



## Recent Research Directions at Keatley Creek (EeR1 7) and Secret Societies in the Pacific Northwest

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Keatley Creek (EeR1 7) is a prehistoric large pithouse village site on the Fraser River north of Lillooet, and it had an estimated population of 1200-1500 at its zenith, with the Classic Lillooet occupation (2,300-1,100 BP), although the extent and development of this and other large communities is currently much debated (Hayden 2005, Prentiss et al 2005, Kuijt and Prentiss 2004) (Figures 2 and 3). It has been a focus of considerable archaeological investigation, nearly continuously from 1985 to present, and provides almost certainly the largest body of comparative data on household variability (especially living floors) from a single site in the Pacific Northwest (with 7 completely and 15 partially excavated pithouses of all sizes and primarily of Plateau, Kamloops, and Protohistoric Horizons) (Hayden 2000a and 2000b, 2004). It is probably not reasonable to assume all 120 of the housepits at Keatley Creek are the collapsed remains of domestic winter pithouses.

We suggest that recent excavations at the peripheries of the site have revealed two sets structures and features that are very distinctive from the domestic housepits that dominate the core of the site. We suggest that the most appropriate cultural model to explain this patterning is that these locations represent two secret society compounds associated with the site that span Plateau, Kamloops and Protohistoric occupations.

**Above (Figure 1):** Ornaments recovered from ST 106. Includes examples of cervid tooth pendant (one of three recovered from the site), and bird bone beads (three of seven recovered from the site) (Photo by Keith Gavac).

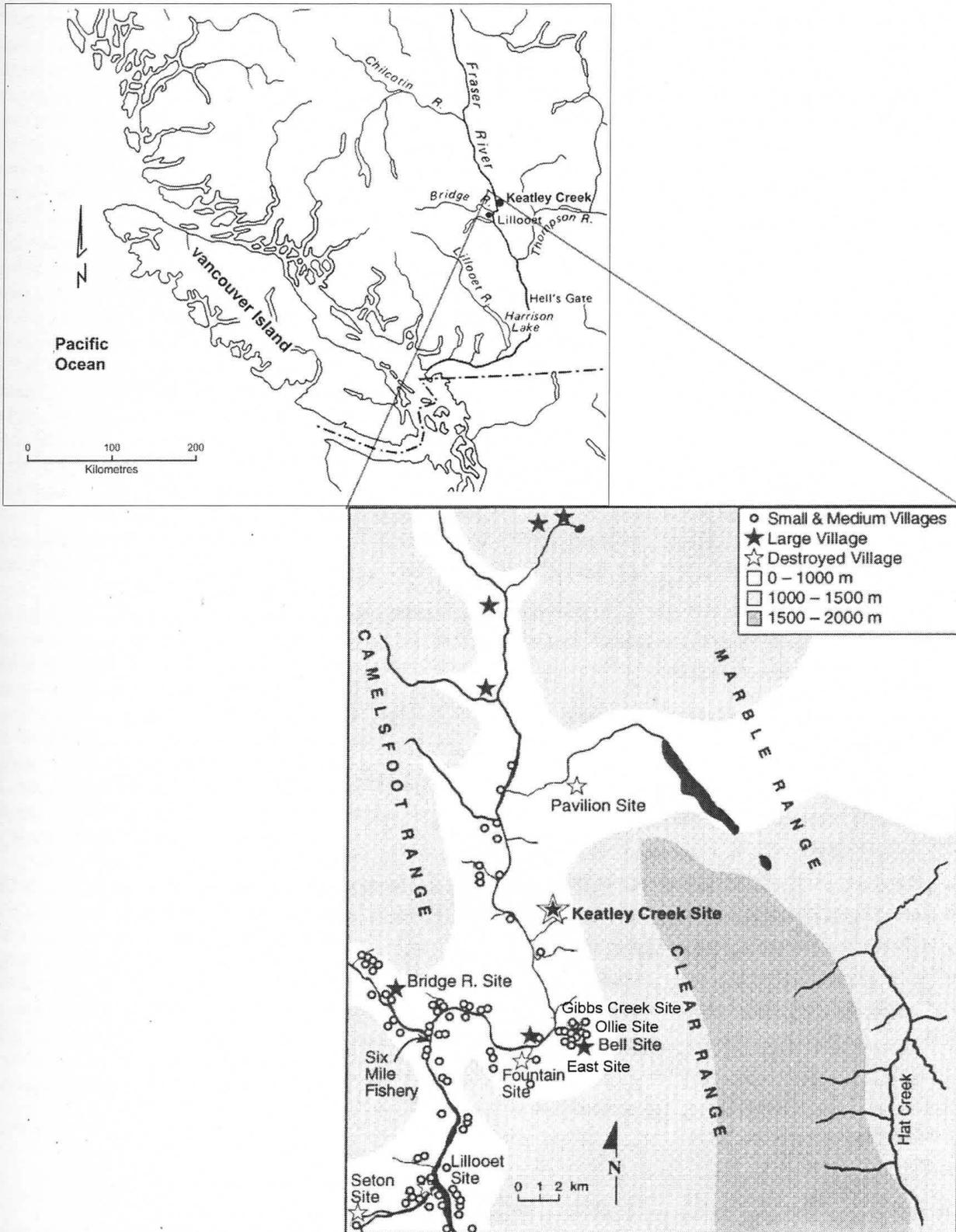


Figure 2: Keatley Creek and Lillooet region sites (after Hadyen and Ryder 1991, and Hayden 2000a).

## Secret Societies in Late Pacific Northwest Prehistory

In a community the size of Keatley Creek, one would expect some degree of specialist activity, e.g., craftspeople, hunters, ritual specialists, warriors, and many nested social relationships, e.g., hereditary crest groups, lineal descent groups, corporate groups, secret societies, and possibly ethnolinguistic groups (the large protohistoric/historic village at Fountain, just 10 km south of Keatley Creek was a multiethnic community) (Teit 1906: 200). Research has suggested that very long-lasting corporate groups are identifiable in the material record at the site (Hayden et al. 1996). We suggest that secret society organizations are also discernable in the cultural material at the site, namely two compounds of spatially isolated meeting houses or structures and exceptionally large food production facilities.

Indeed, Binford (2001: 406) suggests that:

Organizational features such as *secret societies and reticulate socialities* represent a scalar response to the large size of residentially associated social groups that may cooperate in a segmentary fashion. Such large units regularly occur and frequently represent *relatively sedentary settlements* (emphasis mine).

The settlement pattern of the Late Prehistoric (approximately 3500 BP to contact) societies of both the Northwest Coast and the Mid-Fraser region can be accurately described as being composed of "large residentially associated social groups" and consisting of "relatively sedentary settlements." Early examples of settlement patterns with semipermanent houses of various sizes include the Paul Mason site at Kitselas Canyon (3,200-2,900 BP) (Coupland 1988: 237-239), the Boardwalk site in Prince Rupert Harbour (3500-2500 BP) (Macdonald and Inglis 1981), the Katz site along the lower Fraser River (2500 BP) (Ames and Maschner 1999: 159), EeBb 3 (2200-1500 BP) at Kamloops (Rousseau 2004; Wilson and Carlson 1980), and of course the Classic Lillooet occupations (2300-1100 BP) of the Bridge River, Bell, and Keatley Creek sites (Hayden 2000a, 2000b, 2005; Stryd 1973). These early, densely populated, complex hunter-gatherer communities are probably the types of communities where organizational features such as secret societies should be anticipated.

Although weakly described, Teit (1909: 577-8) suggests that secret society organizations, probably historically related to the dancing societies of the Northwest Coast, were present among the inhabitants of the Mid-Fraser region. Secret societies were especially widespread on the Northwest Coast (Boas 1970; Drucker 1951: 366-395; Elmendorf 1960: 550-558; Garfield 1966: 44-47; McIlwraith 1992a, 1992b, Olson 1955: 337; Swanton 1975: 156-166), but were also present in California (Blackburn 1974: 104), and the Great Plains (Binford 2001: 406).

Secret society groups such as Cannibal, Dog, Wolf or Coyote, and Corpse or Ghost, are well described for the central Northwest Coast (i.e., northern Vancouver Island to Bella Coola) and were also present in the Mid-Fraser region (Teit 1909: 577-8). Secret societies composed of an internally graded cadre of elites appear to have wielded significant ritual, economic and political clout in the transegalitarian societies of the Northwest Coast (see Boas 1970, and McIlwraith 1992a and 1992b). The most well-docu-

mented facet of these organizations is their public performances or dances at potlatches, especially their elaborate costumes and paraphernalia. However, for many, if not all, groups these secret society rites permeated society much deeper than public performances.

Secret societies tend to be internally hierarchically graded, with senior members having the greatest prestige, authority, and most connections to secret society organization in other villages. Secret society members had the rights to particular regalia associated with a set of rites or dance, including masks, whistles, button blankets, animal costumes, and possibly many more discrete items (McIlwraith 1992a and 1992b). Advancement within such societies was dependent on investment on the part of an individual in terms of (1) training to gain ritual or supernatural prerogatives and (2) the ability of the individual to sponsor potlatches required to publicly validate those prerogatives (Johansen and Morin n.d.). The obvious correlate is that the individuals able afford the most training and able to muster the largest quantities of resources can advance the highest in such societies. While these individuals may not be true "chiefs," they may wield significant ritual or ceremonial prerogatives, and are able to establish inflationary debt relationships by regularly hosting potlatches to validate their advancement within the society organization (Johansen and Morin n.d.). We suggest similar models of social organisation can be applied to the prehistoric community at Keatley Creek.

Following both the direct historic and cross-cultural comparative approaches, our normative models or expectations of prehistoric pithouse village sites should anticipate secret society organizations and their meeting houses. Cross-culturally, complex hunter-gatherer and horticultural communities much smaller than Keatley Creek often display functional variability in architecture. Most notably, many societies have non-domestic ritual architecture (e.g., shrines, meeting houses, seclusion structures, dancing houses) and many archaeological examples of ritual structures have been identified in, for example, in the American Southwest (Muir and Driver 2002), the European Upper Palaeolithic (Klima 1954: 1-13), and the Near Eastern Neolithic (Byrd 1994: 656). Analogous structures should probably also be expected in a community the size of Keatley Creek.

While the majority of published research at Keatley Creek focuses on the domestic housepits of the core of the site, recent excavations directed by Brian Hayden have focused on a series of structures on the periphery of the site – myself focusing on Terraces 1 and 2 to the east, and Suzanne Villeneuve on the South Terrace to the south of the core of the Keatley Creek community (Figure 3). These small structures were originally excavated because of their unusual locations in relation to the rest of the site (terraces 150-250 m from the core)—clear physical separation from the core of the community.

### The Terrace 1 and 2 Complex

Terrace 1 and 2 are both secluded and dominant portions of the site. These lie at the foot of the Clear Range Mountains that abut the site, and are higher in elevation from the domestic core.



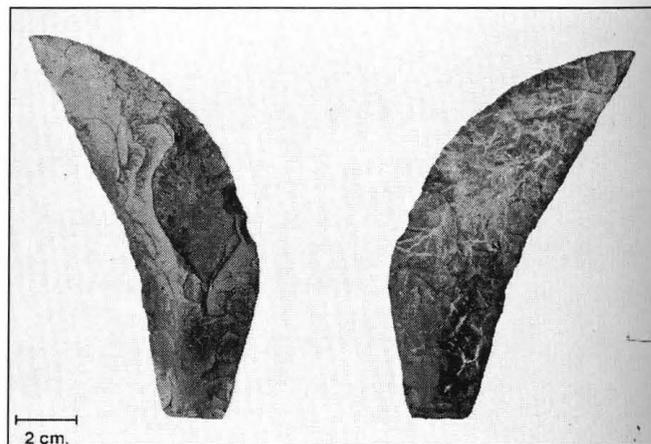
**Figure 3:** The Keatley Creek site (after Hayden 2000a). Note the variable size of the housepits, the tightly packed housepits in the domestic core of the site, and the complexes of structures and features on terraces to east and south of the domestic core.

While from portions of Terrace 1 and 2 one can view the entire Keatley Creek community, the housepits on this portion of the site (ST 104, 105, 106 and 109) are invisible from anywhere else on at Keatley Creek. Consider the above description and Figure 3 compared to the spatial description of secret society (Kusiut) meeting houses among the Nuxalk (Bella Coola) as related by McIlwraith (1992a: 177-178):

Near every village is a place where the chiefs hold such meetings. All the inhabitants know the general locality, but there is such dread of the supernatural powers of the Kusiut society that none would dare go there. If an uninitiated person should do so, he formerly would have been either killed or initiated into the society. The meeting place of the Qomqots chiefs is on a ledge of rock jutting out over a waterfall about a quarter of a mile from the village.... The meeting-places of other villages lack such natural settings, though all are at the bases of cliffs or near some easily distinguished feature.

Terrace 2 is an especially secluded landform at the site and was utilized by the inhabitants of Keatley Creek and perhaps other villages from at least the Plateau horizon (2,400 - 1,200 BP) to the Protohistoric period (400 - 200 BP). The structures on these two terraces are also closely spatially associated with a high number of meat and plant roasting features (containing the largest examples of both types on the site, and the highest concentration of such features on the site) (Hayden and Cousins 2004, Morin 2006). The atypical context of these structures compared to the domestic housepits was intriguing enough to warrant further investigation, especially in regards to whether or not these structures were domestic housepits or functionally distinct structures (e.g., a potlatch house, menstrual hut, meeting house, shaman's house). The cultural remains represented in this complex differ rather dramatically from activities in the winter domestic residences in the core of Keatley Creek (Hayden and Adams 2004; Hayden and Cousins 2004; Morin 2006).

Although there are clear indications of Plateau Horizon cultural activity in this portion of the site (including at least two housepits and the largest root-roasting pit on the site), the most recent occupation of all four structures here is clearly late Kamloops horizon or Protohistoric in date (likely contemporaneous with one another, but definitely postdating the collapse of the major occupation of the site). These four small protohistoric structures have all been tested, and ST 106 ninety-percent excavated. The material remains recovered from ST 106 were the basis of a MA thesis by the author in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at UBC. Based on samples of domestic structures and potential ritual structures at Keatley Creek, Bell, Ollie, Gibbs Creek and East sites (nearly all reported Lillooet region housepit excavations), a comparative analysis (focussing primarily on Keatley Creek housepits) of multiple independent lines of evidence indicated strong and consistent clustering of potential ritual structures as a group distinct from domestic housepits. Most notably, these contained very limited evidence for raw-material reduction, that is, both making and using stone tools, and abundant evidence for intensive use of hearths and of specialized consumption – especially of artiodactyls (probably all deer) and fish soups (Morin 2006).



**Figure 4:** Crescentic biface recovered from a small meat-roasting feature underlying the rim of ST 106. It is one of the most finely flaked stone objects recovered from the site and is unique in the region (after Hayden and Adams 2004).

The sample of potential ritual structures on the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex have very small assemblages, but they consistently contained several classes of extremely rare or unique artifacts, including a probable bone button blanket and bull-roarer in ST 105; and a sandstone saw, men's lahal pieces, and coiled basketry fragment in ST 104 (Hayden and Adams 2004). Structure 109 contained a fan-tailed biface, and a dog sacrum wrapped in birch bark. Structure 106, the focus of my research, contained a bird bone drinking tube, bird bone beads, a cervid-tooth bead, a crescentic biface, a fan-tailed biface, probable tomahawk- and antler-pick type war clubs and the largest ochre cache at Keatley Creek (Figures 3 and 4) (Morin 2006). This atypical assemblage is derived from a sample of only 272 artifacts (much less than most housepits) and only 24 artifacts within the floor of the 9 by 11 meter structure. It surely ranks among the sparsest and most unusual assemblages recovered from the site.

Several classes of artifacts are only found in the proposed ritual structures, and the largest housepits at the site. Examples of these rare artifacts include: bird-bone beads, bird-bone drinking tubes, ground bone points, fan-tailed bifaces, dentalia, and gaming pieces. In terms of faunal remains, moose, lynx, and bear are all only found in large housepits and ritual structures at Keatley Creek.

Another notable feature of ST 106, and the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex in general, is the density and size of meat and root-roasting features associated with it. In particular, there was a small (80 cm by 90 cm) meat-roasting feature (undated prehistoric) underlying the rim of the structure that contained the crescentic biface (Figure 4) and broken fan-tailed biface. Also, the largest meat-roasting feature (undated protohistoric) at the site was identified overlying the collapsed remains of the structure. It is 6.5 m by 4 m, twice as large as the next largest meat-roasting feature at the site (also located in the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex). This feature was very rich in charcoal, fire-cracked rock, and deer remains, and some salmon and bird remains were also recovered from it. Paraphrasing one of the excavators of the feature and structure "it is either an exceptionally large food production facility for

feasts with many guests or a regular-sized food production facility for giants" (Simon Kaltenrieder, personal communication 2003).

Romanoff (1992a) suggests that deer meat was a highly regarded and rare food in aboriginal Mid-Fraser societies, and that it was required to amass significant quantities of dried deer meat to sponsor a potlatch. As dried salmon, salmon oil and dried berries made up the vast bulk of prehistoric regional winter diets (Romanoff 1992b: 237-238, Teit 1906, 1909), large-scale preparation of roots or deer is a likely indication of extra-domestic feasting or potlatching activities, especially in pithouse village contexts (Hayden and Cousins 2004, Romanoff 1992a: 474-475). The scale of this feature compared to all other meat-roasting features at Keatley Creek certainly suggests its use was associated with exceptional events. It was almost certainly used to prepare foods for large numbers of guests at feasts or potlatches.

Considering the discussion above (unusual location, atypical patterns of use, atypical assemblage characteristics, and association with feasting facilities), these structures on the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex do indeed seem to be something distinct from the domestic housepits in the core of the site. Following analysis of the materials recovered from ST 106, and recognizing the potential variability in the sample of ritual structures at Keatley Creek (STs 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 9), I agree with Hayden and Adams (2004) in suggesting that these structures are a distinctive functional category. We suggest that ST 106 and the other proposed ritual structures may have been secret society meetinghouses (Hayden and Adams 2004, Johansen and Morin n.d.). This set of structures and nearby features were likely used by only a limited segment of the Keatley Creek or other communities for holding meetings, training (especially for important dances), exclusive feasting (especially eating special soups), for preparing large quantities of high value foods (namely deer and roots) for public feasts or potlatches, and likely sponsoring such events (Hayden and Adams 2004; Morin 2006).

One example is hardly a trend, but at Keatley Creek there may be two such compounds. Nearly all of the trends discussed above for the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex — unusual location, ritual structures, rare artifacts, and feasting facilities — can be readily applied to the South Terrace Complex as well (ST 9 and ST 107, with Plateau and Kamloops occupations) (Hayden and Cousins 2004; Hayden and Adams 2004) (Figure 3). With a population of 1,200 - 1,500 at the zenith of its occupation (the Classic Lillooet, Plateau/Early Kamloops Horizons), Keatley Creek may well have supported two secret society organizations and their respective compounds — the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex and the South Terrace Complex. Later, in the Protohistoric Period, a community of unknown size at Keatley Creek or the surrounding region supported the secret society compound on the Terrace 1 and 2 Complex.

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Jesse Morin was born and raised in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island. He received his BA in archaeology from SFU in 2002, and is currently wrapping up his Masters at UBC. His research interests focus on the prehistoric complex hunter-gatherers of the Northwest Coast and Plateau, with specific emphasis on salmon processing technology and the social and ritual organization of communities. He is currently planning future research focussing on the largest housepits at the Keatley Creek site.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who volunteered excavating ST 106 (Brian Hayden, Suzanne Villeneuve, Jesse Morin, Jessica Jansen, Jen Lowe, Lisa Anderson, Joanne Hammond, Simon Kaltenrieder, Charles Pelletier, Tanya McMaster, Shirely Kimmit, Ron Adams, Sue Duxbury, Emily Wilkerson, Elenore Hood, Andrew Hunt, Kira Kristenson, Amanda Marshal, Robin Anderson, Nicole Gavac, and Takashi Sakaguchi), all those who had a hand in guiding this research (Brian Hayden, David Pokotylo, and Mike Blake), all the other Keatley Creek prehistorians (Brian Hayden, Karla Kusmer, William Prentiss, Jim Spafford, Diane Alexander, Kevin Berry, Ed Bakewell, Rob Gargett, Mike Rouseau, Dana Lepofsky, Suzanne Villeneuve and more...), and the Xaxli'p and Ts'qw'aylaxw First Nations for allowing us to study your fascinating cultural history.

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