COPPER FACT SHEET

CONCEPTS OF WEALTH

What does it mean to be wealthy? To most people, being wealthy means being rich; having lots of money with which one can acquire valuable possessions and property.

For the Kwakwaka'wakw, the wealthiest people are those who not only accumulate the most stuff, but also give it all away in a potlatch, as a sign of their ability to do so.

COPPERS – WHAT IS A COPPER?

For the Kwakwaka'wakw, the copper symbolizes wealth. Each copper has its own name, history and value.

Coppers were used along the Northwest Pacific Coast. They were originally made from native copper, or placer copper, which was obtained from Alaska and the Nass River. After contact with Europeans, coppers were made from smelted copper which was considered inferior.

Sometimes a Chief would break a copper to show that he was so wealthy that he could afford to damage such a valuable object. The value of a copper rises each time the copper changes hands. The purchase of a copper, its sale or destruction, are all events that occur at a potlatch.

Find more information about coppers in the website section, *"Potlatch"*

All coppers had names. Listed below are the names of seven coppers:

T̓łakwadzi – "great copper"
T̓łakwak̓alaga – "copper noise woman"
T̓łakwagadakw – "copper bodied"
T̓łakwak̓angalis – "long copper in the world"
T̓łakwagila – "copper maker"
*** Galgatu** – "long top"
*** Max̱'inux̱dzi** – "Great Killer Whale" copper

* These two names are taken from "*Smoky–Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed*" by Bill Holm (1983:62, 64)

Coppers also had names for their specific sections much like the body parts of a person as listed here:

T̓łakwa – copper
Ugwame' – face
Ga'las – 'T' of the copper (cross–piece)
U'x̱sde' – whole lower part of copper except the 'T'
Unut̓łame' – sides of the face of the copper
Unut̓saxsde' – sides of lower part of copper excluding the 'T'
K̓alta – cut off with a chisel
Kukwa – break in two