



Preface

Brian Hayden



This is the final report of the Fraser River Investigations into Corporate Group Archaeology Project, a project that has lasted for 13 years. This has certainly been one of the great intellectual and collaborative undertakings of my lifetime. I trust that readers will recognize in the many contributions that make up this report, the remarkable interweaving of many divergent disciplines, lives, and perspectives into a united interpretation of the social and economic organization of a prehistoric community on the Northwest Plateau. This report is special for a number of reasons. Firstly, the nature of the archaeological remains at Keatley Creek are in my estimation, one of our most important national and world heritage treasures. The site is extraordinary in terms of its size for people following a hunter-gatherer way of life (with an estimated peak population of 1,200–1,500). The large houses are extraordinary for pithouses and the preservation of organic remains and stratigraphy is excellent.

Secondly, this report is special because it seeks one of the most elusive entities archaeologists have sought from the beginnings of their systematic exploration of the past: notably, the basic social and economic and political organization in specific prehistoric societies. How did this organization mold the lives of people on a day to day basis? There have been many professional archaeologists who have said that such questions cannot be answered. There have been many others who

adamantly maintain that such questions can be answered. However, while both sides have reveled in pronouncements, few archaeologists have successfully demonstrated how even basic aspects of social or economic organization can be reconstructed from the remote past.

This report demonstrates that with determination, collaboration, and a little luck, a fairly detailed reconstruction of past social and economic organization is certainly possible. This was the goal of the project from the beginning: to understand the social and organization of unusually large houses (residential corporate groups). The results have sometimes been surprising and intellectually exhilarating, as the following chapters document.

Third, as alluded to above, this report is remarkable for the unusual breadth of data and disciplines that have all contributed to making this report a landmark study in prehistoric archaeology. While I originally defined the basic problem orientation of the project, I have had the good fortune to have been aided from the outset by a remarkable team of collaborators, excavators, and analysts in specialized fields. I consider the substantial success of this project to be a tribute to all of them. Many of the authors of the following chapters helped plan the excavation and analytical strategies to be pursued from the outset of the project,

and many were on the first field crew that tested the first housepits in a hesitant and hopeful manner, unsure as to whether we would find any intact or recognizable living floor deposits upon which much of the fate of the project depended. Diana Alexander, Karla Kusmer, Dale Donovan, Dana Lepofsky, and Mike Rousseau were all members of that first field crew and planning committee. They helped modify our strategy as new realities confronted our initial idealistic models, and they continued their involvement in the project over the years in analyzing the overwhelming amounts of material recovered. I consider this final report on the work at Keatley Creek as one of the best examples of what collaborative, interdisciplinary archaeology can produce.

Fourth, this report is special because it substantially increases our depth of understanding in the study of complex hunter-gatherers. Complex hunter-gatherers have become very prominent in the theoretical domain of archaeology in the past two decades because they now appear to be the key to understanding most of the important cultural developments of the last 30,000 years of prehistory, including the emergence of prestige technologies, economic-based competition, private ownership, socioeconomic hierarchies, slavery, domestication of plants and animals, sedentism, and many tangentially related phenomena. This report also provides a major contribution to the systematic and detailed study of site formation processes which have rarely been documented in any thorough or systematic fashion.

Finally, this report is special because substantial parts of it have been built upon an in-depth understanding of the living descendants of the prehistoric Plateau peoples. We were privileged not only to read early ethnographic accounts of traditional Plateau lifeways as recorded by James Teit and others, but also to be able to work with a number of elders from the surrounding First Nations communities. From them we learned a great deal about traditional practices and especially how resources were used. This valuable information constituted a study of traditional resource use that was exceptional in its coverage and documentation of traditional lifeways. This study was published by the University of British Columbia Press under the title of: *A Complex Culture of the British Columbia Plateau* (Edited by B. Hayden). I certainly would like to extend my very deep gratitude to everyone in the native communities that aided us in this work, and especially to former Chief, Desmond Peters, Senior, of Pavilion.

The quest to recover past social and economic organizations on the Plateau has been long and arduous, and it has led to many unexpected ventures, both geographical and intellectual. I have been constantly surprised by new facts, new relationships, new

perceptions, new conclusions, and new questions. However, 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 fabric of the past at Keatley Creek and to create coherent theoretical images of the past. However, the main themes have remained clear and resilient. The venture has been a wonderful growing experience, even if I have at times been exhausted by the endeavor.

I am confident that as a result of the excavations at Keatley Creek, the new conceptual, methodological, and theoretical approaches that I and the other analysts have developed will stimulate further advances in the exciting area of documenting and understanding past social and economic organization. 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 were developed by interested students and analysts who became intrigued by the project and developed their own innovative ways of looking at the data. Once again, I must acknowledge my very good fortune in having such interested, dedicated, and talented individuals involved in this project. It is above all, they who have made it successful.

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