Report from the Northern Gulf: the South Texada Island Provincial Park Archaeological Study

Joanne Hammond

Three-metre seas, five-metre tides, gale-force winds—if the weather around Texada Island these days is anything like it was in the past, it's no wonder people have been taking refuge here for two-thousand years. Scattered along the lonely southwest side of this largest Gulf Island, tucked into the coves that break up the steep, rocky coast, three newly recorded archaeological sites lie buried beneath the beaches and boulders that once provided shelter for the area's first seafarers. In the summer of 2008, our small team of archaeologists and First Nations members endured first-hand the wind and the waves of the Northern Gulf of Georgia, waiting patiently for the breaks in the weather that would allow us on—and off—the island. Our wind-beaten stay here allowed us a glimpse into the ancient lives of the fishers and hunters, clam-diggers and deer-trappers who frequented this part of Texada Island—people who, like us, built fires and cooked food and lay beneath the stars here, beside the sea, in a distant era.

Today, the Tla'amin people, along with their Sechelt neighbours to the south, and the Vancouver Island Snaw-naw-as Nation to the west, claim this part of Texada Island as part of their traditional territory. Though rarely mentioned in oral histories, the beaches of South Texada clearly formed a part of the seasonal round for local aboriginal families. Now a part of the South Texada Island Provincial Park, this strip of dry, low elevation coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem has been left relatively undisturbed by modern development and largely ignored by archaeologists. Until the Spring of 2007, the existence of the three archaeological sites in question was unknown to all but a few souls. One of these, the late Norman Gallagher of the Tla'amin First Nation, thought their protection important enough to bring the sites to the attention of Georgia Combes, then a ranger with BC Parks. An elder and cultural advisor to the Tla'amin Treaty Society, Gallagher was aware of the signs of precontact occupation here—exposures of shell midden, lithic scatters, and ashy hearth residue—and was worried about the impacts these sites were suffering as a result of the unchecked recreational use of the area. His concern was shared by Combes, who then set into motion—slow, grinding motion, but motion nonetheless—Parks' process for funding the preliminary archaeological investigation of these sites. In the summer 2008, our team set about fulfilling Gallagher's wishes.

Project Goals: Site Protection and Archaeological Stewardship

Our research had a dual focus that integrated what are traditionally considered the two solitudes of "academic" archaeological research and "management"-oriented studies. The project considered both academic and management problems

Figure 1 (above): Crew enjoying a view across Sabine Channel from base camp on South Texada Island (photo by Chris Burk).

of significance to the Tla'amin First Nation, other area First Nations, and BC Parks. In cooperation with the Tla'amin Treaty Society, Pacific Heritage Research designed a short project to deal with the immediate problem of the loss of cultural and archaeological information from the three sites, DjSb-22, -23, and -24. We relied on the input of the Tla'amin First Nation to make decisions about priorities, scope, and value of the work; and to provide guidance throughout the project. The overarching goal of the project was to support the Tla'amin First Nation and BC Parks' engagement in the joint stewardship of the heritage places and objects under their shared jurisdiction. We hoped to facilitate Tla'amin First Nation's involvement in meaningful dialogue, planning, and decision-making with respect to heritage management in BC Parks.

The philosophy behind our work stems from our belief that as our province and our country strive to reconcile issues of land and governance with First Peoples, the legal and practical aspects of managing Indigenous heritage must also be renegotiated. Because heritage places have the potential to contribute to and strengthen contemporary culture, identity, and territorial stewardship, their contemporary value goes far beyond our traditional conception of sites as reservoirs of data on human history. We are convinced that engaging Aboriginal peoples in the management of heritage—archaeological and otherwise—is integral to the continued health of the discipline of archaeology and of our society as a whole, and our project prioritized the promotion of just, sustainable heritage stewardship. The management of archaeological and other important heritage sites can be a unique opportunity to ensure a more equitable distribution of the benefits associated with controlling heritage places and objects. The development of responsible, informed, and shared management strategies to between First Nations governments and provincial and federal bodies can be a very real way to begin to rebalance the power that has for so long been denied Aboriginal peoples.

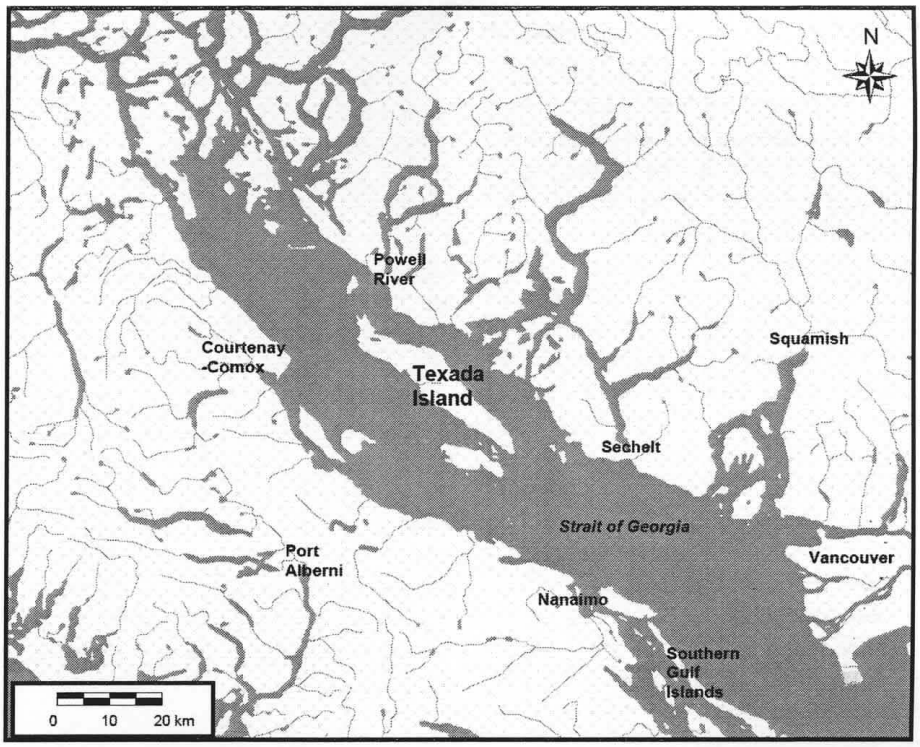

Figure 2. General location of sites DjSb-22, -23, and -24 on Texada Island, in the Northern Gulf of Georgia region.

Archaeological Background

Archaeological research in the Gulf of Georgia region has a relatively long history, (beginning with the works of Charles Hill-Tout and Harlan Smith in the 1890s [Ham 1982; Mitchell 1971]), making it, archaeologically speaking, the best-known region along the entire Northwest Coast (Matson and Coupland 1995; Mitchell 1990; Moss and Erlandson 1995). However, these data are biased heavily in favour of the southerly portion of the Gulf, and the northern Gulf Islands and northern mainland portions of the Gulf are rarely considered. Making up the northern part of the Gulf of Georgia area's precontact "sphere of interaction" (Burley 1980), Texada Island's ancient past is still all but unknown. The archaeology of the island is not addressed in any of the major treatments of Gulf of Georgia or Northwest Coast archaeology (i.e., Ames and Maschner 1999; Fladmark 1982; Burley 1980; Matson and Coupland 1995; Mitchell 1971, 1990), and its rugged and relatively remote nature continue to contribute to this data gap.

Very little contemporary archaeological fieldwork has been conducted on Texada Island, and none had been undertaken in the area that is now South Texada Island Provincial Park. Prior to our visit, only 13 precontact Aboriginal archaeological sites had been recorded on the entire 50-km long, 300-square kilometre island. The sites we visited bring this number to just 16, an astonishingly small number compared with the Gulf of Georgia as a whole, which is estimated to have about 4,600 precontact archaeological sites.

Fieldwork: Methods and Results

Our work at sites DjSb-22, DjSb-23, and DjSb-24 consisted of standard treatments of surface inspection, soil probing, exploratory shovel testing, and the excavation of evaluative units. The challenges we faced in accessing these sites (mainly transport issues due to weather and topography, but also funding limitations) severely restricted the amount of time devoted to research at each locale. Our efforts were restricted to the most central parts of each of the three sites, and those most susceptible to foreseeable natural and anthropogenic impacts. We are acutely aware that the boundaries of the sites have not been adequately established (that is, the site areas as currently defined reflect the limits of our capacity to investigate rather than the actual distribution of archaeological materials), and the following summaries of our findings at sites DjSb-22, -23 and -24 are tentative ones based on this preliminary fieldwork.

Site DjSb-22

Site DjSb-22 is a surface and subsurface shell midden site characterized by somewhat intermittent buried deposits, visible on the surface and ranging to a maximum depth of 100 cm below surface (bs). The site is 107-m long by 35 m wide and is located on a southeast facing promontory above a rocky ocean beach facing the Sabine Channel, surrounded by rocky beaches circumscribed by bedrock outcrops. At the request of the Tla'amin Treaty Society, this site was recorded with the Provincial Archaeology Inventory as the Norman Gallagher Site, to honour the late elder and cultural advisor whose knowledge of and concern for these heritage places brought this study to life.

In total, 33 artifacts were recovered from the site, 21 of which are considered formal tools or parts thereof. As is common in such sites, the remainder of materials encountered are the by-products of manufacturing techniques such as chipping, grinding and sawing. Six projectile point fragments made of ground bone or slate were collected, indicating that hunting of either land or sea mammals was a focus. At least one of the bone points is thought to be a harpoon point. This, along with a fragment of a bone harpoon valve, suggests the site may have been used as a base for sea mammal hunting. Fishing technology is evidenced at the site by a bone bipoint and a fragment of another point, possibly a bipoint, also made of bone. Such objects formed part of a fisherman's toolkit and were used as parts of composite fish hooks, herring rakes, or simple jigging devices.

At least five pieces of ground slate knife, a common tool with myriad everyday uses, were found. One piece of slate, sawn around the edges but not as finely ground as the finished tools, is interpreted as a preform, possibly for a harpoon, that had yet to be finished into a completed projectile point. This, along with chipped and ground slate debitage and a sandstone abrader fragment, indicate that lithic manufacturing took place at this site. Finally, an intriguing slate tool, possibly a backed knife, was found. This tool was made by chipping, not grinding the slate, making it unusual for this site type.

Site DjSb-23

Site DjSb-23 is a small (70 m by 55 m) surface and subsurface shell midden site characterized by somewhat intermittent buried deposits, ranging from surface to a maximum depth of 78 cm below surface (bs). The site is located at the foot of a steep hillside, on a small triangular-shaped spit extending southwest into Sabine Channel, with small bays to the south and west.

Only two artifacts were recovered from the site during this project, neither of which are considered formal tools or parts thereof. Both are slate fragments that have been chipped and sawed, with one exhibiting use-wear on one edge. Neither artifact is temporally diagnostic, though they may be indicative of the kinds of lithic manufacturing activities that may have taken place at this site. The chipped, not ground, manufacturing technique evidenced here make them a somewhat unusual design for this area and raw material.

Site DjSb-24

Site DjSb-24 is a 90 m-long by 65 m-wide site complex characterized by surface and subsurface shell midden deposits (surface to at least 75 cm bs) associated with four distinct rockshelters created by the overhangs of three large boulders. The site is located at the head of small, gravelly ocean beach facing Sabine Channel, and extends up a steep hill along an irregular, steep-sided dry gully.

Three individual boulders at the site house four separate rockshelter features, which measure from a minimum of 2 m to a maximum of 12 m long. Shell midden deposits are visible on the surface in the rockshelters, in the form of fragmented shell, mammal bone, fire-cracked rock, lithic artifacts, and ash.

In total, seven artifacts were collected from the site during this project, five of which are considered formal tools or parts thereof. The remainder of materials encountered are the by-products of manufacturing techniques such as chipping, grinding and sawing. None of the artifacts identified are temporally diagnostic, though for such a small collection a wide breadth of activities can be inferred from the material.

One projectile point fragment made of ground slate was collected, indicating that hunting of either land or sea mammals took place here. One piece of slate, sawn around the edges but not as finely ground as a finished tool, is interpreted as a preform, possibly for a harpoon, that had yet to be finished into a completed projectile point. This, along with the other debitage fragments, indicates that lithic manufacturing took place at this site. One fragment of a mussel shell blade was recovered which could either be a partial shell adze or knife blade (too small a fragment to know), indicating the use of local raw materials.

One plainly impressive artifact collected from this site is a large, finely made ground stone weight or anchor perforated by a biconical drilling technique (Figure 3). Perhaps the most intriguing thing about this artifact is the location from which it was recovered: on a steeply sloped hillside, elevated about 60 m above the beach. While such artifacts are frequently interpreted as net weights related to offshore fishing, or anchors for canoes, the upland location of this item suggests a unique history. While the artifact could be a fishing-related weight that had been stored upslope away from the beach, this location may also suggest alternative uses. Such weights may have formed part of composite mechanical toolkits used in trapping or in elevated storing arrangements, for guy-lining shelters, or other unexpected uses. The weight may have been part of a deer snare, reportedly used by the Tla'amin (Kennedy and Bouchard 1983: 37), and this location—a narrow gully running toward open water—would have been ideal for such a trapping method. Without further investigation into the immediate area surrounding the findspot, the artifact's function is open to interpretation.

Synthesis: Content, function, and chronology of sites DjSb-22, -23 and -24

Many of the artifacts recovered from these sites, though lacking characters that may illuminate their chronologies, are in combination helpful in piecing together the kinds of activities that may have taken place there.

Artifacts and matrices at the sites support the intuitive assumption that pre-contact activities were oriented around a seasonal pursuit of maritime subsistence

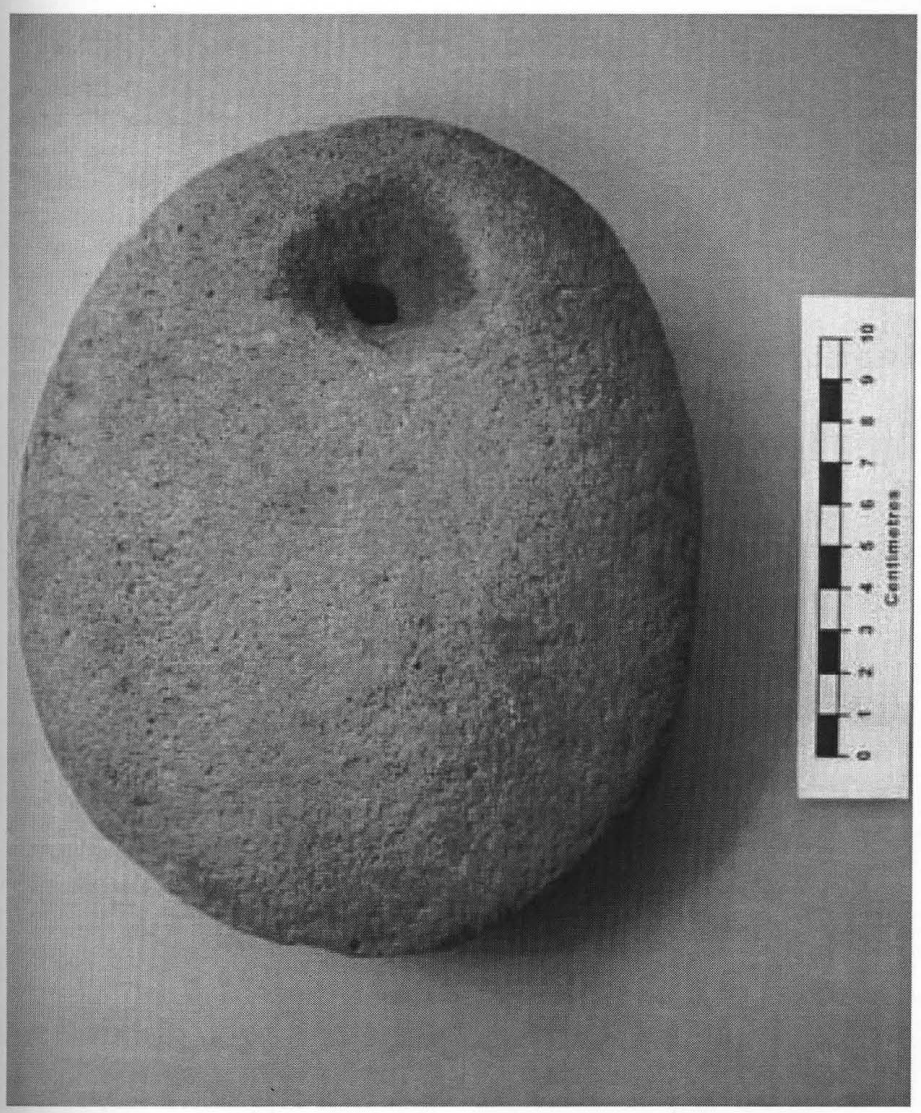

Figure 3. Biconically-perforated stone weight recovered from site DjSb-24 (photo by Joanne Hammond).

supplemented by the procurement of land mammals for raw materials and food. Overall, our impression of the sites and their data is one of long term—but possibly discontinuous—seasonal occupation of the area. Not only were the tools from these sites used to feed, dress, and house their occupants, but it is apparent such implements were manufactured on site. Lithic materials used in tool manufacture and subsistence do not appear to be exotic, and are believed to be locally procured. A steady collection of intertidal shellfish and locally available marine fishes and mammals formed the basis of a diet that was supplemented by hunting locally abundant deer, small mammal, and waterfowl. These mammals contributed not only a varied diet, but their bones, skin, and sinews also provided raw material used to make household and hunting implements.

No evidence of residential remains were encountered at sites DjSb-22 or -23, though this does not necessarily preclude residential functions. Among the several possible explanations for this absence are: the use of temporary seasonal shelter (e.g., lean-to), super-surface housing (i.e., stilts), or of short-term occupation in the distant past (each would leave little evidence). Finally, natural and/or anthropogenic disturbance to the site areas may account for a degree of disturbance sufficient to mask or erase evidence of residential occupations.

At site DjSb-24, the use of the boulder overhangs may represent at least a part-time residential function, which was likely used as a base for fishing and land and sea mammal hunting. The location of the perforated weight artifact (discussed above) may suggest its use in a type of activity other than fishing, though at this time this interpretation is little more than speculation. Overall, the frequency here of utilized rockshelter features—which are, generally speaking, a rare site type—is intriguing. The use of these features in proximity to the notoriously dangerous waters surrounding South Texada Island may suggest another interpretation: emergency shelter. The high winds and rough seas that characterize this area for most of the year may mean that such a location—relatively protected and uniquely populated by large, sheltering boulders—was ideal for those seeking refuge from storms. Again, this interpretation is speculative and would require significant additional investigation of the area and access to a more complete archaeological assemblage.

As no temporally diagnostic artifacts were recovered during this archaeological study, we are only able to speculate as to the age of the archaeological deposits assessed at sites DjSb-22, DjSb-23, and DjSb-24. The sites' composite characters suggest occupations occurred within the last 2000 years, belonging to later Marpole and/or Late Period cultural phases. The dominance of ground slate and ground bone tools over the less-abundant chipped stone tools is considered characteristic of Marpole and later occupations (Burley 1980; Mitchell 1971). The perforated stone weight/anchor from DjSb-24 may belong to an artifact class that is thought by Mitchell (1971) to be a possible diagnostic Marpole-period artifact. The presence of midden deposits so consistently close to or at the surface at all the sites (almost all start between 0 and 5 cm bs) points to a relatively recent termination of site use, almost certainly in the Late Period.

Conclusions: The Burden of Archaeological Stewardship

Much remains to be learned about ancient lifeways in the northern Gulf Islands, yet the sites that comprise the archaeological record of this history are being eroded and disturbed on an ongoing basis. Many sites on the southern B.C. coast are under acute threat from both anthropogenic and natural destructive forces. These forces may be challenging to mitigate, and thus it is imperative to

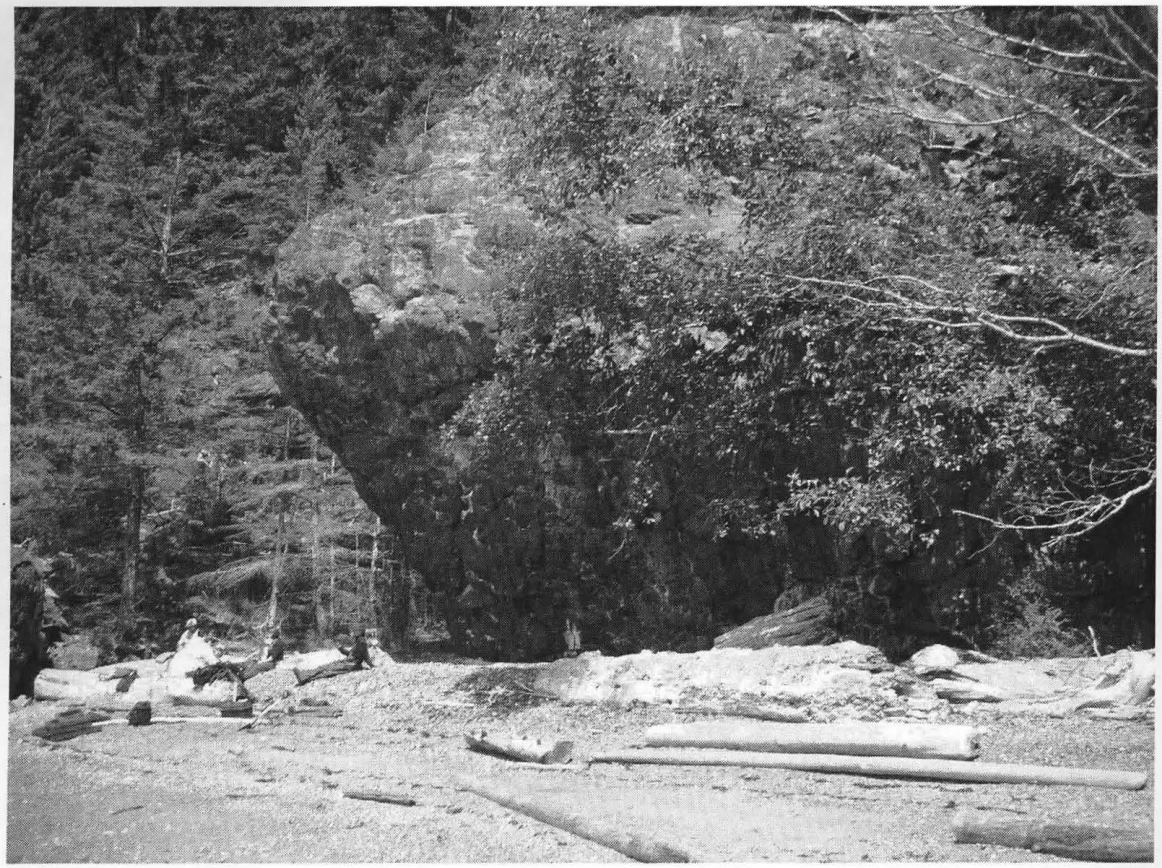

Figure 4. Crew lunching under boulder at site DjSb-24, under which two rockshelter features were identified (photo by Simon Kaltenrieder).

document as much of the archaeological record as possible in its current state. Through documentation of these sites, this project aimed to provide a mechanism for more clearly planning for and assessing the potential impacts to these and other sites.

The fact that this southwestern part of the Island was officially included in the South Texada Island Provincial Park in 2003 has offered the area's archaeology little in the way of protection from the region's recreational users. It is true that the formal "Parks" land-use designation prohibits the kind of developments that usually trigger the protective measures of the Heritage Conservation Act or the involvement of province's Archaeology Branch, but this same "protection" can invite another kind of threat. While we generally think about damage to sites resulting from substantial construction and resource-harvesting operations, our 2008 visits to the area showed us that smaller-scale uses (such as ATV trails, kayak runs, and squatters' encampments) have the potential for equally serious impacts to archaeological sites. Damage to these sensitive areas through recreational uses can be just as thorough, and is just as irreversible, as impacts suffered in the name of "development."

While the park designation means that legal stewardship of the sites rests squarely with BC Parks, the isolated and sometimes inhospitable nature of this coastal region, combined with Parks' perennial funding crunch, makes any real policing of the park an impossibility. The three sites we visited—each tucked neatly into the ragged coastline, their very isolation seeming to ensure their "pristine" condition—had all been visibly altered by recent activities. From the skidding of personal watercraft through beach midden to the semi-permanent squatters' camps constructed atop (even excavated into) stratified archaeological sites, the recreational uses of Parks land can be as destructive to heritage as logging or road-building, yet are often left unmanaged.

The final component of our South Texada Island Archaeological Project was intended to address this issue of sustainable stewardship. In the interest of encouraging BC Parks to assume a greater role in the stewardship of the archaeological resources under their jurisdiction, we concluded our project by making five key recommendations.

First, we advised avoiding park development within the site areas. Our concern for these sites is perpetual, and even seemingly insignificant developments—the construction of a single latrine, for example—have the potential to cause irrevocable damage to non-renewable archaeological deposits. Second, we recommended managing pedestrian, marine, and automotive traffic in and around site areas. Impacts to archaeological sites reported in this study indicate that recreation and residence have exceeded uses intended for the area in the context of its designation as a provincial park, and the prevention of further trespasses should be the responsibility of BC Parks. We suggested the expansion of fledgling "coastal watchmen" programs to include vigilance of cultural, as well as natural

resources. Third, we encouraged education of park planners and staff in heritage conservation, and suggested entrenching archaeological education as part of the annual meetings and training attended by Provincial Parks staff. The most effective way to ensure responsible stewardship of these sites is by informing appropriate Parks staff of their location, features and condition. Fourth, we proposed facilitating further archaeological research. A critical component of responsible stewardship will be the continued support—financial, logistical, and institutional—of archaeological research projects such as this one. Fifth, and last, we advocated co-management of sensitive heritage areas by local First Nations groups. We believe that this last suggestion can also help to accomplish the preceding four recommendations.

This project should serve as a reminder that with the creation of new parks (or other such land-use designation changes) comes the burden of stewardship of the natural and cultural resources in these areas. As a community of archaeologists and Indigenous organizations, we have an obligation to promote the responsible and sustainable stewardship of heritage places, in part by assisting organizations like BC Parks in recognizing their responsibilities as land managers. I conclude by emphasizing that our archaeological investigations in South Texada Provincial Park should be considered the beginning, rather than the completion, of a responsible heritage research and management strategy. Having taken the first step in protecting these invaluable archaeological resources, we encourage all parties to continue in the spirit of the late Norman Gallagher, who brought these sites to light. We are grateful to the Tla'amin First Nation and BC Parks for including us in this important work.

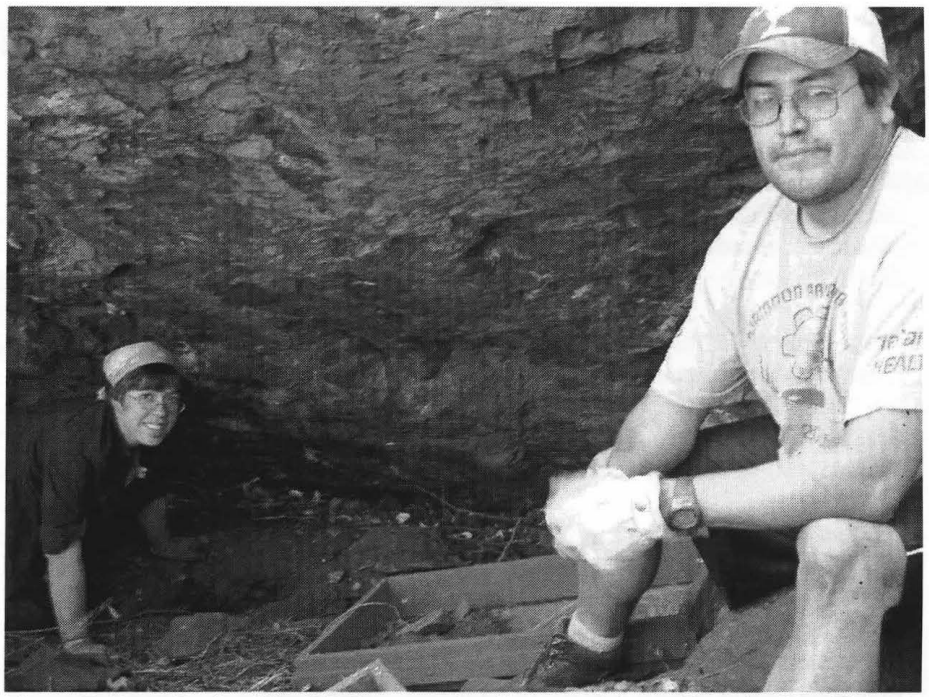

Figure 5. Bess Doyle of the BC Conservation Corps and Jason Francis of the Tla'amin First Nation excavate in a rockshelter at site DjSb-24 (photo by Joanne Hammond).

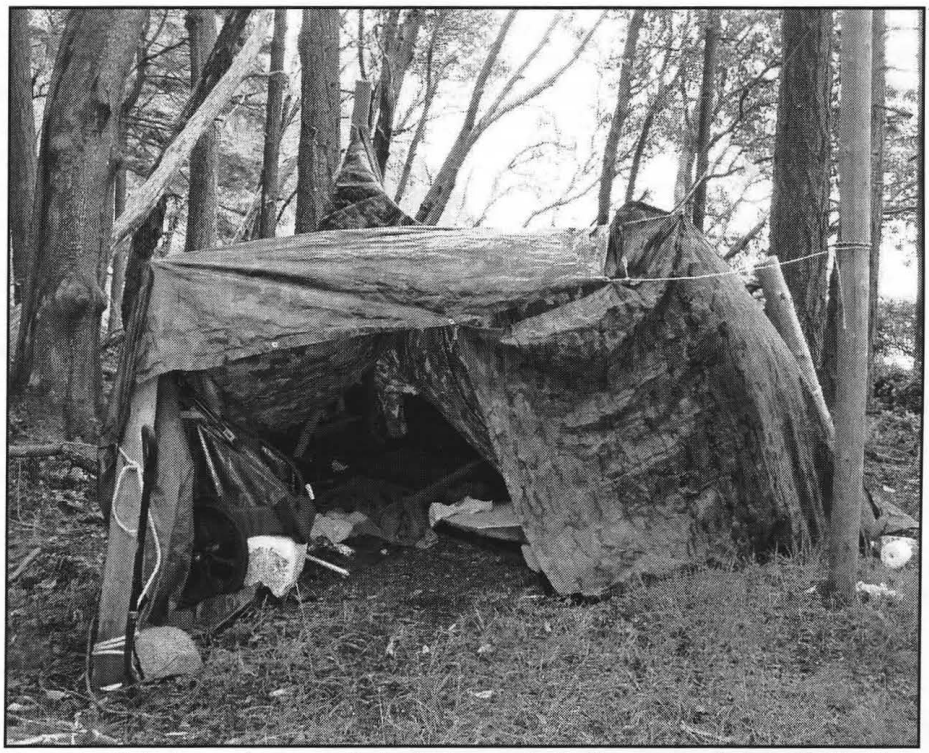

Figure 6. Disturbance from squatter's shelter erected in the centre of site DjSb-23. Note fenceposts embedded in site (photo by Simon Kaltenrieder).

Acknowledgements

The work on Texada Island was directed by Joanne Hammond and Simon Kaltenrieder (Pacific Heritage Research) and carried out with archaeologists Chris Burk (Pacific Heritage Research), Rudy Reimer and Robyn Ewing (SFU), and Bess Doyle (BC Conservation Corps). Jason Francis of Tla'amin First Nation, and Tyrone Joe-Mayse of Sechelt Nation rounded out our team and brought local expertise and good humour to the fieldwork. Laura Roddan of the Tla'amin Treaty Society helped arrange various aspects of the work, and graciously invited us to the community to organize and introduce the project.

References provided on Page 21

Joanne Hammond recently completed an MA in archaeology at Simon Fraser University on Indigenous heritage stewardship in British Columbia (please see the website, www.archaeologywithoutreserve.com). She is a partner and archaeologist with Pacific Heritage Research, based in Vancouver.

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2009-0156	private individual	ALTs to DiRw-1 by construction of a parking lot in Sechelt	ALT
2009-0157	Bruce Ball	AIA for West Fraser Mills Ltd.'s proposed operations in the Central Cariboo, Chilcotin and Quesnel FDs	INS
2009-0158	Samara King	AIA of forestry operations proposed by Apollo Forest Products Ltd. and other licensees and operators within the Fort St. James FD	INS
2009-0159	Frank Craig	AIA for an undetermined number of forestry developments in the BCTS Babine operating area in west-central BC	INS
2009-0160	Rob Field	AIA of developments proposed by Encana Corporation and other possible oil/gas proponents in the Peace, Fort Nelson and Mackenzie FDs	INS
2009-0161	Martina Steffen	Archaeological inventory and test excavations within parks in the Greater Victoria area, to identify intact sites dating to the late Pleistocene and early Holocene periods from approximately 13,000 to 8000 years before present	INS
2009-0162	Duncan McLaren	AIA for proposed restoration of salmon habitat on Brae Island Slough, between McMillan Island and Brae Island, on the Fraser River near Fort Langley	INS
2009-0163	Ian Franck	AIA for proposed subdivision on the W side of the North Thompson River	INS
2009-0164	Ty Heffner	AIA for proposed Crown Land dispositions within the Cariboo Regional District	INS
2009-0165	David Hall	AIA for the MOFR's proposed construction of a helipad at the Pemberton Fire Base near the Pemberton Airport	INS
2009-0166	private individual	ALTs to DcRt-16 by construction of a single-family residence in Oak Bay	ALT
2009-0167	Barbara Horrell	AIA of forestry operations proposed by TBC Forestry Consultants and other possible forestry operators within the Mackenzie FD	INS
2009-0168	Susan McNeney	AIA for BCTS's proposed operations in the Kamloops Business Area (Kamloops, Cascades, Headwaters and 100 Mile FDs)	INS
2009-0169	private individual	ALTs to DhRx-5 by construction of a cabin, Nanaimo District	ALT
2009-0170	Bruce Ball	AIA for Cariboo Forest Consultants Ltd's proposed forestry operations in the Quesnel D	INS
2009-0171	Bruce Ball	AIA for BCTS proposed operations in the Arrow Boundary FD	INS
2009-0172	Michael Rousseau	AIA for proposed upgrading of Beswick Road in Silver Beach Provincial Park, on the N shore of Seymour Arm, Shuswap Lake	INS
2009-0173	Robert Wondrasek	AIA for TransCanada Pipeline Ltd.'s interprovincial (NEB-regulated) Horn River pipeline comprised of two proposed sweet gas PL sections, being the Sierra - Ekwan PL, passing W to E, and the Cabin - Sierra PL, passing N to S, both within the Fort Nelson lowlands region	INS