

CHAPTER 20

Holocene Human Occupation and Use of the *Slapus/Lelachen* Locality in the Lower Lillooet River Valley

Adrian J. Sanders

Rhizome Cultural Heritage Research and Consulting

Peter Merchant

University of British Columbia

Introduction and Background

The Lower Lillooet River valley was far from a cultural side-show to the Lower and Central Fraser River, and Salish Sea nexus. Rather, it appears that in terms of longevity and intensity of occupation, it rivaled its more celebrated neighbors to the south, and north/northeast. This chapter addresses this fact by drawing on oral traditions, historic and ethnographic accounts, and results of four archaeological projects conducted at the supra-village locality of *Slapus*, *Lelachen* and *Quqéwelq* (Figure 1) between 1999 and 2013 (Hudson and DePaoli 1999; Hudson 2000, 2001, 2003; Wells et al. 2009; Ferguson and Broly 2011; Sanders and Merchant 2016). Accumulated data suggests that the cultural landscape comprising this locale was continuously and intensively occupied from the early Holocene through the colonial era, and into the present, situating this primary supra-village among the most significant archaeological complexes within the Salish world. We maintain that the Lower Lillooet was a key foci of Salishan cultural florescence, and there is much to benefit through reconsidering the ways in which this nexus was complimentary to those in the Middle and Lower Fraser River and Salish Sea, which to date, espouse the accepted cultural development narrative.

Previous Research

Although the Lower Lillooet River lies near the Fraser River Valley and the metropolis of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, archaeological research in the valley during the first century of colonization was entirely absent, except for some collecting, then small-scale and relatively sporadic investigations over the last 40 years. However, a number of projects conducted in the last ten years have contributed a wealth of information. A review of the anthropological, archaeological and historical texts from the last thirty-years which pertain to the Salish world, are dominated by results of research conducted within the Central Fraser Canyon, Lower Fraser River and Salish Sea regions. References to the Harrison-Lillooet Interaction Sphere portray it and the Lower Lillooet River specifically, as existing on the

periphery of the Coast and Interior Plateau Salish worlds, a “transitional zone between the Northwest Coast and Interior Plateau Culture Areas” (Ferguson and Broly 2011:7); a place from which people migrated to the core of cultural homelands following the catastrophic epidemics of the 18th and 19th centuries (Carlson 2010:98-99).

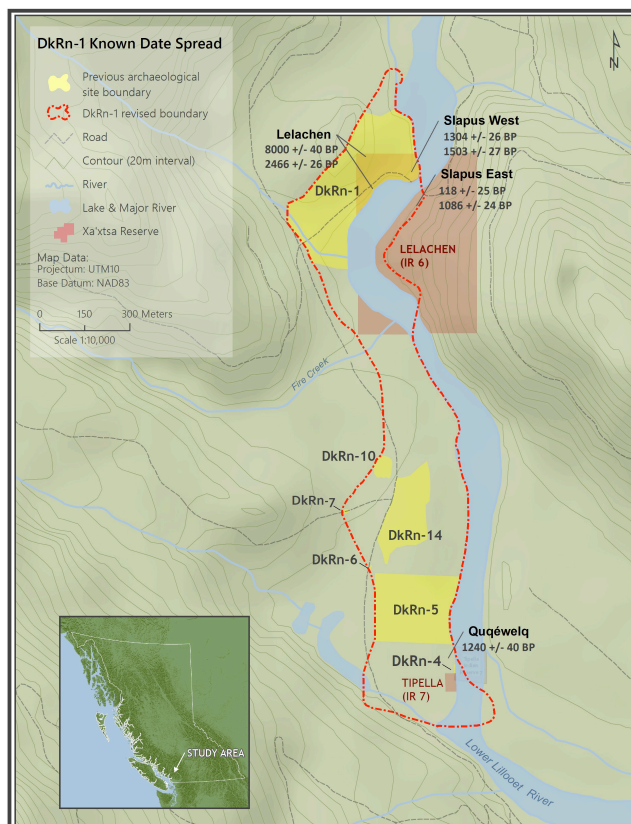


Figure 1. Recently revised boundary of site DkRn-1 (2013 survey area), and location of the four excavation programs.

Perhaps it is this portrayal as a periphery that has caused it to be obscured and overlooked by researchers. This bias extends to archaeological research conducted in the Lower

Lillooet Valley itself, with archaeologists drawing on the cultural historic legacy of the nearby Fraser Valley and Salish Sea when creating archaeological reconstructions of DkRn-1 and surrounding sites, reconstructions that, "...add to the growing body of data about mid-Holocene sites in the southern Strait of Georgia - Fraser Valley region" (Ferguson and Brolly 2011:39). This chapter seeks to provide archaeological insights into the settlement pattern, land-use history and role of a supra-village located at a strategic 'gateway' between two ecological and cultural zones, along the Harrison-Lillooet Interaction Sphere, a term that speaks to the enduring history of interregional interaction between Interior Plateau and Coast Salish peoples. This was, in part, facilitated through the definable geographic transportation corridor, following the nearly contiguous waterway and brief portage section of the Harrison River and Lake, Lower Lillooet River, Lillooet Lake, Birkenhead River, Poole Creek, *Qulpautlen* 'portage', Gates Lake and River, Anderson and Seton Lakes, and Seaton River (Sanders 2006).

DkRn-1 is composed of seven previously recorded contiguous archaeological sites (DkRn-1, 4 to 7, 10 and 14) that were amalgamated in 2015 following a comprehensive survey conducted by the authors in 2013, and due to social interconnectedness of these locations in Xa'xtsa (Douglas First Nation) oral knowledge. This extensive archaeological residential and subsistence complex extends for at least two and a half kilometers along the east and west banks of the Lower Lillooet River (*Nek'etqwim*), occupying river terraces, back-eddy beaches, bedrock outcrops and a river-creek confluence. Within the currently delineated site boundary are numerous place names. From north to south they include *Slapus* ("the rock is leaning", "lower your head"), *Lelachen* ("fishing stage", "fishing platform"), and *Quqéwelq* ("far side"). Each of these locations have recently been subject to archaeological investigations, and are the primary focus of this chapter.

The earliest published account of *Slapus* and *Lelachen* is presented in Charles Hill-Tout (1905). During his ethnographic interviews with Captain Paul, whose ancestry could be claimed from multiple Interior Plateau and Coast Salish communities, Hill-Tout recorded and described many settlements in their territory, including *Lelaqin* (*Lelachen*) and its importance as a fishing station, "...fishing stage (a noted fishing ground — the shore is rocky here and the waters swirl by — the salmon take this course and the Indians erect staging over the water, upon which they stand and fish with the dip-net)." (Maud 1978:102). In 1903 James Teit travelling with Lil'wat Chief James Stager, recorded *Lala'xxen* (*Lelachen*), describing its location on the, "... Lower Lillooet River, 10 miles above Douglas..." meaning, "fishing platform" (Teit 1906:196, 296), as is shown in Figure 3.

The significance of *Slapus* is recounted in an oral narrative provided by Lil'wat elder Charlie Mack (Kennedy and Bouchard 1977:14-15), describing how Mink the *Whalaymath* (Transformer), in order to lighten the canoe

they were travelling in, was tricked into sacrificing a part of his body to the narrow canyon at *Slapus*, thus permitting safe navigation through this turbulent section of river. This narrative, like others that relate to *Slapus*, lend credence to its cultural and economic importance, embedding Xa'xtsa history, subsistence, and cultural knowledge within the landscape.

A full century would pass following the initial visit to *Quqéwelq* by Harlan I. Smith in 1899 before systematic archaeological investigations were conducted at DkRn-1. From 1999 to 2003 Xa'xtsa initiated archaeological investigations at *Quqéwelq* village immediately adjacent to the graveyard that Smith had previously visited (Hudson and DePaoli 1999; Hudson 2000, 2001, 2003).

As a consequence of hydro-electric developments within the Lower Lillooet River valley archaeological investigations expanded, with a focus on the area north of *Quqéwelq*, around *Slapus*. Two specific projects, conducted by Antiquus (Wells et al. 2009) and Amec (2011) resulted in systematic data recovery at DkRn-1. Both investigations were confined to the location of proposed hydro-electric developments, recovering extensive and significant high density archaeological material remains. Antiquus excavated a total of seven 1m² excavation units, four (EU's 1 to 4) were excavated as a 2m² block, resulting in the recovery of 1317 artifacts and 4561 pieces of lithic waste (Wells et al. 2009:26). In addition, two "distinct archaeological features" interpreted as cooking hearths were encountered in the lower levels. Charcoal recovered from these features produced dates of 5210±50 years BP (Beta-242962) and 4720±40 years BP (Beta-242963). Units 5 to 7 excavated immediately west of the bridge over the Lillooet River yielded a "much lower concentration of lithic artifacts" than EU's 1 through 4, and no radiocarbon dates were recovered (Wells et al. 2009:27-30).

In 2010 Amec completed excavation of six 1m² units, identifying what they described as intact cultural deposits to a depth of nearly two meters, recovering nearly 1000 lithic artifacts and 4000 pieces of lithic waste. Amec also identified two buried hearth features and a third feature interpreted as remains of an "ancient habitation structure" (Ferguson and Brolly 2011:iv). Six radiocarbon dates indicate the site was occupied 7100 radiocarbon years ago" (Ferguson and Brolly 2011:iv). In 2013 the nature and focus of archaeological investigation at DkRn-1 shifted when Xa'xtsa initiating a research-based archaeological program conducted by the authors. Excavations at DkRn-1 focused on two named locations; *Slapus* and *Lelachen* (Figure 1). These two loci are defined by a unique bedrock geological formation occupying both banks of the Lower Lillooet River, and a series of distinct downriver terraces occupying the west bank respectively. Each is situated within a stone's throw of the other; yet represent unique activity centers characterized by distinct artifact assemblages and stratigraphic formations. At *Lelachen* excavation occurred on the upper river terrace within the vicinity of the previous Antiquus and Amec excavations, directly below on the

formerly uninvestigated lowest river terrace, and south on the lower terrace midway between *Slapus* and the previously researched named location of *Quqéwelq*. Survey was comprehensive and incorporated the three previously named places and the landforms they occupy.

Excavations focused on two distinct named locations within site DkRn-1: *Slapus* and *Lelachen* (Figure 1). These two loci are situated on a series of distinct river terraces and geologic landforms occupying both banks of the Lower Lillooet River. Each loci is situated within a stone's throw of the other, and represents a unique activity center characterized by distinct artifact assemblages and stratigraphic formation histories.

2013 Excavations

Slapus

Slapus is a small canyon composed of a bedrock outcrop whose formation is attributed to a *Whalaymath* event. This canyon restricts the flow of the Lower Lillooet River, resulting in a series of back-eddies along both riverbanks. Today, as in the past, Xa'xtsa use this locality for fishing (Sanders and Merchant 2016:29-30, Figs. 6-7), with pole nets located on both sides of the canyon and immediately downstream near the confluence of the Lower Lillooet River and Fire Creek ('*Lalaikin*' Palmer 1859). Excavations at *Slapus* were intended to secure data that would help develop a preliminary understanding of Xa'xtsa fishing practices, and involved the excavation of two individual 1m² excavation units on the east bank of the river (*Slapus East*) and a 1.7 x 1m unit on the west bank (*Slapus West*).

Slapus East

The two excavation units at *Slapus East* were placed above a back-eddy on a discrete level bench that contains soil deposits overlying a broader terrain of bedrock, flanked immediately to the north and south by contemporary fishing stations. Units were excavated to a depth of 1.8 m BD, revealing relatively homogenous stratigraphy composed of silt and sand. The lithic assemblage indicates a wealth of lithic raw material types, with a focus on final stages of lithic reduction, consistent with the manufacture of tools associated with fish processing. A complete nephrite adze was amongst these artifacts. Two charcoal samples were recovered from 30-40 cm BD and 110-112 cm BD. Their resulting ¹⁴C dates of 118±25 BP [D-AMS 006523] and 1086±24 BP [D-AMS 006534] indicate a minimum occupation range spanning nearly one thousand years (Table 1).

Slapus West

Slapus West is located on an elevated terrace on a prominent point on the west bank of the Lower Lillooet River, in an area of exposed bedrock containing deep pockets of soil, and it is linked to the aforementioned *Whalaymath* event (Figure 2; Sanders and Merchant 2016:14, Fig. 3). The bedrock prominence is strategically located to a known fishing rock (Figure 3), and is exposed to winds flowing

through the narrow canyon that provides a reliable production center for wind-drying salmon (*tswan*).

A 1.7 x 1m unit was excavated at this location to a maximum depth of 90 cm BD. The objective of this excavation was similar to that at *Slapus East*; to elucidate Xa'xtsa fishing practices and identify the location of a fish processing station. Stratigraphy is relatively homogenous, consisting of four similar strata, and a well-defined hearth. The recovered lithic assemblage was small, corresponding with low-density deposits encountered during earlier excavations (Wells et al. 2009). However, historic artifacts, including machine-punched and wire-drawn nails were recovered in the upper deposits, as was a portion of a finely crafted robust "nipple top" hand maul that was associated with a fragment of a burnt wooden stake (Sanders and Merchant 2016:57, Fig. 22). This is consistent with tool requirements associated with construction of wooden fish processing structures. Remains of such a structure include carved stakes, partially burnt posts, beams, and post/stake molds (Figure 4).

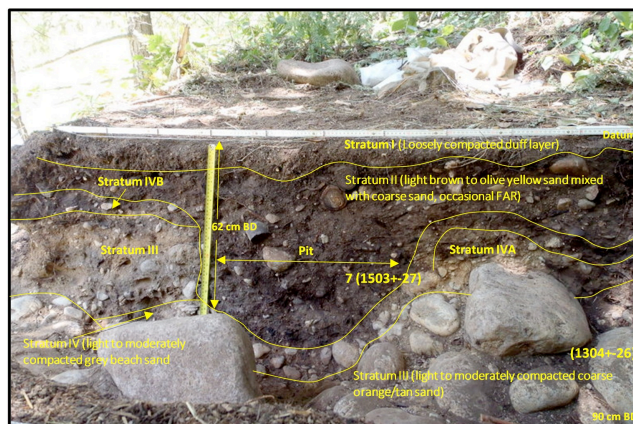


Figure 2. West wall profile of *Slapus West* excavation showing cultural strata, including occupation floor and excavated hearth.



Figure 3. Image taken by Harlan Smith (1899) of a fishing platform and dip net indicating how "it was done a long time ago" (Sam Peters 1998:11-12). Image PN 11397 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Radiocarbon dates from two samples of burned wood from within the excavated hearth and from an occupation surface adjacent to the hearth feature at level six 50-60 cm

BD, are 1503 \pm 27 BP (D-AMS 006535) and 1304 \pm 26 BP (D-AMS 006536) (Figure 2). When collectively considered, the radiocarbon dates and post-contact period artifacts suggest, that *Slapus East and West* were occupied and/or utilized from the late Holocene to the contact period, an inference consistent with documented ethnographic and ethno-linguistic information from Hill-Tout (1905) and Teit (1906), as well as Xa'xtsa oral history. Xa'xtsa Elder Alice Kelly (1918-2016), in an interview with Adrian Sanders (2014), recounted how as a child during the 1920's, she and her family travelled upriver by canoe (poling) to fish at *Slapus*, where they would reside for periods during summer and fall fishing seasons. Xa'xtsa elder Sam Peters provides a mirrored description of events at *Slapus*, including the physical location and some of the structures once located there,

“My grandfather had a fishing cabin at *Slapus*. It was on the little bench on the north side of the logging road, on the west side of the river just beside the bridge. They had a smokehouse there as well to smoke their salmon before returning home. They would stay there until they caught enough salmon to come home.” (Peters 1998:7).



Figure 4. Bottom image (a): a fish procurement and processing camp along the Lower Lillooet River, near Port Douglas (Harlan I. Smith 1899) that shows a net and associated structural components. Archaeological remains of such structures include a carved stake (b), shaped stake tip (c), and burnt shaped stake and ground slate knife fragment (d), used for fish processing.

Lelachen

Lelachen is located approximately 250 m south of *Slapus* on the west bank of the Lower Lillooet River on the north end of a nearly two-kilometer-long terrace. Situated adjacent to a major back-eddy created by *Slapus*, and only a few meters

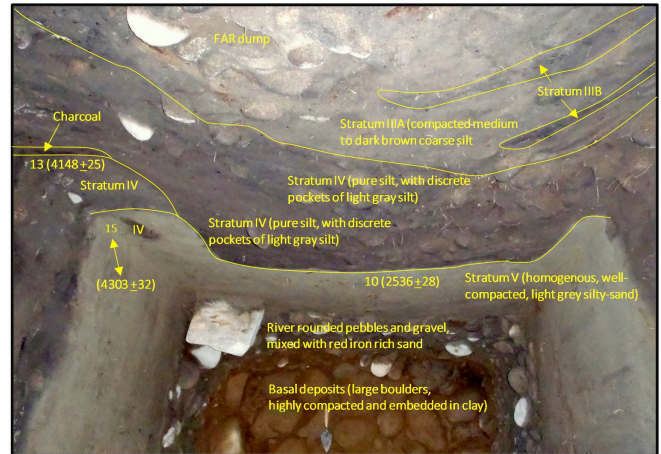


Figure 5. South wall profile (~70 to 360 cm BD) at *Lelachen*, showing lower house floor, and excavated hearth, both laying above a concrete-like solidified, mixed aggregate river bed.

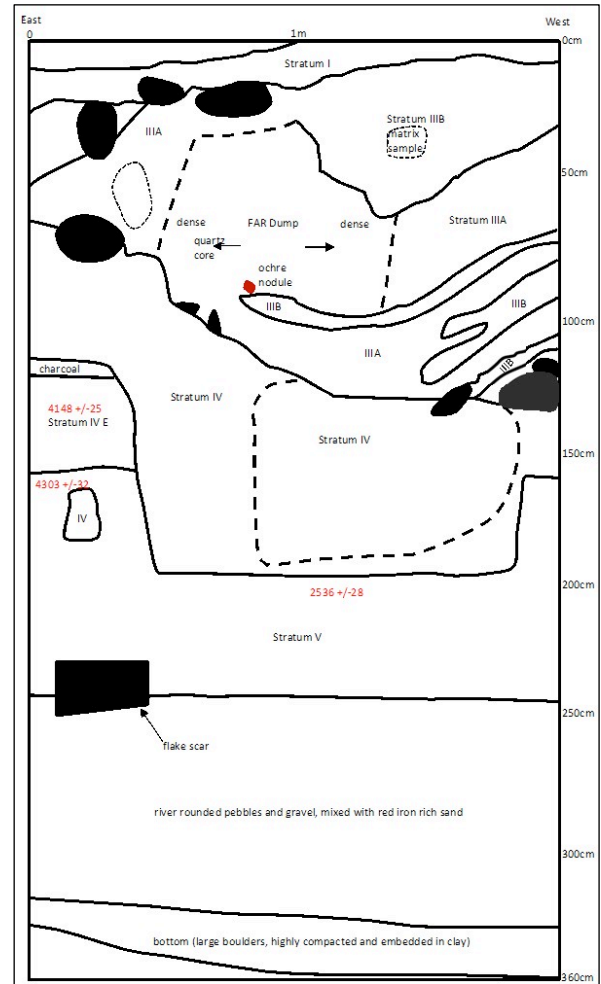


Figure 6. South wall profile at *Lelachen*, showing the stratigraphic and temporal relationship for Holocene period colluvial and fluvial processes and cultural genesis of hearth and living floor deposits.

above the Lower Lillooet River, *Lelachen* consists of a varied suite of physical landforms and orientation to the river, characteristics that make this location an ideal setting for a permanent village.

Two adjacent 1m² units were excavated to a depth of 360 cm BD. Excavation revealed complex stratigraphy and high-density artifact assemblage. Also revealed was an extremely greasy anthropogenic house floor deposit that extended through both units, and a significant well-articulated hearth feature. Semi-circular in plan, the hearth was first identified at 20-30 cm BD (Sanders and Merchant 2016:74-75, Fig.s 35-40). In the upper meter of deposits, the hearth extended into the west and east walls, tapering slightly at its base terminating in clean beach deposits at a depth of 200 cm BD. At its conception, the hearth measured just under half a meter in depth, and over the course of its roughly 2500 year use life, built up roughly another 1.2 m of deposits; its mean width measured 160 cm.

The intensity of occupation is also reflected by the large quantity of lithic artifacts, the frequency of which did not decrease with depth. Stratum VI and VII are both comprised of concrete-like coarse sand, river gravels and a cobble/boulder bed that curiously yielded an artifact assemblage as dense as the living surface of the house floor and hearth feature (Figure 5) (Sanders and Merchant 2016:73, Fig. 33), a testament to its prior use history as a seasonally exposed and occupied riverbed (Sanders and Merchant 2016:77, Fig. 41).

Quqéwelq

Quqéwelq is located south of *Lelachen*, on the west bank of the Lower Lillooet River. Previously identified archaeological remains include house depressions, small quantities of lithics, two projectile points (Hudson and DePaoli 1999; Hudson 2000, 2001, 2003), two burial mounds, stone slate beads, and a pecked stone bowl displaying ochre paint staining (Sanders and Merchant 2016). A single radiocarbon date of 1240±40 BP was obtained from *Quqéwelq* (Hudson 2003:15). Hudson and DePaoli (1999:24), relying on evidence gathered from Xa'xtsa elders relate that, "Oral tradition suggest that the village at DkRn-5 was occupied until about 1850." Stylistic attributes of the two projectile points led them to infer that the area surrounding *Quqéwelq* village had a much deeper use and occupation history than indicated by the single radiocarbon date (Hudson and DePaoli 1999:24). Their observation is consistent with those of Antiquus (Wells et al. 2009), Amec (Ferguson and Brolly 2011), and our own. Furthermore, these conjectures have been confirmed through radiometric dating.

Radiometric Evidence

Twenty-four radiocarbon dates have been obtained from cultural deposits at DkRn-1, providing a range of occupation from 8000±40 to 118±25 ¹⁴C years BP (Table 1). Most of these dates are from *Lelachen* (n=19), obtained during excavations conducted by Amec (2011), Antiquus (Wells et al. 2009), and Sanders and Merchant (2016).

Samples from the 2013 excavations (Sanders and Merchant 2016) were submitted with intent of providing temporal resolution on location-specific activities, in addition to understanding the chronology of the depositional sequence of individual strata. Priority was given samples that bracketed features, with intent to accurately determine duration of individual feature use, and to reconstruct and elucidate the sequence of activities that produced individual strata and features. Dates obtained by Amec (Ferguson and Brolly 2011) indicated the age of identified features and span of site occupation on the upper terrace, while those submitted by Antiquus provided dates for the basal deposits of two evaluative units also on the upper terrace (Wells et al. 2009:28).

Generally, with few exceptions, these dates were stratigraphically and temporally conformable. The oldest date obtained during the 2013 excavation was 5418±30 BP (D-AMS 006531) from a charcoal sample collected at a depth of 267 cm BD within river rounded pebbles and gravel mixed with red iron rich sand (Sanders and Merchant 2016). Two samples were submitted from deeper deposits in the same matrix. At 303 cm BD, a date of 4210±28 BP (D-AMS 006526) was obtained from burnt bone, while a date of 5289±33 BP (D-AMS 006881) was obtained from a burnt bone fragment collected at 308 cm BD. Non-conformity of these dates is not unexpected, owing to the layering and movement of loose sediments and mid to large-size cobbles through colluvial and fluvial processes.

Of importance to the 2013 research program was the need to determine the age and use duration of the excavated hearth feature. A carbon sample (D-AMS 006529) submitted from the bottom of this feature at approximately 200 cm BD provided a date of 2536±28 BP (Table 1). In contrast, a date of 4148±25 BP (D-AMS 006527) was obtained from near the east rim of the feature at a depth of 135 cm BD (Figure 5). The reversal of dates in this context is expected, since the dated stratum was part of a feature routinely excavated into (i.e., hearth maintenance and cleaning). As indicated above, bracketing dates of 2536±28 to 4148±25 BP originating from hearth contexts and a terminal house floor date of 5388±26 BP (D-AMS 006526) recovered immediately adjacent to the hearth indicate that the hearth may have been used and the house may have been occupied continuously for 2800 years.

When dates from all three excavations are collectively considered, they suggest a continuous and uninterrupted 5500 year-long occupation of *Lelachen* between 8000±40 and 2466±26 BP. When combined with dates from *Slapus East* (n=2), *Slapus West* (n=2), and *Quqéwelq* (n=1), the occupation of DkRn-1 extends well into the post-contact period. Recent radiocarbon dates, post-contact (historic) period artifacts, oral traditions, and personal recollections of Xa'xtsa elders attest to 8000 years of intense use and occupation up to the present.

Table 1. Radiocarbon dates from DkRn-1.

Sample No.	Field Recovery No.	Provenience		Radiocarbon age (BP)	
		Locale	Depth (cm BD)	Conventional ¹⁴ C yrs BP	Calibrated (Calendric)
D-AMS 006523	Charcoal T-8 A-1 4.1	<i>Slapus East</i>	30-40	118±25	1681-1938
D-AMS 006534	Charcoal T-8 A-1 1	<i>Slapus East</i>	110-112	1086±24	894-1015
D-AMS 006536	Charcoal T-1 A-6 5	<i>Slapus West</i>	55	1304±26	660-769
D-AMS 006535	Charcoal T-1 A-6 4	<i>Slapus West</i>	50	1503±27	433-632
D-AMS 006532	Charcoals T-1 A-5 3	<i>Lelachen</i>	25	2590±30	820-595
D-AMS 006525	Charcoal T-1 A-5 H 3-A	<i>Lelachen</i>	32	2470±25	767-434
D-AMS 006533	Charcoal T-1 A-5 7	<i>Lelachen</i>	57	2466±26	765-431
D-AMS 006527	Charcoal T-1 A-5 22	<i>Lelachen</i>	135	4148±25	2874-2631.
D-AMS 006526	Charcoal T-1 A-5 H 4-B	<i>Lelachen</i>	158	5388±26	4334 - 4080 B.C.
D-AMS 006530	Charcoal T-1 A-5 24	<i>Lelachen</i>	169	4303±32	3011 - 2882 B.C.
D-AMS 006524	Charcoal T-1 A-5 18.1	<i>Lelachen</i>	185	2641±29	892 - 787 B.C.
D-AMS 006529	Charcoal T-1 A-5 25	<i>Lelachen</i>	200.5	2536±28	797 - 548 B.C.
D-AMS 006531	Charcoal T-1 A-5 50	<i>Lelachen</i>	267	5418±39	4351 - 4081 B.C.
D-AMS 006526	Charcoal T-1 A-5 31.1	<i>Lelachen</i>	303	4210±28	2900 - 2694 B.C.
D-AMS 006881	T-1 A-5 31.18	<i>Lelachen</i>	308	5289±33	4234 - 4001 B.C.
Beta-242692	RC1 (Antiquus)	<i>Lelachen</i>	50-60	5210±60	4230 - 3940 B.C.
Beta-242693	RC2 (Antiquus)	<i>Lelachen</i>	50-60	4720±40	3490 - 3370 B.C.
Beta-281709	RC1 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	140	6000±40	4990 - 4790 B.C.
Beta-281708	RC2 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	75	6860±40	5830 - 5670 B.C.
Beta-284817	RC3 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	75	7100±40	6040 - 5900 B.C.
Beta-284818	RC4 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	130	3750±40	2290 - 2030 B.C.
Beta-284820	RC5 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	55	8000±40*	7060 - 6760 B.C.
Beta-284819	RC6 (AMEC)	<i>Lelachen</i>	55	3050±40	1410 - 1210 B.C.
Beta-172190	Lower Lillooet 3	<i>Quqéwelq</i>	59	1240±40	AD 680 – 1270 - 1060

Temporal and Setting Reconstruction

A preliminary reconstruction of the occupational history of DkRn-1 based upon current data is offered below. Occupation of the upper terrace spanned a 5000 year period between 8000 and 3000 BP (Ferguson and Brolly 2011; Wells et al. 2009), during which time the lower terracedownstream of *Slapus West* was created by a combination of geomorphologic processes, including deepening of the Lower Lillooet River channel, decreasing flow volume, and aeolian silt deposition, then soil generation processes in the valley bottom.

Radiocarbon dates of 2466±/-26 BP and 5418±/-39 BP from within the house on the lower terrace suggest a 3000-year long occupation. The lower terrace experienced a physical and functional transformation during the middle-Holocene period (ca. 5400 BP). Dates of 5418±/-39, 5289±/-33, and 4210±/-28 BP obtained on samples recovered from the meter thick river cobble bed contain a high density lithic assemblage consisting primarily of pebble and cobble tools that indicates local lithic raw

material procurement and use, with renewal of cobbles every freshet. Furthermore, small amounts of burnt bone were recovered from these sub-house fluvial deposits, indicating activities relating to food procurement and preparation.

Slapus sits on a prominent bedrock exposure, a permanent mnemonic landform throughout the entire Holocene. This canyon-like feature transitions downriver into an extensive multi-level terrace. Combined, these landforms provide a stable and highly strategic locality for the endured occupation and use of the supra-village and resource center of *Slapus*, *Lelachen* and *Quqéwelq*.

Radiometric data indicate that the upper and lower terraces were both coevally inhabited for a minimum 2400 years between 5400 and 3000 BP. Whether this information accurately reflects the true duration of occupation at *Lelachen* or simply the available sample dates, is a subject for future inquiry.

The *Lelachen* excavations indicate a house occupation spanning nearly 3000 years, between 5388±/-26 and 2466±/-

26 BP. House strata and radiocarbon dates attest to a continuous, uninterrupted occupation. To invoke the sacred aspect of deep connection held personally, and collectively to the village setting, and with the longhouse and hearth themselves, is to consider the intergenerational custom of their maintenance and refurbishment, not so much through radiometric dating, but through generational terms, and the institutions of practice that arise in their wake. These data hold great significance with regard to regional Salishan cultural florescence, and the longevity of continuous occupation of houses and villages over the *longue durée* within the Lower Lillooet River valley.

Theoretical Implications

Implications of the investigation findings are significant and reveal an impressive expression of *in situ* cultural development corresponding with the dynamic environmental and socio-cultural transition during the Holocene. This becomes more obvious when data from DkRn-1 are compared to recovered assemblages throughout other regions of the Salishan world which suggest increased regularity in shifting settlement patterns relating to environmental changes (LePofsky et al. 2005, 2009), sea level fluctuations, and associated socio-cultural events.

We contend that a significant historic turning point in research was when the Gold Rush and Cariboo Trail solidified with placer mining efforts throughout the Fraser Canyon, thus abandoning the original route design through the Lower Lillooet River valley and beyond to the Fraser River at Lillooet. This caused an influence that would bias subsequent historic and ethnographic accounts and archaeological interpretations pertaining to origins, and development of Salishan culture.

Data secured from archaeological investigations over the last fifteen years from DkRn-1 provide a basis for understanding an overlooked supra-village that participated in, and contributed significantly to, Salishan cultural development within what was once a key “gateway community” (Sanders 2006:3) linking the cultural and environmental histories of the Coast and Interior. Such regionally influential communities would have appeared at similar strategic nodes of favorable monitoring vantage, resource abundance, and mobility ease, although they arose partly within their own unique contexts. For many, ease of salmon capture was paramount, and although relying upon Kew’s (1992) data on the prolific nature of the Harrison salmon run articulates in part the phenomenon of cultural florescence and occupational longevity at the Lower Lillooet River supra-village, we postulate a more dynamic explanation considering socio-cultural and economic variables arising through the controlling of a strategic geography, at a critical cultural and ecological interface. Reconstruction of village settings and associated resource activities, at this nexus and elsewhere in the Lower Lillooet River valley, including mountain settings, provides a better understanding of behavioral, social and material culture

traits shared between Coastal and Interior Salishan groups (Sanders 2016).

Another important gateway and corridor between two Salishan regions is the Yale locale (Borden 1979; Burley 1992; Mitchell and Pokotylo 1996) where the results of previous investigations have been seminal in our cultural reconstruction of Early Period riverine Salishan history. However, none of these Yale investigations provide an account of the rest of the Holocene during the Middle and Late periods, and occupants of the Fraser River drainage were contributors to Salish cultural development and florescence, and participated in community exchange between Salishan communities. Investigations at the Lower Lillooet River have provided an opportunity to observe an additional perspective on the cultural development of the broader Salishan world.

One aspect of this long-term stable occupation was to maintain control of resources and mobility through this key gateway. This is expressed by a considerable number of people permanently residing in this one village, which was in part made possible by local resource abundance coinciding with a strategic “edge ecology” (Turner Davidson-Hunt, and O’Flaherty 2003; Sanders 2006:3-4), where access to plant foods, medicines, and material for technological purposes were readily obtained from both Coastal and Interior Plateau habitats, in addition to animals that cohabit within these unique ecologies.

Dovetailing these theoretical considerations, with archaeological evidence and *Xa’xtsa* oral knowledge it becomes clear that a socio-economic and political dynamic existed between Salishan communities that stressed the practice of interregional interaction across ecological and cultural zones rather than emphasizing separation between them. Although much of our understanding of interregional interaction is based on evidence from Yale, the Fraser River and delta, DkRn-1 holds important information that can increase our understanding of a variety of research and community-based objectives.

We are confident that future lithic source analysis and other studies will confirm conclusively, in precise terms, what we have inferred from the data secured by all three excavations (Ferguson and Brolly 2011; Wells et al. 2009; Sanders and Merchant 2016). It is clear that there is a remarkable consistency in the nature and proportions of lithic raw material types across all excavated areas spanning 8000 years. Excavation on the lower terrace at *Lelachen* in 2013, revealed 360 cm of continuous cultural strata, representing 3000 years of human use and occupation of two successional land forms, indicating two significant land use patterns. This suggests a slight change in the nature of lithic technology, yet maintaining a relative consistency in the nature and proportions of raw material types. Accordingly, it is inferred that knowledge pertaining to lithic material sourcing, and the broader territory, remained a constant to the local inhabitants over many millennia.

Directions for Future Inquiry

Determining the impetus for the apparent shift in occupation of both upper and lower landforms to a concentration on the lower landform should be a subject of future inquiry. It may be related to population density, environmental predictability, or consolidation for socio-cultural purposes.

Realizing the level of occupational and cultural stability and longevity expressed in the archaeological record spanning the better part of the Holocene is somewhat of a surprise considering the potential for contestation of control of such a strategic location. Future research will focus on a holistic inquiry into the indicators that contributed to the intensive occupation and use of this locale that enabled such long-term resiliency.

Current evidence indicates a unique and intense history of continuous occupation and longevity in the Lower Lillooet River valley. Our research design sought to draw together disparate data and reconstruct a synthetic understanding of Holocene-human presence within a geographically defined area. Despite numerous radiometric dates from the northern portion of *Lelachen* and *Slapus*, the landscape and lithic technology pattern observed across DkRn-1 suggests a pan-Holocene occupation. Continued focused research will reveal a growing set of relationships between this supra-village, the Lower Lillooet River valley corridor, and the numerous strategic secondary valleys connecting Xa'xtsa with other "gateway communities" coexisting within the broader Salishan world.