

# The 2007 BC Archaeological Forum

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The sixteenth annual B.C. Archaeological Forum was co-hosted on October 26th and 27th, 2007 by Tsleil-Waututh Nation in North Vancouver and the Simon Fraser University Department of Archaeology in Burnaby. Despite the short notice, this year's Forum was well attended, particularly by students, who made up almost one-third of the attendees. About 60 people attended the Friday evening presentation and dinner, while more than 110 attended the open paper session on Saturday. This year's Forum was also structured a bit differently than those of the past. Instead of a panel discussion on a particular issue — a regular component of past Forums — Tsleil-Waututh Nation provided a detailed overview of their comprehensive land and resource stewardship program, followed by a full day of diverse research and activity reports, instead of sessions on specific topics. Nonetheless, a number of themes emerged from the overall event that say much about the direction that archaeology is taking in the province.

## Tsleil-Waututh Nation and Land Stewardship

On Friday evening, Chief Leah George-Wilson of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation opened the proceedings with a welcome followed by a fabulous dinner at the Tsleil-Waututh Community Centre. For Chief George-Wilson, the Forum was "an opportunity to build partnerships, and friendships, with archaeologists who share the same conservation concerns as the Tsleil-Waututh." To these ends, on Friday evening, Evan Stewart of the Tsleil-Waututh Treaty, Lands and Resources Department took us through the natural and cultural resource stewardship strategies of the Nation, which he described as being founded on a relationship of "inter-



Saturday morning at SFU. Participants enjoying the coffee, SFU Press and ASBC offerings (Photo by Wayne Point).

connectedness between the health of the Tsleil-Waututh people and the health of the environment". Stewart's talk was supported by a poster display of the amazing work the Tsleil-Waututh Nation has done towards "putting the Tsleil-Waututh face back on the Tsleil-Waututh Territory".

Stewart's talk set the stage for the major themes coming out of this year's Forum, including the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and spatial technology for cultural and environmental land use planning, the urgency felt to address the critical issue of conservation, and what Evan called "good bad things," referring to the favourable results that come from unfortunate situations. In a province where archaeology is primarily undertaken prior to site impacts, mitigation or destruction, the phrase seems poignant for B.C.'s cultural resource management industry.

## "Good Bad Things"

The session on Saturday included twenty-four papers on a wide range of topics, presented by representatives of institutions, government agencies, consulting companies, and First Nations. The Saturday session also provided the perfect opportunity to check out SFU's spiffy new lab facilities on the Burnaby campus. As per tradition, updates on recent activities in post-secondary archaeology programs were presented for SFU (Dave Burley, Eldon Yellowhorn, Dongya Yang, John Welch), UBC (Sue Rowley), and UVic (Quentin Mackie), as well as updates for the ASBC (Eric McLay and Natasha Lyons), BCAPA (Brenda Gould), UASBC (Al Morgan), Parks Canada (Daryl Fedje) and the Archaeology Branch (Doug Glaum). However, many of the papers in

the Saturday session gave detailed and fascinating descriptions of specific projects, and many of these also highlighted the theme of "good bad things".

Evan Stewart and Margaret Rogers spoke more to this issue on Saturday, looking specifically at the Kinder Morgan Inc. oil "release" that occurred on July 24, 2007, which quickly and significantly impacted the environment and archaeology surrounding Burrard Inlet. Remarkably, it took seventeen days from the day of the spill to when a site alteration permit was issued by the Archaeology Branch. During the salvage operation, three known sites were updated, and eight new sites and two shipwrecks were also identified (watch the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia's webpage for details: <http://www.uasbc.com/>).

Arnoud Stryd and Richard Broly of Arcas Consulting Archeologists reported that no less than 45% of all their projects over the last year were related to the incredible pace of resource extraction in the northeastern quadrant of BC, including oil, gas, mining and forestry developments. But one result of a "good bad thing" was the work by Arcas in Finlay Reach, where reservoir drawdown exposed a huge number of new, albeit heavily impacted, sites. For Daryl Fedje of Parks Canada, natural disasters, such as the heavy storm damage from last winter, were also "good bad things," as the tree falls from the storms fortuitously exposed previously unidentified caves in Gwaii Haanas holding flaked lithic tools and copious amounts of faunal material, dating between 10,600 and 10,000 BP. As always, the Parks Canada projects in Gwaii Haanas continue to produce astonishing results.

Doug Hudson from the University College of the Fraser Valley described his work, done in advance of development for Independent Power Projects, as both opening up higher elevation areas for survey and simultaneously threatening to forever close this window once the IPPs are in place. John Somogyi-Csizmazia of Madrone Environmental Services reported how a condo development in Nanaimo 'helped' identify an enormous cemetery of great importance to the Snuneymuxw Nation. The Nation is currently negotiating the protection of this area, but not before bearing witness to an excavation that Somogyi-Csizmazia described as "painful."

Tanja Hoffman of the Katzie Development Corporation reported on some of the most fascinating and unique salvage archaeology in the province this year. Katzie is in the middle of what is the largest excavation project currently underway in Canada, taking place in advance of the Golden Ears Bridge and highway expansion project. One expansive wet and dry site, about 420 m long, has yielded evidence of possible wapato 'farms' with digging sticks broken in situ, and ground stone beads in the tens of thousands, all dating to between 3510 and 3470 ± 40 BP. Most of this remarkable site is slated for destruction by the highway project, and letters of support are currently being gathered to support additional excavation, as so far only 5.5% of the area has been sampled.

Even the field schools felt the impact of CRM-style archaeology. Chris Springer's Masters research associated with the SFU field school focused on salvaging data from a structure that will be sacrificed for a dyke in the Harrison River area. Likewise, UBC's field school students were busy screening disturbed midden and trying to stay ahead of the backhoe, looking for archaeological site boundaries before preload covered them forever. What does it say about the nature of our discipline in this province, when the first experience had by students new to archaeology involves a backhoe?

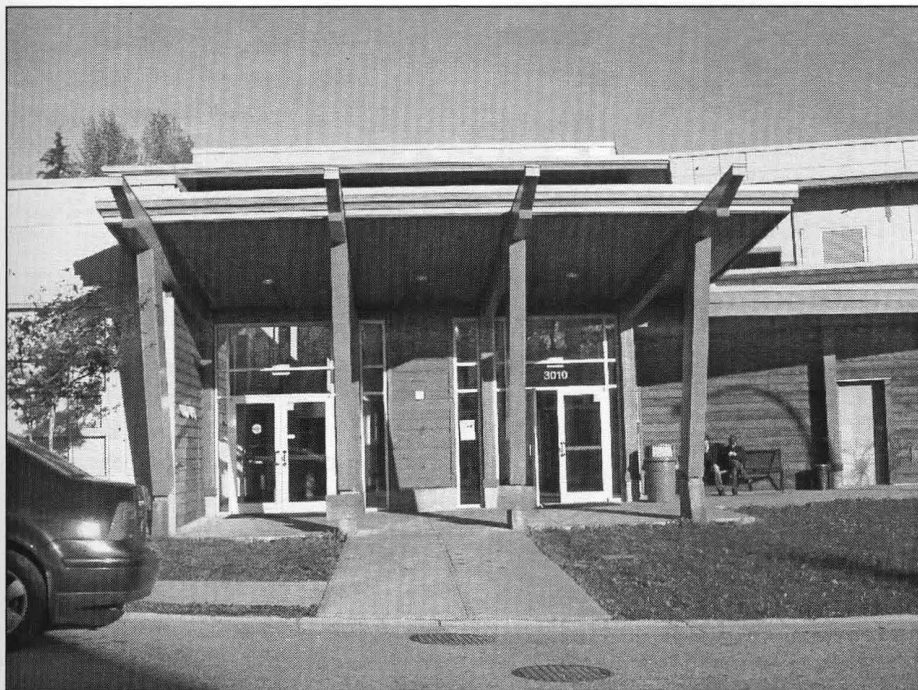
### "Good Good Things"

Yet there are "good good things" on the horizon, too, particularly in terms of relationship building between archaeologists working with descent communities in the field, a mandate that the Forum speaks directly to. Vera Asp, a Ph.D. candidate at SFU and working with her own community in Tahltan territory, described her community-oriented project as very much a "process, not an event." Morgan Ritchie, a Masters student at SFU, has been engaged in this process with the Chehalis First Nation for a few years now, looking at the long history of interconnected communities along the Harrison watershed. Eldon Yellowhorn's work through SFU's Archaeology and First Nations Studies Departments is also a testament to these efforts towards collaboration with descent communities.

These on-the-ground advances in building partnerships with descent communities are also mirrored in some truly innovative attempts by institutions to develop capacity for community-based research. The CRM Certificate being developed at SFU, discussed by John Welch, will make archaeological training more accessible to First Nations, while the M.A. program will be attractive to both students of archaeology and their future employers (see Welch et al., this issue). Sue Rowley of UBC talked about the Reciprocal Research Network, designed to enable geographically dispersed users and institutions — including originating communities — to carry out heritage research projects. We were also treated to an impressive demonstration of just how all the artifacts at UBC's Laboratory of Archaeology are being digitized ("100,261 and counting"), in order to facilitate this research access.

The BC Archaeology Branch is also making considerable headway towards making data available, developing a three-year plan to ensure accurate and accessible data, and providing tools for public awareness. The Branch currently has 32,500 known archaeological sites in their database, a staggering figure that goes up by 1200 per year — and yet there is no backlog of information to be entered. The Branch is also in the process of reconciling digital GIS data to reflect exact site location, and have successfully done this for 25,000 sites on top of their normal workload. The incredible Branch staff certainly has set high standards of productivity, and we are all thankful for their hard work.

Yet there is more to be done, and certainly we look to our professional organizations for support and direction. The British Columbia Association of Professional Archaeologists and the Archaeological Society of British Columbia are both looking for support in terms of new members. Brenda Gould of the BCAPA reported that the organization is continuing to work on developing professional standards and increasing their profile, while ASBC President Eric McLay and Vice-President Natasha Lyons are petitioning the provincial government for better heritage funding. After disbanding the BC Heritage Trust, the province replaced it with the Heritage Legacy Fund, which



Tsleil Waututh Community Centre on Friday evening where Chief Leah George-Wilson welcomed participants to the 2007 BC Archaeology Forum (Photo by Wayne Point).

is privately handled and denies funding to archaeology. The ASBC is also hoping to get a public dig going in Stanley Park for 2008 as part of the conservation and clean-up efforts after the windstorms last winter, and to promote public awareness of the First Nations heritage of the province.

Another "good good thing" is seen in the incredible opportunities being opened up for data recording and analysis by GIS and digital mapping technology. Suzanne Villeneuve also discussed the potential for using digital technology for spatial analysis, employing geophysical techniques including ground penetrating radar (GPR) to identify finely separated strata at Keatley Creek, and also looking to use ancient DNA methods on fish to explore the 'social inequality' hypothesis (luckily Dongya Yang at SFU described some brand new facilities that'll do just the trick...).

Morley Eldridge of Millennia Research described a project that started and ended with digital data. Using a Total Station to complete initial site survey allowed the spatial data of the artifacts to be immediately digitized, skipping several laborious steps on the way to spatial analysis and 3-D digital models overlaid on land features (thanks for that, Google!). Eldridge also discussed the application of

high resolution LiDAR remote sensing for correcting known site locations. Adrian Sanders at UVic further demonstrated the utility of LiDAR to model the landscape in aid of identifying areas of potential human habitation. However, crucially, Adrian reminds us that there is no substitute for the experiential aspect of being on the ground — or, in the case of Martina Steffen of the RBCM, under the ground, where only in person were the bear claw marks and foot prints dating between 8900 and 12,000 BP detected within the 1400+ meters of cave passages on Vancouver Island.

Indeed, the lesson of combining digital tools with ground-truthing is one that has not been lost on Wendy Hawks, who outlined the recent efforts of the Upper Similkameen Indian Band towards creating and testing a GIS predictive model. In the course of this process, the strengths of a GIS were juxtaposed with fears about the application of this technology, and rightly so. As archaeologists, we know better than most that maps rarely reflect absolute 'truth'; however, the possibility is real for developers to rely on these spatial data rather than engage in meaningful consultation, and to use these data to make decisions that should be made by or at least with archaeologists. After all, a GIS cannot predict new types of sites, it's based on the

modern landscape, and as we well know, human behaviour is not always predictable or environmentally/geographically determined. These are critical considerations when creating or using GIS for archaeology, and ones that we can easily forget when we catch sight of those beautiful ArcGIS-Google masterpieces; yet there is something to be said for what Al Morgan of the UASBC called "proven techniques [that] work very well", and there really is no replacement for the tape-and-compass survey that we all know and love . . . at times, anyway.

Whether talking about GIS and digital mapping, artifact cataloguing, caves, condos, or CRM, every one of the presentations at this year's BC Archaeological Forum demonstrated the enormous potential that is created by bringing people together. Yet, these presentations also highlighted that archaeological heritage in this province is in a state of crisis. In the face of both private development and a government looking to extract more dollars out of BC's resources, it is critical that archaeologists and First Nations come together to share in the stewardship of archaeological heritage, for it is through these partnerships that we will create a united front, strong in its ethos of conservation. In this charge, the role of the Forum is clear.

### The Once and Future Forum

When the first BC Archaeology Forum was held in 1992, it was seen as an opportunity for academics, consultants, First Nations, government, and avocational archaeology groups to share information, exchange ideas, and work towards shared objectives. This year's Forum both advanced this mandate and retreated from it.

The wide range of papers highlighted the ongoing professionalization of the discipline in B.C., and showcased the exciting developments in technology that can only help to improve methods and results. The 2007 Forum also maintained the tradition of having a First Nation host or co-host, and the Tsleil-Waututh presentation clearly demonstrated how First Nation involvement in archaeology and other land and resource activities has evolved since 1992. This development was further highlighted



"Go ASBC!": A slide from Eric McLay and Natasha Lyons' presentation, updating Forum attendants on the goals of ASBC.

by the fact that a good percentage of the papers this year were about First Nation directed archaeology, or collaborative projects where descent communities played a major role in the project. First Nations are now doing the archaeology, not just managing or critiquing it, as was largely the case in the recent past. Moreover, this year's event reinforced how the Forum has shifted from the rancorous debates typical of the 1990s to an overall tone of collaboration and common goals.

At the same time, audience turnout from First Nations was low this year, perhaps because of the short notice, the location, and the separation of venues. Likewise, there was a poor showing from

the consulting community compared to that of Forums in the early years. Conflict with the field season is part of the problem, but perhaps there are lingering yet unwarranted fears that the Forum is still used to scapegoat archaeologists. This also may be part of the reason behind the low attendance of provincial representatives, although the Archaeology Branch presentation was a positive indication of provincial support for the Forum. Regardless, we hope next year to see a better turnout from the consultant, First Nation, and government sectors.

Panel discussions tackling issues or challenging practice were also notably absent from this year's Forum. Although

it was wonderful to hear about so many positive results and collaborative projects, a great many issues are still bedeviling B.C. archaeology and they are worthy of public discussion and debate. The panel discussion format is what characterized the very first B.C. Archaeology Forum and this format has been the defining feature of every Forum since. Although the discussions have sometimes been testy, the debates have always been necessary, and we are better archaeologists for it.

Despite these quibbles, the organizers and participants of the 2007 Forum should be congratulated for keeping the Forum a vital part of the B.C. archaeology landscape. The Forum exists without a central organizing body or a source of funding, and is organized each year by an ad hoc group of volunteers, making this event all the more remarkable. Looking towards 2008, the Stó:lo Research and Resource Management Centre — on behalf of the Stó:lo Nation and Sto:lo Tribal Council — has stepped forward and offered to host the next B.C. Archaeology Forum, somewhere near Chilliwack. This means the tradition will continue, and we will have another opportunity to both celebrate our accomplishments and challenge our practices. We hope to see you there next year!

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**Marina La Salle is trying desperately to complete her Masters at the University of British Columbia.**

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