

Tla'amin-SFU Archaeology Heritage Program 2009

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In June and July 2009, Simon Fraser University (SFU) and Tla'amin First Nation conducted the second year of a jointly planned and managed archaeological field school and heritage stewardship program. The program is co-directed by Michelle Washington of the Sliammon Treaty Society, Dr. Dana Lepofsky of SFU's Archaeology Department, and Dr. John Welch of SFU's Archaeology Department and School of Resources and Environmental Management. The goal of this year's research was to further explore and understand Tla'amin history through continued archaeological investigation, knowledge sharing, and partnerships with the Tla'amin and regional community. The field school was located on the Sunshine Coast and in Desolation Sound, B.C., encompassing important sites and landscapes in the northern, central, and southern reaches of Tla'amin traditional territory. Projects featured in 2009 included survey and mapping in Desolation Sound Marine Park, excavations at *Kleh Kwa Num* (Scuttle Bay), and aerial and ground survey of intertidal management systems. By investigating sites throughout the territory we have increased our understanding of the cultural activities and interactions of

Tla'amin ancestors. The Tla'amin possess considerable knowledge of their history, but the region is poorly understood archaeologically. The field school's collaborative approach allows for the combination of oral traditions and archaeology that are helping to illuminate and share Tla'amin history. The overarching goals of the SFU-Tla'amin program are: (1) To establish and sustain meaningful relationships between Tla'amin, SFU, and other partners; (2) To understand, enhance, and share knowledge about Tla'amin culture and history; (3) To integrate an archaeological perspective with Tla'amin traditional knowledge as a means of understanding the past relationships between Tla'amin people and their relationship to the landscape.

Survey and Mapping in Tla'amin Territory

The field school investigated sites near the northern and southern extents

of Tla'amin territory. In the north we mapped and surveyed sites and landscapes in Desolation Sound Marine Park including several bays and promontories at the northern margins of the park. One of these was previously identified and initially mapped by Bill Angelbeck (2009) as the "Flea Village" of Vancouver's 1792 voyage, where houses were perched defensively on the top of these artificially flattened promontories. Our mapping showed that similar sites are located on the adjacent promontories and that each site is associated with an extensive fish trap. Radiocarbon dates from a longhouse and the fish traps suggest that these defensive sites date to the last 600 years or so. In addition, the survey identified two new sites and redefined the boundaries of four sites, increasing the total area of archaeological sites in the park.

Outside of Desolation Sound, we conducted surveys on the Sliammon Reserve and various locations north and

Figure 1 (above). Tla'amin-SFU team. Front: Tanner Timothy; First row: (left to right) Debbie Dan, John Welch, Georgia Combes, Vanessa Medland, Nyra Chalmer, Julia Jackley, Andrea Unrau, Guillermo Garcia, Dana Lepofsky, Michelle Washington; Middle row (left to right): Craig Barnes, Anna Stewart, Allison Hill, Diana Wasylik, Rachel White; Back row (left to right): Mike Szepvolgyi, Aaron Racicot, Fred Foster, Craig Rust, Simon Lloyd-Price, Megan Caldwell, Lisa Wilson.

south of Powell River. South of town, we excavated a site located on an ancient sea terrace ten metres above the modern shoreline. This site has yielded early to late Holocene projectile points indicating that the landscape has been occupied for thousands of years. Private collections from nearby areas have also yielded early Holocene points. We will continue to work with the landowners to assure conservation of these important heritage sites.

Intertidal Resource Management Survey

The SFU-Tla'amin team continued research on intertidal resource management systems across the territory. During extreme low tides in June and July, the team took two helicopter flights to record intertidal modifications through photographs and GPS locations. Over 2,500 images resulted from these flights and no fewer than 120 new intertidal features were identified in at least 60 previously undocumented locations. The astonishingly diverse range of features includes at least ten distinct types of stone fish traps, clam gardens, and other intertidal modifications. In addition to the aerial survey, the team conducted intertidal surveys during the May, June, and July low tides. During these surveys, additional unrecorded intertidal features were documented, including the first recorded wooden stake fish traps in the area. Dates from five of the wooden fish traps range between 300-600 Cal B.P. While still in its initial stages, this research has the potential to help us understand ancient and prospective intertidal management techniques on the northern Northwest Coast, to know more of the regional relationships between intertidal and residential components of settlement systems, and to put to rest notions that ancient people could not or did not understand how to invest in sustainable resource management.

Kleh Kwa Num Excavations

Throughout June and July the field school excavated in the heart of Tla'amin territory at *Kleh Kwa Num*. In 2008, we learned that, during the 19th and 20th centuries, large amounts of herring were processed in smokehouses and drying racks on a rocky promontory on the northern

side of the bay (site DISd-6). A survey in 1976 also identified an earthwork (DISd-7) on the southern side of the bay (Acheson and Riley 1976). In 2009, we aimed to gain a better understanding of how Tla'amin forebears used the landscape through time. We did this by expanding our excavations and by locating new sites around the bay. Our team implemented numerous methods of investigation including survey, mapping, shovel tests, test pits, percussion coring, and excavations.

Through the excavations we discovered that *Kleh Kwa Num* was once a village settlement composed of at least six long-houses. The houses were identified by the presence of compacted and leveled floors, hearth features, postholes, charred posts, stone post supports, and charred planks. The houses can be characterized by an initial leveling of the ground followed by multiple re-building events. Each of the excavation units revealed that the ancient Tla'amin imported gravel, rocks, and

shell midden to create level surfaces upon which to construct their houses. Our initial sets of radiocarbon dates indicate that the first houses were built 2100-2090 Cal BP. Two additional houses, one with an early date of 730-920 Cal B.P and the other with a late date of 220-260 Cal B.P, may indicate that the Tla'amin expanded toward the shoreline in an east and west direction over time. The late date in combination with continual cultural deposits indicates that the houses were occupied steadily until the 18th century. A 10- to 20-cm layer of green urchin and mussel shell caps the last occupation of the houses, apparently marking a significant shift in resource and land use. We do not yet know the reason for this change, but we hypothesize that it is related to the introduction of smallpox and the resulting decline in the Tla'amin population.

Kleh Kwa Num was a place where fishing, hunting and resource processing activities were conducted. Ancient

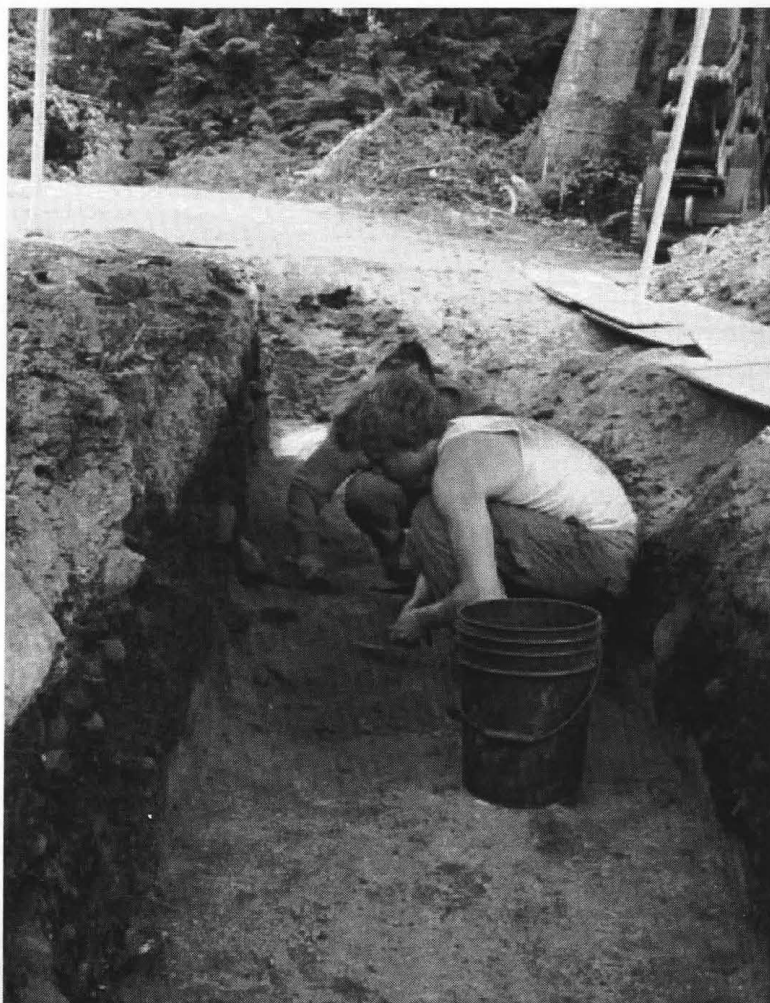


Figure 2. Students excavating a longhouse.



Figure 3. Dr. Dana Lepofsky discussing artifacts at a community event.

artifacts were encountered in all of the excavation units and date to the last 1,000 years. The artifacts include bone harpoon valves and points, projectile points, slate knives, an obsidian flake, and a California mussel shell celt. Significantly, the obsidian and mussel shell celt indicate that the Tla'amin at *Kleh Kwa Num* had long distance trade connections to the north and west. The obsidian is from a source at the base of a glacier in Kincome Inlet. The mussel shell celt is from the west coast of Vancouver Island. Finally, we also identified a petroglyph at the head of the bay. The image is located on a granite boulder and consists of pecked circles that align to depict two mirror image triangles. It is possible that the two triangles represent the two settlements that were located on either side of the bay (sites D1Sd-6 and -7).

Community Outreach

In addition to survey and excavation, we actively promoted Tla'amin heritage stewardship through numerous community events and site tours, visiting local schools, and providing interviews with interested media outlets. In consultation

with the Tla'amin, the field school students designed and created a website to provide accessible and comprehensive information about Tla'amin culture and history to the public. The website features summaries, photographs, videos, links to media pieces, and other multimedia to provide visitors with diverse ways of learning about the past. The outreach projects were made possible by the continual support of and partnerships with Tla'amin individuals and governmental bodies including the Cultural Committee and Chief and Council and Georgia Combes. Our team is excited to continue work with the Tla'amin in 2010.

To learn more about the project please visit <http://www.sliammonfirstnation.com/archaeology/index.html>.

References Cited

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