
In the Wake of the *ya'áats' xaatgáay* ['Iron People']: A study of changing settlement strategies among the Kunghit Haida

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Archaeology in Haida Gwaii, prior to Acheson's work, was largely a disconnected series of small-scale surveys and excavations, with the resulting publications generally representing single-site reports. Granted, these reports provided the basis for regional culture historical reconstructions, most notably by Fladmark (eg. Fladmark, et al., 1990). Nevertheless, Acheson's book provides the first substantial monograph-length regional summary published for the area. That alone would make this a valuable contribution to Haida archaeology, but the book's value is further strengthened through the holistic approach adopted by Acheson, drawing on ethnographic, historic, oral historical and archaeological data.

In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), Acheson provides a brief description of the study area, the southernmost regions of the Queen Charlotte archipelago including Kunghit Island, southern Moresby Island, and the adjacent smaller islands. This region forms the historical homeland of the Kunghit Haida, one of four ethnographically described Haida divisions. He further outlines his objectives for the project and the monograph, namely to examine Kunghit Haida land use and occupancy through a synthesis of ethnographic, historical and archaeological data.

Building on this introduction, Acheson's theoretical and methodological approaches are outlined in the second and third chapters. Through an historical overview, in the second chapter, of the development of archaeological theory, a case is built for the use of a direct historical and analogical approach. Though the "New Archaeology" has challenged the use of analogy in archaeology, Acheson argues that analogy is strengthened by "broadening the database for interpretation and by better substantiating the relationships that interpretative hypotheses and archaeological tests of these hypotheses presuppose" (10). Thus, he argues for the use of both a direct historical approach, drawing on all of the available historic and

ethnographic sources, and a general approach, using sources on the other Haida divisions and on neighbouring groups to broaden the source of analogy. Acheson's methodology is further described in chapter three, where the concept of settlement archaeology is introduced and linked to the analogical approaches described previously. Historically, the development of settlement archaeology was closely tied to cultural ecology, with settlement dictated by resource distributions. On the Northwest Coast, settlement was argued to be closely tied to salmon and other important seasonal resources, giving rise to the accepted ethnographic pattern of a winter village with seasonal mobility. Acheson challenges the notion that this pattern was present and stable prior to the historic period, and his approach recognizes the importance of social as well as ecological factors in structuring settlement.

To provide a context for the ecological factors that influenced Haida settlement, chapter four outlines the current environment and the reconstructed paleoenvironment, such as it is known, for the study area. This is placed, at the beginning of the chapter, within the framework of Haida oral traditions regarding the creation of the Queen Charlotte Islands and the origin of the Haida people themselves. Though the chapter does provide a feel for the rich and diverse flora and fauna of Haida Gwaii, it is also very brief, and those seeking more detail will need to refer to the more detailed list of references that Acheson cites. These discussions are also somewhat dated, and more recent work has refined our views of the sea level history and the paleoenvironment of Haida Gwaii (eg. Fedje and Josenhans 2000; Fedje and Mathewes, in press).

Presentation of the data on which Acheson's analysis is based begins in chapter five, "The Archaeological Record". The chapter begins with an historical overview of archaeological research both on the Queen Charlotte Islands, and on the adjacent Northern and Central Coasts. The age of Acheson's work, which was completed in 1991 and subsequently published in 1998 with little updating, is particularly evident in this section. The creation of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site in 1993, a region which encompasses Acheson's study area, has led to a considerable amount of archaeological survey and excavation by Parks Canada archaeologists and other researchers, none of which is included in Acheson's publication. Though this absence does not directly detract from

Acheson's study or from his ultimate conclusions, the interested reader will have to go elsewhere for information about the current state of Haida archaeology (Fedje and Christensen 1999; Fedje and Mathewes, in press).

Following the historical outline of archaeological research in the region, Acheson turns to a description of the initial site survey that formed the basis for his thesis. This survey involved the examination of 245 kilometres of coastline in the Kunghit region, identifying 114 archaeological sites. Small-scale excavations were then conducted at 18 of the 99 identified "habitation sites", selected to include samples of the four subtypes: group 1 and group 2 shell middens (separated by size based on the bimodal size distribution of shell midden sites), rock shelters, and caves. All of the excavated sites date recently, with radiocarbon dates ranging from 1725 ± 70 BP to the historic period. Artefact assemblages are dominated by bone tools and manufacturing-related stone tools such as abraders, with some European trade goods recovered from historic period sites. Faunal analysis, conducted by Rebecca Wigen and Sharon Keen, resulted in 165 identified taxa, with California mussel, salmon, rockfish and halibut, harbour seal and sea otter, and alcids dominating. Of primary interest for Acheson's central thesis are data on settlement patterns, which demonstrate two trends: increased intensity of site use between ca. 800 and 600 BP, and an amalgamation of dwindling populations of small villages into larger villages in the historic period.

Chapter six, "The 'Island End People': An Ethnohistory", summarizes a wealth of ethnographic and early historic sources on both the Haida in general and the Kunghit Haida in particular to provide an ethnohistoric overview of Kunghit Haida. The chapter is divided into traditional ethnographic categories, including demography, social organization, rank and class, marriage, potlatch, house design, settlement and subsistence, and fortifications and warfare. Again, Acheson's discussion of settlement is of particularly interest. Variability between sources as to the number of identified Kunghit Haida winter villages is argued to reflect the transient or impermanent nature of Haida villages during the early contact period, and "the fact that camps could just as easily evolve into villages and devolve again reveals a less than fixed settlement arrangement" (71). Furthermore, despite some indications of a seasonal round, there were also indications that smaller, dispersed villages were occupied almost

continually, and that seasonal camps involved the construction of rough, temporary shelters for very short-term, infrequent use. Subsistence data further downplays the seasonal round, with high social value placed on some widely available and non-seasonal resources. Finally, though warfare appears to have been a long-standing way of life for the Haida, competition for trade and surplus during the contact period resulted in an intensification of warfare and resulted in an increased emphasis on larger villages in defensible locations.

Chapter seven expands upon this ethnohistoric baseline, drawing on historic sources to recreate the history of the Kunghit Haida during their first 100 years of European contact. The first European contact in the Kunghit area occurred in 1787, with the arrival of James Colnett, and sparked a period of rapid and dramatic change amongst the Kunghit Haida. The lucrative sea otter trade that dominated the early period of European contact along much of the Northwest Coast was short lived in the Kunghit region, and was followed by a period of increasing Haida isolation through the mid 19th century. During this period, Haida settlement changed, with a sequential amalgamation of smaller villages into larger villages such as SgA'ngwa-i (FaTt1) and Qai'dju (FbTs4). This pattern of resettlement began with the first onset of culture contact, and ultimately led to the complete depopulation of the Kunghit region with the abandonment of SgA'ngwa-i in the summer of 1887-1888 in favour of the more northern villages of New Clue and Skidegate. These major changes to Haida lifestyle prior to the period of ethnographic interest call into question the relevance of ethnographic sources to discussions of "traditional" Haida culture.

The archaeological, ethnographic and historic data are synthesized in chapter eight to create a unified picture of Kunghit Haida settlement behaviour. Though varying and often conflicting views arise from the numerous ethnographic and linguistic sources, Acheson argues that there is a general indication that pre-contact settlement was characterized by small, unilineal villages, with the development of larger, multilineage villages being an historic phenomenon. These changes in settlement pattern are argued to have resulted from population declines as a result of smallpox epidemics and increasing warfare, combined with an increased reliance on trade. This settlement pattern change is further evidenced by the

archaeological data, with the two largest Kunghit village sites, SgA'ngwa-i and Qai'dju, both representing multilineage villages. Furthermore, in the 20 km region surrounding SgA'ngwa-i there are more than twenty additional sites with structural features, documenting a trend towards greater intra-site variability in house sizes in the historic period. Acheson also argues that the amalgamation of people into large, multilineage villages moved them away from their seasonal resource locations, thus emphasizing the ethnographically recorded seasonal round.

Acheson's major conclusions, as outlined in the final chapter, are unarguably significant both for the Kunghit Haida region and for the Northwest Coast as a whole. His arguments for changing settlement patterns in the historic period convincingly "counter an orthodoxy in Northwest Coast settlement archaeology that sees large multilineage winter villages, with seasonal dispersal to spring, summer and autumn resource locales, as the prevailing prehistoric pattern on the islands and elsewhere on the coast" (111). Furthermore, this provides evidence that the ethnographically described culture, at least within the Kunghit example, is a result of historical input and changes, and is therefore limited in its reflection of the past. Rather than negating the utility of the ethnographic record, however, Acheson argues that the discontinuity between archaeology and ethnography allows us to assess the mechanisms of change in the native community.

Generally, Acheson's volume is impressive, with an exhaustive bibliography of historic and ethnographic sources on the Kunghit and related areas. As indicated above, the archaeological review is slightly out of date, and, by example, Acheson's suggestion that intertidal lithic sites may represent late Holocene resource processing stations, has been countered by recent work confirming the earlier hypothesis (Hobler 1978) that these are early Holocene sites dating from a time of lower sea levels (Fedje et al. 2001). This is a minor criticism, however, in the face of the substantial, and well-supported conclusions that Acheson draws from his analysis. Furthermore, the extensive appendices of the volume provide detailed descriptions of the inventoried sites, the excavations, and the artefact classifications and descriptions, facilitating subsequent re-analysis by future researchers.

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