

FORWARD

BC Archaeology Then and Now

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In 1968 when Philip Hobler began his first archaeological field work on the coast of British Columbia with a survey of the seaward reaches of Nuxalk (then called Bella Coola) traditional territory on the central coast, the context in which most archaeological work in B.C. was undertaken was very different from what it is today. The only independent archaeological researcher working here at that time was Catherine Capes who undertook excavations at Fort Rupert and Milliard Creek on Vancouver Is. All other archaeology was being done by institutionally based researchers – Carl Borden at UBC, Donald Mitchell at U. Vic., Don Abbott, John Sendey, and Wilson Duff at the BC Provincial Museum, Roy Carlson at SFU who was directing the first archaeological field school in BC, and George MacDonald of the National Museum of Man (now the Museum of Civilization) who was directing the north coast archaeological project at Prince Rupert Harbour. The federal Historic Sites Branch, that later became part of Parks Canada, was mandated to excavate historic sites only, although Bill Folan did procede downward into prehistoric levels at Friendly Cove where he was working at that time.

Archaeology in BC had already entered an expansion stage before 1968 with the enactment of the *Archaeological and Historical Sites Protection Act* by the provincial legislature in 1960 and the establishment of the Archaeological Sites Advisory Board (ASAB) and its permitting system, but in 1968 archaeology was still very much institutionally based. The Archaeological Society of British Columbia had just been organized by members of an evening class in BC archaeology that I taught at UBC, and the first issue of their newsletter, later named *The Midden*, appeared in November 1968 under the supervision of Gladys Groves with Nick Russell as editor. *The Midden* rapidly became the most important medium of communication for archaeology in the entire province and is still published. Today most archaeological work is being done

by archaeological consulting companies rather than museums and universities, a situation that in 1968 would have been beyond belief. How and why has this change come about ?

Archaeological research is dependant both on money and qualified personnel. ASAB had some limited funds available for research, but a more important source was the National Museum of Man's funds for contract and salvage archaeology. From the provincial perspective the chief disadvantage to doing research under this program was that all excavated materials were supposed to be sent to Ottawa. The next significant source was the Canada Council from which the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) was later derived. SSHRC still exists and is an important source of money for university researchers, although most of its archaeological research funds go to support research abroad. Phil Hobler obtained the first Canada Council grant for archaeological field research in BC in 1969 for his 2nd year of survey of Bella Coola territory. The first year had been funded by the President's Research Grant Committee at SFU.

SFU's coastal research program was greatly enhanced when the M.V. Sisiutl, a 37' aluminum hulled research vessel was built and launched on May 13, 1972. The Sisiutl was designed by Phil Hobler in consultation with Matsumoto Shipyards who built the vessel, and was paid for by SFU. We chose the name Sisiutl partly because this mythological water serpent was a symbol of great power with an impenetrable hide, and partly because we were impressed by the Sisiutl monument at Bella Coola near where we were doing research.

The Sisiutl was used from 1972 to the mid-1990s in many coastal archaeological projects and was particularly important in operating the archaeological field school in remote coastal localities. In 1972 the Sisiutl transported students and supplies to our remote field camps at Kwatna and Kimsquit. Kwatna was a particularly good locality for a field school because of the variety of types of archaeological

sites found there: deep shell middens, house depressions, pictographs, burial caves, a waterlogged intertidal site, and intertidal lithic scatters. The greater the number of site types you can expose students to, the more likely they are to comprehend that different kinds of sites require different research techniques. The Nuxalk, who have reserves at Kwatna, were interested in the sites and band members Andy Schooner and Cyril Talleo participated in the excavations. In 1973 we used the Sisiutl for site surveys on Quatsino Sound and Seymour Inlet with funding from ASAB arranged by Bjorn Simonsen, in 1974 for my work at McNaughton Island, and in 1974 and 1975 for Phil's survey of Moresby Island. We used the Sisiutl in 1976 for site survey of the lower Nass and Portland Canal under the auspices of the Nishga Tribal Council with funding from ASAB. In 1977 and 1978 the Sisiutl was back on the central coast supporting more site survey work and excavations at Namu and Kwatna. In 1980 the Sisiutl supported field school excavations directed by Phil at FaSu 19 at Kwatna, and in 1982 at Fort McLoughlin at Old Bella Bella with assistance from Jennifer Carpenter and the Heiltsuk Cultural Education Centre. In 1983 the Sisiutl was used to support excavations at Troup Pass and Mackenzie's Rock and for transporting Heiltsuk students from Bella Bella for restoration work in historic graveyards in the area. From 1984 through 1986 the Sisiutl was used with the Pender Project in the Gulf Islands assisted by Abel Joe from Duncan with financial support from Programs of Excellence at SFU and from the Heritage Conservation Branch arranged for by Art Charlton, and from 1988 through 1990 first for Phil's surveys in the Hakai recreational area and then as support for the field school at Tsini Tsini operating out of Bella Coola.

The Sisiutl saw its last season of operation in 1994 when we used it to support my field school at Namu and Phil's at Tsini Tsini. The Sisiutl was sold in 2002. The Archaeology Department at SFU under the leadership of David Burley had by then moved away from Northwest Coast archaeology as a major area of research interest and replaced it with research on ancient DNA and colonial South American archaeology. Fortunately, both UBC and U. Vic. have continuing Northwest Coast archaeology research programs. Parks Canada has also now become a major player in prehistoric archaeology and Daryl Fedje is undertaking pure research in Haida Gwaii with very significant results.

BC archaeology today, both on the coast and in the interior, is being undertaken primarily by professional archaeological consultants employed by private companies to assess or mitigate the impact of specific construction projects on archaeological remains. This change has come about as a result of several factors. First the *Archaeological and Historic Sites Protection Act* was replaced by the *Heritage Conservation Act* in 1977 and later rewritten and strengthened with several amendments in the early 1990s that provided significant penalties for willful destruction of archaeological sites and guidelines for archaeological impact assessments. The old Archaeological Sites Advisory Board was replaced first by the Heritage Branch, then by the Archaeology Branch, and recently by Archaeological Planning and Assessment to manage permitting and record keeping. The second factor was the perception by the Native peoples of BC that archaeological remains are the physical evidence of their use of and hence their right to this land and its resources that with few exceptions they had never surrendered by treaty. As such these First Nations have tended to welcome archaeological research in their traditional territories, and have become more involved in the field research itself, particularly now that treaties are being negotiated.

A recent issue of *The Midden* (Vol. 34, No. 2, 2002) contains a list of 225 permits for archaeological work issued by Archaeological Planning and Assessment between January and July, 2002. This list provides a sample of what is happening archaeologically in BC today. Only eight of the 225 permits went to archaeologists at colleges and universities with the remainder going to 113 archaeologists employed as private consultants. These figures are in marked contrast to the total of nine archaeologists working in prehistoric archaeology in BC in 1968 of which all but one were from universities or museums. Archaeology has become both big business and because of land claims and treaty issues, highly political. At present it is uncertain to what extent the current high level of consulting archaeology will continue since *The Heritage Conservation Act* is currently under review by the recently elected provincial government.

The 18 papers in this volume do not attempt to cover all coastal archaeology in British Columbia. They are a sample of results obtained from a combination of academic and consulting research, and demonstrate that such combinations work in our quest for understanding and explaining the past. The primary



Figure F-1. Philip Hobler (left) and Roy Carlson (right) at the Launching of the SFU Department of Archaeology's Research Vessel, the Sisiutl, May 13, 1972. Copyright photo by Ray Allen courtesy of the Vancouver Sun.

result of archaeological research undertaken since 1968 is the demonstration of the continuity of occupation by native peoples from 10,000 [cal 11,400] years ago onward. Cannon (Ch. 1) reviews this evidence for the central coast, and Hall (Ch. 2) uses the Bella Coola Valley as an example of the vast sea and land level changes that took place at the end of the Pleistocene that impede discovery of the earliest remains. The Early Period (pre-5000 [cal 5700] BP) has recently been covered in detail (Carlson and Dalla Bona 1996), and Fedje's report (Ch. 3) on Parks Canada and University of Victoria research in Haida Gwaii brings us up to date for that period. McMillan (Ch. 4)

provides information on the end of the Early Period on the west coast of Vancouver island. Reimer (Ch. 5) challenges the view that the coastal peoples were so coastally oriented that they never went into the uplands by presenting the results of survey work in the coast mountains. Rahemtulla (Ch. 6) looks at this same problem of coast-marine tunnel vision, but tackles it differently by emphasizing the importance of land mammal bone as raw material for tools. Catherine Carlson (Ch. 7) provides the long awaited results of the faunal sampling of the Bear Cove site excavated in 1978, clarifies the temporal position of the component containing the abundant sea mammal bones,

and argues against the adaptational models favoured by some recent synthesizers of Northwest Coast prehistory that big game hunting slowly led to a late maritime adaptation on the Northwest Coast.

With Chapter 8 we move to archaeological remains from Middle and Late Period sites. In Chapter 8 the authors demonstrate that the site of Port Hammond, famous in the much older archaeological literature, is a classic Marpole phase occupation. In Chapters 9 (Johnstone) and 10 (Schaepe) information on pre-contact houses is presented. Schaepe's chapter provides the first detailed analysis and critical examination of the data from the Maurer House excavated by Ron LeClair in 1973, and contributes to both a more thorough interpretation of the house structure and to methodology. Johnstone reviews the rather meagre evidence for houses at three Gulf Island sites. Brown (Ch. 11) provides data on the Somenos Creek burials on southern Vancouver Island, and examines the problem of contemporaneity vs. intrusion in regard to burials in southern Strait of Georgia shell middens. Keddie (Ch. 12) provides new interpretations of some of the enigmatic stone bowls from the Lower Fraser and adjacent regions, and discusses the prob-

lem of fakes, while Maxwell (Ch. 13) questions the value of attempts to determine shellfish seasonality using presently known techniques.

With the last five chapters we move away from a total focus on archaeology to one involving considerable oral history and ethnography. McLaren (Ch 14) sequences past events mentioned in six central Coast Salish oral narratives, and then compares these events with events mentioned in the geological and archaeological literature. Seip (Ch 15) examines historic Nuxalk masks in museum collections as if they were archaeological specimens, and reconstructs their cultural context using both style and ethnography as guides. The final three chapters refer to historic period archaeology and ethnography. Prince (Ch. 16) looks at Native responses to European contact at the remote villages at Kimsquit using both ethno-historic and archaeological data, and Spurgeon (Ch. 17) critically examines the use and potential for survival in archeological sites of the food plant, wapato (*Sagittaria latifolia*). In the final chapter (18) Maas interprets the ceramics found associated with the Native houses and Fort McLaughlin at Old Bella Bella. All in all these papers resolve some archaeological problems and point the way for continuing research on others.