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Spirit camp

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# SPIRIT CAMP

BY SANDRA MORRISON,  
HEATHER MYLES, and BRIAN THOM

Approximately six kilometre north of Chilliwack, on the northern shore of the Fraser River, lies Calamity Point, a cleared grassy terrace overlooking the confluence of the Fraser and Harrison Rivers. Maple and cedar trees intermingled with overgrown bushes hug the slope down to the river's edge, while 50 meters behind the terrace the forest begins its steep climb up Harrison Knob.

This picturesque site has been designated by the provincial archaeology branch as DhRl 25, but very little about the depth and extent of the site's components were known until this summer.

Historically, Calamity Point was the location of a farming settlement. Today, all that remains of this chapter of the site's history is the cleared terrace and abandoned farmhouses. Prehistorically, the extent of the site's use is yet unknown, but its ideal location on the Fraser

River strongly suggests that Calamity Point was a valuable salmon harvesting and processing site.

Sto:lo oral tradition says that this site is where the traditional fishing technique of dip-netting originated. Also, it is the only area along the lower Fraser where one can effectively wind dry salmon. Taken together, these aspects suggest that this site would have made an excellent location for numerous economic activities and social gatherings.

Calamity Point may also be an extension of the neighbouring Scowlitz site (DhRl 16) which lies 100 metres north along the shore of the Harrison River. Several burial mounds similar to those present at Scowlitz (Morrison and Myles, 1992) also exist at Calamity Point.

In late July of 1994 the Sto:lo Nation

were using this site as the location of their "Spirit Camp," a program for children to learn about traditional cultural ways from their elders. This program included not only the instruction of salmon harvesting and processing, but also the construction of a contemporary Coast Salish pithouse. It was through this activity that the site's underlying cultural deposits were discovered. While



*The archaeology crew examine the stratigraphy of the excavation cut into the pithouse wall (photo credit: Ann Mohs).*

digging the pithouse, the workers unearthed artifacts such as large pebble tools, choppers, cores, and vast amounts of utilised flakes.

We were invited to the site to try to answer questions such as how deep the deposits were, how old the site was, and what its relationship to the Scowlitz site was. Upon our arrival at the Spirit Camp site, we found the pithouse, designed to be 30 feet in diameter and 6 feet deep, almost halfway to completion. Distinct dark cultural layers were clearly visible in the pithouse profile, and the backdirt piles were littered with artifacts. It was clear to us that an exploration of the site was necessary. Due to the urgency of the situation, Gordon Mohs, on behalf of the Sto:lo Nation, requested an immediate investigation.

## Methodology

Because of the limited time available—construction on the pithouse was still in progress—we decided the most efficient way to recover information would be to take advantage of the already excavated hole. In order to get a clear picture of the stratigraphy we shaved back the pithouse wall. To determine the site's cultural and depositional history without

further disturbing the site, it seemed best to excavate a 1m x 30cm cut in the pithouse wall. We stopped excavation of the test cut when we reached the bottom of the contemporary pithouse, 165 cm below the surface.

Our test excavation exposed four distinct, thick cultural layers. To determine the complete depth of these deposits, we sank an exploratory shovel-test pit into the floor of the contemporary pithouse. We exposed two more cultural layers before we reached

sterile glacial fluvial deposits at 285 cm below the surface.

## Deposits and Stratigraphy

Deposits from both the cut and test pit indicated a continuous cultural occupation from the surface to the interface of the sterile glacial deposits. This was determined not only through the recovery of artifacts and lithic debris, but also by the extent of charcoal present, unidentified animal bone fragments, organic material, and fire-cracked rock throughout the deposits. Several charcoal samples were taken for radiocarbon dating.

## Artifacts

We recovered total of 59 tools and 407 flakes of debitage from the test excavations. Additional artifacts were found in

the backdirt from the construction of the Spirit Camp pithouse. Based on the types and quantity of artifacts found in the *in situ* deposits of DhR1 25, the Charles Culture (circa 5000 to 3500 BP) appears to be an important component of the site

Seven different tool types were found in the six layers excavated. The disturbed backdirt revealed a range of artifacts— notably pebble and flake tools, beads, a few projectile points, and a well-formed grinding stone or dish—but because these artifacts had no definite archaeological provenience, they were not considered to the extent of the tools and debitage found in the test excavations. Since this investigation took place, Sto:lo workers have been slowly sifting through the backdirt piles and have recovered over ten thousand artifacts. The exact number has not yet been tabulated.

#### Tools from DhR1 25

##### Shaped Tools

Ground stone disk beads	26
Quartz crystal microliths	6
Leaf-shaped biface	1
Chipped adze (preform)	1

##### Unshaped Tools

Utilised flakes	16
Retouched flakes	7
Cores	2

<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>
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#### Tools

The overall lack of ground stone (particularly ground slate knives and ground stone points) and the abundance of pebble and flake tools, suggest that these deposits are very old. Ground stone tools are usually found in sites dating 3500 BP and later—after the Charles Culture.

However, ground-stone technology was not completely absent, as evidenced by the presence of the many ground stone disk beads. Ground stone beads, predominately made from mudstone, are abundant in other Charles Culture components at other sites (specifically Crescent Beach, DgRr 1), but are absent from older, pre-5000 BP Old Cordilleran deposits (Thom, 1991). Twenty-four of the twenty-six beads found in the *in situ* deposits at DhR1 25, were of mudstone, and the remaining two made from slate. The proportion of mudstone beads to slate beads strengthens the suggestion that the site's lower

deposits date to the Charles Culture.

The deposits in the lowest level of the test pit were extremely sparse, disclosing only a few flake tools. These deposits sit on very compact glacial fluvial outwash, and may be somewhat older than those found in the dense cultural matrix above.

Generally, we see an increase in utilised and retouched flake tools in the lower deposits. These expedient flake tools may have simply been a factor of the relative thickness of the deposits, or of site function. They could also suggest the antiquity of the site. Comparing percentages of flake tools from this site with those from two other Charles Culture sites—Hatzic Rock and Crescent Beach—similar relative proportions of flake tools appear (see Matson et al, 1991; Mason, 1994). This would suggest a Charles Component at DhR1 25 as well.

The other tools found include a small leaf-shaped basalt biface; a chipped nephrite adze preform; two small pebble cores, and several quartz crystal microliths. Though not diagnostic of any specific period or phase, all are found in other Charles Culture assemblages. The quartz crystal microliths are common at the nearby Scowlitz site, and may have been used in fish-processing as hafted cutting tools. This would provide further evidence to the site's use as a fish processing location.

#### Debitage

An interesting pattern emerges from the lithic debitage. Basalt and andesite dominate as raw material types, but as the deposits become older, more widely varied materials were used. Often these sources are higher quality stone tool-making materials, such as jasper and chert. Although the changes in raw material types over time cannot directly tell us anything of the age of the deposits, this use of a lesser grade material over time is an interesting trend which should be investigated further in future excavations at this site. This trend could be significant as a marker of relative age among archaeological sites in this region.

After analysis and cataloguing, all artifacts and matrix samples recovered from the site were returned to the Sto:lo.

#### Summary and Conclusions

That we were digging through midden deposits was verified by the stratigraphy and artifacts recovered from the excavations at Calamity Point. The large amount of fire-cracked rock in every layer, the high density of flake debitage recovered, the site's prominent location

overlooking the confluence of two major salmon rivers, and its proximity to the Scowlitz site, supports ethnographic accounts that Calamity point was once used as a seasonal fishing camp.

It seems highly possible that this area is an extension of the Scowlitz site. Based upon available evidence, the Spirit Camp site appears to extend further back into time than the neighbouring Scowlitz. The Scowlitz mounds date from between 1410±80 years BP to 1130±80 years BP, and the artifacts recovered from the mound-fill suggest a date around 2500 years BP. This estimate is supported by a carbon sample taken from a floor below the burial in Mound 23 which dates to 2200±160 BP (Blake et al, 1993). These dates suggest that Scowlitz may have been used from late Locarno Beach to late Marpole times.

With the indication of an older, Charles Culture phase present at Spirit Camp, the site's importance grows considerably. Such a long continuous occupation provides the opportunity for the study of *in situ* evolution of complex societies on the Northwest Coast.

There is still a great deal to be learned from this site, information we were unable to garner from one day of excavations. Our main question, that of antiquity, still remains unanswered. Although we have speculated on the age of the site from the visual evidence, it is necessary to have radiocarbon tests conducted to determine with any certainty the existence of a Charles culture component. Yet, this brief investigation has broadened our perspective of the area surrounding the Scowlitz site, and has added to the available data needed for further research.

It has also generated new and important hypotheses about the history of the Sto:lo people in this area. If indeed this is one huge village site as we suspect, its critical location on the Fraser would have made it a powerful village in the area, one that should be studied. The sacred territory of the Scowlitz mounds and the prosperous village adjacent to it would have made this location just as significant in prehistory as it appears to archaeologists today.

Following our excavations at Calamity Point, we learned from Gordon Mohs, Heritage Consultant for the Sto:lo, that because of the site's significance, the Sto:lo Nation halted construction of the pit house. As a result, future studies are now possible at this site which we believe will continue to

# NEWS ITEMS

## LITHIC WORKSHOP

This summer from August 14th to 25th, 1995 at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, there will be a workshop in lithic analysis. The workshop will be offered as Anthro 486 or Anthro 586 by the Department of Anthropology in collaboration with the Faculty of Extension. Students may receive graduate or undergraduate credit. Registration will be limited to 12.

The workshop will be instructed by Dr. Sheila Coulson from the Institutt for Arkeologi, Kunsthistorie og Numismatik at the University of Oslo. Topics covered will include experimental replication and refitting; illustration and documentation of refitting; sequences and production methods, identification of raw materials, applications to analysis.

Participants will be expected to work on their own collections from an excavated site. For further information, please contact:

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## ARTIFACT IDENTIFICATION

Again this year the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology (MOA) will hold artifact identification clinics. Knowledgeable professional museum staff will identify and offer advice on objects brought in. In order to have staff on hand familiar with the area or type of object in question,

expand, not only in size, but in importance. A report outlining the findings from this excavation is on file with the Sto:lo Nation.

Sandra Morrison is in the first year of the M.A. programme at the University of British Columbia and is focusing on Fraser Valley archaeology. Heather Myles received her B.A. in anthropology at U.B.C. and is currently involved in contract archaeology. Brian Thom is completing his M.A. at U.B.C. and is presently working with the Sto:lo Nation conducting ethnographic research.

reservations will be necessary at the clinics this year. To find out about that curious object that you found, or to get more information about something that has been in the family for years, take the object and your stories to the MOA. Please note that the museum does not give financial appraisals.

There is no charge to attend the clinics. Plan a visit to the museum while you're there. On Tuesdays it's open until 9:00 pm and admission is free. The clinics are scheduled between 7:00 and 8:30 in room 217 at MOA on the fourth Tuesday of the month on January 24th, and March 28th. Call (604) 822-5087 to reserve a place.

## ARCHAEOLOGY INTERNSHIPS

The Crow Canyon Archaeological Center in south-western Colorado is offering a total of 10 research internships for advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate students this year. The interns accepted will include four in field excavation techniques, two in field survey techniques, four in laboratory techniques, and two in environmental archaeology dealing with archaeobotanical techniques.

Room and board is provided in the way of tents and meals at the Center's dining hall. A modest stipend is given interns to help defray other minor living expenses. Course credit for internships is not offered, but may be arranged through the student's home institution. A travel allowance of up to \$350 (US) is available.

Deadline for application is March 3,

1995. Further information and application forms may be requested from:

Crow Canyon Archaeological Center  
23390 County Road K  
Cortez, Colorado 81321 USA  
Tel. (303) 565-8975

## KEATLEY CREEK FILM

"The Life and Death of the Classic Lillooett Culture" is a 45-mm documentary film produced by Simon Fraser University. The film examines a complex hunter/gather/fisher culture on the Northwest Plateau of British Columbia, and investigates how a hierarchical society emerged defined by rich and poor classes, slavery, ownership of land, and other cultural usually identified with an "advanced" society.

Presented from an archaeological perspective, the film examines the sudden collapse of a series of prehistoric villages in the Northwest Plateau near Lillooet, B.C. Archaeologists are shown excavating, interpreting archaeological matrix, and analyzing faunal, botanical and lithic remains. The film demonstrates how Native traditions, subsistence practices and values are integral to understanding events and cultures of the past.

Although a hefty price at \$249, the film makes an excellent supplement to courses on Interior B.C. cultures. The film is available from New Vision Media Ltd., 12140 Horseshoe Way - #150, Richmond, B.C., V7A 4V3. Tel. 275-7910 or 1-800-667-1500; Fax 275-7910. Contact them for a preview, or for purchase information.

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