Smaylilh or Wild People Archaeology

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Abstract:

The native peoples who inhabit the Pacific Northwest Coast and Interior Plateau possess oral traditions concerning cryptozoology, including the 'wild people' also known as Sasquatch or Bigfoot. For the Squamish Nation, these are Wild People, or "Smaylilh". Squamish historical accounts indicate that these Wild People and humans are, or once were, related. This common ancestry indicates long-standing co-habitation within Squamish territory.

This paper deals with a number of examples of this, including stories or tales of brief encounters with Wild People. Encounter stories have been mapped and relate to the regional archaeological record. It is suggested that archaeological sites in remote or difficult to reach locations represent Smaylilh activities. In taking this approach, it is hoped that anthropological/archaeological theoretical concepts can be meshed with Indigenous, First Nation, perspectives.

Introduction

The genesis of this paper began as a result of conversations with several relatives of mine in the Squamish Nation. Our discussions, part of my ongoing dissertation research, usually revolved around territory, places, as well as oral history from the level of village communities to

individuals (Squamish Nation 1992). These discussions have taken place over several years, many times being centered on my research - and especially focused on places that I working on, including those in very remote sections of the Squamish Nation. Often, I would ask knowledgeable people for their opinions of territory I was about to venture into. A typical response would be;

"Oh you're going to hang out with the wild people..."

or

"Why are you going there, only the animals and other beings live out there..."

I often wondered why people said this, until I discovered for myself the essence of those places, indicated by unique qualities of flora and/or fauna as well as the rare archaeological site – always in remote, difficult to access locales. Conventional archaeological understanding of such special places usually suggests casual use of these landscapes, but I suggest they are much more significant. I would like to present some preliminary findings, presenting an alternative and potentially debatable perspective, that these remote sites combine etic perspectives with an emic Indigenous explanation that includes manifestations of the Smaylilh people. In undertaking this approach, I present a specific theoretical perspective (cf. Ingold 2000) combined with ethnographic (Bouchard and Kennedy 1976a and 1976b; Hill-tout 1897, 1900, 1978; Mathews 1955; Turner and Bouchard 1976) and archaeological data (Reimer 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006) to indicate that the Wild People are human, are related to the Squamish Nation, and both share knowledge of plant, animals and places. This is not a paper about the "Bigfoot" of pseudoscience and the sensationalist media; it is about cultural perspectives and the incorporation of wider sources of data than the usual artifacts and sites and how we interpret past (and present) landscapes.

While the use of oral history and archaeological data has been a matter of debate (cf. Mason 2000; Echo-hawk 2000), several researchers on the Northwest Coast have successfully combined archaeological data and oral historical data. McLaren (2003) illustrated the close correlation of Coast Salish narratives and temporal changes in the archaeological record of the southern Northwest Coast. Similarly to this, Fedje and Mathews (2005) present oral history and archaeological data as having long cultural continuity in Haida Gwaii. In each case, oral history of various events and shifts in the use of landscape and resources mesh and provide an enhanced understanding of the region's history. Both McMillan (2002) and Budhwa (2002) provide compelling evidence for the value of combining oral history and geo-archaeological data in examination of catastrophic paleoenvironmental events along the entire Northwest Coast. More specific cases of the use of oral history and archaeological data can be found in White (2006) where his use and understanding of Bella Bella community oral history refines the interpretations regarding the construction and use of stonewall fish traps and their role in managing fish stocks. Similar to this, Williams (2006) used oral histories to show the importance of the mariculture of rock line walls to the formation and management of clam gardens and not fish traps along areas of the Northwest Coast. In these cases, the researchers were successful in combining oral history and archaeological data since they took the time to understand the variation in each, and weigh each set of data set fairly and equally. Similar approaches have been successfully applied to many other areas of North Americas, such as the Southwest by Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2006), where they found close links between oral history and archaeological settlement patterns and resource uses. Elsewhere, Yellowhorn (2002) reinterprets Plains archaeology through an Internalist Piegan perspective that includes the formulation of land use and settlement interpretations different from conventional science based archaeology. Combining oral narratives with

archaeological data one can move from various scales of analysis; from individual sites and locations, to collections of sites in a watershed, to a complete territorial cultural landscape. Researchers must be wary not to rely too much on a single account when moving up in these scales of analysis, thus one must search for multiple accounts of evidence when proposing ideas about past cultural activities.

Theoretical Perspectives

Current theoretical approaches to Pacific Northwest Coast and Interior Plateau archaeology remain entrenched in Cultural Historical (Matson and Coupland 1995), Evolutionary (Croes and Hackenberger 1988) and Cultural Ecological (Prentiss and Chatters 2003) models. These models apply a direct historical approach, or search for key cultural traits, to form cultural patterns as based on common cultural adaptive traits. These models attempt linkages of pre-contact material cultures to the ethnographic recent past. They do not tend into consideration all details of oral history, nor place names of First Nation groups.

Archaeological (that is, etic) modeling views the Squamish Nation's past in clearly defined stages that tend to simplify data into preconceived traditions, phases or developmental stages and/or adaptations that ultimately present native cultures as being inert – reacting primarily to external stimuli. These models differ from First Nations' emic perspectives in that long-term, structured oral history and traditions show continuous use and occupation of territory from time immemorial.

I present a synthetic model, in that oral history and place names correlate with archaeological data as it pertains to the Smaylilh in particular. This perspective is influenced by Tim Ingold's writings in "*Perceptions of the environment, livelihood, dwelling and skill*", specifically his focus on 1) Hunting and gathering and attendant ways of perceiving the environment, and 2) Ancestry, generation, subsistence,

inherited memory and land use patterns (2000: 40-60, 132-151). Ingold's approach helps me address how people of the Squamish Nation perceive the Smaylilh and documents their experiences with them in the 'back of beyond'. The Squamish Nation believes, with a nod to Ingold, that; 1) human beings cannot be meaningfully separated from the environment, 2) people, plants and animals exhibit patterned behaviors that cross-cut species, and 3) persons who utilize a territory develop and/or learn in a landscape as expressions of knowledge as to how other people, animals, plants, mythical beings, inanimate objects and/or places are related to perceptions of place and, indeed, history (see Figure 1).

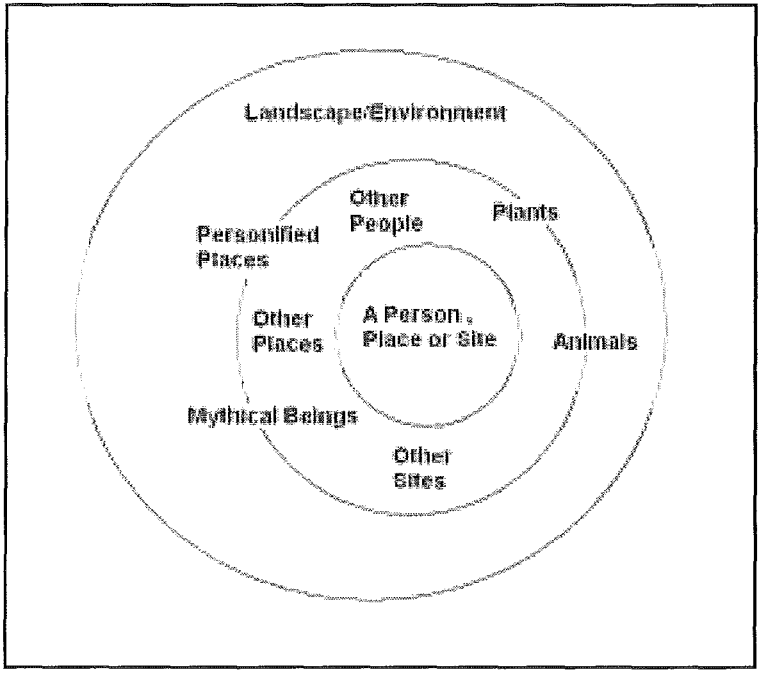

Figure 1. Squamish Nation Perspectives of Landscapes and Environments.

As Ingold's Relational Model demonstrates, linkages among concepts of ancestry, generation, substance, memory and land are expressed through the meanings a culture gives ascribes to them – the emic perspective. The ancestors of the Squamish Nation are not only deceased relations, but ***also animals, plants, spirits and mythical beings***. These ancestors are tied to places in the landscape and remind people of their past. This appears to be highly dependant on location and experiences drawn from 'being on the land'. Any experience gained by the ancestors was passed across generations through oral traditions. Oral traditions encapsulate and conceptualize past meanings and provide a sense of purpose to people's actions. This is commonly experienced through the Squamish Nation "Witness Ceremony", a ceremony that insures continuity of Squamish Nation oral history. By conducting repetitive actions in a location or 'taskscape', the substance of material culture is formed – resulting in the creation of archaeological sites, features and artifacts. The sub-strata of Squamish Nation culture is manifest in people's knowledge of the ancestors, their personal ancestral name, oral traditions, and other historical documents such as place names and tasks conducted in a specific locale.

By recognizing and applying this perspective, I am able to explore the Squamish Nation's emic perceptions of the environment by means of examination of archaeological sites, landscape features, place names (including inanimate objects or 'non-site' sites), bioresources (flora and fauna) and the role of the Wild People as they exist in the memory of some Squamish Nation individuals.

Ethnographic Accounts of Wild People

While there are numerous accounts of encounters with Wild People (Figure 2), I present a selection of three detailed ethnographic accounts drawn from several sources (Bouchard and Kennedy 1976a and 1976b; Hill-tout 1897, 1900, 1978;

began to carry down the mountain goat hides he had been given bit-by-bit. It took him a long time. Finally, he got the entire gift home. His friends asked him time and again where the hides came from, but he would not tell. It used to be said about him that he would go off, disappear, and then come back, refusing to say where he went. On his deathbed, he told about the tribe he had seen up in the mountains. After his death, people would go and look. No one discovered them, and eventually they stopped looking.

A Violent Encounter With A Wild Person

In opposition to the above account is a story, recorded by Kuipers (1967, 1969), of a violent meeting with a Wild Person. On a certain day, a man decided to go hunting. He was from ***Skwelw'il'em*** (a village at the mouth of the Squamish River); I do not remember what his name was. He paddled out to Swi'yat (Woodfiber), then he went up into the mountains. Night fell, so he made camp, built a fire, and when he was finished, he lay down to sleep (figure 5).

The fire went out, but the moon was rising. The man's attention was drawn by a sound of someone from below climbing up. He had made his camp in a recess in the mountainside. The maker of the noise became visible, but backed away, while the man kept still. Again, he heard noises, and the other was climbing up again. First there appeared a hand and eventually a face of what he thought to be a man. As he grabbed his rifle the other now became visible and behaved as if he was after our man. The latter became frightened and shot him in the stomach. He disappeared, falling down with a loud yell. Our man took action; he ran for shore, climbed in his canoe, and paddled home.

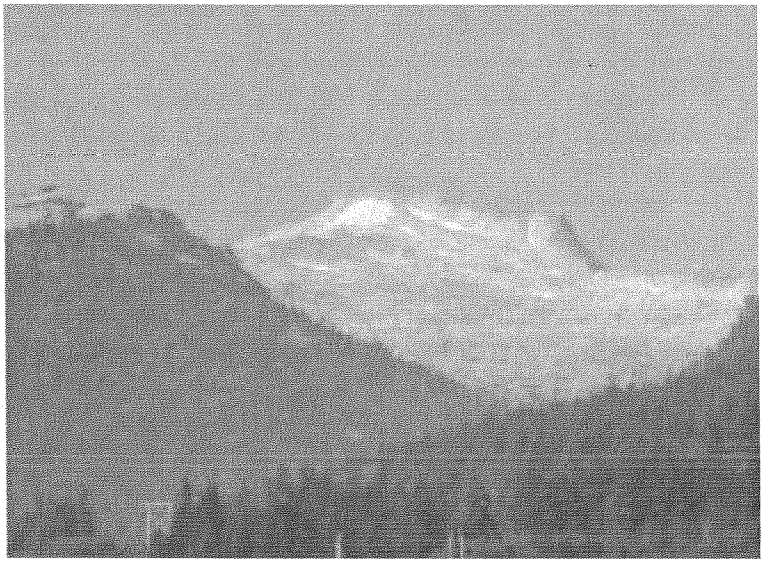

Figure 5. The mountain, valley and creek known as Swi'yat or Woodfiber.

Upon his return, the man asked if anybody had gone missing. He had a look at all the other surrounding villages, but there was no such report. After a considerable time had passed, the man went back to have a look at the spot where he had camped, and went down to what he judged to be the place from where the apparition had come. He reached the bottom and saw a skeleton there. It was, indeed, a human being, except that the bones were very large. The shinbone reached up to his hip when he measured it. It must have been an enormous man!

Squamish Nation Shamanic Training

Upon reaching their late teens or early twenties, young men who were deemed to have spiritual insights or desired to undertake training to become a shaman, were separated from their families (Barnett 1955; Bouchard and Kennedy 1986;

Matthews 1955). They were told training would take as long as five to ten years in the wilderness - away from everything that is human. If they accepted, plans were made to move them to places where they could begin training. Over time, they took on a wild-looking appearance since they dwelt alone in remote locations.

During training, it was expected they would come to have special knowledge of places, plants and animals of their training area. Training centered on being part of the environment, to learn the ways of other things and to remember them, so that they could bring this knowledge back to their people once training was finished.

There are accounts of shamans from the Squamish and Cheakamus river valleys ending their training in Burrard Inlet, traveling some 150 km over mountain ranges and river valleys - over some very remote and difficult terrain. Occasionally they may have been seen, heard or encountered by resource-gathering parties from villages, or other men in training. When encountered they must have looked wild and unkempt, like Smaylilh, because this is who they were, with long hair, wearing only animals skins – living wild.

If one considers alternative explanations of Wild People as ancient primates (cf. Meldrum 2006), the evidence falls short, there is no reliable evidence to conclude that Bigfoot or Sasquatch are a genetically viable species. Therefore the consistent oral histories of many Northwest Coast groups (cf. Ally 2003; Mack 1996), when combined with the archaeological record, offer a more likely scenario of what Wild People are and the role they play for Indigenous people.

Modern native peoples still practice these spiritual training activities. Because of this, I have come to understand that these young men in training were living wild in specific areas of our territory, and consequently leaving an archaeological footprint. Therefore, archaeologists and land and resource use managers need to think about remote areas in light of this information. Because these "Wild Men" were

traditional knowledge specialists and are held in respect, it is required that their training areas be protected for future cultural use (Squamish Nation 1992; 2001).

Wild People Archaeology and the Regional Archaeological Record

The archaeological record of Squamish Nation territory is diverse (Reimer 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). There are numerous site types ranging from coastal middens, clam gardens and fish traps, to up-river villages, trails and culturally modified trees. Of the 218 known sites, those in low elevation contexts total 168. These typically are the well-studied, large, stratified sites, whereas those in the uplands are more ephemeral because they are small and found deep in the coastal rain forest, as well as in high elevation contexts.

Largely ignored until recently, some research studies have expanded the known range of sites and contexts. These total the 40 remaining sites. Sites in remote locations include mid- elevation rock shelters, culturally modified trees and lithic scatters at high elevations. Many of these would take many days, if not weeks, to travel to on foot, and most are in extremely difficult to access locations.

Previous research and interpretation of these sites focused on linkages with the lowland archaeological record. Mid-elevation rockshelters are generally thought to be base camps for hunting, plant gathering and territorial defense. High elevation alpine sites are linked to mountain goat hunting, lithic acquisition and harvesting of food and medicinal plants. While these interpretations are likely, a few sites do not fit into any settlement pattern, hunting or resource-use models. Individually, these sites are not particularly significant, but they do provide potential evidence of people, wild or otherwise, did away from their home villages in river valley and ocean-side settings.

If one is willing to consider the role of some of these remotely set sites as those of the Wild People, we will be adding a new chapter and synthesis of some aspects of Northwest Coast Archaeology. I propose that these far off sites were the result of Smaylilh or Wild People habitations; that is, young men undergoing spiritual training alone, in isolated settings for years on end.

Discussion

It maybe possible that the ethnohistoric accounts of Smaylilh are accounts of people on long extended hunting trips or engaged in spiritual training, yet most of these experiences would not have been on the same level of intensity as those young men who were engaged in multi-year vision questing in their quest to become shamans. After spending five to ten years out in the remote and difficult to reach wilderness areas, it seems very likely that one would leave an archaeological record very similar to that of the Wild People of oral tradition as small archaeological sites in odd locations, far away form home villages in comparison to the distribution of other archaeological sites in other areas.

Furthermore, spiritual trainees most likely resembled a Wild Person; they had long hair, wore sparse clothing, and were physically fit and capable of feats of endurance not easily matched by those without this training. In these years of training, one would gain a lifetime of experience that would help an entire generation of Squamish Nation people once the trainees returned to the village to re-enter 'normal' daily life. Unfortunately, the consequences and stories of how Wild Men were tamed must be left as the subject of another paper.

In their multi-year stay in the wilderness, Wild People (now revealed as Shamans in training) would have had to learn how to deal with plants and animals on levels that few today would understand (e.g., Wade Davis' experiences with the 'souls' of plants and animals in traditional societies). There would have also been encounters with mythic beings and

encounters with places on high mountaintops, spiritually charged waterfalls and rock bluffs/shelters (think how J.R.R. Tolkien wove these images into the Lord of the Rings and the many journeys through his Middle Earth). After these encounters, a shaman would have eventually come back to their human home with the knowledge of how humans are related to plants, animals, and the places they dwell in - all would become part of a village and family's oral history and traditions, including naming a place. When we read of other oral history events, such as the transformation of animals and plants, about mythical beings such as Thunderbird, and others, we undertake the development of perhaps a new understanding of when, where and how those events took place, and their significance in a pre-industrial society. When shamans in training did not come back to their home village for years, their disappearance (and eventual reappearance as wild people) perpetuated stories of the Smaylilh, Wild People, into the present.

Not all who dared venture to these locations have had an encounter with a Shaman/Wild Person, yet enough would come back with tales of sightings, sounds or other experiences which would be passed down in family memory. Places on the landscape would then be imbued with sacred qualities, and efforts would be made to keep them in their wild state, acknowledging the reciprocal relation with the Smaylilh or Wild People and their need for land and resources.

It is very difficult for me to impart to you, the audience, what this means to me, as I find it hard to put my feelings into words. What you really need to do, as I have learned, is to go and experience these wild places and, perhaps become a bit wild yourself, even if just for a little while. This may not be everyone's idea of doing fieldwork, but at the very least it offers something to think about when doing archaeology in those far-off, difficult to reach places. To paraphrase a famous poet:

"there (were) strange things done 'neath the Coastal sun by the men who moiled for knowledge ... the forest and mountain trails have their secret tales, that would make your blood run cold" (with apologies to Robert Service).

Conclusion

I propose a need to study First Nations' oral histories in different and new ways if we are going to begin to consider the context of any one regional archaeological record. While current constructs of Northwest Coast archaeology serve a useful purpose, and are interesting and significant in their own right, we also need to continue to incorporate both archaeological theory and data with Indigenous perspectives (cf. Watkins 2001, 2005; Watkins and Ferguson 2005). In pursuit of such as goal, we must consider the breaking down of arbitrary divisions of human/animal, culture/nature and natural/ supernatural.

One way to break down these divisions is to take a phenomenological perspective when doing archaeological fieldwork. In doing so, one can begin to consider the roles that the world has on us and how this affects the ways we formulate our perceptions and interpretations. From time spent, and experience in, many remote and hard to reach locales along the Northwest Coast I have sought to do this, and I have attempted to keep the memories of my experiences in certain places alive. In doing so, I have come to understand the role and need for wild spaces within Squamish territory and the reasons why they are kept that way. Hence, if an area has little or no archaeological signatures this does not mean that that area was not used or is not culturally important, rather it just has a different role.

The many cultural groups of the Northwest Coast and adjacent Plateau all describe Wild People in their own way; this is merely a reflection of those particular groups' cultural values. These values need to be listened to and considered when interpreting the archaeological record of those groups. We need to do this if we are ever going to gain a holistic understanding of what happened along the Northwest Coast and Plateau. This region is a region with a culturally and archaeologically rich history that deserves multiple voices, open to different ideas and interpretations of the past – but interpreted with an eye and ear, to the past!

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