

## FORUM:

### *Media Representations of Archaeology in B.C.*

#### **A Response to *The Midden's* Forum on Media Representation and Cultural Resource Management in British Columbia**

In an effort to orient my response, I would like to begin by noting that I am a PhD Candidate in the University of British Columbia's Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program. My current research addresses the issue of modern coastal change and maritime heritage. I have 10 years of experience in Northwest Coast archaeology and cultural resource management (CRM), studying and working on both sides of the great Salish Sea divide that is the U.S./Canada border.

It was with great dismay that I read *The Midden's* latest Forum comments (2011, 43[2]:1-3) regarding the Willow's Beach and Qualicum Beach imbroglios. As the Archaeological Society of British Columbia's (ASBC) editorial staff noted there, the central issues at the time were who should pay for archaeological management work and how to address potential ethical violations. As the three Forum pieces highlight, the discussion quickly moved beyond such mundane issues of cost to more visceral problems with the state of archaeology and CRM today, and ensuing displays of racism in online newspaper comments. The three responses were provided by (a) the ASBC, (b) the British Columbia Association of Professional Archaeologists (BCAPA) and (c) a recent university graduate in Archaeology with a certificate in CRM.

So, what did they have to say? First, and sadly, the ASBC really had nothing to offer, other than "supporting" the Provincial Government for upholding the *Heritage Conservation Act (HCA)* and advocating for "the protection and management of cultural heritage" (2001:1). In a time of such great social and environmental change, this hardly seems adequate. For the BCAPA, it was "especially important to note that registered Professional members (RPCA) of the BCAPA are required to recommend avoidance through project re-design as the first option to mitigate against potential adverse effects to an archaeological site" (2011:2). Furthermore, they reminded us that "the *HCA* is in place to protect B.C.'s heritage, including archaeological sites, regardless of their location on Crown or private land." Like the ASBC, the BCAPA called for "greater education" and "open dialogue between stakeholders, ensuring that issues such as those recently experienced can be avoided." I was uplifted, however, by the third respondent, Nicole Slade, who astutely observed that it seems these controversies represent "a continuation of a power struggle that has been going on since Europeans first set foot in B.C." (2011:3). As with the others, more effort to "educate people" was called for.

I will start with this observation: "Education" is not the answer! Resource managers have been playing this card since the 1970s and it no longer flies. I was born in Seattle, Washington in 1971, the exact same time modern environmentalism and resource management emerged, and since then, and despite 40 years of "public education" efforts, I have seen the situation in the Pacific Northwest (and in the world) getting much worse,

not better. The latter view is shared by virtually all social and environmental scientists specializing in the study of contemporary resource management. While education may be useful to some very specific ends, it is irresponsible to market it as some sort of panacea. It is not education that is necessarily lacking, rather the interest of the public in a history that is not their own—especially when that history interferes with Progress. A useful concept here is *cultural cognition*, which refers to "the tendency of individuals to form risk perceptions that are congenial values" (Kahan et al. 2011:147).

This leads to the comments by the BCAPA. Promotion of organizational Professionalization and State governance must be counter-balanced by the observation that both represent concentrated power, increased bureaucracy and internal policing. The bigger and more "Professional" the BCAPA gets, the more it will become a rigid, bloated, insular, top-down, hierarchically-structured organization. As virtually all resource management literature shows, from the 1970s onwards, top-down control has been recognized as *the* core management problem—not the solution. In this way, the BCAPA is running counter to ongoing efforts to decentralize resource management and build "local," "community-based" or "bottom-up" resilience. There is also little evidence to suggest that Professionalization leads to "better management" of resources; there is however significant literature supporting exactly the opposite. BCAPA's recent move to Professionalization and formalized control (see <http://www.bcapa.ca>) may well represent an unhealthy and irreversible power shift in B.C. heritage politics.

My discontent with the issues as they are framed by the ASBC and BCAPA emerges from my observation that many archaeologists, for various reasons, seem unwilling to confront two concepts with which we should all be *intimately* aware. The first lesson we learned comes from our "Introduction to Archaeology" course: that is, management—be it of Ancient Mesopotamian irrigation systems or contemporary heritage—is all about social power and State control (King 2009; Smith 2004). Put another way, (State-controlled) CRM has virtually nothing to do with "preserving the past" and nearly everything to do with controlling access to "the resource." In particular, this includes transnational mega-corporations who work as proponents and advocates for the very developers whose interests necessitate the destruction of archaeological heritage (King 2009). In B.C., and now nearly everywhere else, this directly facilitates the neoliberal agenda of "freeing up" markets (i.e., communities) for "growth and development" (i.e., economic "Progress"). The second lesson is that our current land use practices that impact and shape how archaeological heritage is "managed" are not only unsustainable; they are also an injustice to living people and their land.

To proclaim that archaeologists are "saving" or "preserving" heritage, archaeological or otherwise, in the midst of the most culturally and environmentally destructive period in human

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history—from industrialization to globalization—is the height of absurdity. The “rise” of Modern British Columbia only dates to the 1950s; as such it is hard to ignore its ideological and political influence on present land use, and resulting management practices. The ongoing commodification, scientization and bureaucratization of heritage (King 2009; Smith 2006), which follows perfectly the path laid out by W.A.C. Bennett and his cohorts a mere sixty years ago, is indefensible. It must be stopped. It must be reversed. My conclusion is that in Modern CRM, more heritage destruction yields more dollars for (nearly) everyone working in the heritage industry. The only losers are those whose heritage is being destroyed in the name of Progress—in this case, the First Nations.

In the greatest of ironies, twenty-first century CRM is, at its core, about nothing less than global heritage destruction. By not addressing these ugly truths, archaeologists are merely maintaining (and, if we “educate,” propagating) the status quo. True heritage stewardship involves less concrete and steel, not more. Yet we continue to deceive.

Thank you for letting me speak, and I leave you with these

words from 40-year heritage expert Thomas King (2009:7):

We now have bureaucracies overseeing environmental impact assessment (EIA) and cultural resource management (CRM), and we have well-heeled private companies doing EIA and CRM work under contract. What we do not have is an orderly system for actually, honestly considering and trying to reduce impacts on our natural and cultural heritage. It’s all pretty much a sham.

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### References

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- King, Thomas. 2009. *Our Unprotected Heritage: Whitewashing the Destruction of Our Natural and Cultural Environment*. Left Coast Press: Walnut Creek, CA.
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### Archaeology in the News

Many of our readers will be familiar with the South Fraser Perimeter Road (SFPR) Alignment, a major highway construction project designed to “offer goods movers an efficient transportation corridor, while restoring municipal roads as community connectors by reducing truck and other traffic on municipal road networks in Delta and Surrey, improving quality of life for residents and local businesses” (Gateway website 2011; Figure 1). This project has been in the works for over 5 years and has seen a flurry of recent media attention since about last October, intensified now that archaeological investigations are now fully underway at the St. Mungo and Glenrose Cannery sites.

Newspaper headlines have included the following:

- “Highway would cut key first nations archeological sites: Construction of the South Fraser Perimeter Road will have a destructive impact on two of B.C.’s oldest and most important first nations archaeological sites and the project will likely require the disinterment of ancient human remains.” (Randy Shore, *Vancouver Sun*, 24 April 2008)
- “Human activity goes back some 8,000 years, digs showed” (Michael Blooth, *Surrey Now*, 30 April 2010)
- “Ancient history could be paved: 9,000-year-old First Nations site threatened” (Brian Lewis, *The Province*, 1 October 2010)
- “South Fraer Perimeter Road opponents turn to courts to stop development” (Elaine O’Connor, *The Province*, 25 May 2011)
- “Paving history—or protecting it?” (Jeff Nagel, *Surrey North Delta Leader*, 26 August 2011)
- “First nations take government to court to save ancient burial sites from road: Government has known since 2006 plan could damage millennia-old plots, plaintiffs say” (Tracy Sherlock, *Vancouver Sun*, 31 August 2011)

These articles focus on the impact of the SFPR project—but, rather than addressing environmental degradation, noise increase

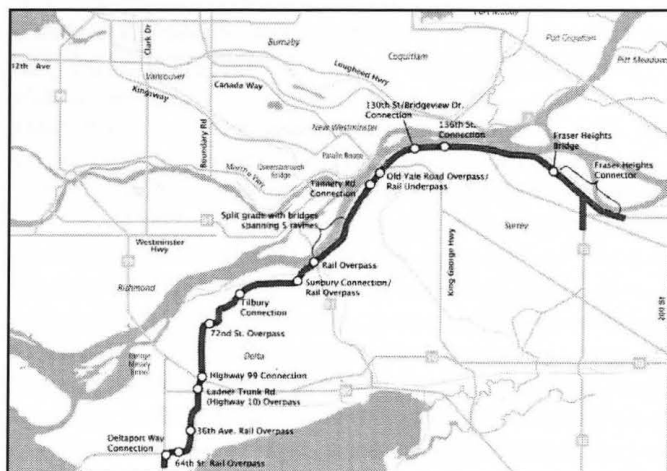


Figure 1. Plan for South Fraser Perimeter Road Alignment, from the Gateway Program website: <http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/gateway/>

and visual disturbance, or potential declining property values in the area, they almost exclusively emphasize the imminent destruction of the St. Mungo and Glenrose Cannery sites, commonly described as “sacred burial grounds.” Lewis’ (2010) article summarizes the situation neatly: “It’s certainly one of B.C.’s oldest heritage sites and it’s also well known internationally in archeological circles, but as important and priceless as it is, that’s still not going to stop the B.C. government from building the \$1.2-billion South Fraser Perimeter Road over it.”

A few key players have starring roles in these articles. Richelle Giberson, a local resident and part of the “Stop the Pavement” organization (stopthepave.org), has been vocal in her opposition to the SFPR expansion, both for environmental reasons

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