



THE ASBC PAGES

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

First Nations and the ASBC: Another Constitutional Question

A 2004 *American Antiquity* article praised British Columbia for its collaborative archaeological process in working with Native people in North America. Indeed, compared to other jurisdictions in North America, the practice of archaeology in BC does involve substantially greater consultation, participation and decision-making with First Nations peoples. Yet, such interaction should not be assumed to mean there aren't differences — take Craig Bay. Or, it shouldn't indicate that there isn't still a great deal of improvement needed to meaningfully reconcile with First Nations over the protection, management and interpretation of their archaeological heritage. For instance, despite more than a decade of administering our current *Heritage Conservation Act*, British Columbia has yet to implement a single *Section 4* "Agreements with First Nations".

In reaction to Bear Mountain conflict in Victoria, the First Nation Leadership Council and British Columbia has recently struck a working group to explore First Nations' interests and recommend options to improve provincial heritage conservation. Only time will tell where this political process and any recommendations end up; however, the need to reconcile First Nations interests in government heritage legislation, policy and its administration and best practices is clear.

What is the role of the Archaeological Society of BC in reconciliation process? In general, the ASBC organization and our membership have always been strong supporters of active involvement of First Nations in archaeology over the last 40 years, as practically expressed in our *Midden* publication, public lecture series, fieldwork projects and political lobbying. Yet, less than a handful of our membership are First Nations persons today. And few First Nation governments subscribe to *The Midden*. How can the ASBC be more explicit in our welcome for First Nations to join?

In recently reviewing the ASBC Constitution, I was struck by our two stated purposes:

- (a) To protect the archaeological and historical heritage of British Columbia and to this end to assist the various levels of government in implementing applicable heritage legislation;

- (b) To further public understanding of a scientific approach to archaeology.

Since written in the 1970's, archaeological practice in BC has gone well beyond simply advocating a scientific perspective, but actively involves engaging different social and cultural perspectives within our society, especially First Nations. As defined in legislation, heritage is about "values," whether they may be scientific, cultural, historical, educational or even aesthetic. Do we still think that archaeological sites in BC are worth only for what information archaeologists can extract about the past? Or have we expanded our scientific worldview to respect and appreciate these ancient heritage places for their inherent social values and meaning to people today — most significantly, as the ancestral cemeteries, villages and belongings of First Nations people?

While the founding purposes of the ASBC remains clear - to advocate a scientific approach and promote public awareness — I believe that it is also important for our organization to adapt and change to address current practices and concerns.

The reality is the substance of the ASBC and archaeology in BC is primarily concerned with First Nations' archaeological heritage. For this reason, I recommend that the ASBC consider drafting the following new purpose into our Constitution in 2008:

- (c) To respect and promote understanding of First Nations interests in archaeology.

While this proposed clause may not be "necessary," I argue such small steps may be important for the future success of the ASBC, particularly to welcome more First Nation involvement. And as far as Constitutional and Bylaw amendments go, it is a meaningful and socially-significant public statement for the ASBC to make.

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ASBC President