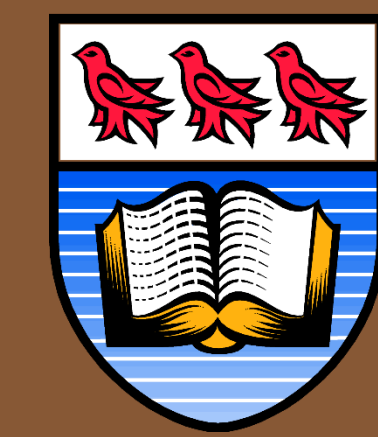


Mapping Kwakwaka'wakw Place Names

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University
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Northern Vancouver Island Archaeology Paleoecology Project

- I had the opportunity to join the NVIAPP, a project funded by the Hakai Institute and headed by my supervisor, Dr. Duncan McLaren.
- The project employs several archaeologists and focuses on the archaeology, paleoecology, and sea level change of Northern Vancouver Island during the late Pleistocene.
- The database of place names will be sent as a shapefile (for QGIS) to the NVIAPP for use in determining areas of interest and establishing additional context of existing sites.

Hunt/Boas Ethnographic Work

- Franz Boas is well known to those within the field of anthropology but probably unknown to most people. He is perhaps most well-known for establishing his theory of cultural relativism, and his extensive ethnographic fieldwork on the Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw) of North Vancouver Island and the mid-coast, documenting and 'preserving' as much of the culture as he could.
- Lesser known in the field of anthropology, and often overshadowed by Boas, is George Hunt, a Tlingit-English man who had grown up fluently speaking Tlingit and English and worked as a field liaison for Boas' research. He is now considered to have been an ethnologist and linguist in his own right.
- George Hunt grew up in Kwakwaka'wakw territory, at Fort Rupert. Here he gained many connections to Kwakwaka'wakw culture and would come to eventually marry two Kwakwaka'wakw women of high status
- Both Hunt and Boas became fluent in Kwak'wala, and after teaching Hunt to write Kwak'wala, Boas alone translated the Kwak'wala manuscripts Hunt produced on his travels
- Modern speakers of Kwak'wala now take into consideration that many of the more complex linguistic forms and metaphors of Kwak'wala were lost on Hunt and Boas as non-native speakers, producing texts that are missing the full nuance of the language.
- This means that many of the texts contain very literal translations that may have more context and meaning in Kwak'wala, which is evident in some of the more confusing place names
- The work done by Boas and Hunt continues to be reevaluated in contemporary discussions, including further examination of the ethical practices of some of their work, and the role Boas took on as the sole translator

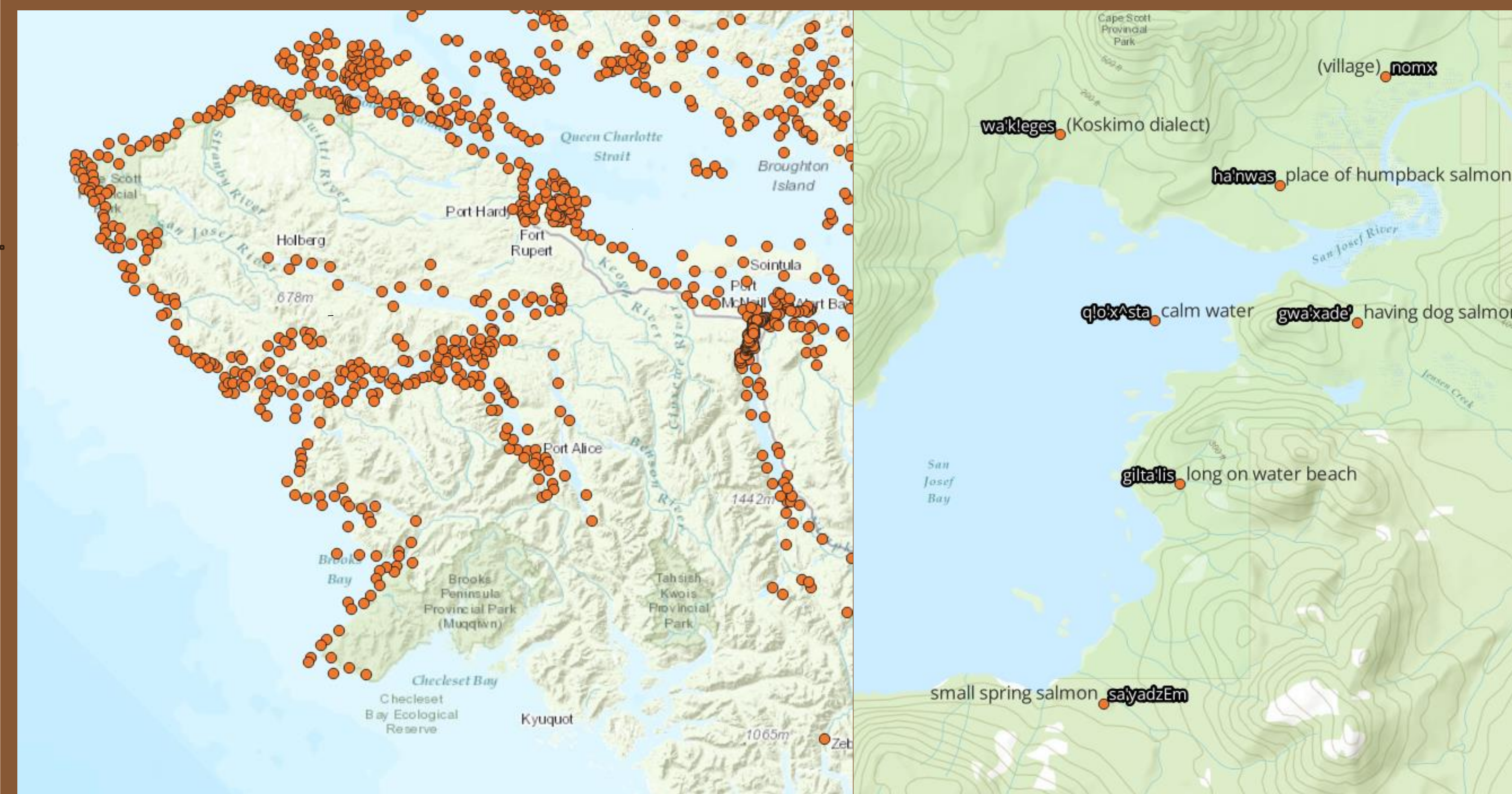


Figure 1: View of Northern Vancouver Island (Bailer, 2023).

Figure 2: View of San Josef Bay (Bailer, 2023).

Transcribing Boas Kwak'wala

- My main point of reference was the book "Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians" and the goal was to keep the names and their translations as close to the original text as possible.
- Many characters used in Boas' Kwak'wala writing system are incompatible with QGIS, so I swapped out symbols or dropped symbols when needed.
- For example: "t!E'māis – beach" would become "t!E'mais – beach".

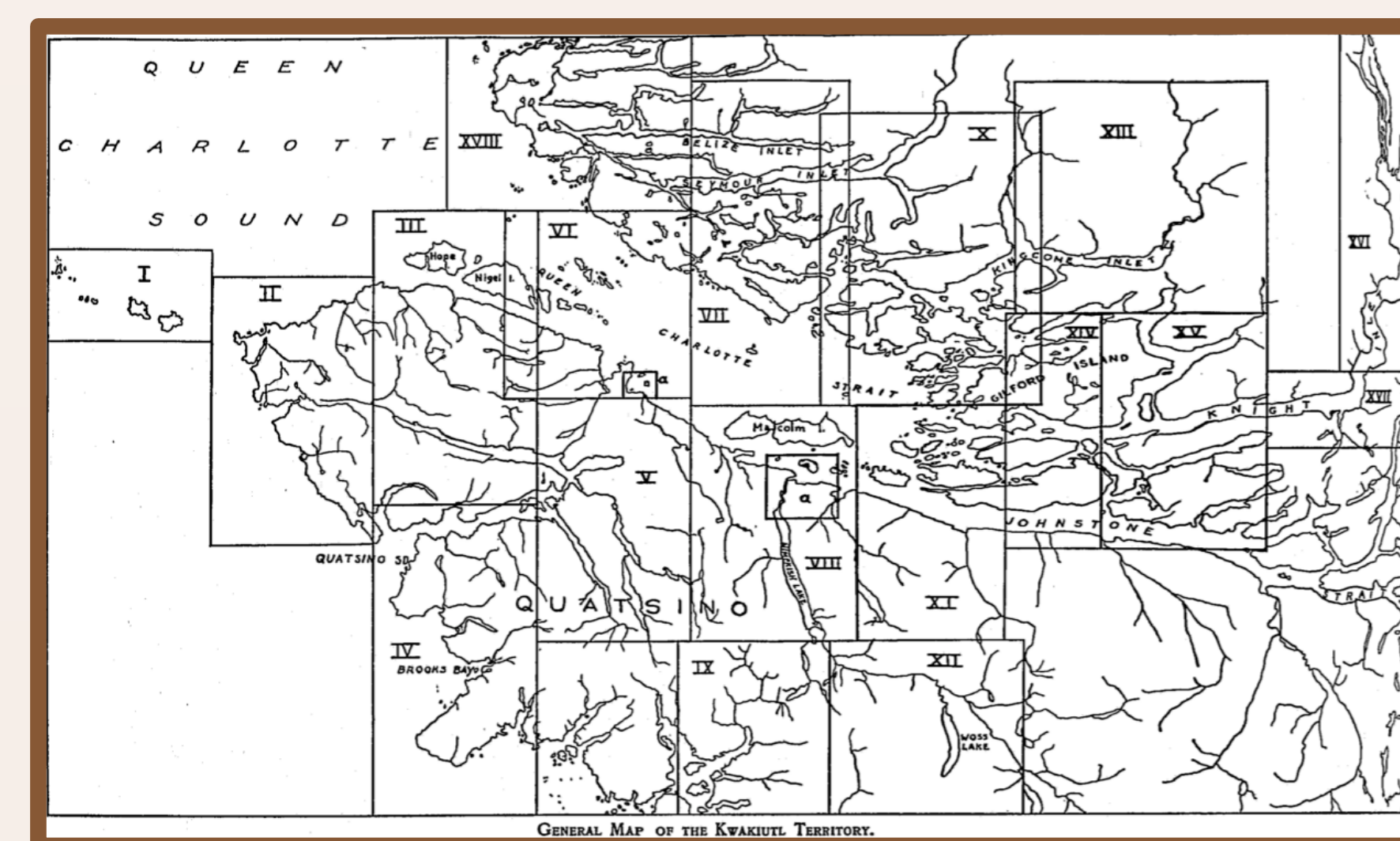


Figure 3: General Map of the Kwakiutl Territory. (Boas, 1934)

Using the Map

- The place names provide a level of context that is usually overlooked or hard to come by for archaeology sites and help with piecing together the picture of what was happening pre-contact in Kwakwaka'wakw territory.
- Many names are environmental and show where to find certain resources. These are another example of the rich history of traditional ecological knowledge collected and passed down by the Kwak'waka'wakw throughout time.
- Alongside the Boas database of placenames, the project will eventually include translations of place names provided by the U'mista Cultural Society, so the two can be viewed in tandem.
- The map is formatted as a shapefile on QGIS, meaning it can be pasted and layered over other maps with various kinds of geospatial and contextual data.
- Labels for Kwak'wala and English can be toggled on/off to be shown separately or together, and filters can be used to show only points from certain areas or with the same names

Discussion

- The trend seems to be that place names are a mix of practical or descriptive place names and names that likely have non-literal or metaphorical meanings, as seen below at Lawn Point.
- For example: ko'x^dEmis – site of lukewarm water on beach, is a translation with a likely literal meaning, describing the environment of the place, while me'matolis – to lie end to end, was marked with a question mark, and it's possible that it has a metaphorical or non-literal meaning in Kwak'wala that Boas was missing.
- Further contemporary research could be focused around expanding on or verifying the translations done by Boas.



Figure 4: View of Lawn Point Provincial Park (Bailer, 2023).

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