

University of Northern British Columbia/Heiltsuk Nation/Wuikinuxv Nation 2014 Archaeology
Field School

April 29-June 8

Bella Coola and Calvert Island British Columbia

\$4600

Thanks to the generous support of the AIA Waldbaum Scholarship I was able to participate and gain experience in Dr. Farid Rahemtulla's six week field school during the spring (May/June) between Bella Coola, British Columbia and the Hakai Beach Institute (HBI) on Calvert Island focusing on shell midden excavation, field experience and mapping. Four weeks were spent on Calvert Island travelling to our site (EjTa-4, or "Four" as we call it), excavating and examining our finds in a lab space provided. The HBI is an amazing facility provided through generous contributions of the owners in order to further coastal research in numerous ecological and archaeological areas. EjTa-4 is located on traditional Heiltsuk and Wuikinuxv Nation territory and we had the awesome experience of meeting elders from both nations, listening to oral histories and seeing the context they provided while at the site and in the lab.

Our days began at 7am when the breakfast bell rang. We would eat, make lunches and head to the dock to board Lunds (small boats with outboard motors) for the 10-15 minute trip to EjTa-4. Upon approach, the site looks like a narrow beach and a tall embankment a large bay area leading up to it. The entire embankment is the result of more or less continuous occupation for the past 9,000 years. Our work pattern was six days on, one day off every week. We would set up our tripod screens made of driftwood either on the beach or in the bay depending on the tide and on the few days the pump failed to start, we bucketed water. Dr. Rahemtulla chose to open up a new unit adjacent to an old one from the year before which was the deepest unit at this site with a depth of 4.7 meters (.5 meters deeper than Namu, the oldest occupation site on the Northwest Coast). Given the dense coastal forest and high water tables, we ran into water at about 3.5 meters, which resulted in some serious bailing efforts. Ultimately we achieved a depth of 4.9 meters (still not to the bottom of the midden) through rotating excavating teams daily. Some artifacts include stone and shell beads, worked bone, harpoon arming points, lithic flakes and bi-facial tools. A mystery of the site is the reason for abandonment or decreased presence approximately 400 years ago.

Learning to excavate a deep shell midden has particular challenges. The changes in layers can be so minute that we missed a few (i.e crushed shell to ground shell) and had to correct the level forms at the lab: rates of accumulation are extremely variable. This complex stratigraphy demonstrates the dynamic nature and life of shell middens and it was extremely valuable to learn first hand how to draw profiles of this difficult stratigraphy.

While in Bella Coola for the second portion of the field school, we were exposed to mapping techniques, data entry and multiple field trips to local schools, ceremonies and the petroglyphs. This field school put me in the path of several prominent Northwest Coast archaeologists and First Nations including Daryl Fedje, Duncan McLaren, Quentin Mackie, Elroy White and Jennifer Walkus who were more than happy to share experience, knowledge, methods and invite us to their projects. Also, Nuxalk, Heiltsuk and Wuikinuxv elders, artists and

teachers, including Alvin Mack and "Auntie" Eve who contributed to our understanding of the area, its traditions and Indigenous methods of viewing time, space and history that were beneficial to our overall involvement and participation. This field school helped many of us realize the importance of utilizing and including oral traditions and perspectives when practicing archaeology more than any book or article in a classroom. This field school demonstrates the importance of building good relationships and maintaining an open dialogue with First Nations. First hand experience is key when it comes to bridging knowledge and cultural gaps, especially when both parties have important knowledge and insight.

As an aspiring archaeologist who lives in an environment saturated in deep history, this field school provided the perfect combination of contextually based experience and opportunities to interact with people I would not have otherwise had the privilege of meeting. This field school takes place in the most spectacular locations in British Columbia with narrow valleys, wide channels, dense forests, abundant wildlife and amazing people who share the interest of learning and expanding their ways of knowing and perspectives. Thank you to the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship Fund without which this field school and experience would not have been possible.



Looking East down Kwakshua Channel at the end of the HBI dock in the morning.



Mt. Buxton in the background of this view during high tide: the midden is directly behind.



Surveying and mapping exercise with Abney Levels and stadia rods in Bella Coola.



How to load a crew boat at low tide: slide the gear on tote lids down the gangplank: very time efficient!