

# **Dimensions of Regional Interaction in the Prehistoric Gulf of Georgia**

Chapter 7 (pp. 170 – 187)

From the volume:

## **Emerging from the Mist** Studies in Northwest Coast Culture History

Edited by R.G. Matson, Gary Coupland and Quentin Mackie  
2003 UBC Press, Vancouver BC

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# 7

## Dimensions of Regional Interaction in the Prehistoric Gulf of Georgia

*Colin Grier*

Thirty years ago Donald Mitchell (1971a) argued that the Gulf of Georgia constitutes a distinct region in terms of its natural, ethnographic, and archaeological character (Figure 7.1). Mitchell placed most faith in his conclusions concerning the region's ecological distinctiveness. However, subsequent ethnographic and archaeological research in the Gulf of Georgia has largely corroborated Mitchell's observations, and research has since turned to considering the cultural processes that produced the unique character of Gulf of Georgia societies.

Suttles (1990c:14) has attributed the cultural distinctiveness of the region, at least in part, to the spatial extent and intensity of intraregional social networks in which Gulf of Georgia groups participated. Ethnographically, widespread movements of Gulf of Georgia peoples produced spatially extensive areas of interaction and exchange (Barnett 1955; Mitchell 1971a; Suttles 1998). Groups from various areas of the Gulf of Georgia region travelled significant distances and maintained strong intercommunity ties with affines (individuals related through marriage) throughout the region (Suttles 1987c). An important aspect of these long-distance relations was economic; they worked to redistribute spatially and temporally clumped resources. However, the social and political component of these interactions was also critical. Exclusive affinal relations among high-status individuals from various communities and households formed an important basis for defining a "noble class" within central Coast Salish societies (Suttles 1987b; 1987c).

Archaeological investigations provide some sense of the antiquity of regional interaction and exchange in the Gulf of Georgia (e.g., Brown 1996; Burley 1980). A variety of archaeological materials are widely distributed throughout the region from roughly the Locarno Beach/Middle Pacific period (that is, after 3500 BP), indicating substantial antiquity to the movement of people and goods throughout the region (Burley 1980; Carlson 1994). However, investigating the nature of prehistoric interactions in the

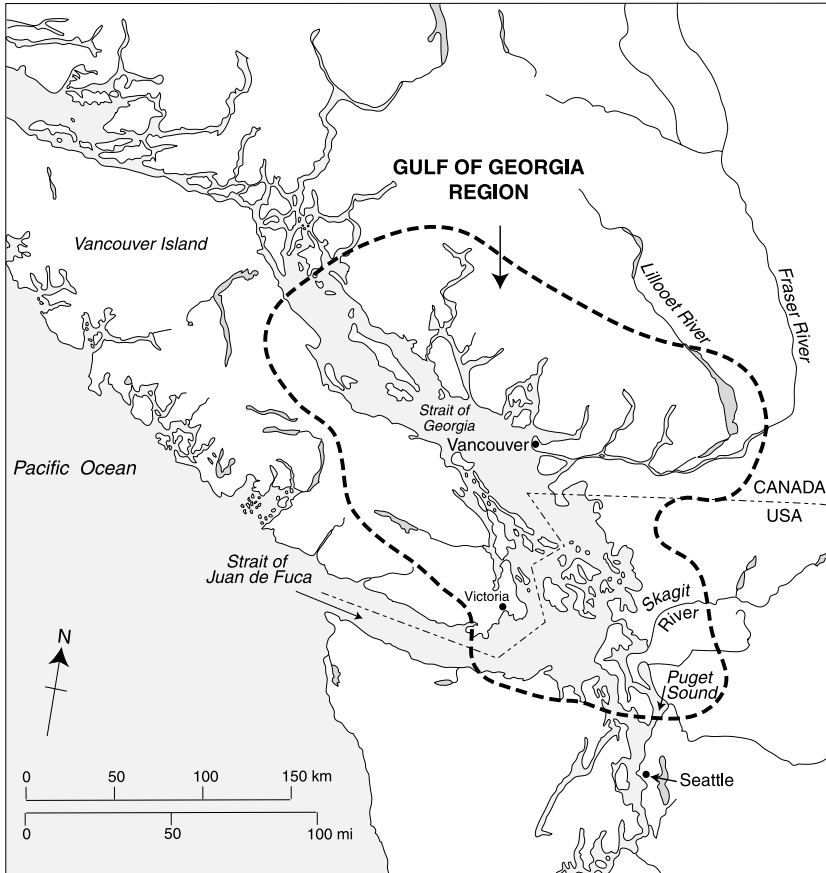


Figure 7.1 The Gulf of Georgia region as defined by Mitchell (1971a).

region is not well served by projecting ethnographically described exchange systems on to these data. There are numerous reasons to be skeptical about this approach, and these are discussed for the Gulf of Georgia region in the next section. The problem for archaeologists is to identify not only the antiquity of exchange and interactions in Gulf of Georgia prehistory but also to employ archaeological data rather than strictly ethnographic models to reconstruct the development and history of regional social networks.

The investigation of how regional exchange systems developed and changed over time has implications that reach beyond the Gulf of Georgia. The existence of regionally distinct cultural expressions within a coast-wide cultural pattern suggests that regional networks may have been important factors that structured the development of the prehistoric cultural landscape. The scale of major changes on the prehistoric Northwest Coast was often coast-wide, where similar developments such as the appearance of

large houses and cranial deformation as a marker of status appeared along large areas of the coast within short periods of time. In order to understand these widespread processes of change, we need to view the problem in terms of phenomena that are appropriate to the scale of the events.

The development of Northwest Coast socioeconomic organization can be viewed in light of research elsewhere that suggests that increasing regional interactions preface the development of strong social and political networks (usually accompanied by accelerated flows of material goods) and ultimately hierarchical social forms, regionally integrated economic systems, and polity formation (Graves and Spielmann 2000; Johnson and Earle 1987).

In this chapter, I consider the development of intraregional exchange networks in the Gulf of Georgia region, focusing not on the commodities themselves but on how these networks developed into more complex and regularized interactions through time. I review the situation in the historic period, where long-distance movements and an elite exchange network of social ties (described by Suttles [1987b]) promoted significant regional coherence among central Coast Salish groups. I then examine the archaeological evidence for exchange and interactions in the prehistoric Gulf of Georgia, focusing on the Marpole period (2500-1000 BP). By roughly 2000 BP, it appears that regional relations of exchange had developed into more substantial social and political networks that spread ideas as well as commodities throughout the region. I then present recently obtained archaeological data from the Dionisio Point site (c. 1500 BP), which provides some sense of the way in which a large Marpole-age village site in the Gulf Islands of southwestern British Columbia may have articulated with regional social and economic networks.

These site data, coupled with evidence for the widespread distribution of Marpole iconography in stone sculpture, suggest that the nature of interaction had, by the Marpole period, become more substantive than simple long-distance exchange, facilitating the spread of ideas and cultural practices. Overall, data remain thin and unsynthesized (though see Ames and Maschner 1999:165-174 for a recent discussion), and thus only general statements can be made concerning the nature of prehistoric regional networks. Yet, these data point to the need to investigate generalized exchange networks as the precursor to more formalized networks of social and political relations that ultimately supported social stratification on the later prehistoric and ethnographic Northwest Coast.

### **Gulf of Georgia Interactions in the Historic Period**

Detailed evidence concerning regional interactions in the Gulf of Georgia comes through ethnographic and historical records that document patterns of long-distance movement and exchange following European contact (Suttles 1998). These data indicate that many central Coast Salish groups

practised an extensive pattern of seasonal movements within the Gulf of Georgia region, serially exploiting resources that became available throughout the region over the course of a year (Barnett 1955; Mitchell 1971a; Suttles 1990b).

Ethnographies provide useful description of the movements of Hul'qumi'num-speaking groups from southeast Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands (Hul'qumi'num is also referred to as Island Halkomelem, as it is the dialect of the larger Halkomelem language family spoken by groups based in the islands). As part of their seasonal round, which Mitchell (1971a:27) estimates to have covered between 200 and 300 miles (320 to 480 kilometres), island-based Hul'qumi'num groups, including primarily the Cowichan, Nanaimo, and Chemainus, moved in summer from their territory on the west side of the Strait of Georgia to the Lower Fraser River (Figure 7.2) (Barnett 1955; Mitchell 1971a; Rozen 1985; Suttles 1990b, 1998). Large numbers of salmon were obtained during Fraser River spawning periods, and these fish were dried and returned as stores to the islands. Stored salmon provided household subsistence during the sedentary, winter months when local resources were not abundant.

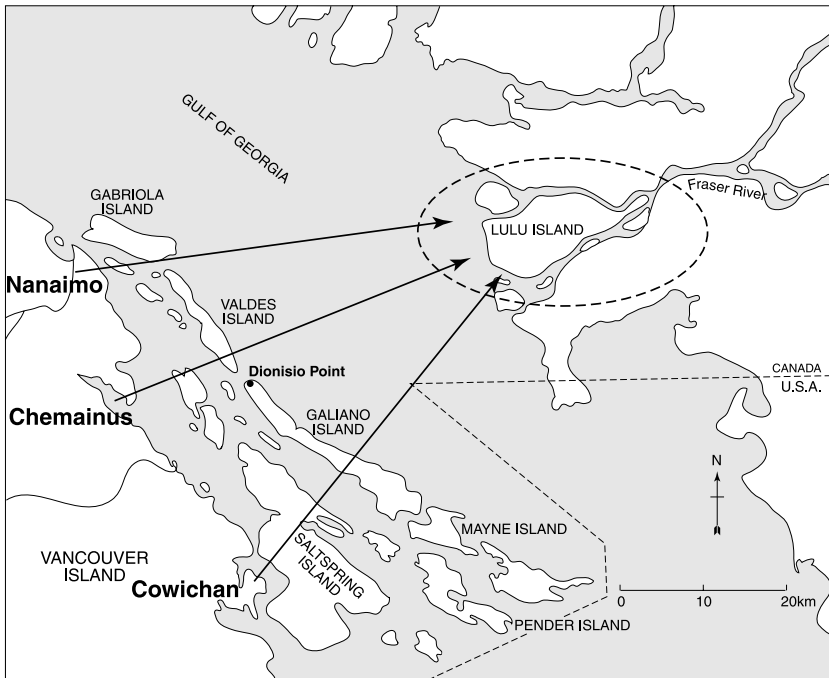


Figure 7.2 Ethnographic movements of Island Halkomelem (Hul'qumi'num) groups across the Strait of Georgia to the Fraser River.

Ethnographic sources indicate that the movement of population to the Fraser River was also substantial. Barnett (1955:22) notes that all the able-bodied Cowichan left for the Fraser River. Hill-Tout (1907) indicates hundreds of Vancouver Island people would catch and dry salmon on the Fraser. At Fort Langley in 1828, McMillan (cited in Duff 1952:25) noted 400 canoes of Cowichan passing by on the Fraser River in just one day. Supporting these accounts of large-scale population movements are records of a number of summer villages in the Fraser Delta area identified as either belonging to or inhabited by island-based Hul'qumi'num peoples (Barnett 1955; Duff 1952; Rozen 1985; Suttles 1998:169). Overall estimates of the number of Nanaimo, Chemainus, and Cowichan that travelled to the Fraser Delta on a yearly basis are as high as 1,500 (Suttles 1998:172). Barnett (1955:22) adds that only a nominal number of Hul'qumi'num people remained behind in the islands to maintain a presence at winter village locations.

While participation in the Fraser fishery was an integral aspect of Hul'qumi'num movements, the aggregation of normally widespread groups on the Fraser River in the summer brought far-flung groups together at various times and places, facilitating trade, marriages, feasting, and exchange (Mitchell and Donald 2001). In the historic period, trade was promoted by the availability of European goods at Fort Langley on the Lower Fraser River beginning in the 1820s (Suttles 1998). Trade at the fort likely broadened existing trade, contact, and alliances between the Aboriginal groups that gathered there (174).

Contact among widespread groups in the context of regional movement and exchange provided an avenue to maintain and expand intercommunity political relations. Suttles (1987b:18-21; 1987c:210-220) has described the ethnographic central Coast Salish noble class as a regionally recognized peer group of elite affines mutually supported by a network of exclusive inter-elite exchange relations. This elite exchange network facilitated exchanges of food, wealth, ritual knowledge, rights of access to resources, and the construction of alliances and marriages. These exchanges promoted regional elite solidarity and the exclusion of lower-class people from access to status resources. This elite exchange system served to reproduce the social stratification evident in ethnographic central Coast Salish societies.

It is clear that regional interactions in the historic period Gulf of Georgia were qualitatively more significant than simple material exchange in commodities. The regional social network of exchange relations was an integral aspect of Coast Salish society. However, the data from which these observations derive have minimal time depth and provide little information on the development of patterns of interaction prior to European contact or how they were affected by changes in population dynamics in the region following European contact.

The historic period pattern of interaction and population movement has been used to interpret archaeological data and suggests that similar patterns of population movement (e.g., Burley 1989) and regional social networks (e.g., Brown 1996) existed as early as 2000 BP. However, caution seems warranted in applying the historic situation to archaeological data. Loss of population resulting from diseases introduced by Europeans may have shifted long-standing territorial relationships and patterns of movement (Suttles 1998:170). Depopulation of areas of the Fraser River Delta may have only recently allowed the establishment of villages on the mainland by Hul'qumi'num groups from the islands.

The draw of European trade goods at Fort Langley may also have significantly altered patterns of movement on the Lower Fraser River. Most island-based groups appear to have included Fort Langley in their summer travels. Whether this location was visited by island groups in the summer prior to the establishment of Fort Langley is unclear. In light of these factors, it is useful to consider archaeological evidence for regional interaction in prehistory, working towards the present rather than back from the present into the past.

### **Evidence for Regional Interactions in the Prehistoric Gulf of Georgia**

The extent and nature of prehistoric regional interaction and exchange within the Gulf of Georgia region is documented primarily through the distribution of various forms of material culture produced within the region as well as the occurrence of extraregional resources in Gulf of Georgia archaeological sites. The earliest evidence for inter- and intraregional exchange is provided by data indicating that significant obsidian exchange networks existed along the coast as early as 6000 BP (Carlson 1994). The distribution of sourced obsidian indicates that material originating in various areas of the Northwest Coast was distributed widely, including within the Gulf of Georgia, by 4000 BP. Nephrite, used extensively in adze blades, is also found widely throughout the region by 2500 BP. Nephrite cannot be attributed to a specific source, though much of this material appears to have originated from the Fraser Canyon roughly 300 kilometres inland (Carlson 1994:337; Galm 1994:294-297).

The widespread distribution of obsidian and nephrite does not directly indicate either that extensive long-distance movement was involved in resource procurement or that highly formalized exchange networks existed to distribute these materials. It does suggest, however, that a significant degree of social connectivity prevailed along the coast and within the Gulf of Georgia.

Obsidian was a practical commodity in that it provided material for the manufacture of chipped tools with sharp cutting edges, and nephrite was

used in the important coast woodworking industry. Relatively early evidence of extraregional exchange of materials that were less specifically utilitarian also exists for the Gulf of Georgia. The occurrence of steatite (soapstone) labrets at the Pender Canal site in the Gulf Islands in deposits dating to roughly 3500 BP indicates that soapstone, likely from the Fraser Canyon area (Galm 1994), was moving down the Fraser River by this time.

Exchange in extralocal marine shells, particularly west coast dentalia, became significant by 2500 BP. These materials are found inland some distance, suggesting they may have moved against inland lithic materials such as steatite and nephrite (Burley 1980; Galm 1994). As marine shells generally were non-utilitarian materials, their widespread distribution suggests that trade had come to include prestige or wealth materials that may have been used as a means to mark some form of social differentiation. This is strongly suggested by the occurrence of large numbers of dentalia shell in mortuary contexts after 2500 BP (Burley 1989; Burley and Knusel 1989).

While significant evidence for the exchange of utilitarian and prestige materials is found in the Gulf of Georgia between roughly 4000 and 2500 BP, these archaeological patterns cannot be used to support the interpretation that more than generalized patterns of down-the-line long-distance trade existed. The exchange networks through which materials were distributed appear to have extended well beyond the Gulf of Georgia and provide little indication that the Gulf of Georgia itself had developed into a coherent region of interaction by 2500 BP.

Intraregional exchange relations do appear to become qualitatively different by the Marpole phase. The Marpole phase (2500-1000 BP) is considered by many researchers as the period during which Gulf of Georgia societies developed many of the core cultural institutions that persisted into the historic period (Matson and Coupland 1995:241-242; Mitchell 1971a:52-56). In the Marpole period large plank houses appear, as does evidence for ascribed, hereditary social inequality. The exploitation of salmon was intensified, perhaps to its greatest extent in Northwest Coast prehistory (Burley 1980:55; Matson 1992; Mitchell 1971a:52).

Marpole artifact styles and assemblage patterning are broadly similar across the Gulf of Georgia region, suggesting a level of homogeneity to Marpole phase cultures that may be the product of intraregional social interaction and exchange of material resources (Burley 1980; Matson 1974; Matson and Coupland 1995:211-218). Burley (1979) has noted the occurrence of substantial non-local obsidian in Marpole-phase assemblages throughout the Gulf of Georgia, as well as large quantities of dentalia shell in graves at sites such as False Narrows in the Gulf Islands (Burley 1989), indicating that extralocal goods remained desirable.

However, it is during the Marpole phase that we see the distribution of material culture that appears to reflect the spread of ideas as well as

commodities throughout the region. Duff (1956) has investigated the distribution of prehistoric stone sculpture in the Gulf of Georgia region. Most dated examples of this sculpture are Marpole in age (Holm 1990). Duff identifies consistencies in the form and style of sculpted bowls over a large region extending from the Fraser Canyon to Vancouver Island. Given the likely ceremonial function of much of this sculpture, this unity of iconographic style has been used to infer a broad area of shared ideological precepts. The distribution of the sculptural style is also similar to the ethnographic distribution of the Coast Salish language group (Brown 1996; Duff 1956).

Brown (1996) has identified similarities in Marpole earthen burial mound construction that suggest shared cultural practices across the Halkomelem-speaking area at this time. The similarities in construction and design of large earthen mounds from the Lower Fraser Valley, primarily at the Scowlit site and at Comiaken on southeastern Vancouver Island, indicate that mortuary practices were similar over a broad region. These burial mounds contain high-status burials, implying that the interaction that spread conventions of mound construction occurred primarily among elites. Brown argues that this situation is consistent with the elite exchange model presented initially by Suttles (1987b), in which elites exchange non-local material resources and symbols of power through a system of intervillage marriage alliances.

Examination of the distribution of representation in sculpture and elite mortuary practices indicates that significant exchange of information as well as material resources occurred during the Marpole phase in the Gulf of Georgia region. Both Ames and Maschner (1999:165-174) and Renfrew (1986) have argued that consistency of material culture across regions results in part from the need to have a common yardstick by which concepts such as status and authority may be displayed, perceived, measured, and ordered. Some level of standardization or regularization of cultural notions, and perhaps mechanisms of regional interaction, is thus implied by the widespread distribution of consistent ideological concepts embodied by material culture. These data may be used to posit that, during the Marpole phase, socio-political systems, rather than simply exchange systems, were becoming regional in scope.

How such developments were tied to other developments in Marpole societies – the appearance of large plank houses, the use of cranial deformation to mark social status, and the development of large-scale storage economies – remains unclear. Marpole phase societies provide the earliest convincing evidence for ascribed, hereditary status distinctions in the Gulf of Georgia (Burley and Knusel 1989), and the development of an entrenched elite likely occurred in concert with economic intensification and production of a surplus (Hayden 1994). An important question is whether the

increasing regional nature of social systems inferred for Marpole societies was tied to the development of a regional surplus economy centred on the Fraser River – an economy in which widespread Gulf of Georgia groups participated.

There is currently little evidence available to address this question, which would require documenting movements of people either directly to the Fraser River or transport of Fraser River salmon to outlying areas. Both processes may be invisible at the resolution archaeological data offer. Below, I consider recently obtained data from the Dionisio Point village site that provide some indication of how groups from the Gulf Islands may have participated in regional interactions in the Marpole phase as well as of how closely these groups were tied to developments along the Fraser River.

### **Dionisio Point: Evidence for Regional Interaction**

Investigations of the nature of prehistoric interaction in the Gulf of Georgia must consider regional distributions of various forms of material culture and resources. Yet it is also useful to explore data from individual sites in detail in order to glean insights into how various areas of the prehistoric Gulf of Georgia were connected to larger regional networks. Data from recent excavations at the Dionisio Point site provide a means to assess in what ways and to what degree Marpole phase Gulf Island groups participated in social and economic networks outside of their local context.

The Dionisio Point site (DgRv 3) is located on the northern end of Galiano Island. Galiano Island is one of the southern Gulf Islands situated in the Strait of Georgia between Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland (Figure 7.3). The site includes five sizable house depressions that contain the remains of plank houses with floor areas that ranged from 200 to 400 square metres (Figure 7.4). While the contemporaneous occupation of all houses has not been directly demonstrated, the site can reasonably be described as a village (Grier 2001). House 2, with thirteen carbon dates derived from a variety of house features, has been securely dated to 1500 BP and was likely occupied for at least a century (Grier 2001:125).

Four of the five house depressions are situated on three prominent terraces. Approximately 2 to 3 metres of elevation separate one terrace from the next. The fifth depression sits by itself on a lower and much less defined terrace area immediately behind the active beach. Terracing to create level platforms to accommodate large houses created a distinctly step-like form from the original gradual slope, and the build-up of ridges of shell midden around the house perimeters (presumably) during occupation of the village site further accentuated the house depression outlines. This considerable architectural investment and significant duration of occupation indicate substantial settlement at this location.

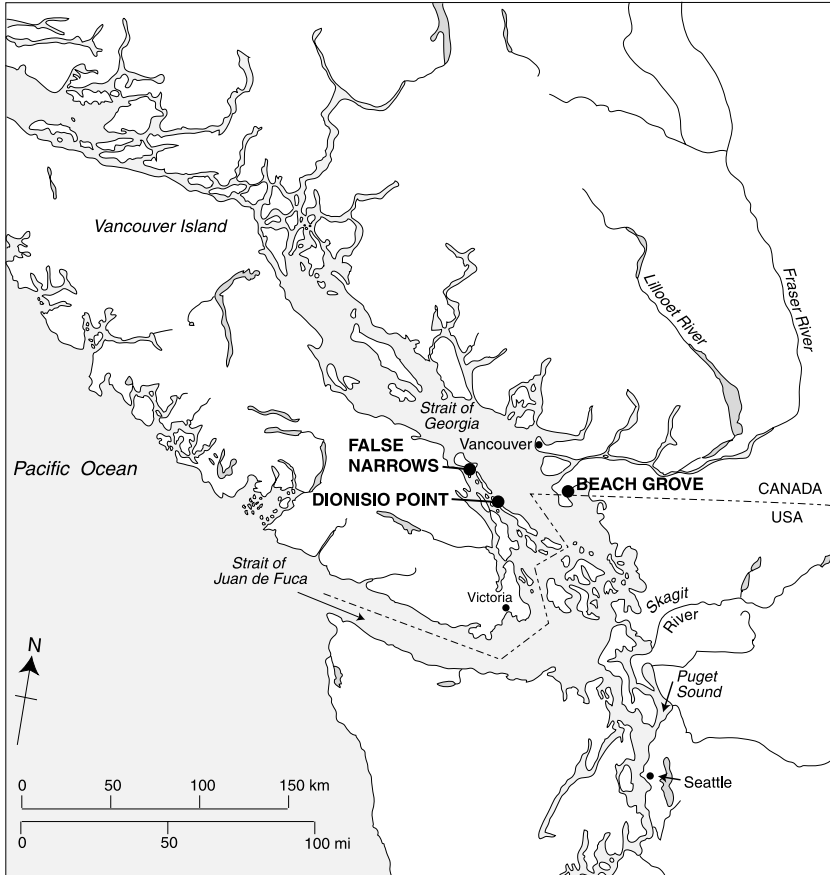


Figure 7.3 Location of the Dionisio Point site and other sites referred to in the text.

Two field seasons of excavation, one in 1997 and the other in 1998, were undertaken at the Dionisio Point site. Excavations sampled two houses, one extensively (House 2) and one modestly (House 5). These excavations produced relatively fine-grained information concerning the spatial and architectural nature of House 2 and recovered artifact and faunal material from its interior. In total, 77 square metres of the roughly 200 square metres of interior space (just under 40 percent of the interior area) in House 2 was excavated down to, and in some cases into, basal non-cultural beach gravel underlying the house occupation deposits.

The faunal assemblage recovered from the House 2 excavations provides some indication that salmon played an important role in the household economy and, coupled with other lines of inference, that this importance

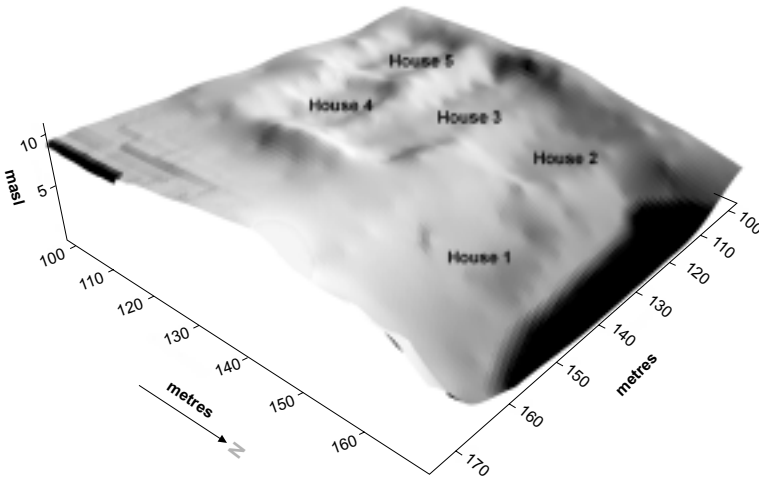


Figure 7.4 Surface map of the Dionisio Point (DgRv 3) site, showing the five house depressions known to exist there.

may be attributed to the consumption of Fraser River salmon resources. An intensive quantitative analysis has not yet been completed for the House 2 faunal assemblage. However, data describing the presence/absence of seven classes of faunal remains in house excavation contexts are available and provide a useful though coarse picture of the relative distribution of seven classes of fauna throughout House 2. Six classes of faunal taxa appear in more than half the forty-four House 2 excavation contexts. These include salmon (31/44), herring (36/44), other fish (36/44, which at Dionisio Point, included primarily rockfish [*Sebastes* spp.] and dogfish [*Squalus acanthias*] but little halibut or other flatfish), bird (26/44), and shell (23/44). Land mammal was particularly widespread among excavation contexts (42/44), while sea mammal was very restricted in its occurrence (3/44). Less quantified observations indicate that salmon vertebrae are relatively common in the contexts in which they appear.

While these data are nominal in scale and should be weighted accordingly, they do indicate that salmon, the only resource that does not occur in significant numbers within a few kilometres of the village site, is generally as abundant (at least in terms of the number of contexts in which it is present) as are local fish, bird, mammal, and shellfish resources. This use of extralocal salmon suggests that at least the one investigated household at Dionisio Point obtained an economically significant resource from a relatively distant location.

A general sense of the season of occupation of the site can be gleaned from the faunal assemblage, which bears on how much emphasis was placed

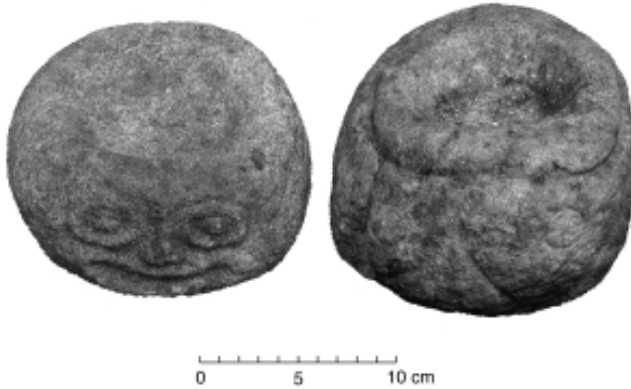
on stored resources. Historically, in the Gulf Islands herring spawned in late winter/early spring (Matson and Coupland 1995:22). The abundance of herring bone in House 2 at Dionisio Point suggests that the residents were at the Dionisio Point village at least during the spring when herring spawned. Spring is also the time during which fresh salmon availability is low in the Strait of Georgia and Fraser River system (Kew 1992:109-111). These observations suggest a winter-through-spring village occupation that relied on stored salmon from fall fishing and subsequently fresh spawning herring in the spring. This pattern is consistent with a variety of ethnographic descriptions of Hul'qumi'num seasonal rounds and sedentary winter-season plank-house villages in which salmon stores sustained sedentary occupation through the winter (Barnett 1955; Burley 1989; Duff 1952; Suttles 1998).

The substantial architecture that existed at the site can also be seen in light of Ames's (1996:134) argument that the existence of large houses implies significant storage since it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to support large households throughout the winter in most areas of the coast without some form of stored resource. This observation is particularly relevant to residential locations situated away from large salmon-bearing rivers, as was the case with Dionisio Point.

Together these observations support the inference that the occupation at Dionisio Point was focused to a significant degree on salmon fishing and storage, in addition to local resources. However, no lines of evidence point to this salmon as being Fraser River salmon specifically. There are smaller salmon-bearing rivers on the east coast of Vancouver Island, such as the Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Chemainus, that could have been the source of salmon. However, these rivers support fewer species and thus have less abundant and more temporally restricted runs, which ethnographically, were exploited *in conjunction* with Fraser River runs.

It is difficult to evaluate whether the quantity of salmon available in Vancouver Island rivers alone would have provided a basis for a successful storage economy. However, the physical location of the Dionisio Point village, unlike those located directly on these rivers, appears to provide access to both Vancouver Island and mainland salmon-fishing locations. Dionisio Point is roughly the same distance from the north arm of the Fraser River (22 kilometres) as it is from the Nanaimo River (24 kilometres) and the Cowichan River (21 kilometres). To the extent that intensive, surplus economic production was a concern for Marpole groups in the Gulf Islands, the Fraser River would have offered significantly greater returns than would Vancouver Island rivers.

Another line of evidence for the participation of Dionisio Point households in broader Gulf of Georgia interactions comes in the form of symbolic regional culture. Two pecked and ground stone bowls with incised human faces were recovered from the interior of House 2 (Figure 7.5). The



*Figure 7.5* Anthropomorphic incised stone bowls from House 2.

two bowls were found upright in their typical use position, suggesting that they were in situ, abandoned either in storage or use context. Why these items were abandoned is not clear; neither was broken or significantly damaged.

The class of portable stone sculpture to which these two bowls belong has been the subject of extensive study, particularly in the seminal work of Wilson Duff (1956). Many of these objects are known to exist throughout the Gulf of Georgia region. Yet few of these objects have been recovered from well documented archaeological contexts (Burley 1980; Duff 1956), and none has previously been recovered from interior house deposits. They are generally believed to be primarily a Marpole-period artifact, though few have been dated directly.

Both bowls conform generally to Duff's Type III Bowls with Human Heads (Duff 1956:22). Duff defined this class of artifact as boulders carved in the shape of a human head, where the whole figure is conceived as a head, with the face covering one side and the depression in the top (1956:69). Two other of these human head bowls have been found in the vicinity of Dionisio Point, one being described only as from Valdes Island (the island north of Galiano) and the other from Cowichan Gap (Porlier Pass), on which the Dionisio Point site is situated.

A human head carved in a style similar to the Dionisio Point bowls but without evidence of a bowl was recovered from the Marpole component (FNII) at False Narrows (Burley 1989:93-95). Duff (1956:71) links Type III human head bowls to the seated human figure bowls that were elaborately carved in soapstone. Focusing on breakage near its bottom, Burley (1989:95) describes the False Narrows head as perhaps having been part of a human seated figure bowl. If true, this would link the human head bowls seen at Dionisio Point very closely with the steatite human figure bowls found along the Lower Fraser River.

Both examples from Dionisio Point are round to oval in overall shape, with a flattened surface on the bottom for stability. Pecked into the top is a shallow depression. In both, the depression is roughly circular in shape and conical in profile but flat-bottomed. On a flattened end of each bowl is a face consisting of two eyes, a nose, and a mouth.

The exact use of incised or carved stone bowls as a class of sculpture remains enigmatic, but most evidence points to a function in ritual. Similar bowls were not in use among historic period Coast Salish groups, though limited ethnographic references to these sculptures unquestionably associate them with ritual, shamanism, spiritual knowledge, and power (Duff 1956:55-59). The actual usable bowl area is certainly too small to have been used in preparing any significant amount of foodstuffs (Drucker 1951:90). However, they would have been suitable for grinding and preparing a modest amount of plant or mineral substances (Duff 1956:55). The stone bowl from the southwest area of House 2 was found to be heavily stained with ochre, with staining occurring within the bowl, on the exterior surface, and on the incised face itself. No sizable pieces of ochre were recovered from the interior or in the immediate vicinity of the bowl, though four pieces of ochre were recovered from excavation units elsewhere in House 2. Ochre preparations and pastes were used ethnographically (and are still used) in many ceremonial and ritual contexts as a body application to provide protection against spiritual entities and pollution. Prehistorically, ochre is found in burials and thus had a role in funerary rites (Burley and Knusel 1989:6).

Most of the finer examples of Marpole sculpture found on the Lower Fraser River, such as the elaborate seated human figure bowls, were manufactured from steatite that originated in the Fraser Canyon. Gulf Islands examples are generally manufactured from locally available sandstone rather than steatite (Duff 1956:48-49), as is the case with the two bowls from Dionisio Point. This suggests local Gulf Islands emulation or adoption of a style of symbolism that had a regional currency, but which Duff argues originated in the Lower Fraser region (1956:71).

These observations suggest that the Dionisio Point House 2 household was drawing upon a Marpole regional ritual-symbolic system and that they had some access to symbolic resources that appear to have been associated most strongly with the Fraser River. Coupled with inferences that large-scale use and storage of salmon was conducted at Dionisio Point, the available evidence suggests that the Dionisio Point household was significantly connected to economic, social, and perhaps political networks that extended beyond their local context.

### **Archaeological Implications**

As Carlson (1994) suggests, addressing the nature of intraregional as opposed to extraregional exchange can be challenging as there are often few

materials that can be pinpoint sourced, and many commodities that were traded, particularly on the Northwest Coast, may have been perishable (e.g., subsistence goods). Without specific commodities to track, it is necessary to make inferences concerning the nature of exchange relations through ancillary data and broader inferences concerning social systems. For example, while I have posited that Gulf Island groups as early as the Marpole phase may have obtained and consumed significant levels of Fraser River salmon, there are few direct lines of archaeological evidence that could be used to unambiguously mark the presence of prehistoric island-based Hul'qumi'num populations on the mainland. Consequently, more indirect approaches to the problem are necessary.

One possible avenue to explore is the effect of economic intensification on house size in the Gulf Islands. The household, as a basic social institution in most societies, is linked to social and economic processes that operate at a variety of scales. Household size and composition responds to the broader patterns of economic and social organization (Ashmore and Wilk 1988; Wilk and Rathje 1982). In the prehistoric Gulf of Georgia, as on the Northwest Coast in general, large households provided the labour to carry out complexly organized tasks, including fishing for and drying salmon. Salmon storage economies involved consumption of a large quantity of dried salmon over the winter months, and this delayed consumption would also have required a mechanism to distribute stores to those who contributed labour to production. An important function of most households involves managing the distribution of resources for its members. The distribution of stored salmon resources was thus likely a household issue; in societies on the Northwest Coast, control over subsistence resources generally occurred at this level (Ames 1995, 1996).

If groups from the islands were involved in a regional economy focused on the Fraser River, what effect would this have had on house size and household organization in the Gulf Islands? The Dionisio Point and False Narrows sites indicate that large households existed in the Gulf Islands by the Marpole phase. The development of large households in the Gulf of Georgia region may have been a product of multiple factors. However, if during Marpole times households were assuming a greater role in the distribution and control of stored resources due to a greater reliance on stored salmon, then this would exert upward pressure on household and house size. When delayed consumption of resources occurs (as with stored salmon), this process depends "for [its] operation on sets of ordered, differentiated, jurally-defined relationships through which crucial goods and services are transmitted" (Woodburn 1988:33). Those who produced salmon stores in summer would have expected to be included in the distribution network, and so those involved in production required social ties that ensured access to salmon stores in the winter when they were consumed. The network of

production-based relations therefore forms the basis for an appropriate household distribution network. A larger production unit for salmon fishing and processing may have meant larger distribution networks and thus larger households.

Following this logic, we would expect relatively large houses to occur in the Marpole-phase archaeological record of the Gulf Islands only if these groups were involved in substantial surplus production and storage. Two Marpole-age village sites with house depressions from the Gulf Islands – False Narrows on Gabriola Island (Burley 1989; Mitchell 1967) and Dionisio Point (Grier 2001; Mitchell 1971b) – are of mid-Marpole age and are similar in their overall layout, having large house depressions on multiple long benches (Figure 7.4).

Beach Grove, a Marpole-age site in the Fraser Delta area, contained perhaps ten house depressions when first recorded. At present only two of these depressions (numbered 3 and 4 on Figure 7.6) remain relatively intact. A topographic map and measurements of these and several other partial depressions were produced with the aid of a total station EDM in March of 2000. When compared with previous sketch maps that depict areas of the site now lost (e.g., Figure 7.4a in Matson and Coupland [1995:207]), depressions 3 and 4 appear representative of the range of depression sizes that once existed at the site.

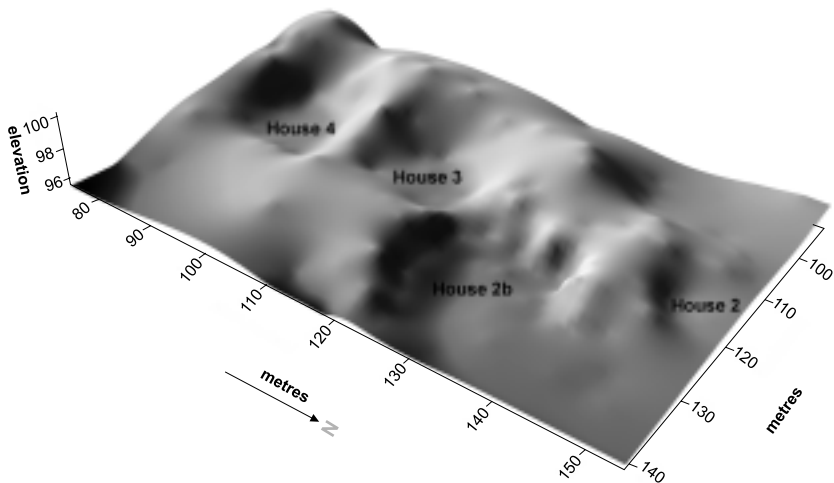


Figure 7.6 Surface map of the remaining depressions at the Beach Grove site (DgRs 1). House numbering follows that used in Figure 7.4a in Matson and Coupland (1995:207), with the exception of 2b, which was not identified as a house depression there. Note that the vertical axis values are not masl values but are relative to the mapping datum, which was arbitrarily set at 100 metres.

A comparison of the similarly aged sites of Dionisio Point in the islands (Figure 7.4) and Beach Grove on the mainland (Figure 7.6), reveals that the Gulf Island houses appear as large or larger. Of the five house depressions at Dionisio Point, four have inside measurements of roughly 20 metres by 10 metres (200 square metres) while the largest is approximately 40 metres by 10 metres (400 square metres). At Beach Grove, the inside diameter of depression 3 measures 13 by 10 metres (roughly 130 square metres) while depression 4 measures 11 metres by 11 metres (121 square metres). The sample of Marpole-age sites with defined house depressions is quite small for the Gulf of Georgia and unfortunately is likely to remain so, preventing widespread comparisons. Nevertheless, houses appear overall to be quite large in the Gulf Islands region in the Marpole period, equivalent to or larger in size than those in the Fraser River area on the mainland, despite expectations that the largest houses should occur in areas with immediate access to abundant resources.

The critical question is whether the development of large houses in the Gulf Islands came about through entirely local processes. My contention here is that large houses did not develop in isolation in the Gulf Islands. There are no salmon rivers in the Gulf Islands that approach the economic potential of the Fraser, and no salmon-bearing rivers in the immediate vicinity of Dionisio Point itself. The Cowichan and Nanaimo rivers on the east coast of Vancouver Island had significant salmon runs, but even when they are considered together the Fraser River still offered a much more reliable, diverse, and abundant source of potential surplus.

If the appearance of large houses reflects the increasing role of households in carrying out processes of intensive production and delayed distribution of stores, then salmon acquisition from the Fraser River was highly influential on household size and organization. This is not to suggest that large households resulted solely from either salmon intensification or economic ties to the Fraser River, but it seems difficult to argue that developments in the Gulf Islands from the Marpole period onward were unconnected to the resources available on the Fraser River.

## **Conclusion**

Existing data, though thin, suggests that by the Marpole phase significant changes had occurred in the kinds of regional interactions that existed earlier in the Gulf of Georgia region. The generalized exchange networks that moved commodities into and through the region prior to 2500 BP appear to have developed into or become embedded in more substantial intraregional relations that spread ideas and symbolic material culture throughout the Gulf of Georgia. This suggests a coherence or unity to the Gulf of Georgia region that is not visible in the earlier archaeological record

of the region and that may reflect the development, as Mitchell suggested, of the Gulf of Georgia as a distinct cultural area after roughly 2500 BP.

Suttles (1990b) and Ames and Maschner (1999:165) suggest that there is significant time depth to the regional patterns of inter- and intraregional trade both in the Gulf of Georgia and for other regions along the coast. Clearly, by the Marpole phase interactions within the Gulf of Georgia were qualitatively more substantial than those of simple long-distance exchange. The long-term development of these more substantial Gulf of Georgia interactions appears to be tied temporally to other major developments, such as the appearance of large houses and ascribed inequality both within the region and on the Northwest Coast in general. Careful consideration of the spatial and temporal dynamics of regional interaction systems, and how we may study them archaeologically, will be critical to advancing models for the evolution of coastal societies.

The main limitation to what we can and currently do know is that of data. Acknowledging this reality requires viewing the interpretations provided here as a framework of potentially useful questions rather than specific conclusions. However, avenues that have yet to be explored, such as a broader examination of settlement patterns outside of the Fraser River area, should prove fruitful to pursue. For example, why do large villages such as Dionisio Point and False Narrows occur in the outer, easternmost Gulf Islands during Marpole times? Is this an indication that settlement patterns were oriented with respect to access to the Fraser River? Or are these villages simply the expansion of settlement due to population increases on Vancouver Island? These questions bear directly on how integrated Gulf of Georgia economic and social relations had become at various junctures in prehistory. Thirty years ago Don Mitchell (1971a:29) argued that Gulf of Georgia settlement patterns and economies could be understood with respect to their relationship with economic and cultural developments that centred on the Fraser River. A significant amount of work remains to be done to evaluate how far into prehistory this statement applies.

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