

THE PITT LAKE PICTOGRAPH SITES

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INTRODUCTION

Pitt Lake in the Fraser Valley runs roughly north to south draining via the Pitt River into the Fraser River some 25 miles east of Vancouver. It is one of the few truly tidal lakes in the world, and its sheltered waters and southern sloughs sustain a considerable waterfowl population. In May and June the water level rises enough to flood extensive mud flats at its southern end thus making even the most southerly of the reported sites easily accessible. The shore-line is studded at intervals with granite outcrops, many of which have sheltered faces and protected niches chosen as pictograph sites.

Nine such sites were located, and of these eight were found along the western shore. (This distribution is likely due to the fact that most of the suitable outcrops were also located on this shore). Considerable care had been taken to select the specific rock faces utilised. The designs had all been painted in red pigments and frequently depicted similar motifs. The sites fall within the historic territory of the Katzie Indians, a Salishan speaking group; Suttles (1955:17) names Pitt Lake as the "Lake of the Katzie". It is likely that the ancestors of the present Katzie population can be credited with the paintings.

The pictographs at all of the sites were sketched, and the main figures were measured and then photographed in both black and white and in colour. A survey form was completed for each site. Each site was plotted onto a map (Fig. 2).

THE SITES

Site DiRp 4

This site is the most southerly of the pictograph sites and is

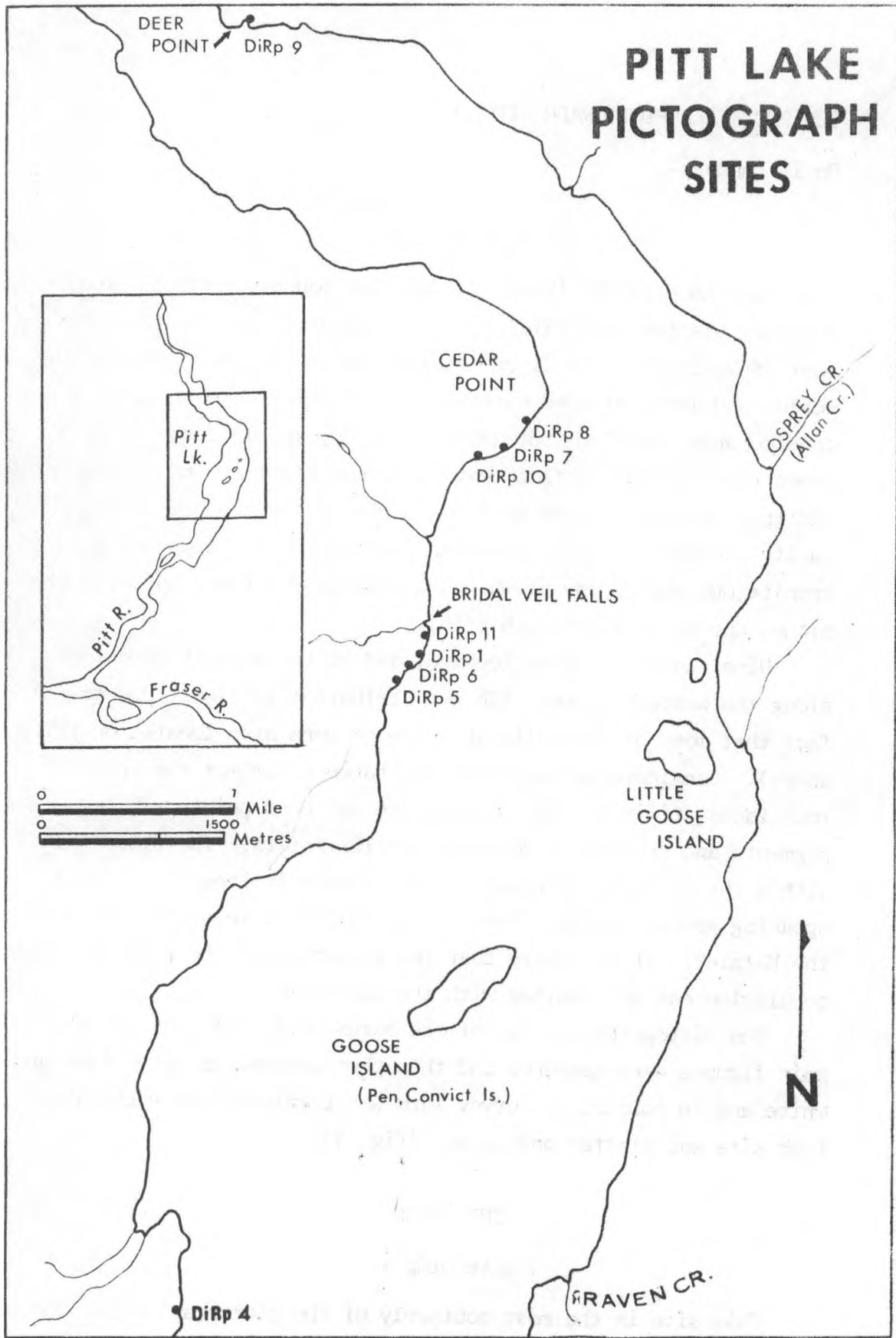


FIG. 2. Map of Pitt Lake showing location of pictograph sites

located on the western shore of the lake, south of Goose Island, and approximately opposite the outfall of Raven Creek. The paintings are on light coloured granite below the curving roof of a shallow overhang. They are easily accessible from the water via a series of sloping ledges. The overhang provides little protection from wind and wave damage and the paintings are more weathered and faded than at the other sites. Yellow lichens have partially obscured the pigment although stiff brushes proved effective in removing some of this covering.

The only figure which can still be determined with any accuracy is anthropomorphic in nature with a circular head with single circles for eyes, and an oval body with traces of two or three horizontal ribs (Fig. 3). One arm, raised to shoulder height, terminates in four fingers while the other arm appears to be stretched above the head. To the right the outline of a faded circle can be partially traced as well as a few other faint lines still further away. There is considerable staining of the rock surface around both the figure and the circle and lines, but there is no longer a discernible design. A circle and central dot appear at the extreme right. All of the pigment is of the same faded orange-red colour.

Site DiRp 5

This site is located on the western shore of Pitt Lake opposite the northern end of Little Goose Island and south of Bridal Veil Falls. The paintings are at least 5 meters above May high water and are to be found on a smooth, light rock face which is entirely free of moss or lichens. A series of rocks below the paintings make this site easily accessible if approached by water. Even though the paintings are below a considerable overhang, there has been some fading particularly of the right-hand figure.

This panel is composed of three anthropomorphic figures sharing the same rock face in a tight group (Fig. 4). The first of these is

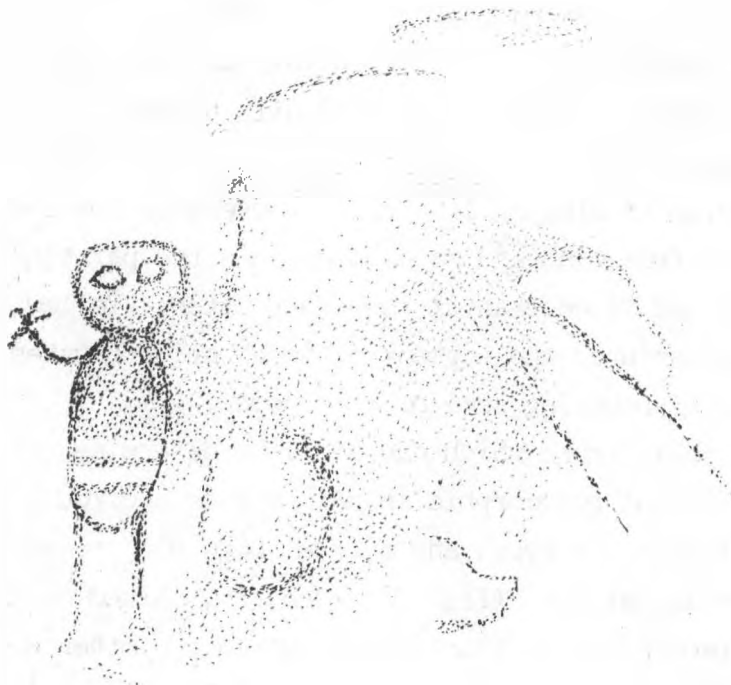


FIG. 3. Pictograph at site DiRp 4.
Figure approximately 1.2 meters tall

a "stick" figure with a bird-like head. Below, a face with prominent eyebrows which join above the nose and large eyes in the form of ovals about central dots, joins a mouth (or body?) which consists of a horizontally bisected oval. Attached to the latter are two hands (or feet) each with three digits. The third figure is an upright anthropomorph with a circular head topped by a three-pronged "head-dress". The eyes and mouth are also circles, while the body is an elongated oval with ribs, spine and tail clearly depicted. The straight legs are simply drawn and no toes are shown. The hands, upraised to shoulder height, appear to be triangles each with five digits. The entire group is approximately 2 meters in height and the colour of the paint in figures a and b is red, while that of c is similar to that of site DiRp 4.

Site DiRp 6

This site is just north of DiRp 5, on a south-facing exposure at the base of a granite cliff which slopes gently down to the water's edge. There are four panels of paintings; three are somewhat protected by overhanging rock; the first panel is partially obscured by a light travertine formation. The fourth has been almost obliterated by ground water trickling down the cliff.

The first panel consists of three figures (Fig. 5). One is a bird with a long curved beak and short three-toed feet; its oval body tapers to a short, stubby tail and contains three parallel curved rib-lines. Just below is an outstretched form of a fish (?) or second bird, the details of which are not clear due to the travertine cover and slight spalling of the rock face. Perhaps the most interesting of this particular group is the third figure, an upright biped with a small, dark head, the top of which has spalled away, and a long oval body with many sharp projections and a thick short tail. The body is bisected vertically, but no ribs are shown. All are painted in red, but c perhaps due to the light travertine cover, appears to be a deeper shade of the same colour.

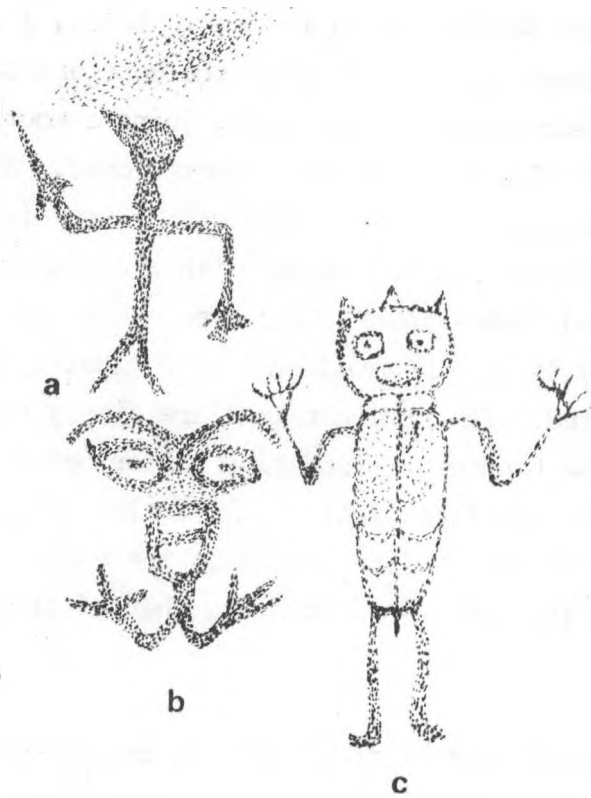


FIG. 4. Pictographs at site DiRp 5.
c is approximately 1 meter tall

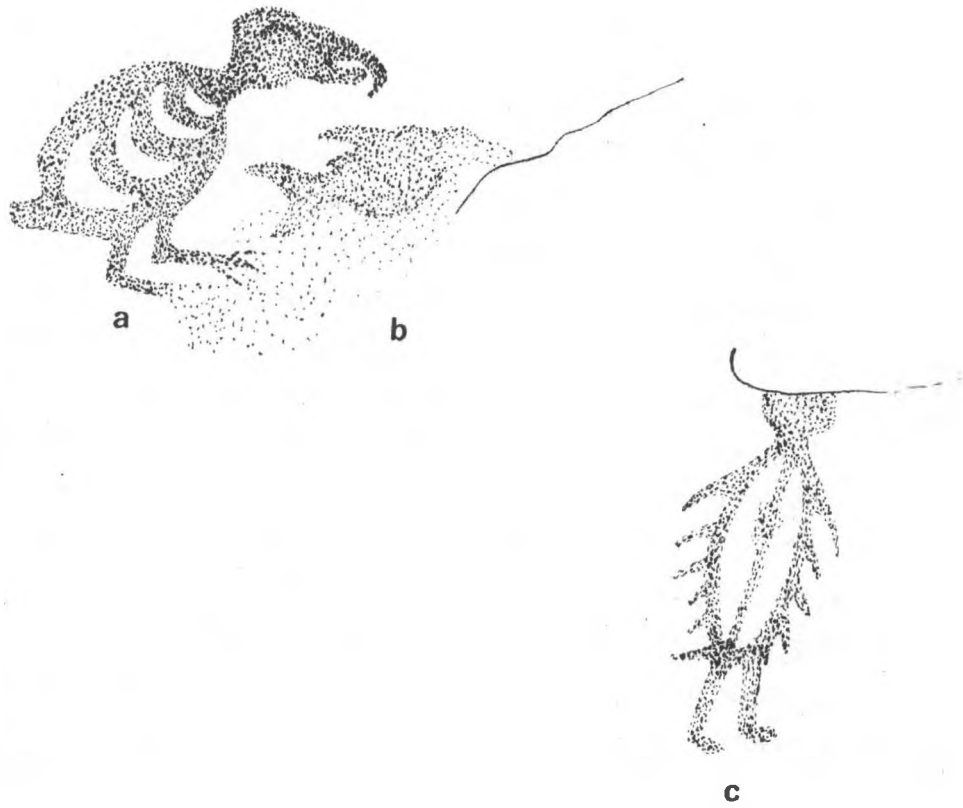


FIG. 5. Pictographs at site DiRp 6,
panel A. a, approximately
50 centimeters in length

The second panel, on an adjoining rock face consists of six individual figures; three are anthropomorphic, two zoomorphic, and one geometric (Fig. 6). The head of the first anthropomorph on the left, consists of two joined circles about central dots, representing eyes, which are topped with heavy eyebrows. The mouth is a large oval very similar to that of the second figure at DiRp 5. The body in this case is a large square with a heavy spinal column and three horizontal ribs. The short arms are upraised and appear to terminate in five digits, of which two on each hand are depicted very faintly. The legs are attached horizontally to the body and each ends in three toes. The next anthropomorphic figure is quite similar to the first although his eyes are very large and are unjoined, and his mouth and teeth are more clearly depicted. His feet appear to be more human and his arms hang downward. Horizontal ribs cross his square body. The head of this figure is done in a dark shade of red while its body and all of the other figures are an orange-red colour. Between these two figures is a clear and bright oval with a central dot. To the right of the second anthropomorph are two quite faded creatures one above the other. They are similar in appearance and the long snouts may be intended as bird's beaks, however, they are so faint that any designation would be sheer conjecture. The last anthropomorphic figure is standing, but is faded to the extent that only the outline can be discerned. He appears to have two large straight "horns" atop his head and an open, bird-like beak. His one clear arm terminates in a three-fingered hand, while his feet appear to be almost human.

The third panel, 3 meters to the east, includes a very clear human figure standing at the bow of a canoe and holding what may be a paddle at shoulder height (Fig. 7). The form of a second man at the stern of the craft is also apparent. The almost casual stance of the first figure is very skillfully rendered. To the left of these two is an amorphous stain, the upper part of which

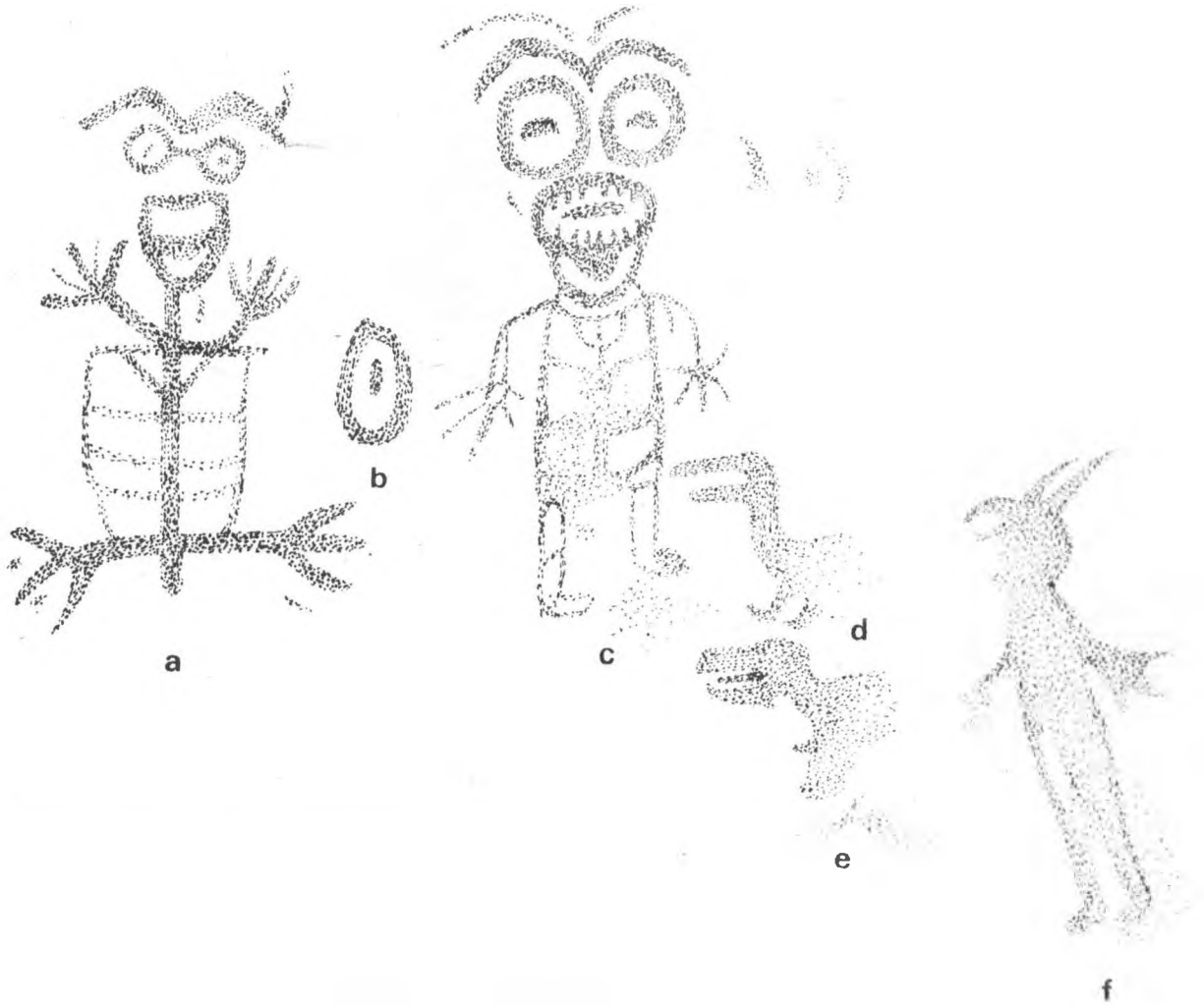


FIG. 6. Pictographs at site DiRp 6,
panel B. f, 45 centimeters tall

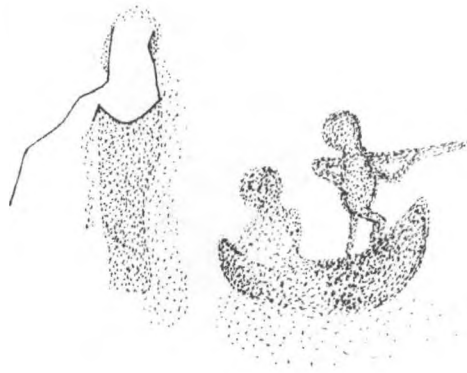


FIG. 7. Pictographs at site DiRp 6,
panel C. Canoe length, 35 centimeters

has weathered away. The canoe and figures are red; the stain is more orange-red in colour.

The last panel (not illustrated) has been practically obliterated by a dark water stain. No form can be discerned at all. It seems as though it was originally painted on a strip of rock several shades lighter than that surrounding it.

Site DiRp 1

This site is located on the western shore of Pitt Lake, just north of both DiRp 5 and 6 and a little south of Bridal Veil Falls. The first and second panels are below an overhang, and the third is located on the recessed wall of a sheltering niche. All are easily reached from the water by sloping rock ledges. The most southerly panel is the most faded (Fig. 8). Two bird figures are apparently intended, each with a round head depicted in profile and a single circular eye and short, sharp beak. The triangular body of one is barely traceable. Instead of wings, both appear to have long thin arms, which in one figure appears to end in two and three digit hands. Similar arms and three digit hands can be seen on the second such figure. This discrepancy in the number of digits may very well be due to the severe fading which makes tracing the lines uncertain. The lower portions of both figures have disappeared entirely. Near one hand of each figure is an oval. Other curved lines are present but no recognisable design could be traced. The right side of this panel has disappeared beneath black lichen which our brushes could not remove.

The second panel on a neighbouring rock face is perhaps the clearest and most pleasing to view (Fig. 9). Neatly placed on a smooth lightly coloured rock surface are two more "bird-men" in active poses. Both have the same round heads and eyes and short beaks. The uplifted foot of one figure is somewhat flattened, much like the webbed foot of a water bird. In fact, their whole appearance is duck-like. Their bodies are triangular, or, as only

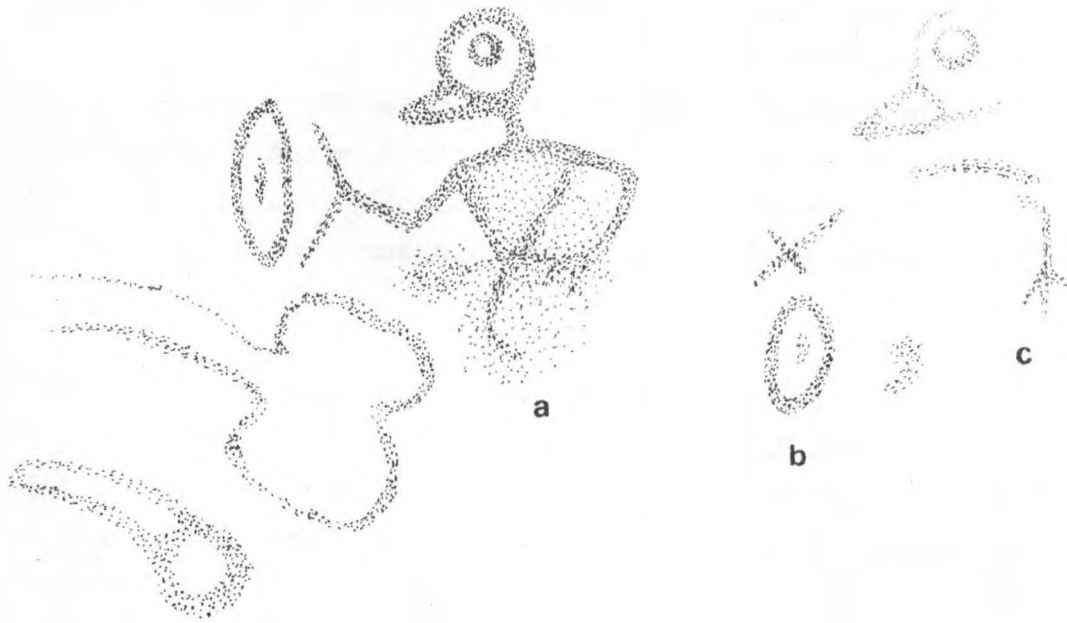


FIG. 8. Pictographs at site DiRp 1,
panel A. Panel is approximately
2.5 meters in length

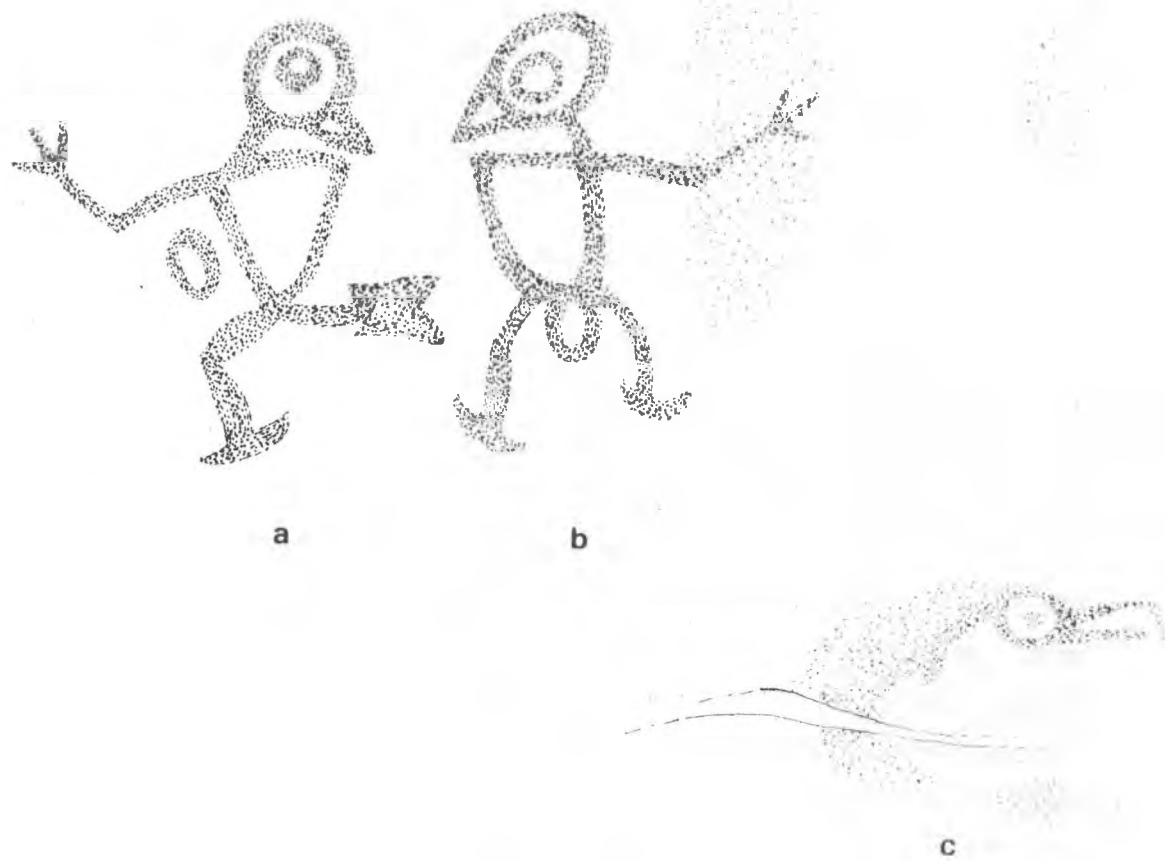


FIG. 9. Pictographs at site DiRp 1,
panel B. b approximately
1 meter tall

one three-fingered hand is shown for each, possibly "stick-like" with the other arm bent at the elbow and touching their waists. Both are associated with ovals (no central dots), one of which rests between the first figure's elbow and knee, and the other between the legs of the second figure. They are painted with an orange shaded pigment. The edge of a protecting rock ledge above these figures is heavily coated with dark red paint while a nearby ledge contains vertical strips of the same colour. Below and to the right of the bird figures is a third creature with a round head, dotted eye and long sharp beak which curves downwards. The body of this figure is red, but faded and little form can be determined.

A small dry niche in the granite outcrop several meters to the right of the previous group provides some shelter for part of the third panel at this site (Fig. 10). The clearest of these seems to represent a crescentic canoe containing two vertical figures. Above this is a heavy curved line with a thick stem. There are a few indeterminate smudges near the canoe and on the more open rock surface outside of the protection of the niche and badly damaged by water stains and rock weathering is what appears to have been a human figure. The "stick" body and two arms, each with a five fingered hand are the only discernable lines. Beyond, and still more exposed a second such figure is indicated by a dull red stain and a single traceable arm with three digits. Figures a and b appear to be a faded red colour, while c is orange-red.

Site DiRp 11

This site is located approximately 31 meters north of DiRp 1 and is well hidden from view. Traces of a "winged figure" with a nearby oval and central dot are all that can be determined although this may once have been a fairly large and well detailed site (Fig. 11d). It is damaged by both weathering and lichen growth.

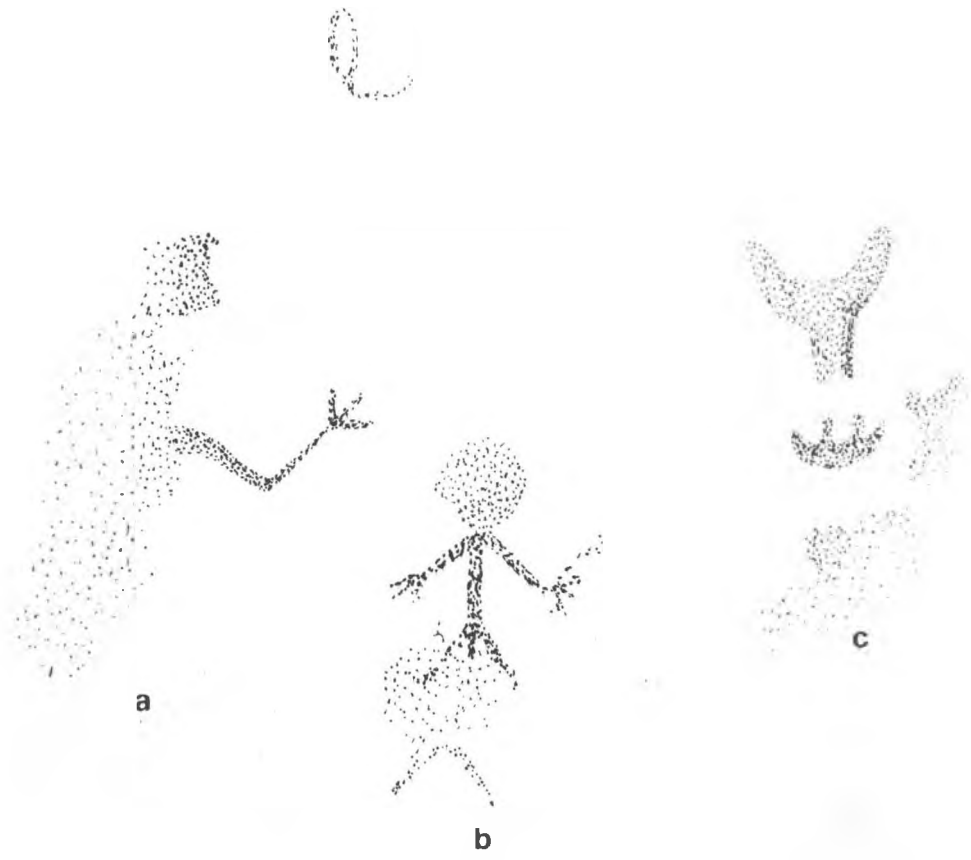


FIG. 10. Pictographs at site DiRp 1,
panel C. Panel is approximately
3 meters in length

**a****b****c****d**

FIG. 11. a, pictograph at site DiRp 10, (15 centimeters in width). b, pictograph at site DiRp 8, (45 centimeters long). c, pictograph at site DiRp 7, (30 centimeters in length). d, pictograph at site DiRp 11, (panel approximately 4 meters in length)

Site DiRp 10

This small site is located just to the south of DiRp 7. The design is basically that of an oval with traces of other lines on the rock face nearby. It is some 2.5 meters above high water and is in poor condition. (Fig. 11a).

Site DiRp 7

This site is situated on the western shore of the lake, north of Bridal Veil Falls, but south of Cedar Point. The rock surface is roughly textured, contains some lichen and is lighter in colour than the rest of the cliff face. The only design which could be found is a 30 centimeter long three-pronged red figure resembling an arm with three digits at one end (Fig. 11c). It is neither accessible nor readily observable. Because it is at least 6 meters above the high water level of May, the painting was likely made during either May or June when advantage could be taken of the extra height, although even then, a canoe and a long stick for applying the paint must have been a necessity. The paint is orange-red.

Site DiRp 8

This site, the most northerly to be found on the western shore of the lake, is just north of DiRp 7 and approximately one-sixth of a mile south of Cedar Point. The design (Fig. 11b) is approximately 4 meters above May high water and is located on a light section of rock which stands out clearly. The clearest figure is that of a three-spoked circle, centred on the light rock face. Above this is a partly spalled pattern remaining only as a broken and faded stain of orange-red pigment. As with DiRp 7, it is most likely that the painting was made in May or June when advantage could be taken of the higher water levels.

Site DiRp 9

This site, the only one to be found on the eastern shore of Pitt Lake, is located on a vertical rock face a few meters from the modern cabins at Deer Point. It is about 3 meters above high water and is easily accessible from the water via the rock ledges below it. The painting due to a relatively exposed position is fading, particularly in its lower portions. The design (Fig. 12a) is that of an anthropomorphic figure with a round head, circular eyes and mouth and prominent eyebrows which meet over the nose. Two pointed ears are quite noticeable. The body had faded considerably but the figure seems to be standing erect with arms outstretched at shoulder height. The hands each seem to have five fingers. The figure is most similar to the anthropomorph at site DiRp 5 (Fig. 4c). An orange pigment was used.

CONCLUSIONS

Similar design elements recur at the various sites along the shores of Pitt Lake. The most frequent motif is the prominent headed anthropomorphic figure which, when considering all nine sites, occurs a total of 17 times. These figures with their circular eyes, internal structural details and three to five digits would seem to link the Pitt Lake paintings with similar figures in paintings to be found in Coast Salish and Kwakiutl territories along the Northwest Coast. For example, a figure at Orford Bay, Bute Inlet (Fig. 12b) is almost a duplicate on that found at DiRp 4. Similarly, one at Antonio Point, on Maurelle Island (Fig. 12c) is reminiscent of both figure c at DiRp 5 and the upright anthropomorph at DiRp 9. (Fig. 12a). The crescent-shaped canoe at DiRp 1 (Panel C-c) is also very similar to many depictions of canoes to be found along the coast. It is the opinion of this writer that the style of the pictographs on Pitt Lake is more coastal than interior in its affiliations, and this is perhaps to be expected as Pitt Lake falls



FIG. 12. a, pictograph at site DiRp 9, (approximately 1 meter in length). b, pictograph at Orford Bay, Bute Inlet, (dimensions unknown). c, pictograph at Antonio Point, Maurelle Island, (approximately 40 centimeters wide).

within Coast rather than Interior Salish language area. The "bird-men" at DiRp 1, however would appear to reflect a local design. While birds of all kinds are a common Northwest Coast subject, these of Pitt Lake are quite unique. Possibly, they were inspired by the waterfowl population for which the lake is known.

The Katzie people in 1936 related to Diamond Jenness a local myth which mentions either one or all of sites DiRp 5, 6, 1 and 11. In this story, a supernatural being, sent to put the world in order, discovers a lazy people inhabiting the west side of Pitt Lake just opposite Goose Island. This being punishes the people by "making them sink beneath the water". As a warning to others, their customs were painted on the rocks for all to see (Jenness 1955:28-9). There is little to suggest the customs of lazy people at the sites in question, but the tale reveals that the Katzie people, or at least the shaman who was Jenness' informant, knew of the paintings. Similarly, in the side of the mountain above DiRp 9 is a large cave said to be the home of the thunderbird (Suttles 1955:18) which was the guardian spirit of a famous Katzie warrior. It is possible that the pictograph, while not actually depicting the bird in question, may none-the-less be connected with this myth. The guardian spirit quest, common to all Coast Salish peoples, may well have been the motive behind the paintings.

The colour of the paint used can be roughly classified as either red, orange, or orange-red, the latter falling between the other two. Two distinct pigments, red and orange appear together at sites DiRp 1, 5 and 6, which suggests that different portions of these sites may have been painted at different times.

Of all the sites recorded, DiRp 5, 6 and 1 were by far the clearest and perhaps most striking. They are also the easiest to reach and therefore are most likely to be threatened by vandalism. While none of the sites as yet show any damage other than natural weathering, the increased development of the lakeshore will mean

that more people are likely to come to know of the paintings' existence. With this in mind, a recommendation for protection of the three sites mentioned above has been sent to Victoria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nelson Oliver, an archaeology student at Simon Fraser University, and Desmond Lundy were invaluable in this survey. The pictographs were initially brought to our attention by Mr. Oliver, a resident of the area, who was concerned about possible damage to the paintings as the lakeshore becomes increasingly open to development.

