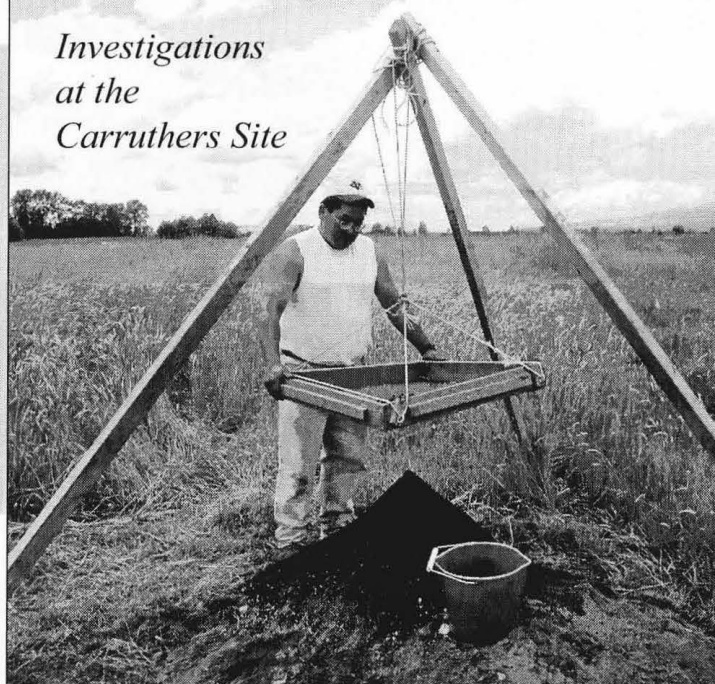


Langara Field School

*Investigations
at the
Carruthers Site*



Rastko Cvekic

Langara College teamed up with Katzie First Nation this year to offer their 15-credit archaeology field school in the Pitt Polder region. This area, bounded by Pitt Lake, the Pitt and Alouette rivers, and the highlands to the east, was a tidal marshland dissected by sloughs before late 19th century diking changed the landscape. Part of Katzie traditional territory, the "Polder" used to have abundant wapato patches, which were harvested annually in autumn. Today it is a rich agricultural land for different crops.

The field school crew, headed by Langara instructors Tanja Hoffmann and Stan Copp, spent the major part of the season excavating at the Carruthers site (DhRp-11), a provincially designated heritage site near the Alouette River in Pitt Meadows. Some time was also devoted to a reconnaissance survey of the area around DhRp-11 and further afield near Pitt Lake.

DhRp-11, the Carruthers site, has yielded pre-contact material of what the investigators consider to be very high significance, including a wet-site component with excellent organic preservation. After surface surveying and shovel testing in 2004, this year's investigation was conducted by excavation in natural layers of 2x2 meter units. This work was made necessary as part of an impact assessment for the landowner's plans to modify the land surface under which the site is located. All artifacts recovered this season are housed at the Katzie Administration Offices, where they are currently being catalogued and analysed.

The Carruthers site is situated near Sheridan Hill, which, according to oral history, used to be the highest mountain in the vicinity. It is from this mountain that Swaneset, from whom

many Katzie people are descended, had climbed to the sky, only to come back with a wife. Upon returning to earth, Swaneset reduced Sheridan Hill to its present size, in the process making the other hills that dot the "Polder" landscape to this day. He then led his people to settle down near the Fraser River, at what is today Katzie IR #1, where his sky wife released the eulachon into the world and taught her husband's people how to catch and prepare them. The Carruthers site is centrally located within this resource-rich landscape, and it is little wonder that exciting archaeological material should be coming to light from its vicinity.

DhRp-11 was originally excavated by David Crowe-Swords in 1973 as part of his research at Simon Fraser University. He interpreted the site as a seasonal camp with autumn occupation and dated it to around AD 800 on the basis of diagnostic artifacts. The artifact assemblage of close to 3,500 items was dominated by ground slate knife fragments, with sizable quantities of abraded fragments and chipped stone projectile points also present. The slate knives could have been used for preparing fish or wapato – a starchy tuber that resembles the Irish potato.

Topographically, the Carruthers site was laid out in a horse-shoe-shaped scatter of seven low mounds, spread over an area of 350 by 350 meters. These mounds were all leveled for agricultural activity, so one of the goals of this year's investigations was to determine where the mounds were located, in order to establish where Crowe-Swords had excavated three decades ago. Sadly, the old excavation units could not be located with certainty, because Crowe-Swords had only dug into the mounds, which are now obliterated, and not into the surface beneath them. The lesson

Photo: Crewmember Sid Johnson of Katzie keeps a watchful eye for cultural material at the screening station, Carruthers site (DhRp-11), June 30.

learned is that permanent site datum points must be established for future investigators to be able to coordinate their work with the results of previous excavation.

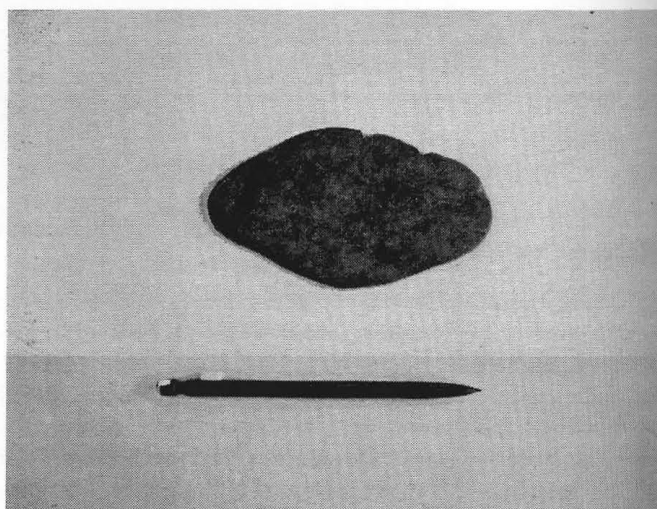
A second objective for this year's field school was to gain a better understanding of site use. This was necessitated by the fact that at least eight carved stone bowls, characteristic of high status during the Marpole period, had been found over the years in the vicinity of the site. These artifacts represent a large time-investment and are suggestive of high status activities and year-round occupation, which raises the possibility that the interpretation of the site as a seasonal camp, offered by Crowe-Swords, may not be complete. This year's excavations unearthed pieces of red ochre, a stone pipe, and a damaged stone bowl, adding further evidence to the argument for high status. Slate knives, adze blades, projectile points, and abraders were among the other lithic artifacts recovered, along with a wooden haft and a stake, preserved in peat. The most abundant material found, however, was exhausted fire-cracked rock. The activity that produced such large amounts of fire-cracked rock is still being debated, but ongoing analysis is likely to narrow down the possibilities. Other evidence for more permanent occupation at the Carruthers site is a patterned set of postholes, which may even be the remains of a permanent longhouse, but a larger area needs to be excavated to verify this interpretation.

Hoffmann and Copp had a third research goal in mind for the 2005 investigations at DhRp-11. A wet-site component pre-dating the main artifact-bearing layer at little less than a meter below the surface was sampled to determine whether it included cultural material. Indeed, from the single unit in which this layer was sampled, waterlogged organic artifacts have come out. Carved wooden implements and wood shavings indicate the presence of a woodworking industry at the wet-site component. The potential for organic preservation in the component is unique and warrants attention from the archaeological community. The waterlogged layer is protected by a clay seal, which could be destroyed by the proposed modifications to the site. Therefore, considering the high potential for investigating organic material culture, the investigators hope to be back at the Carruthers site in the near future. In the meantime, two charcoal samples have been sent for radiocarbon analysis to date the waterlogged material, and there are plans for getting a soil specialist involved in interpreting the complex stratigraphy of the lower levels. The question of how the waterlogged layer, which has also been identified at nearby localities, was formed, remains to be investigated.

These exciting archaeological discoveries were, in any case, only a part of what the students got out of the Langara field school experience. While learning about archaeological field techniques, laboratory methods, and geospatial analyses, part of the deal was also a course on ethnoarchaeology. This consisted of structured informant interviews, hands-on participation in traditional activities like bark stripping and salmon preparation, and morning discussions of how ethnographic information is pertinent to the understanding of the past behaviour that produced the archaeological record at the Carruthers site. Perhaps even more importantly, the field school allowed students to interact with Katzie crewmembers on a daily basis, which facilitated an ongoing cultural exchange. It is through these endeavours that lifelong friendships can form and collaborations for future archaeological research can arise.



Nearly complete nipple-top hand maul, recovered on June 22 from the Carruthers site (DhRp-11).



Complete ground slate knife, recovered on June 20 from the Carruthers site (DhRp-11).

As Katzie elders ceremonially opened and closed this season's excavations at DhRp-11, everyone involved in the Langara field school could appreciate the respect that the cultural heritage – of all of us – deserves.

Acknowledgments:

This report is based on a field visit to the Carruthers site and on informal telephone interviews with Stan Copp, Jamie Pierre, and Tanja Hoffmann. To Bill Angelbeck and Stan Copp for inviting me to write about the Langara field school; to Gary Sonik for accompanying me on the field visit; to the instructors, students, and crewmembers for making the visit enjoyable; and to the Katzie for sharing their cultural heritage: Thanks!