EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Presentation to highlight researcher with connections to the Indigenous Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC CORE AREAS SUPPORTED

- People and Places
- Research Excellence
- Local / Global Engagement
- Transformative Learning

Photograph of Paul Legaic
Date before 1870 Source: The Apostle of Alaska
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

William Beynon, 1915.
© MCC/CMC, 31045, CD95-898-014 (left).

© MCC/CMC, 103014, CD2003-0080 (right).
When Ligeex Painted his Portrait on the Cliff of the Nass River. Recorded by William Beynon
An Ongoing Debate

Not Even Hearsay? The Oral Narratives of the First Nations of British Columbia

David Henige

Abstract Numerous claims have been advanced recently that some content in the oral traditions of the First Nations of British Columbia accurately recalls periods as long ago as the last Ice Age. Since such claims have not been validated anywhere else, it seemed worth looking into the matter. I discuss the possibility that virtual all our products of feedback from outside sources that has been assimilated into First Nations' stories since as early as the nineteenth century. I regard this hypothesis as considerably more plausible than a scenario requiring such large numbers of oral transmitters. Astonishingly, proponents use no written sources for their arguments, or attempt to trace any traditions farther back than the nineteenth century. Great swatches of crucial material have been ignored—missionary journals, travelers' accounts, newspapers, and relevant archives. Under the assumption that all sources for a given argument should routinely be addressed, I conclude that First Nations' traditions cannot be accepted as historical before the early nineteenth century, possibly even later.

In December of 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada issued its ruling on a case (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia) in favor of the appellants, members of the First Nations. The case featured a number of academic supporters, demonstrating "expert witnesses" for the occasion. While the evidence and the arguments in 1997 were much the same as they had been in 1991, this time the verdict was just the opposite, and the testimony professed by the plaintiffs/appellants about their communal past was upheld.

Given that I, and many others, had all failed to demonstrate that oral traditions were credible historical sources, I was taken aback by this intrusion by the courts, and in this manuscript I discuss the reasons why. I am not qualified to express any opinion on, nor do I have any interest in, the legal ramifications of the 1997 verdict. Instead, I concentrate on the extraordinary theoretical relationship between the judgment and other evidence purporting to support the 1997 verdict—not least of all, evidence that was never brought to the table. No doubt it was gratifying to read in the court's verdict that oral narrative, "passed on through an unbroken chain across the generations," can lead the way to "historical truth," but can it? This is akin to pontificating on the niceties of medieval canon law without being able to read Latin.

It is not very surprising that advocates of the long-term stability of oral materials take this as a judicial imperative; as perhaps it was intended. Unfortunately, this claim completely lacks evidentiary support, at least before the period ending ca. 1880. The "expert witnesses" consulted only a small proportion of the relevant evidence and offered no excuse for completely ignoring the careers of...
Kate Duduward, Ginaxankiik Tribe, Lax Kw’alaams. Interpreter for more than 50 years.
“Eagle House” of Chief Dudoward of the Gispaklo’ots Tribe, Lax Kw’alaams. Inset: Wayne Ryan, Gispaklo’ots, who built the current Eagle House at this place.
# Early Adawx Chronological Index

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Frederick Alexsee (Tsimshian) painting "A Fight Between the Haida and Tsimshian". Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History).
Lax Kw’alaams (Port Simpson) by Fredrick Alexcee, from UBC Special Collections.
Integration and Conflict

- 2500-1500 BP
- Social differentiation
- Population growth
- Conflict over resources
- “Tlingit” invasion
- Aksk leads alliance

Material Correlates?
- Ethnicity, conflict, movement.

Dundas Island Group
(Source: Marsden 2001)
6000-5100 cal BP

5000-4100 cal BP

Growth up to ~1300 years ago, then a regional settlement shift.

4000-3100 cal BP

3000-2100 cal BP

2000-1100 cal BP

1000-100 cal BP
Late villages: 10 in PRH
10 in total
Curved villages 1 in PRH
3 in total
Large villages 8 in PRH
11 in total
Small villages 41 in PRH
47 in total
Total 63 in PRH
71 in total

Abandonment of Harbour ≈ 1300 cal BP.

“Egalitarian” and “ranked” villages contemporaneous.
Relative Sea Level

The diagram illustrates the changes in relative sea level over time, with a focus on the Younger Dryas period. The x-axis represents calendar years before present (BP), and the y-axis represents elevation in meters above sea level (masl, CGVD28). The chart includes various data points and lines indicating different types of sea level indicators such as RSL Index Point, Lower limiting point (subtidal or marginal), Lower limiting point (marginal), Upper limiting point (terrestrial), Upper limiting point (archaeological site), Well constrained inferred RSL curve, and Loosely constrained inferred RSL curve.
Radiocarbon dates have a complicated history…

Uncalibrated Radiocarbon dates must be calibrated to account for this.

95.4 % chance (2 s.d.) the event dated is 8010 - 7658 BP
Bayesian Analysis

- The black square in between gives us the most likely span/length of hiatus

**Hiatus began** sometime between **1240-1060 calBP**

**Hiatus ended** sometime between **1060-945 calBP**.

**Hiatus lasted** between **42-249 years**
Steve Dennis, Lax Kw’alaams: my archaeological research partner since 1994.
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