

Capilano Archaeology in the Seymour Valley

Bob Muckle

Capilano University's 2008 archaeology field school focused on documenting remains from early 20th century residential and logging activities in North Vancouver's Seymour Valley. Initial plans for the 2008 school were to document historic resources in the Capilano Valley but logistical difficulties required us to return to the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve (LSCR) in the Seymour Valley for the ninth consecutive field season.

For the previous eight field seasons the field schools have documented historic period activities within the LSCR, with a particular focus on residential, recreational, and logging activities dating to the early 1900s. The 2008 field school continued this documentation, with survey, mapping, and excavation.

Two sites were discovered during survey. Neither site exhibited any standing structures but there was considerable household refuse scattered on the forest floor at both. The survey was designed to find and document evidence of a caretaker's residence from the 1930s, and although more research is needed before it can be confirmed, it is likely that one of the sites was indeed that residence. Observed surface artifacts at this site included bottles, broken dishes, and what appear to be parts of a wringer washing machine.

The other site discovered during the survey is a possible logging camp dating to the late 1920s or 1930s. Dozens of artifacts were observed on the surface at this site, including a large cross-cut saw, stove pieces, dishes, and bottles.

Features and surface artifacts at the fairly remote Suicide Creek site were last examined by field school students in 2004. This site was an early 1920s logging camp set up in a standard Pacific Northwest pattern, with a distinct bunkhouse, and discrete midden close to the kitchen, but contained evidence of Japanese workers, mostly in the form of Japanese dishes and bottles. Students in 2008 recorded 40 previously undocumented artifacts on the forest floor, bringing the total number of artifacts from the site to almost 500. Artifacts documented in 2008 include: fragments of leather boots, horseshoes, pieces of a bed frame, a stove leg, a talc shaker, tobacco cans, and beer and medicine bottles. Students also uncovered cedar planks laid on the forest floor for roads and foundations.

In addition, students worked at the McKenzie Creek site, which is one of the sites field school students have spent some time at for at least two weeks in each of the previous three years. Like the Suicide Creek site, this site was also a logging camp with Japanese workers dating to the 1920s. Unlike the Suicide Creek site, however, the McKenzie Creek site was laid out in a more traditional Japanese way, with several cabins, a garden, and a central bathhouse.

The primary research objective of work at the McKenzie Creek site in 2008 was to investigate the idea that after its use as a logging camp in the early 1920s, a small group of Japanese may have continued living at the camp through the late 1920s and perhaps until the Japanese internment in 1942. Previous work at



More than 1,500 artifacts from early 20th century logging camps and residences in the Seymour Valley have been documented, including this footwarmer. (Photo by Bob Muckle)



Many personal items have been recovered at early 20th century sites in the Seymour Valley, including timepieces. This is the workings of an alarm clock. (Photo by Tyler Hicks)

the site had revealed no evidence of any artifacts more recent than the early 1920s, but the variable conditions of cans and glass throughout the site suggested a much longer period of occupation than a normal logging camp in the area. A memoir mentioned an abandoned camp in the Seymour Valley that continued to be used, noting the odd location of a cookstove, suggesting it may have been hidden; this provided further basis for a continued occupation.

A thorough analysis of the artifacts recovered in 2008 is yet to be done. However, preliminary analysis indicates the hypothesis may be supported. A key piece of evidence is the recovery of a rolled up tube of Colgate toothpaste. Research to date suggest the tube is of a style produced no earlier than 1928. Overall, 20 artifacts were recorded at the site in 2008, bringing the total number of documented artifacts from the site to 456. Other artifacts collected in 2008 include buttons, tobacco cans, a toothbrush handle, beer bottle, fragments of a stoneware jug, pieces of leather boots, and an ink bottle.

Bob Muckle was the Capilano Field School Project Director and teaches anthropology and archaeology at Capilano University.
