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# On the Past 40 years of Archaeology in the Pacific Northwest

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## On the Past 40 years of Archaeology in the Pacific Northwest

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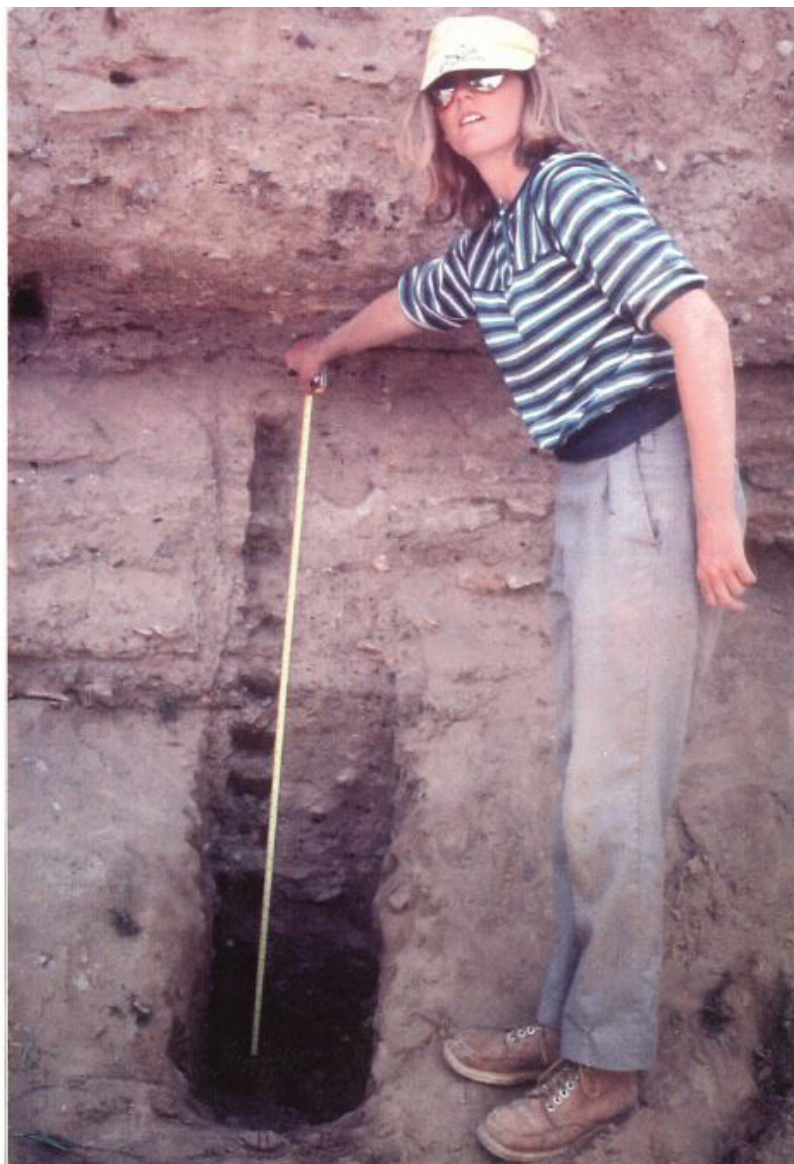
I was asked to write a short essay reflecting on key changes I have seen in Pacific Northwest archaeology over my approximately 40-year career. I have settled on one main thing: the growth in Tribal sovereignty over archaeology, which parallels a shift towards a broader conception of what archaeology *is*, or at least how it is practiced by academics and in cultural resource management (CRM). What I highlight of course reflects what has changed the most in my thinking and practice. So, I will use some of my own history to illustrate these changes.

I came to archaeology as an anthropology major at the University of Georgia, and I graduated in 1977 (Figure 1). I loved anthropology—for teaching me about cultural relativism, belief systems, biological and cultural evolution, the extraordinary diversity in humanity across all time scales. I gravitated towards archaeology in particular, since it joined subjects I'd always liked—history and geology. I ended up in the Pacific Northwest by chance. While at field school in central Washington in 1975, I bonded utterly with the region, through weekend road trips to the Washington Coast (including to Ozette), the Puget Sound, Vancouver Island, and the Canadian Rockies. We all know the feeling when a place *feels right*; that is what I felt all the time that summer. Thus, when I was considering graduate schools—I only applied to one program, the University of Washington (UW). I was accepted, then enrolled in 1979.

The UW archaeology program had a very particular bent, with a strong focus on science and evolutionary models, which was very much

in the processual mold. As an undergraduate I had been taken with Lewis Binford and the “New Archaeology,” which emphasized archaeology as a science, seeking generalizations about human behavior, past and present. I was especially drawn to ecology and exploring long-term human-animal relationships, which led me to zooarchaeology, and ultimately fisheries. I appreciated statistics, logic, answering questions with a cool analytic gaze—all of it. My advisor, Don Grayson, faculty Robert Dunnell, Julie Stein, and Pat Kirch—and fellow graduate students—together greatly influenced my intellectual development, and gave me models for teaching and mentoring, which continue to influence me as a professor and researcher at Portland State University.

Besides the science emphasis, the sub-fields in the UW anthropology program were extremely isolated—socially and intellectually. For archaeology students, this meant we had very little exposure to theory and method in cultural anthropology. Moreover, we were disconnected from ethnography—and especially local Native American Tribes in course work and research. The reasons for this are complex. I suspect the lack of engagement with Indigenous people and Tribes more generally was because of the legacy of university scholarship tending to operate in isolation. Of course, academia carries the weight of colonialism in general that privileges the academy (with Western traditions of knowledge) over Indigenous voices and needs, then and now. I also think the science emphasis of UW archaeology helps explain the lack of connection with Tribes. During the 1980s, the



**Figure 1.** Virginia taking soil samples from a profile at Mohenjodaro, Indus River, Pakistan, Winter, 1983.

post-processual paradigm was starting to take off, which was a direct critique of processualism and the science focus of UW archaeology. Post-processualism is an umbrella for a range of theoretical frameworks including structuralism, feminism, Marxism; it highlighted the political nature of archaeology, and, at least in early days, was strongly critical of western science (Earle et al. 1987). The post-processual program also called for greater inclusion of diverse voices—including Indigenous ones. This basic case for fairness and equity resonated with me and others at the UW. However, the post-processual critique against science was too much for most of us to take.

Whatever the reason, and it pains me to say now because of how narrow and restrictive it sounds, throughout the 1980s the UW program largely could (and did) operate independently of Tribal interests or concerns. Perhaps the UW was more extreme than other academic archaeology programs in the region. There were exceptions. For example, archaeologists from Washington State University worked closely with the Makah Tribe in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the Ozette (Samuels 1994) and Hoko projects (Croes 1995). And as part of the Chief Joseph Dam Project, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville closely worked with the archaeology

contract office of the UW (Campbell 1985). These and other interactions notwithstanding, before the 1990s, Indigenous people had very little say regarding the practice of archaeology in the Pacific Northwest.

All this began to change in 1990 with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the watershed federal legislation, which provides for the repatriation of certain Native American human remains or ancestors, funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants or affiliated Tribes. NAGPRA redressed the long history of unequal treatment of Native American human remains, but also increased Tribal sovereignty more generally over their past—how it would be studied and shared. NAGPRA forced archaeologists for the first time to work with Tribes and in so doing, it created opportunities for Tribes and professional archaeologists to simply engage one another across a range of issues. The law also forced archaeologists to deeply reflect on the discipline's colonial history; it directed us to find ways of reconciling professional interests and a concern for basic fairness with Tribal concerns and goals.

As part of increased Tribal control, the 1990s also saw the establishment of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) to support Tribes in managing cultural resources on Tribal lands, which began to take control of certain duties carried out by the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs). Slow to develop in the beginning, as of 2018, there are 180 THPOs across the country (National Park Service 2020). In fairness, many THPOs are challenged to keep up with the demands put on them, given funding and staffing issues, but still, their presence is indicative of increasing Tribal power in CRM. With these changes has come a change in taxonomy, in the classification of our identities. Twenty or so years ago, there were “archaeologists” and “Tribes,” where there is now a growing number of “Tribal archaeologists” or “Indigenous archaeologists.” Stapp and Burney (2002) provide an in-depth discussion on the history of Tribal CRM.

Importantly, shifts in CRM, which gives Tribes greater authority over their past, are consistent with aspects of the post-processual program with its call for diverse voices participating in archaeology. CRM laws themselves incorporate language which supports the protection of places holding cultural values, independent of physical traces of archaeology, such as stone tools, animal bones, or house features (see Moss 2005 for discussion). Thus Criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination process (of the National Historic Preservation Act, 1966) stipulates that sites may be deemed significant if they are “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” (National Park Service 1990:2). Moreover, the 1990s amendments to the NRHP nomination process created a way to document and evaluate Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs), holding values that were important to a community such as “beliefs, customs, and practices, of a living community that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice” (Parker and King 1998:1). Although, as Barcalow and Spoon (2018) point out, the TCP framework has not fulfilled all its promise, they suggest ways to address these constraints. The takeaway here is this: CRM laws that guide decisions about what our society wants to protect for future generations encompass more than information relevant to science or academic research questions.

I agree with Moss (2005) who argues that shifts in the practice of CRM in the 1980s to 1990s—especially in regards to increased Tribal involvement—had the effect of shifting the theoretical landscape in which academic archaeology operated. At least some of us who had positioned ourselves as independent scientists working in the processual paradigm realized that these goals were simply too narrow. In the late 1990s, I started to fundamentally “get” that archaeology had value besides what it could objectively tell us. I began to reconnect with the humanities side of archaeology, both in support

of Indigenous values, but also broader society. What this has meant to me practically is increased comfort and ability to hold simultaneously different viewpoints about something—an artifact (or *belonging* as many Indigenous peoples prefer), a site, a landscape. I can appreciate the scientific insights from study of a stone tool (its age, role in trade networks or measure of social status); but I respect and moreover wish to understand what Indigenous people may draw from that object and that this material culture is living and not stuck in the past.

Besides appreciating that we can use different lenses to understand the human past and its connections to us today, increasingly scholars working in the Pacific Northwest have shown the power of integrating knowledge from Western science and traditional knowledge holders (Figure 2). Much of this work has focused on human-environmental relationships, such as in coastal areas where scholarship has examined the long history of human management of

shellfish beds (Deur et al. 2015; Lepofsky et al. 2015); or landscapes more generally such as through fire, transplantation, coppicing, etc. (see papers in Deur and Turner 2005). All of this work has challenged deep-rooted western views that see Indigenous people in our region as passively foraging, lightly living on the landscape, rather than actively managing it (Campbell and Butler 2010).

Beyond this, our region has seen an increase in community-based and collaborative projects where Tribal and other archaeologists co-create knowledge through a collective view of goals and objectives. Just to name a few examples, Gonzalez et al. (2018) showcase a collaboration between the UW and Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde designed to serve a range of goals including to highlight the history of settler colonialism on the reservation, with the broader purpose of supporting Tribal survivance and cultural renewal. A long history of collaboration among Portland State University, led by Kenneth



**Figure 2.** The Čixwicən project team, from left to right, Michael Etnier, Virginia Butler, Sarah Sterling, Kris Bovy, and Sarah Campbell at the mouth of the Elwha River, Washington, August, 2011 (Photograph by Kathryn Mohlenhoff).

M. Ames; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Chinook Tribe focused on the Lower Columbia River, generating a rich body of knowledge about social complexity, human-environmental relationships and more; but as important, supported tribal revitalization (Boyd et al. 2013; Daehnke 2017; Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge 2020)

Thus, from my perch 40 years on, much has shifted in Pacific Northwest archaeology, with an increasing role for Tribes, and an increasing commitment from academia and CRM to support that role. There is much more to do. We are dealing with a deep and tenacious history of settler colonialism and systemic racism. And

like most cultural-political transformations, change is uneven and slow. But there is change. My efforts to build relationships with Tribes and other community partners as part of my own and student projects have been the most rewarding experiences of my career. I am grateful to have lived as these changes have taken place. Collaboration is the right thing to do in support of justice, equity, and inclusion. Moreover, enlarging the scope of “who” does archaeology gives us new and important insights about our collective human past, which we would not have otherwise.

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