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Dating the Scowlitz site

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UP-DATE ON SCOWLITZ

DATING THE SCOWLITZ SITE

by Michael Blake, Gary Coupland, and Brian Thom

One of the central aims of the 1992 Scowlitz Project [see *The Midden*, Oct 1992] was to establish the age of the burial mounds and cairns at the site. This is extremely important because so few burial mounds and cairn sites have been securely dated in the Northwest Coast Culture Area. Two or three sites with burial mounds or cairns on Vancouver Island have been dated (K. Capes, 1964; G. Keddie, 1984, B. Smart, pers. comm, 1992), but as far as we know, none from the B.C. mainland have ever been dated. As a result, we could only speculate about the chronological place of such important burial mound sites as the one at Hatzic, excavated by Charles Hill-Tout 100 years ago. We know little of their importance in Coast Salish prehistory and their relationship to the Vancouver Island mortuary complex.

The 1992 excavations at the Scowlitz Site (DhR1 16), at the mouth of the Harrison River near Chilliwack, produced a number of radiocarbon samples that have now been dated and may help to answer some of these questions. Although analysis is still far from complete, we present the dates obtained so far from the 1992 fieldwork. At present, we have several dates from three distinct contexts at the Scowlitz Site: Mound 1, Mound 23, and water-logged artifacts from the beach.

Mound 1.

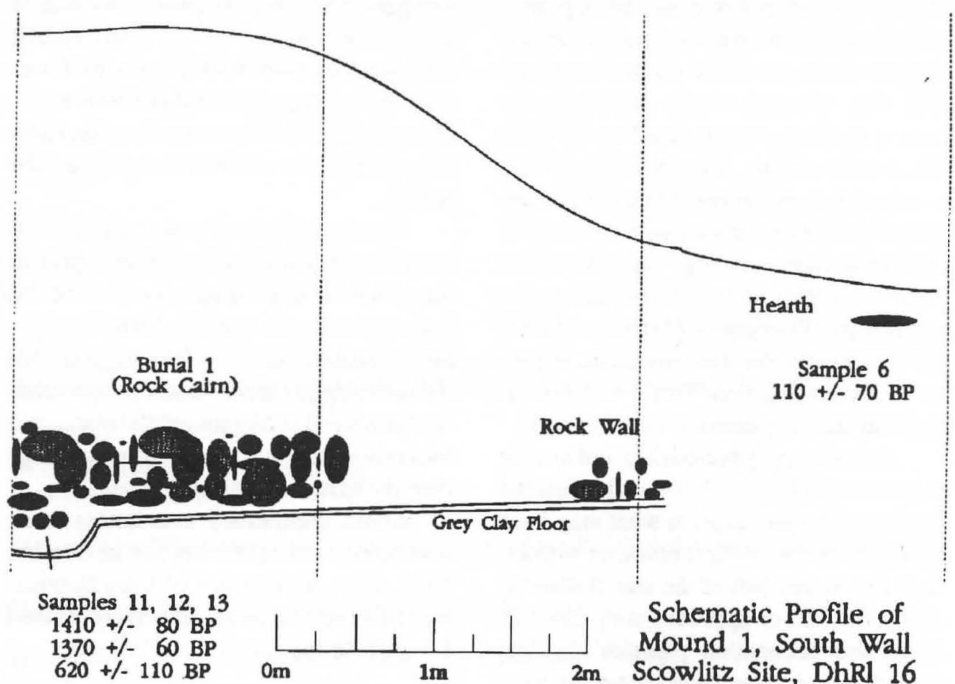
Four dates have been obtained from Mound 1, the largest mound at the site. Charcoal from a hearth that was found just below the surface at the base of the mound dated to 110 ± 70 BP and must represent an Historic Period occupation at the site. The other three samples are from the burial located deep within the core of the mound. The most important date is an accelerator date of a fragment of human bone. Its age is 1370 ± 60 BP. In addition, a piece of charcoal found next to the cranium dated to 1410 ± 80 years of age. These two dates, taken together, provide a strong indication

that the individual in Mound 1 died and was buried sometime between AD 460 and AD 640. Mound 1's construction could be placed somewhere in the transition between the Skamel Culture Type (500 BC-AD 500) and the Canyon Culture Type (AD 500-1800) of the Fraser Canyon, or between the Marpole Culture type (400 BC-AD 400) and the Gulf of Georgia Culture type (AD 400-1800) of the Coast.

We also obtained a date from material that appeared to be some sort of cedar bark matting or container surrounding the burial.

Mound 23

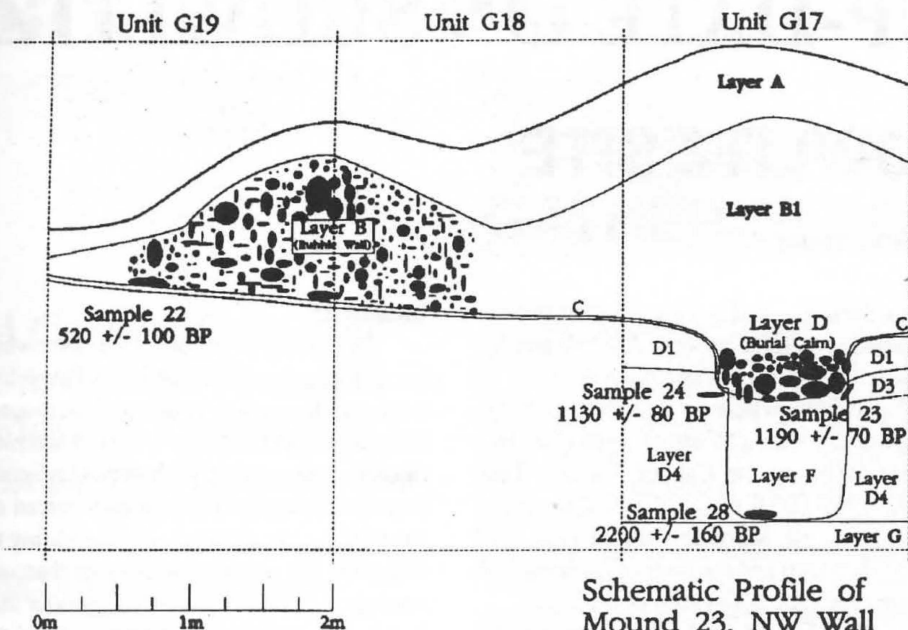
The dating of Mound 23 is somewhat more difficult because the human skeleton buried in the cairn in the heart of the mound did not preserve. We took several samples of carbon associated with distinctive construction features of the mound instead of the burial. One of these samples, dating to 520 ± 100 BP, was from a piece of charcoal resting on a yellowish sandy-clay floor that had been laid down just before the mound was built. Since this floor was incorporated into the burial pit and the cairn, it was likely



A sample of this material dated to 620 ± 110 BP making it several centuries more recent than the burial. If the dating is correct, then this sample must have been from rootlet matting that accumulated later in the cairn surrounding the skeleton. Dates from a small sample of leather and a sample of abalone shell included in the burial offering should eventually help to pinpoint the date of burial.

part of the mortuary construction and contemporary with the burial itself. The sample was covered by a rubble retaining wall that outlined the square-shaped mound. Though it could date the actual mound construction, because of its closeness to the edge of the mound from which it was taken, this sample is likely an intrusion from a later time.

Two other dates obtained may be more



Schematic Profile of Mound 23, NW Wall Scowlitz Site, DhRl 16

relevant. The burial pit in Mound 23 cut through one layer of charcoal that appeared to be associated with an occupation surface that pre-dated the burial mound construction. This charcoal, clearly underlying the yellow sand-clay layer, dated to 1190 ± 70 BP. A third sample, dated to 1130 ± 80 BP, was from a charcoal concentration that appeared directly associated with the rocks of the burial cairn and may date the actual burial. Together, these last two dates give an age-range from about AD 690 to AD 900 for the occupation that immediately preceded the construction of the burial mound, and may actually date the burial as well.

A more deeply buried charcoal sample was recovered from a layer well below the bottom of the burial pit in what may have been one of the earliest house or midden deposits on that part of the site. It dated to 2200 ± 160 BP, or approximately 250 BC. Since this occupation predates the first mound, we may have found an earlier occupation that preceded the mortuary mound-building complex.

Water-logged deposits

In March 1992, prior to the burial mound excavations, we discovered some water-logged artifacts on the beach of the Harrison River (DhRl 16w) just upstream from the burial mound complex. One of these, a wooden-hafted slate knife, was extremely well-preserved (see cover of *The Midden*, June 1992). A minute sample of

the wood from the handle radiocarbon dated using the AMS method, produced a date of 1180 ± 70 BP (AD 770). This would make it contemporary with the charcoal in the floors underlying Mound 23, and provides a nice chronological link between the main habitation/burial site and the waterlogged deposits.

Another sample of waterlogged wood found in direct association with a basket on the beach several meters away from the hafted stone knife, dated to 580 ± 70 BP, or approximately AD 1370. This suggests that the waterlogged deposits were accumulating for several centuries and the associated basket may be considerably younger in age than the hafted stone knife.

Some preliminary assessment work was carried out at the wet site in October 1992 under the direction of Kitty Bernick, with more investigations tentatively planned for the near future.

Conclusions

The dating of the features and deposits at the Scowlitz Site is beginning to provide some fascinating insights into the time period and extent of the burial mound/cairn complex in B.C. It appears that there was an occupation of the site spanning at least the past 2200 years. However, the two burial mounds that have been excavated so far fall within the past 1500 years. If the dating is correct, this means that the burial mound/cairn complex developed at about the tran-

sition from the Marpole phase of the Coast (or Skamel phase for the Fraser Canyon region), and continued until about 500 years ago. Mound burial practices seem to have died out throughout the Fraser River region before the Historic Period since mound burials were never reported ethnographically, and a range of other mortuary techniques were commonly used.

Capes' work in the Comox Valley seems to suggest the mortuary mound-building complex began earlier on Vancouver Island. If so, perhaps its origins could be associated with the social and political developments of the Marpole Phase. Questions concerning the antiquity, geographic extent, and range of variation in this mortuary complex remain to be fully answered although work at Scowlitz has provided a footing from which to proceed. It is an important part of the past of the Salish peoples; a part that we must try to conserve and understand before any more of these sites are destroyed.

Computer generated profiles by Brian Thom.

Dr Michael Blake is a professor at U.B.C. and led investigations at the 1992 field school at Scowlitz, along with Dr Gary Coupland from the University of Toronto. Brian Thom was part of the research team gathering data for his MA at U.B.C.

Radiocarbon dates from the Scowlitz Site (DhRI 16).

Samples were dated by Beta Analytic, Inc. Samples with a CAMS number were sent by Beta to Cambridge University for accelerator dating (AMS). All dates are uncalibrated.

Sample number	DhRI carbon sample no.	Provenience	C-14 age BP \pm one sigma	Radiocarbon years BC/AD	Material and context
Beta-56198	6	Mound 1, K17,	110 \pm 70	AD 1840	charcoal from a hearth located at the base of the mound
Beta-56199	11	Mound 1, Burial 1	1410 \pm 80	AD 540	charcoal sitting beside cranium of Burial 1
Beta-56200 CAMS-3830	12	Mound 1, Burial 1	1370 \pm 60	AD 580	human bone sample from individual in Burial 1
Beta-56201	13	Mound 1, Burial 1	620 \pm 110	AD 1330	bark or root fibres underlying Burial 1
Beta-56202	22	Mound 23, G19	520 \pm 100	AD 1430	charcoal sample under rubble wall and resting on top of yellow sand C-layer floor
Beta-56204	24	Mound 23, Burial 1, level 2	1130 \pm 80	AD 820	charcoal below yellow sand C-layer floor and resting beside cairn boulders
Beta-56217	23	Mound 23, G17	1190 \pm 70	AD 760	charcoal below yellow sand C-layer floor
Beta-57218	28	Mound 23, G17	2200 \pm 160	250 BC	charcoal from layer F, a floor below the burial
Beta-56206 CAMS-3831	38	Water-logged deposit, beach	1180 \pm 70	AD 770	wooden knife handle (DhRI 16w:1).
Beta-57219	40	Water-logged deposit, beach	580 \pm 70	AD 1370	cedar wood fragments in direct association with a large basket fragment (DhRI 16w:2)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

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by **BRIAN HAYDEN**

W.H. Freeman and Co: New York, 1992.
approx 469 pp, 193 illus.

Described by Marvin Harris as, "The best introductory archaeology book I have ever read."

Nemiah: The Unconquered Country

by **TERRY GLAVIN** and the **People of the Nemiah Valley**

New Star Books: Vancouver, 1992.
153 pp, 64 photos. \$24.95 (paper).

The history and culture of the Nemiah Chilcotin told against the backdrop of the Chilcotin War and ongoing struggle to maintain control of their valley.

Themes in Southwest Prehistory

GEORGE GUMERMAN, editor

School of American Research Press, 1993
370 pp, illus, maps. \$22.50 (paper)

Twenty-five authors present current thinking on environment, demography, nutrition, aggregation, abandonment and other issues in Southwest prehistory.