

## UBC Up North

by Chris Ames

As I headed down the slight hill from the church to the dock with the fifteen other field school students and the twelve crew members I was able to pick out the two fishing boats that brought us all from our field camp to the *Lax Kwalaams* (Port Simpson) community. We had just finished a magnificent afternoon with the Tsimshian elders where we were treated to a fabulous lunch and were questioned about the work that had been and was going to be undertaken this past summer. It was the third week of the four-week University of British Columbia (UBC) field school held in northern BC. As we approached the ocean a familiar smell of salt and fish blew toward us and there was an incredible energy emanating from the group of students. We had all just gained an insight into BC archaeology that none of us ever could have expected. In fact, this mid-June afternoon during which no field work was conducted may have been the most educational part of the field school.

I spent this past summer participat-

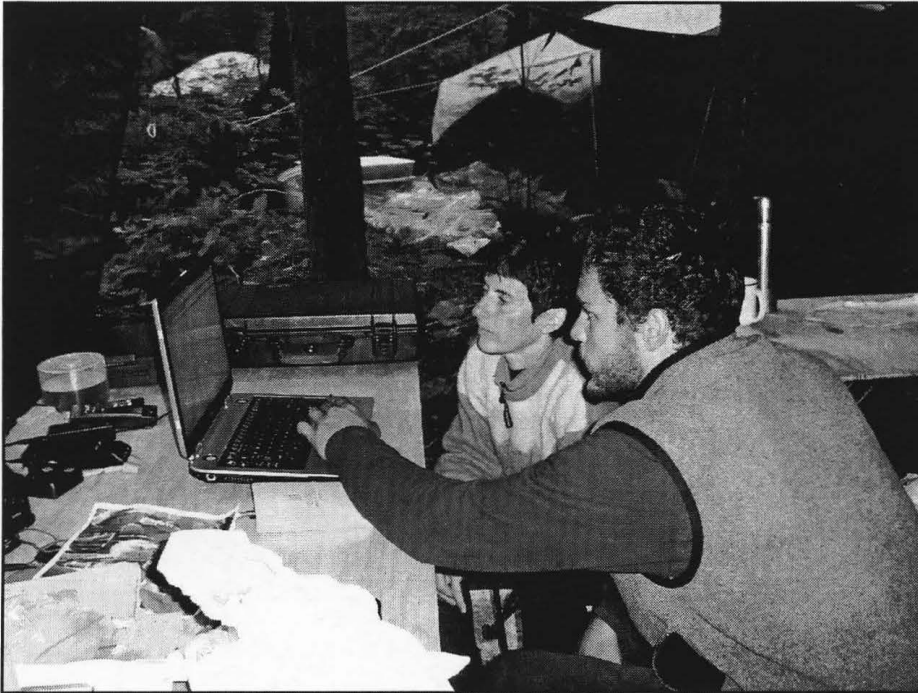
ing in the UBC field school on a remote group of islands, the Dundas Islands, approximately 40 km northwest of Prince Rupert Harbour. The field course began with a two week introduction and orientation to the greater research project and the field techniques that would be needed for the summer. A total of sixteen students participated in the course and all but two came from UBC Vancouver. One student came from UBC Okanagan and another from Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo.

The initial two-week training session was held in early May and involved a complete immersion in field archaeology at the UBC Vancouver campus. We were instructed and practiced survey, mapping, and excavation techniques and were briefed on Tsimshian heritage as this is whose past we would be trying to understand. Here we met Dr. Andrew

Martindale, one of the two head investigators of the project. The other head investigator is David Archer of the Northwest Community College located in Prince Rupert. Together Martindale and Archer have organized a three year project whose general goal is to understand the spatial distribution of archaeological material throughout the Dundas Islands using survey, mapping, and dating techniques. This past season was the second and most field intensive year of the project. In fact, the combination of a field school and large-scale academic research project provided a unique experience to us students that I feel is invaluable.

The two weeks of classroom training passed quickly and was followed by a two week break until we all reunited in Prince Rupert, the logistical foundation and source of supplies for the field season. A major challenge of the field school was

*Above:* Andrew Martindale piloting one of the skiffs and its crew to the Connell Island site.



Sue Formosa and Chris Ames working in the computer lab on 3-Dimensional map data collected by the total station crew. This day the crews were unable to leave the camp because of inclement weather so everyone spent the day working around camp.



An anchor stone found on the beach in front of one village site. The rock wall was only visible at low tide so Sue Formosa and her mapping crew had to plan ahead and work quickly to avoid being chased away by the tide.

ensuring the transport of the equipment and food needed for a group of thirty people. No small feat considering our field camp was on a small island in the middle of the Dundas region without direct access to fresh water.

The centrality of our field camp was

a critical component of the field season as we were divided into a number of small crews that worked in many different parts of the region. On a daily basis the crews would depart the field camp in small skiffs and head out onto the ocean for anywhere from a 10 to 40 minute ride to the work site

for that day. The work being conducted was different for each crew as the project was organized into smaller research endeavors that contributed to the larger goal of understanding the overall spatial and temporal distribution of archaeological remains on the Dundas Islands. Researchers were present from McMaster University, UBC, the University of Victoria (Uvic), and the University of Western Ontario (UWO).

One of the primary research interests was Dr Martindale's goal to survey the entire group of islands. The plan was to document and sketch a map of every site found in the region as well as take samples for dating. To do this Dr. Martindale led a small crew that surveyed, recorded, and sketch-mapped whereas a second crew was responsible for taking samples. This crew followed behind the survey crew by about a day or two and would extract core samples from shell middens. The core samples were taken using an environmentalist's subsoil probe or ESP that removes sealed clear plastic tubes from the ground with a diameter slightly larger than a quarter. All cores were taken to the bottom of the respective shell middens and at a number of sites — this meant samples deeper than five metres below the surface. The benefit of the core-sampling technique is the relatively non-invasive and expedient manner of obtaining data of shell midden stratigraphy. Traditionally, large-scale excavation would be required to gain insight into midden stratigraphy at the depths that we were reaching with the ESP. Also, the sealed tube means that it is possible to extract dateable samples from various depths and be confident there is no contamination. At the end of the field season, the third week of July, the survey of the islands was complete and more than thirty new sites were recorded, a few of which are substantial villages but the majority found are small camp sites. Furthermore, Natalie Brewster, a PhD student from McMaster University, was able to sample shell middens with an auger at the same time as the ESP coring tool to collect faunal remains for herself and shellfish samples for Meghan Burchell who is also a PhD student from McMaster.

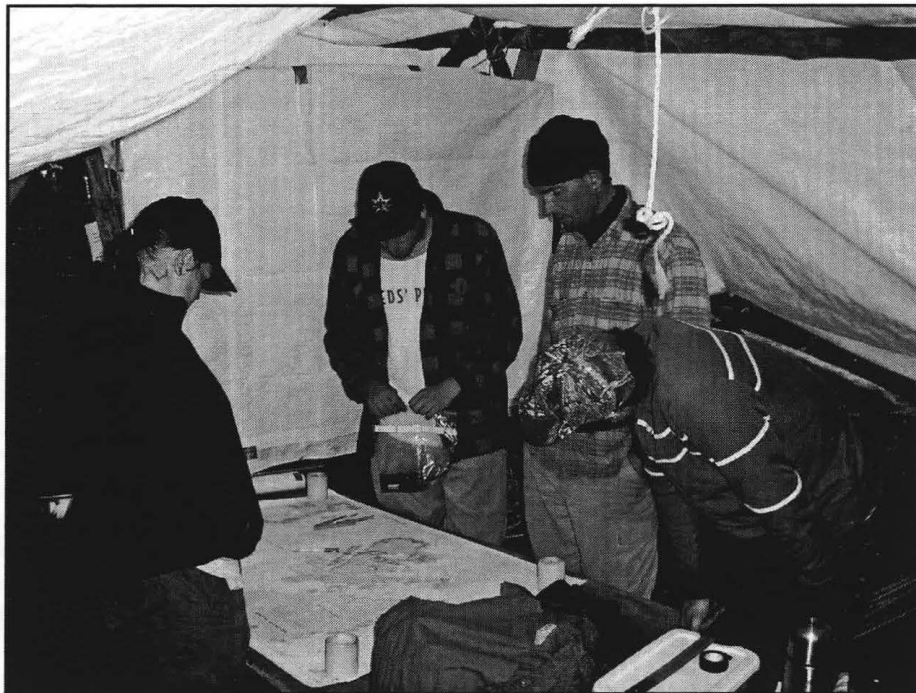
In addition to the survey and sampling crews, David Archer led a team that conducted detailed mapping of a number of large village sites in the region. David would take a small crew of students and identify and label all house depressions and the typical shell ridge marking the perimeter

of large Tsimshian villages. Following the detailed ground mapping of a village, a crew of surveyors led by Sue Formosa would follow behind and digitally map the village using a total station. This allowed three-dimensional models of the sites to be created that can be used for many research purposes including David Archer's work on the spatial organization of Tsimshian communities. Another of David Archer's interests is the relationship between the surface contour of house depressions and the house floors underneath. This led to an excavation of a 1-m by 4-m trench across a house depression. The excavation was successful in that the house floor was discovered and its location in relation to the shell ridges and surface contour was mapped in detail, however, the final results are yet to be determined.

Two other research projects were being conducted in the Dundas Islands this past season, one by Duncan McLaren, a PhD student from UVic, and another by Angela Ruggles, an MA student from UBC. Duncan McLaren's interest is in the older sites on the islands and his research is based on his own detailed reconstruction of the ancient coastlines. Duncan used this information to predict at what elevations he is likely to find sites from certain times in the past and as a result his crew spent a considerable amount of time surveying high elevation terraces. Duncan located a number of potential sites that await further analysis and dates but he also undertook an excavation of a mid-elevation shell midden that will produce a considerable amount of faunal information from a time period that is little understood.

The final project the field school was involved with was Angela Ruggles' research on the use of plants in the past. Angela led two excavations in the center of house depressions in the hope of discovering hearths that are known to promote the preservation of plant material. Her preliminary analyses of her samples have produced a considerable amount of botanical remains but it is too early to know what they will tell us.

With such a wide array of projects and such little time to collect the necessary data, it was a true challenge to make the field school as educational as possible. The system that was developed saw the students rotating every few days to a new



Kisha Supernant, Bryn Letham, Andrew Martindale, and Rich Bolton standing in the camp dining hall and plotting sites discovered that day.

crew allowing us all to experience every aspect of the larger project. This made for an exciting four weeks of field work that introduced me and my newly made friends to the field techniques of excavation, survey, site sampling, palaeoethnobotany, GPS technology, and computer-based mapping. However, the training we received was not restricted to these techniques as there was a conscious effort to teach us about the ethical responsibilities of an archaeologist. A special trip was planned to *Lax Kwalaams* where we were questioned about our work by the elders and Dr. Martindale gave a brief presentation of what we were finding. Also, the end of the field season for the few students that stayed after the field school witnessed a series of public lectures by Dr. Martindale, David Archer, Duncan McLaren, and Sue Formosa back in Prince Rupert.

Every time I reflect back on my experience this summer the one memory that predominates is our trip to *Lax Kwalaams*. I cannot escape the feeling and my thoughts as the group was returning to the fishing boats after the discussion. As we continued closer to the dock I saw that a boat had come in from a brief but successful fishing trip. Only one man was on the boat and he had more fish than he would be able to process by himself. I im-

mediately noticed that two other men from another boat and an older woman on the dock had started to help him gut and clean the salmon. The speed and efficiency with which they worked was incredible and I caught myself staring with admiration at their skill. At this moment I thought back to the words of the Tsimshian elders. They were extremely receptive of the work we were doing and they expressed a strong desire to know what evidence remains of their heritage in the Dundas region and an even stronger desire to have it brought back to them so they see it and do with it what they please. These words turned in my mind while I watched the fishermen working together helping each other toward a mutual goal and I understood why the afternoon of sharing stories and discussion had such an impact on me. I realized that being an archaeologist in British Columbia is not just about the material unearthed but more importantly the relationships that can be developed in the present through these materials of the past. I thank everyone involved for the experience I gained, the guidance I received, and the friendships I started.

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