

## The Story Poles

These two story poles are not meant to be “read” as linear accounts but rather suggest key figures and themes in associated legends. Both embrace the concept of protecting natural resources from insensitivity and greed.

In the wake of shipping his story poles to the Department of the Interior in spring 1931, Haida carver John Wallace sent an explanation of the poles’ iconography. What follows are detailed descriptions and versions of the two associated legends, all in Wallace’s own words. *The Chief’s Daughter* is a morality story about the consequences of treating others cruelly. *The Raven* is a cautionary tale about false pretenses.

### The Legend of *The Chief’s Daughter*

“It was a custom in the old days for every tribe to have a chief. This chief gave advice and counsel to old and young. One of the things the people taught their children was never to tease or make fun of any of the living creatures. Of course, the children were told that something awful might happen to them if they did treat cruelly these innocent creatures.

The chief had one child, a daughter who had heard all of the things that might happen to a person for doing wrong things, but she was not satisfied with what she heard. She wanted to prove these statements.

“One day she went down to the beach, found a bullhead [fish] and began to make fun of it by calling it names and trying to make it eat a stick. The next day she went down to the beach again. While down there, she met a man who told her to come with him. This man had power to change himself into a bullhead fish and to do the same to the girl. Here he changed himself into a bullhead and showed the girl how pretty he was and took her to his home out in the sea. The girl rode on the back of the bullhead to his home.

“For two days the chief hunted for his daughter and finally gave her up as dead. He then put on a coat of the finest of feathers which was used by the chief to signify that he was going out to die. As he walked along the beach in mourning, he noticed some whale killers\* [in] the water. He called to one to help him find his daughter. The whale killer came near the chief and told him to get on his back. It was not long before the whale killer arrived at the home of the bullhead where they found the chief’s daughter. His daughter had been turned into a bullhead. It was too late for him to get his daughter. She had such beautiful designs that the chief decided to go home at once and make a bullhead blanket for his wife in memory of his daughter.”



INTR 02447

### Iconography of *The Chief’s Daughter*, as related by John Wallace

- ◀ The daughter of the chief
- ◀ A fish known to the Indians as bullhead [similar to catfish or sculpin]. In this story, the fish represents the creatures of the world in which life exists.
- ◀ The chief, father of the daughter. The hat he is wearing is one which the chiefs wore when they were in great trouble.
- ◀ A whale killer.\* In this story, the whale killer acted as a messenger for the chief to find his daughter.

\*Historical note: While the carving resembles a seal, the whale killer in this context is believed to be an orca/killer whale.

### Iconography of *The Raven*, as related by John Wallace

- ▶ The Raven is the good spirit. He is thought to have been the creator of the world, the maker of the creeks, trees, and all living. Some of the very old Indians looked on the raven as a god.
- ▶ The daughter of the spirit of the creek. Note the fish in her hair.
- ▶ The bird represents the creek watchman and is a servant of the spirit of the creek. The bird is a friend of man and the salmon. It warns the spirit of the creek of oncoming danger to the salmon from wild animals and frogs. In order to protect the salmon at spawning time, it will fly over the water and cause it to rain. This raises the waters in the creeks and drives the bears and other fish-eating animals away from the spawning grounds and thus protects the fish.
- ▶ The spirit of the creek [has] the spirit of the salmon in his ears. He is the ruler of the salmon and the creeks. The frog in his mouth is an enemy of the fish and is being destroyed by the spirit of the creek.



INTR 02446

## The Legend of *The Raven*

“This story is an old legend supposed to have happened in or near the vicinity of Hydaburg, Alaska. A raven one day was flying over this part of the country and came to a creek. As he flew near the water he thought he heard the laughter of children. Instead of children it was the splashing of the fish in the water. This to the Indians means that the fish are happy and are laughing.

“The raven was getting hungry and wanted something to eat. He wanted a salmon but could not get it. Finally he decided to fly toward the source of the creek. It was not long before he came to a lady, the daughter of the spirit of the creek, who had risen from the water. On her hair, which had the appearance of water lilies, were hanging several fish. When the raven saw how beautiful this daughter of the creek was, he asked her to marry him. This would give him a chance to get all the fish he wanted to eat with very little effort on his effort. The daughter of the creek told the raven that he was too black to be her husband.

“The raven was puzzled. After a bit he thought of a beautiful butterfly whom he knew to be a wonderful artist. He thought to himself. ‘I will hire this butterfly to paint my breast and face with beautiful designs and then ask the daughter of the creek to marry me.’ The raven at once told the daughter of the creek that he would be back to see her the next morning. The raven then went to the butterfly and asked it to paint his breast and face with beautiful designs. This the butterfly did, and the raven went joyously on his way to meet the daughter of the creek.

“When the raven arrived to meet the lady, the raven looked so much prettier that she decided to marry him at once. After they were married, they decided to build a fish smokehouse. After the house was finished, the raven would go down into the water, and sockeye salmon were thrown out on the dry land. They got more than they needed. In cutting the salmon to clean them, they used clam shells for knives. It was not long before they had the house full of fish to dry. As the raven went back and forth in the house he would occasionally touch his head against the fish hanging overhead. This made the raven very angry, and he began swearing. When the daughter of the creek heard the raven swear, she felt very bad about it and decided to teach the raven a lesson. She at once went down into the water, and all the fish that they had put into the fish house became alive and went back into the water. The only thing the raven had to eat was some fish eggs that he had buried. Not long after that, the little birds—servants of her father—came to her and took her back where she was when the raven met her in the creek.”