

Title:
Northern, Central, Diversified, Specialized: The Archaeology of Fishing Adaptations in the Gulf of Georgia (Salish Sea), British Columbia

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Abstract (summary):

The Coast Salish subsistence economy has been characterized by local fishing adaptations to regional ecological variability (Mitchell 1971a.) This dissertation explores the temporal depth of these adaptations in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish, the Gulf of Georgia. Many researchers have used this, Donald Mitchell's (1971a), model to develop theories of regional cultural development. Many of these interpretations present social complexity or social inequality – a hallmark of Northwest Coast social complexity – as having developed more or less in lock-step with the specialized fishing adaptation described among the Central Coast Salish, around the Fraser River. The temporal depth of this adaptation and the “Diversified” fishing adaptations described among the Northern and Southern Coast Salish, as well as their developmental relationship, are not well understood. In exploring this problem, this study evaluates whether or not the ecological ethnographic model is representative of the archaeology of these cultural subareas. A gap in the regional dataset which corresponds with a large portion of Mitchell's (1971a) “Northern Diversified” fishing subarea has largely presented a previous study of this type. Recently excavated sites in traditional shísháhlh territory provide artifact and archaeofaunal data that fill in this gap. These data are analyzed along with existing data from the Northern subarea and from the Central Gulf of Georgia (River and Straits Fishing subareas). The results of this study significantly broaden our understanding of prehistoric Coast Salish socioeconomic diversity, and test the assumed salmon specialization on the Fraser River and its primacy the development of regional ethnographic characteristics, especially pronounced social inequality. The results also shed light on the prehistoric importance of herring, a decreasingly overlooked resource in Northwest Coast archaeological studies, and advocate for the use of fine mesh recovery for quantifying the relative importance of fish species.

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