Mile 90 - 100

26. Lak-an-Zoq ("Place of the fishing village") - This village along with territories bordering the Meziadin Lake was ceded to the Kitwancool tribes after prolonged wars with the Tse-Tsaut, a people who came from beyond Meziadin Lake in the Stikine River Region. While the construction of an airstrip and skid camp has destroyed much of the site, a low lying area about 1000' x 500' still remains. It is probable that most of the daily fishing activities would have been carried out here while houses would have been situated on the plateau above where the airstrip and skid camp are now located.

27. Prehistoric Village - A terraced clearing about 1/8 mile up the south side of the Meziadin River from the Nass was tested for cultural deposit and contained a black loamy stratum characteristic of previously recorded archaeological sites in the region. Also noted were a number of rectangular depressions which may be the vestiges of early habitations.

INTERPRETATION

The archaeological survey was partially designed to provide a solution to both the problem of the time depth of historically known Gitksan subsistence and settlement patterns and the problem of cultural origins. During the course of investigations no sites were recorded that diverged significantly from the historically known Gitksan pattern. The distribution of archaeological sites reflects an orientation towards permanent settlements and seasonal activity areas on or near the tributaries and canyons of the major rivers. Surface features such as cache pits and house depressions are analagous to historical Gitksan architectural forms. It is doubtful that the shallow deposits observed reflect in situ development of historically known subsistence techniques. This, in combination with the homogeneity apparent in the location and patterning of sites, leads us to speculate that the Gitksan are relatively recent arrivals to the region and that they were already successfully adapted to the river environment. In this sense, the findings of the survey tend to complement currently held theories suggesting that the Gitksan are descended from groups who originally

occupied the Skeena estuary and adjacent areas of the coast.

A further concern of the study was to recover evidence for non-Tsimshian ethnic groups that existed either prior to or contemporaneous with Tsimshian occupation of the study area. No conclusive evidence was recorded that would shed light on the problem. A single Tse-tsaut village at the mouth of the Meziadin River, previously known from ethnographic sources, could not be identified archaeologically, owing to extensive land altering activities that had occurred in the area. On the Skeena, lithic materials of Athapaskan origin have been observed at Kitselas and Hagwilgait canyons. No similar materials were recovered from eroded site localities in the study area, suggesting that the surveyed areas of the Cranberry and Nass were not extensively utilized by Athapaskan groups in the early prehistoric period. In later years, the influx of Tsimshian groups may have facilitated Athapaskan adoption of an increasingly more riverine oriented subsistence leading to more extensive exploitation of resources in the study area. As in the case of the Hagwilgait Carrier, many cultural features would have become indistinguishable from Tsimshian counterparts. This may account for the problem of archaeological identification. Later known conflicts between Athapaskan and Gitksan tribes would have been the natural outcome of competition for resources now highly prized by both groups.

In conclusion, it should be noted that predictions made about the prehistory of the study area are tentative. Traditional methods of collecting survey data were frustrated by a number of factors which may have affected an objective interpretation:

1. For the most part the identification of sites and surface features was complicated by the unusually dense forest and undergrowth in certain areas of the study corridor.
2. The observation of artifacts and cultural debris from sites, usually an important data source, is prohibited by relatively acid soil.
3. Whereas estimations of relative chronology can often be made by comparing the depth of cultural deposits at various sites, the slow rate of soil accumulation in the study corridor prohibits use of this method.

4. The frequent flooding of the Nass and the meandering of the Cranberry have contributed to the erosion or complete destruction of some ethnographically known settlements and inferentially, countless unknown areas of prehistoric activity.

It is hoped that in time a program of selective excavation will be undertaken to further assess and interpret the heritage resources of the region.

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