Archaeological Research in Nootka Territory: Barkley Sound to the Alberni Valley

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The Nootka were the native occupants of Vancouver Island's rugged west coast and the adjacent tip of the Olympic Peninsula. Their highly maritime way of life, including the whale hunt and its associated ritualism, has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Prior to the recent expansion of archaeological activity on the Northwest Coast, models of prehistory were primarily drawn from the relatively extensive ethnographic literature. The Nootka figured prominently in such schemes, being seen by several writers as retaining relatively intact the basic pattern of Northwest Coast culture (Drucker, 1955b:69; Borden, 1951:39).

The prehistoric development to this ethnographic culture was, however, virtually unknown. While little archaeological research has yet taken place in Nootka territory, in a few locations a picture is beginning to emerge. In particular, the excavations at Yuquot and Hesquiat on Vancouver Island and at Ozette on the Olympic Peninsula are providing detailed local chronological sequences.

This article describes results of field-work carried out in the summers of 1973 to 1975, directed by the author and Denis St. Claire. In the first two seasons, field-work was centred on the excavation of a prehistoric site at the head of Alberni Inlet (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a). During the most recent field season, archaeological site inventory was carried out by the author in the Alberni Valley and along Alberni Inlet (McMillan, 1975a, b) and D. St. Claire in Barkley Sound (St. Claire, 1975). Previous archaeological field-work in the study area consists only of several partial inventories in Barkley Sound, particularly of the Broken Group of Islands (White, 1974) and the Bamfield area (Abbott, 1963); test excavation at a trench embankment site near Bamfield (Buxton, 1969); a partial survey of Sproat Lake (Keddie, 1971); and informal surface collecting and site recording by John Sendey of the Alberni Valley Museum.

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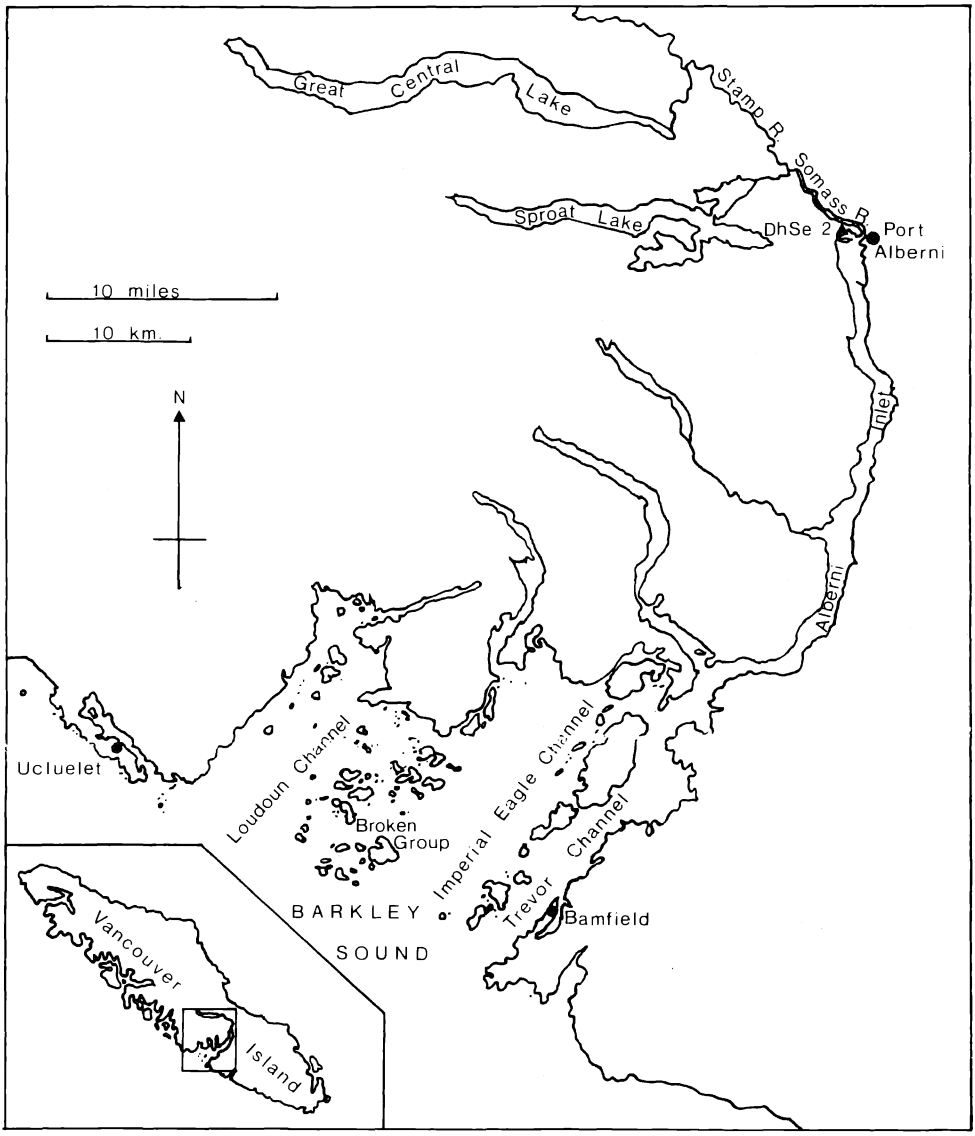

FIGURE 27. The Barkley Sound — Alberni Inlet area of Vancouver Island, showing the location of the Shoemaker Bay site (DhSe 2).

THE STUDY AREA

Barkley Sound is the most southerly large coastal indentation on the west side of Vancouver Island. It is a roughly rectangular embayment, approximately 24 km wide, broken into three channels (Loudoun, Imperial Eagle, and Trevor) by two major island groups (Figure 27). A number of long, narrow, steep-sided inlets extend from the north of the sound into the rugged interior of Vancouver Island. Alberni Inlet, by far the largest of these, extends for 40 km into the centre of the island, cutting through the entire width of the central mountains.

Alberni Valley, at the head of the inlet, is nestled between the Beaufort Range and the main Vancouver Island Range. This is an area of fairly low relief, extending northwest from the head of Alberni Inlet for a maximum of about 30 km, with a width of about 8 km. The valley gradually rises from sea level at the inlet to about 460 m at the northwestern end (Fyles, 1963:5). Major rivers draining the valley include the Stamp and Sproat, joining to form the Somass, which enters the head of Alberni Inlet. These are primarily fed by the two long, narrow lakes, Sproat and Great Central, which lie among the mountains to the west of the valley.

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Five Nootka-speaking bands were the historic occupants of Barkley Sound. The Ucluelet held their main winter village territory at the western entrance to the sound around Ucluelet Inlet; the Toquaht were in Toquart Bay; the Uchucklesaht around Uchucklesit Inlet; the Ohiaht in Bamfield and Sarita areas on the east of the sound; and the Sheshaht in the Broken Group of islands and on the adjacent central shoreline. Each also claimed widely scattered specific resource sites. No single major political unit or confederacy developed in Barkley Sound, unlike other areas in Nootka territory where there was a general correspondence of geographic and political units (Drucker, 1951:10). Shifting alliances and occasional lengthy periods of warfare characterized inter-group relationships (Swadesh, 1948).

The economic cycle of the Barkley Sound groups was heavily dependent upon diversified marine resources. The differential distribution and seasonal nature of most of these resources require considerable seasonal movement. Group composition fluctuated with this cycle, ranging from small family units at the fall fishing stations and other specific resource sites to large population aggregates at the major villages. It is clear from

this ethnographic pattern that site seasonality poses major problems in archaeological interpretation (of. Abbott, 1972).

By the historic period, the Sheshaht had extended their territory to include the rich salmon fishery of the lower Somass River at the head of Alberni Inlet, and also held a number of small fishing stations along the inlet. Their arrival in the Alberni Valley was a relatively recent event, possibly occurring as late as just prior to the historic period (Boas, 1890: 584; Drucker, 1950:157, 1951:5; Sproat, 1868:179). Our Sheshaht informants affirmed this tradition and described an alliance with the Ohiaht to seize this new territory. The Sheshaht occupation continued to be seasonal, with most of the year spent in Barkley Sound, until well into the historic period. The upper sections of the rivers and the inland lakes in the Alberni Valley were left to their less maritime Opetchesaht neighbours.

The Opetchesaht are the sixth Nootka-speaking band in the study area. Their traditions maintain that they have always lived along the lakes and rivers of the Alberni Valley, venturing down the Alberni Inlet to Barkley Sound only in the historic period. They differed from other Nootkan groups in being primarily adapted to lake, river and forest resources, with deer and elk playing major roles in the diet. Lengthy hunting trips to the interior were important in the traditional economic pattern. Such excursions took hunters well within the territory of the Coast Salish on the east side of Vancouver Island, and contact, usually hostile, was common with the Comox and Nanaimo Salish.

The Opetchesaht themselves are likely to have been Salishan speakers prior to the late arrival of the Sheshaht. Boas' (1890:584) Opetchesaht informants claimed that the language of their grandfathers was Nanaimo. Sapir (1915:19), from linguistic traits he considered Salishan remnants in Opetchesaht speech, associated the original dialect with Pentlatch, a now-extinct Salishan language.

This ethnographic and linguistic indication of Salishan occupation prior to Nootkan arrival in the Alberni Valley provided a specific focus for archaeological investigation. A major goal of excavation was to ascertain whether a prehistoric site in the Alberni Valley would show closest affinities to other excavated sites in ethnographic Nootka territory or to known archaeological cultures on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

The site survey of Barkley Sound and Alberni Inlet was conducted by boat, giving total coverage of the shoreline. Midden sites were most easily

discernible, but an effort was made to locate non-midden occupation sites as well. In the Alberni Valley, survey was centred on the major waterways — the Somass, Sproat and Stamp Rivers, and Sproat Lake.

Types of archaeological sites occurring in the study area are shown in Table 7. While most were recorded in 1975, the results of earlier inventories are also incorporated. The two sites at the head of Alberni Inlet are included in the Alberni Valley entry. One Alberni Inlet site, consisting of historic house ruins with no archaeological deposit, is omitted, as are a number of historically known occupation areas associated with the late dogfish oil trade, which have left no archaeological trace. Each category is briefly described in the succeeding sections.

TABLE 7

Recorded Sites in the Barkley Sound — Alberni Inlet Area

	Barkley Sound	*Alberni Inlet*	*Alberni Valley*
Middens	65	5	15
Defensive Sites	3	0	0
Surface Artifacts	0	0	18
Burial Sites	14	0	2
Fish Traps	7	1	1
Petroglyphs	0	0	2
TOTALS	89	6	38

Middens

The islands and bays of Barkley Sound provided both sheltered village locations and easy access to marine resources. The high site density in the sound, particularly in such areas as the Broken Group, reflects this fact. Large shell-midden sites, many 100-200 m in length and with an apparent depth of 2-3 m are conspicuous features of the modern landscape. House-platforms are evident on a few sites, and many display the debris of recent occupation. At least one site (DeSh 1), on Ohiaht Reserve No. 9 near Bamfield, has structural remains of a traditional longhouse still standing in heavy vegetation. A 1902 photograph (Scott, 1972:141) shows an intact house frame, in front of which stand two large carved anthropomorphic figures, now on display in the British Columbia Provincial Museum. A fortress site is immediately adjacent to this village.

The important Sheshaht village of Equis (I.R. #8), just north of the Broken Group, will serve as an example of large midden sites. It actually is two adjacent middens, with approximate dimensions of 120 x 30 m and 145 x 40 m respectively (St. Claire, 1975:13). Informants maintain that both were occupied at the same time of the year, by different septs of the Sheshaht. According to O'Reilly (1883), this was historically one of the principal Sheshaht villages, important for its abundant shellfish and a small salmon fishery, and as a sealing and dogfish station. Rock tidal fish-traps are still evident between islets off the site.

An abundance of impressive sites like that found in Barkley Sound is lacking along Alberni Inlet. The rugged, fiord-like nature of this waterway prohibits concentrations of sites, but even where suitable locations exist sites are very small and shallow, and appear to be recent. They also contain very little shell.

Ethnographically, these inlet sites were fishing stations, and were associated either with the late arrival of the Sheshaht in the Alberni area or with the historic participation of the Opetchesaht in such activities as the dogfish oil trade. The Ucluelets also held a salmon fishing station, which they obtained by warfare at a relatively late time period (Swadesh, 1948:78).

In the Alberni Valley, only one site at the end of the inlet and one on the lower Somass River could be termed shell-middens. However, a number of sites are characterized by a matrix of dark soil with abundant fire-cracked rock. Such deposits are frequently exposed along river banks, where continual erosion also results in surface artifact finds. Abrasive stones are by far the most common implements recovered, but examples of a groundstone industry, particularly ground-slate artifacts, also occur. Less frequent are small chipped basalt projectile points and historic items. A number of such sites, all on the Somass and Sproat Rivers, were seasonally occupied as fishing villages well into the historic period.

Defensive Sites

Midden deposits on high bluffs or promontories are considered defensive or refuge sites. Defensive structures are visible at only one of the three examples. This site, on Aguilar Point at Bamfield, is bounded on the landward side by a trench-embankment across the narrow neck of the peninsula. Test excavation yielded a radiocarbon date of A.D. 1245 for this earthwork (Buxton, 1969:29). Another midden site is at the base of this fortified promontory. A similar situation exists nearby, where DeSh

1, previously mentioned as possessing standing structural remains, lies at the base of a rock-bluff carrying midden deposit along the top. The third defensive site is one of the outer islands in the Broken Group. This has shell-midden on two levels, including a flat area at 30 m elevation. Sheshaht informants maintain that this was a refuge site, although it could also have served as a lookout for migrating sea-mammals.

Surface Artifacts

Evidence of an early occupation in the Alberni Valley was recorded from the area along the Somass River. A number of sites have been exposed in gravel quarries and other distributed areas well back from the river and a considerable elevation above it. These sites lack any midden deposit, and are recognized by surface collections of lithic artifacts and detritus found in the disturbed gravel. Both the site locations and typological nature of the artifacts argue for considerable antiquity.

These elevated site locations, up to 30 m above sea level, suggest association with earlier, higher relative sea levels. Post-Pleistocene emergence in the Alberni area has been considerable. Both Holland (1964:117) and Fyles (1963:73, 90) estimate this at 90 m, compared to 15 m along the open west coast of Vancouver Island. Organic materials formed during the latter half of this uplift have radiocarbon ages of 11,500 to 12,350 B.P. (Fyles, 1963:xiii, 93).

Surface-collected lithic implements from these sites include microblades and microblade cores, pebble tools, retouched cortex spalls and other crude flake tools, large cores, abrasive stones and occasional bifacial projectile points or knives (Figure 28). Projectile points tend to be crude, based on flakes, with bifacial retouch largely restricted to the edges of the implement. A considerable quantity of chipping detritus was also collected. Many artifacts and flakes show relatively heavy patination.

The microblade industry is one of the most diagnostic elements in these surface assemblages. A total of twenty-two microblade cores has been recovered from seven sites in this category. Fine-grained basalt is a frequent raw material. All appear to be based on irregular fragments, with blades removed from any suitable surface. Occasionally cores show blade removal from several directions. Little preparation of the striking platform is evident.

Lacking any radiocarbon dates or chronological controls through excavation, no firm age estimate can be made for these sites. However, it is likely that they predate 5000 B.P., by which time sea levels appear to have stabilized within 1-2 m of the present (Fyles, 1963; Fladmark,

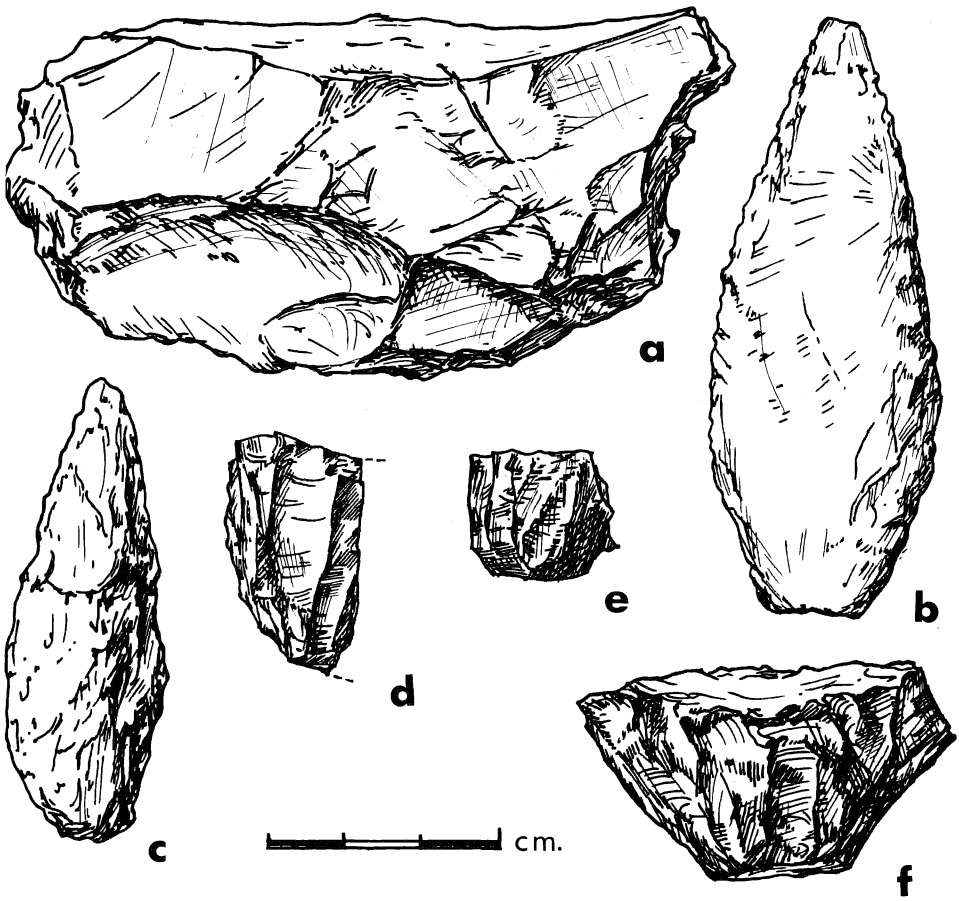

FIGURE 28. Surface artifacts from elevated sites in the Alberni Valley. (a) retouched cortex spall-tool; (b-c) bifacially flaked projectile points; (d-f) basalt microblade cores (a, c, e — DhSf 31; b, d — DhSf 18; f — DhSf 16).

1975a). Certainly these raised deposits must predate the excavated site of DhSe 2, at the head of Alberni Inlet. This site is only slightly above sea level, and has a radiocarbon age estimate of 4030±105 B.P. for the initial occupation (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a:70). The microblade industry described here shows a general similarity to that described and illustrated by Fladmark (1971) from several sites in similar geological contexts on the Queen Charlotte Islands. At one such excavated site (FiTx 3), a microblade component has been radiometrically dated to 7000-8000 B.P. (Fladmark, 1975a:280). It is quite possible that at least some of the Alberni area sites are of similar antiquity.

Lithic implements in similar geological contexts may eventually be exposed at a number of locations on western Vancouver Island. However, it is interesting to note that in both areas mentioned here (Alberni and the Queen Charlotte Islands) lithic sites were exposed by road construction or in gravel quarries. Lacking such large-scale disturbance, they would be extremely difficult to locate, which may explain why so few have been recorded.

The category "surface artifacts" also includes several sites which are obviously much more recent. In particular, two small island sites, recorded during the earlier Sproat Lake survey (Keddie, 1971), yielded typologically recent implements from beach areas lacking any adjacent midden deposits.

Burial Sites

The ethnographic Nootka mortuary practice was to place the corpse in a wooden box, which was either removed to a small cave or rock shelter at some distance from the village or was lashed in the upper branches of a tree, usually on a small island. Occasionally, for people of higher rank, the body was placed on a prominent point and a memorial erected (Drucker, 1951:147). There is some doubt as to the antiquity of this mortuary practice. Most observed burials are clearly historic, although earlier remains may exist. White (1974:16) relates cave burial to the historic epidemics, and dates its frequent use to after 1880.

All recorded mortuary sites in Barkley Sound are burial caves or rock-shelters. Each contains one or more individuals, generally in wooden boxes or occasionally in historic trunks. Cedar-bark robes or matting and cordage are commonly encountered. Many burials have suffered extensive recent disturbance or vandalism, and in some cases most human remains have been removed by looters. Along the rugged shoreline of Barkley

Sound, such small caves and rock shelters are difficult to locate, particularly when well above the water line or in heavy vegetation. The fourteen presently recorded are unlikely to represent the total number.

In the Alberni Valley, inhumation appears to have once been practised, as shown by several burials from the excavated site of DhSe 2 (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a:65; 1975b:7). By the historic period, however, local mortuary customs were typically Nootkan. A small cave at the head of the inlet and the trees of a nearby island were frequent burial locations (Bird, 1972:45). Today even the cave has disappeared, a victim of road construction.

Fish-Traps

A number of well-preserved fish-trap complexes are visible at low tide in the Broken Island Group of Barkley Sound (Figure 29). These are loosely piled rock walls, occasionally occurring in groups, usually across the mouth of a small bay or cove. Such structures are likely to have a long time depth in this area. Only one rock tidal fish-trap site was found in Alberni Inlet, where a point mid-way along the Inlet has at least two very small, shallow, curving rock alignments (McMillan, 1975a:36). The only fish-trap site recorded for the Alberni Valley is of a different type. Still visible at low tide in a small creek entering the Somass River are the bases of wooden stakes which once formed part of a weir and trap structure (Figure 30). A major line of stakes crosses the creek, while three other lines extend at an angle from the bank.

Petroglyphs

Both petroglyphs and pictographs occur in Nootka territory, although the former are much more numerous. Large petroglyph panels exist at a number of open ocean sites on either side of Barkley Sound (Hill and Hill, 1974:71-85). However, neither the sound itself nor Alberni Inlet contain any recorded rock-art sites. Two petroglyph locations on the interior lakes which extend into the Alberni Valley are the only such sites in the study area.

The impressive petroglyphs at Sproat Lake (DhSf 1) are among the best known in the province. Designs, apparently of mythical marine creatures, are carved into a vertical rock face at the edge of the lake. They show a considerable resemblance to the Nanaimo petroglyphs on the east coast of Vancouver Island. G. M. Sproat was the first European to describe the site, although he was evidently unimpressed:

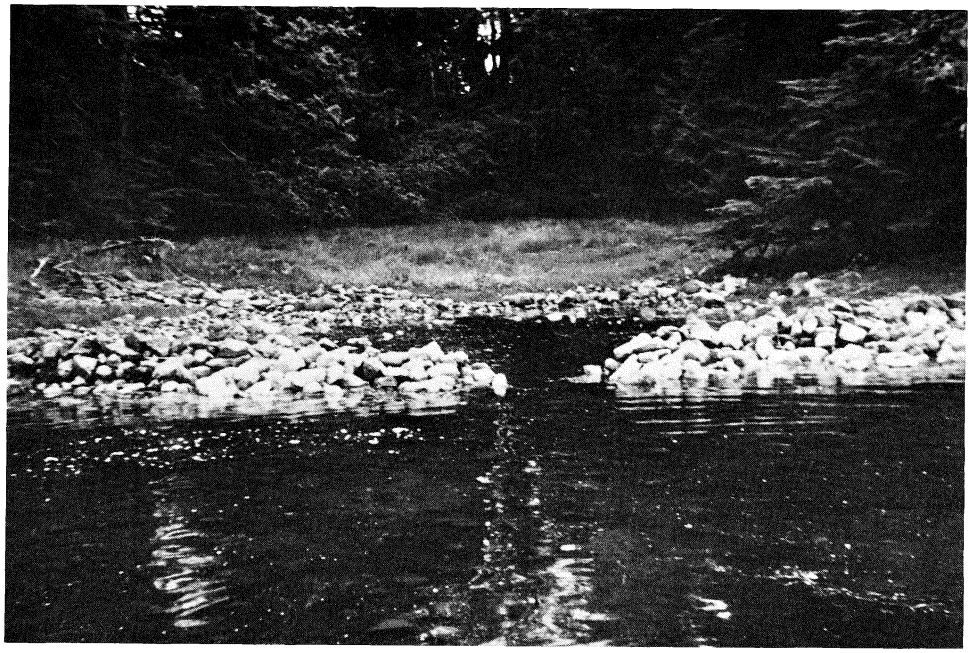

FIGURE 29 (Top). Rock tidal fish-trap in the Broken Island Group, Barkley Sound.

FIGURE 30 (Bottom). Wooden fish weir stake remnants, Kitsucksus Creek, Alberni Valley.

The only rock carving ever seen on this coast is on a high rock on the shore of Sproat's lake behind Alberni. It is rudely done, and apparently not of an old date. There are half-a-dozen figures intended to represent fishes or birds — no one can say which. The natives affirm that Quawteaht made them.... The meaning of these figures is not understood by the people.... (Sproat 1868:268).

A petroglyph (DiSi 1) is also known to have existed near the western end of Great Central Lake. Photographs show a single long, narrow figure on a sloping rock face near the water. A substantial rise in the water level of the lake due to dam construction has apparently inundated this site.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

With the exception of a small test excavation at the Aquilar Point trench embankment (Buxton, 1969), excavated data from the study area are restricted to a single site (DhSe 2) in the Alberni Valley, at the head of Alberni Inlet on Shoemaker Bay (Figure 27). A total of forty-five 2 x 2 m units was excavated in the summers of 1973 and 1974. A descriptive summary of the data recovered during the first season is already in print (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a). As the overall analysis and preparation of a final report is still in progress, only a brief summary will be presented here.

As the site is located in an industrial area and has suffered considerable disturbance, the original dimensions are unknown. Excavation was conducted on a small, relatively intact remnant. The depth of deposit ranged from about 50 cm to slightly over 1 m. Three major stratigraphic zones were identified, along with a thin localized fourth stratum, overlying littoral gravel. While it is felt that a cultural continuum is represented, it is possible to isolate two components, which are discussed separately below.

Shoemaker Bay I

Matrix: All lower non-shell matrices are included. Over most of the excavated area this consists of an upper zone of dark soil with frequent ash lenses and a lower zone which is slightly lighter in colour, containing a great number of small, rounded pebbles. A thin layer of light-brown to gray sand containing cultural material lies at the base of the deposits in one area of the site.

Chronology: The earliest radiocarbon age determination, based on charcoal collected from the top of beach gravel, is 4030 ± 105 radiocarbon

years: 2080 B.C. (GaK-5105). It presumably dates the initial occupation. A later date of 2860±90 radiocarbon years: 910 B.C. (Gak-5104), based on charcoal from the lower dark soil matrix, is more likely to indicate the beginning of intensive occupation. The upper date for this component is uncertain.

Technology: Individual artifact categories are described in the earlier report (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a). Several chipped stone artifact types particularly distinguish this component. A well-developed microblade industry is indicated by ninety quartz-crystal microblades, plus one basalt example. Associated with the microblades is abundant detritus of obsidian and quartz-crystal, occurring primarily near the base of the cultural sequence and becoming progressively rarer near the upper limits of this component. Chipped projectile points, generally of basalt, although single examples of obsidian and chalcedony exist, are common. While a variety of point types occurs at the lower levels, stemmed points predominate near the top. Chipped schist or slate knives are common only at the lowest level of this component.

Ground stone implements include celts, projectile points and sandstone saws. A few ground stone pendants occur, along with an unusual lignite artifact (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a; Figure 6b, c) which may be part of a composite labret. Abrasive stones are abundant.

Artifacts of organic materials are much less common than in Shoemaker Bay II, and are largely restricted to the upper stratum of this component. These include small wedge-based bone points, land-mammal bone splinter awls, antler toggling-harpoon valves and canine tooth pendants. Two examples of intact three-piece composite toggling-harpoon heads (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a: Figure 7a, b) were excavated near the top of this component.

Subsistence: Reconstruction of subsistence activities is hindered by poor preservation of organic materials in all but the uppermost levels of this component. Detailed faunal analysis has not yet been completed. Certain artifact types, such as chipped projectile points, indicate the importance of land-mammal hunting in the economy. It is likely that many of the mammalian, fish and avian species identified for Shoemaker Bay II were also part of the diet here. Shellfish remains were virtually absent.

Habitations: Evidence exists of a large house structure in the earliest occupation period. Three large post molds, with diameters of 0.8 to 1.0 m, occur in a straight line, from which the presence of a large plank house is inferred. Smaller post moulds and large rock-lined hearths are common at the same level, near the base of the deposit. A large trench

feature, lined with boulders, extends for 14 m in a line parallel to that formed by the large post moulds and at the same stratigraphic level. Its function is unknown, but is assumed to be associated with the house structure.

Shoemaker Bay II

Matrix: This component is represented in a single stratigraphic unit, composed largely of crushed clam and mussel shell, mixed with dark soil. This zone is comparatively thin, being absent from some areas and reaching a maximum depth of about 30 cm. Bone and antler are well preserved in this matrix.

Chronology: Two charcoal samples from near the top of this zone were submitted for radiocarbon dating. The results were 1450±80 radiocarbon years: A.D. 500 (GaK-5108) and 1130±85 radiocarbon years: A.D. 820 (GaK-5432). Abandonment of the site is estimated at several centuries after the most recent date.

Technology: Artifacts of organic materials are abundant in this component (60.8 percent of total, compared to 14.1 percent for Shoemaker Bay I). Small wedge-based bone points, presumably the arming points on composite harpoon heads, and harpoon valves of antler are particularly numerous. Other common or distinctive artifacts of organic materials include barbed bone points, land-mammal bone splinter awls, deer ulna tools, split limb bone chisels or gouges, bone fish-hook shanks, bird-bone tubes, sectioned antler fragments, and beaver tooth tools. Artifacts of stone, with the exception of abundant abrasive stones, are less frequent. Chipped stone tools are relatively rare (2.1 percent of total compared to 36.2 percent for Shoemaker Bay I), with small triangular basalt projectile points being the most common examples. Projectile points of slate or phyllite (including small triangular forms) celts and sandstone saws are common ground stone artifacts.

Subsistence: Faunal remains were abundant in this upper component. While species identification for the first season's field-work has already been reported (McMillan and St. Claire, 1975a:65-70), detailed faunal analysis has not yet been completed. Salmon appears to have been one of the major elements in the diet. This is in accordance with ethnographic accounts and the known importance of the salmon fishery along the Somass River. Technology also supports this with the frequent occurrence of valves or arming points from composite harpoon heads, uniformly of a small size, which would be suitable for taking salmon. Deer remains were

also particularly common at this site. Other important elements of the diet as indicated by faunal remains were sea-mammals (including harbour seal, northern sea lion, and whale), waterfowl (a wide variety of species has been identified), and shellfish (particularly California mussel and three species of clam). While several of these food items could only have been procured at some distance from the site, the dominant picture is of a culture primarily adapted to such local resources as the salmon run of the Somass River, the avifauna of the Somass Delta, and the deer in the mountains which surround the valley.

Habitations: No definite evidence was encountered. Large plank houses of the ethnographic form are inferred.

DISCUSSION

The cultural affinities of Shoemaker Bay I most closely lie with temporally equivalent units in the Strait of Georgia. Chipped stone tools, such as projectile points, are common in the lower levels of the site. Such implements are characteristic of the Marpole and Locarno Beach phases in the Strait of Georgia region (Mitchell, 1971a: 52, 57), yet are extremely rare at the excavated Nootka sites of Yuquot and Hesquiat. A similar distribution exists for ground stone projectile points. Microblades, a long-standing tradition in the Strait of Georgia region (Mitchell, 1968), are lacking from excavated Nootka sites, with the exception of a single fragment from Hesquiat. Therefore, on the basis of artifact distribution, cultural development in the Alberni Valley would appear to be linked with that along the Strait of Georgia.

During Shoemaker Bay II, characterized primarily by an economic shift to intensive utilization of shellfish, ties can be seen to Barkley Sound and the open west coast. This is particularly evident in the faunal remains. California mussel (*Mytilus californianus*), a major component of the upper stratum, is found only on the open coastline. Remains of whale (sp.?) and northern sea-lion (*Eumetopias jubata*) also indicate exploitation of Barkley Sound resources, as it is unlikely that such sea-mammals would venture to the head of the long, narrow Alberni Inlet. However, distinctive artifact types of this component, such as small triangular chipped basalt projectile points and thin triangular ground-slate points, are virtually unknown in excavated Nootka sites. The overall affinities continue to lie to the east, most closely resembling the Gulf of Georgia culture type as defined by Mitchell (1971a:48). It is unfortunate that

the site appears to have been abandoned so early, as it would be interesting to see if late Nootka influence could be archaeologically discerned.

Evidence also exists for very early occupation of the Alberni Valley. Elevated sites exposed in gravel quarries or road construction have yielded surface collections suggesting considerable antiquity. Sites in similar geological contexts may eventually be exposed in a number of locations on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and this outer coast zone may ultimately be crucial in understanding early population movements along the coast.

Occupation sites along Alberni Inlet are small and appear to be recent. Ethnographically, these were seasonally occupied fishing stations. In other areas of Nootka territory where archaeological inventory has been conducted, sites along the inlets tend to be similarly shallow and relatively recent. This may suggest that no great time depth exists for the extensive seasonal round as ethnographically known. The full development of this economic cycle may be associated with the fairly late coalescence of small local groups into larger political units.

Numerous large shell-middens in Barkley Sound indicate the presence of a substantial population for a considerable period of time. Lacking any excavated data, we can only speculate on the length and nature of that occupation. Nevertheless, the extensive midden deposits likely represent several millenia of accumulation. Elsewhere in Nootka territory, we see a time depth of over 4,200 years at Yuquot in Nootka Sound (J. Dewhirst, pers. comm.) and about 2,500 years at Hesquiat (Haggarty and Boehm, 1974:9). A cultural continuum from earliest occupation to the historic inhabitants has been reported for Yuquot (Folan and Dewhirst, 1969: 239) and Ozette (McKenzie, 1974:146). It would be interesting to see if such continuity exists in Barkley Sound.

Obviously, much more work needs to be done before a synthesis of the area's prehistory can be undertaken. In particular, the Alberni Valley sites in geological contexts suggesting antiquity should be tested, with a primary goal of obtaining suitable material for dating. These sites are also the most endangered in the study area. Excavation is also needed at one of the river sites, particularly one which was occupied into the historic period by a known group. In addition, none of the numerous Barkley Sound sites has received archaeological attention other than surface survey.

The comparative lack of archaeological research on the west coast of Vancouver Island should not, however, be viewed as entirely unfortunate. This area's prehistoric resources have not suffered as great an attrition as have many areas in the province. The large number of intact archae-

ological sites in Nootka territory can be seen as a major resource for future, better-prepared archaeological research, working in co-operation with the native bands. This could yet be a key area, as indicated by ethnographers decades ago, to our understanding of cultural development all along the Northwest Coast.

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