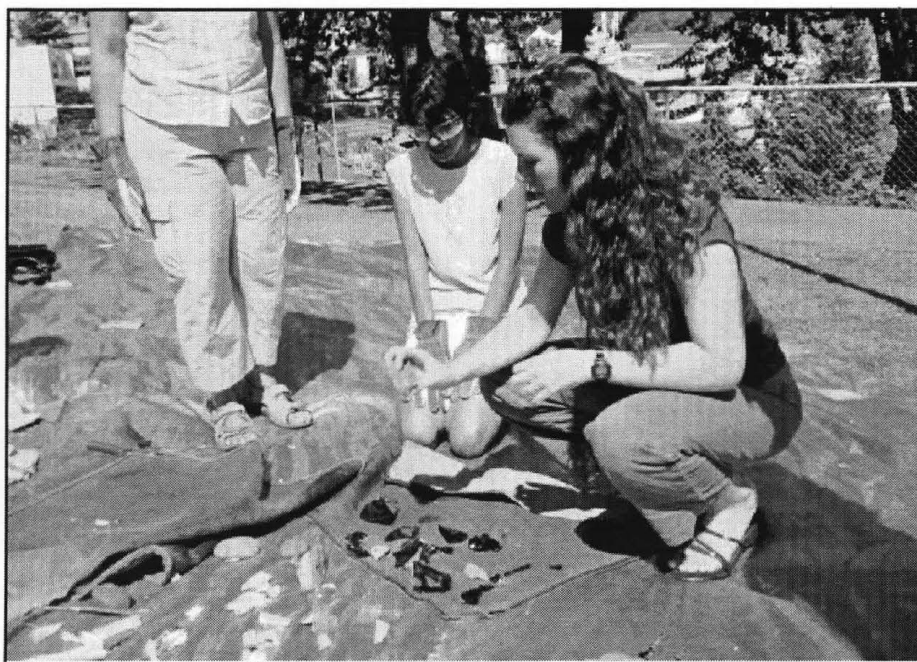


“Discover Archaeology” and Make the Connection

Julie Cowie

In February 2002, the ASBC Nanaimo Branch was invited by the Nanaimo District Museum to organize an archaeological display as part of their 35th Anniversary celebration. Thinking caps were hauled out of storage and we decided to put together an interactive bone display to introduce the public to archaeology through hands-on materials. The bone display focused on how bones can give us clues about the archaeological record, such as seasonality and subsistence. It involved the skeletal remains of a variety of species, from a whistling swan to a beaver. A replica of a skeletal human arm and leg were brought to illustrate that though many species have bones, not all are arranged or look the same way. It was a very effective learning tool. We also featured the stratigraphy and archaeological principles display constructed for a previous ASBCNB event. Participants could make their own bone and stone tools. From this small beginning this event has now grown to be one of our most successful programs to date, hosting over 500 participants in five years. It kindled the idea that public programs are essential if we want to conduct grassroots heritage conservation education.

Now in the planning stages of our sixth year, I look back to what has brought us this far. From experimental archaeology to exploring disease, we have attempted to illuminate the minds of visitors by bringing archaeology and its principles to them. Something they can touch and relate to. It's about getting your hands on a chunk of obsidian and making a stone tool; making a connection with the past. It's that 10 year old kid from Gabriola Island who we met in year two of our program, who keeps bringing home various carcasses that she finds on the beach (much to the horror of her mother) to see



Above: Colleen Parsley discussing lithics with two visitors from Ontario, Discover Archaeology 2005; Below: Discover Archaeology 2004 (Photos by author).

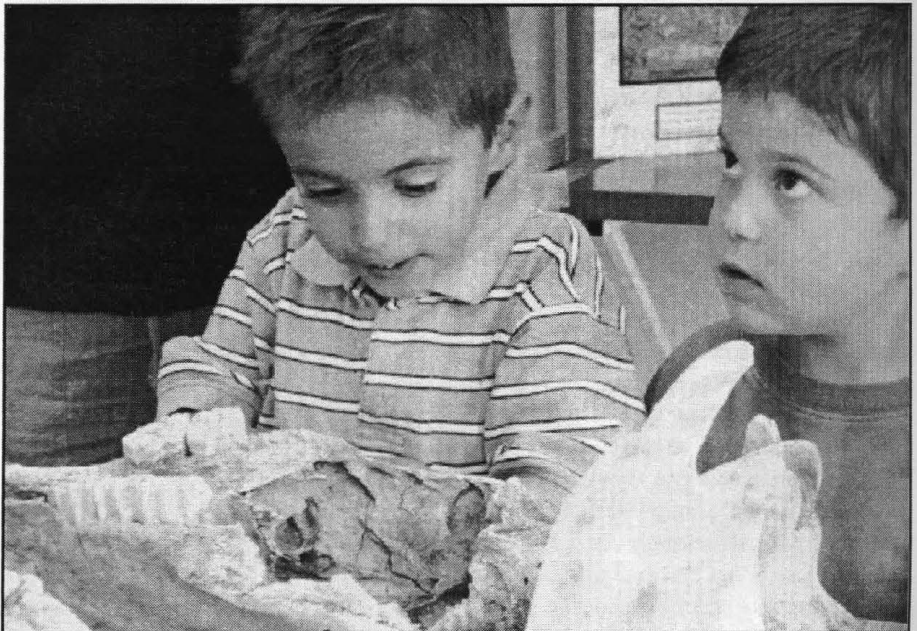
their bones. She couldn't wait to come to our event to talk to someone who shared her interest. It's about two boys last year who spent three hours making stone tools, reconstructing pottery, and making mosaics. I think a lot of people have an interest in the past; they just don't have a way to make that connection beyond the television or a book. "Discover Archaeology" does that. Through hands-on activities we can show the public that the past is very much alive and is worth protecting. If we can teach the public that the past, not just their own but the past of other cultures, has value then we can hope that they will deem it important enough to care about its future.

This event also brings people who are curious about archaeological sites on or near their property, curious about what they should do. Others know of sites that are being impacted and don't know what to do. We have also had people bring us artifacts, some genuine...some not. This event has allowed us to have a greater public presence in our community, allowing us the opportunity to educate about heritage conservation on a grassroots level.

Planning this event has always been a challenge but we are well supported by the Anthropology Departments at Malaspina University College and the University of Victoria, as well as the Archaeology Lab at Simon Fraser University and the Archaeology Department at the University of Calgary. All have been gracious to lend us material and without them this event would never occur. Local media has also been helpful in getting our message out, with the A-Channel being our biggest supporter by allowing us to appear on their morning show for the last three years, talking about archaeology and the various specimens I had brought with me. The Nanaimo Branch is also grateful for the fiscal and moral support of the Provincial ASBC.

We encourage you to participate in our "Discover Archaeology" program this summer. Make the connection.

Julie Cowie is the current President of the Nanaimo Branch and has served as its President since 2003. She holds a degree in Archaeology from the University of Calgary, with a specialization in lithic and faunal analysis.



Above: Discover Archaeology 2002; Below: Xristos and Yiorgos Vassilopoulos at Discover Archaeology 2004 (Photos by author).