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Figure 12 (right). Rudy Reimer talks with members of the public at SCMA.

## Klahowya Village: Heritage and Aboriginal Tourism in Stanley Park

Marina J. La Salle

*Come enjoy Vancouver's premier family-friendly Aboriginal tourism experience! See and experience the rich, vibrant Aboriginal culture through song, dance, art and cuisine! Ride the Spirit Catcher Train - Enjoy live cultural performances daily - Listen to Aboriginal stories & legends at the Story Telling Circle (teepee tent) - Browse artisan kiosks to purchase authentic Aboriginal arts & crafts - Taste amazing Aboriginal cuisine from authentic food vendors - Try your hand at making some Aboriginal crafts...and much more! (Metro Vancouver 2010)*

In August 2010, after coming across the above advertisement on the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation website, I made the trek across town to visit 'Klahowya Village'—an Aboriginal village featured as a summer exhibit in Stanley Park. Klahowya is Chinook jargon for 'welcome,' and this is certainly the message that is conveyed throughout the project. Co-sponsored by Vancouver Parks and the non-profit, membership-based organization, Aboriginal Tourism Association of B.C. (AtBC), Klahowya was marketed as "an authentic Aboriginal tourism experience" involving live cultural performances and dancing, on-site work by artisans such as weavers and wood carvers, a storytelling circle, and the chance to speak with Elders (Figure 1). AtBC's mission statement is "to contribute to the preservation of Aboriginal culture and advancement of economic development through support, facilitation and promotion of the growth and sustainability of a quality and culturally rich Aboriginal tourism industry in British Columbia" (AtBC 2010). In other words, it's all about cultural tourism, a project designed to ride the wave of successful marketing seen at the 2010 Olympics, says Keith Henry, AtBC's CEO (pers.comm. 8 November 2010).

My interest, however, was to see how this contemporary 'Indigenous village' exhibit connected with the rich history, heritage, and archaeology in Stanley Park—history that First Nations and archaeologists have long been aware of, but that

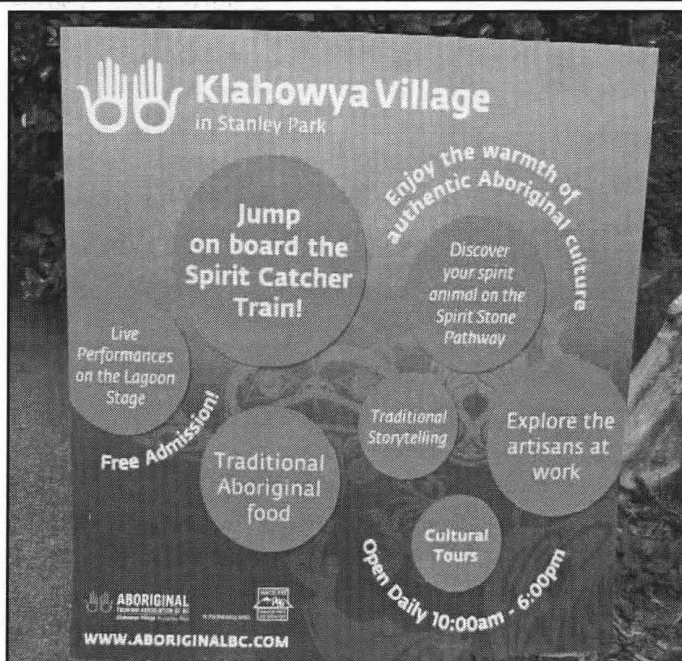


Figure 1. Advertising billboard at Klahowya Village in August 2010.

was more recently publicized in *The Vancouver Sun* following the storm-induced damage to sites in the park (Shore 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). The ASBC, particularly Past-President Eric McLay, played a key role in promoting public awareness of the archaeological heritage of Stanley Park

Klahowya is definitely a theme-park village. While the three local First Nations—Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, and Squamish—were most closely involved in the design of the project and the art work (produced by local Aboriginal artists affiliated with AtBC), the Aboriginal village presents an amalgamation of British Columbia First Nations' cultures into 'pan-Indigenous' traditions, flattened of all cultural diversity. Cultural features common to most Nations are synthesized to present simplified representations that emphasize a cultural connection to 'nature,' such as the

importance of raven, coyote, and bear in traditional stories (as well as on televisions broadcast throughout the village), and the role of cedar and salmon in traditional lifeways and practices. Other iconic regional representations were also included in the form of a teepee, a painted North Coast style house-front which served as the dance stage (Figure 5), and, most creatively, the SpiritCatcher Train, “a 13 minute journey into the forest of Stanley Park and the Aboriginal history and culture of British Columbia” (AtBC 2010; Figures 2 and 3).

Indeed, given that Stanley Park is one of the most contentious territories in First Nations’ British Columbia—Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh all assert it as an ancestral site—it is no wonder that specific cultural references at Klahowya are absent. This was partly intentional, said Keith Henry in a telephone interview last Fall, and a diplomatic move to avoid any potential conflict as over twenty-five First Nations are represented in Klahowya. This is why the name ‘Klahowya’ was chosen for the village in the first place, symbolic as a trading language for intercultural connections and communication—a realm owned by no one people.

Perhaps for the same reasons, there are no references in Klahowya to the more ancient Indigenous heritage of Stanley Park. With only six weeks to get Klahowya up and running following its approval by Stanley Park authorities in mid-May 2010, Keith said that this ‘oversight’ in acknowledging the park’s long Aboriginal presence is in part simply due to not having enough time to engage with this history. AtBC has since been in discussion with the local First Nations to consider how to present this history in a mutually respectful and sensitive way. At present, the only landmark in Stanley Park to acknowledge its Aboriginal connections is a placard by Lumberman’s Arch, noting its Coast Salish name as *Xwáyxway* (pronounced whoi-who) meaning “Place of the Mask.” The 2010 suggestion of a formal name change to reflect the park’s Indigenous history failed to persuade (Crawford 2010); meanwhile, every car on its way to the park drives over the shell midden remains of displaced village and cemetery sites, bulldozed to create the platform connecting the city to the park.

The pan-Indigenous representation of Klahowya, however, was perhaps *too* successful in down-playing *specific* cultural traditions in favour of simplified and iconic representations of shared

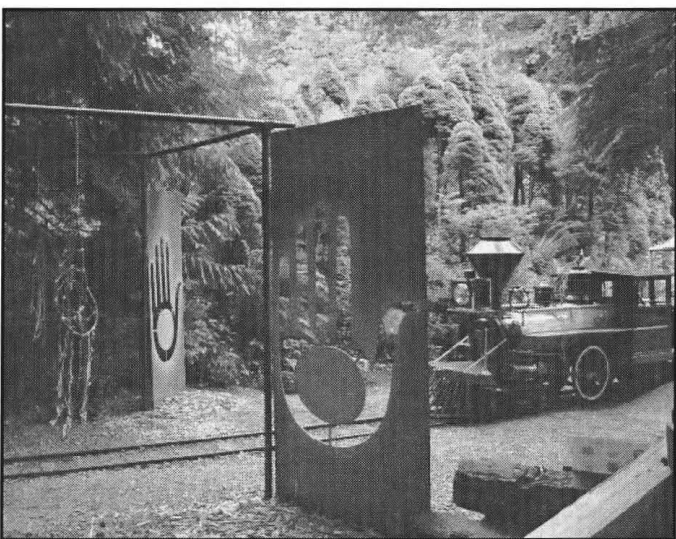


Figure 2. The 'SpiritCatcher' Train as it begins its journey.

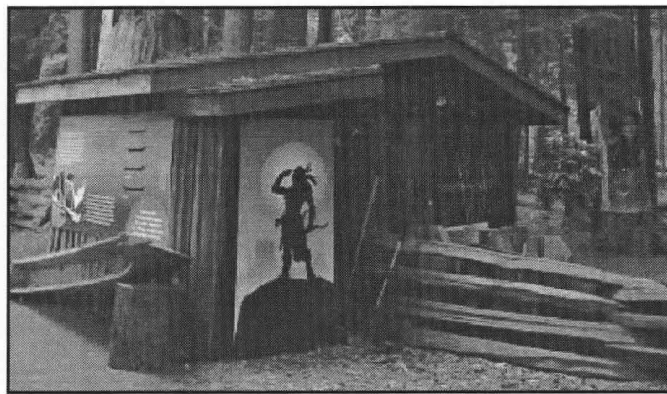


Figure 3 (above). Iconic imagery at the canoe carving shed, with the SpiritCatcher Train route in the background.

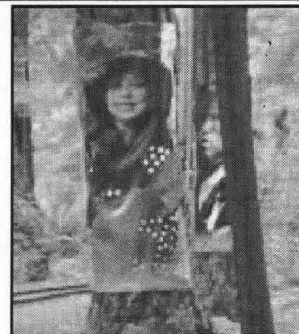


Figure 4 (right). Posters of unknown First Nation individuals displayed on trees throughout the SpiritCatcher Train route.

values. For example, in the woods while on the SpiritCatcher Train, visitors encounter large panels with photographs depicting ‘Elders’ in traditional cultural garb (Figure 4); yet there is no reference to who these people are, where they are from, or what the meaning is behind this. This left me feeling that there *was* no meaning, and instead, by presenting generic ‘Indians’ in this decontextualized manner, the panels became a form of appropriation, just another way to brand and market the village as an “*authentic* Aboriginal experience.”

Few may know that this is not the first time that Stanley Park has been the site of a recreated ‘Indian Village.’ As Jean Barman describes in *Stanley Park’s Secret: The Forgotten Families of Whoi Whoi, Kanaka Ranch, and Brockton Point* (2005), Vancouver Parks set about recreating “a different kind of Aboriginal presence in the park at the very time it was struggling with the resident families” of Brockton Point, Kanaka Ranch, and the existing Indigenous residents of the park (172). After evicting these communities, “[t]he board gave its vigorous support to what was termed an ‘old-time Indian village’” (172), featuring ‘traditional’ themes and artifacts as if time had stood still. In this sense, there was an “imagined Aboriginality still being pursued in Stanley Park” where Indians “would be on display, much like the animals in the park’s zoo” (235).

In an email communication last Fall (12 October 2010), Jean recounted that this village was built for the summer of Vancouver’s 50th anniversary in 1936, and in fact a photograph in *Stanley Park’s Secrets* depicts August Jack Khatsahlano dancing with a ‘5 cents’ admission sign in the background. Reflecting on Klahowya, Jean recognized in this new manifestation a very old idea: “I was struck when I went to Klahowya Village in late summer by the similarities,” she said.

Yet, significant differences do exist between the village as envisioned then and Klahowya. To begin with, the 50th anniversary village depicted a long-time past of Indigenous groups, and emphasized the North Coast and totem poles rather than



Figure 5. The Kulus Dancers put on a show for a full crowd in front of the North Coast style housefront used as a dancing platform for daily events. (All photos by author)

local First Nations (173). It was also a Vancouver Parks Board initiative. Conversely, Klahowya as an AtBC project is an Aboriginal initiative—conceived of, organized, and performed by First Nations who are its primary beneficiaries—and local bands are especially involved throughout the process. “In recognition of the three Nations whose traditional territory includes Stanley Park,” AtBC held ‘Nation Days’ for Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, where for a three-day period each Nation hosted the village with their own performers, artists, and storytellers, “to share their culture and to tell the stories of their Nation’s historic and cultural connection to Stanley Park” (AtBC 2011). What visitors to Klahowya experience is therefore something at least a *bit* less artificial than 100 years ago, instead showcasing how traditional technologies and materials have been interwoven with contemporary cultural practices. In this way, Klahowya is complicated: while it may challenge some stereotypes, reducing First Nations’ cultures to simplified and generic themes and icons simultaneously propagates them—and the familiar ‘stoic Brave viewing the landscape’ image remains a prominent feature (Figure 3).

Thus while some may critique Klahowya for its blatant commodification and commercialization of culture (Mortenson and Nicholas 2010; see also Comaroff and Comaroff’s 2009 *Ethnicity, Inc.* for a discussion of this growing trend worldwide), it clearly differs from the ‘Indian Village’ in Stanley Park of 100 years ago in being a project organized ‘with, by,

and for’ First Nations. In this sense, Klahowya could be interpreted as following an ethic of Indigenous self-representation, self-determination, and ultimately sovereignty over the tangible and intangible expressions of culture—recognized as inherent rights in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While Canada did not ratify the UN Declaration until late in 2010, several heritage organizations in B.C. had already been operating in line with these principles for years before; perhaps unexpectedly, Klahowya may be one of them.

After its first season, Keith Henry feels that Klahowya was a success. AtBC’s target of 120,000 visitors over 67 days was exceeded by 42,000 people, and the 1000+ visitor surveys have been compiled to improve the 2011 Aboriginal village (AtBC Management Team 2010). Interestingly, although the village was marketed to ‘tourists,’ 67% of all visitors were ‘domestic’ and only 25% international; most people were local to the Lower Mainland. It will be interesting to see how this year’s Klahowya Village has changed from its initial unveiling, beyond the introduction of an admission fee. As an archaeologist, I personally am curious to see how Stanley Park’s ancient history and Aboriginal heritage is featured, or whether it is even mentioned, in this celebration of contemporary culture (and commerce). The Village is already open and will remain so until September 11, 2011—for more information, visit AtBC’s Klahowya Village website: <http://www.aboriginalbc.com/klahowya-village/>.

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