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THE DOG'S HAIR BLANKETS OF THE COAST SALISH

The clothing used by the natives of any country before the advent of the white man is of interest alike to the historian and the ethnologist. Climate and environment are the determining factors in the necessity for clothing as well as in the selection of its materials. In the temperate zone the skins of the wild animals of the region are naturally the most obvious source of supply, for this is simply a case of one native appropriating the ready-made covering of another—after he has, in all probability, devoured the original tenant. The first visitors to the Northwest Coast found the Indians usually clad in furs and skins. Some, however, wore a sort of blanket woven from the inner bark of that, to them, blessed tree, the cedar. But many in southern British Columbia and in northern Washington used a blanket made, wholly or in part, of dog's hair.

The references to these dog's hair blankets, which are scattered through the various books of travel to this coast, are so numerous that I propose to gather them together in this short article, in the hope that they may be of use to students of our history and furnish a point of departure for those who wish to pursue the subject further. No pretense is made of a complete or systematic investigation of the matter, nor, indeed, of any special knowledge thereon. Doubtless these peculiar blankets are mentioned by many other visitors besides those whose remarks are now reproduced. This article is merely an amplification of a considerable number of notes which, in the course of desultory reading, have gradually accumulated.

The first Europeans to visit our coast were the Spaniards under Juan Perez in 1774. Accompanying the expedition were two missionaries, Fathers Crespi and Peña, whose special duty it was to record the events of the voyage. Unfortunately, all their observations were made from the ship's side, as no landing was made anywhere on the coast of old Oregon, using that term in its very broadest sense. As their vessel, the *Santiago*, hovered around North Cape, Queen Charlotte Islands, in a vain attempt to enter Dixon Entrance, the Indians, "Pagans," as the reverend fathers called them, came out in their

canoes. Father Peña says, "They had . . . pieces of woven woolen stuffs very elaborately embroidered and about a yard and a half square, with a fringe of the same wool about the edges and various figures embroidered in distinct colors."¹ A little later he mentions that both the men and the women were sometimes clad in their "woven woolen stuff." When the *Santiago* reached the entrance of Nootka Sound, where another vain effort to land was made, the Indians paddled out to the vessel. Speaking of the Nootkans, he says, "We did not see cloths woven of wool amongst them as at Santa Margarita [North Cape]."² The other missionary, Father Crespi, has very much the same tale to tell. The natives of Queen Charlotte Islands, he says, brought out to them, "other coverlets, or blankets, of fine wool, or the hair of animals that seemed like wool, finely woven and ornamented with the same hair of various colours, principally white, black, and yellow, the weaving being so close that it appeared as though done in a loom."³ When at Nootka he reports, "Among these Indians no cloths woven of wool or hair, like those seen at Santa Margarita, were met with."⁴ The Spaniards were only at Nootka for about twelve hours; had their stay been longer they would doubtless have discovered that these people also had woven woolen materials.

Four years later the celebrated Captain James Cook reached Nootka Sound, where he remained from March 29 until April 26, 1778. He found the people clothed mostly in furs, or in what he calls, "a flaxen garment"; though he does say, "They have also woolen garments, which however are little in use."⁵ He hazards no surmise as to the origin of these woolen garments. He does, indeed, add that "Hogs, dogs, and goats have not as yet found their way to this place,"⁶ but this statement, as will hereafter appear, was, so far at least as the dogs were concerned, an error. Ellis, the assistant surgeon of the ships, mentions these flaxen garments, which he describes as "a kind of cloak apparently made of the bark of a tree."⁷ He supposes that the material was "the interior bark of the fir-tree,"⁸ but, as we know, it was in reality the inner bark of the cedar. He also noted the woolen garments: "Some of them [the cloaks] are made of the hair of an animal which resembles wool, but how or

¹ *Peña's Diary* (Historical Society of Southern California, 1891, Publications), ii, 123. The diary is given in Spanish and in English.

² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³ *Crespi's Diary* (Historical Society of Southern California, 1891), ii, 191. This diary is also published both in Spanish and in English.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵ Captain James Cook, *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (Dublin, Chamberlaine, 1784. 3 vols.), ii, 304.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, 294.

⁷ William Ellis, *Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clarke* (London, 1782, 2 vols., 8vo.), i, 191.

⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 219.

where they procured it, we could never learn."⁹ Ledyard, however, was more keen-sighted than either Captain Cook or Doctor Ellis. Not only did he see dogs at Nootka Sound, but in speaking of the clothing of the natives he says that besides the bark garments they had another kind "principally made with the hair of their dogs, which are almost white and of the domestic kind."¹⁰

Neither Dixon nor Meares throws any light upon the subject. Dixon, as is well known, never landed on the coast during his voyage and could know but little of the clothing of the natives and nothing about their dogs. Meares' real knowledge of the Indians was confined to the vicinity of Nootka, and the only clothing he alludes to is that made from cedar bark.

Very little information on the customs or clothing of the natives in the vicinity of the Strait of Juan de Fuca is to be obtained from the published voyages of the fur traders. They were evidently too intent on the pursuit of peltry to devote much attention to such matters. However, Haswell is a shining exception. He was the second mate of the *Washington* on her first voyage. The winter of 1788-1789 was spent at Nootka Sound, thus affording such a careful observer a good opportunity to become acquainted with the people and their surroundings. He says: "Their dress is in general a garment with three sides square the lower side rounding with a fringe and the upper edge trimmed with Fur on each side about two inches in breadth the garment is composed of wool of the mountain sheep but the rest of the garment is made of the bark of a Cedar tree beat to a state that it sum resembles hemp they have allso blankits of excellent workmanship of the wool of mountain sheep and as well dun as tho' it was wove in a loom."¹¹

Vancouver, as was to be expected, is quite explicit in his reference to these dog's hair blankets. In May, 1792, when anchored near Restoration Point, he noticed the "woolen and skin garments" of the natives. His entry regarding the dogs is rather lengthy, but is so important that it is given in full. "The dogs belonging to this tribe of Indians were numerous, and much resembled those of Pomerania, though in general somewhat larger. They were all shorn as close to the skin as sheep are in England; and so compact were their fleeces, that large portions could be lifted up by a corner without causing any separation. They were composed of a mixture of a coarse kind of wool, with very fine long hair, capable of being spun into yarn.

⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 214.

¹⁰ *Ledyard's Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage* (Hartford, 1783), pp. 70 and 71. Jared Sparks, *Life of John Ledyard* (Cambridge, 1828), p. 71.

¹¹ Haswell's manuscript log of a Voyage Round the World on board the Ship *Columbia-Rediviva* and Sloop *Washington*, under date March, 1789.

This gave me reason to believe that their woollen clothing might in part be composed of this material mixed with a finer kind of wool from some other animal, as their garments were all too fine to be manufactured from the coarse coating of the dog alone. The abundance of these garments amongst the few people we met with, indicates the animal from whence the raw material is procured, to be very common in this neighborhood; but as they have no one domesticated excepting the dog, their supply of wool for their clothing can only be obtained by hunting the wild creature that produces it; of which we could not obtain the least information."¹²

In July, 1793, when Vancouver was near Millbank Sound he observed that the natives in the vicinity were clothed either in the skins of the sea-otter or in garments made of cedar bark, by him erroneously called "pine bark." The latter were frequently bordered on the sides and bottom with woven material in various colors. For this purpose woolen yarn very fine, well spun, and usually of a lively yellow, was used. From this fact he inferred the presence in that locality of the same fleece-bearing animal; but, as he remarked, it was very strange that not one person was to be seen clad in a woolen mantle such as had been so plentiful in "New Georgia," *i.e.* the region of the coast Salish. He adds that in "New Georgia the principal part of the people's clothing is made of wool."¹³ Nowhere does it appear that Vancouver carefully compared the woolen borders of Millbank Sound with the woolen blankets of Puget Sound and vicinity.

A year later near Lynn Canal he met a chief dressed in a more superb style than any yet encountered. The only portion of this grandee's dress which need detain us is his robe. "His external robe was a very fine large garment, that reached from his neck down to his heels, made of wool from the mountain sheep, neatly variegated with several colours, and edged and otherwise decorated with little tufts, or frogs of woollen yarn, dyed of various colours."¹⁴ Vancouver is not quite right in saying that this dress was made from the wool of the mountain sheep. In this connection the following extract is given from Langsdorff who, in the summer of 1805, was at Kodiak. "The Overseer Bander shewed me the wool of a wild American sheep, which was whitish, fine, and very long, and is much used by the natives of the northwest coast of America for clothing and carpets. I never could obtain a sight of the animal that produced this

¹² Captain George Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Oceans* (London, Stockdale, 1801. 6 vols.), ii, 130. Meany, *Vancouver's Discovery of Puget Sound*, p. 136.

¹³ Vancouver, *op. cit.*, iv, 37; and in the 4to. 3-vol. edition, London, 1798, ii, 281. three-volume, London, 1798, iii, p. 249.

¹⁴ *Vancouver's Voyage* (London, Stockdale, 1801. 6 vols.), v, p. 430; and in the quarto three-volume, London, 1798, iii, p. 249.

wool; it must however be very different from the *argali*, or wild sheep, *ovis ammon*, for this has a sort of hairy coat, more like the rein-deer and nothing like wood. I do not know that any seaman or naturalist has described or mentions having seen the American wool-bearing animal in question."¹⁵ The mysterious animal from which the wool referred to was obtained is not the mountain sheep or bighorn, but the mountain goat. This latter, says Sir George Simpson, "has an outer coat of hair, not unlike that of the domestic variety of the species, and an inner coat of wool, beautifully white, soft, and silky. Instead of wool again, the bighorn has a thick covering of hair, pretty much resembling that of the red deer."¹⁶

The author of the *New Vancouver Journal*, who from the internal evidence I believe to have been Mr. Bell, the Clerk of the *Chatham*, speaking of the Indians of Nootka, says: "They likewise manufacture a Woollen Cloth which they use to wear, though not so generally as the other kinds I have mentioned, this I believe is made from the Wool of an animal which we never saw and call'd the Mountain Sheep."¹⁷ This statement it will be observed does not accord with that of Ledyard, nor with that of Jewitt, which will be given presently.

In June, 1792, while Vancouver was pursuing his course northward from Puget Sound the Spanish vessels, *Sutil* and *Mexicana*, entered the Gulf of Georgia. They made their way to the western side and anchored off the northern end of Gabriola Island near the present city of Nanaimo, where they remained for a few days. Their narrative of the voyage only exists in the Spanish edition, but the Provincial Archivist of British Columbia has obtained a translation into English from which the following extract is made. They say: "The Indians also offered new blankets which we afterwards concluded were of dog's hair, partly because when the woven hair was compared with that of those animals there was no apparent difference, and partly from the great number of dogs they keep in those villages, most of them being shorn. These animals are of moderate size, resembling those of English breed, with very thick coats, and usually white: among other things they differ from those of Europe in their manner of barking, which is simply a miserable howl."¹⁸

¹⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels* (Carlisle, 1817), p. 366.

¹⁶ Sir George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey Round the World* (London, 1847. 2 vols., 8vo), i, 315.

¹⁷ *Washington Historical Quarterly*, vi, 69, January, 1915.

¹⁸ Howay and Scholefield, *History of British Columbia*, i, 173. *Viage hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana* (Madrid, 1802), p. 57. For those who prefer the original it is appended. "Tambien ofrecian mantas nuevas. que inferimos despues fuesen de lana de perro, ya porque cotejada la texida con la de estos animales no se encuentra diferencia, y ya por el grande numero de ellos que tienen en estas rancherias, de los quales los mas estaban esquilados. Son estos animales medianos, parecidos a los de casta inglesa, muy lanudos, y por lo comun blancos: entre otras cosas se diferencian de los de Europa en el modo de ladrar, que se reduce a un lamentable aullido."

Jewitt, who was a captive at Nootka, 1803-1805, speaks of the natives there having "a kind of grey cloth made of the hair of some animal which they procure from the tribes to the south." Dr. Brown in his annotation thereto says this is dog's hair, and adds, "A tribe on Fraser River used to keep flocks of these curs which they periodically clipped like sheep."¹⁹

Lewis and Clark record in their journals under date of February 22, 1806 (Ed. Thwaites, iv, 96-97) that, while at Fort Clatsop, they saw many skins of the mountain sheep (really the mountain goat) "in the possession of the natives dressed with the wool on them and also [saw] and have the blankets which they manufacture of the wool of this sheep." They give quite a lengthy description of the animal, plainly showing that it was the goat. The Indians told them that the horns were erect and pointed; but one of their *engagés*, La Page, evidently confused it with the mountain sheep, or bighorn, and insisted that "the males had lunated horns bent backward and twisted."

Simon Fraser records in his journal that during his descent of the Fraser River in 1808 he came into contact with the coast Salish near Yale. "They have," he says, "rugs made from the wool of the *Aspai*, or wild goat, and from dog's hair, which are as good as the wool rugs found in Canada. We observed that the dogs had lately been shorn."²⁰ And some thirty miles further down the river in the vicinity of Ruby Creek he came to a village of the coast Salish where "they make with dogs hair, rugs with stripes of different colours crossing at right angles and resembling at a distance, Highland plaid."²¹

In the fall of 1824 James McMillan explored the lower reaches of the Fraser River as a preliminary to the location of a coast trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company. The journal of the expedition was kept by John Work. He records that, having come overland from Boundary Bay, they reached the Fraser at the point now known as Langley, where the Fort was actually built, three years later. There they met Indians who wore blankets "of their own manufacture and made of hair or coarse wool, on which they wear a kind of short cloak made of the bark of the cedar tree."²² There can be but little doubt that these blankets were made in great part at any rate of dog's hair, though the journal does not mention the existence of any dogs.

¹⁹ *Jewitt's Narrative* (Middletown, 1815), p. 67. *Jewitt's Narrative*, edited with an introduction and notes by Robert Brown (London, 1896), p. 105.

²⁰ L. R. Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest* (Quebec, 1889. 2 vols.), i, 93. This volume contains Fraser's Journal of his voyage down the Fraser in 1808.

²¹ *Ibid.*, i, 195.

²² *Washington Historical Quarterly*, iii, 218, July, 1912.

²³ *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vi, 196, June, 1905. Dr. John Scouler, "Journal of a Voyage to N. W. America, 1824, 25, 26."

In the following year Dr. John Scouler, the surgeon of the Hudson's Bay Company's vessel *William and Anne* and the friend of David Douglas, was at Tatooch, near the entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and in his *Journal* under date August 8, 1825, will be found the following entry: "The natives of Tatooch show much ingenuity in manufacturing blankets from the hair of their dogs. On a little island a few miles from the coast they have a great number of white dogs which they feed regularly every day. From the wool of their dogs and the fibres of the Cypress they make a very strong blanket. They have also some method of making red and blue stripes in their blankets in imitation of European ones. At a little distance it is difficult to distinguish these Indian blankets from those of Europe."²³ And later, on the 18th of the same month, when in the vicinity of Point Roberts, he records, "Blankets of dog's wool are very common, and although superior in durability to those of Europe, are far from being so comfortable."²⁴

The Rev. Jonathan S. Green, who made a voyage to the northwest coast in 1829, says in his *Journal*, page 44, referring to the inhabitants of the Queen Charlotte Islands, "Formerly, from the wool of the mountain sheep they wrought blankets and other garments, coarse indeed, but durable and curious."

Dunn, who was at Millbank Sound during the building of Fort McLoughlin and for over a year afterwards, does not mention seeing any blankets there except those made from cedar bark. It would thus appear that even the slight fringes of mountain goat's wool, which Vancouver noticed, had disappeared in the intervening forty-four years.

In the summer of 1846 H.M. surveying vessel, the *Herald*, was engaged in surveying the harbor of Victoria, adjacent water, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The vessel anchored in Port Townsend on the 13th of July, 1846, and in the account of the voyage, after describing the dress of the Indians, the author, Berthold Seeman, the naturalist, says: "They keep dogs, the hair of which is manufactured into a kind of coverlet or blanket, which, in addition to the skins of bears, wolves, and deers, afford them abundance of clothing. Since the Hudson's Bay Company have established themselves in this neighborhood, English blankets have been so much in request that the dog's hair manufacture has been rather at a discount, eight or ten blankets being given for one sea-otter skin."²⁵

Pilgrimages to this coast were quite in order in the thirties

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁵ *The Voyage of the Herald* (London, 1853), 1, 109.

and forties and amongst other arrivals was Paul Kane, the artist. He accompanied from Fort William the Hudson's Bay Company's brigade which left that fort in May, 1846. In the course of his wanderings he reached Fort Victoria in April, 1847. He gives a lengthy account of these dogs, and the process of manufacture of the blankets. "The men," he says, "wear no clothing in summer, and nothing but a blanket in winter, made either of dog's hair alone, or dog's hair and goosedown mixed, frayed cedar-bark, or wildgoose skin, like the Chinooks. They have a peculiar breed of small dogs with long hair of a brownish black and a clear white. These dogs are bred for clothing purposes. The hair is cut off with a knife and mixed with goosedown and a little white earth, with a view of curing the feathers. This is then beaten together with sticks, and twisted into threads by rubbing it down the thigh with the palm of the hand, in the same way that a shoemaker forms his waxend, after which it undergoes a second twisting on a distaff to increase its firmness. The cedar bark is frayed and twisted into thread in a similar manner. These threads are then woven into blankets by a very simple loom of their own contrivance. A single thread is wound over rollers at the top and bottom of a square frame, so as to form a continuous woof through which an alternate thread is carried by the hand, and pressed closely together by a sort of wooden comb; by turning the rollers every part of the woof is brought within reach of the weaver; by this means a bag is formed, open at each end, which being cut down makes a square blanket."²⁶ The wildgoose skin blankets of the Chinooks to which he refers contained no dog's hair. They were fabricated by cutting the goose skin into strips and twisting them so as to keep the feathers outward. These feathered cords were then netted together, forming a light but very warm blanket, a sort of savage eider-down coverlet.

It is quite natural to expect that these unique blankets, of which the artist has given such a lengthy description, would call forth all the powers of his brush. Yet one seeks in vain amongst the illustrations in his volume for any picture relating to this interesting matter. Nevertheless, Paul Kane did make it the subject of a most valuable oil painting, now owned by E. B. Osler, Esq., M.P., of Toronto. This painting shows in the background an Indian woman busy with the distaff spinning the wool into yarn; in the middle ground another woman is at work at the loom; while in the foreground is the little white dog itself. A copy of this painting is to be found in the

²⁶ Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America* (London, 1859), pp. 210-211, and p. 184.

Guide to the Anthropological Collection in Provincial Museum, issued by the Government of British Columbia in 1909, at page 53.

The most recent reference to these blankets, by one with first-hand knowledge, which I have met is by the late Alexander Caulfield Anderson in a document preserved in the Archives of British Columbia, but it adds nothing to the very full statements already given.

By the time that the gold seekers of 1858 arrived, the natives appear to have lost the art of weaving these blankets, the blankets themselves were very scarce and difficult to obtain, and the wonderful dog had become almost extinct. The late Jonathan Miller, the first postmaster of the city of Vancouver, B. C., who came to the lower Fraser in 1862, stated that, soon after his arrival, he was present at a large *potlatch* in the vicinity, and that during the ceremonies he saw one of the actors devour, or pretend to devour, alive, a small, white, long-haired dog of a species that he had never seen before amongst them.

This statement he made to Professor Charles Hill-Tout, the well-known authority on Salish ethnology. No record, verbal or written, has been encountered relating to the existence of these dogs after that time.

Several of these blankets are to be seen in the Provincial Museum of British Columbia; and on page 51 of the *Guide*, already mentioned, will be found a reproduction of a very beautiful specimen of this native work. Dr. C. F. Newcombe, who compiled this volume, gives on the same page a description of the method of preparing the wool and manufacturing the blanket, which agrees closely with that of Paul Kane.

When these references are examined it will appear that the blankets found in Alaska, along the coast of northern British Columbia, the Queen Charlotte Islands, as well as those found by Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the Columbia were made entirely from the wool of the mountain goat (*Haplocerus montanus*), but that those on the southern end of Vancouver Island, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound, the Gulf of Georgia, and Fraser River were manufactured, wholly, or in great part, from the fleeces of this strange and now extinct wool-bearing dog. It is passing strange thus to find these dogs and these novel blankets confined to the small area about the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a foreign wedge, as it were, separating the otherwise continuous line.

Whence came this fleece-bearing dog, and why is it that it was only found in the locality mentioned? Was it a comparatively recent arrival, and does that account for its not having become more widely

diffused? So far as my knowledge goes, no similar animal is to be found or is known to have existed among the surrounding tribes. One hesitates to enter into an enquiry which may raise from its grave the age-old question: Whence came our Indians? That able and scholarly missionary, the Reverend A. G. Morice, who is more familiar with the Déné than any other living person has given it as his opinion that they are probably connected with the so-called "Paleo-Asiatic" peoples of Northeastern Asia, *i. e.*, the Kamschadales, Tchuktchi, etc.²⁷ Describing the dogs of the Kamschatka, Captain King says: "These dogs are in shape somewhat like the Pomeranian breed, but considerably larger."²⁸ He speaks also of their "melancholy howlings." Lieutenant Hooper remarks of the dogs of the Tchuktchi, by him spelled, "Tuski," that their bark is a melancholy whine.²⁹ Mr. J. Keast Lord, who was the naturalist attached to the British North American Boundary Commission, in discussing this question supposes that the dog came from Japan and adds, "I am informed by a friend who has been there that the Japanese have a small long-haired dog, usually white, and from description very analogous to the dog that was shorn by the Indians of the coast and of Vancouver Island."³⁰ Is it possible that the coast Salish may have come from the same region as the Déné and brought this dog with them? Or may we suppose that at some comparatively recent date a Japanese junk may have been stranded on the shores of the Strait of Juan de Fuca or vicinity, as happened in 1834, and that the original pair from which this strange race of canines sprang, thus came into their possession?

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²⁷ *The Northwestern Denes and Northeastern Asiatics* (Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute, Toronto, 1915).

²⁸ Captain James Cook, *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (Dublin, 1784), iii, 204-205, and p. 201.

²⁹ *Ten Months Among the Tents of the Tuski* (London, 1853), p. 42.

³⁰ *The Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia* (London, 1866), ii, pp.215-217.