Household Archaeology on the Northwest Coast

Edited by
Elizabeth A. Sobel, D. Ann Trieu Gahr, and Kenneth M. Ames

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Chris Springer

The household as an analytical unit has become an increasingly important component of archaeological investigations on the Northwest Coast (NWC) since the mid-1980s (e.g. Coupland 1985; Ames 1985). The impetus for this emphasis on households was fuelled by the recognition that these domestic units were the basic social and economic components of non-industrial societies (Wilk and Netting 1984). Therefore, it was assumed that to understand the broader social and economic processes leading to complex hunter-gatherer societies described historically and ethnographically, a more refined approach or movement "downward in specificity" was necessary (Wilk and Rathje 1982:617). This refinement was, and continues to be, pursued in NWC archaeology by ever more detailed and focused explorations of house remains, the archaeological "footprints" of households. Reporting on a number of past and ongoing excavations and analyses of house sites on the NWC, this publication purports to represent the latest efforts in household archaeology in the region.

The volume is an outgrowth of a symposium given at the 64th annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology held in Chicago, Illinois in 1999. Although initially conceived as a symposium on household production, the eleven papers in this volume (not including the editors' introduction) also speak to a number of other topics germane to household archaeology: the origins of households; the social and economic structure of households; the life-cycle of houses and households; the association of households with exchange networks; and site formation processes. Varied in specific approach, the fundamental issue that binds the papers presented here is determining what role households played in social complexity on the NWC. In addition, all of the studies use the remains of plank houses as the focal point of research. Although plank houses were certainly important structures on the NWC, it is this latter focus that highlights the volume's two main weaknesses. First, the long known presence of pithouse remains on the NWC is not addressed (Barnett 1955, 1944; Duff 1952, 1949; Hill-Tout 1904; Smith 1949; Smith 1925) and second, the lower Fraser River Valley, a major social and economic artery where these in-ground structures were widely utilized, is neglected. The inclusion of papers concerned with sites located along the lower Columbia River to the south of the Fraser (Ellis, Sobel, and Smith) and the lower Skeena River to the north (Martindale) makes the omission all the more confusing.

Kenneth Ames opens the collection with a paper addressing what he considers to be a lack of theory regarding the development of households among hunter-gatherer groups on the NWC. He claims that the underlying assumptions viewing households as both venues linking individuals to the broader community and as fundamental to the emergence of social complexity are derived from ethnographic work conducted among peasant farming communities. When applied to NWC hunter-gatherer societies, he argues for these assumptions being articulated as hypotheses rather than tacitly accepted frameworks for research. With this in mind, he proposes a model that considers the relationship between fluctuating household demographics (the household-cycle) and risk management as causal factors in the emergence and perpetuation of large-scale households out of a pre-existing system based on social ranking.

Ames highlights an interesting issue in this chapter but his criticism of the assumptions that guide household approaches on the NWC falls decidedly short. He fails to speak to the problems associated with the unquestioning use of local ethnographic and historic sources in archaeological investigations in the region generally and among the contributors to this volume specifically (Martindale's study a notable exception). For example, the ethnographically derived assumption that large houses equal elite
households and small houses equal commoner households is a fundamental premise underpinning much of the work presented in this volume (e.g. Coupland, Ellis, Grier, Smith, Samuels, Trieu, Sobel). Assumptions such as this should be no more tacitly accepted than the assumptions inherent to household theory borrowed from research conducted among peasant farming communities. This does not even begin to address the many other problems associated with the ethnographic present and the Eurocentrism that plagues much of the available documentary evidence for the NWC.

Yvonne Marshall and Ann Trieu follow Ames with papers offering general perspectives on the built environment of the house and its role in structuring and maintaining large-scale households. Both papers apply Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1982) concept of Sociétés à maison or “House Societies” which emphasizes the importance of place and the sociopolitical interests of individuals or groups in their choice of residence over consanguinity in kin relations. Marshall expands on this concept to address the question of why House Societies emerged by combining it with Peter Wilson's (1988) ideas on the relationship between social domestication and permanent architecture. She contends that the first people to arrive in the region came with already established notions of household organization and connection to place (sensu Ames, this volume) from which formalized social systems eventually emerged as a means for regulating the complexities of domestic living in large houses and communities. In a similar vein, Trieu considers the appearance of plank houses and their concomitant households as fundamental to the emergence of social complexity. She defines the household as the “pivot” of social organization bound together by a mutual commitment to a large body of tangible and intangible property including house structures. To ensure the continued life of the house, Trieu proposes that a system of transmission was devised which facilitated the rise of household elites who managed household property and assured its continuity through inheritance and descent.

Using specific case studies, the seven papers that follow the more general contributions of Ames, Marshall, and Trieu, comprise the bulk of the volume. Gary Coupland’s and Colin Grier's papers continue the argument presented by Marshall and Trieu for the importance of the built environment of the house to the structure and continuity of NWC households. Relying heavily on ethnographic and historic evidence, Coupland builds an argument for House O at the McNichol Creek site located near Prince Rupert as a “Chiefly dwelling.” Specifically, he considers the size and location of the house and the distribution of features and artifacts as indicators of a Chiefly household that utilized House O as a means of communicating non-verbal social messages to both community and household audiences. Combining a similar degree of ethnographic expectation within a practice theory (Bourdieu 1977) perspective, Grier also explores the link between plank house architecture and household organization. Central to his paper is the concept of transmission, the mechanism through which cultural norms are produced and reproduced over time within an overarching social structure of “organization and meaning.” Analyzing the internal features and artifact distributions in House 2 at the Dionisio Point site on Galiano Island, he argues that plank houses and their contents both reflected the social mores of ancient NWC communities and reified those mores over time through the organization of the household and the placement of the house on the landscape.

Andrew Martindale and Stephen Samuels add to the northern and central coast regional themes with papers focusing on investigations in traditional Tsimshian and Makah territories. Martindale critically compares documentary sources against archaeological work conducted at the sites of Psaceay and Gitkaakangeek on the Skeena River to show that, contrary to standard interpretations, Tsimshian resistance to change and acculturation at the household level lasted well into the early twentieth century. He argues that the initial incorporation of European interests, vis-à-vis an increased focus on fur, altered power structures at the community level with a shift toward paramount chiefs but did not substantially change the traditional makeup and subsistence practices of households. However, the subsequent rise of the wage-based economy in the mid-nineteenth century diminished the power of the paramount households by giving increased economic opportunities to individuals outside of the traditional lifeways pattern. Martindale proposes that it was this transition that ultimately began the slow demise of traditional extended families and practices such that by the 1920s European style nuclear households were the norm in Tsimshian communities.

Thinking about house economics from a different perspective, Samuels uses spatial and temporal analyses to compare elite and commoner household production at the Ozette wet site on the Olympic Peninsula. His findings suggest that, although production intensity was very similar between the houses, the elite household emphasized woodworking whereas a greater focus on land-based hunting strategies was pursued by their lower status counterparts. More significant differences between the houses were noticed by Samuels when he considered change in household production over time. The elite household reflected a greater degree of variability in activity types and production intensity between compartments compared with the consistent “factory-like operation” of the low status household. Samuels interprets this difference as the development of intra-household organization according to status in the elite house.

The three remaining case studies (Ellis, Sobel, and Smith) shift the regional focus of the volume southward to Chinookan sites located in the lower Columbia River Valley. Exploring social patterning in what he defines as non-elite houses, David Ellis notes that a consequence of the long standing interest in the emergence of social complexity on the NWC has been an emphasis on investigations of large plank houses or the “big houses” of elite households which are generally believed to reflect this shift in social organization. To fully understand the range of complexity among NWC populations, he argues that the role of non-elite households must also be considered. In contrast to the storage-based, delayed-consumption strategy pursued by high status Chinookan households, smaller commoner households had to move according to their subsistence needs and engage in immediate use of resources. Based on analysis of the house remains and artifact assemblages from the Broken Tops site in the Portland Basin, Ellis interprets the two modestly sized dwellings as reflecting the latter immediate consumption strategy utilized by commoner households. He further supports his argument with ethnohistoric data which suggest that contrary to what is commonly argued for other areas of the NWC, the economic needs of low status Chinookan households were not met through association with elite houses. Elizabeth Sobel ad-
dresses this variability in Chinookan households and communities from a different angle in her study on the connection between intra-site prestige and supra-local trade in obsidian. Through detailed lithic analyses of artifact assemblages collected from the sites of Cathlapotle located in the Cascades area and Clachlalah in the Portland Basin, she found that all the households from both sites had access to obsidian in its raw state and all manufactured and maintained similar tool types. However, her findings also indicate that the elite households at Cathlapotle and Clachlalah were more directly involved in the supra-local trade of obsidian than the lower status households. This suggests to Sobel that controlling exchange along the Columbia was associated with prestige among Chinookan households and communities.

Using the excavations conducted at the Meier site in the Portland Basin as a case study, Cameron McPherson Smith explores the effects of site formation processes on spatial analyses of floor deposits for interpreting ethnographically documented household organization and rank-based production. With ethnographic descriptions of household organization as a guide, Smith breaks the Meier house into three analytical units representing the social and spatial divisions of Chinookan culture. He considers fifteen potential cultural and natural site formation processes in his study and determines that the majority reflect culturally patterned behaviour within the analytical units. Given these findings, Smith argues that spatial patterning of production-related artifacts and features can be used to infer social organization at the Meier site. Further, he claims spatial analysis in general is an effective tool for archaeological interpretation assuming that all possible formation processes are accounted for prior to interpretation.

The closing overview chapter authored by Jeanne Arnold also offers a comparative perspective on the current state of household archaeology conducted on the NWC and in her particular area of interest, the Channel Islands off the coast of southern California. Although an interesting read, greater emphasis on her association with the work being conducted in the lower Fraser River Valley (Lepofsky et al. n.d.) would have been both more compelling and appropriate for the volume. As mentioned above, the omission of work on pithouse sites in the Fraser Valley is an unfortunate lack in the volume’s content given both the significance of pithouses among the Coast Salish groups who populated the lower Fraser River watershed (Barnett 1955:55; Duff 1952:46-47; Hill-Tout 1904:332; Schaeppe et al. 2001:46-47) and the past and recent archaeological work on pithouses and pithouse settlements in the area (e.g. Duff 1949; Hanson 1973; Lepofsky et al. n.d.; Mitchell 1963; Schaeppe 1998; von Krogh 1980). There is an implication in this omission that the lower Fraser Valley is not part of the “Northwest Coast proper.” A paper on the social implications of variability in pithouse forms and the use of plank houses and pithouses in the same communities, alluded to by Arnold in her overview, would have given the volume balance and greater justification for its claim of representing the latest work in NWC household archaeology.

These complaints aside, this volume represents an unprecedented collection of NWC household data presented in well-written and informative papers. The authors persuasively demonstrate the utility of the household as an analytical unit for interpreting past social dynamics in the region. Although no question is ever truly answered by archaeology, the contributions in this volume offer insightful perspectives on NWC households and lay important groundwork for future research. As such, it is an indispensable volume for anyone interested in NWC households and the intriguing research directed at understanding these complex and ancient social institutions.

Chris Springer is a Master’s candidate in the Archaeology Department at Simon Fraser University. The focus of his proposed research is to examine the association of cultural identity and household organization with the form and contents of a pithouse located in the Harrison River Valley of southwestern British Columbia.

References Cited


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Coming to Shore
Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions and Visions


xxxviii + 508 p., illus., bib., index
ISBN: 0803232306 (cloth); 0803282966 (paper)

Kisha Supernant

Coming to Shore is a volume of papers presented at the 2000 conference in France in honour of Levi-Strauss. There are two stated purposes to this volume: (1) to honour the legacy of Levi-Strauss in Northwest Coast ethnography and (2) to bring together current ethnographers working on diverse issues in Northwest Coast communities for the first time in a generation. The editors see three strands of ethnographic traditions represented in this volume: French, American and Canadian. This holds true throughout the volume, but it becomes clear that these traditions do not always engage with Northwest Coast cultures and communities in the same way.

The volume is divided into four separate sections, each containing a number of papers, but thematically, it falls into two parts. The first part includes two sections: “The Legacy of Northwest Coast Research” and “Texts and Narratives”, and focuses on ethnographers and methods from the past. The second includes: “History and Representation” and “Politics and Cultural Heritage” and focuses on the present and future of Northwest Coast research. Claude Levi-Strauss begins the volume with a short paper, in which he discusses the importance and significance of the Pacific Northwest in the anthropological imagination and sets up the first part of the volume. This first section, appropriately, deals with the history of Northwest Coast anthropology. Several of the authors attempt to place Levi-Strauss in the pantheon of foundational ethnographers in the region, but fall short due to Levi-Strauss’ limited influence on Northwest Coast anthropology. Regina Darnell draws comparisons between the approaches of Levi-Strauss and Franz Boas, connecting the Levi-Straussian approach to the Americanist framework and pointing out important areas of convergence and divergence. The next set of chapters are retrospective in nature, from Fredrica de Laguna’s fascinating personal account of her career as a holistic anthropologist working in Alaska to Marie Mauzé’s analysis of how the Northwest Coast has “haunted” the imagination of French anthropology. Peter Maranda, Marjorie Halpin and Margaret Anderson, in their respective papers, address structuralism in its various guises, from its role at the University of British Columbia to its application as a methodology in the ethnography on the Northwest Coast.

In the section entitled “Texts and Narratives”, three scholars engage with oral traditions and life histories from the region. In Judith Berman’s article, she contextualizes encounter stories as social and cultural commentaries on contact, and argues that narratives “address contemporary Native relationships both to traditional cultural values and the dominant society” (157, emphasis in original). Robert Bringhurst analyzes Haida texts recorded by Swanton, emphasizing their poetic, literary and performance value. In their paper, Martine Reid and Daisy Sewid-Smith reflect on their experience facilitating the autobiography of Kwakwakawakw elder and noblewoman Agnes Alfred, a life history which strives to present life as seen and lived by Agnes Alfred herself.

While the first half of the book looks to the past, the last half of the book looks forward. It contains a series of important articles written by ethnographers and anthropologists who are currently engaged in active research in First Nations and Native American communities. It is this portion of the book that effectively demonstrates the continuing vitality and importance of Northwest Coast anthropological research to both the broader discipline and, most significantly, to the current socio-political struggles of First Nations and Native American communities.

The section “History and Representation” begins with Sergei Kan’s article, in which he explores how Southeastern Alaska Natives were represented to early American tourists, and how they were portrayed as somehow more advanced, less noble, and cleverer than their counterparts in the lower United States. Tourists in the late nineteenth century were entranced by the natural landscape of Alaska, but were often disappointed with the “natives” and regarded them as “crafty and unclean” (211). The complex history of the Northwest Coast exhibit in the American Museum of Natural History is the focus of Ira
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Jackins’ article, in which she argues that these displays have “played a critical role in forming our image of Northwest Coast Indian cultures” (222). Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer, in their paper, continue their long tradition of insightful research by exploring the dynamic and changing nature of Tlingit identity, particularly how the notion of clan has shifted through the creation or re-imagining of different songs, symbols and patterns of inheritance in contemporary Tlingit communities.

The next three articles, by Aaron Glass, Bruce Miller and Daniel Boxberger, are interconnected in that they focus on current socio-political issues in First Nation communities, challenging the way that anthropologists and others have constructed ideas of “tradition” and providing the highlight of the volume. One of the most interesting and relevant points to come out of these discussions is how concepts of tradition, often constructed through earlier ethnographies, are adopted, modified and maintained in contemporary communities. These authors move beyond and redefine what much of the rest of the book honours and upholds as Northwest Coast ethnography.

Patricia Erikson, coming from a museum perspective, uses the model of “autoethnography” to explore the contribution of cultural centres and tribal museums to Native communities on the Northwest Coast, specifically the Makah. She points to the role of tribal museums and cultural centres as focal points for undermining traditional museum representations and creating new methods of presentation and interpretation of Native history. Cultural geographies are increasingly discussed in the context of non-literate societies, and are the focus of Thomas Thornton’s article. He explores the role of place among the Tlingit; particularly how place represents and informs the Tlingit ideal of living and being in the world. Harkin continues in this thread, unpacking how different narratives and experiences have constructed the past, present and future place of Clayquot Sound. His analysis of the changing political, environmental and historical context of Clayquot Sound illustrates the tension between local traditions and global discourses about environment, wilderness and the meaning of place.

The final chapter in the volume is an account of the process leading up to the Makah whaling hunt, told by Janine Bowechop, a woman from the Makah Nation. She is one of the few anthropologists to discuss the connection between archaeological material and contemporary practice as she recognizes the role of material from Ozette in teaching the younger generation of people about traditional whaling.

In general, this volume fulfills its two stated goals, as it both pays tribute to and moves beyond the ethnographic approaches of Levi-Strauss and Boas. The subtitle of the volume, Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions and Visions neatly summarizes the accomplishments of this collection of papers.
PERMITS ISSUED BY ARCHAEOLOGY & REGISTRY SERVICE BRANCH ENDING 2006

Permitted project descriptions as provided by the Archaeology Branch have been edited for brevity and clarity. The assistance of Ray Kenny (Manager, Permitting & Assessment Section) and Jim Spafford (Heritage Resource Specialist) in providing this information is gratefully acknowledged.

Note: Information about Permits is subject to restrictions imposed by Federal privacy regulations. For this reason, Site Alteration Permits issued to private landowners will not identify those Permit-holders by name, or provide exact addresses or legal descriptions for their properties. The federal privacy regulations do not apply to corporate developers, or archaeologists.

Glossary of Abbreviations: A number of recurrent abbreviations may not be familiar to many readers of The Midden, and the most common of these are defined here.

**Permit types:** ALT = Alteration; INS = Inspection; INV = Investigation.

**Archaeological project types:** AIA = Archaeological Impact Assessment; AIS = Archaeological Inventory Study; SDR = Systematic Data Recovery.

**Forest industry terms:** CMT = Culturally Modified Tree; CP = Cutting Permit; FD = Forest District, FL = Forest License; MoFR = Ministry of Forests and Range; TFL = Tree Farm License; TL = Timber License; TSA = Timber Sales Area.

**Other government agencies:** FOC = Fisheries and Oceans Canada; DIAND = Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; LWBC = Land and Water B.C., Inc.; MEM = Ministry of Energy and Mines; MoT = Ministry of Transportation; RD = Regional District.

**First Nations abbreviations:** ATT = asserted traditional territory; FN = First Nation.

**Legal title descriptions:** DL = District Lot; P/L = pipeline; Rge = Range; R/W = right-of-way; Sec = Section, Tp = Township; T/L = transmission line.

### 2006-427
Bruce Woodbury alteration Alterations to EbPw-1 by proposed 15-foot widening of a 100-foot section of the E side of Grainger Road by the Village of Canal Flats to facilitate moving of a house Municipal

### 2006-428
Dan Manuel alteration Archaeological monitoring, including surface collection and inventory-level testing, at EaRa-4 during rehabilitation by the Upper Nicola Band of an existing rock weir complex on Shapohin Creek, located at the N outlet of Pennask Lake First Nations

### 2006-429
Clinton Coates inspection Inventory and AIA of a property on the E side of Columbia Lake, within the bounds of EbPw-1, Canal Flats Residential

### 2006-430
private individual alteration Alterations to EbPw-1 by excavation of an existing water line, excavations beside and under the existing house and minor landscaping to improve drainage on a property at Eagles Nest Estates, Canal Flats Residential

### 2006-431
Sean Abram alteration Alterations to those portions of EbPw-1 referred to as "Zone A", "North Pond Area", "Boat Dock", "Tree House Area", "Remainder Zone B" and "Strata Roads" (N of the dedicated stream) by activities associated with the development of a proposed subdivision "Cottages at Painted Rock" within Lot A, DL 110, Plan 17833, Kootenay District, Canal Flats Commercial

### 2006-432
Chris Engisch inspection AIA of possible impacts to DJSd-7 and DJSd-8 from activities related to demolition of a cottage and proposed house construction and associated ancillary activities in portions of a property on Porpoise Road, Homby Island Residential

### 2006-433
Wayne Coulison alteration Alterations to DJSs-16 from forestry operations proposed by Hecate Logging Ltd. within Block H9502, FL A19236, on the E side of Port Eliza Inlet, Campbell River FD Forestry

### 2006-434
Jim Stafford inspection AIA of Western Forest Products, Jordan River Division's proposed forestry operations within Cutblock 570, TFL 25, about 7 km inland of Juan de Fuca Strait near the headwaters of Loss Creek, South Island FD Forestry

### 2006-435
Joel Kinzie inspection AIA of proposed geotechnical testing, on behalf of the Lower Nicola Indian Band, at the Hector Creek and Pye Lake Dam sites near Merritt First Nations

### 2006-436
Chris Engisch inspection AIA for the MoT's proposed Trill Gravel Pit, located S of McCoy Lake and W of Devil's Den Lake in the Port Alberni area, and the proposed Espinosa Gravel Pit, located at the head of Espinosa Inlet MoT

### 2006-437
Brian Pegg investigation Systematic data recovery to mitigate impacts from BC Hydro's Upper Hat Creek operations at EeR-1, EeR-99, EeR-101, EeR-215 and EeR-221, and also including collection of unmodified cobbles from the Hat Creek, Maiden Creek and Arrowstone Hills 'basalt' sources as well as analysis of regional collections (including trace element analysis) from previously investigated sites, generally located in the Upper Hat Creek area and the surrounding region Hydro

### 2006-438
Rob Field inspection AIA of proposed forestry developments by Western Forest Products Limited, Gold River and Zebraics Operations, for portions of TFL 19, FL A19231 and other possible timber licence, located on Vancouver Island and Nootka Island, Campbell River FD Forestry

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2006-439  Douglas Brown  inspection  AIA for Spuzzum Creek Power Corporation's proposed development of a small (20 ha.) run-of-river hydroelectric generation project along Sakwi Creek, located N of the Chehalis IR #5 on the N side of the Harrison River near Agassiz

2006-440  Jim Stafford  inspection  AIA of Island Timberlands Limited Partnership's proposed timber harvesting operations in Blocks 554201 and 554401 in DL 8 and 17, Rupert District, located just E of Port McNeill

2006-441  Bob Macdonald  alteration  Alterations to EaRo-26 which may result from Sagebrush Golf and Sporting Club Ltd.'s construction of a golf course hole and associated facilities on the E side of Nicola Lake, approximately 2 km N of Quichichra

2006-442  Jason Neumeyer  alteration  Alterations to FgSc-73, FgSc-74, FgSc-75, FgSc-76 and FgSc-77 by contraction activities associated with development of the Kulusuk Road in the vicinity of Kulusuk I.R.1, at the W end of the middle Kulusuk Lake, Quesnel FD

2006-443  Remko Engelbertink  alteration  Alterations to CMT site FkTe-7 in cutblock 5, and CMT site FkTe-8 in cutblock 6, by forestry operations proposed by Brinkman Forest Ltd., on behalf of Hasla Forestry Ltd.; both blocks located in TFL 41 in the vicinity of Eagle Bay on the SE side of Amos Passage, Kalum FD

2006-444  Tim Tanton  alteration  Alterations to DrRu-18 by the District of North Saanich's proposed upgrading of the existing storm sewer outfall at the NW end of Eventide Road in Aardmore, District of North Saanich

2006-445  Heather Pratt  inspection  Inventory and AIA of Judy and Barry Cutler's proposed subdivision of Lot SD, Except Plan LMP102242, DL 1499, Plan 8958, NWD, at 7991 Highway #101, Powell River

2006-446  Diana Alexander  inspection  Inventory and AIA of the MoT's proposed improvements to a 7 km section of Highway 97 between Bentley Road and Okanagan Lake Park, near Summerland

2006-447  private individual  alteration  Alterations to DiRw-30 (Crescent Beach site) by proposed redistribution of archaeological deposits previously excavated for a house foundation, and from excavation of service trenches, at 2623 McBride Avenue, Surrey

2006-448  Monty Willis  alteration  Alterations to DrRu-1 by proposed expansion of the Kokanee Resort, at the S end of Sugar Lake

2006-449  Michael Clark  alteration  Alterations to Locality 1 and Locality 2 of DiRw-30 by proposed construction of a dock/pier and removal of industrial debris, associated with the development of a residential subdivision by Porpoise Bay Properties on Sechelt Inlet

2006-450  Doug Perdue  alteration  Alterations to bark beetle-infested CMTs from FhRm-12, within TFL 53, CP 236 Block 5, 1 km W of Ahbu Lake, Prince George Forest District

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Smith, Harlan  1925 A Semi-Subterranean House Site in the Bella Coola Area on the Coast of British Columbia. Man 25:176-177.


