

## THE MOUNTAIN-GOAT

**The Mountain-Goat Myth (Gitksan)** recorded by William Beynon from Isaac Tæns, an old Hazelton chief, in 1920.

The people, after adopting this crest, built a salmon *t'in* (trap) and a huge house. Every year they went to the mountains, and there they hunted the mountain-goat. On one of the trips one of them caught a little mountain-goat. It was crying, and the men took pity on it. He used the fat which he was carrying on himself, and rubbed the little mountain-goat with it; he did the same with his red colouring. Then he turned the kid loose.

The mountain-goats were very angry because of the hunters who were slaughtering their people in large numbers. One day two strangers garbed in robes appeared in the village. They refused native foods offered them, but invited the people of Temlarh'am to a great feast on the mountainside. Children playing nearby saw the strangers eating grass. They told their elders, but when they came out to see, the strangers had stopped grazing, and the elders thought the children were fooling them.

On the way to the feast on the mountainside the people saw a huge house by a clearing, and were invited into it by strange people, among whom was a young man with red paint on his face. He went to one of the guests (the one who had befriended him), and said, "Come, my friend, you shall be my guest." Then the chief entertained his guests with the help of his *halait*. He had food served. The young man with the painted face stayed with his own guest, and when the others were getting ready for bed, he took his new friend aside and said to him, "When you sleep, stay near the end of the wall. I will be next to you." When this guest woke up in the morning, he heard someone telling him not to move. When he looked around he saw the whole side of the mountain fallen away and the house gone. He was worried, for he thought he would die also. But the young man with the painted face said, "I know you. You saved me once, and I will try and do the same for you. I will give you my shoes, with which you will be able to climb down the mountain. When you come to the bottom, take them off, and I will go for them." The guest was at first afraid, but his friend told him to have no fear. He put the shoes on as he was told, and in this way got to the foot of the mountain. Here he saw the remains of all his friends among the rocks. He went on down the mountain, but he was the only one saved of all his people who had been at the feast.

The remaining people at Temlarh'am went to recover the bodies. They knew it was the mountain-goats that had killed their relatives, because the young man with the painted face said to the guest who was saved: "The mountain-goat people are seeking revenge. You saved me once though, and that is why I am saving you."

**The Painted Mountain-Goat (Gitksan)**, communicated by Mr. Coleman, obtained from Gitksan school children of Glen Vowell, upper Skeena River, in 1946.

The boys and girls of the Glen Vowell Indian Day School can see from their windows a sign which they know means: "Be Kind to Animals." The "Umshewahs" or White People who have never heard the old Indian story call it Rocher-de-Boule Mountain. We call it Stekyawden or "The Painted Goat".

A long time ago Indian boys and girls were taught to be kind to animals. They were allowed to kill those they needed for food and clothing, but were never to kill any that they did not need. After a while the people forgot to be kind, and killed many animals that they did not need. Even the boys and girls forgot. One day a mountain-goat was caught and the children took it down to the river.

They made a big fire and threw the goat into it. When it jumped out of the fire they threw it into the river. For a long time they played in this way until the goat was badly burned, cold, and tired. Many older people saw the children, but only laughed at the plight of the poor creature. The Chief's son, Raven-Feather, came along. When he saw the poor goat being dragged about he took it away from the children. "Don't you remember," said Raven-Feather, "that the mountain spirits will be angry if you are cruel?" But the children only laughed at him.

Raven-Feather kept the goat in his lodge until its burns were all healed. The goat's face had been badly burned, and Raven-Feather put some crimson-coloured salve around the eyes. When the goat was better, Raven-Feather took it to its home in the mountains.

While most of the men were away fishing for salmon, three strangers came to the village. They were wrapped in long grey blankets and kept their faces covered even when talking. They invited every one to a feast at the time of the Harvest Moon. The women accepted the invitation and gave them gifts of food. The visitors thanked them and hid the food in their blankets.

One small orphan boy followed the men out of the village. He ran back to tell that when he hid behind a tree the men threw away their blankets and were changed into goats. No one would believe him. When the Harvest Moon came, the visitors returned to guide their guest to a level plain some miles from their village.

A man with crimson circles around his eyes received Raven-Feather and placed him in a seat of honour. All were soon eating heartily of the rich foods provided by their strange hosts. Finally they could eat no more, and fell asleep.

The man with the crimson circles invited Raven-Feather to stay beside him. While they slept the spirits of the mountain changed the surface of the ground, and when the guests awoke they found themselves on top of a mountain. Between them and the grassy plains below were slippery crags on which their hosts were walking.

The villagers tried to climb down, but lost their footing. When Raven-Feather wanted to follow he was stopped. His host, whom he now recognized as the goat he had rescued, took off its shoes and gave them to the boy. With them Raven-Feather was able to follow the goat down the mountain. No one else returned from the mountains. Raven-Feather called the new mountain "The Painted-Goat" in honour of the one who had saved his life.

**The Mountain-Goat of Gitrhahla**, belonging to the "Royal" household of Hale among the Gitrhahla tribe of the Coast Tsimshians on Porcher Island. Dictated to William Beynon by Joshua Tsiyebesæ, at Port Simpson, 1916.

In the neighbourhood of Temlarh'am (On-where-it-is-good), there was a herd of mountain-goats (*matih*) which the people abused and killed. They did not kill them for food, but would cripple and maim them before letting them go. One day, a young Prince of this village was out hunting and came upon a lot of young men abusing a little mountain-goat (kid). When he saw this he became angry and said, "Stop that! These animals will some day return and kill us all on account of the way we are treating them." He took the kid under his arm, went up the hill, and said to it, "Go, my brother, go home where you belong. Do not forget me!"

(The informant explained: in older times, the people believed all animals were capable of doing supernatural things, and were human beings of a superior kind.) The younger people kept on killing and maiming the mountain-goats, although the older people wanted them to stop.

One day, a young man came into the village, entered the house of the chief, and said, "You and all your men are invited to a great feast to be given by a great Chief up in the hills." The chief agreed to go, and the messenger said, "When the day comes, somebody will come down and guide you all to his house." Now this man was a mountain-goat in human shape. Everybody got ready for the big feast, learned new dirge songs to be sung at it, and never inquired who was inviting them or where this chief was. The mountain-goats had used their supernatural power so that they would not ask. When the day came, a few young men arrived at the village and said, "To-morrow we will go up into the hills to the feast, and enter the house of the chief." Early in the morning the people followed the young men who led them up into the mountains. When they came to a large mountain they rested outside and were fed. Among the invited guests was the young Prince who had saved the life of the kid, and as he sat there among his people a young man came to him and said, "Brother, when you go into the house do not sit at the side among your people but at the end. You will sit near me. I have not forgotten you." The young Prince did not know what he meant or who he was.

After all the guests had rested and had eaten something, they wandered about, as the feast and dances would soon commence. They saw that all the houses were made of rock built into the mountains, and all the people who lived here seemed to move about very quickly and lightly. When the Chief who was giving the feast was ready, the guests were called in and were all seated on one side of the house by themselves. When they had finished eating, a dried meat was served which tasted like that of the mountain-goat. Actually it was the dung of the mountain-goat fixed up like meat. When they had finished eating, dancing began. The dancers now entered and all of them wore mountain-goat head-dresses. They were very realistic; even their feet and movements were similar to those of the mountain-goats. "They are like real mountain-goats," the people said. The dancers now sang a song (informant knew it: Mountain-Goat song) in which the singers told how some of their tribe had been crippled and killed and how they would avenge themselves upon the people who had destroyed them. The guests, knowing that these people were mountain-goats and would seek revenge, looked towards the door, but it had disappeared. It was now a solid mountain wall. They could not escape. The leader of the dancers, a big man who had a larger *kalk matih* and larger feet than the others, ran past the guests and jumped over the fire. After he had done this a few times he shouted, "The time has come when we will show you people what we will do." Another song was

sung (informant knew it), and the dancers kept jumping and dancing from one end of the house to the other. The young man who was looking after the Prince said to him: "When the big dancer says, 'I will kick the mountains,' you hold on to me very tightly, and I will save you. Your people are all to be destroyed. Nothing can save them." So the dancer jumped and ran, and said, "I will kick the Mountains," and as he did the whole side of the mountain fell away, and with it the guests, who were all sitting on that side. Only the young Prince, who had done as he had been told by his friend, was saved. He found that he was holding a mountain-goat kid, and that all the people in the house were now changed to mountain-goats. The kid turned and said to the young Prince, "Follow me, do whatever I tell you, and you will be saved."

The Prince did this. He saw that the roads along which they had come had disappeared, and that they were on the edge of a great precipice over which the people and mountain had fallen. The kid then said to the Prince, "The mountain-goats have killed all your people because they killed and abused us and made us suffer. You saved my life once; I will now save yours." Then he led the Prince away, taking him on his back over difficult places. They travelled for several days, and came to a very swift stream (Skeena) across which they wanted to go to the Prince's village. The Prince did not know how he would get across, so the kid said, "I will take off my skin and give it to you, and you will be able to jump across. My hoofs will keep you from slipping on the rocks. You can jump far with my skin. When you get over, you will throw it back to me." This he did, and the Prince took the kid's skin and became a mountain-goat. He jumped across the river with ease. When he had crossed, he threw back the skin to the kid, who resumed it again and jumped across too. They continued their way, and finally the goat said, "On that hill I will leave you. It is near your village." When they arrived there, the kid said to the Prince, "You know now the power of mountain-goats. You must not kill any more than you want for food. You will make a crest of the mountain-goat headdress. You and your family will keep it and wear it." After this the kid turned away and returned to the hills, and the young Prince went on until he found his village. He saw that it was in ruins with only mourning women about. He thought he had been away only a few days, but learned that he had actually been absent 10 years. He told the women what had happened and they sang dirge songs.

(Informant says these are the dirge songs that are always sung in his house. A good many people know them also at Port Simpson.) Later the women married men from neighbouring villages. This young man was a royal Gispewudwade. (Informant states that this crest cannot be used by any *lekahkiget* house, but only in royal houses. It is not the privilege of the Larhmawn (sea-coast) group of the Gispewudwade — the Gitnagun'aks.)

**The Mountain-Goat of Skedans**, according to James Deans (36:56-58).

The mountain goat is a crest of the raven phratry. It is not shown on any of the totem posts at the model village (at the Chicago World Fair, 1893). It is shown as a head with two horns on top of the mortuary column erected to the memory of Chief Skiddance of Skiddance. This column stands in front of one of the houses. The figures on it are as follows: The lowest a bear, Skiddance's crest; the second, the head with horns, showing that he was connected with the society of the mountain goat; the third, on top is the moon; on each side of the column are two little figures of a man and woman. The bear signifies greatness, the goat



Mountain-Goat, at Skidegate



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nobility, the moon height. Altogether the inscription reads thus: "Erected to the memory of the great, the noble and the high Skiddance, Chief of Skiddance, by his daughter and son-in-law, the two little figures." This story of the mountain goat does not belong to the Hidery; it is a story of the same totem belonging to the Cowitchian tribes of Vancouver Island. The name in the language of these people is pe-kull-kun, pe white, kull-kun, wild animal.

*The story.* "There was a time long ago, our fathers tell us, when our people, the Whull-e-mooch (dwellers on Whull, Puget Sound, State of Washington), lived a long way farther south than we their children do now. Northward from the sea coast to the farthest mountains, the whole country as well as the sea was covered with snow and ice, so deep that the summer heat failed to melt it. The old folks tell us that their fathers did not like the land they lived in, but were at a loss where to go. Southward lived a people they feared, because they were stronger than our fathers were; northward the snow and ice as well as the great cold prevented their moving in that direction. While they were discussing what to do, Spaul, the raven god, suddenly came amongst them. After listening to their grievances he said, "I shall soon settle that difficulty." So saying, he turned all the snow and ice into pe-kull-kun, and sent them to make their abode in the fastness of the highest mountains, where there would be plenty of food for them, while their flesh would be food and their hair clothing for the Whull-e-mooch for ever. After the snow and ice had all gone, the climate became warmer and the land drier, which enabled the Whull-e-mooch to move northward to where we, their children, now live and our fathers lived before us."

This tradition is remarkable from the fact that at one time this Pacific slope was covered with snow and ice. This, the ice grooves, which everywhere abound, from the bottom of the



Mountain-Goat totem pole, at Skidegate

sea to the tops of the hills, plainly show. It is not all apparent that the Indians would ever think to associate these ice grooves with a period of snow and ice. It is a tradition of the settlement of this country after the glacial period.