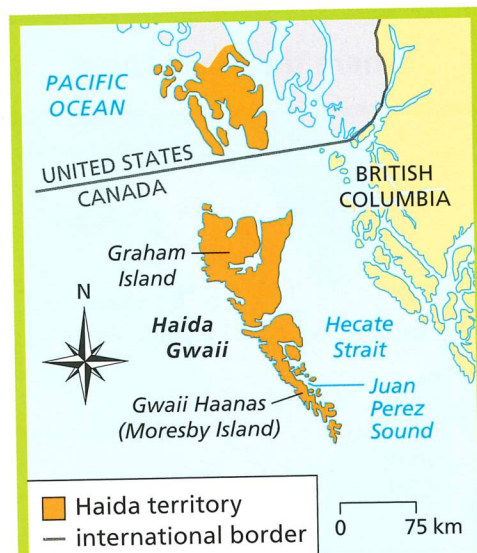


A HAIDA ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE

Where the Haida Live



Haida Gwaii is located off the northwest coast of British Columbia. It is an **archipelago** (a group of islands) in the Pacific Ocean. Haida Gwaii, which means “islands of the people” in the Haida language, is the traditional home of the Haida.

For thousands of years, cedar trees have met many of the needs of the Haida of British Columbia. The Haida developed a tradition of managing their use.

Haida found a way to remove strips of the flexible inner bark without damaging the trees. They used this bark to weave sleeping mats, baskets, and clothing such as hats. For a tree, the inner bark is essential. It helps to transport the nutrients that keep the tree alive. Stripping all the bark from a tree can kill it.

The Haida took great care to leave enough inner bark on a tree so that it could continue to thrive. When strips of bark were removed, women said a prayer to thank the spirit of the tree for providing the bark and to explain what the bark would be used for. **Q:** What do you think would have been the short- and long-term consequences of this practice for the Haida?

“Oh, the cedar tree! If mankind in his infancy had prayed for the perfect substance for all material and aesthetic needs, an indulgent god could have provided nothing better.”

– Bill Reid, *Haida* artist, 1948

Avis O'Brien is a Haida-Kwakwaka'wakw artist who learned to strip bark from a cedar tree in the traditional way, ensuring that the tree continues to be a resource in the future. Avis learned this art from her older sister.



ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACIES

Some of the practices used by early societies continue in many parts of the world today.

Salinization

As in present-day Iraq, salinization continues to be a challenge in many hot and dry areas of the world. Every year, billions of dollars' worth of crops are lost in many countries. **Q:** How do you think these crop losses affect people today?

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This trend [of salinization] is expected to continue unless concrete measures are planned and implemented to reverse such land degradation.”

– Manzoor Qadir, *United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health*

Raised-Field Farming

In swampy, low-lying areas that flooded during rainy seasons, the Maya created raised fields to transform swamps into farm fields. To create the fields, Mayan farmers dug canals in the swamps. They used the soil they dug out to create raised plots of farmland.

The canals provided water for the crops, and the fish in the canals provided natural fertilizer. In addition, water plants harvested from the canals were used as fertilizer in other fields. **Q:** What consequences do you think would result from transforming swamps into farm fields?

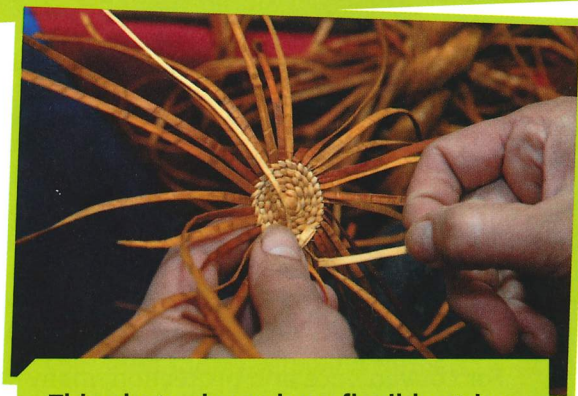


Farmers in parts of Central America continue to practise raised-field farming today.

Culturally Modified Trees

In recent years, governments have recognized the importance of the Haida practice of preserving trees. Trees that were—and are—used and preserved by the Haida and other Indigenous peoples are called **culturally modified trees**, or CMTs. CMTs are now often protected by law. CMTs are used as evidence that Indigenous peoples have lived in their traditional territories for many thousands of years.

Q: Why do you think government recognition of CMTs is important to the Haida?



This photo shows how flexible strips of cedar bark are woven to create items such as hats, baskets, and blankets. This skill is passed down from generation to generation.