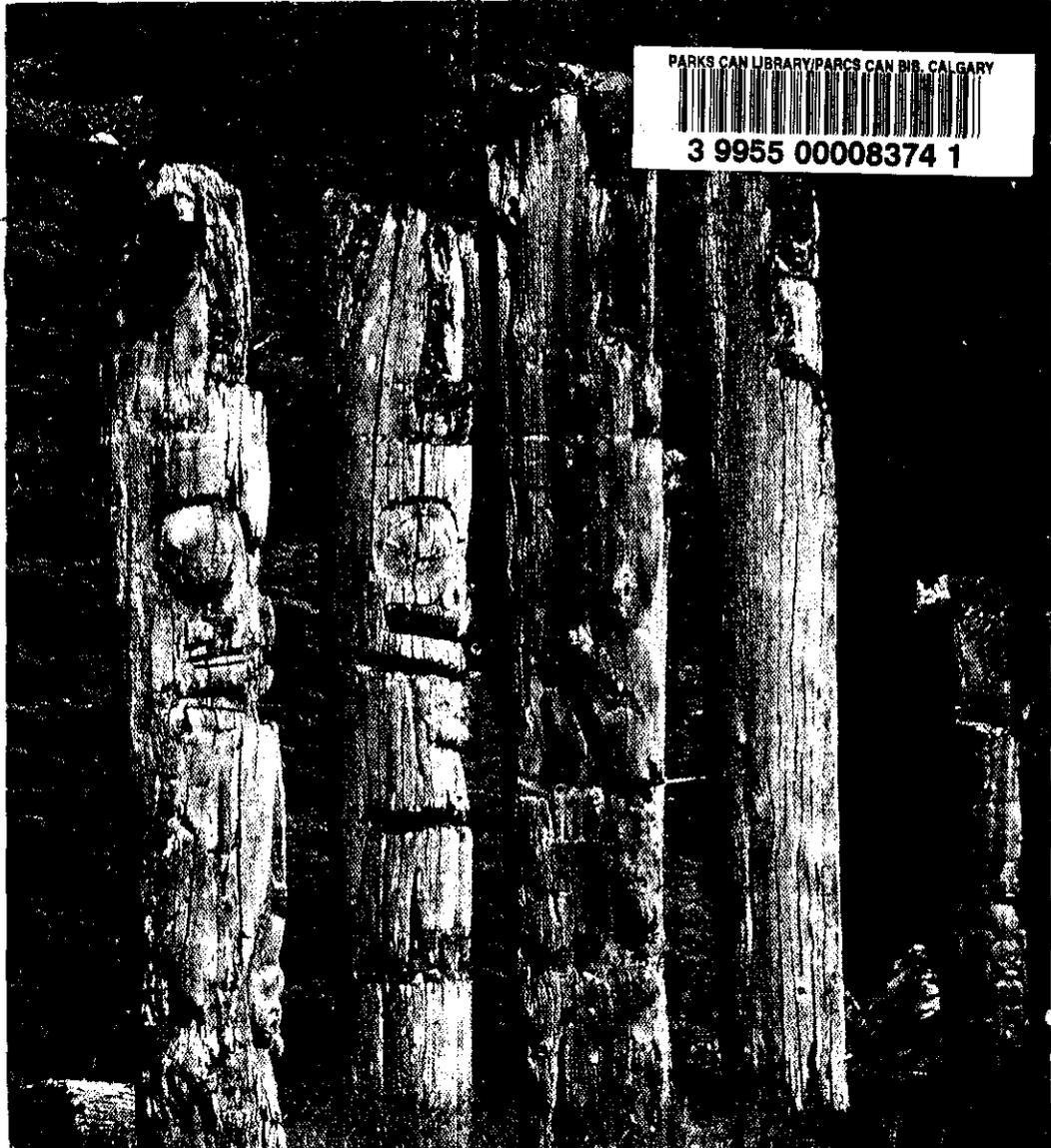


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SGAANG GWALL

Exploration Guide

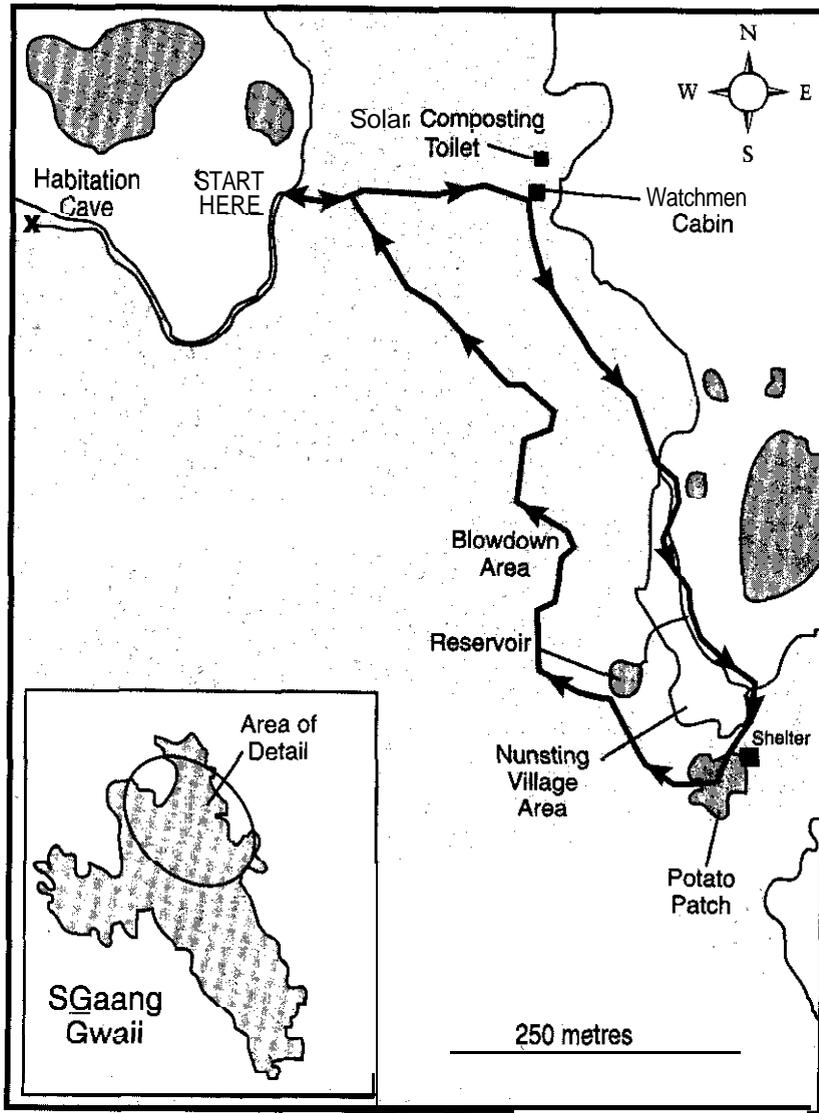
Gwaii Haanas

National Park Reserve • Haida Heritage Site

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Map of S'Gaang Gwaii

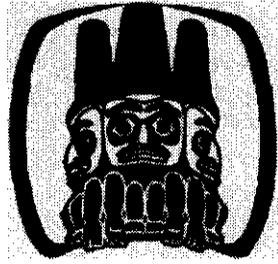


SGAANG GWAI

Exploration Guide

You can help protect SGaang Gwaii by remembering the following:

- *Please stay on the trails. Cultural remains such as poles and longhouses are fragile. It is easy to damage these and other cultural artifacts by wandering off the trails and stepping on them without realizing it.*
 - *Do not enter caves. You are welcome to view them from the outside but entry is prohibited to ensure your safety and out of respect for the Haida. Many caves were used in the past for habitation and burial purposes by the Haida.*
 - *Watch wildlife from a respectful distance.*
 - *Burrow-nesting seabirds have colonized this isolated island to avoid disturbance. They are susceptible to human activity-particularly physical disturbance of their habitat and sensory disturbance (lights, noise) of the birds themselves. For the protection of the seabirds, overnight mooring is not permitted. You may moor your vessel while visiting SGaang Gwaii during daylight hours. Keep to the trails to avoid damaging seabird burrows.*
-



HAIDA GWAII WATCHMEN

The “watchmen” are three carved human figures wearing high hats, seeming to peer **out** towards the horizon from their lookout atop **some Haida** poles. These figures represent actual watchmen who were strategically located to be able to detect and to alert the village of an enemy or any other happenings of which he should be aware. This symbol was adopted by the **Haida** to represent the **Haida Gwaii** Watchmen Program.

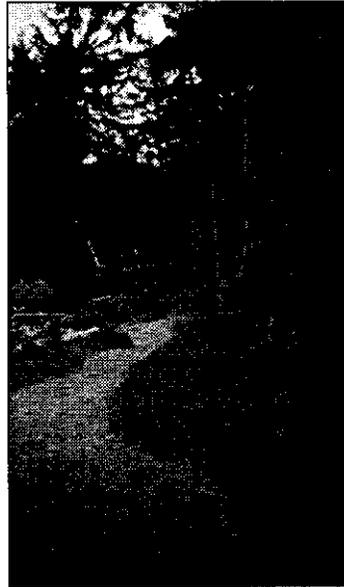
The **Haida** people, in recognizing that the natural and cultural worlds cannot be separated and that the protection of Gwaii **Haanas** is essential to sustaining **Haida** culture, initiated the Watchmen Program as hosts to protect-culturally significant sites. The Watchmen's presence is a critical element in protecting sensitive sites and in educating visitors. Heed their advice during your visit -their knowledge of **SGaang** Gwaii will add to your understanding of this place; and their direction will help you to avoid damaging its unique features. However, please remember that the Watchmen are not tour guides.

WELCOME TO SGAANG GWAI

SGaang Gwaii (*Wailing Island*) is located off the west coast of Kunghit Island at the southern extremity of the Haida Cwaii archipelago. Its Haida name comes from the sound made by 30-40 foot waves as they surge through a hollow of a reef near the island — a sound like a woman wailing.

The Ganxiid Haida chose this place to live because of its sheltered bays and the richness of the surrounding lands and waters. Nan Sdins — the last village on SGAANG Cwaii to be occupied on a full-time basis — was a winter village situated on the leeward side of the island, shielded from the ocean by a small islet. Once known as SGAANG Gwaii 'Llnagaay (Wailing Island Town), it lost this identity when European traders called the village after its Chief. Thus, SGAANG Cwaii 'Llnagaay became known as "Ninstints" — a mispronunciation of "Nan Sdins," the village Chief of the time. The name translates as "The One Who is Two," a name that reflected that the bearer was so great that he was equal to two men.

Nan Sdins is a site sacred to the Haida. They consider this place more than a village site — here lie the remains of their Haida ancestors; here reside their spirits. Between 1790 and 1890, several thousand Haida died on Haida Cwaii — cut down by epidemics introduced when they made contact with the Europeans and against which they had no defense. On SGAANG Gwaii, many hundreds are buried — in caves, in mortuary poles and in the earth. As you walk the paths of this island, remember that you are walking among these spirits and that this place is sacred ground.



Trail through Nan Sdins village site.



Hereditary Chiefs meeting with management team to discuss preservation of SGaang Gwaii.

PROTECTED FOR THE WORLD

Nan Sdins is the most important village site connected to the ways and culture of the southern Haida known as the Ganxiid. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized the national historical significance of this place and designated it as a national historic site in 1981. In the same year, UNESCO granted the island World Heritage Site status, reflecting its importance to the global community. The village of Nan Sdins represents the only example in the world of the remains of a traditional Northwest Coast First Nations village site, complete with standing poles and the remains of massive cedar longhouses. Here, evidence of human occupation and use remains in the form of caves, midden sites, upright and fallen poles and a few standing longhouse posts, house pits and beams.

A CULTURE SHAPED BY NATURE

Just as the land and the sea have shaped the Haida culture as a whole, the natural features of SGaang Gwaii have shaped the lives of those who have lived here for millennia. The waters surrounding the island are rich with nutrients welling up from the deep Pacific. Large populations of plankton thrive on these nutrients

and, in turn, become food for the shell and fin fish which are in their turn fed on by birds and mammals. The **Haida** are inextricably linked in this circle of life.

S**G****a****a****n****g** Cwail consists of one larger island and 27 small islets. The main island is made up primarily of Triassic age volcanic rock, seen at the surface as a series of ridges and knolls. Toward the coastline of the island, the rock formations create an alternating series of bays and rocky outcrops and also surface to create small reefs and islets offshore-excellent habitat for the sea lions and seals hunted by the **G****a****n****x****i****i****d** **H****a****i****d****a**. Much of the remaining coastline consists of a series of undulating ridges and exposed grassy knolls with a number of small cliffs facing the sea. These cliffs and the higher 30-40 m cliffs along the southwest side of the island could be used as lookouts and were part of a natural defense of the island against enemies. As you enter the forest from the beach, there is evidence of old shorelines in the form of cliffs and surge channels — the ground you're walking on was once below the surface of the ocean.

The isolation of this island group and the absence of mammalian predators make **S****G****a****a****n****g** Cwail an incredibly important seabird nesting area. Despite its small size, it supports amazing numbers of seabirds — over 40,000 breeding pairs of 10 different species.



Rhinoceros Auklet

Seven species nest on the main island, of which the Rhinoceros **A****u****k****l****e****t** (20,600 pairs) and **C****a****s****s****i****n**'s **A****u****k****l****e****t** (8,000 pairs) are most numerous. Their abundance and predictable **b****e****h****a****v****i****o****u****r** during the breeding season (March-September) made them an easy source of food for the **H****a****i****d****a**. **S****G****a****a****n****g** Cwail also supports 16 species of forest songbirds as well as bald eagles, peregrine falcons, sharp-shinned hawks and saw-whet owls.

The size of the island and its isolation from other islands have had other effects. Smaller, more remote islands typically support fewer species due to the distance over which animals and seeds **m****u****s****t** travel to colonize them. **S****G****a****a****n****g** Cwail is known to support only two land mammals -the deer mouse and river otter. Two species of marine mammal-pacific **h****a****r****b****o****u****r** seals and Northern sea lions — haul out on the rocky islets.

THE GANXIID HAIDA

Haida oral tradition and recent studies speak of more than 10,000 years of occupation of **Haida** Cwail. For millennia, these sea-going people have traveled around these islands, over to mainland, and at least as far south as California in their large, distinctive canoes.

The people of **S**Caang Cwail are of a **Haida** sub-group called the **G**anxiid Haida — remembered today as some of the fiercest **Haida** of **Haida** Cwail. The records of Europeans in the 1700s indicate that the **G**anxiid Haida were living in at least two dozen towns in the southern part of the islands. The history of the winter village of Nan Sdins extends back in time at least 2,000 years, and possibly much longer. It once had 20 houses and a population of approximately 300. Some houses could often shelter up to 30 or more individuals. The people, poles and houses at Nan Sdins include those of the original town of **S**Caang Cwail 'Illnaagay and other lineages/families who gathered there for the winter, or who moved from other villages over time.



Remaining corner posts of longhouse.

First encounters with European traders in the late 1700s were peaceful but in 1791, the massacre of about 50 Ganxiid Haida by the English sea captain John Kendrick and the crew of the ship *Lady Washington* touched off a succession of retaliatory raids and killings which continued until 1795. But by far the deadliest blow

from contact with Europeans was the series of smallpox epidemics and other diseases — beginning in the 1830s and recurring periodically throughout the 19th century — that decimated the **Haida** population. The death of the majority of **G**anxiid Haida from the epidemics reduced the population of Nan Sdins to the point that it was no longer viable as a permanent settlement after the **1880s**. By 1884, the survivors were gradually migrating north, eventually settling in Skidegate.

HAIDA LINEAGES

Haida divide themselves into **two** groups or *moieties*: the Ravens and the Eagles. The moieties function primarily for the regulation of marriage and the succession of rights and property. All marriage partners have to be chosen from the opposite moiety: if a man is an Eagle, his wife and children are Ravens. Each moiety is in turn subdivided into numerous smaller and more localized groups or lineages. Descent is determined **matrilineally** — through the mother's line. Therefore, it would be a chief's sister's son (his nephew) who would be first in line to inherit his chieftainship, rather than his own son.

Early histories of **SGaang Gwaii** say that the ruling village Chief at the time of European contact was Koyah (a mispronunciation of "Xoyah", meaning "raven"). In the last years before the **Ganxiid** people moved north, the leadership of the village of **SGaang Gwaii** had passed to a chief of Eagle lineage named "Nan Sdins". The population of Nan Sdins village itself comprised several lineages, including families who had moved to **SGaang Gwaii** following the devastating impact of the epidemics.

Each lineage measured its wealth by the breadth of its access to such things as hunting lands and fishing streams, berry-picking areas or stands of fine timber. Right of access, not only to natural resources but to the supernatural as well, could be traced through a lineage's ancestry and history. incorporeal wealth such as dances, songs, crests and names handed down through the lineage were jealously guarded. The wealth of the individual was measured not by accumulation, but by distribution of property.

VILLAGE LIFE

Nan Sdins was primarily a winter village. From the spring into fall, families went to their various hunting, fishing and food gathering territories where they began preparing for the winter ahead. In the surrounding waters and on nearby rocks and islets, seals and sea lions were hunted. Cod, halibut and other marine life were harvested, and elaborate fish weirs provided all the salmon needed. The forest provided a bounty of food, medicine and the raw materials to build longhouses and craft the tools and housewares of everyday life.

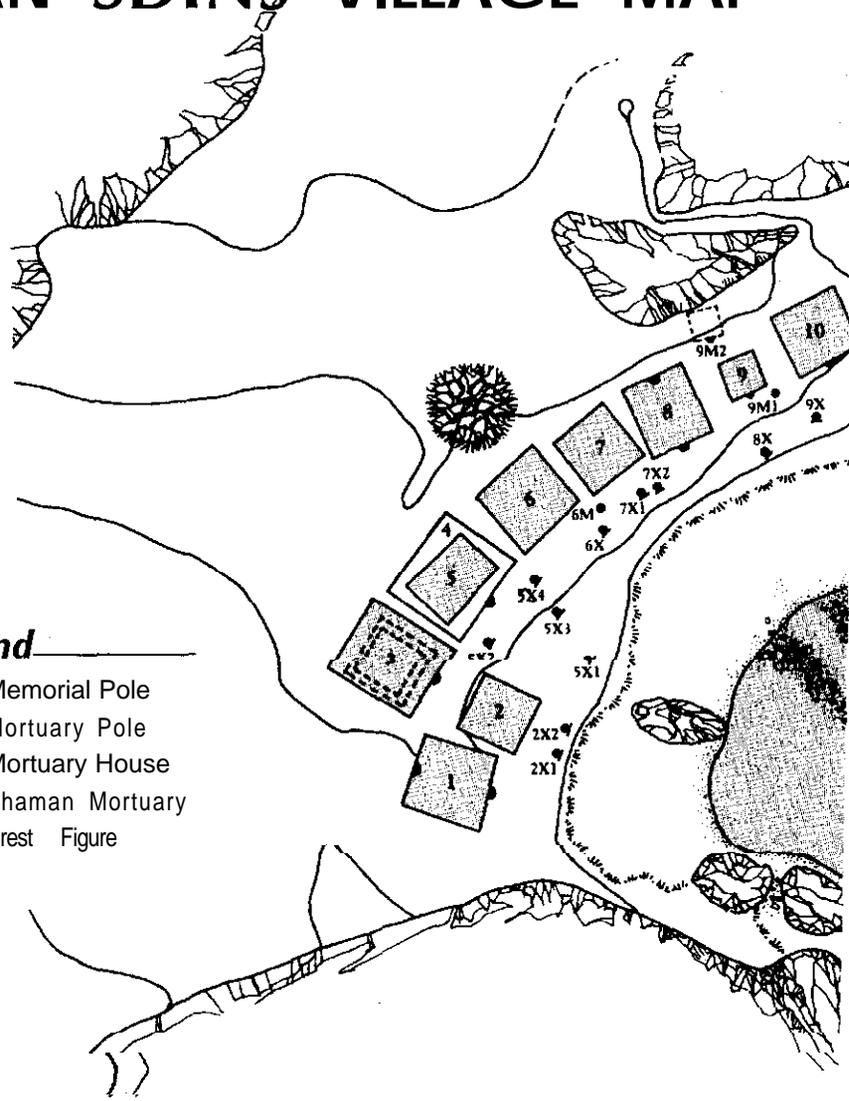
NAN SDINS VILLAGE MAP

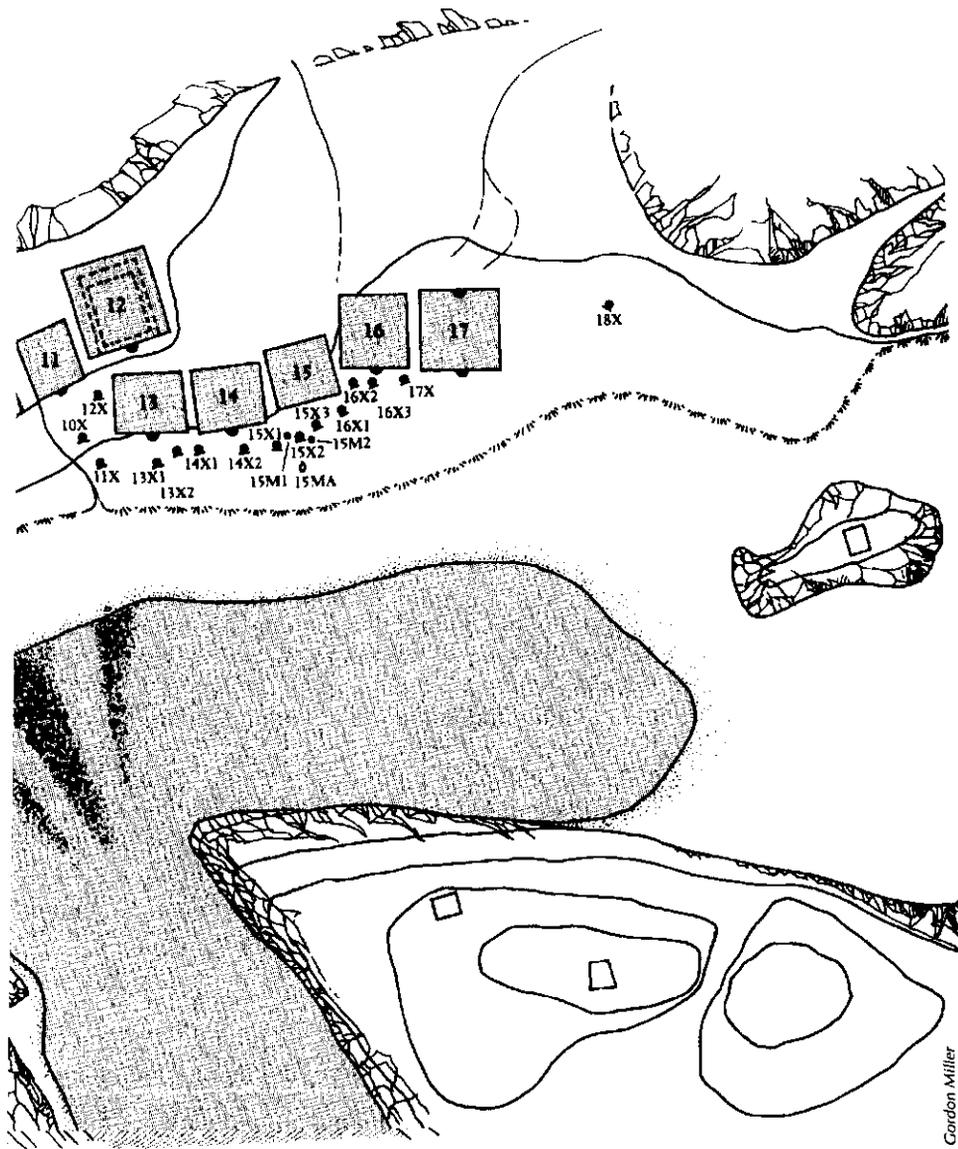
Legend

- M Memorial Pole
- X Mortuary Pole
- MH Mortuary House
- s Shaman Mortuary
- MA Crest Figure

Houses in the Village

- | | | | |
|------------|---|-----------|---------|
| House 1: | People Think of This House Even When They Sleep Because the Master Feeds Everyone Who Calls | House 6: | House 1 |
| House 2: | Cloudy House | House 7: | No nam |
| House 3: | Thunder Roils upon it House | House 8: | No nam |
| House 4/5: | Crease House | House 9: | No nam |
| | | House 10: | People |
| | | House 11: | Driving |





mat is Always Shaking
 e recorded
 d: recorded
 ie recorded
 Wish to be There House
 a Weasel House

House 12: Mountain House
 House 13: No name recorded
 House 14: No name recorded
 House 15: No name recorded
 House 16: No name recorded
 House 17: Raven House

In the winter months, the families would regroup at Nan Sdins. Potlatches and ceremonial feasts would be held. The **potlatch** tradition is one that confirms or asserts the status of the individual or commemorates important events: raising of a pole, building of a house, naming a chief's successor, marriages, and the like. Food and gifts are presented to guests in payment for witnessing the event. Songs and dances specific to each occasion were important parts of these gatherings.

In combination with the summer harvests from land and sea, **SGaang** Cwail and surrounding areas provided almost all that was needed for everyday life. There was good shelter, and a water source running through the village, dammed to form a reservoir. Native crabapples — and apples from a single, introduced apple tree-added variety to the diet. Potatoes, acquired through trade routes from Southern tribes, were readily adopted as a staple food and as a trade item. The potato patch located at the south end of Nan Sdins village was quite large and productive. Today it is still visible-but overgrown with grass.

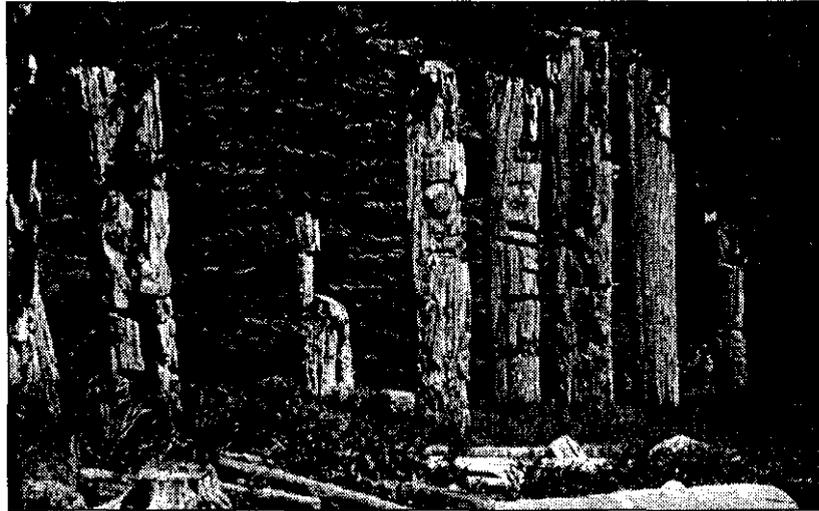
The oceans and forests of **SGaang** Cwail provided an abundance of plants used for food, medicinal, practical or spiritual purposes. Berries, ferns, mosses, roots, leaves, **bark and** stalks all were used.

Berries were picked and mashed into cakes, then dried and stored in boxes **or** preserved in **eulachon** grease in watertight boxes. Roots yielded medicines or were eaten. Certain leaves were used for storing or cooking foods. Some barks were used for medicine or eaten raw. Although the forests of **SGaang** Cwail provided these riches, the young age of the forest --a result of repeated blowdowns caused by the exposed nature of the **site**— meant that the large cedars in the quantities required for crafting houses, canoes and monumental poles would have been harvested from the **more** plentiful cedar stands on **Moresby** or Kunghit Islands.



Beaver carved on mortuary pole.

The forests of **SGaang** Cwail are a typical mix of Sitka spruce, western hemlock and **western** red cedar. Spruce is plentiful near the shore, especially along the more exposed



Standing mortuary poles.

west coast. Hemlock and red cedar are more abundant inland. Behind the village of Nan Sdins, there is a large uniform stand of younger cedar and hemlock that extends almost halfway **across** the island. It is probably the result of tree clearing by the villagers for firewood and other uses.

Because resources were so rich and food could be stored, there was plenty of time for craft, play, and exploration. Women gathered bark to make clothing, baskets, rope and other useful items, and were known to take part in trade. Men traded, carved, and painted artistic designs on their work and on the items made by women. These are just some of many activities that went on.

In general, **Haida** children began learning their life skills at an early age. Babies were dipped into the ocean before their eyes could open after birth, to keep the **Haida** people strong. As they grew older, they played games that taught them skills and allowed the elders to watch and observe which child excelled at what. Some children were born into hereditary positions, such as that of a chief. A child was raised from birth to be a chief when that was his destiny. A "historian" began at a very young age having to repeat word-for-word the histories of his people: the **Haida** had no written language; history was passed orally from generation to generation.

THE POLES OF NAN SDINS VILLAGE



Frontal, memorial, and mortuary poles are the three main types of poles carved by the **Haida**. Each pole, with its **representations** of human and animal figures, tells a story associated with an individual or family lineage. Some of the Nan Sdins poles were removed from **SGaang Gwaii** to locations in Prince **Rupert** (1938), and Victoria and Vancouver (1957). At the time of their removal, it was believed that it was the right thing to do to help conserve the remnants of what was perceived as a dying culture. But the **Haida** culture is a dynamic and living culture and efforts are now under way to repatriate these poles as well as other cultural objects. Those poles, along with those remaining on the island, provide the most complete documentation of the historic sculptural traditions of the **Haida**.

House Frontal Poles

The most obvious and detailed of the three types of poles, each tells a story of a family's history. Placed at the front of a house, a hole in its base served as the house entrance. There are no standing frontal poles left at **SGaang Gwaii**. They have either fallen **over** and returned to the earth, **or** were removed to museums. Frontal poles fell sooner than the other types of poles as the base was weakened by the hole cut through its base.

Memorial Poles

These poles were erected in memory of a deceased whose remains were deposited elsewhere or whose body was lost at sea. A single crest figure was carved at the base; at its top might be the figure of a raven or an eagle. In between these two figures, the pole might be left blank or be filled by **potlatch** cylinders. The number of potlatches hosted by the deceased during his lifetime were indicated by **potlatch** rings carved into the pole.

Mortuary Poles



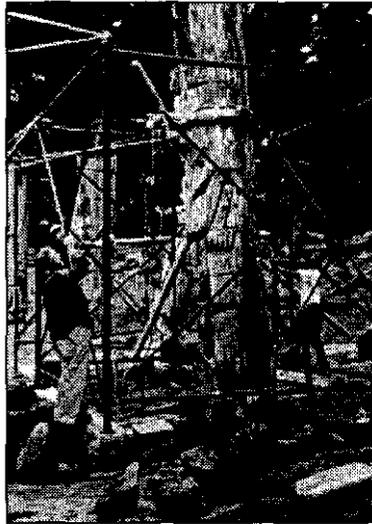
Top of mortuary pole.

A mortuary pole was the grave of a high status person. The pole, carved with the crests of the deceased, had a cavity at the top where the body of the deceased would be placed, inside a bentwood box. A plaque, usually with a painted or carved design on it, was placed in front of this cavity to cover it from view. A board would be placed on top to keep rain out, and rocks placed on top of the board to stop the winds from blowing it away. Mortuary poles are considerably shorter than house frontal poles or memorial poles. They are carved with the stump of the tree serving as the top of the pole — inverted.

Pole Conservation Project

The poles of Nan Sdins village will eventually return to the earth as part of the natural cycle of things. This is the way it should be.

Haida elders have agreed, however, that the surviving poles of Sgaang Gwaii may be stabilized to delay this inevitable fate. This



Conserving the poles at Nan Sdins.

is a formidable challenge. Conservation actions are guided by the principles that the least intrusive measures will be used to extend the life of the poles, and no action will be taken that is not reversible. The objective of conservation measures is to keep the poles standing as long as possible; once down on the ground, they deteriorate quickly.

The poles make ideal hosts for tree seedlings as well as *sala* bushes and other vegetation. Much of the damage suffered by the surviving poles was caused by this vegetation. The environment itself has been enlisted as a primary and self-sustaining agent for effective conservation. Damaging trees

were removed from the immediate vicinity but enough were left surrounding the site to provide an adequate wind break. Ultraviolet rays from the increased sunlight reaching the poles destroyed many of the **mosses** and lichens which grew on them, and their bleached exteriors then became a hostile environment against further deterioration. The area was ditched to drain wet areas. Soil and organic material from around the bases were removed and replaced with inert beach gravel.

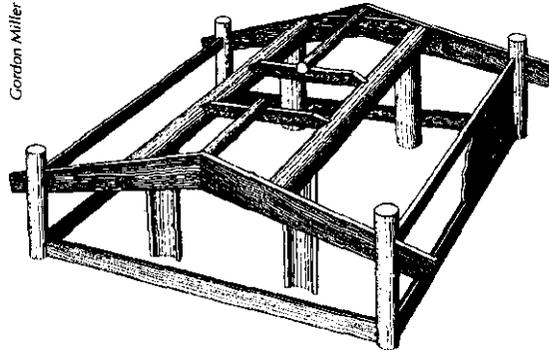
In 1995, following consultation with hereditary leaders, a decision was made to straighten several of the poles. No project like this had ever been attempted before. Three poles were straightened using a unique cage and cable system. A fourth pole, not strong enough to handle the stress of being straightened, was braced instead. Photographic records are being kept of all the poles to monitor their condition over time.

HOUSE REMAINS

The **Haida** built two types of houses. In one, the basic support structure consisted of two parallel round beams set across two interior pairs of uprights. The second type had six beams on the roof and used more elaborate **joinery** in its construction. This latter type of construction is unique to the **Haida**.

When a high-ranking chief had accumulated the wealth required to raise a house, he contracted people of the opposite moiety to assemble the materials required for construction. The Chief would oversee the entire building of his house. The scale of construction

accomplished in a short time was seen as a direct reflection of the workforce the chief could **muster** — an indication of his prestige.



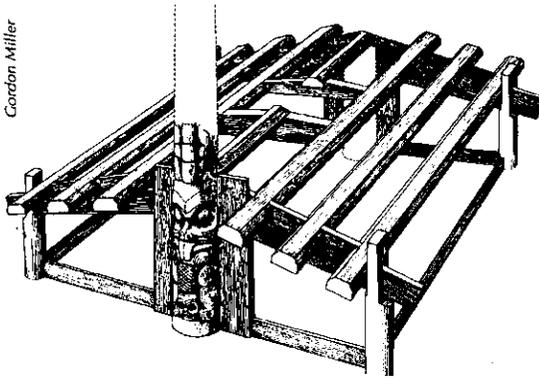
Gordon Miller

House type 1

The plank walls on each house were **moveable** and could be used for other structures during the

summer camp months. The entrance into the house was usually through the frontal pole but there was often a back door for quick escapes or for removing the dead. A deep pit, descending in platformed stages from the outer walls towards the centre of a house, served as the ceremonial centre of a village. Usually the only house with this feature in a village was that of the village chief.

Gordon Miller



House type 2

Today at Nan Sdins you can still see two obvious house pits, house-posts interlocked with gables, beams that once supported a roof but are now resting on the ground, and slight imprints in the ground from other long-houses.

RESTORING NATURE'S BALANCE

The thick understory of grasses, wildflowers and shrubs typical in coastal areas is mostly absent on SGaang Gwaii. The forest floor is mostly bare soil or moss while the coastal bluffs are covered in hardy grasses and sedges. There are a few areas of thick salal and salmonberry, particularly along cliff edges on the east and west coasts. Huckleberry is scattered throughout the interior of the island.



Tidal flats in front of Nan Sdins village.

However, much of the forest understory is virtually absent on SGaang Gwaii as a result of the grazing and browsing of the Sitka blacktail deer population — a species introduced to Haida Gwaii in the 20th century. With no predators, the deer population ex-



Nan Sdins village site.

ploded throughout the islands. Birds and other small animals which live in the understory were being affected. The deer were also damaging the cultural features of Nan Sdins by browsing on vegetation growing on the poles and by walking on downed or leaning poles to get at the vegetation. As part of an islands-wide research program into their impact on forest ecosystems on Haida Cwail, deer have been eliminated from SGaang Cwail.

Prior to their removal in 1998, a monitoring program was put in place to find out to what extent forest and shoreline vegetation would recover from decades of browsing by the deer. Shoreline communities are believed to have been particularly hard hit and to have lost many of the flowering plants and shrubs one would expect to find on SGaang Gwail. Vegetation plots were established and detailed measurements are showing that there is a tremendous variety of plants on the islands in addition to the mossy cover common on the forest floor, although they are restricted to inaccessible cliffs or to the protection afforded by fallen trees or other obstacles. After only a short recovery time, it is becoming obvious that if deer are controlled, many species, both plant and animal, will return and thrive.

Checklist of Wildlife found on SGaang Cwaii

Burrow Nesting Birds

- Fork-tailed Storm-petrel
- Leach's Storm-petrel
- Horned Puffin
- Ancient Murrelet
- Cassin's Auklet
- Rhinoceros Auklet
- Tufted Puffin

Surface Nesting Birds

- Pelagic Cormorant
- Glaucous-winged Cull
- Pigeon Guillemot
- Oystercatcher

Other Types of Birds

- Bald Eagle
- Raven
- Chestnut-backed Chickadee
- Swainson's Thrush
- Oranged-crowned Warbler
- Fox Sparrow
- Red Crossbill
- Pine Siskin
- Red breasted Sapsucker
- Northwestern Crow
- Varied Thrush
- Great Blue Heron
- Marbled Murrelet
- Winter Wren
- Hermit Thrush
- Townsend's Warbler
- Saw Whet Owl
- Kingfisher
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Pacific Slope Flycatcher
- Brown Creeper

Mammals

- Sitka Deer
 - River Otter
 - Harbour Seal
 - Northern Sealion
 - Deer Mouse
-

*“Humanity has a need for places
to expand beyond the dimensions
of the day-to-day grind and to
fortify the body, mind and spirit
— places for our ancestors and
those that follow us. Cwail
Haanas provides people with
such a touchstone....”*

*— excerpt from the Cwail Haanas
Strategic Management Plan*



Cwail Haanas is cooperatively managed by representatives of the Council of the **Haida** Nation and the Government of Canada sitting on the Archipelago Management Board (**AMB**). Together in consultation with local community and public interests, the AMB is working toward a management strategy which spells **out** common goals to protect the ecosystems and cultural heritage values of Cwail Haanas for future generations.