

# The Crescent Beach site and the Place of the Locarno Beach Phase

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

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The Crescent Beach site (DgRr 1) was excavated in 1989 and 1990 as part of “The Origins of the Northwest Coast Ethnographic Pattern; The Place of the Locarno Beach Phase” research project. The excavation of the Crescent Beach site was one of the three major parts which comprised the overall project funded by S.S.H.R.C. (Matson 1988a). The three main goals of this project are as follows: 1. The re-analysis of existing Mainland Locarno Beach collections originally collected by C. E. Borden; 2. The comparison of these assemblages with both earlier and later cultures; and 3. The excavation and analysis of the Crescent Beach site with the focus on recovering subsistence information on Locarno Beach and earlier and later cultures. The choice of Crescent Beach for this investigation is based on the knowledge from previous excavations that it was the only known mainland site that had the Locarno Beach component “sandwiched” in between immediately preceding and succeeding cultures. This volume reports on all three aspects, although the bulk is concerned with the description and analysis of the material recovered from Crescent Beach in 1989 and 1990.

The importance of the Locarno Beach phase lies in its position relative to the development of the ethnographic cultures observed on the Northwest Coast. These well-known cultures, referred to as the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern by Matson and Coupland (1995:5-8), represent a stage that archaeologists have long agreed to have been reached by circa 1500-2000 years ago during the Marpole phase (Borden 1970; Mitchell 1971:54; Burley 1980; Matson and Coupland 1995:200-225). The Marpole phase is well represented in the Gulf of Georgia region, and succeeds the Locarno Beach Phase (Borden 1970; Mitchell 1971, 1990; Matson and Coupland 1995:154-183) which dates from circa 3300-3500 RCYBP to 2500 RCYBP. The Locarno Beach Phase, in turn follows the Charles culture, represented by the St. Mungo and Mayne phases in the Gulf of Georgia. There is general agreement that the Charles culture does not represent the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern (Matson and Coupland 1995:97-142) but the position of the Locarno Beach phase in this regard is less clear, with some investigators finding little evidence of the characters associated with the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern (Burley and Knusel 1989; Matson and Coupland 1995) and at least one arguing otherwise (Carlson 1991).

During the past few decades, there have been many theories about the origin of the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern (Matson 1992; Matson and Coupland 1995:146-154). In the past decade or so, the publication of the relevant archaeological details for many regions in the Northwest Coast culture area has allowed archaeologists to go well beyond preliminary sequences. From this more detailed and informed perspective attempts have been made in creating a more cohesive picture of Northwest Coast prehistory. It is from the now available data that we know that there is no substantial evidence of the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern during the St. Mungo phase. We now know that the long-held belief about the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern being reached during the Marpole is well-justified. Therefore,

sometime between the St. Mungo and Marpole phase full scale development of the Northwest Coast Pattern takes place. At the time this project was initiated, the Locarno Beach culture was much less well-documented than either preceding or succeeding cultures, and although, it still remains to be documented more fully, our state of information is more comparable to chronologically neighbouring cultures.

There are three major issues concerning the Locarno Beach phase and its contingent cultures; its economic organization; its relationship with preceding and following cultures; and its social organization. Croes and Hackenberger (1988) argue that the switch from a pre-storage to a storage economy is a pivotal transformation, and they suggest that this has occurred by the Marpole phase. Croes and Hackenberger also argue that pre-storage populations on the Northwest Coast were limited largely by the amount of shellfish available for procurement during the winter season. In Croes and Hackenberger's model, the first resource to be stored in large quantities was Flatfish taken in the spring and summer. In time stored Salmon became more important than Flatfish, since Salmon, unlike Flatfish, could be intensely utilized without any noticeable decrease in the population size of this fish. Intensive utilization of Salmon would be more important as the storage and processing technology develops so that large amounts could be processed during its short season of availability. The change in abundance, and type of fish and shellfish remains from Crescent Beach can be used to evaluate this model in general, and the nature of the Locarno Beach phase economic organization more specifically. For example, at the beginning of the Locarno Beach phase, at Crescent Beach, is there evidence for a wide scale dependence on shellfish which gradually evolves into a dependence on Flatfish which then declines and is replaced by Salmon? By the beginning of the Locarno Beach phase dependence on shellfish may have decreased and the culture may have been moving towards a more storage dependent economy. Matson (1983) predicted that Locarno Beach would not be salmon dependent, which he saw as co-occurring with the Marpole phase (which also fits Croes and Hackenberger's economic model). As we will see, there were some real surprises for Matson (e.g. Matson 1992). Croes and Hackenberger's model fits a trend most Northwest Coast Prehistorians see, that on the Northwest Coast there is a gradual change from an early generalized coastal adaptation, to a later more productive and specialized economic pattern. Careful excavation focussing on the recovery and analysis of subsistence information present at Crescent Beach does shed light on these issues.

The second major issue, involves the relationship between Locarno Beach and contingent cultures. Although the artifacts recovered from the 1989 and 1990 Crescent Beach excavations were too limited to conclusively resolve the second research question, the linkage of this data with Percy's (1974) much larger set based on earlier excavations is informative (Pratt 1992). These results are summarized in Chapter XI. The questions examined have to do, on the one hand, the relationship between Locarno Beach and Marpole, and on the other, the relationship between Locarno Beach and St. Mungo. Underlying both questions is the relationship between the existing published descriptions of the Locarno Beach phase, largely based on Gulf Island components, and that recovered from Crescent Beach.

The third and final issue focuses on the social organization of the Locarno Beach phase. This subject encompasses a number of issues, but the one that we are concentrating on is the relationship between economy and society. Given that Northwest Coast society is keyed on control of resources, can we identify developments in this realm based largely on subsistence information excavated in a specific way from a site? Based on Croes and Hackenberger's model, shellfish would have been key resources in the Pre-storage economy, and as previously mentioned, the presence of substantial amounts of shellfish prior to Flatfish and Salmon may imply that a storage technology was not yet in use. If shellfish were the key winter resource, we would expect their use to have been concentrated in the winter, and possibly important beds to have been "owned" by a specific group or family. The ownership of resources, then, may have occurred previous to, and therefore be partially responsible for the development of other aspects of Northwest Coast Society

(Matson 1983,1985).

The Developed Northwest Coast Pattern is well known for its multifamily households, and this has been often seen to be tied in with the stored salmon economy and the ownership of resources, along with the development of a stratified society. All of these aspects are either demonstrated (remains of very large plank houses, large numbers of salmon, the analysis of burial remains by Burley and Knusel [1989]) or assumed (ownership of important resources) because of the presence of evidence of the other attributes for the Marpole culture. Which of these characteristics are present in Locarno? Those that are then can be linked to those that only occur later in Marpole and be evaluated if they are “necessary prerequisites” or even causal for the later occurring traits. Although the previous paragraph shows the similar logic as the current one, it was part of the original research design, and this one was not. As the research evolved, it is this more general approach of the current paragraph that produced the most useful results.

With the above orientation of the original research design, the excavation at Crescent Beach focussed on seasonality and subsistence information first, and artifact accumulation second. Given the known effect that combined specialized stratigraphic layers can look like a generalized economic adaptation, concealing their specialized nature, major efforts were spent excavating by natural layers and keeping separate, both in the field and in the lab, the information gathered from these natural layers. After the successful completion of the 1989 field season it was obvious that our work in natural layers was paying off with a great deal of information on subsistence and this approach was continued into the 1990 field season with little change in our excavation strategy. Working over wide areas within natural layers was first carried out in the Northwest Coast at the Crescent Beach site in 1977 by Ham (1982), and we learned many lessons from his work, which helped prepare us for our own fieldwork.

The organization of this volume is as follows: First the area and previous excavations are reviewed; Second the excavations in 1989 and 1990 are described, followed by a synthesis of stratigraphy and dating. Next the artifacts are described, followed by the faunal analyses. The important features are next briefly summarized in a short chapter. An interpretive description of the the site components follows. Next descriptions of C. E. Borden’s Locarno Beach and Whalen Farm excavations are given along with the our tabulation of the artifacts recovered. Finally, a concluding chapter both summarizes the findings at Crescent Beach, and investigates the similarity of the various “well described” Locarno components with each other and early and later cultures and returns to the general questions posed in this introduction.