

BOOK REVIEWS

Haida Gwaii:

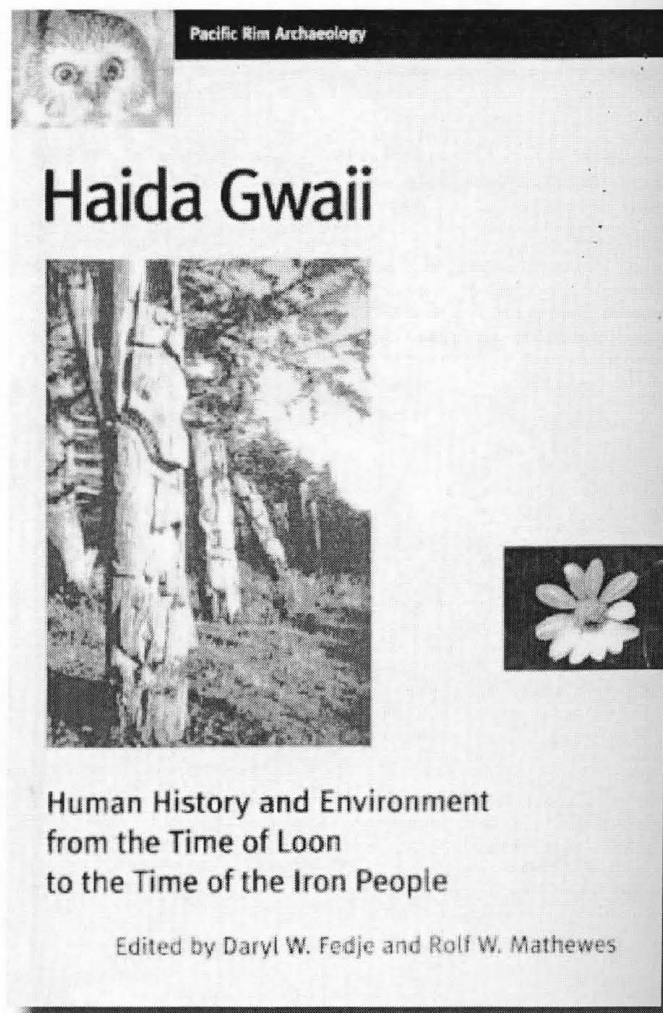
Human History and Environment from the Time of Loon to the Time of the Iron People

edited by Daryl W. Fedje and Rolf W. Mathewes

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When Captain George Dixon sailed by a remote archipelago off the north Pacific coast in 1787 he named the islands for his ship, the *Queen Charlotte*. Today these islands are more commonly known as Haida Gwaii ("Islands of the People"), the Haida homeland that had already been occupied for over 10,000 years when Dixon appeared. This isolated archipelago has long fascinated academic researchers from a variety of fields, who have been intrigued by topics as diverse as the unique nature of endemic plant and animal species and the impressive Haida achievements in art and architecture. Archaeology also plays a role, particularly since the creation of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, covering the southern portion of the archipelago, in 1987. The pace of archaeological research has greatly accelerated in recent years through the cooperative endeavours of Parks Canada and the Haida Nation. Such work has been multi-disciplinary, involving a considerable number of scholars examining past cultural and environmental history. This volume presents that data. The editors bring their own differing expertise to this compendium: Daryl Fedje is a Parks Canada archaeologist and Rolf Mathewes is a biologist at Simon Fraser University.

The book contains forwards by Guujaaw (president of the Council of the Haida Nation) and Knut Fladmark (whose pioneering archaeological research on Haida Gwaii set the stage for much that followed), as well as a short preface and conclusion by the editors. The bulk of the book consists of 16 papers, organized into three parts, each of which has a short introduction by the editors. Many of the papers have multiple authors, and many authors' names appear on more than one article, reflecting the team nature of much of the research. In all, 27 people contributed to the articles in this volume. Fedje's prominent role in this research is evident as his name appears on seven of the 16 articles, plus the preface and conclusion. There is an understandable emphasis on the recent research results from Gwaii Haanas, but other articles



deal with more northerly sites, providing geographic balance. An important and exciting focus of the Gwaii Haanas research has been on early occupations, associated with earlier sea level stands, investigated by Fedje, Quentin Mackie and Al Mackie, among others. Temporal balance, however, is provided through several papers on the late precontact period, such as Steven Acheson's work on settlement archaeology in Gwaii Haanas. The book ends at European arrival and does not attempt to deal with Haida culture as historically known.

Part 1, "Paleoenvironmental History," contains six papers that deal with such topics as reconstructing past shorelines, climate, vegetation changes and faunal history. Environmental data

provide essential context for the human story, whether assessing the feasibility of early coastal migrations or understanding the human presence on a dynamic landscape. Dramatic changes in relative sea level, along with marked climatic changes and vegetation shifts, affected human adaptations and the nature of the archaeological record. Bear remains from K1 Cave dating to about 14,500 years ago suggest the presence of open land capable of supporting other large omnivores such as humans at that time, although the earliest dated archaeological evidence is about 4000 years later. Lower sea levels of the early Holocene exposed large areas of open land that could once have supported animal and human populations but are now submerged. Several papers deal with the possibility that populations of plants and animals survived in ice-free refugia during the glacial maximum. Little evidence was found for such relict populations, and some island species that had earlier been proposed, such as the dwarf Dawson caribou, were specifically rejected. The general consensus is that if such refugia existed, they are now under the water of Hecate Strait. In one chapter, Fedje et al. examine the complex paleoshoreline record around Hecate Strait and conclude that any evidence for human presence along the coast from before 12,500 BP to about 9500 BP would now be drowned, sites around 9500 to 9400 BP would be in the modern inter-tidal zone, and sites after that time would be on raised strandlines well above the modern shore. Sea levels were rising so rapidly throughout this period that associated sites reflect only relatively brief occupations. Clearly such important information is vital in understanding the archaeological record of Haida Gwaii.

The Haida perspective on their past is presented in two papers in Part 2. *Nang Kiing.aay7uuans* (James Young), an elder teaching in the Skidegate Haida Language Program, recounts the story of *Taadl* (Loon) that takes place at the beginning of Haida time (and makes a good starting point for the book's subtitle). In the other paper in this section, *Kii7iljuus* (Barbara Wilson) and Heather Harris present Haida oral traditions of "Long, Long Ago." Such narratives tell of a time when sea levels were lower and no trees grew on the land. The authors argue that these stories could refer to very ancient times, and possibly describe conditions existing in the early Holocene.

The largest part of this book consists of the eight archaeological papers in Part 3 ("Haida History Through Archaeological Research"). In the first paper, Fedje and Mackie present an overview of cultural history for these islands. Along with the editors' introduction, this provides general context for the detailed articles that follow. Many of these papers deal with the recent research in Gwaii Haanas, particularly investigating early occupations. Despite the key location of these islands in assessing the coastal migration hypothesis, and the claim that a viable environment for human settlement existed as early as 14,500 years ago, the rising sea levels of the early Holocene have submerged any areas that might have supported such occupations. At present, the oldest evidence of human presence comes from two inland caves that have yielded chipped stone spearpoints in contexts dated to about 10,500 radiocarbon years. The search for early coastal settlements is constrained by the sea level history, as all sites earlier than about 9500 years are submerged. A number of sites dating to only slightly later have been located in the modern inter-tidal zone. Kilgii Gwaay, the subject of a detailed article in this section, is the

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best known. This site is particularly important as waterlogging and shell deposits have resulted in excellent preservation of organic materials, including a variety of faunal remains and evidence for woodworking. Kilgii Gwaay was occupied only for a short period between about 9450 and 9400 BP as the sea continued its relentless rise. By 9000 BP sea levels were about 15 metres higher, leaving sites of this age on raised strandlines well removed from the modern shores. Richardson Island, also in Gwaii Haanas, is the major excavated example. The people of this early stage had a maritime economy and efficient watercraft, with a stone tool technology that featured bifacial implements. Fedje and his colleagues define the Kinggi Complex, dating from greater than 9500 to 8900 radiocarbon years, for these materials.

Following Kinggi are the Moresby and Graham traditions, defined by Fladmark through his research in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fedje and Mackie add a transitional Early Moresby stage, from about 8900 to 8000 BP, marked by the addition of microblade technology to the bifacial stone industry of the Kinggi Complex. Fladmark's Moresby Tradition becomes Late Moresby, from about 8000 to 5000 BP. Late Moresby sites, characterized by microblades, microblade cores, and pebble tools, with an absence of bifacial implements, are found on raised beaches well above the modern sea level. Cohoe Creek, described in detail by Tina Christensen and Jim Stafford, is a raised beach site spanning the Late Moresby and the early Graham traditions. Its northern location provides a balance to the Gwaii Haanas raised beach sites described in a chapter by Fedje, Christensen, and Martin Magne. Microblade technology disappears in the Graham Tradition (5000 to 250 BP), which features ground stone and bone artifacts. By the late Graham period, societies were more complex, with evidence of substantial architecture, highly developed art, warfare, and contact with peoples of the mainland coast. Mackie and Acheson present a summary article on the Graham Tradition, which is followed by one on Gwaii Haanas settlement archaeology by Acheson. Even at the end of the Graham Tradition, sites differ from those recorded for the historic Haida, as settlements shift

from dispersed, relatively permanent communities to the historic large aggregated villages with a seasonal pattern of movement. The arrival of European traders ("Iron People") ends the time frame covered by the articles in this volume.

This is a dense book, filled with detailed information. It includes lengthy descriptions of site strata and the geological forces responsible for their deposition, discussions of artifact attributes and technology, and long tables of site information, faunal remains, and radiocarbon dates. This is not a book for the casual reader who wants a general overview, preferably with nice pictures of people and places. However, all Northwest Coast archaeologists will find it an indispensable reference, as will any other researchers interested in the environmental or human history of the north coast. Even a more general reader will find much of value, particularly by reading the short introductions to each section and the conclusion provided by the editors, and then dabbling into whatever articles seem of most interest.

A testament to the on-going research in Haida Gwaii, particularly in Gwaii Haanas, is that some of the contents in this book may be superseded with new discoveries in the near future. In the last few years new methodologies for determining past shoreline locations have led to great advances in the study of early human settlement, although the difficult challenge of investigating pre-9500 BP sites remains. Modelling of earlier, now submerged, shorelines holds great potential for future research with technological innovations. For now, this volume is an up-to-date compendium of archaeological and paleoenvironmental research, with references up to 2005. Fedje and Mathewes describe the archaeological record as conservative and continuous, fitting with Haida oral traditions to attest to the stability and time depth of Haida culture. This book provides an excellent statement of existing knowledge on human and environmental history in Haida Gwaii over the past 10,000 years or so, while holding the door open for exciting new discoveries and interpretations in the future.

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