Story Idea: Monumental Cedar

Summary: Monumental cedars are old growth cedar trees of high enough quality to be used in traditional Haida practices such as canoe and pole carving and traditional-style buildings. These trees have become increasingly rare due to logging, so in recent years, forestry practices have been modified to preserve these trees.

Facts:
- The two cedar species found on Haida Gwaii are the Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) and the Yellow cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*).
- It appears that the cedar tree was not part of the landscape of Haida Gwaii until about 5000-3000 years ago, as changes in the climate after the last ice age gradually led to the establishment of the current vegetation of the islands.
- Cedar trees often grow in twisted or bent shapes and have large branches all the way up the truck. Because of this, it is challenging to find trees with large sections of clear wood. Clear (knot-free) wood is needed to carve canoes or poles.
- In the past, the Haida would cut test holes into standing trees to check the quality of the wood. Cedars often have hollow, rotten centres, so it was important to check the core of the tree before going to the great effort of falling it. Trees with test holes, as well as trees that show evidence of bark stripping or other traditional use, are called Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs).
- In recent years, the Haida Nation became concerned that logging, if carried on as it was being done at the time, would soon result in a lack of appropriate cedar for culturally significant projects.
- In 2007, a Strategic Land Use Agreement (SLUA) was signed between the Province of British Columbia and the Council of the Haida Nation. The SLUA covers many aspects of forestry management on Haida Gwaii, with an emphasis on Haida traditional uses of the forest. [www.mieds.ca](http://www.mieds.ca)
- To qualify as monumental cedar, a cedar tree must be “a visibly sound red or yellow cedar tree that is greater than 100cm dbh and has a log 7 metres or longer above the flare with at least one face that is suitable for cultural use” (from the Strategic Land Use Agreement).
- Extensive rules and regulations have been put in place to protect monumental cedars and various other species. This has resulted in controversy as some locals feel that the rules are too strict and make it impossible to have a viable logging industry on the islands, while others feel that protecting these features is the top priority.
- Visit the Cultural Wood program page for information that allows Haida carvers and builders to access wood that is necessary for culturally important projects: [http://www.haidanation.ca/Pages/Programs/Forests/Cultural_Wood.html](http://www.haidanation.ca/Pages/Programs/Forests/Cultural_Wood.html)

Suggested Itinerary:
To see examples of how large cedar logs are used, visit Old Massett or Skidegate where you will see carved poles and examples of traditional building styles. Look for carvers working on canoes or poles in the carving shed at the Haida Heritage Centre [www.haidaheritagecentre.com](http://www.haidaheritagecentre.com)

Take a walk in the forest to view Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs). A convenient spot to find some CMTs is along the easily-accessible Spirit Lake Trail in Skidegate.
More Information:
Contact the Haida Gwaii District Office of the Ministry of Forests and Range (in Queen Charlotte, 250-559-6200) for information on regulations and current forestry practices.