



WRANGELL COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION
Shakes Island Renovation Project

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Wrangell Cooperative Association Takes down Shakes Island Totem Poles for Refurbishment

Master Carver Wayne Price to Assess Damage

Wrangell, Alaska – 09/19/2011 Over a series of three days – August 29, 30, and 31, 2011 – the Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA) took down most of the totem poles on Shakes Island for refurbishing. Many of the totems also needed to be moved in order to replace the tribal house. Others were leaning and threatened to fall on the house during the typical fall and winter storms.

The three days of activities began with ceremonies on Shakes Island on August 29, 2011. Leading the ceremonies were Marge Byrd, Dawn Hutchinson-Stevens, Virginia Oliver, and Joel Churchill. Master carver Wayne Price, here assisting with the project from Haines Alaska, and other local tribal members also participated while a small audience watched the event. Among the audience was a descendent of Baron Ferdinand von Wrangel, for whom the town is named.

Traditionally, totem poles are left to return to the earth naturally so there is no specific Tlingit ceremony for taking them down. The elders, who were dressed in Tlingit regalia, spoke to each pole while brushing cedar boughs, used traditionally in ceremonies, across the poles. “We told the poles that they had to come down, that they are rotting,” said tribal elder Marge Byrd. “We told them that we’ll fix them up. We needed to prepare them.” The ceremonies concluded with the arrival at high tide of a barge, owned and piloted by local Gary Allen, bringing heavy equipment to use in taking down the totem poles over the next several days.

The first totem poles were taken down on August 30, 2011 beginning with the three smallest poles: the Bear Up the Mountain totem, the Double Whale Crest Hat totem and the Undersea Bear totem. Because they are small, these totems did not require the use of the large crane located on Gary Allen’s barge. At high tide, the barge arrived at the Northwest corner of the island and tied up to a previously placed anchor buoy. The crane was attached to the Eagle totem, which is not in the way of construction but was ascertained by master carver Wayne

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Price as needing repairs. After digging around the base with the back hoe and then tugging with the crane for several minutes, the totem was finally cut through at the base with a chain saw. The Eagle totem was then secured to the front of the barge and then brought to the West side of the island and laid on the lawn behind the tribal house. The barge and crane then departed for the day.

The pair of Chief Kadashan totems, the Crane totem and the Red Snapper totem, were taken down by crane on August 31, 2011. Again arriving at high tide, Gary Allen this time brought the barge and crane to the East side of the island. These totems have been leaning a little more each year and came out easily with a little side-to-side motion from the crane. They were also laid on the lawn behind the tribal house.

The Three Frogs totem is newer and located away from the tribal house. It is now the only totem left standing on Shakes Island.

Photos available upon request.

About Shakes Island

Shakes Island is located in the harbor at Wrangell, Alaska and contains the Chief Shakes Historic Site, a National Register site that receives over 10,000+ visitors a year. The island stands as one of the few lasting reminders of Southeast Alaska Natives and their unique totemic art. The site's main feature is a replica of a 19th century Tlingit tribal house which is set on the authentic location historically occupied by Chief Shake's lineage. Not only is the site important to the national chronology of Native-white contact, it is still used today for Tlingit ceremonies and contains the prized clan artwork – at.óow – of the Stikine Tlingit s. Shakes Island is owned and operated by the WCA.

About the Shakes Island Renovation Project

The Shakes Island tribal house was completed in 1940 built by collaboration between the CCC, the Forest Service and the local Tlingit tribe. Except for minor repairs, no major reconstruction has taken place to the structure. Because the tribal house is listed on the National Historic register, the replacement timbers must be hand adzed. Master carvers from other communities are overseeing and training locals to complete the adzing. The old structure needs to be dismantled and then a new structure erected in its place with the hand-adzed timbers, new electrical and a new roof of split cedar shakes. The totem poles on the island also need to be refurbished. When the project is complete, a celebration of project completion will be held. Learn more or make a donation to the project at www.ShakesIsland.com.

About the Wrangell Cooperative Association

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Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA) is the federally recognized tribe of the Stikine River region. WCA's charter was approved by the Department of the Interior in 1942. The tribe's mission is to support the cultural, ceremonial and subsistence lifestyle for all Alaskans and to promote the safe use and availability of a healthy environment for present and future generations. WCA provides social services, employment and educational opportunities to both the tribe and the Wrangell community. Of the 2,000 residents of Wrangell, approximately 800 are tribal members.