



WORLD'S TALLEST TOTEM—The eyes of the totem art world, and eyes elsewhere as well, are upon the Alaska Indian Arts, Inc., Port Chilkoot, Alaska where the world's tallest totem pole is being carved. When completed, the huge totem will tower 132 feet into the air. The long wooden sculpture is being prepared for Expo '70, Asia's

first World's Fair which will be held in Osaka, Japan next year. Encountering money difficulties, the villagers of Kake, where the idea originated, raised the necessary funds to execute the totem work. Carvers at Port Chilkoot are busily working on the big project.

World's Tallest Totem 132 Ft. High

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During the early part of this century, the Tlingit Indian residents of Kake, Alaska, burned

every totem pole in town.

This bizarre action was brought on by zealous Christian Missionaries who convinced the people that a totem culture was inappropriate now that "civilized" religion had come to Kupreanof Island.

Appropriately enough, in 1967 the year of the Alaska Purchase Centennial, the village members decided to revitalize their heri-

tage. As part of the state-wide Centennial celebration, it was decided that the village would carve and erect the world's tallest authentic totem pole.

The then Governor of Alaska, now Secretary of Interior, Walter J. Hickel, assisted by flying to Kake and falling a 140-foot-long Alaskan spruce. But, for several reasons, mainly financial, the

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undertaking was not completed.

The project was dead or seemingly so, for more than a year. Then, early this year, the Sixth Alaska State Legislature authorized and funded Alaska's participation in Expo '70, Asia's first World's Fair which will be held in Osaka, Japan next year.

Upon hearing this news, officials from Kake contacted the Alaska Department of Economic Development and presented their dream to Commissioner Frank H. Murkowski.

Once again, though, the problem was money. The determined villagers were not to be denied, however, and managed to raise the necessary funds among themselves.

Once that was solved, another problem appeared. Totem carving is rapidly becoming a lost art and several carvers would be needed to insure that the early deadline for Expo could be met.

The solution came in the form of Alaska Indian Arts Incorporated, of Port Chilkoot, Alaska. This non-profit corporation had worked for years to revitalize the Indian heritage of the region through such activities as the world famous Chilkoot Dancers, and totem carving.

The organization had not only the capability but the desire to undertake the task and was prepared to put a half dozen carvers to work immediately.

It was at this point that, hopefully, the final problem occurred. After inspecting the aforementioned spruce, Carl Heinmiller, Director of Alaska Indian Arts, felt that it was too big,

weighing over thirty tons.

He also felt that spruce wood did not lend itself to carving and that cedar would be much preferred.

Commissioner Murkowski then contacted members of industry and solicited their aid. First to respond was Ketchikan Pulp Company in the form of Vice-President Art Brooks. Brook's crews spent weeks searching for a suitable tree.

Finally, a slender Alaskan Red Cedar measuring more than 130 feet was located. The tree was cut and gently lowered by block and tackle, placed aboard a barge and then towed several hundred miles by the Halverson Towing Company of Ketchikan, for delivery to Port Chilkoot.

The finished product will be transported to Japan on a lumber ship provided by Alaska Lumber and Pulp Company of Sitka.

Carving on the totem is now in progress. The designs which will be incorporated are all authentic figures from Tlingit lore, many of which are now seldom seen.

When completed, the totem will measure 132 feet, which, according to authorities on art, will make it the longest single piece of sculpture in the world.

First stop for the big totem will, of course, be Osaka where it will form an integral part of Alaska's exhibit at Expo '70.

Its final resting place will be Kake where it will serve as a center for what villagers hope will be a major tourist attraction for the industrious little community of about 500.