

## Our Collective Heritage: How Much do we Really Care?

A friend just told me that another of Lasqueti's ancient First Nation's settlements was recently leveled with an excavator to be replaced by a modern home. This is by no means the first time this has happened in my 26 years on Lasqueti, although it could be argued that this case is a bit different since I had talked to the landowner before about the importance of the site on their property. In other cases, I have received remorseful phone calls the day after with hopeful pleas that I could somehow undo the damage that had been done. I never could. In all cases, the outcome is the same: 1000's of years history – the record of 100's of individual lives lived – destroyed in minutes. Without the sequential layers of history that make up an archaeological site, all that is left is a pile of artifacts, charcoal, and shell, with no context – no story to tell. It is the words of a book piled in a random, meaningless heap.

For those of you who don't know me, I am a professional archaeologist, specializing in Northwest Coast history. I am passionate about cultural heritage, and, as I have written in the *Isle & Times* before, I see cultural and biological diversity as inextricably linked. I am constantly fighting my personal grief about the parallel, worldwide losses in both of these realms. I devote much of my social justice energy to educating about the value of cultures that develop in particular places over the long-term. One of the many reasons I love Lasqueti is that we, as a collective, recognize the value of community and the connection to place.

It's hard to convey the pain I feel when I see our community failing to protect its ancient cultural heritage to the highest possible standards. I have spent many hours over the last two decades working with Lasquetians to create a better model for cultural preservation than we see elsewhere. I've talked and written about how to protect and steward the archaeological heritage on your property (<http://www.lasqueti.ca/files/care%20and%20tending.pdf>), about calling me before you dig on your property (<http://lasqueti.ca/files/Call%20before%20you%20dig.pdf>), about how there is no need to fear your land is going to be taken away from you as a result of First Nations claims (<http://www.lasqueti.ca/archaeological-heritage/more-info>), and of creating a trained community-wide archaeological "response team" to deal creatively with our archaeological heritage. I've seen a growing awareness and enthusiasm over the years about all things archaeological. For instance, I rarely hear anymore the statement that "*First Nations didn't live here permanently...*" and many people have taken me up on my suggestions about heritage stewardship. But in the end, the destruction of our collective heritage has continued, and in fact, has increased in magnitude as we develop more of the island and use more earth-moving machines.

So, I turn to you, my community, to ask this: *Do we want to protect and preserve our archaeological heritage? If so, how and what parts? What role do you want me, as a local professional archaeologist, to have? Do you want to be able to damage archaeological sites on your property, but hope that others won't? Should we report people who are in contravention of the "Provincial Heritage Act"? Is it important to us to still have an archaeological heritage on Lasqueti in 50 years? At the rate we're going, we won't.*

I feel I have come to the end of a personal road—I can't do this on my own. It's time for us, as a collective – a community that believes strongly in *community* – to figure out if and how we want to honor the other communities who have lived on Lasqueti before us. Does the past matter to us? Is a healthier world one in which recognizes the value of the past as well as the future? Clearly, I think it is, but I am just one voice.

I would like to initiate a community discussion of these issues. As a starting point, I invite people to write me and to send their insights to the broader email list.

With deep respect,

Dana