



This display shows just some of the projectile points found in the pile of earth that was dug up for the original location of Moricetown's new museum. Numerous other artifacts were uncovered, including human bones.

rick budhwa

DIGGING UP THE PAST: Archaeology in a cultural context

by Matt J Simmons

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Issues around the dead—whether recently deceased or ancient ancestors—are seldom simple. Within a community are emotional connections to the dead and in the early days of archaeology little attention was paid to those connections. But when a First Nations burial ground is impacted by development, the issues that arise can take years, even decades, to be resolved. In some cases, they may never be resolved satisfactorily.

In 2004 and 2006, two such sites were impacted in northern BC, both heavily laden with human remains. Only now are the far-reaching implications of these developments coming to some kind of closure. And with that closure comes an opportunity to explore the relationships between the living and the dead and to discover new and exciting finds in the archaeological record.

"Two burial grounds in two years with two different communities and finding the same damn things, the same artifacts...that's very cool." Rick Budhwa, archaeologist and principal of Crossroads Cultural Resource Management, becomes very animated when he talks about the projects he's involved with in northern BC. The two sites he refers to are near Hazelton and in Moricetown.

Hazelton's sensitive archaeological discovery started with a hydro project. "Six years ago, BC Hydro disturbed a burial site in Hagwilget Canyon," says Budhwa. "At first they ran away because they didn't know what to do. And then they said 'Let's quickly do the archaeology.' But we were telling everybody, including the First Nation, 'Don't ram this through. We need time.'"

Luckily, both BC Hydro and the Hagwilget Village Council listened and Budhwa's group was given the time they needed. "It allowed us to look in the community at who was impacted," he says. "So we hired them. We started hearing things like, 'I've had nightmares every night since this happened five years ago and now they've stopped.' That's psychosocial trauma. Resource management doesn't account for this, because resource management doesn't involve people who study culture."

Keeping culture alive

Budhwa's primary goal is not so much the archaeological but the *cultural* impact of development. That means focusing on people. "We emphasize the nature of relationships. When I started this company in 2004, I was really concerned that there was no cultural work being done, only archaeology." He makes a distinction between the two, saying that archaeology, while fascinating, scientific, and an important part of cultural resource management, often skims over the impact on the communities in which the development is taking place.

He gives an example of a scientist going into remote traditional territory to test the water. The

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Rick Budhwa

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water is fine but an elder sees the scientist from a distance taking a water sample and, with no context for the scientific process involved, goes back to the village and says, 'The water's poison.' Now, the traditional use of that water has been inadvertently impacted by a seemingly innocuous action. "It's those kinds of intangibles that we're trying to look at."

With human remains, says Budhwa, the intangibles are even more elusive, and until now they've been largely ignored. "If we're dealing with a burial ground, shouldn't we be connecting with the people who are affected and doing

some kind of traditional healing? That should be part of the project."

Moricetown's museum

In the early 2000s, the Moricetown band council received funding to build a new museum in the village. They chose a scenic and central location, just off Highway 16, above the historic and culturally significant Moricetown canyon.

"The hereditary chiefs said, 'Don't build this there,'" explains Budhwa, "but the Moricetown band council—elected representatives of the community—said, 'Go ahead and do some



Crew member Willie Pete uses a screen to separate artifacts from soil.

positive situation, he explains, because those people already have the skills to help, but they also need to be involved on a personal level.

The archaeology itself brought some amazing results. "We found tons of projectile points of all sizes, and artifacts that nobody even knows what they are. They look like chocolate bars and they're grooved." He sketches an example. "It's made of some clay-like substance. They're only ever found in canyon context so right away you think of fishing. I've taken one around the province to conferences to show the grandfathers of archaeology, but no one knows what they're for."

"Then I started talking to the elders and asking them. And Alfred Joseph told me, as soon as he saw it: 'They did those in the canyons. We used to use those to make baskets, nets, and ropes out of cedar, which can be used for fishing. You take cedar bark, which is stringy and gnarly and you need to smooth it out.'" Budhwa shows with his hands how it would work.

He excitedly explains that this method of interpreting artifacts is often overlooked or missed because of time constraints, and that's something he hopes to change. "We brought all of the artifacts that we found in the pile and put them on display during the canyon opening. We had a suggestion box: 'Tell us what this is for.' We wanted the *community* to interpret these artifacts."

The human remains themselves will be "reunited," or re-buried. "The Wet'suwet'en are going to have a reburial ceremony. And then everyone involved will help us create a new interpretive display at the museum."

This buy-in, this tangible connection between the living members of a community and their ancestral roots is, for Budhwa, what makes it all worthwhile. To him, cultural resource management can be much more than fieldwork and report-writing. It's relationships, friendships, and connections.

He draws a little diagram of what natural and cultural resource management has looked like up to now. On one side are natural resources—forests, water, fish, soil, wildlife—and on the other is archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, and so on. "But," he says, circling his finger around the diagram, "it's *all* cultural."



archaeology, but we're putting it there.' So we did some archaeology, found it was a burial ground, and said, 'Don't do it.'"

Despite the warnings, construction began in 2004. "They've been marginalized to small pieces of land and then you go in there and tell them what to do with it. And that small piece of land has human remains everywhere! What are they supposed to do? So they went ahead and started digging the foundation. And sure enough, out popped this skull and a human body. They shut everything down."

The location of the museum was moved, but what about the impacted site and the archaeological remains? "All the earth dug up in 2004, which was full of *everything*—artifacts and human remains—they put in someone's backyard and covered with tarps, to be forgotten." But it wasn't forgotten. Everyone who has lived in a small town knows that something as big as this doesn't just go away—it festers. "Every accidental death in the community or anything bad that happened, they pointed to that pile, because they knew what was in there."

The pile sat untouched for eight years. "Every year I went to them and said, 'Are you ready? It's time to bring closure,'" says Budhwa. "And they weren't ready. But this year I got a call. They were ready."

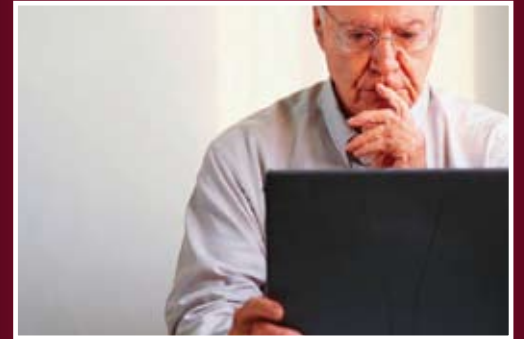
Endings and beginnings

To bring closure, Budhwa started the archaeological work but continued to focus on the local residents. "We hired a dozen people from the community. We got all the people who worked on the dig in 2004 and hired them back in 2012." It's an incredibly

The crew that worked on the Moricetown site poses for a photo. Applied anthropologist Rick Budhwa, at left, believes that resource management should include the cultural impacts of development.



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