

his own territory by travelling to it with his uncle, with or without his parents.

Laws Regarding Ownership of Territory:

Under Wet'suwet'en law, feast names are legally related to distinct territory. "When one chief died, whoever took his name would look after the grounds that went along with the name. That is the way it has always been from the beginning of time." (Moses David, Chief Samooh. Aug. 23, 1982). The feast names are passed on from clan member to clan member, and not to someone outside the clan. Thus a feast name is passed from uncle or aunt to nephew or niece, and never from father to son or daughter.

The highest names in each house are the ones that have the ultimate responsibility over the land. Looking after the land involves an extensive range of responsibilities and includes overseeing the burning of the berry patches; regulating how many beaver can be taken from a particular beaver lodge; managing the harvesting of other game, and determining who is granted permission to use the territory. However, lesser names in the clan are associated with the territory entrusted to the high chiefs. The assumption of a name in the clan is a manifestation of the holders right to use clan territory, under the direction of the head chief. "All the name holders belong on all the clan territory." (Alfred Joseph, Chief Gisdaywa. personal communication. January 28, 1987).

When the holder of a title dies, the title and the associated

territory is passed on officially and formally in a feast held by the deceased's clan and witnessed by all the other clans. Any changes in territory, such as giving some up as compensation, etc., must be conducted in and announced at a feast to be valid. Thus the chiefs with jurisdiction over territory often announce who they have added to the list of people registered on the trapline that corresponds to the territory. The people registered constitute a core, but not an exclusive group who have use rights to the territory. Use rights can be extended, with the chief's permission, to all clan members and affines.

No transaction concerning the land is legally binding unless it takes place in the feast. The Wet'suwet'en are out-spoken that if a fellow Wet'suwet'en sells a trap line he or she is acting illegally. No single individual has the right to alienate the territory of the clan. However the Wet'suwet'en find themselves in an awkward situation in which the surrounding immigrants and federal and provincial government accept individual transactions as valid and are only peripherally aware of the feast as the proper mechanism for dealing with any and all transfers of property.

Occasionally the existence of two separate systems of jurisprudence, the Wet'suwet'en and the Canadian governments', puts the Wet'suwet'en in conflict with each other. When this occurs there is unanimous consensus that it is the feast system which takes precedence.