

Film chronicles Wet'suwet'en totem pole journey to France

by Larry Joseph, *Extension Specialist, Aboriginal Forestry and Indigenous Knowledge*



Larry Joseph photo

Film crew (left to right), Rylan Kerbes, Simon Backès (film director), and Larry Joseph in Hagwilget Canyon beneath the gaze of the mountain, Stekyodan (he stands alone).

This past June, I was asked to be part of a film crew that produced a documentary with significant modern-day lessons and implications for how to manage and extend information on First Nations cultural heritage resources, as well as lessons on oral history research, surrealism art and the exotic, the self-image

of the Wet'suwet'en clan, and the ethics of selling and repatriating cultural objects.

The goal of the filming was to tell the story of the purchase and removal of a Wet'suwet'en clan totem pole from Hagwilget in northwestern BC, my home village, to Paris, France, where it remains to the present day. In 1938, **Kurt Seligmann**, a

prominent artist within the Surrealist movement in Paris, entered into lengthy negotiations with the Laksilyu (Frog Clan) clan members and its hereditary chiefs to purchase the pole and remove it from Hagwilget Canyon. It was then shipped to the world famous Musée de l'Homme where it stood until 2006 when it was again moved, this time across the Seine to the main entrance of the new Paris museum, Musée du quai Branly.

I personally know chiefs, witnesses, and clan members, both living and deceased, who gave permission for this amazing transaction, a consent that lasts to the present day! The 26-minute film, a project of the film production company, Program 33, the Musée du quai Branly, and the Franco-German cultural TV channel ARTE, will be broadcast as part of a television documentary series called Arts du Mythe (Arts and Myths) in June 2010. That means several million people in Europe will be able to see it!

In future issues of *LINK*, I will review the film and write a more comprehensive article. Also look for my presentation at the "Indigenous Earth: Praxis and Transformation" conference in Penticton, in March 2010 (see page 23). 🌲