Archaeological Research in the Coast Salish Region of Southwestern British Columbia, Canada

The rich history of Hu’uqumi’num Salish peoples of coastal southwestern British Columbia, Canada is captured in the incredible range and diversity of archaeological sites in the region.

Archaeological research at a number of these sites conducted by Dr. Colin Grier and WSU Anthropology graduate students has allowed for the reconstruction of economic and social practices extending over the last 5000 years.

**HOUSEHOLDS and VILLAGES**

Excavation at the 1800 year old village site at Dionisio Point has revealed the complex relationships between families inhabiting early longhouses. Specialization of families in various economic pursuits (sea mammal hunting, fishing, land mammal hunting) is attested by the association of artifacts for these activities with specific hearths identified inside the houses.

Above: Penelakut Salish artist reconstruction drawing of the village as it likely stood 1800 years ago. Right: Excavations of House 2 in progress.

**RECONSTRUCTING SETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS**

Investigation of ancient village locations on cusparse spits (double beach landforms) is in progress. These landforms started as small beaches 4500 years ago and have been expanding since then. Human settlement has expanded in concert with this beach development. As shorelines grade outward, increased beachfront offers additional intertidal resources for human use. Bog areas at the base of the spit were likely areas of plant tending. Past research indicates that many local and distant resources were brought to these locations as they emerged as major village sites.

Left: Shingle point on Valdes Island typifies the cusparse spit pattern. Ancient shorelines identified through carbon dating show major periods of habitation. Right: Six cusparse spit locations, all of which were Hu’uqumi’num Salish Village sites at the time of European arrival in the area, are the subject of a major new research initiative.

The Gulf Islands of southwestern British Columbia represent a unique ecosystem. The diversity of resources available to Hu’uqumi’num peoples was astounding, incorporating rich salmon runs, complex marine food chains, and a diversity of plant and terrestrial animal species. It is on these resources that Hu’uqumi’num peoples have based their lifeways and traditions over at least the last 5000 years.

**THE RESEARCH TEAM**

The research underway necessitates a team of specialists to properly collect and analyze the various materials used to reconstruct past lifeways.

**Principal Investigator**

Colin Grier, Assistant Professor, WSU Anthropology

**Fossil Pollen, Charcoal and Botanical Remains Analysis**

Kelly Darr, PhD Student, WSU Anthropology

**Zoological (Animal Bone) Analysis**

Susan Lukowski, MA Student, WSU Anthropology

**Beach Geomorphology and Soils Analysis**

Patrick Dolan, MA Student, WSU Anthropology

**PARTNERSHIPS**

Our archaeological research is conducted in partnership with the Penelakut and Lyackson Nations, dovetailing with their interest in reconstructing their traditional territories and economic practices. Archaeological fieldwork incorporates elders and youth, emphasizing technical training, knowledge sharing, and the collaborative pursuit of effective heritage resource management strategies and stewardship.

Sincere thanks is owed to the Chiefs and Councils (past and present) of the Penelakut and Lyackson Tribes for granting us the privilege of conducting research in their territories. It is through their efforts and the enthusiasm of countless elders and field assistants that the research has been possible.

It is with the support and involvement of these individuals and groups that the research achieves its ultimate significance.