

Introduction to the Papers on Central Coast Archaeology

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The 2 papers in this volume are the result of the long term work on the Central Coast of British Columbia by the Department of Archaeology at Simon Fraser University. The papers are based upon graduate theses presented to the department in 1976 (Chapman) and 1977 (Apland) . They have been abridged somewhat but have not been updated or revised.

Since these are the first reports on Central Coast archaeology to be published in this series it is in order, by way of introduction to review the history of the department's work in the area. Geographically the area begins with the north end of Vancouver Island and associated mainland coast. It extends northward some 400 km across the Queen Charlotte Sound to a point south of Douglas Channel (Fig. 1.1). The topography varies dramatically on any east-west transect from low lying outer coast to the inner coast with its deeply incised fjord-like inlets. Historically the area includes the traditional territory of the Bella Coola, parts of the southernmost Haisla, the Hieltsuk, and much of the southern Kwakiutl area.

Some 10 field seasons, beginning in 1968, have seen Simon Fraser University sponsored archaeological projects on the Central Coast. Archaeology at Simon

Fraser University has been fortunate in being part of the original organization of the University. When Roy Carlson began teaching there in 1966 his prior recommendations had already resulted in the construction of an archaeology laboratory and provision for courses. I joined the faculty in 1967 after two years of palaeolithic work in the eastern Sahara. It could safely be said that I was unspoiled by previous experience with maritime archaeology. Shortly afterward I began a search for an area of British Columbia that would be suitable for a long-term programme of field teaching and research. Compared with the interior, the more advanced cultural development and presence of deep stratified sites made the maritime region seem more attractive. Even at that time a fair amount of archeological work had been done on the southern coast by local institutions. On the northern coast, National Museum of Canada projects were underway near Prince Rupert and on the Queen Charlotte Islands. In between, the Central Coast remained a rather large, unstudied area. Further encouragement to consider the Central Coast was provided by a gasoline company road map that deceitfully promised ease of access in the form of a major highway leading westward to Bella Coola from Williams Lake. Only later did we discover the degree of exaggeration

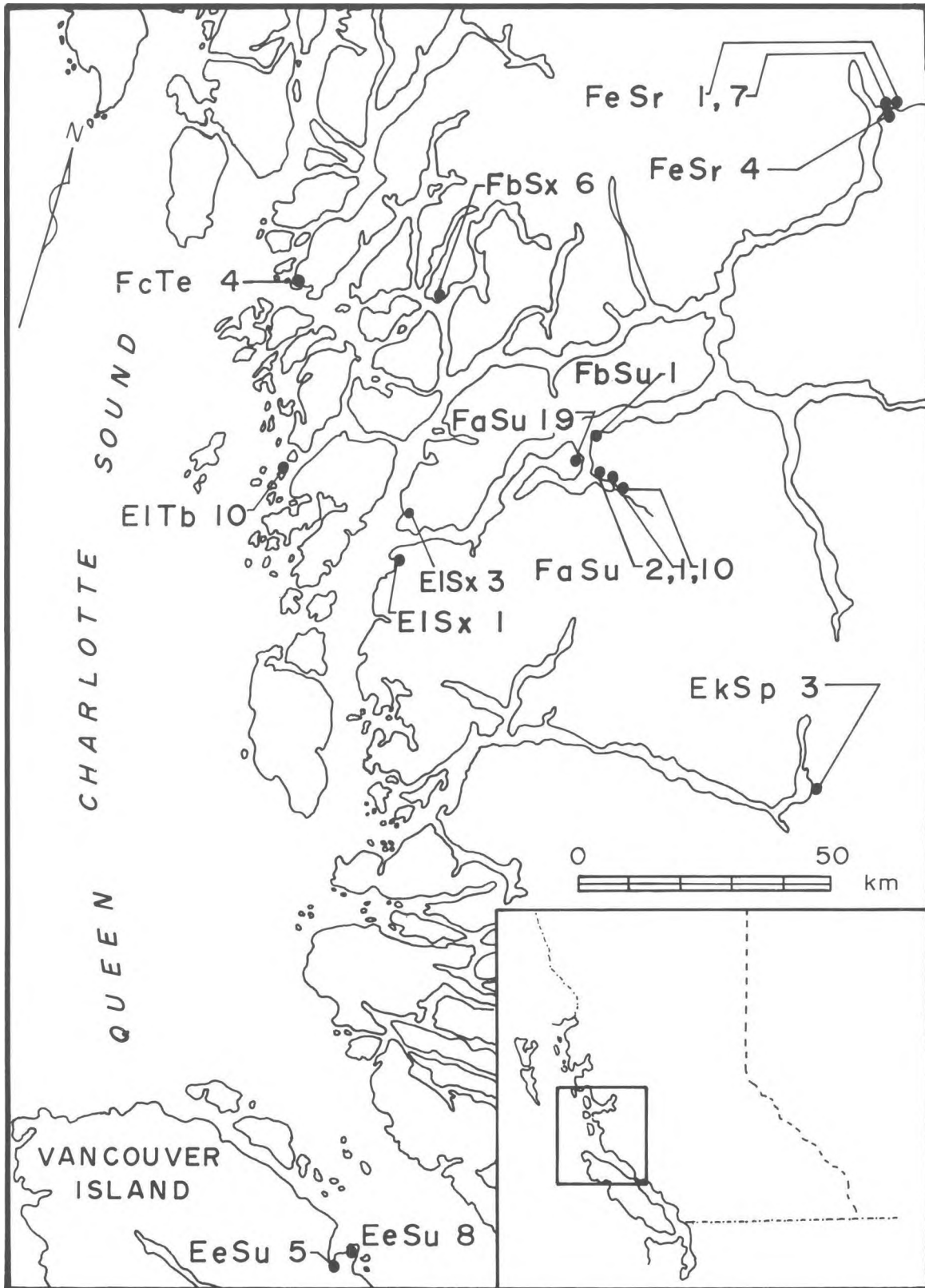
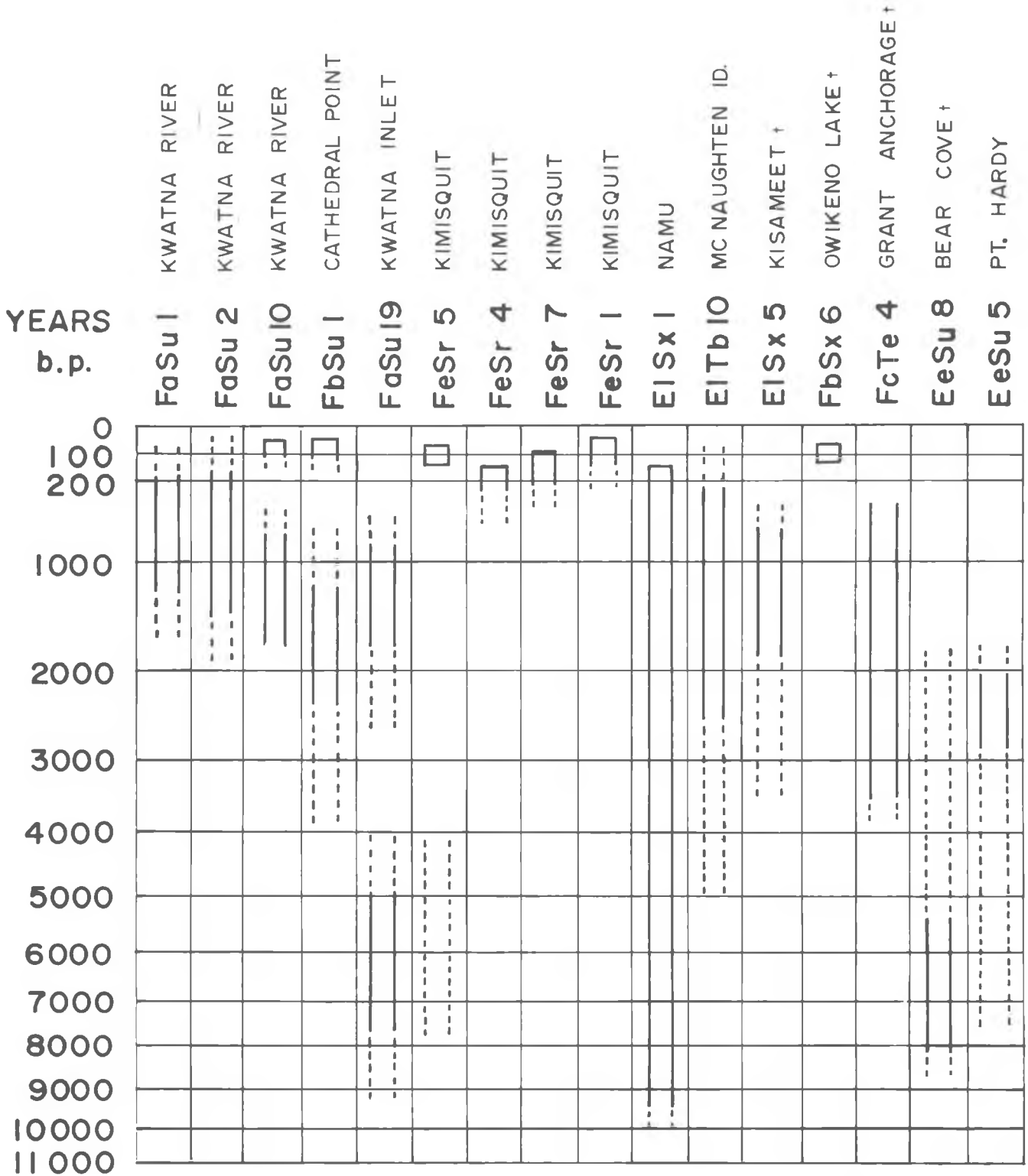


Fig. 1.1 Map of Central Coast showing excavated sites.



† CENTRAL COAST EXCAVATIONS NOT SPONSORED BY SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fig. 1.3 Approximate time range represented by excavated sites.

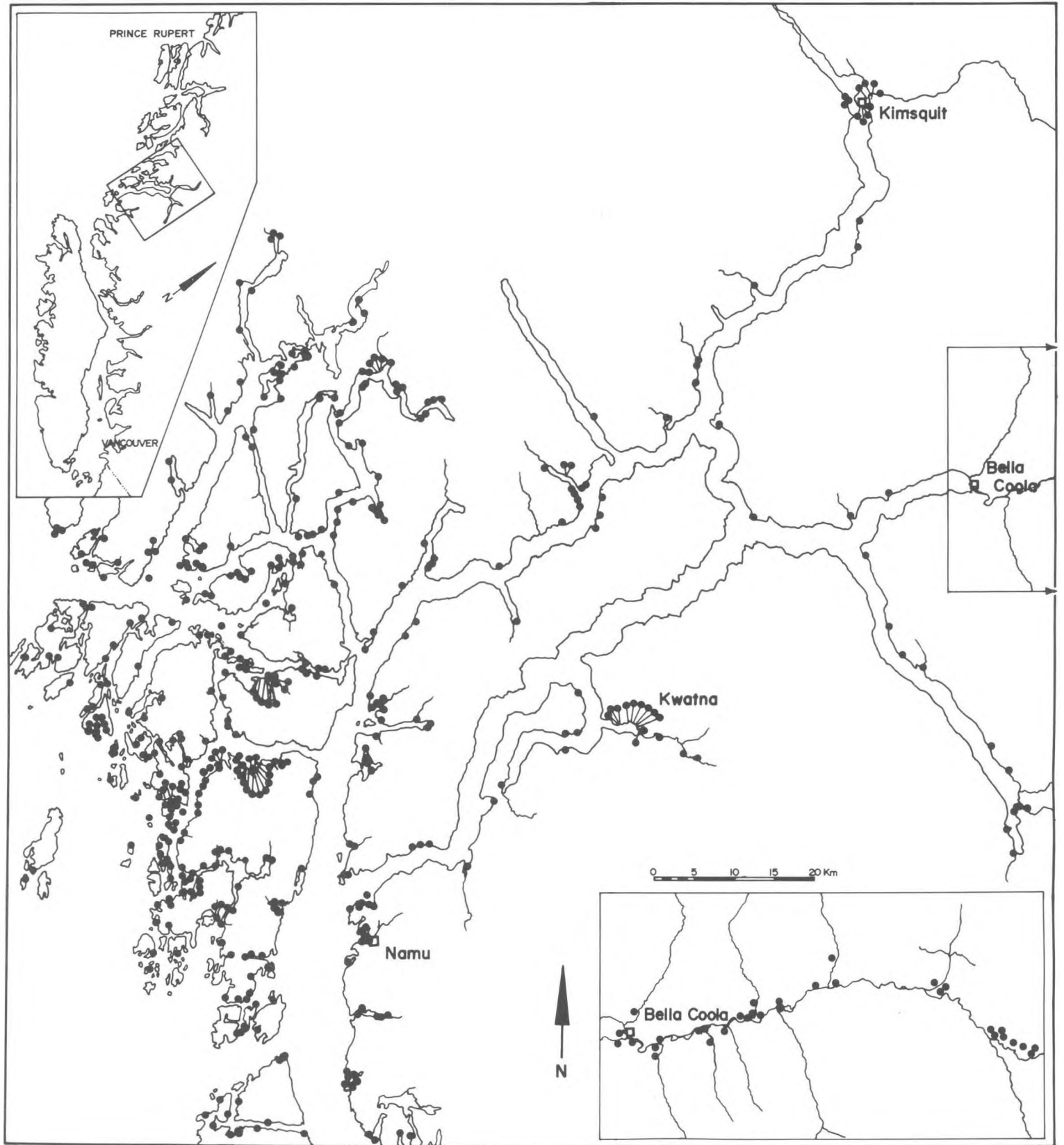


Fig. 1.2 Map of surveyed sites in the Bella Bella-Bella Coola region.

concealed in that broad red line.

Three ethnographic factors define the background for our archaeological investigations. The first is the anomalous position of the Bella Coola in their isolation from other Salish speakers both on the coast and in the interior. The second is the boundary on the east between the Bella Coola and the interior plateau peoples separating groups speaking unrelated languages and with contrasting cultures and environments. Third, is the Bella Coola-Hieltsuk boundary on the west a case of mutually unintelligible languages but a sharing of cultural traits and environment. These circumstances of varying culture, language, and environment during the ethnographic period set the stage for our initial archaeological investigations by posing a host of questions concerning prehistoric cultural traits, their distributions, origins, and relationship to environments.

Work began with a data gathering orientation. Since so little was known of the archaeology of the area it was not thought advisable to formulate more complex research goals. Productive research must involve an interdependence between the field data and the questions we ask since archaeological data from a given area are not capable of providing illuminating answers to every question that might be asked. This has been recently stressed by Trigger:

Archaeologists must learn to live with the realization that their desire to study whole cultural systems cannot be realized ... Archaeologists must learn to ask the kinds of questions with which the data are equipped to deal (Trigger 1978:151).

In short, one must know what the data are like before it is possible to see the problems and formulate the questions that can guide further work.

The application of research goals appropriate in other archaeological areas might have been non-productive. For example, in environmentally marginal areas the diachronic study of subsistence systems has been greatly aided by studies of paleoenvironment. Often in such cases even small cultural changes can be seen to be in phase with environmental shifts. Yet, this kind of approach when applied to the study of Central Coast shell middens has proven to be of only limited explanatory value (Hester and Nelson 1978). Archaeological studies seem to have progressed through the greatest number of developmental stages in those areas where inquiry has been underway longest. Compared with most New World areas, archaeological work of any scale on the Northwest Coast has been in motion only a brief time, 30 years on the southern coast and half that elsewhere (Carlson 1978). Perhaps we can shorten the stage-by-stage development of research orientation but there is no wisdom in attempting to skip whole stages. It has been and will be a difficult step-by-step process. In the end the data will be our best guide and will determine what can be learned.

Archaeological projects on the Central Coast sponsored by Simon Fraser University are listed in chronological order in Table 1.1. The approximate time range represented at excavated sites is given in Figure 1.2. My reconnaissance survey in 1968 laid the groundwork for much of our subsequent field efforts. Sponsored by the S.F.U. President's Research Grants fund, the 1968 survey provided initial familiarity with the Central Coast, its archaeological sites, and its rather special logistic requirements. Almost all of the sites that were later the focus of large excavations were found in the 1968 survey. Also in 1968 an archaeological survey project in the Bella Bella area west of Fisher Channel conducted by J. Hester was sponsored by the University of

TABLE 1-1 Central Coast Archaeological Projects sponsored by Simon Fraser University

YEAR	PROJECT	DIRECTED BY	DURATION	APPROXIMATE CREW SIZE
1968	Bella Coola-Bella Bella area survey	Hobler	6 weeks	3
1969	Excavations at Kwatna River Sites, FaSu 1,2,9	Hobler	8 weeks	18
1970	Excavations at Kwatna River Sites, FaSu 1,2	Hobler, Carlson	8 weeks	16
1971	Excavations at Kimsquit Sites, FeSr 1,4,7	Hobler	8 weeks	8
1971	Excavations at Kwatna River Sites, FaSu 1,2	Carlson	8 weeks	8
1971	Excavation at Port Hardy Site ...	Chapman	6 weeks	7
1972	Excavations at Kimsquit Sites, FeSr 4,5	Hobler	8 weeks	8
1972	Excavations at Kwatna River Site, FaSu 10	Carlson	8 weeks	8
1972	Excavations at MacNaughton Island, ElTb 10	Pomeroy	10 weeks	5
1973	Seymour Inlet, Quatsino Sound Survey	Carlson, Hobler	7 weeks	4
1973	Excavations at Port Hardy site ...	Chapman	9 weeks	8
1974	Excavations at MacNaughton Site ElTb 10	Carlson	8 weeks	6
1974	Bella Bella area survey for intertidal lithic sites	Pomeroy, Apland	8 weeks	2
1977	Excavations at Namu ElSx 1	Carlson	8 weeks	8
1977	Studies of intertidal lithic sites	Hobler	8 weeks	6
1978	Excavations at Namu, ElSx 1	Carlson	8 weeks	6
1978	Excavations at FaSu 19	Hobler	8 weeks	6
1980	Excavations at FaSu 19	Hobler	8 weeks	12

Colorado. Hester's field work continued through 1970 and included excavations at Namu, Kisameet, and Roscoe Inlet (Hester and Nelson 1978). Associated with the initial Colorado survey in 1968, Anthony Pomeroy continued survey work in the Bella Bella area in 1969, 1970, and 1974. This work later became the basis of his doctoral dissertation at Simon Fraser University (Pomeroy 1980). Figure 1.3 shows the total archaeological survey sample for the Bella Bella and Bella Coola areas of the Central Coast recorded by the author, Pomeroy, Hester, and others.

In 1969 the first S.F.U. field school on the Central Coast established a camp at the mouth of the Kwatna River about midway between Bella Coola and Bella Bella. The camp consisted of a large laboratory and dining structure made by re-erecting posts and beams from a ruined native house and covering them

with a large polyethylene sheet. Students and staff were housed in small tents, cocooned in layers of polyethylene. It was the first full scale archaeological camp and a prototype for several to come. We learned from it that, despite warnings to the contrary, it is possible to keep a large field crew reasonably dry and comfortable in an area of such high summer rainfall. The camp served us well for 3 field seasons. In the early winter of 1971 it was destroyed by a massive mudslide. Now, beneath hardening mud the ruins of our camp, like those of older sites await discovery by future archaeologists.

In all, 4 field seasons (1969 - 1972) saw Simon Fraser University field schools on the Kwatna River. I was initially interested in the area because of the remarkable sites of Nutlitliqotlenk (FaSu 2) and Axeti (FaSu 1).

Nutlitliqotlenk is the largest shell midden encountered on the 1968 survey. The survey surface collection indicated that, in addition to an impressive volume of clam shells, the site was also likely to contain a sufficient sample of artifacts to establish a material culture profile if not a chronology. This assessment proved correct. In addition, Carlson's 1971 excavations turned up evidence of a large uniform surface which he interprets as a house (Carlson 1972). These remains are fairly deep within the midden and thus are early in the site's history. The name Nutlitliqotlenk has been an enigma. Translated by McIlwraith as "place of many boulders" (1948: 21) it is today not a place particularly characterized by boulders. Our excavations showed that in several places the shell midden had initially accumulated on an old surface littered with boulders. These are likely the source of the name. The boulder areas were obscured by deepening midden deposits early in the site's history. Thus, though inappropriate for many centuries, the name has persisted.

Also on the Kwatna River the site of Axeti (FaSu 1) was found to have an extensive waterlogged cultural deposit with perishable materials preserved in a black anoxic mud. It was the first such site to be recorded on the B.C. Coast (Hobler 1970, 1976b). Exposed only during low tides, the deposit is on the upstream shore of a large island at the mouth of the river. Full scale work took place in 1969 and 1970. Metal tools proved inadequate for the task of excavating the delicate materials and were cautiously replaced by hydraulic techniques employing pump driven fire hoses and gravity fed garden hoses with fine spray nozzles. The materials recovered from the waterlogged portions of Axeti include basketry, matting, rope, and cordage of cedar bark. A variety of large and small wooden artifacts found include splitting wedges, bent fish hooks, weir stakes, and numerous pieces of uncertain function. Axeti also has a

well represented cultural deposit on the shore adjoining the waterlogged intertidal midden. Work on this area of the site revealed a good sample of non-perishable artifacts and evidence of architectural features.

On the Kwatna River about 1 km above Axeti, a third site, Anutcix (FaSu 10), was also the subject of a fullscale excavation project. Carlson's 1972 work at Anutcix investigated a rectangular surface depression of architectural origin and probed a midden that proved to be deeper and more extensive than surface evidence had indicated.

Together, these 3 excavated sites represented the major settlements on the lower Kwatna River. A time span covering about the last 2000 years is indicated. The evidence for the early portion of this span has come principally from Anutcix and portions of the lower stratigraphic units of Nutlitliqotlenk. Surprisingly, a well represented historic component from the late Eighteenth or Nineteenth Centuries has not been found. Changes through time in the proportion of certain artifact types and in the presence or absence of other types have prompted Carlson to suggest a division of the occupational continuum of the Kwatna River sites into 2 phases, Anutcix being the earlier and Kwatna the later (Carlson 1973; Hobler and Carlson 1973).

In 1971 I began 2 seasons of excavation at Kimsquit on the delta of the Dean River close to the head of Dean Channel some 90 km by water north of Bella Coola. Dean Channel, the longest fjord on the west coast, is cut deeply along the edge of the interior plateau. At Kimsquit a noticeably drier, more interior-like climate prevails. Surface water of the inlet are fresh with the result that only traces of fragmented clam and mussel shell are present in the cultural deposits.

Two major excavations and 2 minor ones were undertaken during my 1971 and

1972 field schools at Kimsquit (Hobler 1972a). Of special interest, site FeSr 4 consists of 23 large rectangular depressions of architectural origin. This site, though replete with architectural information, was remarkably devoid of artifactual materials and may have been only briefly occupied. At other Kimsquit sites extensive cultural deposits revealed both native and historic manufactured materials but showed no evidence of subsurface architectural remains. A small test in front of a standing post and plank house yielded quantities of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century trash. Site FeSr 5, another Axeti ("occupied mound") was tested in 1972. This narrow rocky outcrop had been topped by a small plank house in early historic times. Surface finds of pebble tools at its base prompted trenching which revealed a much older component mixed with the historic materials. In addition to the pebble tools excavation produced obsidian microblades and a leaf-shaped bipoint. This early component was not datable by means of radiocarbon analysis but probably predates 5000 B.P.

In all, the Kimsquit work presents a picture of 3 successively occupied sites. Occupation at these appears to have begun only immediately prior to historic times and spans the time from the introduction of historic trade goods to the full integration of cash economy and store-purchased items. Evidence for the prehistoric occupations so well represented at the Kwatna sites is yet to be found. Their absence may relate to an as yet undated geologic event that resulted in a major rerouting of the lower 3 km of the Dean River. Such an event could have destroyed most sites older than A.D. 1700 or could have so disrupted the salmon spawning potential of the river as to have rendered it unattractive for human settlement for an extended period.

The 1971 field season saw several S.F.U. field projects on the coast and

in the interior sponsored by the federal Opportunities for Youth programme. In addition to the field schools on the Dean River at Kimsquit and on the Kwatna River a third full-scale Central Coast project supported by the Opportunities for Youth programme was initiated at Port Hardy by Chapman (1972). The results of her work are published in this volume. Chapman's work at Port Hardy was undertaken because construction threatened a large shell midden. Full-scale excavations took place during the 1971 and 1973 field seasons. A good cultural sample and stratigraphic sections were obtained. Two cultural components were identified. A well represented assemblage of ground stone, bone, and shell artifacts was associated with the shell midden. Beneath the shell midden in a dark essentially non-shell matrix Chapman found a poorly represented earlier component characterized by flaked stone. This pattern of an earlier flaked stone component underlying a later shell midden deposit has now been widely recognized on the coast. Its significance has been the cause of considerable speculation. In the author's opinion, until good diachronic studies of shell midden chemistry are done it will remain impossible to determine whether the absence of shell in these early levels is of cultural-environmental significance or is due simply to factors of preservation.

The 1972 field season also saw the first season of an S.F.U. Project at McNaughton Island (E1Tb 10) about 30 km south of Bella Bella (Pomeroy 1980). This small but deep shell midden site is on one of hundreds of small islands and rocks on the outermost part of the Central Coast facing the Hecate Strait. It remains the only excavated site in this unique Central Coast micro-environment. A second season at McNaughton was conducted by Carlson as part of the 1974 S.F.U. field school (Carlson 1976). Pomeroy interprets the McNaughton Island Site as representing a winter and spring village that may at times have been used

as a regular winter settlement. His midden chronology begins with a basal radiocarbon age of 2520 ± 90 B.P. from a sample some 4 m below the present surface. An upper radiocarbon age is 900 ± 80 B.P. (Pomeroy 1980). Carlson's 1974 field school at McNaughton Island expanded the excavation into an adjacent area of the site revealing deposits that seemed to complete the temporal sequence through to the appearance of manufactured historic trade goods (Carlson 1976). The McNaughton work is significant in that it documents the presence on the outer part of the Central Coast of cultural components resembling those of the Anutcix and Kwatna Phases on the Kwatna River. Much better represented at McNaughton than on the Kwatna River are cultural materials dating between about 1500 B.P. and 2500 B.P.

A flaked stone component at McNaughton Island predating the various shell midden occupations was first observed by Pomeroy who noticed andesite flakes and a fragment of a leaf-shaped point in the intertidal zone in front of the main midden deposits. My 1968 survey had included a few pieces of flaked andesite from the upper intertidal zone at 3 sites on the inner portions of the Central Coast but it was not known at that time how atypical of the later to be excavated shell middens such materials were. In 1969 and 1970 Hester had shown that a flaked stone component at Namu underlay the shell midden deposits and that it was surprisingly early (Hester and Nelson 1978). His earliest radiocarbon age is 9140 ± 200 B.P. In 1970 Carlson observed flaked stone within the intertidal zone at Cathedral Point 16 km from the Kwatna River. By then it had become clear that such materials were not typical of shell midden sites. Over the next 2 field seasons several more intertidal lithic sites were found in the Kwatna Bay and Kwatna Inlet areas. Some of these produced large surface collections but in no case was it possible to trace the materials directly to a source on the shore above the intertidal zone.

A participant in the Kwatna area intertidal lithic site surveys, Brian Apland, also served on the 1973 survey in the Seymour Inlet-Quatsino Sound area (Carlson and Hobler 1976). This project was a reconnaissance survey of the extensive territory around the north end of Vancouver Island and in the Seymour Inlet complex on the mainland opposite the north end of Vancouver Island. The several intertidal lithic sites recorded during this field season were characterized by an assemblage rather unlike that found in the Kwatna area intertidal sites. In order to fill out the Bella Bella area sample of intertidal lithic sites Apland and Pomeroy devoted the 1974 field season to a specialized survey aimed solely at the discovery of such sites. Working during low tides from a base camp on McNaughton Island they added measurably to the site sample and to the range of materials in the collections. This material combined with Pomeroy's previously recorded sites, the Kwatna area materials, and the sites from the north end of Vancouver Island constituted the subject matter of Apland's thesis which is included in this volume. Apland's analysis constitutes the only clear description and comparisons of Central Coast intertidal lithic assemblages. Because the sites are surface sites they lack the much needed associations and directly datable organic material. The question of redistribution also remained as did the enigmatic problem of how the sites related to hypothesized sea level variations.

By 1974 Central Coast work had achieved several goals. S.F.U. sponsored work at shell middens at Kwatna, Kimsquit, Port Hardy and McNaughton Island together with Drucker's early work (Drucker 1943), Simonsen's Grant Anchorage excavation (Simonsen 1973), and particularly Hester's Namu and Kisa-meet excavations had provided material cultural data covering a period of some 5000 years. A pre-shell midden occupation at Namu adding another 4000 years

to the sequence had been demonstrated although not fully defined by Hester and his associates. An intertidal lithic site phenomenon was being explored and characterized by Apland. With all of this ground work underway a host of new questions could be asked. After a period of 2 years during which no full scale projects were initiated on the Central Coast a new phase of inquiry began. One of the primary goals became the understanding of the pre-shell midden human population, their origins, subsistence strategies, and technologies. To this end Carlson in 1977 began a 2 year S.F.U. field school excavation at Namu, taking up where circumstances of time and funding had forced Hester to leave off. Hester's main trench was cleared and expanded. Numerous radiocarbon samples and an expanded cultural sample were obtained.

One face of the main trench was prepared for the removal of a full stratigraphic profile. The profile sections are now re-assembled as part of the Namu exhibit in the S.F.U. Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. In 1978 the locus of the Namu excavations moved back up the hill some 30 m. Sterile in this area was reached at 3.95 m. These deep excavations produced a huge sample of flaked stone and many radiocarbon samples. The basal cultural unit now has an age of 9720 ± 140 B.P. From this basal unit upward the Namu excavations are now the most thoroughly dated by radiocarbon analyses of any British Columbia site (Carlson 1979).

Pursuing a different approach in 1977 I undertook a series of specialized studies of Central Coast intertidal lithic sites. Participants in this work were S.F.U. field school students who were rotated at regular intervals with those learning excavation techniques at Namu. This diversification of field training experience has been a feature of several of our Central Coast field schools. The problem of datable associations and the question of possible

redistribution of intertidal lithic artifacts were the focus of the 1977 work. Most of us had been thinking of the intertidal lithic sites as drowned camps, eg. relatively intact cultural deposits dating from a time of slightly lower sea levels. Thus, if the time of the lower sea level could be known, the approximate age of the sites could be estimated. But there was an alternative explanation. The artifacts could have gotten into the intertidal zone through the erosion of shoreward cultural deposits and the subsequent downslope movement of the materials on to the beaches. If this were so the age of the artifacts need not necessarily be ascribed to a time of lower sea level. With these questions in mind 5 sites were subjected to intensive surface scrutiny. The provenience of all intertidal specimens were recorded in precise 3 dimensions. The results of the subsequent analysis show little statistical evidence for sorting of artifacts by natural redistributive processes. Downslope movement was in evidence statistically only on 1 site with a steeply sloping beach. The remaining intertidal lithic distributions appear to be in place and relatively undisturbed.

While recording the intertidal lithic distribution at Joashila (FaSu 19) some 10 km from the Kwatna River, a small shell midden was found on the shore immediately adjacent to the beach artifacts. This 1977 find encouraged the expectation that we might be able to relate the site's well represented intertidal cultural deposit to an intact deposit on the shore and thus be able to explore its age and associations. With this in mind I devoted the 1978 and 1980 field school projects to excavations at Joashila. The work revealed a large

lithic deposit partly underlying a small Anutcix Phase shell midden. The early cultural materials had been left on the surface of a broad talus slope that may have served as a raw material source. A radiocarbon age on the upper portion of the lithic deposit is 5340 ± 100 B.P. The much deeper earlier

portions of the site are as yet undated.

In retrospect, there has been an evolution in research orientation on the Central Coast over the last 14 years. Initial survey work identified sites and site clusters. The first seasons were explorative and aimed at defining the outline of local culture history. Visible sites such as shell middens received most of our attention. The ethnographic literature along with our local native informants immensely enriched and guided the work. At the same time they imparted a distinct bias in the direction of later sites. Much recent work is still in a culture history mode, as probably it should be, but emphasis has shifted to the less well understood early period. New directions include special studies such as the work on downslope movement described above. In his doctoral work Pomeroy interwove extensive survey data with ethnographic and historical information in a reconstruction of early historic band territories of the Bella Bella. I am currently analyzing Central Coast survey data in

an effort to relate site distributions to known resource distributions (Hobler 1981).

Graduate theses such as those of Chapman, Apland, and Pomeroy are significant contributions to the literature as is Hester's 1978 monograph and Simonsen's 1978 paper. Journal articles and papers delivered at meetings have kept professional audiences apprised of current work but there remains a backlog of full descriptive reports.

Future field work will probably see a move to less strictly culture-historical research. Efforts to find and study earlier sites are still needed and may be specifically directed to unorthodox localities such as high elevations and perhaps even the sub-tidal zone. A positive new development is the interest and desire on the part of native people to be directly involved in archaeological studies. The future may see fully cooperative projects especially at late sites near reserves where the educative value for young people of direct historical interpretation can be realized.

