

CHAPTER 2

The Coyote People

Because native life and culture is so important to understanding archaeological remains in North America, we shall take a brief look at what traditional life was like in the Lillooet region before examining the archaeological remains from Keatley Creek in detail. There are three native linguistic groups that converge on the site catchment area of Keatley Creek (Figure 2.1). This is the area around the site that would have been regularly used for obtaining food resources. These linguistic groups are the St'at'l'imx (or St'at'imc; pronounced Shtla-tlye-mkh, also known as the Fraser River Lillooet Indians), the Nlaka7pamux (pronounced N-le-ka'-p-mkh, also known as the Upper Thompson Indians), and the Secwepemc (pronounced Sha-khwep-makh, also known as the Shuswap Indians).¹ All three languages are members of the Interior Salish language family, and all three claim to be descended from a coyote ancestor who is the most prominent figure in their oral traditions (Teit, 1917, p. 12). All three groups also have similar material culture. Therefore, archaeologists have not been able to distinguish these groups from each other prehistorically, and we cannot say for certain which of the three languages was spoken by the prehistoric residents of Keatley Creek. However, because there is an unbroken cultural tradition throughout the Salish-speaking part of the Plateau, from middle Prehistoric times (*ca.* 7000 B.P.) until contact with Eurocanadians in the 1800s, it seems almost certain that the residents of Keatley Creek spoke one of the Interior Salish languages.

Because of the strong cultural continuity in the area (especially from about 3500 B.P. onward, when semisubterranean housepits and a strong reliance on salmon first became widespread), observations on traditional native life should provide many

¹ Henry Davis, who works with Lillooet language, has provided the following pronunciation guide for these terms:

St'at'imc: The first sound is (approximately) as in English "*ship*." The second is produced by putting the tongue in position for a dental t, then, producing an ejective by trapping air between the tongue and glottis, raising the glottis, then releasing the t into a lateral fricative, which is like a "whispered" l. The third sound is something between the vowel in "cat" and "bet," the fourth is a glottalized (creaky) "y," then a plain old m and then a sound halfway between ch in German "ich" and ch in Scottish "loch."

Nlaka7pamux: N is a syllable on its own. The l is a whispered l (lateral fricative) like Llewellyn in Welsh; "a" is like "e" in bed; k is nonaspirated as in skin, not kin. The 7 is a glottal stop; the middle sound in uh(7)oh; p as above; the third a is not pronounced; mux as in mc above (just different orthographic representation).

Secwepemc: First sound is like English "s" (approximately). Second is a schwa (like the a in "about") Third, (cw) round the lips as you produce the "c" sound described in St'at'imc above. Fourth, "e" as in "bed." Next, nonaspirated "p" as in "spit" (not "pit"). Then another schwa, and last two as above.

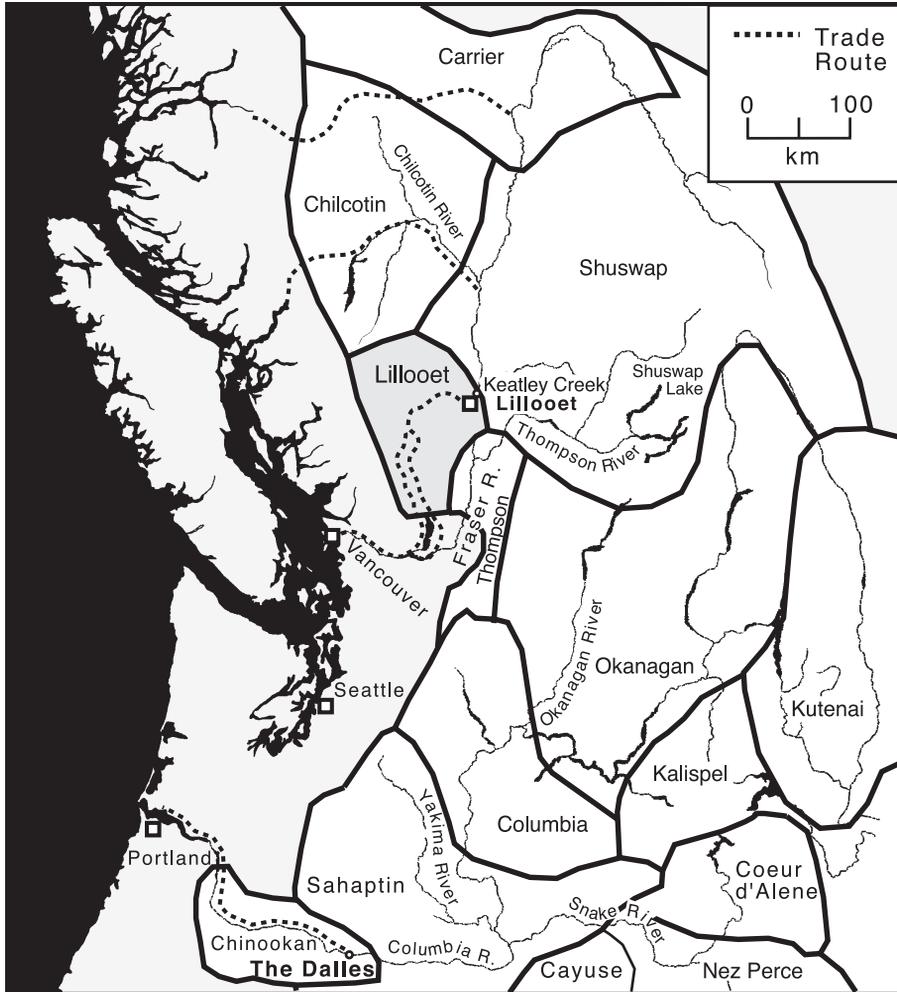


FIGURE 2.1. Map of language groups of the Plateau culture area.

insights into past cultures of the region. The ethnographic observations made around 1900 have greatly aided us in understanding the functions of tools such as bark peelers, digging-stick handles, hide scrapers, the use of plants, and a host of other details that would otherwise remain as unexplained curiosities. However, ethnographic observations must always be used cautiously since tool uses, behaviors, and other conditions sometimes change from prehistoric to historic periods. I have distinguished a number of types of ethnographic analogies that differ in terms of their reliability and applicability (Hayden, 1993, p. 127). The type of ethnographic analogy that I use most at Keatley Creek is referred to as “synthetic cultural analogy” since it is a synthesis of several distinct, but closely related groups (the Stl’atl’imux, the Nlaka7pmux, and the Secwepemc). It has a high reliability value. For instance, it is almost certain that the objects we recovered resembling the illustrations of historic digging-stick handles and bark peelers were actually used for these purposes (Figure 2.2). On the other hand,

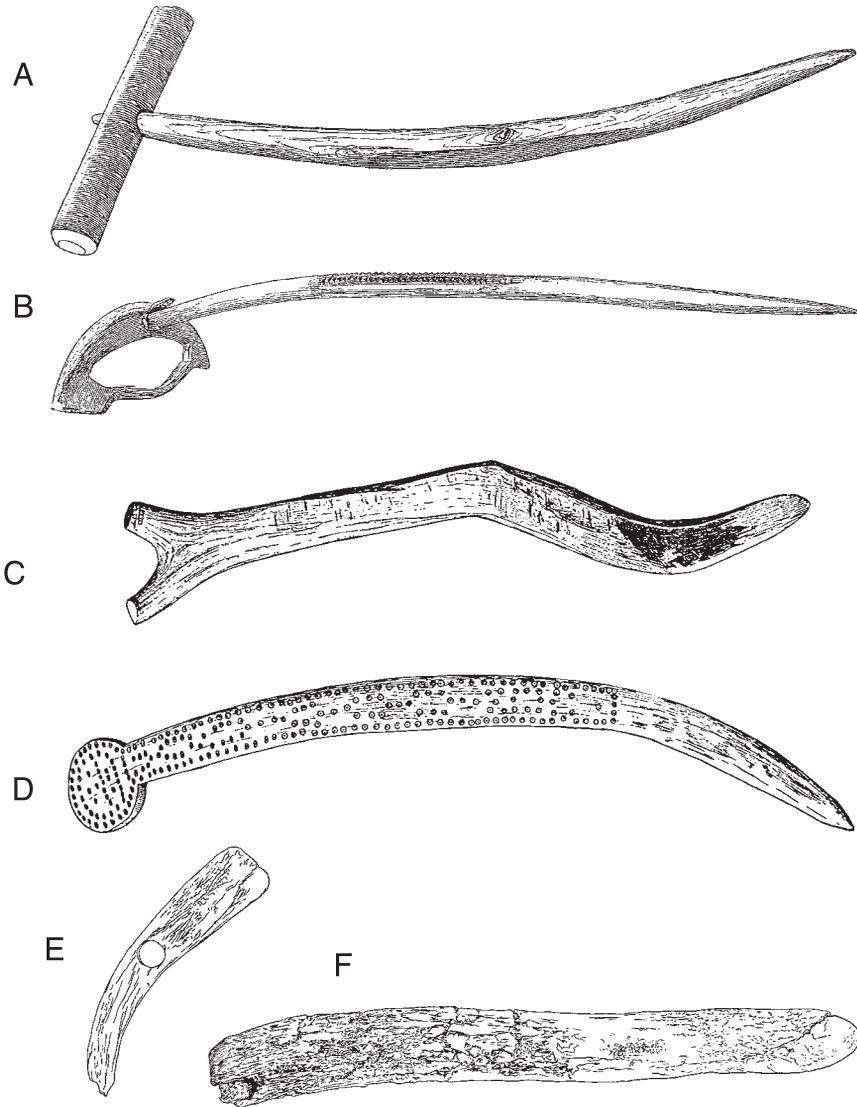


FIGURE 2.2. Illustrations of digging-stick handles (a, b) and bark peelers (c d) that James Teit recorded in use among Interior Salish groups in the 19th century are very similar to archaeological examples of digging-stick handles (E) and bark peelers (F) recovered at Keatley Creek from a thousand years earlier. Ethnographic analogy is very useful in determining the functions of archaeological items in such cases.

synthetic culture analogies are limited in their applicability to the groups from which they are derived, that is, to the Interior Salish and possibly other Plateau groups. This is still a relatively large geographical area for the use of these analogies.

From 1898 to 1912, James Teit described in remarkable detail the traditional life of all three of the Interior Salish groups. Teit had married a Nlaka7pmux woman and learned much of the language. He had an abiding interest in native cultures, and for-

tunately was also able to record much of these details in writing with some help from Franz Boas. The following descriptions are largely based on Teit's accounts, although many traditional activities such as salmon fishing continue to play an important role in people's lives right up to the present. It has therefore been possible to obtain more details about important aspects of traditional lifestyles as recently as this decade (see Hayden, 1992).

OBTAINING FOOD

Ethnographically, the most important resource throughout the region was salmon. And the most productive fishery along the Interior Fraser River was located about 10 km upstream from the modern town of Lillooet at a place called the Six Mile Fishery, or the "Fountain"—referring to the cascade in the Fraser River at that location (see Figures 1.2, 2.3). Many other rich fisheries extended up and downstream from that point. The most productive fishing locations were at points where rocks jutted into the river, or where the river was restricted. The farther one could reach with a net, the more and the larger salmon it was possible to obtain. Therefore, people often built platforms out into the water to catch the most and the best salmon (Figure 2.4). These fishing sites

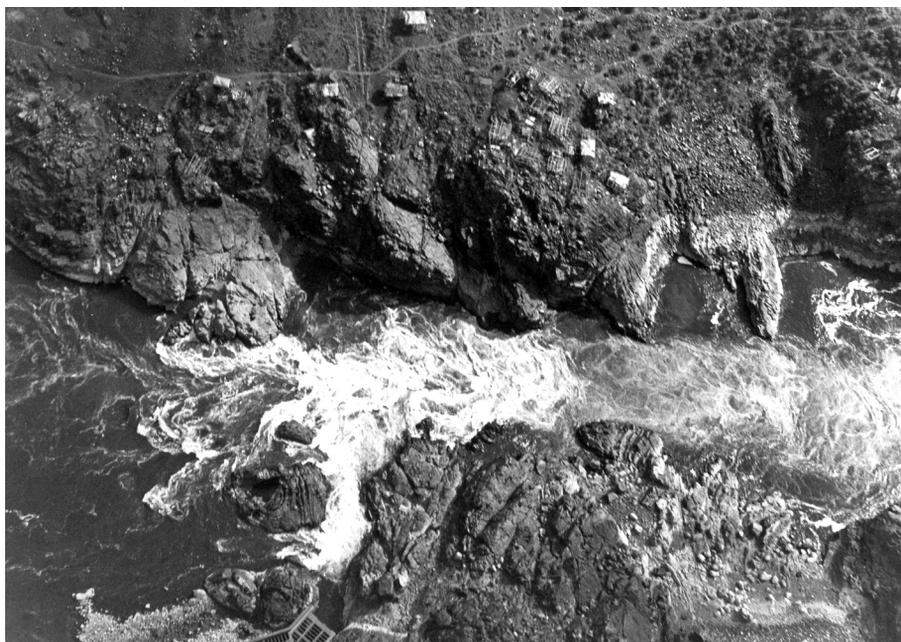


FIGURE 2.3. An aerial view of "The Fountain," today known as the Six Mile Rapids and Fishery. The narrow constriction of the river is difficult for salmon to ascend, so they gather in pools behind the rock jetties below the rapids where they are caught by fishermen. Traditionally, each of these jetties was owned and had a platform erected to assist in catching fish. Today, the structures for drying fish can be seen on the rock terraces above the river.



FIGURE 2.4. *Traditional fishing platforms such as these were constructed by Indians on the Plateau to reach the larger and more numerous salmon that swam in deeper waters. These platforms were in use near The Dulles on the Columbia River, but similar ones were also used along the Fraser River.*

and platforms were owned by families, although there were other fishing sites open to the public.

Fishing in this fashion was frequently dangerous, especially when several large salmon weighing up to 30 or 40 g each struck the large, traditional hoop nets. Fishermen took their lives into their hands when they stood on narrow ledges or springy platforms to catch salmon. Having a rope tied around the waist and secured to something on land saved many fishermen from plunging into the roiling currents of the Fraser River, a river that sucked people under the water and sometimes did not return them to the surface for days, many kilometers downstream. At the peaks of the salmon runs, fishermen could catch hundreds of salmon in a hour, but they generally became fatigued after only a half an hour of this intensive activity.

It was the women's work to butcher and dry the salmon, and this took more time than the catching of salmon. On average, a woman could process about 50 to 60 salmon per day, hanging them to dry in the hot, late summer winds of the Fraser Canyon for about three to four days. Thus, for a household to have large quantities of dried salmon for the winter and for trade, they needed access to the better fishing locations with platforms, and also enough women to help process all the fish that were caught. It is probable that the importance of women for producing dried salmon helped establish the practice of wealthy men taking many wives (historically, up to 10 wives). The fishing sites, like other important prerogatives, were inherited in

the male line. In most Interior Salish groups, women's status was lower than men's although among the Stl'atl'imx and the rich Canyon Shuswap, their status seems to have been well above their Salish sisters elsewhere on the Plateau. This is consistent with trends elsewhere in the world where richer transegalitarian societies use marriage exchanges to invest and increase wealth, thereby placing women in critical brokering positions (Hayden, 1995).

In the Lillooet region, each family required hundreds of dried salmon to last out the winter in their pithouses. There were substantial variations in catches from year to year, with spectacularly large runs every fourth year, as well as occasional years of low water levels and almost no salmon. Being able to store salmon from one year to the next was very important. After the salmon runs had subsided in early fall, most families stored their dried salmon on roofed, elevated platforms by the river. They also carried a substantial portion up the steep canyon slopes to their winter village where it was either stored in pits or on platforms. After storing dried salmon at their village locations in the fall, the families continued to trek up the mountain slopes until they reached the high alpine areas where the deer had congregated (Figure 2.5). By September to October, the deer had built up their fat stores and their fur was in prime condition for the coming winter. Fat was especially important for people in this area to provide enough calories to keep warm; carbohydrates were relatively rare in the diets of Interior peoples. Fat is constantly mentioned and emphasized in the myths of the Interior Salish people recorded by James Teit.

In the mountains, perhaps some of the domesticated native dogs helped run down the deer. When not collecting whitebark pine nuts, the women defleshed the skins of the killed deer. Skins that they did not have time to work into buckskin by the arduous, traditional tanning techniques were dried and brought back to the winter village to be worked on during the winter. Because deer were not very plentiful and because of the great labor required to produce buckskin, tanned skins and especially buckskin clothes were greatly valued. Not everyone had them. Poor people wore clothes of sagebrush bark. Deer meat, too, was highly valued and was dried in the mountains and taken back to the winter village for use in feasts.

When the days turned too cold to stay in the alpine areas, when the snows began to accumulate, families returned to their winter villages where they had stored dried foods for the winter: salmon, deer meat, fat, berries, and some roots gathered in the spring. In the pithouses, they worked on repairing tools, fishing nets, making skin clothes, and other crafts. When the weather was not too cold they went hunting (for the deer were forced down to lower altitudes by deep snow) and some people went ice fishing. They feasted and danced, and between events, they snuggled and slept, almost as though they were hibernating.

By March, stored supplies generally ran low, either due to feasting or due to poor harvests. People were anxious to get out of their winter places and went in search of early berry shoots, onions, balsam root, cow-parsnip, fireweed, lodgepole pine cambium, or other plants. Some people went down to the river to fish for the "spring" or chinook, salmon that returned in sparse numbers. When the snows had cleared from the intermediate grasslands, people went to the mountains to collect berries, various lily

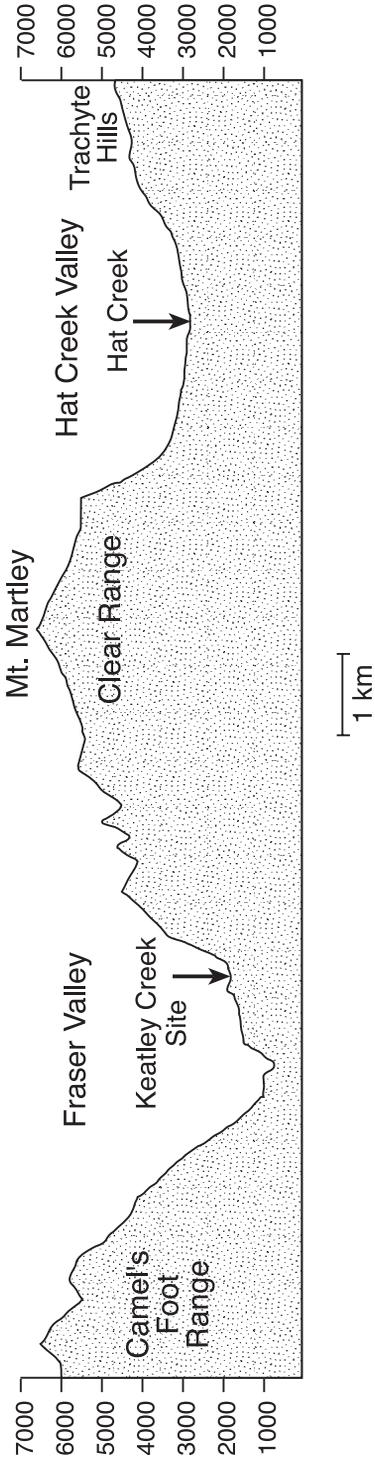


FIGURE 2.5. A cross section of the topography from the Camelsfoot Mountains, through Keatley Creek, to the alpine peaks of the Clear Range, and through the Hat Creek Valley. The prehistoric occupants of Keatley Creek made the arduous trek to the alpine areas and Hat Creek to collect plant foods and to hunt, probably twice a year just as their historic descendants did. (Vertical scale is exaggerated.)

roots, and “mountain potatoes” (*Claytonia lanceolata*, also known as “spring beauty”) as well as to hunt. Women dried many of these plants and brought back as much as they could carry down the mountain to their winter village.

As the weather warmed the alpine areas, many people continued their migration into these higher areas to harvest the lily roots, berries, and mountain potato roots, and they undoubtedly hunted along the way. Other families went to the mountain lakes to fish for trout. By the time they brought dried mountain plant foods back to the winter villages for storage in June or July, Saskatoon or service berries were ready for harvesting at lower elevations, and people gathered many bark buckets of the sweetest berries for storage. By the end of July, the salmon were running and families moved down to the rivers once again to begin fishing for the winter.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Social and political complexity varied considerably between peoples of the Interior Plateau. Those areas with the most productive fishing locations such as the Lillooet communities, the Canyon Shuswap, and farther south, the Wishram and Wasco communities at The Dalles on the Columbia River, all had quite complex social and political organizations. The people of these regions controlled major trade routes to the coast as well, and they must have enhanced their surplus-based trading profits due to this fact. The elites in some of these areas tried to restrict trade to themselves. They controlled bridges and trade routes and charged fees for using them (Ferguson, 1984, pp. 286–287, 304, 314; Teit, 1909, pp. 535, 541, 576, 583). At The Dalles they even charged Lewis and Clark a fee for transiting their territory.

Chieftainship was hereditary, slavery and trade were important, and there were many kinds of feasts including potlatches, although these may not have been as spectacular as those on the coast during the years the fur trade was booming. Ownership of facilities that required substantial labor to construct was inherited through males and stayed within families. These facilities included deer fences, salmon platforms, and fishing rocks. House structures were inherited through women. Houses and owned resource locations were often marked with carved or painted crests (totemic animals) indicating their owners. Trade, exchange, and the wealth that resulted from them seem to have been more important than warfare, and these wealthy, complex groups were noted for their non-warlike attitudes. Wealth consisted of owned fishing locations, of dentalium and other shells traded from the coast, of buckskin clothes, furs and warm bedding, of wives, of stores of meat and fat, of eagle feathers and other bird plumage, of slaves, canoes, and of nephrite adzes. The wealthy families shared with the poor when the spectre of starvation haunted the poorer families, but the rich complained about the lazy moochers in their communities. When men of wealth died, their dogs and slaves were reported to have been sometimes killed at the interment and the sacrificed dogs suspended from poles (Teit, 1906, pp. 269–270; 1909, p. 593). With such inequalities in wealth and power, with slave and hereditary elite classes, and with ownership of resources and the means of production, these were clearly complex hunter-gatherers.

James Teit (1909, p. 576) described the following:

The Fraser River bands were divided into three classes,—noblemen, common people, and slaves. The first class were called “chiefs,” and constituted ... nearly *one-half to over two-thirds of the whole population* [italics added]. The nobles had special privileges, and generally married within their class. Nobility was hereditary, and seems to have descended in both the male and the female line. Women of this class appear to have been on an equality with the men The crest of the (noble) group was carved and painted on the top of the ladder of the underground house, the ladder frequently being made very long for this purpose ... representations of the crest were also erected at the main fishing-places ... and also at their graves.

Teit (1906, p. 258) also mentions potlatches:

Potlatches were given by one individual to another or by the chief of one clan to another ... the chief represented his clan, and the potlatch was equivalent to one given by all the members of one clan to all the members of another. Some of these potlatches were great affairs; and *clans tried to outdo one another by the quantity and value of their presents, thus showing to all the country that they were most powerful, wealthy, and energetic* In most cases the *guests were expected at some future day to return presents equal in value to those given to them, or even of greater worth* [italics added].

Later, Melena Nastich (1954, pp. 23–25, 83) obtained the following information:

Wealthy households were large, consisting not only of the offspring of polygynous marriages, but of a number of slaves and of a fringe of poor relatives ... some such households numbered up to thirty people. *Each nuclear family of spouses and their offspring occupied its own living space, possessed its own cooking rocks* [italics added], baskets, blankets, and eating utensils, but functioned in close harmony with other members in social and economic pursuits High social standing ... was the result of accumulated wealth and recognized achievement. High standing families carefully avoided marriage with low status families for fear of jeopardizing the wealth and social status of the household.

Elsewhere on the Plateau, where salmon and other resources were less plentiful, leadership was not determined as much by inheritance as by ability. Slaves were less important and ownership of resource locations was less prevalent. Many of these groups are noted for their egalitarian ethic, which Verne Ray and others assumed was characteristic of all Plateau groups. In reality this represented only one end of the full Plateau spectrum.

Groups with less abundant and less reliable resources were more noted for their warlike nature and regularly raided those groups with a stockpiled surplus of dried fish and meat. Occasionally there were great wars. Women’s status in these leaner and meaner groups was generally not very high. It is less clear that the communities at this end of the spectrum represented very complex hunter-gatherers.

RECENT TRENDS

Shortly after the gold rush that seriously affected Lillooet and many other Interior communities in 1858, the British Columbia government acted to preempt most of the land claimed by natives in the Interior, including most of their resources. The government left only what can be called “postage stamp” reserves, although they included many of the important fishing locations. These events are engagingly chronicled by Joanne Drake-Terry (1989). With the introduction of highly efficient, highly desirable (and in the case of firearms, even necessary items for self-protection) industrial goods, coupled with the restriction and devaluation of native resources, native communities found themselves in impoverished economic situations.

The reduced relative value of their resources and the physical diminishment of those resources due to logging, placer mining, damming, farming, ranching, and other industrial activities all meant that native Indians had to contend with more limited and increasingly scarce resources. These are the same resource conditions that had made generalized hunter-gatherer values and social institutions so adaptive. And like generalized hunter-gatherers, the pressures on the colonized Interior Indians to become more egalitarian and to share their limited resources within communities became overpowering. Owned deer fences were abandoned, deer meat became less valuable, the European potato was called “chief,” people no longer recognized ownership of fishing rocks, and hereditary leadership was abandoned. Thus, the resources that people had to depend upon strongly influenced the nature of their social and political organizations. In this case, diminished value and availability of resources led to an abandonment of resource ownership and hereditary privileges. In recent years, there has been a trend to view the current egalitarian ethics of the modern communities as typical of all past Interior cultures. But any dispassionate reading of the early ethnographies clearly indicates this was not so (see Scheffel, 1994, and comparable observations on the coast by Donald, 1985, p. 241).

Other changes have also taken place. During the Great Depression and Second World War, many families relied to a great extent on traditional foods. Much traditional subsistence knowledge was retained during these years. With increasing wage labor opportunities from the 1950s to the present, many of the labor intensive and low-yielding subsistence activities have been abandoned. Today, almost no one goes to the mountains to collect lily roots or other food plants. On the other hand, hunting is still popular, as is fishing, although the techniques have been modernized and chinook salmon are no longer valued as the prime salmon species. Now sockeye salmon are more highly valued, I suspect because the flesh is less oily and more easily dried. Fish with high oil content would have been valuable under traditional conditions for the same reasons that fat was highly valued, that is, to provide enough calories for adequate body heat in the cold winters. Preservation techniques have also changed, with most dried fish today also being put into freezers.

Although much oral heritage and knowledge has been lost in the last four decades, there is still a strong cultural identity on the part of members of Interior Salish bands and many people continue to engage in productive, traditional subsistence activities.

SUMMARY

Ethnographic observations help not only to identify the use of unusual types of tools, but in regions like the Plateau, this information can also establish the range of social and political organizations that archaeologists may encounter in investigating past cultures. In the case of the Interior Salish, there is a surprisingly broad range of sociopolitical organizations. These extend from nearly egalitarian communities to communities that appear to be quite stratified both economically and socially, but not politically. Economic stratification occurs when some individuals or families own resources or the means of production and others do not. Social stratification occurs when there are separate, hierarchical social classes, such as nobles and slaves. Political stratification occurs when one community controls the independence of other communities in a hierarchical fashion. Transegalitarian societies are frequently economically and socially stratified, but are not politically stratified. Observations on the regional range of cultural organization help to focus archaeologists' attention on key questions in their research, such as how complex the prehistoric community at Keatley Creek was and what kinds of evidence are associated with different levels of complexity.

From the preceding discussion, it appears that highly productive salmon fishing locations, the occurrence of wealth items, reduced warfare, and rich burials are some of the phenomena one should expect with more complex communities of hunter-gatherers. This use of ethnographic observations is referred to as using "analogy from principle" because it is based on the identification of causal principles. In this case, a cultural materialist perspective leads us to expect that the effective harvesting and storage of abundant salmon resources generated wealth and inequalities. Lavish displays of wealth in burials and houses characterize some families. Such displays of success might be especially important where succession to power and resources is unstable and competitive (Randsborg, 1982, p. 135; Cannon, 1989). Surplus wealth should also enhance the importance of exchange resulting in a reduction of warfare. Such principles again demonstrate how resource characteristics affect social complexity. When well substantiated and documented, these types of analogies are among the most powerful that archaeologists can use. They are broadly applicable and they are generally quite reliable. Although, as with the laws of physics, one must always be aware that other factors can change expected outcomes, just as hot air balloons seem to contravene the law of gravity. However, like all levels of analogy that generate new insights, specific interpretations must always be tested with archaeological data. No analogy should be accepted as valid unless it also conforms with the archaeological evidence.

Ethnographic observations on the changes that have taken place from traditional precontact times to historic and present times also reveal how changes in the nature of resources, technology, and economy can lead to profound changes in social relationships, private ownership, political institutions, and values. As the nature of resources changes, people's perceptions also change regarding social relationships, claims to resources, degrees of sharing, and political relationships that are in their best interest. This is as true today as it was 2,000 or 200,000 years ago.