

CLOSE TO HOME

THE CHINOOK, A CEDAR CIVILIZATION

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

The long-tapered canoe slides through the water with the grace of a dolphin. Sleek. Handsome. Ancient yet modern in design. A work of art.

This is the matrix of a proud and tenacious civilization that nearly disappeared before our eyes. They persevered. This is Chinook (or “Tsinuk”) at its very best.

The giant cedar tree was picked by the elders and the esteemed carver, an artist among the proud peoples of the Northwest coast. The tree rose like twining hands from dark fertile soil, from black loam that lay near the water, Pacific water, or its tributaries. A blessing was passed from the

natives to the tree. An explanation for the transformation of its life was laid at the roots of the 200-foot cedar.

There was no clearcutting of entire forests by these First Peoples. The trees were hand-selected for building a lodge, a totem or canoe — one here, one there. Often planks were wedged from the north side of the cedar. After half a dozen of the broad boards had been carefully extracted, the tree was left to grow and prosper. Nutrition still flowed up the uncut section of that tree.

If a seeker is lucky enough to walk in these preserved forests, he or she may run into the giants, still tall and vital, the scars mostly covered up by age. Native women would peel

Continued on Page 7



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

