

G'psgolox Pole

Return and Renewal

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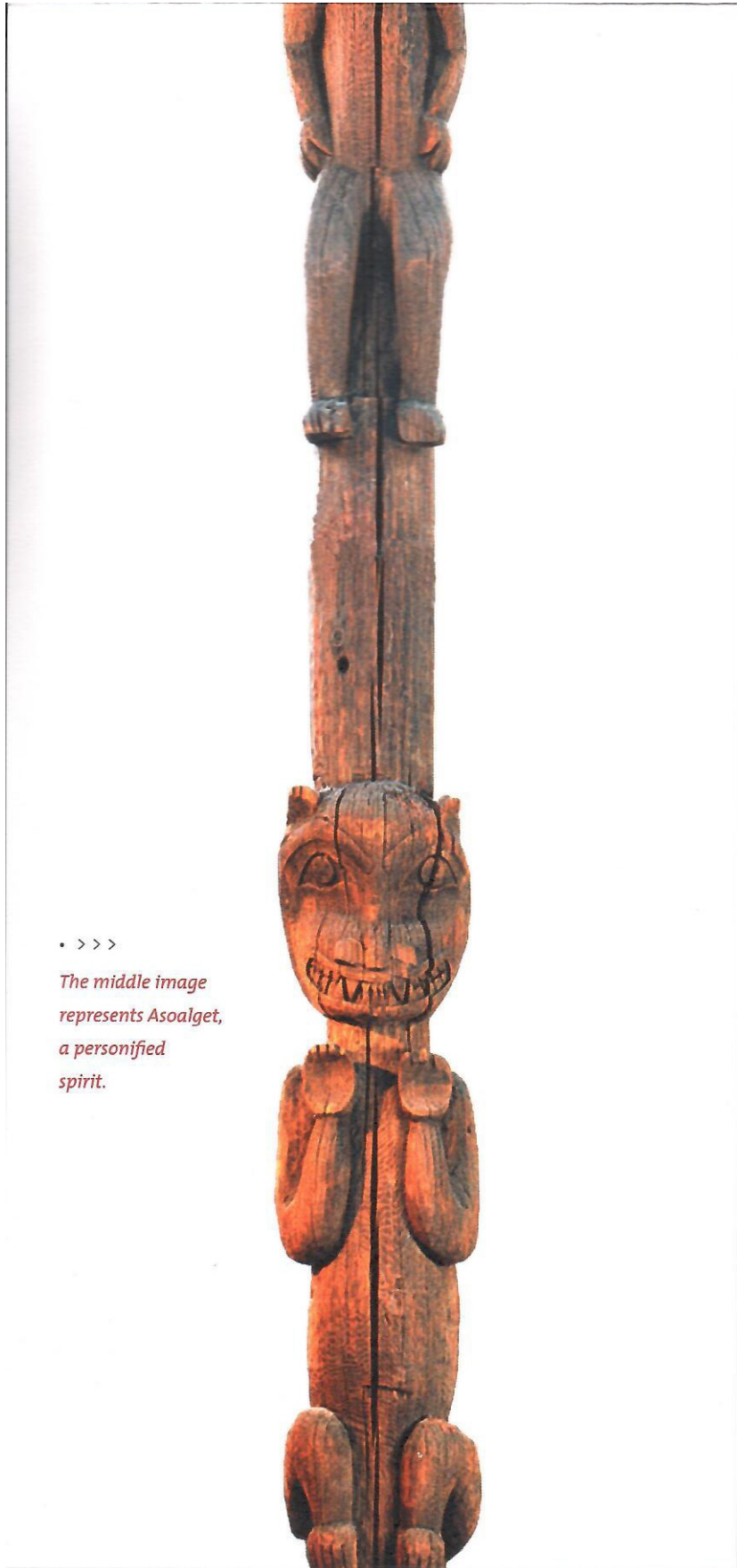
In 1872, Chief G'psgolox of the Haisla commissioned the carving of a totem pole to commemorate an encounter with the mythical being Tsooda. In 1929, the pole was cut down at Misk'usa, a village in the Kitlope Valley on British Columbia's North Coast, and sold, under dubious circumstances, to the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, Sweden. After 62 years, the Haisla discovered its whereabouts and in 2006 finally repatriated the totem pole to its homeland. This marks the first time ever that a totem has been brought back from overseas.

The return of the G'psgolox totem pole has become a catalyst for cultural revival and renewal. Haisla children and future generations will be able to see, touch and feel a piece of their history, reclaimed by a nation who persevered against all odds.



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*The top image of
the totem pole
represents the
good Tsooda Spirit.
He wears a hat
that revolves on
his head.*



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*The middle image
represents Asoalget,
a personified
spirit.*



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*The bottom image
represents a mythical
grizzly bear living
under water.*

The legend. Long ago, when G'psgolox was Chief of the Kitlope people he suffered a great loss, losing all of his children and all the members of his tribe. These deaths filled him with great grief. One day, he set off into the woods where the Tsooda Spirit revealed himself, asking the Chief why he was so sad. G'psgolox told Tsooda about his woes and Tsooda showed great compassion by giving him a piece of rock crystal. He told G'psgolox to go back to his dead people and bite a piece out of the rock. G'psgolox did so and called out to his people up in the trees. The dead people returned from the trees—alive. He observed Zola among them and realized the Zola Spirit had brought his people back to life. From that day on, G'psgolox was a great medicine man. Before healing someone he first took a bite out of the rock that the Zola Spirit had given him.

A journey of a hundred years, a journey of thousands of miles.

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- 1872 Chief G'psgolox (Paddy McDonald) of the Eagle Clan hires Humdzeed and Wakas, both of the Raven Clan, to carve the totem pole in Misk'usa, a village in the Kitlope Valley.
- 1924 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (of England) requests the preservation of totem poles in B.C. and in response the Department of Indian Affairs is "commissioned to take up the matter, perhaps to buy out the totem poles in the Skeena River."
- 1927 On Dec. 16, Iver Fougner, the Indian Agent in Bella Coola, requests permission from the Department of Indian Affairs for Mr. Olof Hanson, Swedish Consul in Prince Rupert, to purchase the G'psgolox pole, stating that the "chances are that the pole, if not removed, after some time will fall down and be destroyed."
- 1928 On Jan. 11, the Department of Indian Affairs permits Fougner to sell and export the G'psgolox pole given that "the Indian reserve was uninhabited and very isolated..." and "provided that the Indian owners are willing to dispose of it."
- 1929 The pole is transported to the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, where it is erected in the open and exposed to wind and weather for approximately six months.
- 1929 The museum moves to Djurgårdsbrunnsvägen in Stockholm and there the pole is placed horizontally in an unheated storeroom where it remains for more than 40 years.
- 1975 The museum moves to temporary premises while a new facility is built. The pole undergoes conservation work due to dry rot.
- 1980 On March 25, the pole is erected in the new climate controlled building of the Museum of Ethnography after being stored at Beckholmen with the warship Wasa.
- 1991 On Dec. 1, a Haisla delegation arrives

Reverend

In Stockholm to meet with museum officials and announces its wish to reclaim the G'psgolox pole. Repatriation negotiations begin.

- 1992** *In October, the Haisla and Xanaksiyala people sign a declaration claiming ownership of the G'psgolox pole.*
- 1993** *On Nov. 26, Mike Harcourt, then British Columbia's Premier, sends a letter to Mrs. Brigit Friggebo, Minister of Culture for Sweden, requesting the return of the totem pole.*
- 1994** *On Feb. 24, the Swedish Government grants permission for the totem pole to be presented as a gift to Kitamaat Village Council.*
- 1994** *On Aug. 16, the totem's homeland is designated as the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy Protected Area, the world's largest unlogged coastal temperate rainforest watershed.*
- 1997** *A Haisla delegation returns to Sweden on Oct. 25 for the third time and the museum agrees to return the pole on condition that it is placed in a climate-controlled facility.*
- 2000** *In May, with support from Ecotrust Canada and the Na na kila Institute, four Xanaksiyala carvers begin to carve two replica poles, one to be sent as a gift to Sweden and the other to be erected at Misk'usa, the location of the original totem.*
- 2000** *In August, a ceremony to celebrate the raising of the new replica pole at Misk'usa is held. The second replica pole, partially carved, is sent to Stockholm and awaits the carvers.*
- 2000** *The Xanaksiyala carvers travel to Sweden in September to complete the carving of the replica pole inside the Museum of Ethnography.*
- 2004** *The National Film Board of Canada releases "Totem: The return of the G'psgolox Pole," directed by Gil Cardinal, at the Vancouver International Film Festival in September.*
- 2005** *The Government of Sweden agrees to*

Return and

return the G'psgolox pole after pleas from G'psgolox descendants for its immediate return.

- 2006 On March 8, the old totem pole in Sweden is taken down and placed in a transport box.
- 2006 On March 14, the replica pole is raised outside the museum in Stockholm.
- 2006 The G'psgolox pole leaves Gothenburg harbour on March 23 to cross the Atlantic and travel through the Panama Canal to Tacoma and then Vancouver.
- 2006 On April 26, Chief G'psgolox (Dan Paul Sr.) welcomes the return of the pole to Vancouver, where it is temporarily displayed at the UBC Museum of Anthropology.
- 2006 A gala hosted by the Vancouver Foundation on May 17 celebrates the return of the G'psgolox pole.
- 2006 The Government of Sweden officially gives back the G'psgolox pole at a ceremony at the U.N. World Urban Forum in Vancouver on June 19.
- 2006 After an absence of 77 years, the G'psgolox pole returns to Kitamaat Village in Haisla territory on July 1.

Coming home The Na na kila Institute and Haisla Totem Pole Committee are working to raise capital to build the G'psgolox pole's permanent home, Q'adilas. For more information on how you can help build a new home for the G'psgolox pole, please contact the Na na kila Institute:

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