

JAMES TEIT DOCUMENT ON ROCK PAINTING

Compiled by Grant Keddie, Curator of Archaeology, Royal B.C. Museum, 1982.

The following typescript is from a handwritten letter sent in 1918 by James Teit of Spence's Bridge, to Francis Kermode - then director of the Provincial Museum of Natural History [now the Royal B.C. Museum]. The original is in the James A. Teit Papers, Mss M3689 in the Glenbow Alberta Institute Archives. It is not known who typed the version I have. I have re-typed it to make it available electronically. The typescript is double spaced on four legal size pages. I have single-spaced it, but did not make any other changes. I left miss-spellings, grammatical errors, the one bracketed word "Render", and some very long paragraphs.

This is an important document, as it was written after Teit had traveled widely and had studied several First Nations groups in greater depth. By 1918, he would have had a better perspective on a larger body of knowledge on the subject of rock paintings, than he had at the time of writing his earlier publications. Because it is not edited we can see Teit's constant (but important) concern with qualifying his statements.

At the end of his Notes, Teit gives references to some of his publications. Here is a fuller version of those references:

Teit, James. 1900. The Thompson Indians of British Columbia, Vol. 1, Part IV, The Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Edited by Franz Boas. Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Teit, James. 1909. The Shuswap, Vol. I, Part VII. The Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Edited by Franz Boas. Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Teit, James 1906. The Lillooet Indians, Vol. II, Part V, The Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Edited by Franz Boas. Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

**"NOTES OF ROCK PAINTINGS IN GENERAL". By: J. A. Teit,
Spences Bridge. 1918.**

Rock Paintings are quite common throughout the Southern Interior of British Columbia, in the whole country between the Cascades and the Rocky Mountains, wherever inhabited by Interior Salish Tribes and Kutenai. Further north among the Athabaskan Tribes of the Interior they are much less common, and seem to decrease in number toward the north. They are also on the whole scarce on the Coast. They are plentiful to the South in the Interior of Washington, Idaho etc. Many of the Rock Paintings in the Southern Interior of B.C. and to the South have been sketched or photoed or both. This Seymour Arm painting conforms to the general type of the Rock paintings of this region, and has no striking feature of any kind. I don't know what the Indians living nearest to this Rock painting say of it, but they will likely disclaim knowledge of its history and also of the exact meanings of the pictographs. This does not cause surprise to persons acquainted with the general origin of these Rock Paintings.

These paintings are to be found in places as cliffs over looking or close to Lakes and Streams, near Waterfalls, within and around caves, on the walls of canyons, natural amphitheatres, and on boulders near trails etc. Generally they are in lonely or secluded places near where Indians were in the habit of holding vigil and undergoing training during the period of their puberty ceremonials when they generally acquired their manitous.

These places were resorted to because they were considered mysterious and were the haunts of "mysteries", from whom they expected to obtain power. The Mysterious forces or powers of Nature were believed to be in greater abundance and strength at these places and the novices desired to imbibe power and knowledge from these sources to help them in after years. They went through excercises, purified, supplicated, slept, prayed, fasted and held vigil at or near these places so as to obtain as much as they could of this power.

At the expiration of the training (or sometimes also during same if they had any vision or experiences considered extraordinary or specially important) the novice painted pictures on cliffs or boulders near by (or at)

these training places wherever rocks with a suitable surface for painting on , could be found. Where these did not abound very few paintings are made, or the paintings were done on small smooth stones, or on debarked tress etc. The paintings made were largely in the nature of records of the most important of the novice's experiences whilst training, such as things seen in peculiar or striking visions and dreams, things obtained or partially obtained as manitous or guardians etc., things wished for or desired to be obtained, things actually seen during training or during vigils which were considered good omens, actual experiences or adventures of the novice, especially those in connection with animals etc.

By making paintings of these things on rocks the novice believed they would [Render] such powers (or manitous etc.) they had attained (or obtained) stronger and more permanent, and what they desired to attain (for instance to be a shaman, warrior, proficient hunter etc, etc.) or to obtain (as a certain Manitou, or certain powers and benefits etc., etc.) more easily and quickly obtainable.

The common paint was vermilion earths or red ochres (native paints obtained in many parts of the country in abundance). It was generally mixed with melted animal fat and applied with the point of the index finger. Red was the color almost always used as it was symbolic of life, goodness, good luck etc. etc. Black, yellow and white colors were only very rarely used, and no other colors as far as I know.

Paintings of manitous and men were also sometimes made in certain places near camps or overlooking paths and routes (on land or water), by which enemies of evil (such as certain sicknesses or harmful things) might approach. These pictographs by reason of this connection with the manitous or guardian spirits of the people who made them were believed to help in the protection of the latter.

Still other paintings made occasionally were of a monumental and historic character either marking the spot where certain important happenings took place (such as battles etc. etc.) or narrating or recording in a pictographic way some event important in the life of the person (or in the lives of the people) who made them. Occasionally also persons when they saw (or though they had

seen) something supposed to be supernatural or some monstrosity or some ghostly thing, drew a picture of it red partly it seems to protect themselves from possible harm, and partly to obtain power from it or obtain it as a manitous. These pictures might be made any place.

Indians also frequently painted pictures on rocks which were thought to be metamorphosis beings (originally human or semi-human, or semi-animal or semi-god like in character) concerning which there were stories in their ancient mythological tales or traditions. These rocks are generally boulders corresponding roughly to human and animal forms or to parts of the body etc. or rocks worn into peculiar or fantastic forms or various kinds suiting in some way the story that is told of them. By painting on them power in some degree it was thought might be obtained from them or their spirits. It will thus be seen that all the large rock paintings were made by several or many different individuals (male & female) at different times. Some individuals made only a figure or two and other a number. Thus one person did not know exactly the meaning of the figure painted by another, because he did not know the other person's dreams, experiences, etc.

He might guess at the meaning and also might know that certain figures represent certain things, but of their connection one with the other he could not be sure. A person who saw the pictures of say a basket and of a Sun painted on a rock would probably know that the pictures represented these things, but beyond that he would know nothing with certainty. He would surmise that the basket was painted by a girl as a record of the sample basket she had made during her ceremonial training at puberty (at this time girls made samples of all kinds of work they might be expected to make in after life) or because she desired to be expert in basket-making in after years. So with the figure of the Sun. He would surmise a young man painted it either because he had acquired it as a Manitou, or desired it as a Manitou, or dreamed of it. Different forms of the sun or lines connected with it might enlighten him as to which of these reasons was the correct one. People usually made their painting in secret and alone, and often offer prayers when making them. Some individuals depicted the object they desired to record, by painting figure clearly, whilst other who were poor in the pictographic art, painted figures so carelessly and rudely that other people had great difficulty in making out what they represented. In

places where older figures had faded or become indistinct, Indians often painted over these. On some rocks which were favorite places for painting. So many figures had been made by many persons at many times that the whole cliff had been covered with figures which so ran into each other and over each other that there was no more room left to paint any more. In cases like this the pictures had become so intermixed and confused very few of them could be made out clearly or understood. On some cliffs where the surface of the rock within easy reach had been completely covered, young men sometimes made ladders and put on their paintings above the others. In some cases young men suspended themselves with ropes, to make their paintings out of ordinary reach or in some striking place. The lower part of the cliffs, overlooking Lakes were generally painted from canoes. Striking natural phenomena (such as eclipses etc.) if they occurred during the person's training were frequently recorded by painting on rocks. Rock paintings in different places vary a great deal in age, as also do very often the different pictures on the same rock. As far as the Indians know rock paintings have been made from time immemorial and until lately. A number of old men and women still living have made them. It may be said the practice of making these paintings commenced to fall into disuse about 60 years ago. Of course, some have been made since then, and paintings are still made occasionally on small smooth stones and pebbles. Probably most of the rock paintings now to be seen are between 60 and 100 years old, but some in places where the rock or their situations are favorable to the preservation of the paint, no doubt are very much older. Some Indians believe that many of the larger and older rock paintings are not the work of human beings, but are pictures made and shown by the mysteries, or powers, or spirits of the places where they are to be seen. It is said that in some places these pictures appear and disappear and in some places different pictures appear at different times. For some printed information re Rock paintings in general, and certain particular rock paintings and their meanings see Teit - "The Thompson Indians of British Columbia" plates XIX and XX (photos and sketches of Rock Paintings from 13 different places are here given with explanations of the figures as far as possible) also Teit "The Shuswap p. 591. Teit "Notes on the Chilcotin Indians" (appendix to the Shuswap fig. 280) Teit "The Lillooet Indians plate IX. Teit Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist. VIII p. 227. etc."