

SHORT COMMUNICATION
USE OF CINDER CONK (*Inonotus obliquus*) BY THE GITKSAN
OF NORTHWESTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

LESLIE M. JOHNSON GOTTESFELD

Department of Anthropology

University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2H4

The Gitksan Indians of northwestern British Columbia, Canada, gathered the "sterile conks" of the cinder conk fungus, *Inonotus obliquus* (Pers.: Fr.) Pilat (Hymenochaetaceae) (Holsten et al. 1985; Gilbertson and Ryvarden 1986). These massive black eruptions of fungal tissue externally resemble charred cork; under the dark crust they are a yellowish-brown color and have a corky texture. They emerge from cankers on living birch trees (*Betula papyrifera* Marsh.) (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The crusty sterile conk was broken off the trunk for use. Cinder conk had



FIG. 1.—*Inonotus obliquus* sterile conk growing on living *Betula papyrifera* Marsh. stem, Cedarvale, British Columbia, Canada.



FIG. 2.—*Inonotus obliquus* sterile conk in section showing yellowish brown interior and black surface. Collected from living *Betula papyrifera* stem, Quesnel, British Columbia, Canada.

two principal uses: for moxibustion treatment of swollen athritic joints, and as tinder or a slow match for making and transporting fire. Use of cinder conk for moxibustion continues; use for a slow match has been supplanted by matches and other modern means of kindling fire.

After conversations with a Gitksan elder who described the use of this unusual fungal structure, I collected specimens of cinder conk and brought a collection of the fungus to the elder to verify the identification. A voucher (*Gottesfeld Eth. 54*, ALTA) is deposited with the University of Alberta Herbarium.

The Gitksan have two words for cinder conk: *mii'hlw* and *tiiuxw*. I am uncertain if these words have distinct meanings; they may represent intervillage dialect variants with the same meaning. A Gitksan elder describes cinder conk and its

