Chapter Three: THE NON-NATIVE PRESENCE

The first contacts between the Nuu-chah-nulth and outsiders occurred north of the study area, outside Nootka Sound. An initial brief encounter with a Spanish vessel under the command of Juan Pérez in 1774 was followed four years later by the arrival and month-long stay of Captain James Cook. This event was to have major repercussions all along the Northwest Coast. The discovery that the soft brown sea otter pelts obtained from the Nuu-chah-nulth could be exchanged for enormous profits in China led to an influx of trading vessels along the west coast. For a few brief decades, until the inevitable depletion of the sea otter populations, the Nuu-chah-nulth were in frequent contact with European and American traders. During this time they acquired great quantities of European goods, with those of metal being particularly in demand.

European discovery and exploration of Barkley Sound occurred during this early period of the maritime fur trade. Captain Charles William Barkley in the British trading vessel *Imperial Eagle* sailed into the sound in 1787. He named the sound after himself, and a number of prominent landmarks, such as Cape Beale, after members of his ship's company. His anchorage was off Effingham Island, which he called Village Island because of the presence of a large Native settlement (*Huumuuwa*; Fig. 10:5). Effingham (still known locally as Village) Island is one of the outer islands of the Broken Group, only a short distance from Benson Island. In the following year, Captain John Meares in the *Felice Adventurer* sailed into the sound to trade for furs and anchored near the same village. The American trader Robert Gray, in the vessel *Washington*, also arrived off the Broken Group in 1788 and traded with the Nuu-chah-nulth, who came out to his ship in several canoes. In the following year he entered the sound and noted two villages, although his journal does not specify their locations (Inglis and Haggarty 1986: 29).

The Spanish, under the command of Don Francisco Eliza, explored the coast south from their fortified settlement in Nootka Sound. In 1791, José Maria Narvaez, commander of the vessel *Santa Saturnina*, was sent to explore and map Barkley Sound, which the Spanish termed the "Boca de Carrasco" (Wagner 1933: 146). The Spanish officers noted that this was the most densely occupied region that they had encountered, stating that it "contained more Indians than Nuca [Nootka] and Clayocuat [Clayoquot]" (Wagner 1933:149). This

suggests that Barkley Sound had a population of over 8500 people, as the Spanish had estimated that Clayoquot Sound was home to about that number (Wagner 1933:145–6). The map produced by the 1791 expedition (B.C. Archives, Maps Collection CM/A1414; see McMillan 1999:189) shows the general outline of the sound with the two major clusters of islands. Five Nuu-chah-nulth villages were noted on the map, with the only one in the Broken Group clearly being the village of *Huumuuwa* on Effingham Island. No settlement was indicated for Benson Island.

In 1793 Captain Josiah Roberts arrived in the *Jefferson* and began trading, visiting a number of villages throughout the sound. The ship's crew wintered over near the head of Toquart Bay, on the western side of the sound in Toquaht territory. An unpublished journal kept by the first officer, Bernard Magee, describes trade interactions with the Nuu-chah-nulth of the region. Relations were often strained, and at one point thefts from the ship led to violent retribution, as the crew of the *Jefferson* attacked the village of "Seshart," where they ransacked the houses and took several of the best canoes, apparently killing several people in the process (Magee 1794; Inglis and Haggarty 1986:46). "Seshart" (an early rendering of *Ts'ishaa7ath*, or Tseshaht) may refer to a village along modern Sechart Channel, which would be near the *Jefferson's* anchorage, but as this would have been prior to the amalgamations which led to Tseshaht dominance over this area it seems unlikely that any such village would have had that name at this early time. Also, Magee's reference to traveling six miles from the ship to the village would place this incident in the outer Broken Group. It seems likely that "Seshart" refers to the village of Ts'ishaa, which would be our only early historic reference to this major Tseshaht community.

The next ship to arrive was the *Ruby*, under Captain Charles Bishop, in 1795. It sailed into the western portion of the sound, probably into Ucluelet Inlet, to trade. By this time the fur trade was in decline, as the sea otter had been hunted to near extinction along this part of the coast. There is no record of another European trading ship arriving until 1817, when the French vessel *Le Bordelais*, under command of M. Camille de Roquefeuil, sailed into the eastern channel of the sound. With the exception of this last encounter, the Nuu-chah-nulth of Barkley Sound had minimal

contact with outsiders for about half a century following the brief flurry of activity in the maritime fur trade.

A resumption of trade was brought about in the 1850s by the demand for dogfish oil, which was required for lubrication by the developing lumber mills in the Fraser Valley and Puget Sound. A number of trading schooners, primarily American, called into Barkley Sound to trade for dogfish oil, which the Nuu-chah-nulth were industriously catching and processing in large quantities. Dried salmon and fur seal hides were also traded for European goods during this time (Scott 1972: 75).

European settlement in Barkley Sound proceeded slowly. By 1860 the first trading post had been established by Captain Stuart at Ucluelet (Inglis and Haggarty 1986: 62). The 1861 chart of Barkley Sound prepared by Captain Richards, a Royal Navy surveyor, shows five trading posts, including two in the Ucluelet area and one on Gilbert Island, in the Broken Group (Scott 1972: 73). Other short-lived commercial enterprises in the sound include a fishing station at Effingham Island in the Broken Group and a copper mine on Tzartus (Copper) Island in the Deer Group, both established in the 1860s.

After British Columbia entered Canadian confederation in 1871, attention turned to the aboriginal land issue. In 1874 Dr. Israel Powell, the newly-appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs, sent George Blenkinsop to Barkley Sound to gather information on Nuu-chah-nulth land use and their preferences for reserves. By this time the Tseshaht were primarily resident along the Somass River in the Alberni Valley, although *Hiikwis* on Sechart Channel was noted as their winter village and several sites in the Broken Group, such as *Huumuuwa*, were being used as fishing stations (Blenkinsop 1874). In 1882, Peter O'Reilly, the reserve commissioner, visited each of the Barkley Sound groups and allocated reserves. He assigned the Tseshaht a total of nine reserves, with by far the largest being on the lower Somass River, where most of the band resided (O'Reilly 1883). Of the remaining eight reserves, two are on Alberni Inlet (one, however, was sold early in the twentieth century), three (including *Hiikwis*) are on the upper shores of Barkley Sound, and three are in the Broken Group islands. The latter consist of *Huumuuwa* on Village Island, *Kakmakmlh* on Keith Island, and *Tl'ihuuwa* on Nettle Island. The Benson Island sites of Ts'ishaa and Himayis do not appear to have been occupied during either the

Blenkinsop or O'Reilly visits and the land was not assigned as a Tseshaht reserve, allowing title to pass to non-Native owners.

Ownership of Benson Island has changed hands several times over the past century. The land of what was then called Hawkins Island was first alienated in 1893 by John Webb Benson, who completed the purchase of the island (for the grand sum of $33) in 1903 (Wallbank 1991). Benson built a hotel on the site of Himayis (Fig. 18) and had fruit trees and a garden, along with a meadow for his oxen, on what is today the open area of Ts'ishaa. He lived on the island until his death in 1913. Somewhat later the Colonist newspaper in Victoria reported that Hawkins [Benson] Island: "Had a hotel that was well worth visiting. There were about ten acres cleared and a portion of it was planted in garden and orchard to supply the hotel. The island and hotel are owned by Mrs. Benson, widow of an old-time sealing captain and one of the early pioneers of the West Coast of Vancouver Island" (Scott 1972: 198).

Despite Benson's occupation of the island, the Tseshaht continued to make occasional use of their traditional home. The surveyors' notes and map prepared for Benson's 1903 purchase indicate several "Indian houses" at the western end of Ts'ishaa, as well as an "Indian shack" at Himayis. These would have been temporary shelters, rather than the large multi-family structures that once stood at the site. They were still being used at the time Benson was there, according to Wallbank (1991: 1), which may account for their location at the far western edge of Ts'ishaa, as far removed from Benson's home and gardens as possible.

By 1920 the island belonged to Judge Alfred Clarke, who spent his summers there. Judge Clarke hired Delmont and Elizabeth Buck, who lived on the island year-round with their family, to be caretakers of the hotel and farm. Buck built a barn for the cow and horse sent out by the judge, plus small structures for pigs, chickens, and rabbits (Wallbank 1991: 6). Concern about their children in this isolated location, however, led the Bucks to move to Alberni in 1922. In 1937 ownership of the island passed to Judge Clarke's son, Hugh Clarke. After Clarke failed to pay the taxes on the land, Benson Island was purchased at auction by Kyle W. Kendall in 1955 (Wallbank 1991: 8). The final private owner of the island was William Garden of Seattle, who purchased it in 1962 and constructed a small summer home there. The hotel had been dismantled and had largely disappeared by that time. Only a few minor traces remain today of the

Figure 18. The Benson home and hotel constructed on the site of Himayis.

buildings constructed by these late occupants of the island.

Finally, in 1975, the island was purchased by the Crown as part of the newly-declared Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. All the islands of the Broken Group were included as one of the three units of the Park, the others being the Long Beach area (northwest of Barkley Sound) and the west coast lifesaving trail (southeast of Barkley Sound). Cabins and other traces of recent occupation were systematically removed by Park employees to enhance the "wilderness" experience for Park visitors. The sheltered waterways of the Broken Group, with their scenic beauty and abundance of wildlife, became a favoured destination for an increasing number of boaters and kayakers. On Benson Island, the open area of Ts'ishaa became a campground for these visitors, one of a limited number of such facilities within the Broken Group. Part of the recent co-operative initiative between the Tseshaht and Parks Canada involves plans to relocate campsites from Ts'ishaa and other major village sites to locations of less archaeological significance, as well as to increase visitor awareness of the importance and vulnerable nature of these heritage sites.