

## Finding a Piece of History: What Next?

You're walking on the beach, clearing land, or digging in your garden, and you find something. Perhaps a tool crafted 1000s of years ago, obsidian, flaked and chipped with care, or perhaps shells in soft, ashy soil—a midden, which tells us this was a gathering place or village site.

You've found a piece of the island's deep history, a precious part of the heritage of Indigenous Peoples who lived, fished, built villages, and created art here since time immemorial.

So now what?

Finding a piece of cultural heritage can be a profound experience, and brings a special obligation. It reminds us that the land holds stories of which we are only vaguely aware, stories that stretch far into the past and that have great relevance for the present.

Taking the right steps when you find or know about archaeological evidence is both your legal duty and an act of respect for history and for Indigenous People. Here's some basic information:

### 1. What laws govern archeological finds?

The *British Columbia Heritage Conservation Act* tells us that we may not "excavate, dig in or alter, or remove an heritage object from, a site that contains artefacts, features, materials or other physical evidence of human habitation or use before 1846" unless we have a permit.

This law applies to any place where artefacts have been found, whether just now, by you, or by others, in the past. Known sites are registered by the Archeology Branch. There are over 50,000 of these in BC, including ancient stone carvings, remains of early houses and villages, shell middens, rock art, and culturally modified trees, some as old as 14,000 years. Many sites, however, are not known.

### 2. What are my responsibilities and options as a landowner wanting to build?

It is your legal responsibility to ensure that you are not building on archeological material unless you have a permit from the Archeology Branch. But how do you know? Denman Islanders will find out when they apply to the Islands Trust for a Siting and Use Permit—Trust staff will check to see if the property is in or near a registered archeological site.

If you would like this information *before* you create a site plan (a good idea), you can contact the Trust to gain access to provincial data. Data is kept confidential from the public to ensure the preservation and protection of sites and cultural heritage.

### 3. What should I do if I find an artefact or other evidence of Indigenous use?

Report your find to:

**The BC Archeology Branch**

250-953-3334

[archeology@gov.bc.ca](mailto:archeology@gov.bc.ca)

[www2.gov.ca/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/archeology/report-a-find/](http://www2.gov.ca/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/archeology/report-a-find/)

**The K'omoks First Nation office**

250-339-4545 [reception@komoks.ca](mailto:reception@komoks.ca)

**AND the K'omoks First Nation archeologist, Dr. Jesse Morin**

at [theidmorin@gmail.com](mailto:theidmorin@gmail.com)

You can also contact me and I'll assist with these notifications and provide further information if needed ([lbusheikin@islandstrust.bc.ca](mailto:lbusheikin@islandstrust.bc.ca), 250-218-3216).

If you are in the midst of building, you need to pause work to make these reports.

#### 1. What if I think I've found human remains?

Again, contact the Archaeology Branch and the police (to determine if the remains are ancestral). They will take the appropriate further steps. And do not disturb the remains!

#### 2. Will I still be able to build on my property if I report findings? Is it in my best interests to just keep quiet?

The Archaeology Branch aims to minimize disruption of construction while protecting archeological material. Above all, it is important that the find is recorded and information shared with local First Nations. If the find is significant, you may be asked to work with an archaeologist and representatives of local First Nations as you move forward. Options could include avoidance or respectful removal and reburial.

Failure to report findings can lead to a stop-work injunction, fines of up to \$50,000 and up to two years imprisonment.

#### 3. Why is it important to report all findings, even small ones?

Archaeological information helps all of us understand the history of this place and prevent the destruction of cultural heritage. For First Nations, this information supports cultural revitalization and provides key evidence of rights and title.

For Denman residents, learning how to appropriately respond when we find pieces of history is an act of reconciliation, and can invite us into a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture, history, and worldview.

As a trustee and a member of the Islands Trust Cultural Working Group, I'm learning that these "archaeological objects and sites" have deep and sacred meanings for Indigenous People, reflecting the vibrant connection between Indigenous People and their ancestors. These are

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spiritual matters that are of crucial importance to First Nation cultures.

If you're interested in learning more, I recommend the video *Dust & Bones*, featuring spiritual leader and archaeological consultant Harold Joe from the Cowichan Nation, which you can search out on YouTube.