

More on our archaeological heritage

Since writing my last piece in the *Isle and Times*, I've had several conversations with Islanders about archaeology. Two kinds of questions arose in these discussions: People asked "If I bring attention to the archaeological site on my property, will it mean my land will get taken away in land claims?" and, "What can we, as a community do to preserve our archaeological heritage?" I'll address both of these here.

Land Claims and Archaeology

Many people across British Columbia are fearful that revealing archaeological sites on their property will result in their land being taken away. However, this fear is generally unfounded. First, it's important to understand that many of the sites in British Columbia, and certainly *most* of the sites on Lasqueti are already known both to government archaeologists and First Nations. This is especially true for those sites along the coast line. Recorded sites are listed in a Provincial data base with formal site numbers attached to them. Thus, you don't need to worry about "bringing attention" to your site, since it likely is already part of public knowledge.

However, even though the locations of sites are generally known, sites on private land play only a minor role in First Nations land claims. First Nations include both Crown land and private property in their claim areas, but only ask that Crown land be given back to them. Compensation (monetary or otherwise) is sought in lieu of private land within the claim area. There is no legal precedent supporting the return of private land in land claims.

Further, archaeology, more generally, has played only a minor role in land claims. There are two primary reasons for this. First, since it has already been established in the courts that First Nations have been in British Columbia since "time immemorial", archaeology isn't needed to show this. The second reason relates to how difficult it is to figure out "ethnicity" from the archaeological record. Although often asked, archaeologists can rarely determine "who lived here". That is, I can not tell from the style of a projectile point whether it was made by someone from what is now the Sechelt or Nanoose First Nations. There generally just isn't enough variation in artifacts across the region to determine "who".

To my knowledge, three First Nations claim Lasqueti within their "core area". They are the Tla'Amin (Sliammon), Nanoose, and Qualicum. The core claim areas of the Sechelt and the Comox just skirt around Lasqueti.

What can we do?

The first and most important step towards preserving our archaeological heritage is for us to decide that this is something that is important. Once we *truly* decide this, the rest is relatively easy.

As I wrote last time, the best thing is to avoid *any* impact to archaeological sites, but this may not always be possible. So, if you can't move your project to a different location, consider ways to minimize impact. For instance, instead of leveling a building site by digging, bring in fill and put it on top of the archaeological deposits. Then the archaeological deposits are covered and protected.

When destruction can't be avoided, have an archaeologist excavate at least some of the site that is going to be disturbed and destroyed. (Remember from our past discussions that we can only reconstruct the history of a site if the artifacts and features are observed in their original archaeological context.) While an archaeological excavation can normally be a somewhat expensive process, I am hoping to train a "community archaeological team" to do basic archaeological excavation and note-taking on a volunteer basis. Initially, at least, this should be under my direction. I am working towards getting the appropriate archaeology permits (required by law) to make this possible. I'll keep you updated on the progress of this.

In the meantime, if you have an interest in being part of our "Lasqueti archaeology team", or have any questions about archaeology, please contact me.

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