

Highlights of the 2012 Langara College Archaeology Field School

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Figure 1. Students surveying the intertidal zone at Stanley Park, Vancouver. All photos by author.

The 2012 Langara College Archaeology field school was a departure from those offered in the past. It consisted of two anthropology courses (9 credits total), was entirely local and did not involve camping.

An on-campus archaeological site was constructed in a sunken courtyard facility located between the Gymnasium and Administration buildings. Two 12-foot square by two-foot deep wooden containment units were constructed within this area.

Box A was filled with alternating strata of pre-contact artifacts and features superimposed by additional strata containing late 19th through 20th Century historical artifacts and features. Box B held four to five traumatized replica human skeletons, buried in shallow graves replicating a potential crime scene. Students alternated excavations between the two boxes over the semester.

An additional site consisting of three recent culturally modified trees (CMTs), in this case three rectangular bark-strip



Figure 2. Replica Yuan Bao (Sycee).



Figure 3. Dr. Rudy Reimer (SFU) recording post-holes in sandstone shelf, Brockton Point, North Beach, Vancouver. Dr. Reimer kindly assisted students on one of our field trips to Stanley Park both in survey techniques and an 'open air' talk about Indigenous archaeology.

scars on Western Red Cedars, provided on campus practice recording this type of site.

The on-campus 'sites' complemented off-campus reconnaissance that allowed students to complete the requirements of the British Columbia government Resource Information Standards Committee (RISC) Archaeology certificate program.

Off-campus field reconnaissance methods were a major component of the field school. These ranged from pedestrian examination of pre-contact as well as mid-19th to late-20th Century North Arm Fraser River sites to give students a taste of fieldwork.

More intensive field reconnaissance was conducted along specific foreshore portions of Stanley Park. Previously recorded culturally modified trees were examined and re-recorded using standard Level I and II protocols, as were sites ranging from isolated artifacts and lithic scatters to middens.

Students re-located DhRs-811, a recently recorded petroglyph, plus a

number of additional rock art boulders in two locations - Ceperley Park (Second Beach) and Brockton Point areas. A probable petroglyph resembling an octopus, although heavily encrusted with barnacles and mussels, was located near Brockton Point.

Historical documents point to a nearby semi-submerged boulder that was known for always being a place where octopi could be procured. We are still trying to determine a non-invasive method for determining if this image is based on an underlying glyph without disturbing the marine life.

Pre-contact and historic occupations of the Brockton Point area were a primary focus of the field school as this area contains evidence from the pre-contact through historical occupations of early Vancouver. The historic period provided a number of intriguing inter-tidal zone finds including 19th and 20th Century bottle glass, bottles, ceramics, internal battery carbon posts, and a profusion of spark plugs.

Of interest, four post-holes excavated into the sandstone shelf on the north-facing beach at Brockton Point match late 19th and very early 20th Century practices of setting fixed mooring stations or the construction of a building over the water in this location. Photographs from the time indicate both types of features were present on this peninsula.

Although the pre-1888 cemetery for the earlier Vancouver historical populations is known to be located between the Nine O'Clock Gun and the Brockton Lighthouse, vegetation growth was too dense to conduct ground truthing.

Most pre-1888 graves would have been marked by wooden fences, long since rotted away, it was hypothesized that some burials may still exhibit vases, bottles or other receptacles that once held offerings to the deceased. Students quickly deduced that a cemetery reconnaissance would likely be more productive during winter months when the ground surface is actually visible.

An important part of the 2012 field

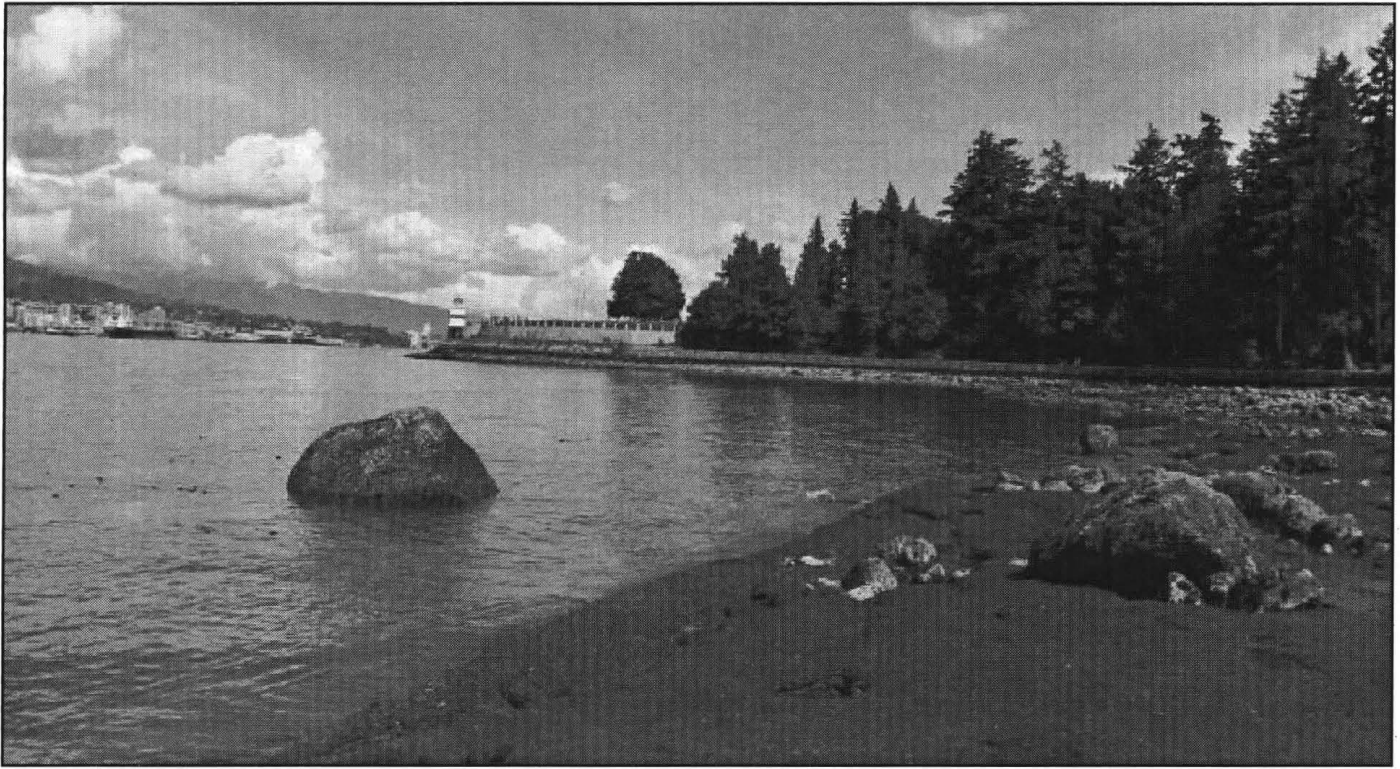


Figure 4. The Octopus Rock fishing station at Brockton Point mentioned in Major Matthews' archival records as always being a place where one could find octopi to fish.

school was the use of a computer lab for research assignments. These were heavily oriented towards historical document location and analysis (e.g., all seven volumes of Major Matthew's Early Vancouver manuscripts are online from the Vancouver Museum and Archives); locating online sources for artifact identification (e.g., "Gollywog" ceramics of the early 20th Century as well as artifacts observed in the field); using the VanMap utility (City of Vancouver) to produce contour maps of the Brockton Point peninsula, Mountain View Cemetery and other locales; researching the historic land-use of Brown's Landing in New Westminster; using GoogleEarth to conduct preliminary overviews of potential foreshore sites around Point Grey and Stanley Park, and other practical assignments.

Regular lab work consisted of standard archaeological analyses of pre-contact and historical artifacts, as well as many additional 'hands-on' practical assignments required of academic and consulting projects. Although hand-held GPS units were used extensively, students also had to master old-fashioned compass and pace as well as compass and hip chain

or tape survey methods. They also learned that festooning parts of Stanley Park with hip chain thread is not an acceptable practice – you retrieve this stuff!

Two types of artifacts stand out in my mind. Both were found to engage the students and encourage the development of research skills. The first was a photograph of a watch. The back plate exhibited information that allowed students to locate information about the watch (in less than 15 minutes online), but it was the context that was important. The context was that the watch in question likely belonged to a USAF aviator whose plane was shot down in 1968 over enemy territory.

Eight seasons of excavation by JPAC (Joint Prisoners of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command) on the crash site produced features and artifacts that strongly suggested the aviator had not survived the crash. A grieving father had to turn to archaeology to determine if his son is still an MiA (Missing in Action) or a KiA (Killed in Action) 'statistic'.

The watch is exactly the make and model favoured by USAF aviators flying missions over VietNam in 1968. This single 'assignment' made archaeology

not only personal, but provided a sense of its potential importance for the living as opposed to an exercise concerning the distant past.

Second, students located three curious metal ingots in the tidal wash zone below the Brockton Point lighthouse. Online research coupled with field trips to Chinatown and the New Westminster Museum provided some clues for identification. These metallic ingots are replica Yuan Bao or Sycee ingots. These were legal tender until 1911 in China and were usually made of silver or gold in multiples of ca 0.85 grams (one tael). What were these doing in the tidal zone, below the lighthouse (in company with wave worn coins) and so close to the pre-1888 cemetery? We are still working on this...

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