

INTRODUCTION

The Chilcotin Indians are an interesting group, though relatively little is known about them. Any previous research has been done by widely separated people; and this research, only in quite specialized areas. A few general overall descriptions of the Chilcotins have been written but these are incomplete. In this paper, I will try to synthesize much of this separated material into a complete usable form and present it in a brief manner.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Chilcotins lived at the headwaters of the Chilcotin River and the Aniham Lake district, an area from latitude $50^{\circ} 10'$ to latitude $52^{\circ} 40'$. Their lands reached from the Cascade mountains to the west, to almost the banks of the Fraser River. (see map 2).

This was a fairly hospitable land. It was in the southern portion of the Interior plateau, the land being hilly with many long river and lake valleys. The plateau is a dry belt. At Kamloops the temperature varies from 22°F in January to 70°F in July. Precipitation is about 10 inches yearly.

The countryside was rich in game - caribou, bears, goats, sheep, marmots, and rabbits and yielded many edible roots and berries. The salmon in this area ascended the

rivers so irregularly that the Chilcotins traded for much of their salmon from the Bella Coola to the west, and from the Shuswap in the Fraser River area.

ORIGINS

A strange thing about the Chilcotins is that they may not have been there very long. It is quite likely that they were pushed out of the Peace River drainage area. They moved south and occupied, perhaps by force, the western tip of the Shuswaps land, and a portion of the southern part of the Carrier's land, the latter of which they have been at enmity ever since.

The Chilcotin spoke Athapaskan, and as all Athapaskan speaking tribes "they clung tenaciously to their language, but derived the colour of their social and material life from neighboring peoples."¹ Their social structure was derived from the Bella Coola.

There were three or four bands in a tribe, each subdivided into three classes - nobles, commoners (both further grouped into clans), and slaves. Little more is known about these clans than that the most powerful was named Raven, and that descent was reckoned through both male and female lines. Individuals obtained high rank by giving potlaches, but occasionally the chieftainship seems to have been hereditary.

When the Chilcotins first arrived they probably lived in oblong or conically shaped lodges made of rush mats or

1

footnote * Diamond Jenness

brush on poles, a type of dwelling almost universally used in north and eastern British Columbia. These were not suitable for the cold, dry, windy winters of the area, so they soon adopted a small sized version of the subterranean house of the Shuswap (see figure). These houses had two disadvantages, though; water seeped in and no amount of bark lining could keep it out and; two, no-one could enter without showering the people inside with dirt.

The clothing of the Chilcotins resembled that of the other Athapaskan tribes which in turn resembled that of the plains Indians. This consisted of moccasins, leggings, robes, breech-cloth or skirt² made of skins, and belts of skin or woven, and cap.

TECHNOLOGY

As with all the Indians in Canada, the Chilcotins used stone tools. This cannot be confused with the term "Stone Age", as this term was coined to describe a stage in our own development when we were a primitive people. The Chilcotins are not primitive in the same sense and so the term is inappropriate. Back to technology.

The Chilcotins made stone tools. Projectile points were made in various shapes, sizes and styles according to

²It is probable that, like the Carrier, the Chilcotin didn't adopt the breech-cloth until the early nineteenth century.

the period³ and need. Knives and scrapers were fashioned for skinning and dressing animals. Most stone tools were made by both percussion and pressure flaking methods, and most were made of basalt. Occasionally a fine grained quartzite was used for coarser tools, (choppers etc.). Other more precious stones were used such as quartz crystal, chert, and chalcedone. Obsidian was traded from the Aniham lake district in bulk and sometimes in the form of small triangular points. Ground slate knives and points were also produced.

Bone and antler was used for flaking tools, fishhooks and harpoons.

They did little woodworking other than house building (notching logs) so the need for woodworking tools was small.

The appearance of trade goods preceded the appearance of white man by at least fifty years. Rifles replaced arrows as a hunting tool and knives replaced their stone counterparts but a few stone tools were still made. Flakers for making stone tools were found made of rolled and pounded copper. Also some chipped glass has been found.

ART AND RELIGION

The Chilcotins' art was not as spectacular or as important to them as that of the Northwest Coast, but it was there. Small carvings of bone or antler were made, mainly as ornaments. They also traded for the small dentalia shells which were used along with small bird bones, seeds, berries and later, trade beads in necklaces. They learned from the Shuswap to weave rush mats and coiled baskets with
³Archaeologists identify various cultural phases by point styles.

imbricated decorations. They also used zoomorphic and anthropomorphic handmauls.

Little is known of the religion of the Chilcotins. It is known that both boys and girls went into seclusion at adolescence, owing to the influence of the Coast, but the guardian spirits acquired by the boys were often determined by inheritance. Also the sweat house, a small conically shaped structure, played an important role, in purifying both men and women at rituals or religious ceremonies.

At the death of a nobleman, an elaborate potlach was given by his clan, giving away most of his possessions. A wooden pillar erected over his grave was carved to represent his crest.

The dead was not always buried. Sometimes they cremated them or left them under a pile of stones or brush.

IMPACT OF WHITE MAN

Probably the first white man to see the Chilcotin country was Alexander MacKenzie who in 1793 reached the Pacific Ocean by passing through the Rockies and the Chilcotins. A few years later, trading posts were taking furs from the Indians. One located at Bella Coola was the scene of one of the greatest tragedies in the history of B.C.

An Englishman arrived at Victoria with smallpox. It spread through the fort and then infected the Indians camped there. These Indians were ordered to return to their villages and of course the disease arrived at Bella Coola. The Indians had no resistance to the disease so it hit hard. The summer of 1862 saw entire villages wiped out.

Starvation took a similar toll. Weakened by smallpox