Tribal Journeys to Bella Bella

"People gathering together"—Festival

Pulling together to save the Great Bear
Over thousands of years the Heiltsuk along with other Pacific North West Coast First Nations were the most sophisticated non-agricultural societies on the planet. Ocean going canoes allowed our societies to thrive. They were and are a social and cultural keystone amongst our people. Canoes are our traditional mode of travel that we used for harvesting resources from land and sea. With their Glwas our people travelled along the coast for social, cultural and political purposes and they transported goods for commerce and trade. Over the last 150 years our societies and ocean going canoes went into a decline. Much of our traditions were suppressed or ignored.

With the growing awareness of the increasing loss of our language and culture, there was a strong belief that the revival of the ocean going canoe would be an important vessel for healing, empowerment, self determination, youth and community development.
The spiritual, social and cultural meaning of our traditional ocean going canoe was revived when the Heiltsuk Nation paddled their canoe the “Glwa” from their village of Bella Bella 500 km to the Expo ‘86 in Vancouver. After three years of planning, carving the canoe and training, this was the first journey of its kind in this century for the First Nations of the North Pacific Coast of North America.

Rebirth of the Glwa

In the summer of 1989, the “Glwa” participated in the “Paddle to Seattle” canoe gathering of Native Americans of Washington State. While in Seattle, the Heiltsuk delegation invited all the tribes of the region and all Indigenous Maritime Nations of the Northwest Coast and the Pacific Rim to paddle to Bella Bella for a traditional canoe gathering Qatuwas 1993.

Participation in this heroic journey to Bella Bella served as an important rite of passage for individual and tribal participants alike. It reaffirmed our vitality as Indigenous Maritime Nations and the idea of “Tribal Journeys” was born. Tribal Journeys has continued annually since with an ever growing number of participating canoes.
Resurgence

Rebirth of the Glwa

For more than 20 years the Tribal Journeys have transformed the lives of thousands of aboriginal youth. It has helped them to reconnect to their culture and has strengthened their confidence as contemporary First Nation people.

On their voyage the pullers learn about traditional ecological knowledge, and environmental stewardship. They also gain respect for the ocean and its power, and how to work together as a team. The mental and physical challenge of the canoe journey prepares them for challenges they may face in life.

Today “Tribal Journeys” once again are woven into coastal First Nation’s culture. The majority of the tribal groups of the Pacific Northwest participate in coastal canoe activities and the numbers continue to grow.

With the continued cultural growth of “Tribal Journeys” other indigenous groups such as Maori from New Zealand, Native Hawaiians, Ainu from Japan, Alutes from Aleutian Islands, the Cree and Metis from boreal forest and prairies have become participating canoe families.

Heiltsuk youth canoes, Paddle to Makah, Tribal Journeys 2010
The Heiltsuk traditional territory lies in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest, the largest remaining intact temperate rainforest system left on the planet. For more than a decade we have been collaborating with many groups to protect these lands, waters and resources while developing a sustainable coastal economy.

However, we still face serious threats from proposed resource developments. Together with our allies we will take whatever action is necessary to protect our traditional territories from catastrophic damage caused by unnecessary developments.

Tribal Journeys provides an opportunity for the Heiltsuk to pull together with other coastal indigenous people to save the Great Bear Rainforest.
Qatuwas “People gathering together” June 29-July 5th 2014

Following traditional protocol the Heiltsuk sent canoes to invite both the North and South coastal First Nations once again to Bella Bella for the Qatuwas “People gathering together” Festival from June 29th-July 5th 2014. We expect over 100 canoes with over 1,000 pullers and about 5,000 visitors to join us for this important event.
Please support Qatuwas 2014

We are a small community with limited resources, however, we are determined to make Qatuwas 2014 a success. We are seeking support from other First Nations, private and public donors.

Your support will allow us to organize this gathering with a dedicated team of staff and volunteers to take care of accommodation, transportation, food, sanitation needs, festival logistics, protocol planning, support for Big House construction, programming and communications.

We believe that bringing together youth and elders to celebrate our traditions and culture will strengthen us as a people and a community.

Qatuwas 2014 will let our youth experience the importance of the Glwa that connects us so much to our lands and seas. It fills our elders with pride to see our culture and traditions continue to live on through our young people.

The Heiltsuk Hemas (Hereditary Chiefs) and the Heiltsuk Tribal Council are proud to support Qatuwas 2014.
Pulling together to save the Great Bear

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