

THE ASBC PAGES

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Celebrating BC Archaeology 2008

It is BC's 150th Anniversary in 2008. The Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts has launched a gold rush to celebrate BC's heritage this year – feverishly spending upon multi-million dollar 'spirit squares' across the province, prime-time TV commercial space and numerous community weekend heritage-related events. After all, BC is a unique place with a fascinating and rich history—there is much to celebrate.

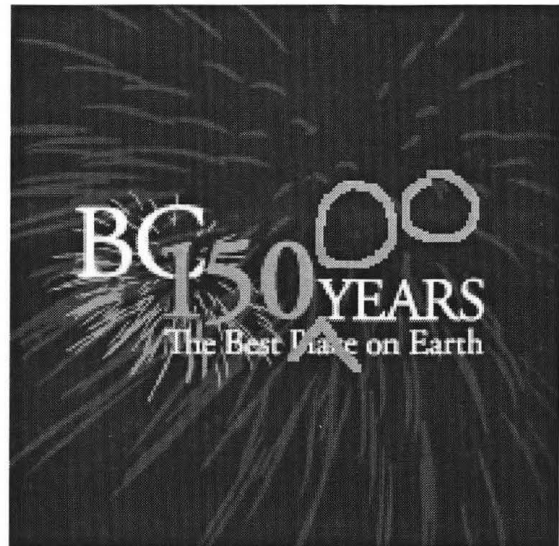
Sadly, though, few of BC150's publicly-funded events or advertising mention archaeology. While First Nation heritage is stated to be among the four priority areas for BC150 funding, to date, few festivities appear planned and most government ads and sponsored First Nation heritage events concern recent historical events and living persons, not the ancient past.

It appears that promoting awareness of the 15,000 years or more of First Nation history before 1858 A.D. is a bit of an awkward subject in British Columbia.

Like A.D. 1492, BC150 may understandably not inspire much reason to celebrate for many First Nation peoples. Given the history of colonialism and continued lack of progress in treaty negotiations and achieving equality of living standards, it is reasonable if BC First Nations may be reluctant to publicly share their cultural heritage, no matter how well-meaning the interest.

Perhaps knowingly, British Columbia has offered appearances but made no substantive commitment to invest in the subject to any great depth—much like its New Relationship with First Nations. If the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts has a genuine interest to celebrate BC First Nations' heritage, it certainly hasn't been reflected in any increase in basic funding or public education initiatives for the Archaeology Branch this year, despite repeated and urgent calls by First Nations and archaeologists and local governments for the provincial government to invest more staff and resources in the protection and preservation of our priceless archaeological heritage.

Today, there exists over 32,000 recorded archaeological sites in British Columbia. Yet, there are few public places that commemorate or celebrate the preservation of this ancient First Nation heritage legacy. Rather, it is the destruction of First Nations' heritage places by unregulated land-use and provincial administration that is symbolic of the relationship between



government, First Nations and mainstream British Columbians. Hiding this archaeological heritage from the public has proven not to be a solution.

We do know from public opinion polls that there exists a great interest about archaeology in BC, but that few persons may be aware of either the depth of First Nation history on these lands, nor of the strong provincial heritage legislation that helps protect these heritage sites. But if the general public has no opportunity to be better educated about archaeology or the values behind provincial legislation, we can't reasonably expect much societal change to prevent the incremental loss of our archaeological heritage in BC.

For this reason, I believe there is a great need for all of us to take this opportunity in 2008 to help promote awareness of archaeology and the public message of heritage conservation in BC. There is much to celebrate about BC archaeology—from new archaeological evidence that supports coastal migration models into the New World, to the recent discovery of entire new site types such as clam gardens and rock-walled defensive features, to new exciting research directions in collaboration with First Nations over intellectual and cultural property and resource management.

If we are to maintain public support for our provincial heritage legislation for the future, we all need to take the time and effort to invest in public education about archaeology and heritage conservation. Otherwise, in another 150 years, we all have to wonder if will there be any archaeological heritage left to celebrate?