GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE

THE 2002 UBC FIELD SCHOOL AT DIONISIO POINT

by Colin Grier and Bill Angelbeck

Figure 1. Bob Laing provides pointers on the fine art of clam digging at Shingle Point, Valdes Island.

The 2002 Project

The months of May and June 2002 saw the return of archaeological field research to the Dionisio Point (DgRv 3) site in Dionisio Point Provincial Park on the north end of Galiano Island (Figure 2). Fieldwork at the site included the archaeological field school offered every summer by the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver. The field school added a new dimension to the archaeological activities that have been conducted at the site since 1996. Previous years of excavation at the site (described in *The Midden*, see Grier 1999) targeted the remains of one of five large houses that existed at the site roughly 1,500 years ago. Much has been learned over the last few years about the architecture of this ancient house and the household it contained.

The research focus also took a new tack in 2002, expanding to consider the organization of the village as a whole. Many questions about ancient Hul'qumi'num Salish villages remain unanswered. How many people did they contain? Did they form a single political unit? Were they large social units, such as extended family lineages? Did the entire village cooperate economically to secure resources? Did they share or pool resources amongst households within the village? These questions can be addressed in part with data from Dionisio Point (known as Quelus in the local Hul'qumi'num language). Fieldwork in 2002 sampled areas of midden around all five of the known house remains in order to obtain a preliminary sense of what resources each household was obtaining and consuming.

Archaeological research at Dionisio Point is aided strongly by the amazing preservation of the remains of the village. To most park visitors the village site area appears as an undulating landscape sloping towards the beach. To an archaeological eye, three broad terraces and prominent trash midden "berms" are visible. Trash appears to have been dumped around the exterior of each house during occupation, resulting in pronounced depressions marking where the ancient houses stood (Figure 3). From this surface topography we have determined that four of the houses at the site measured around 10 metres wide by 20 metres long. The largest house measured upwards of 10 by 40 metres. Excavations inside what has been named House 2 indicate that this house, and likely the others as well, resembled the shed-roof style houses built by the Coast Salish at the time of contact with Europeans.

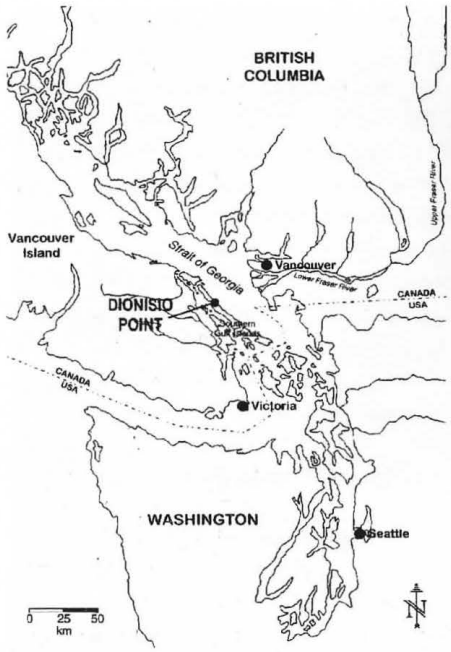

Figure 2. The location of the Dionisio Point site on Galiano Island.

The Field School

The 2002 UBC field school was taught by Dr. Colin Grier, who has directed research at the Dionisio Point site since 1996 (Grier 2001). Bill Angelbeck, a UBC PhD student in Northwest Coast archaeology, acted as teaching assistant. Ten students were enrolled, nine from UBC and one from the University of Victoria. Two members of the Penelakut Tribe, Robert "Bob" Laing and Pecolliket "Peco" George, joined the project, assisting in the archaeology and passing on their knowledge of traditional culture, ecology, and food resources. This 14-person crew camped in Dionisio Point Provincial Park, just 150 m from the ancient village site. This proximity to the site, the remoteness of our camp (Dionisio Point Park is a marine access only park), and the tough challenge of living next to one of the nicest beaches in the Gulf Islands (not too mention a sunny and dry early summer), all contributed to a thoroughly educational and enjoyable experience for everyone.

The course itself (Anth 306) emphasized instruction in excavation methods and Gulf of Georgia prehistory. Eight excavation units (1-x-1 m) were dug in the middens around the five houses. Students were paired and shared digging, screening, paperwork, and photography duties over the course of the project (cover). Students also were taught mapping techniques through use of a total station (Figure 4). This surveying and mapping device, which measures distances and elevation differences with a precise radar beam, has become a regular component of archaeological data collection methodology. This technology certainly has assumed a prominent role in collecting spatial and topographic information at Dionisio Point (for example, in collecting the information to produce the surface wire-frame map in Figure 3).

In addition to excavation and mapping, Bill Angelbeck introduced students to site survey and subsurface testing methods. The main village area of the Dionisio Point site is bounded to the north by the waters of Maple Bay and by prominent sandstone ridges to the east and west. However, to the south lies a relatively flat expanse of shrub, ferns, and forest. This area had not previously been explored, and so we had almost no sense of how far behind the main village area the site extends. Bill supervised teams of students who completed a series of survey transects extending south, excavating test pits every 10 m with a posthole digger. Results indicate that cultural materials occur within 25 metres of the houses, and that the flat area behind the village was not intensively used for site activities.

Partnership with the Penelakut Tribe

Research at Dionisio Point has been conceived and conducted under the premise that the Penelakut Tribe, within whose traditional territory the site lies, would play a prominent role in the research. The Penelakut have a strong interest in the local area, and recognize the opportunity that research at the site provides for training their members in archaeological methods and facilitating a broader range of cultural studies, including ethnographic, place name, and linguistic research. The Dionisio Point site currently enjoys the protection from development that being within a provincial park offers. Thus, research interests (rather than development or forestry) control the pace and intensity of research at the site. This has had a number of benefits. First, it was possible to take the time to develop a research protocol in partnership with the Penelakut Chief and Council early on in the research program (before the 1998 field season). This protocol outlines the types of data that should be collected and defines the roles and obligations of all involved in the project. This collaborative effort has ensured that problem-oriented research, careful methodologies, and sensitivity to Penelakut traditional values and interests hold sway.

Broader research collaboration has paid off in the development of diverse projects complementary to the archaeology. In 2002, Peco George was engaged, in addition to his archaeological efforts, in collecting information from Penelakut elders concerning the resources available in the local environment. The Penelakut still use much of the area for hunting and fishing, and local elders hold a wealth of information about the way in which one makes a good living - in the traditional fashion, of course - in the Gulf Islands. Peco's work in 2002 (both archaeological and ethnographic) was funded through the HRDC Summer Employment program administered by the Penelakut.

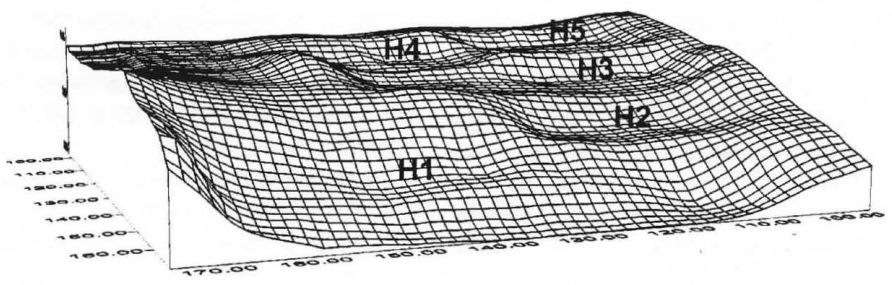

Figure 3. Surface wire-frame map of the house depressions at Dionisio Point. Topographic information has been collected with a total station since the beginning of research in 1997.

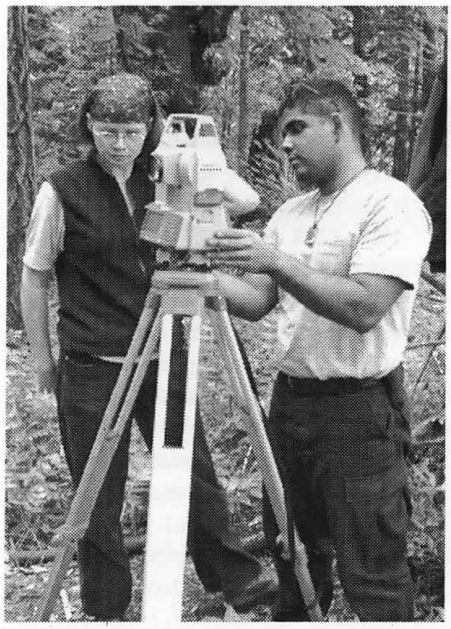

Figure 4. Jodie Anderson and Vlad Avila putting the total station through its paces.

Studying the Gulf Islands Ecology

The Gulf Islands terrestrial and marine ecology is unique in coastal British Columbia, and in fact within Canada as a whole. Situated in the rain shadow of the Vancouver Island mountains, these islands form the driest region of the British Columbia Coast. Constricted marine passes, including Porlier Pass between Galiano and Valdes Island, contain waters that flow at speeds of up to 10 knots as the tide ebbs and floods. These "tidal streams" create an energetic and tumultuous marine environment that hosts a distinct suite of marine resources, including sea urchin, mussels, scallops, cod, and sea mammals.

Learning about the ecology of the Gulf Islands is critical for understanding the way in which the environment was utilized in the past by Hul'qumi'num peoples. Bob Laing and Peco George provided invaluable traditional knowledge about resource acquisition strategies on our field trips and excursions in the local area. Our first trip involved an enjoyable boat ride and day trip to the Shingle Point (DgRv 2) site on the south west coast of Valdes Island. On the long stretches of beach Bob demonstrated techniques of digging for clams (basket cockles, in this case, Figure 1). As well as giving (almost) everyone a taste for raw clams, we were able to gain an appreciation for the amount of labour involved in digging clams. We also gained a "fresh" perspective on the mounds of archaeological shells that comprise the middens we were excavating back at Dionisio Point. Peco and Bob regularly brought in many traditional marine foods to supplement our camp diet, including ling and rock cod, salmon, sea urchin, prawns, oysters, and octopus.

Public Archaeology

The Dionisio Point site is situated in a provincial park and we all spent time talking with and presenting archaeology to interested visitors. The well-trodden main park trail passes immediately behind the site. Many local Galiano Islanders use the park trails to get some summer sun, scenery, and exercise. Our activities certainly peaked the interest of passersby, who were often surprised to find large scale excavations occurring at this remote location. Field school students gained considerable experience in interacting with the public and communicating the nature and significance of our research. Many locals had some interesting information of their own to offer concerning the recent history of the area, and we were happy to listen.

More formal guided tours of the site with interpretive talks and discussion were provided for members of the Galiano Island Museum Society and the Archaeological Society of British Columbia. Both Helmi Braches (former ASBC President) and Patricia Ormerod (current ASBC President) toured the site and took the opportunity to get in some camping time. The list of dignitaries didn't stop there. We were visited by Professor David Pokotylo, Head of the UBC Department of Anthropology and Sociology; Eric McLay, archaeologist for the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group; and Neil Miler, Coast Research director and a Penelakut Tribe member who has participated in excavations at Dionisio Point in previous years.

An official visitors day was held on June 15. This "open house" day was announced in the local Galiano paper and at least 30 people arrived for a tour of the site. It is quite encouraging to see the level of interest in preserving the past that exists in the Gulf Islands. In these days of uncertainty concerning heritage legislation, it is nice to know such interest exists.

We were in turn treated to our own tour of the site we thought we knew so well when Penelakut elders Florence James and Mary Jo arrived by boat with Lisa Shaver (Penelakut economic development officer). The wealth of information they had about the symbolism and meaning that large houses held in traditional Penelakut culture was eye-opening to say the least. It was also a useful change of perspective from the basic functional perspective on houses one acquires when digging up piles of ancient food trash.

Some Preliminary Results

The artifacts and faunal remains recovered from the 2002 field school excavations are being analyzed and catalogued at UBC's newly christened Charles Borden Archaeological Research Centre. The students worked in the lab after the fieldwork season identifying and cataloguing artifacts and fauna, and many have continued on in the lab analyzing collections from previous excavation years. We are all furiously working towards producing a large FileMaker database for the entire site collection, including Don Mitchell's 1964 excavation material. This database will include artifact identifications, provenience information, and digital photos that can be used for research and instruction by both archaeologists and the Penelakut Tribe.

Data collected during the 2002 field season have been informative in a number of respects, and bear on the central objective of obtaining a preliminary sense of the village economy. The quantity and diversity of artifacts and faunal material recovered from house midden areas varied. Chipped stone manufacturing debris predominated in two excavation units, while other units were bereft of all but food refuse (shell and bone). Some contained very little cultural material at all.

While it is tempting to interpret these differences as related to differences in economic activity from house to house, a couple of points need to be considered beforehand. Some of the artifacts and faunal materials may be debris from outside activities rather than discard from interior house activities. Obtaining a broader sense of the way in which materials accumulated in various areas of

Figure 5. The 2002 field school crew. From left to right: Bill Angelbeck, Angelica Rost, Rastko Cvekic, Stacey Cunnigham (seated), Jack Russell, Sara Perry, Jess Jansen, Andrea Davidson (seated), Jodie Anderson, Vlad Avila, Colin Grier. Missing: Kathryn Hepburn.

the site will be critical to understanding the preliminary patterns we now see. These "formation processes" are now fairly well understood for the interior house areas at Dionisio Point. However, they are less well-known for exterior areas.

For example, it has not been entirely clear how much of the lay of the site reflects initial terraforming of the site area into flat platforms for house construction versus how much resulted from the dumping of refuse in mounds over time. Based on this summer's observations, much of the mound-like topography is not necessarily dense shell midden. Consequently it now appears that there may have been a much greater labour investment in initial site construction than we had previously recognized. Clearly we need to expand our efforts to obtain greater samples. Trash middens are probably the least homogenous deposits one can investigate, and so bigger samples make for stronger inferences.

A few more radiocarbon dates will help us sort out these matters as well. Previous radiocarbon dating tells us that the site was occupied for small-scale shellfish collecting after the village was abandoned around 1,400 years ago. Identifying which exterior deposits can be assigned to the village occupation phase and which post-date the village will help us more clearly model site formation processes.

In a field school situation, results are also measured in terms of the knowledge and experience gained by the students we train. The objectives of the course were to provide students with both a stimulating research experience and skills that would be applicable to consulting work. We also wanted to illustrate the many benefits of partnerships with First Nations in archaeological research. In these respects, the summer was a great success. And the camping was fun too.

Acknowledgments

Long-term projects cannot happen without the contributions of many individuals, many of whom go beyond the call of duty. For the 2002 season a few of the many people who deserve sincere thanks include Lisa Shaver and Chief Earl Jack from the Penelakut Tribe, Dave Hutchcroft from the Archaeology Branch, Chris Kissinger of BC Parks, and Fred King of K2 Park Services.

The students (Figure 5) were an energetic bunch, and deserve thanks as well for their tireless efforts and unbridled enthusiasm in their work. Also, the field season would have been much less enjoyable and not nearly as informative without the participation and good humour of Bob Laing and Peco George.

References

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Colin Grier received his PhD from Arizona State University in 2001 and is now a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia. He has conducted archaeological research in the Gulf of Georgia region since 1996.

Bill Angelbeck is a PhD student at UBC focusing on Northwest Coast archaeology. He acquired an MA in cultural anthropology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. His prior archaeological fieldwork has been in the US Southeast and Plains.