

BCAPA Comment on the CBC Report on Englishman River Site

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This letter concerns the CBC report, "Homeowner Charged \$35,000 by Archaeologists," by Kathy Tomlinson, April 20th, 2010

In the recent CBC story (April 20, 2010) about the landowner incurring "substantial costs" dealing with archaeological issues on their property in order to develop their land, numerous statements were made that places the archaeological consulting community in a rather bad light. If the story is to be believed, it is unfortunate that the landowner appears not to have been given sufficient information to understand the nature of the archaeological work or the costs involved in developing their property. It is even more unfortunate that the CBC story paints archaeology as the problem rather than the process involved. In order to substantiate the complaints against the archaeological company, few if any supporting details were provided. In response to this story we wish to add another point of view

Archaeological sites are often the only link we have to the past and are an invaluable part of cultural heritage. Once an archaeology site is destroyed by a development, the site's information is lost forever unless it has been scientifically investigated. The *Heritage Conservation Act* automatically protects archaeological sites dating before 1846 A.D. in British Columbia. Land owners and development proponents with issues that pertain to archaeology are usually provided instruction (when necessary) from regulatory agencies, including the Archaeology Branch. Often the Archaeology Branch suggests they search the firms listed on the BC Association of Professional Archaeologists website, where they should request competitive bids from archaeological consultants to undertake the necessary regulatory studies. The choice of the consultant rests with the development proponent. Archaeological consulting firms are located throughout the province with at least six consultants based on Vancouver

Island.

As with any contracted work, whether it is garden work, getting a new roof or choosing an archaeological consultant, the landowner/developer should have a contract with terms, conditions, costs, and other expenditures clearly stated. For example if a non-resident archaeologist is hired, it is standard practice to charge per diem, travel, and accommodation. The charge out rate quoted in the CBC news story is within the range for a qualified professional archaeologist. It should be noted that this is not the actual hourly rate which the archaeologist earns, rather it is the charge-out rate the archaeological consulting company invoices the proponent in order to cover overhead costs, insurance, equipment, etc. and is also known as the "multiplier."

A key to any successful archaeological project is communication. A lot of the background communication between the landowner and consultant has been left out of the CBC story so it is difficult to comment upon the apparent surprise with the final bill. It is evident from the story that the archaeologists had communicated with the client about work on the site at several occasions. Communication between the landowner/developer and the archaeological firm is extremely important especially when dealing with clients with little experience dealing with archaeological sites. Consulting archaeologists working under contract will stay within their cost estimate. If issues arise, costs can often significantly increase, which may require revisions to project development designs, scopes of work, and cost estimates (This appears to have been the case in this situation). For the successful outcome of a project, negotiations between a well-informed client and an archaeologist are provided in a revised contract.

One of the major criticisms of the story (and comments on the CBC webpage) was the issue with the landowner having to pay for archaeology. It should be pointed out that until the early 1980s

the BC government did have an archaeological program in which assessments were undertaken by government workers. The political will of the time decided that archaeology was important and that it would move to the user pay model. This approach led to the archaeological consulting community we have today. Regardless on one's point of view we would like to stress that if a landowner and/or developer has a significant problem with the work conducted by a professional member of the BC Association of Professional Archaeologists, then a grievance can (and should) be filed with the Association. One of the ways that consulting archaeologists can be professional is by maintaining a satisfied client base. We may all complain about the costs involved in whatever we do, but in the end it is the quality of the product that allows us to continue in our field. It should be, and usually is, possible to treat archaeological remains with respect at the same time as meeting all regulatory requirements.

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