

PREFACE

Understanding the nature of hunter-gatherers, and especially complex hunter-gatherers, is a quest that I have pursued over the last 20 years. Twelve of those years have been spent excavating and analyzing the materials from Keatley Creek, an unusually large winter housepit village on the edge of the British Columbia Plateau. This quest has been long and arduous and it has led to many unexpected areas, both geographical and intellectual. I have been constantly surprised by new facts, new relationships, new perceptions, new conclusions, and new questions. Some of these issues, such as the nature of elite power in transegalitarian societies, have made me return to old research areas, such as Mesoamerica, in order to clarify my perceptions of transegalitarian societies in general. Some of these issues, such as feasting, have led me to undertake new research projects, such as an ethnoarchaeological project focused on feasting among transegalitarian societies in Southeast Asia. The quest has never become dull or boring. If anything, it has been too interesting and too captivating. At times, it has been difficult to hold all the threads together in order to make a coherent tapestry of the past at Keatley Creek and to create coherent theoretical images of the past. However, the main themes have remained clear and resilient. I have found this venture to be genuinely exhilarating and a wonderful growing experience even if I have at times been exhausted by the endeavor.

As one of the largest housepit villages in western Canada, with some of the largest housepits on the Plateau, the site of Keatley Creek features very prominently in our understanding of complex hunters and gatherers. It is a site with many keys to understanding how our own form of hierarchical society with its elites, corporations, private ownership, and pronounced competitiveness emerged from much different egalitarian societies. Such transitions happened not only on the Plateau, but repeatedly in many different places throughout the world over the last 20,000 years or so. The transition from egalitarian types of societies to hierarchical ones is arguably the single most important cultural change that has occurred since the emergence of our ancestral hunting and gathering way of life some two million years earlier. Understanding how and why the transition to hierarchical society took place is one of the biggest challenges of contemporary archaeology. I have been fortunate to be able to pursue this quest in such a spectacular environment and with the assistance of many special people.

I am confident that as a result of the excavations at Keatley Creek, the new conceptual, methodological, and theoretical approaches that I and other analysts have developed will stimulate further advances in this exciting area of inquiry. However, many of the advances that we associate with this project have been fortuitous and serendipitous. I certainly did not foresee or plan for all of them. Many of the advances derived from interested students and analysts who became intrigued by the project and developed their own innovative ways of looking at the data. I have been constantly impressed by my very good fortune in having such dedicated and talented individuals involved in this project. It is they who have made it successful. Many of them are featured in the following chapters. There are many more individuals who have donated

their time and efforts during the excavation and cataloging phases of the project. Although space is restricted, and I hope to acknowledge them all in the final site report, I would like to thank them all as a group here.

In this brief space, I would like to thank first and foremost those people that have generously permitted us to excavate on their legal and traditional lands: Mr. J. E. Termuende, of the Diamond S Ranch, and the Pavilion (Ts'gw'aylaxw) Indian Band. The Fountain (Xaxli'p) Indian Band has also provided substantial support. More than anyone else, Desmond Peters, Senior of the Pavilion Band, has been a mentor of our research in the area and has been invaluable in providing information on traditional culture. In the creation of this project, Dr. Arnoud Stryd was both an inspiration and a generous advisor. Morley Eldridge provided many seminal ideas and data as well. We have always been warmly welcomed by the people in the Lillooet region whether in meetings, at gatherings, on ranches, on reserves, in museums, or in stores; and we are grateful for their interest, their hospitality, and their friendship. Trevor Chandler, in particular, has been a constant supporter.

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For instructors, students, or individuals who are interested in viewing the impressive geographical location of the Keatley Creek site, and in seeing some of the excavations and analyses in progress, a commercially available DVD titled *The Life and Death of the Classic Lillooet Culture*, can be procured from Archaeology Press, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6. This is a documentary program that has been widely broadcast on television in Canada. Information about the excavation at Keatley Creek is also available in the final report on the site (Hayden 2000), the articles listed in the reference section of this book, and may also be found on the World Wide Web at www.sfu.ca/archaeology/museum.