



THE ASBC PAGES

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Heritage and Government Policy

Prior to this fall's election, the Archaeological Society of British Columbia emailed a letter to each of the five party leaders inquiring what importance they give to heritage legislation. We asked whether their government (if elected) would ensure that our nation's archaeological and historical sites would be protected by the development of comprehensive federal heritage legislation. Template driven responses that had little or nothing to do with heritage policy in Canada were received from the Bloc Quebecois and New Democratic Party. We have yet to receive a response of any kind from the other three national parties.

I suppose in this time of economic "crisis," it is the usual excuse that heritage policy is not a national concern and money and time can be better spent with a redundant election. Politicians appear to have a generally apathetic attitude regarding cultural heritage and this extends particularly towards archaeology. Many archaeologists view the pursuit of national heritage legislation to be futile. Though I commend past efforts that made some progress, it would appear that these efforts were ultimately defeated by parties that are pro-development and seemingly apathetic to cultural heritage conservation.

I would hope that the situation would be better provincially and support for the preservation of archaeology and public heritage education would be funded by our provincial coffers. Why not? Our province is wealthy in comparison to the rest of Canada (ignoring Alberta). BC should fund heritage protection, yet the province has allowed many archaeological resources to be destroyed in the past through lack of will and funds. Perhaps the best example of this lack of funding is at the Archaeology Branch. As it stands now, our provincial regulators, the Archaeology Branch, are understaffed, provided with little budget, and are still expected to provide services for ever expanding development throughout the province. Our valuable Archaeology Branch heritage specialists are not given travel budgets to visit at-risk sites or attend important heritage related meetings outside of Victoria. The BC Association of Professional Archaeologists, the ASBC, and the First Nation Leadership Council have repeatedly asked for more Archaeology Branch funding, but to no avail.

Our provincial government has embarked on an ambitious media extravaganza called BC 150 which is meant to celebrate our province's 150 year birthday. Our initial ASBC application

for funding under the BC 150 program was rejected. We have appealed the rejection response and are still waiting for the final decision although there are only a few months left of 2008. I'm not holding my breath but I am crossing my fingers.

Where can we start to effect change? At the federal level, it would make sense for provincial societies and associations to support the Canadian Archaeological Association's attempts to enact federal heritage legislation. Most integral to the creation of federal heritage legislation is the support of First Nations communities across Canada. Both dialogue and the seeking of common ground must be pursued in order for real change to happen in this arena. The ASBC has already embarked on a letter writing campaign addressing the new Heritage Minister. Once the issues in Ottawa have settled down somewhat, we will continue the effort. Provincially, we must explore new partnerships with other organizations including the BC Association of Professional Archaeologists, and the Underwater Archaeological Society of BC. Regionally, we must increase communication with neighbouring provincial societies and archaeological organizations south of the border in Washington and Oregon. With better communication and cooperation at the federal and provincial levels, change will come about. Who knows, maybe one day the province will award some BC 15,000 funding to put toward archaeological conservation and public education.

Ian Cameron
ASBC President