Barking up the Right Tree: Understanding Birch Bark Artifacts from the Canadian Plateau, British Columbia

Shannon Croft
Simon Fraser University

Rolf W. Mathewes
Simon Fraser University

DOI: https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i180.184165

Keywords: Paleoethnobotany, women, plant technology, birch bark, archaeology, Lillooet, aboriginal culture

Abstract

Several birch bark containers and other birch bark artifacts made by prehistoric First Nations have been encountered during archaeological excavations on the Canadian Plateau of British Columbia. From these discoveries, it is apparent that birch bark technologies were of major importance to First Nations, yet little attention has been paid to them as a category of artifacts. Ethnographic records from the Canadian Plateau indicate that birch bark basketry was consistently made by women. Thus, birch bark baskets provide a tool with which to make women and their work visible in the archaeological record. Birch bark baskets were important for food collection and storage, and appear in burials and girls puberty rituals. Here we describe two Late Period birch bark baskets and their contents (approximately dating to the Plateau Horizon 2400–1200 BP) from sites near Lillooet, BC and illustrate how birch bark was closely associated with women, both economically and spiritually.

Author Biographies

Shannon Croft, Simon Fraser University
Department of Archaeology

Rolf W. Mathewes, Simon Fraser University
Department of Biological Sciences
Harvesting Birch Bark: Birch bark is a lovely material that can be woven, folded, and lashed into a great variety of projects. If done mindfully, birch bark can be sustainably harvested without permanently damaging trees. The images in this Instructable were taken by Ale... When done at the right time of year the bark will literally pop off the tree. However, if done too late in the season the cambium (inner bark) will come off with the outer bark. If the cambium is damaged the tree may die. If done right, a tree will re-grow its bark over the course of 10-20 years. I have heard that the best bark comes from trees that have already been previously harvested, and traditionally people would return to harvest in the same grove over the course of several generations. Add Tip. Ask Question. Barking up the right tree: understanding birch bark artifacts from the Canadian Plateau, British Columbia. Article. Full-text available. Several birch bark containers and other birch bark artifacts made by prehistoric First Nations have been encountered during archaeological excavations on the Canadian Plateau of British Columbia. From these discoveries, it is apparent that birch bark technologies were of major importance to First Nations, yet little attention has been paid to them View. Network. Birch bark manuscripts are documents written on pieces of the inner layer of birch bark, which was commonly used for writing before the advent of mass production of paper. Evidence of birch bark for writing goes back many centuries and in various cultures. The oldest dated birch bark manuscripts are numerous
Gandhāran Buddhist texts from approximately the 1st century CE, which are believed to have created in Afghanistan, likely by the Dharmaguptaka sect. Translations of the texts, mostly in Kharoṣṭhī Department of Tourism, Culture & Recreation March 2010 Volume 8 Croft, S., [2014] Mathewes, R.W., “Barking Up the Right Tree: Understanding Birch Bark Artifacts from the Canadian Plateau, British Columbia,” in BC Studies, no. 80, Winter.