

ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

Rare Inland Sites Threatened on Salt Spring Island

A \$165-million new village development on Salt Spring Island is confirmed to have disturbed a series of rare, inland archaeological sites during construction last year. Highbridge Village is the largest urban development expansion in the history of the southern Gulf Islands. Significant planning work has been undertaken over the last 10 years to develop the outline for the new village, including rezoning arrangements under the Salt Spring Island Official Community Plan (1998). Unfortunately, heritage conservation was never meaningfully addressed in development plans.

In 2003, local Salt Spring Island residents contacted the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group to report the presence of a

large, high-elevation inland shell midden, DfRv-110, and several unrecorded inland sites adjacent to Highbridge Village. Few inland sites have been recorded in the region and the nature of these rare sites is poorly understood. Preliminary evidence from the investigation of several Gulf Island sites indicate that the intensive settlement activity atop of these mountain landscapes appears to date around 2,000 years ago during the Marpole Phase (2500-1500/1000 BP).

Despite notification, the Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. developer proceeded to risk preparing the village site prior to their receipt of a development permit or an AIA study. In June 2004, HTG and Salt Spring Island residents soon instigated

an RCMP investigation against Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. for non-permitted impacts to the DfRv-110 site and two other unrecorded sites in contravention of the Heritage Conservation Act (1996).

Under the direction of the Archaeology Branch, Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. has recently completed a comprehensive inventory and impact assessment for Highbridge Village. This inventory has discovered a complex of archaeological sites atop of Channel Ridge, including several inland shell middens, lithic scatters, a hearth feature, and two previously unknown petroglyph rock art boulders.

The final report for the AIA study prepared on behalf of Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. has recommended that the petroglyphs boulders be removed out of the way of Highbridge Village developments in concern for their conservation. The Hul'qumi'num Elders have vehemently opposed this recommendation in respect of preserving the sanctity of their heritage at this ancient cultural landscape. In turn, HTG has requested that Channel Ridge begin to incorporate heritage conservation into their long-term development plans.

The RCMP investigation continues. Highbridge Village still awaits the issuance of a development permit.

Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group



RCMP investigation of Highbridge Village development site with HTG, Archaeology Branch and Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. staff, June 17, 2004 (Photograph courtesy of HTG).