

Americas (Northwest Coast)

Select the caption you wish to read from the index below or scroll down to read them all in turn

Americas (Northwest Coast)

- 1 - Cedar bark waistcoat
- 2 - Shaman's rattle
- 3 - Raven rattle
- 4 - Feasting dish
- 5 - Feasting dish
- 6 - Feasting dish
- 7 - Crooked Beak of Heaven (*Galokwudzuwis*)
- 8 - Portrait figure
- 9 - Spoon
- 10 - Feasting dishes
- 11 - Silver Pendant
- 12 - Bowl
- 13 - Feasting spoon (*sdláagwaal xasáa*)
- 14 - Pendant amulets
- 15 - Bowl
- 16 - Feasting spoon
- 17 - Feasting spoon
- 18 - Feasting spoon

- 19 - Feasting spoons
- 20 - Bow and arrows
- 21 - War club (*chitoolth*)
- 22 - Whalebone club (*chitoolth*)
- 23 - Adze head
- 24 - Scraper and maul head
- 25 - Crest pipe
- 26 - Panel pipe
- 27 - Model crest pole
- 28 - Model crest pole
- 29 - Model crest pole
- 30 - Model crest pole
- 31& 33 - Fish hooks
- 32 - Jig-hook
- 34 - Trolling hooks
- 35 - War club
- 36 - Beaver-tooth gouges
- 37 - Wood-working tool
- 38 - Wood-working tool
- 39 - Labret
- 40 - Painting of Whale
- 41 - Basketry-covered flasks
- 42 - Chief's Box Killer Whale

- 43 - Harpoon cover
- 44 - Canoe paddle
- 45 - Basket (*t'cayas*)
- 46 - Baskets
- 47 - Burden basket
- 48 - Bark beater
- 49 - Clothing element
- 50 - Cedar bark cape

1 - Cedar bark waistcoat

Mid-1990s

Nuu-chah-nulth nation

The waistcoat and shaman's rattle below were presented to Graham Searle in June 1998, a local museum volunteer. He was named Tic Ma (teech mah) which means 'generous heart' and he became the Keeper of the Totem Pole.

2 - Shaman's rattle

Joe David (born 1946), late 20th century

Nuu-chah-nulth nation

This shaman's tool enables him to communicate with ancestral spirits. Benevolent spirits were called upon to help provide strength and guidance when needed.

3 - Raven rattle

Early 1900s

Heiltsuk or Nuxalk nation

Used by a chief when dancing. The body depicts mythological figures; a raven with a frog in its beak. A shaman lies on the raven's back, his tongue is connected to that of a kingfisher. Two frogs sit on the shaman's chest. The underside is carved and painted like the face of a hawk.

4 - Feasting dish

Voyage of HMS America, 1845

Nuu-chah-nulth nation

The feast dish was used to contain the delicious fish oil of eulachon or smelt. This dish is associated with potlatch feasting, and was treasured by the families who owned them. This particularly old dish is carved with a wolflike form that relates to the Nootka's winter ceremonials.

5 - Feasting dish

"Allan Laka" (date unknown)

19th century

Tsimshian nation

Feasting dish in the form of a sea lion or a beaver made from yellow cedar wood. A label on this item states that the carver, who was possibly from Kitkatla, Porcher Island, was the last of his people to be baptised by the Church Missionary Society.

6 - Feasting dish

19th century

Kwakwaka'wakw or Tsimshian nation

A red cedar wood dish carved in the form of a flounder. In the Kwa'kwala language, pa-ees is the word for flounder.

7 - Crooked Beak of Heaven (*Galokwudzuwis*)

Godfrey John Bruce (Born 1966)

Carved in 1998

People believe that from the beginning of time supernatural beings existed. Hamatsa is a related ceremonial dance that consists of characters and bird-monsters who inhabited the sky world.

8 - Portrait figure

19th century

Possibly Heiltsuk nation, west coast of British Columbia

This seated male figure is wearing a high collared garment, edged in red. The hairstyle and features are European. Such figures were often carved specifically for potlatch presentations.

9 - Spoon

Probably Freddie Alexcee (1853-1944)

Tsimshian nation, Skeena River region, British Columbia

This spoon is painted in a European style by a Tsimshian artist who fused traditional and Western art forms. It depicts the Beaver, the first British Columbian trading vessel for the Hudson's Bay Company.

10 - Feasting dishes

18th century

Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

These frog-styled dishes would have held candlefish oil for important occasions like potlatch. The black stain was created by the oils, which suffused with the wood over time.

11 - Silver Pendant

Marcel Russ (Born 1973)

Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

A symbol of wealth, stability and communication, a frog's croaking is believed to bring good fortune. This piece was purchased for the museum by the late Mrs. Mavis White who was involved in the Totem Pole project in 1998.

12 - Bowl

Late 18th/early 19th century

Salish, Wishxam/Wasgo region, Columbia River Plateau

This elaborately carved bowl with its raised ends and designs of interlocking triangles was used for ceremonial purposes. It differs from figural imagery employed by people in the more northerly regions.

13 - Feasting spoon (*sdláagwaal xasáa*)

19th century

Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

A two-piece horn spoon made for someone important. The handle and bowl are carved separately and are joined with three copper rivets. The effects of European contact have meant that we don't know what the figures represent.

14 - Pendant amulets

Voyage of HMS Discovery, 1791-5

Tlingit nation, southeast Alaska

Two bear-tooth amulets. The first is carved in the form of a wolf. The other is incised with three X marks and a line of short strokes, a ladder-like design and a line crossed with short strokes.

15 - Bowl

Voyage of HMS America, 1845

Salish nation, west coast of British Columbia

Bowl made of mountain sheep horn. The underside of the handle is decorated with incised lines.

16 - Feasting spoon

Before 1863

Kwakwaka'wakw nation, northern Vancouver Island

The figure on the handle may represent a human in spirit form. This goat horn spoon might have come from the Fort Rupert, Quatsino or Nimpkish areas.

17 - Feasting spoon

Collected between 1863 and 1866

Kwakwaka'wakw nation, northern Vancouver Island

A spoon of mountain goat horn carved with the head of an unidentified animal. The process of making dishes, bowls and spoons from horn involved steaming and shaping in a mould before carving.

18 - Feasting spoon

Late 18th/early 19th century

West coast of British Columbia

A steam-bent goat horn spoon decorated with a handle finial. This was originally part of the Devon & Exeter Institution collection, which was later transferred to this museum in 1872.

19 - Feasting spoons

Collected before 1869

Likely Tsimshian nation, west coast of British Columbia

Two spoons painted to represent animals, possibly a salmon with its mouth closed and a killer whale with its mouth open. Spoons like these were made specifically for potlatch feasting.

20 - Bow and arrows

Voyage of HMS Destination, 1863-6

Barclay Sound, Vancouver Island

Bow with bowstring of twisted sinew and two arrows with long metal fore-shafts and two-feather flights.

21 - War club (*chitoolth*)

Voyage of Captain George Vancouver, 1791-5

Nuu-chah-nulth nation, Nootka Sound

The head is carved in the form of an eagle with eagle head-dress and inset with abalone shell. Whalebone clubs were common all over the coast after European contact and was traded into the interior regions of British Columbia.

22 - Whalebone club (*chitoolth*)

Voyage of HMS Discovery, 1776-80
Nuu-chah-nulth nation, Nootka Sound

After European contact, the eagle-headed club became the most popular all over the coast. This early example was collected by Captain James Cook in 1778 on his third voyage.

23 - Adze head

Collected early 20th century
Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

Adze head documented as having been found on Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), historically Haida territory. It is not known how this item was obtained.

24 - Scraper and maul head

Collected early 20th century
Ogden Point, Victoria, Vancouver Island

A scraper of iron socketed into a carved length of bone or antler. Excavated at Ogden Point, which is historically Salish territory.

25 - Crest pipe

Made between 1820-1862

Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

A finely carved argillite pipe made for sale to Russian, American and European visitors. There is no cultural meaning to the order of the crest figures depicted. From the top, killer whale, frog, wolf, hawk, small human figures, and a wolf again at the mouth.

26 - Panel pipe

Made between 1830-1860

Haida nation, Queen Charlotte Islands

Section of a ship-panel pipe depicting a stylized tobacco leaf, two cascading bunches of tobacco berries and a dancing sailor. This pipe is made of argillite, a soft carbonaceous shale found only in Haida Gwaii.

27 - Model crest pole

Late 19th century/early 20th century

Kwakwaka'wakw, Vancouver Island

The word totem is derived from the Ojibwa word nintotem, which means 'my family sign.' Totems serve as family crests in that particular mythological personalities have strong associations with specific clans. The word totem has mistakenly been used to refer to guardian spirits.

28 - Model crest pole

Early 20th century

Tlingit nation

An ivory model of a full-size pole by William Ukas to honour Kohlteen, a Kiks'adi chief.

From top: Person of the Glacier, Frog, Elder Raven 'teaching' Younger Raven, Killisnoo the Beaver (who was a chief's pet) with a small frog.

29 - Model crest pole

Kakasolas (Ellen Neel)

Made in 1956

Kwakwaka'wakw nation, Alert Bay

This pole represents Eagle and Bear. It was given to the donor in 1956 as a leaving present from fellow teachers at a school in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

30 - Model crest pole

Bought 25 June 1916

Made by Chief Johnson

Tlingit nation, Ketchikan, Alaska

This model is based on Chief Johnson's original crest pole, which was carved in 1901 and stood at a height of 17 metres. This model was sold to tourists through the Indian School at Ketchikan.

31& 33 - Fish hooks

Collected between 1863-1866

Barclay Sound, Vancouver Island

These bentwood fish hooks are of a type that were in use until the 1950s in the southern and central coastal areas. These so-called 'halibut hooks' were also used for catching cod and dogfish. They were made from spruce or fir tree.

32 - Jig-hook

Collected between 1863-1866

Barclay Sound, Vancouver Island

This is a jig-hook for catching cod and salmon. Jigging is a method of luring and catching a fish whereby the hook is jerked upwards at intervals on the end of a line in order to simulate the movement of its prey.

34 - Trolling hooks

Voyage of Captain George Vancouver, 1791-5

West coast of British Columbia

Bundle of four trolling hooks. Trolling hooks were baited and attached to lines to attract fish by the way they move through the water when trailed behind a moving vessel.

35 - War club

Late 18th/early 19th century

Haida nation

A whalebone club, carved on both sides in the form of a salmon, a staple food. In mythology, salmon were thought to be immortal beings who lived in an ocean house. Their role was to offer themselves to people as food during their annual migration.

36 - Beaver-tooth gouges

Late 18th/early 19th century

West coast of British Columbia

Carving tools each made with a beaver incisor bound to a wooden handle with sinew and skin. The sharp edge was used to carve and gouge grooves, the smooth back to polish wood and the outer edge to sharpen knives.

37 - Wood-working tool

19th century

Nuu-chah-nulth nation

A single cedar shaving remains preserved between the blade and handle of this adze. Collected by the Reverend Dyson between 1885 and 1889 when he sailed around the world.

38 - Wood-working tool

Voyage of HMS Discovery, 1776-80

Kwakwaka'wakw nation, possibly Nootka Sound

The figure on the handle has been identified as an eagle or a hawk. Recent research in British Columbia suggests that the tool is of Kwakiutl origin (Gwa'yi) and comes from the Kingcome Inlet area. Collected by Captain James Cook.

39 - Labret

No later than the 19th century

Haida or Tsimshian nation, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia

This oval labret was worn inserted through a slit beneath the lower lip. Labrets disappeared from use in the north between 1805 and 1825.

40 - Painting of Whale

Patrick Amos (Born 1957)

24 June 1998

This was used for the Na-yii-l invitation to the dedication ceremony for the museum's totem pole. The Killer Whale is associated with a large dorsal fin and black and white design. This animal is held in awe for its size and power.

41 - Basketry-covered flasks

Late 19th/early 20th century

Nuu-chah-nulth & Makah nations

European glass vessels covered in tightly twined sedges. These were made for sale outside the originating community.

Collected by Edgar Dewdney, who was Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories.

42 - Chief's Box Killer Whale

Tom Paul (born 1979)

20 June 1998

Nuu-chah-nulth nation

This painting represents a chief's bentwood box for the purpose of storing important goods that include ceremonial regalia. The box is made from one piece of wood that is steamed and bent into shape, hence bentwood.

43 - Harpoon cover

Late 19th century

Northwest Coast, west coast of British Columbia

Harpoon cover made of strips of woven red cedar bark.

Collected by Reverend F J Dyson 1885 – 1889 when he sailed around the world.

44 - Canoe paddle

Voyage of HMS America, 1845

Salish nation, Discovery Bay, Washington State, U.S.A.

Wooden canoe paddle with T-shaped handle butt. Collected by J D Agassiz at Discovery Bay, Strait of Juan de Fuca.

45 - Basket (*t'cayas*)

Early 19th century

Salish nation, Fraser River region, British Columbia

The geometric design represents butterflies, one of several traditional motifs. Bundle coil construction of cedar root strips with a tucked overlay design in red cherry bark.

46 - Baskets

Late 19th/early 20th century

Nuu-chah-nulth nation, west coast of Vancouver Island

A collection of small baskets in cedar bark and other, as yet unidentified, vegetable fibre in checker weave, plain weave, single-pair twining and wrapping.

47 - Burden basket

Early 19th century

Salish nation, Fraser River region, British Columbia

Holes at the rim show that the straps were attached to carry the basket slung over the back. Burden baskets were used to carry loads. Their method of manufacture strengthened the basket's purpose.

48 - Bark beater

Collected 1863-1866

Northwest Coast

Carved from whalebone, this item was used to beat the inner bark of the cedar to separate layers of bark and to soften the fibres. It was used at right angles to the lay of the fibre over a large flat sturdy base.

49 - Clothing element

Late 18th/ early 19th century.

Interior Athapaskan or Tanaina nation

This item was traded with the Tlingit. It consists of a length of grey-black leather with a 'stepped mountain' pattern in dyed porcupine quill. It would have been attached horizontally to a leather shirt in parallel with similar length strips.

50 - Cedar bark cape

Voyage of HMS America, 1845

Makah nation, Cape Flattery, Washington State, U.S.A.

The cape was woven from the beaten inner bark of the yellow cedar tree. Once edged with sea otter fur that now remains only in fragments, this garment would have been worn by a person of nobility. Collected by J D Agassiz.