

Archaeology News

JAPAN-NORTHWEST COAST WET SITE EXCHANGE

Dale Croes and Amy Homan,
with contributions from Jason Channel,
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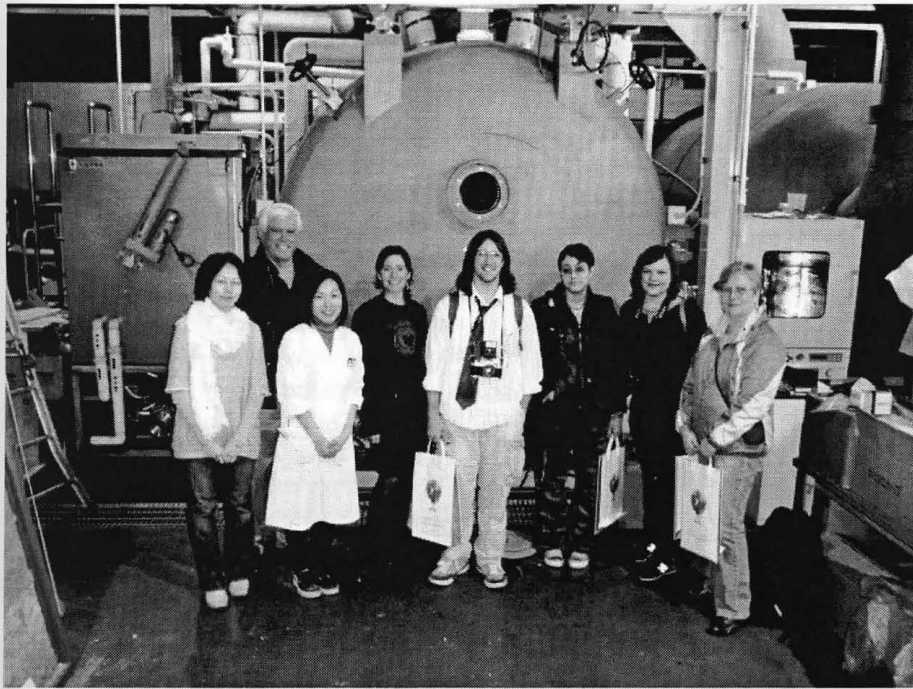


Figure 1. Group photo in front of walk-in freeze dryer used to finish conservation of waterlogged wood and fiber artifacts at the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties.

Wet site preservation of basketry and acorn pits on both sides of the Pacific Rim has recently expanded a mutual interest and exchange between Japanese and Northwest Coast Archaeologists. When Dr. Dale Croes' South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) and Dr. John Fagan's Archeological Investigation Northwest (AINW) crews found numerous acorn leaching pits, some with baskets in them, at the Sunken Village Wet Site (35MU4) on Sauvie Island, Portland Oregon in 2006 (reported earlier in *The Midden* 40[1]), Dr. Croes emailed pictures to wet site archaeologist and Wetland Archaeology Research Project

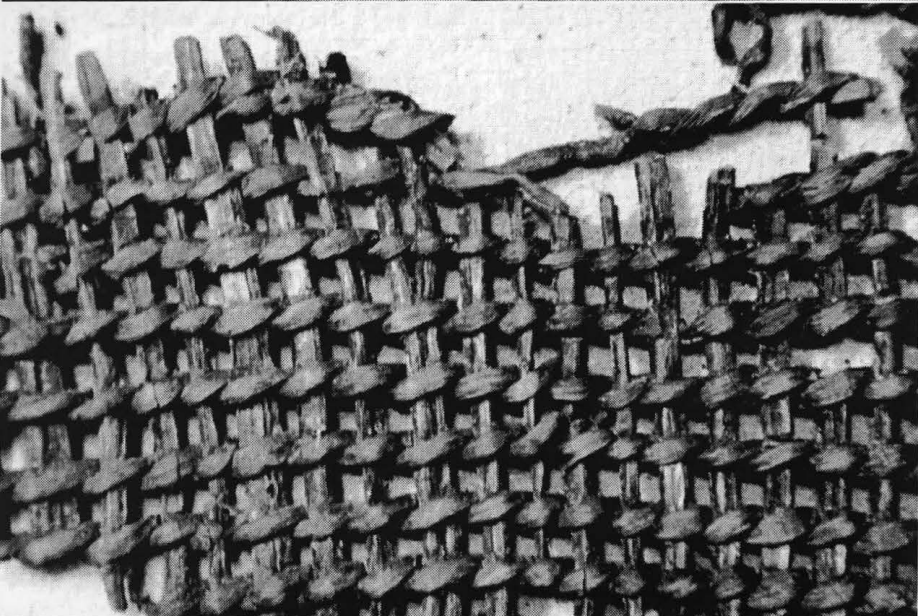
(WARP) Pacific Representative Dr. Akira Matsui, Director, Center for Archaeological Operations, Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, National Institutes for Cultural Heritage. Dr. Matsui had been helping direct the excavation of a 7000+ BP Higashimyo Jomon wet site on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu that revealed hundreds of acorn storage pits often containing preserved baskets. He offered to assist and sponsor further investigations of Sunken Village with SPSCC and AINW through an international grant, bringing 4 colleagues to help with a detailed mapping of over a hundred acorn leaching pits in the fall of 2007.

The Sunken Village research synthesis is now reported in the *Journal of Wetland Archaeology* (JWA) as special volume 9 (Croes, Fagan and Zehendner 2009).

To expand exchanges and visits to wet site collections and sites on both sides of the Pacific, mutual visits occurred in the Spring of 2009 by Japanese archaeologists to Northwest Coast museums and collections in Washington and Canada, followed with visits by American and Canadian researchers to museums, collections and wet sites in Japan.

In late February and early March 2009 Dr. Akira Matsui and two researchers, Dr. Naoto Yamamoto, Professor, Department of Archaeology, Graduate School of Letters, Nagoya University and Dr. Tomonori Kanno, Tohoku University Archaeologist joined Dr. Croes to visit Northwest museums and research sites with an emphasis on wet site basketry and Northwest Coast harpoons. They were hosted by (1) the University of Washington Burke Museum (thanks to Megan Noble; and met with Adam Rosabaugh concerning his MA Thesis research on Northwest Coast harpoons at Western Washington University, (2) the Royal British Columbia Museum (thanks to Grant Keddie; Figure 7), (3) University of Victoria Zooarchaeology Laboratory (thanks to Rebecca Wigen), (4) Simon Fraser University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (thanks to Barbara Winter), and (5) the Katzie First Nation archaeology laboratory in Pitt Meadows to see their wet site artifacts and macroflora, especially ancient wapato, recently recovered from archaeological site DhRp 52 (thanks to Amy Homan and Katzie First Nation).

In late March and early April 2009 the SPSCC Anthropology Club students and researchers, after two years of fund raising, joined by researcher Amy Homan from S.F.U. and Katzie Development Corporation, traveled on exchange to Japan.



Dale Croes and student researchers flew together to Osaka. Amy flew on her own to Tokyo, Narita airport straight from the Vancouver International Airport. Traveling alone, her journey was a bit more challenging and scary, especially when she had to find her way through the Shinjigawa Station in Tokyo, Japan's largest rail station, without understanding a word of Japanese. (The four students traveling with Dale Croes [who also knew no Japanese] taken all had Japanese language classes). Amy only got on the wrong train once, but luckily it was heading to Nara!

From March 26-28, 2009, Kathleen Hawes, Olivia Ness, Jason Channel, Eva Marie Fuschillo, Amy Homan and Dale Croes were hosted by Dr. Akira Matsui at the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, where they toured their well-equipped wet site laboratories, that included huge stainless steel heated polyethylene glycol tanks and a freeze dryer that you could literally walk into (Figure 1). This large research laboratory also specialized in state-of-the-art dendrochronology research, chemical element analysis, radiography—x-ray digital film, 3-D imagery analysis, and other archaeological analyses. Dr. Takayuki Okochi gave us an eye-opening demonstration of his non-intrusive, non-destructive laser beam equipment for recording and digitally imaging tree rings inside an object—a technique he helped design. We also visited many museums and temples in the area.

On March 29th we traveled over the Japanese Alps to the Sea of Japan, Kanazawa City by bullet train, where we were hosted by Dr. Naoto Yamamoto, Professor, Department of Archaeology, Graduate School of Letters, Nagoya University. Our first visit was the Kanazawa Archaeology Center where we recorded 3-4,000 BP Jomon basketry and an

Figure 2. Approximately 3,000 year old Jomon cherry bark child's shoe at the Kanazawa Archaeology Center.

Figure 3. Common 3-4,000 BP Jomon open twined basketry from the Sakuramachi Site.

Figure 4. 3-4,000 BP Jomon red lacquerware comb from the Sakuramachi Site

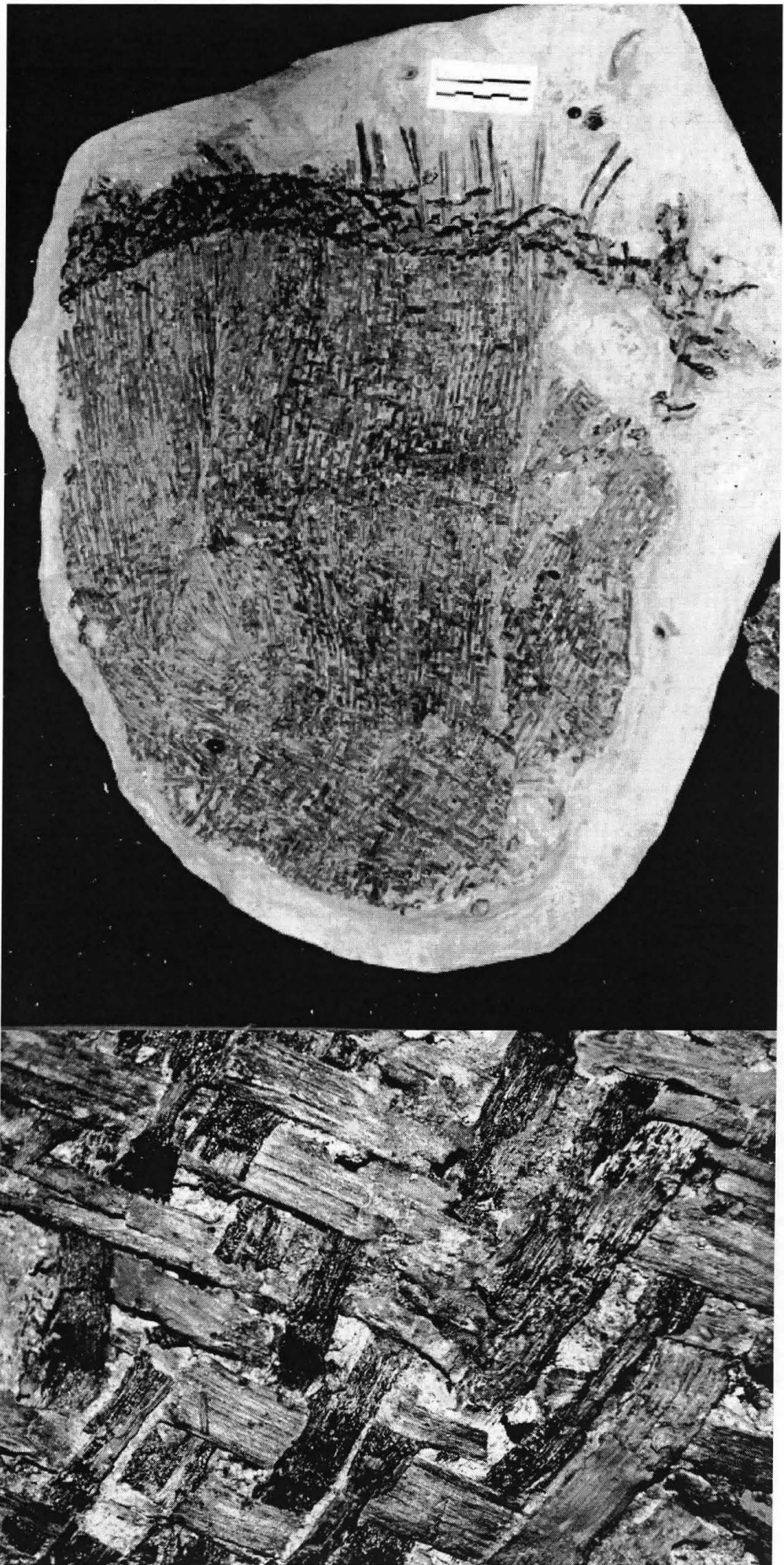
amazing child's cherry bark shoe (Figure 2). We visited Jomon Wood Circle reconstructions, a wooden version of a Stone Henge-like calendar structure, and saw the actual wooden post remains at the Shinpohommachi Archaeological Storage Facility. We then rode a bus to the White Mountain Folklore Museum, where we saw numerous diamond plaited mats, a bag, and frame looms for making diamond-plaited mats. This was of interest to us since a distinct diamond-plaited soft-bag was found in 2007 at the Sunken Village site. This kind of diamond plaited soft weave on two-strand string warps has been recorded for up to 9000 years in caves in the Great Basin through to examples in Klamath, Puget Sound Salish and Bella Coola museum collections, and for 3-4 millennia in Japanese wet sites (see Croes, Fagan and Zehendner 2009 for discussions of this potential cultural sharing of basketry techniques across the Pacific).

The next day we drove by bus outside of Kanazawa to the impressive Sakuramachi Site Jomon Park excavated material exhibition and storage facility. This 3-4,000 BP Jomon wet site has an impressive array of basketry, mostly open twined and twill plaited work, as well as red lacquerware combs and wooden bowls. This project resulted from rescue archaeology during road construction (Figures 3-4).

On April 1st we went to the rail depot for a long train ride through Osaka to Saga on Kyushu Island, southern Japan. We passed through Hiroshima City; viewing this beautiful city that had experienced the first atomic bomb during WWII, which was sobering. We arrived in Saga City in southern Japan and took cabs to visit the location of the Higashimyo Jomon wet site rescue excavation. The site is greater than 7,000 years BP and the area is now filled by a large reservoir. Over 700 baskets and basketry fragments as well as many wooden artifacts were found in acorn stor-

Figure 5. 7,000 BP acorn storage basket from the Higashimyo Jomon wet site. Note acorns around basket and also the decorative color contrast around the rim. Scale in cm.

Figure 6. Examples of decorative basket weave of twill (left) and combination twined and checker plaiting from the 7,000 year BP Higashimyo Jomon wet site.



age pits in this large shell midden site.

The next morning we visited the Higashimyo research and processing laboratory located in a converted middle school facility. We were amazed by the size and number of recovered large acorn baskets that had been used to pack acorns in numerous acorn storage pits; evidently the acorns were placed in basket loads into the ancient pits. When the acorns were recovered in ancient times, many of the baskets were too soggy to reuse and left in the pits. The 7,000 BP baskets were in very fragile condition and removed on a pedestal of soil after being injected with and encased in hardened foam, to be opened and cleaned in the laboratory, then sent to conservation where they were hardened on the matrix to stabilize them (Figures 5-6). Many associated wooden artifacts included combs and bowls, as well as dot-incised bone artifacts and Jomon pottery. Certainly it is one of the most spectacular Jomon wet sites in Japan and the world, and we were fortunate to see and photographically record this huge perishable artifact collection.

On April 3rd, we returned to the Nara Research Center. We prepared to present a half-day mini-conference the next day on our Sunken Village and Katzie First Nation's wapato site research. The presentations were held in the Nara Research Center Conference Room for their research staff and Kyoto University students. We presented each of our half-hour PowerPoint talks which were then summarized by a Nara researcher into Japanese following each talk. All papers were enthusiastically discussed and well received, providing an excellent format for exchange. At 4:30 pm we all went to the lobby where the students had prepared a wonderful dinner party (it was pouring rain out so we decided to stay at the Center). We celebrated a great visit and exchange as a perfect conclusion for our visit. Dr. Matsui told us that we were the first foreigners invited to visit these Japanese wet site sites and collections, and we hope these kinds of wet site exchanges and team efforts can continue across the Pacific.

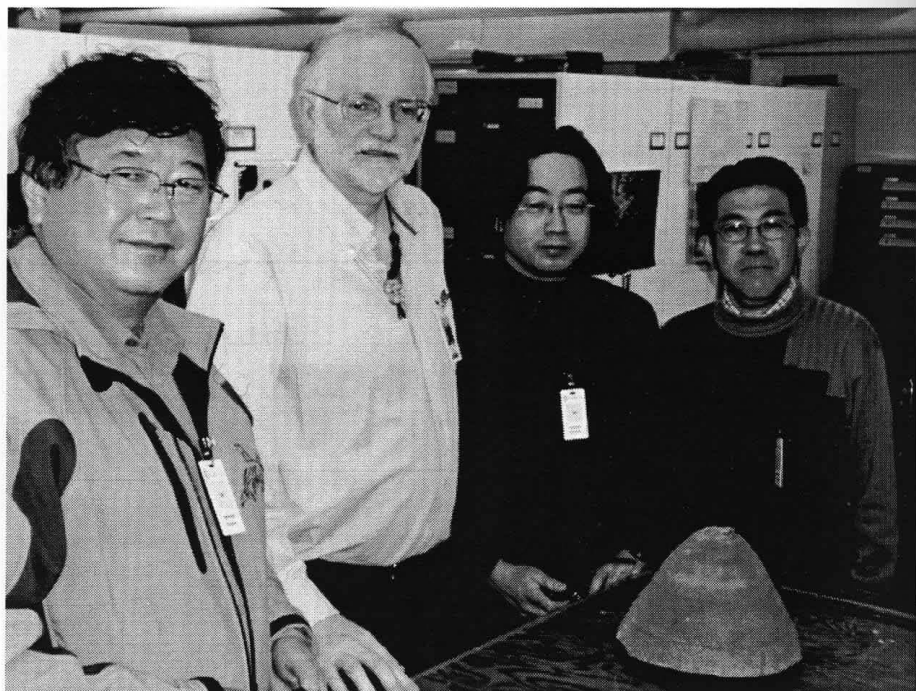


Figure 7. Japanese wet site archaeologists visiting Royal British Columbia Museum through the kind generosity of Grant Keddie, Curator of Archaeology. From left to right, Dr. Akira Matsui, Grant Keddie, Dr. Tomonori Kanno and Dr. Naoto Yamamoto. We are observing the ancient Katete River basketry hat found in Tlingit territory.

Reference

- Croes, Dale R., John L. Fagan and Maureen Newman Zehendner
2009 Sunken Village, Sauvie Island, Oregon, USA, A Report on the 2006-2007 Investigations of National Historic Landmark Site 35MU4. *Journal of Wetland Archaeology* Special Edition 9. (web site for ordering: <http://www.oxbowbooks.com/bookinfo.cfm/ID/86051/Location/DBBC>)

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