



# The ASBC Pages

Recent media coverage of archaeology in the province raises important questions about the professional practice of cultural resource management, provincial heritage protection, and public perceptions of archaeology more broadly. The central issue was who should foot the bill for archaeological investigations, and on-line discussion was replete with comments from the general public that ranged from outrage at the reported cost of archaeology to an outright dismissal of its value at all. In his blog (<http://qmackie.wordpress.com>), Quentin Mackie published several posts reflecting on the situation and called archaeologists in the province to speak out against potential misrepresentations of what archaeology is

and how it works.

Towards this, the Archaeological Society of British Columbia has issued a formal statement on the matter, as has the British Columbia Association of Professional Archaeologists (BCAPA). We include these statements here, along with a Letter to the Editor, together framed as a Forum on 'Media Representations of Archaeology in B.C.'

We invite our readers to send their comments on these and other related issues to us at: [asbc.midden@gmail.com](mailto:asbc.midden@gmail.com).

Editorial Committee

## FORUM: *Media Representations of Archaeology in B.C.*

### ASBC Statement on Recent Heritage Issues within the Province

Founded in 1966, the Archaeological Society of British Columbia (ASBC) represents a diverse community including researchers, consulting archaeologists, students, members from First Nations and the general public. What brings us together is a great interest and enthusiasm for our rich and intriguing heritage, be it ancient or more recent in age. Over the past 45 years, we have advocated for the careful management and preservation of our province's heritage and worked to educate the public about archaeology. Our constitutional aims as a society are to:

1. Encourage the identification and protection of archaeological sites and material in B.C., and
2. Provide lectures and publications for the spread of knowledge about archaeology.

Archaeologists have incredible stories to tell about the heritage sites we investigate, and the history of our practice—how and why archaeology is done—has changed over the years. Provincial legislation protects archaeological sites (the *Heritage Conservation Act* protects sites dating to before 1846 AD). In the past, the assessment and recording of archaeological sites throughout the province was done by the government; however, budget and personnel cut-backs put this to an end in the late 1970s to early 1980s.

Today, those seeking to develop an area that either contains a recorded archaeological site or has not been assessed for archaeological remains are responsible for the logistical and financial planning of this process. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, archaeological sites are subject to varying levels of assessments known as Archaeological Overview, Impact and Alteration. In this system, landowners hire qualified archaeologists

to determine the levels of investigation required and undertake this work under provincially-issued permits.

Recently, concerns about the cost and utility of assessing and protecting archaeological sites have been expressed in the media, specifically in relation to a housing development in Oak Bay, Victoria that impacted a well-known archaeological site (site DcRt-10) that is protected by the *HCA*. This is of great concern to us.

This site and others like it are much more than heaps of shell and food debris. They are a record of people's lives, of past environmental conditions, and in many cases contain ancestral human remains—so are places of great importance to First Nations. As such, heritage sites are significant both scientifically, as unique and irreplaceable sources of knowledge about people in the past, and socially, as places with names and stories that connect people today with their history and cultural identity.

The ASBC supports the provincial government for upholding the *HCA* and hopes they will continue to do so. We encourage people to join us in the ASBC and support our mandate to advocate for the protection and management of cultural heritage.

We also encourage those who wish to learn more about archaeology in the province to join us in our monthly public lecture series, to read our publication *The Midden*, and to become a member in our organization. For more information on the ASBC, please visit our web pages.

<http://www.asbc.bc.ca/>  
<http://www.asbc.bc.ca/vicsite/>  
<http://www.asbcnaimo.nisa.com/>

The ASBC Executive

## FORUM: *Media Representations of Archaeology in B.C.*

### Statement from the British Columbia Association of Professional Archaeologists

Recently, various media outlets have brought attention to cultural heritage resource work conducted by consulting archaeologists in British Columbia. Generally, these articles have focused on issues between cultural resource management archaeologists, the B.C. Archaeology Branch, and private developers, focusing on requirements for developers to conduct archaeological studies because of the presence of known archaeological sites on their properties. In the opinion of the British Columbia Association of Professional Archaeologists (BCAPA), the vast majority of these news articles contain inaccurate and erroneous information that is detrimental to the heritage conservation ethic that our membership promotes. In addition to the misrepresentation of facts, little attempt has been made to present any perspectives other than those of the developers. The particulars surrounding these reported issues are complex, and the BCAPA maintains that these issues should not be represented in such a biased manner. In order to fully understand the issues at hand, and to perhaps answer questions that are raised, the perspectives of all parties should be addressed by the media prior to publication.

Under the current legislation, the province administers the *Heritage Conservation Act (HCA)* through a user-pay system for archaeological work. Currently, the *HCA* affords automatic protection to all cultural material (known or unknown) that pre-dates 1846 AD, which means that the owner of a property that wishes to conduct ground disturbing activities, including their contractors, is responsible to determine if their project will impact protected archaeological remains or take the risk that archaeological deposits are not present. Where archaeological sites are identified, the developer/property owner is responsible for costs associated with mitigating (e.g., archaeological excavation) any adverse effects of the proposed development to the archaeological sites. The costs of archaeological study required to determine

potential effects and conduct mitigation are borne by those responsible for proposing development. It is especially important to note that registered Professional members (RPCA) of the BCAPA are required by our code of conduct to recommend avoidance through project re-design as the first option to mitigate against potential adverse effects to an archaeological site.

A court case involving a landowner from Oak Bay was recently brought before the court in an attempt to recover costs associated with archaeological studies conducted for a residential development within a known archaeological site. In this case, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled in opposition of the landowner, and in favour of the Archaeology Branch. The BCAPA encourages the judiciary to uphold the principals of the *HCA* and the Archaeology Branch's administration of the *HCA* and fully supports any ruling which may strengthen it. The *HCA* is in place to protect B.C.'s heritage, including archaeological sites, regardless of their location on Crown or private lands.

Another news article from a residential re-development in Qualicum Beach brought the ethics of BCAPA members, the role of consulting archaeologists, and the *HCA* into question. This article was posted online by a major national news outlet and it provided an opportunity for readers to add their comments. Reactions to this article fueled unnecessary controversy, encouraged individuals to break the law, and, most unfortunately, it incited racist comments. The BCAPA executive lodged formal complaints with the media outlet resulting in the removal of the posts from the public domain as the third party posts were in contravention to the media outlet's own posting policies. However, this type of public reaction is the expected result from the publication of one-sided journalism rather than well-rounded articles that allow readers to gain an informed opinion. Another approach for this developer would have been to lodge a formal complaint with the BCAPA. The BCAPA has a grievance

procedure that peers and members of the public can access should an RPCA be perceived to have deviated from the BCAPA's code of conduct or code of ethics. Our codes of conduct and ethics, along with instructions for accessing the grievance procedure, can be found on our website: <http://www.bcapa.ca>.

It is evident from the recent news articles, and the comments posted online, that members of the public are generally uninformed about heritage conservation and archaeological practices in B.C. However, gaining support for the protection and conservation of archaeological sites through public education is one of the keys to opening a healthy dialogue about such issues in the future. The BCAPA supports public education through our Speakers Bureau. This is a community service provided by volunteer BCAPA Professional member speakers. Through the Bureau, professional archaeologists are made available to speak to community groups, schools, and other organizations throughout B.C. Moving forward, it is the hope of the BCAPA that greater education on the subject of archaeology and the *HCA* can lead to a more open dialogue between all stakeholders, ensuring that issues such as those recently experienced can be avoided.

We encourage all those involved in heritage conservation throughout B.C. to get involved with the BCAPA. Visit our website to learn more about membership and the initiatives we are pursuing to promote heritage conservation, provide public education, and contribute to the archaeological record of B.C. The BCAPA would also like to encourage open dialogue in all matters involving archaeology in B.C. We have recently launched a B.C. Archaeology Forum site. This forum can be accessed online: <http://forums.bcapa.ca>.

**Eva Brooke**  
**President of the BCAPA**

## FORUM: *Media Representations of Archaeology in B.C.*

### A Letter to the Editor...

The recent controversy at the Willow's Beach site in Oak Bay reveals some serious misconceptions regarding archaeology and heritage held by the public. The article published in the *The Vancouver Sun*—claiming a \$600,000 archaeology bill for the archaeological impact assessment (AIA) at the Willow's Beach site upon which homeowner Wendi Mackay wanted to develop—inspired much anger in the general populace, revealing saddening ignorance and blatant racism towards First Nations people. It seems that many people do not understand what archaeology actually is—hence why high school students volunteered to excavate to avoid the expense of professional archaeologists (see comments for McCulloch "Oak Bay Homeowner Stuck with \$600,000 Archaeology Bill," *The Vancouver Sun* 8 March 2011).

Being a recently graduated Archaeology student with a certificate in Cultural Resource Management from Simon Fraser University, my experiences give me some insight regarding this contentious situation. I have always been a history buff with a fascination for the stories behind material culture. At SFU my studies and personal influences resulted in an increasing appreciation for local heritage and a passion for engaging in publicly relevant archaeology.

As a budding archaeologist, my personal experience is that many people seem to think archaeology only exists in Egypt, Greece, or Rome, even South America, but not North America. Hence the surprise when people find archaeology under their house. I understand the conflict of interest between heritage protection and the need for modern development and resource harvesting, yet people who live here need to be reminded of the history of this province. Let us not forget that 'British' Columbia was once a British Crown Colony, having an even deeper history preceding colonialism.

Although the colonial times are over to many of us, they had and still have

serious and tragic effects on local First Nations people whose heritage is beneath the ground's surface. Conflict between archaeology and domestic development gives the impression that traditional territories are once again up for grab. This land is not *terra nullius*—a "land belonging to no one," as Columbus once declared. Sadly, in this case all people seem to see is the \$600,000.00 price tag, without considering what contributes to the cost. The problem is obvious: why should people care about protecting heritage that is not their own, that they have not learned about, and that allegedly costs so much money?

Archaeological resources are part of someone's heritage, which is not easy to put a price on. Laws exist for a reason—in this case to protect heritage resources. It is homeowners' and citizens' responsibility to know provincial legislation. It is also the responsibility of the government to inform us of these laws, and that of real estate companies to inform us of archaeological resources on properties.

It seems to me this controversy is a continuation of a power struggle that has been going on since Europeans first set foot in B.C. Moreover, it is characteristic of our province; the commotion raised only signifies its importance and need for acknowledgement. Most people are not familiar with the time frame involved in AIAs, as expressed by Mackay's discontent with the slow excavation pace. Expedience is highly variable depending on the type of the site. Site types bring up another point of interest. The site on the Mackay property has been identified as a "midden." In lay terms, "midden" means a garbage dump. So why all this controversy over ancient garbage, wonders the public? As archaeologists, we know why middens are important. The public clearly does not, presenting a great opportunity to teach them.

An even greater link needs to be made between the collaborative work done by archaeologists to benefit descendant communities (as in Pemberton, "Ancient

History of Vancouver's First People," *The Vancouver Sun* 5 April 2011; and "A time for Healing" *The Vancouver Sun* 26 June 2006) so people can see how archaeology can be a positive that helps people reconnect with their lost past. Contemplate for a moment what would it mean to you to learn about your ancestors and your culture that yourself or members of your family were once legally forbidden to celebrate. Archaeology, including data from AIAs, can establish these missing links for people. We must emphasize this if we want people to care and, moreover, to understand why AIAs are legal requirements.

The Mackay case is going to be appealed to the Supreme Court. The racist backlash and homeowner grievance with the *Heritage Conservation Act (HCA)* exemplified by this case demonstrate that there is a problem with our education system, and perhaps with the enforcement of the *HCA*. There must be a better solution that does not result in high individual expenses, and disrespectful, racist attitudes. Preserving the heritage of our province and our country is something we are all accountable for as Canadian citizens. As archaeologists, it is our responsibility to collaboratively educate people so that ignorance can no longer be used as an excuse for such discrimination.

Nicole Slade  
Vancouver, B.C.

#### Correction: Issue 43.1

In Grant Keddie's article in our last issue (43.1) entitled 'Bird Leg Rings on the Northwest Coast?', the description for artifact EbRj-Y:1172 on page 13 should have read: "On side 2 there are two incised circles around this hole (outer 15mm diam.)..." and "Side 1 has 13 radiating lines with three groups of three and one of four lines."