

## Reviews

---

**Coast Salish Essays.** By Wayne Suttles. Vancouver: Talon Books, (elsewhere) Seattle & London: University of Washington Press. 286 pp. \$30.00 Cloth. \$14.95 Paper.

With this book, anthropologist Wayne Suttles presents a compilation of 16 essays he produced over a 30-year period. Ten of the essays examine the Central Coast Salish, five the broader Coast Salish and the final one on the Interior Salish of the Plateau. *Coast Salish Essays* is a book easy to fault but equally easy to recommend. It is perhaps the only volume that examines often-overlooked Coast Salish culture in a breadth of fascinating topics (e.g. beliefs concerning the sasquatch or 'bigfoot,' introduction of the potato, the interconnection between art, power and prestige, and the position of potlatching within culture). Such discussions fall outside a straight ethnography and are well suited to presentation in essay form.

The Coast Salish occupied much of the territory from southwest British Columbia through southwestern Washington State. Suttles conducted his principle field work from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s among the peoples he calls the Central Coast Salish. These groups, more than 15 in all, resided from the lower Fraser River valley to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and traditionally spoke two related Coast Salish languages, Straits (or Lkun-geneng) and Halkomelem.

The initial four essays explore aspects of the Central Coast Salish social system, delving into the interconnected webs of potlatching, marriage alliances, resource variation and fluctuation, and social status. The essays, when originally penned, were designed to challenge misconceptions about those topics on the Northwest Coast and are therefore heavy with cross-cultural

comparisons. At that time they were pioneering. Now, to those who have benefited from their place in the literature (each of these essays has been published from one to three times over the past 20–30 years), they must seem to be common sense.

All essays appear as they were originally published or given as papers. There are no individual introductions to the four parts into which the essays are divided, and there is frequent repetition between essays, especially in introducing who the Central Coast Salish are. It is the absence of little new information throughout the volume that will disappoint specialists working in the area—there is no wealth of Coast Salish data added in support of Suttles' positions. To put the essays into perspective, the readers should examine Wilson Duff's ethnography, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser River of B.C.* (British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1952).

Suttles' use of the label 'Central Coast Salish' should not be confused with its use by linguists who are referring to a larger area, including within it the Twana and Puget Sound Salish to the south and Squamish, Sechelt, Pentlatch and Comox speaking peoples to the north. Unfortunately, Suttles appears to be out of his area of expertise when he extracts supporting examples from the larger group, having particular problems with the geography and people of southern Puget Sound. In one case he states that the Puyallup lived inland and therefore probably depended more on roots and bulbs than did neighbors who lived on the Sound. In reality, the main village of the Puyallup people was at the mouth of the Puyallup River. Its residents and those of other downstream housesites on or near Commencement Bay had ready access to saltwater resources, either near their homes or on nearby Vashon Island. Other Puyallup villages located upstream throughout the Puyallup River drainage basin also gathered marine resources, including trips to the Sound specifically to gather octopus. This failure to note the effects of upstream versus downstream residence carries through in discussions of the Central Coast Salish. Although Suttles preaches that ecology led to social and cultural diversity among the various cultures of the Northwest Coast, he does not appear to view the Coast Salish with the same eye for diversity in politics, ceremonialism and social organization.

Suttles gives perhaps the best description of the link between ownership and leadership among the Coast Salish. However,

some of his other comments on politics are puzzling. He claims, at the time of white contact, the Central Coast Salish groups had "few significant cultural differences" among them (p. 161n), lacked any formal political organization, and that their villages might have lacked social cohesiveness, in-group feeling and internal social control. These assertions do not fit well with Duff's work or ethnographies on adjacent Coast Salish groups. For example, Coast Salish communities probably all had some internal social controls (including ways to punish certain offenses). Additionally, most Fraser River tribes had "[c]lose kinship among the male nucleus of [the] population, common environment and economic activities, common history, awareness of common traditions, [and] political unity based on a recognition of a main leader and tribal boundaries" (Duff, 1952:87).

Essays 7, 14 and 15 deal in different ways with the location of the Salish homeland and what Suttles calls an "anthropological myth" concerning the recent emergence of the Coast Salish. He suggests that the Coast Salish were not merely borrowers of coast culture, following a comparatively recent migration to the coast, but rather have been in the coastal Northwest Coast area for as long as anyone; cultural differences were the result of different habitats and social organization.

Suttles' work in this area is very important at this time. In western Washington State the archaeological record is being used against Coast Salish tribes to deny access to artifacts. For example, the Steilacoom Tribe of Pierce County was informed that although artifacts were uncovered on a sewer project along the Steilacoom River (now called Chambers Creek) they cannot be those of Steilacoom Indians because they are of too great an antiquity and of a different type than ethnographic Steilacoom artifacts.

Suttles rejects claims that the Coast Salish moved into the area after Northwest Coast culture was already developed. Although his main theory is that Salish homeland was in the Puget Sound/Strait of Georgia area and that the Interior Salish split off and moved inland, he does allow that movement may instead have been westward. Westward movement would match existing oral tradition that holds that the Indians of southern Puget Sound and below entered western Washington over Cowlitz Pass and Cowlitz Prairie. Such movement would not invalidate Suttles' arguments concerning the Coast Salish and vol. development.

If they entered into the area at a time prior to the movement of the Nootkan and Chimaukuan groups onto the Olympic Peninsula, they would have developed their own coastal culture independently. Movement from the interior to the coast would also explain the archaeological record which shows earlier stone implements but later wood/stone tools and a corresponding shift from game animals to fishing. As Suttles points out, the Coast Salish were in place for a considerable time and underwent a series of phases.

The writing found in *Coast Salish Essays* tends to be in a popular style. Notions are often vague rather than explicit. For example, Suttles speaks of one group being "hosts to" another, leaving it unclear whether the visitors stay in the hosts' houses, camp in or adjacent to the host's village, or camp in an area of their own with the acknowledgment that they are allowed to do so by the group owning the territory. Other times he fails to make consistent statements regarding the vast number of related cultural factors he addresses. For example, in Essay 2 we are told that high status comes from sharing food. This appears to contradict Essay 1, where we were told that high status comes from being born into the right family.

Production problems with the volume, such as the maps (used as endpapers) being printed in the wrong order, are of minor consequence. Of major impact, to the specialist and layperson alike, are the failure of the index to list all occurrences of an entry and the absence of a detailed map of the Central Coast Salish peoples and their territory.

Fortunately, most of the problems outlined above do not detract from the majority of the arguments or the overall usefulness of the book.

*Nile Thompson*

Steilacoom Tribal Museum and University of Washington

**Phoenix Indian School.** By Robert Trennert. Los Angeles: Indian Press, 1984. 345 pp. \$23.50 Cloth. \$8.95 Paper.

The *Phoenix Indian School* is must reading for every American Indian and anyone interested in the American Indian.