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Fall 2013

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### Citation Details

Deur, D., Turner, N. J., Dick, A., Sewid-Smith, D., & Recalma-Clutesi, K. (2013). Subsistence and resistance on the British Columbia Coast: Kingcome Village's Estuarine Gardens as contested space. *BC Studies*, (179), 13.

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# SUBSISTENCE AND RESISTANCE ON THE BRITISH COLUMBIA COAST:

## *Kingcome Village's Estuarine Gardens as Contested Space*

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DAISY SEWID-SMITH (MAYANILTH), AND  
KIM RECALMA-CLUTESI (OQWILOWGWA)

### INTRODUCTION

**F**ROM THE VERY BEGINNINGS of exploration and settlement, the North American continent presented a vast pool of resources for European newcomers and unprecedented new opportunities for amassing wealth and power. Exploration of the “New World” was driven by national interests – in western Canada, principally British interests – as well as a thirst for new goods for commerce. During the earliest phases of colonial occupation in British Columbia, First Nations were often seen as gatekeepers to furs, food, and other provisions sought by newcomers (Fisher 1992). However, as colonial power was consolidated, in British Columbia (as across the continent) newcomers started moving in to permanently resettle the landscape. In this milieu, Indigenous peoples were increasingly regarded as impediments to the colonial project, and colonizers applied various mechanisms to bring about territorial displacement and resource dispossession, the deep consequences of which are still with us. The traditional resource claims and practices of First Nations were among the targets of this resettlement effort. Their traditional harvesting places – camas prairies, berry patches, root gardens, and other plant production areas – were frequently reclaimed and reoccupied by colonial peoples, often settlers from Britain or eastern North America. In turn, these places were degraded and changed by livestock, agricultural production, and urban development, thus undermining First Nations ecological, economic, social, and ceremonial

institutions, all of which had been partially sustained by traditional food production systems. The impacts of this horticultural dispossession were significant, and they were compounded by the cumulative effects of the residential school system, enforced dietary changes, ceremonial proscriptions, and epidemics that undermined Indigenous societies throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Harris 1997; Ommer et al. 2007).

On the BC coast, as with other lands having dense Aboriginal settlement, colonial occupation was predicated upon the legal and physical removal of First Peoples from their critical resource lands. Estuarine, riparian, and floodplain ecosystems, especially, were converted into Euro-Canadian homesteads and taken over by economic enterprises. Grassy, salt-tolerant meadows were among the few broad, open places encountered by arriving Anglo-Canadian settlers along the rugged BC coastline, and they were among the very few places suitable for agricultural reoccupation, especially in steep and heavily timbered parts of the coastline. As topographically and ecologically unique areas, these coastal meadows were of high value to First Nations and were common sites of estuarine root gardens at the time of contact. The dispossession and destruction of the Aboriginal resource base, including these productive tidal gardens, were among the mechanisms consciously employed in the legal and physical removal of Native peoples from the BC coast (Harris 1997, 2002; Fisher 1992; McDonald 1987).

In this article, we focus on one example of colonial pre-emption of resource lands (and of the contest for control of plant cultivation spaces) by specifically examining the traditional estuarine gardens in Kingcome Inlet – a long, narrow fjord on the mainland opposite northeastern Vancouver Island. Coastal First Nations traditionally created and maintained gardens of edible roots – including springbank clover (*Trifolium wormskioldii*) and Pacific silverweed (*Potentilla egedii*) – through a variety of practices such as soil amendment and aeration, weeding, in situ replanting of roots, and transplanting of roots between sites. Such gardens were considered property, were managed under the guidance of clan chiefs, and were subject to rules of inheritance (Turner, Deur, and Lepofsky this volume; Deur and Turner 2005; Turner and Kuhnlein 1982). At Kingcome, as elsewhere in British Columbia, the history of colonial pre-emption is evident in the displacement of people from their homelands, the erosion of their food security, the loss of cultural cohesion, and the loss of opportunities for culturally mediated intergenerational knowledge transmission.

As colonial peoples began to settle along the BC coast, estuarine gardens, including those of Kingcome, rapidly became “contested spaces” – places where Native and colonial peoples competed over the material and symbolic use of the land. The topic of contested spaces is a key theme in the literatures and discourses of geography, planning, anthropology, and political ecology, and the presence of such contested places has been widely documented in a variety of colonial contexts (Escobar 2001; Strathern and Stewart 1998; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Scott 1987). More recently, researchers have identified contested places that have been significant to British Columbia’s First Nations (e.g., Union of BC Indian Chiefs 2005; Evenden 2004; Harris 1997, 2002; McDonald 1994; Willems-Braun 1997). Such studies demonstrate that the displacement of First Nations from key traditional resource harvest sites in British Columbia has contributed to their cultural, social, and economic erosion (Deur and Turner 2005; Turner, Deur, and Mellott 2011; Lutz 2008). They also suggest that these changes have affected Indigenous food security (Parrish, Turner, and Solberg 2007) and undermined the roles and status of women, who were the principal cultivators (Turner and Turner 2008). In turn, restricted access to such sites became a critical element in the economic marginalization of First Nations communities following the colonial encounter (McDonald 1987). The disproportionate power of colonial institutions has allowed the material displacement of Indigenous peoples and their imprint from the landscape; still, at various times and in various ways, these peoples have sought to “reoccupy” or “reclaim” their lands through symbolic mechanisms, even as more concrete steps towards reoccupation remain elusive (Escobar 2001; Furniss 2000).

These same processes have played out at estuarine garden sites in many parts of the BC coastline. In order to understand the demise of traditional cultivation and the absence of a detailed written record pertaining to traditional plant cultivation on the BC coast, it is important to investigate the role of garden sites within the broader historical geography of contact. We do so here with particular attention to Kingcome Village on the mainland BC coast (Figure 1), the home village of Clan Chief Adam Dick (Kwaxistalla), who participated in the authorship of this article. Indeed, Chief Dick’s oral historical account of these gardens is fundamental to this article’s conclusions because it is one of the few original sources describing how Kwakwaka’wakw viewed the appropriation of their gardens. In addition, Kingcome Village functioned as a locus of Kwakwaka’wakw resistance to the potlatch

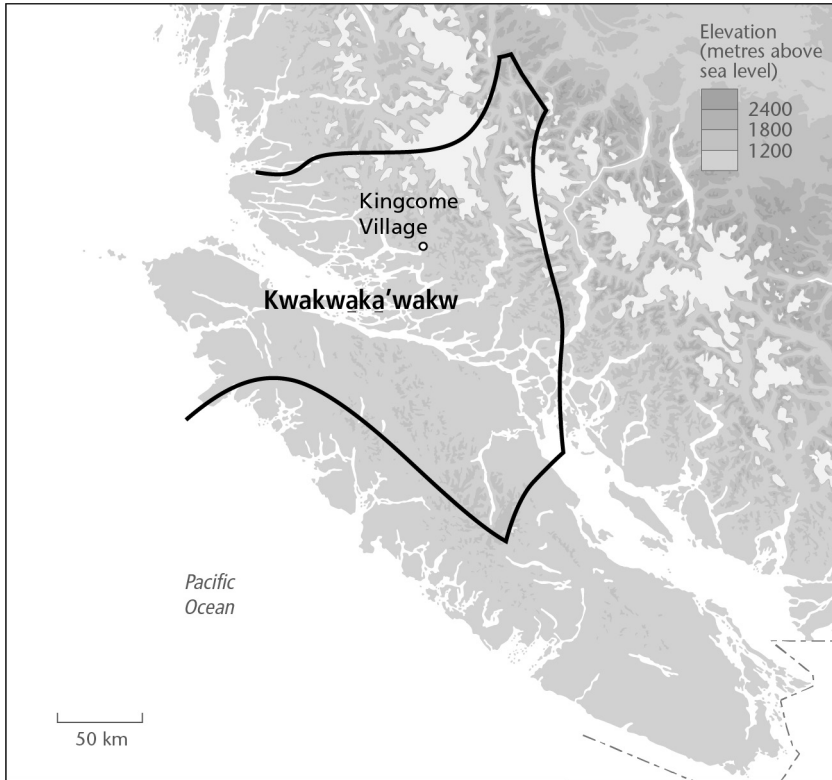


Figure 1. Map of southern coastal British Columbia showing the location of the Kingcome Village within Kwakwaka'wakw territory. Map by Eric Leinberger.

ban and other colonial proscriptions on traditional cultural activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, Kingcome Village provides an illuminating case study of the mechanisms and outcomes of colonial dispossession of key food production lands (Cole and Chaikin 1990).

In the case study that follows, we discuss the cultural value of managed estuarine habitats and then describe the history of their takeover by newcomers – that is, how they came to be alienated. Finally, we focus on the impacts of this appropriation and the subsequent actions undertaken to reclaim these lands and to regain and renew the cultural practices associated with them. Examining the history of colonialism in the context of this one case study is not only relevant from a historical point of view but also helps us to illuminate and situate contemporary conflicts surrounding First Nations land use, cultural identity, food security, and relationships with governments and society at large.

The current study is based in no small part on a series of interviews conducted by authors Deur and Turner between 1998 and 2013 with Chief Kwaxistalla Adam Dick, who is chief of the Kawadillikalla Clan of the Tsawataineuk Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. According to traditional protocols, Clan Chief Kwaxistalla is the official spokesperson for his people and the bearer of the history of his clan. Specially trained since his youth in his chiefly obligations, he possesses unique knowledge of and authority on the topics of this article, and he serves as our primary source informant for much of its content. Our account has been aided, too, by repeated interviews, carried out over the same period, by Kwakwaka'wakw leader and historian Mayanilth, Dr. Daisy Sewid-Smith; and cultural specialist Oqwilowgwa, Kim Recalma-Clutesi. The account that follows has also been aided by informal interviews with no fewer than ten other elders from Kingcome Village, carried out during visits to that community in 1999, 2005, and 2008; while the accounts of Kwaxistalla are authoritative and do not differ substantively from these other interviewees, the latter provide revealing details regarding the effects of root garden dispossession on the social and economic experiences of those who are not of chiefly status. Field visits with Kwaxistalla and other village residents to the former sites of the Kingcome gardens and to recently restored garden sites, as well as participation in one of Kingcome Village's "root feasts," have also added considerably to the first two authors' understanding of the themes presented in this account.

#### CONTESTING ABORIGINAL CULTIVATION

The cultural biases and territorial agendas of the nineteenth century, seen in hindsight, are starkly evident in early imperial accounts of Indigenous estuarine gardens and other cultivated sites. For example, travelling along the west coast of Vancouver Island on 4 September 1792, Archibald Menzies, the botanist on the Vancouver expeditions, reported a number of Nuu-chah-nulth women tending gardens at Tahsis on Nootka Sound:

In the evening our curiosity was excited in observing a number of Females busily occupied in digging up a part of the Meadow close to us with Sticks, with as much care and assiduity as if it had been a Potato field, in search of a small creeping root ... of a new species of Trifolium [*T. wormskioldii*] which they always dig up at this time of year for food ... Wherever this Trifolium abounds the ground is

regularly turned over in quest of its Roots every year. (Newcombe 1923, 116)

Subsequent evidence of the colonial awareness of the significance of these gardens includes military attacks on them. For example, in 1864, the Ahousaht Nuuchahnulth people of Clayoquot Sound scuttled a colonial sloop, the *Kingfisher*, which had been sent to monitor their activities and to enforce colonial prohibitions on illegal trade in the remote inlets that surrounded their villages. In response, two British gunboats, the *Sutlej* and the *Devastation*, conducted a scorched-earth campaign on tribal resource sites throughout the territories of the Ahousaht and other neighbouring Nuuchahnulth nations. In an action that was, according to Victoria's *Colonist* newspaper, "conducted according to the strict rules of civilized warfare," these ships bombarded occupied houses and destroyed salmon-fishing weirs (quoted in Fisher 1992, 168). In addition, crews poured coal oil over each village's estuarine root gardens and set them ablaze, destroying the year's harvest, leaving soils toxic and likely damaging the gardens' stone structures and wood boundary markers. Oral tradition hints that many of the gardens were permanently abandoned at this time. Indeed, more than a century later, several of these scuttled gardens were identified by Nuuchahnulth consultants in Clayoquot Sound during deliberations regarding the long-term management of that waterway (Bouchard and Kennedy 1990).

At the same time, some colonial authorities discounted the existence of Indigenous agriculture. For instance, Robert Brown (1873, 50), reports: "Of agriculture they are quite ignorant – they have no aboriginal plant which they cultivate." And, even when cultivating potatoes, "their utter laziness prevents them from scratching over anything but a mere scrap of ground." The precise reasons for such editorial bias, apparent in many accounts of the time, will forever remain unclear, although there is considerable evidence that the reasons were rooted in both ethnocentric notions of what constitutes "cultivation" and in the territorial agendas and acquisitive ambitions of the nineteenth-century colonial project (Deur 2002a, 2002b). Certainly, advocates of appropriation of tribal lands cited this presumed lack of a cultivating tradition as a justification for their position. In 1868, frontier capitalist and later Indian reserve commissioner Gilbert Sproat (1987, 8) suggested that land dispossession within the territory could proceed apace because Indigenous peoples did not practise agriculture or own property. Specifically regarding Nuuchahnulth communities, he notes: "Any right in the soil which these natives had as occupiers was partial and imperfect as, with the

exception of hunting animals in the forest, plucking wild fruits, and cutting a few trees ... the natives did not in any civilized sense, occupy the land.”<sup>1</sup> This characterization was typical of colonial discourses of the period, linking an absence of Western forms of land occupation and use with the presumed absence of any such thing as Aboriginal title. On this view, British Columbia’s colonial land policy promoted the creation of small reserves encompassing individual village sites, “cultivated fields” of introduced crops, fishing stations, and little else (Harris 2002; Tennant 1990). This was especially damaging along the outer coast and archipelago, where estuarine gardens were not recognized as “cultivated fields.”

Moreover, attacks on root gardens, less organized than those carried out by the *Sutlej* and the *Devastation*, were also carried out by “vigilante” groups of settlers in these years. Kwakwaka’wakw oral tradition describes occasional groups of settlers descending upon and burning down the small houses that were used by Indigenous harvesters at estuarine root garden sites (Daisy Sewid-Smith, personal communication, 2000; Adam Dick, personal communication, 1998). In some cases, the attacks are unambiguously associated with colonial reoccupation of these prime coastal meadows for agriculture and settlement from the mid- to late nineteenth century; in others, they seem to have been largely strategic strikes that sought to undermine local Aboriginal economies and related territorial claims generally. These attacks occurred as late as 1912, when white settlers burned down the structures at the well-documented clover gardens at *Bi’s* – a site on Vancouver Island’s Quatsino Sound. This particular action may have been intended to undercut pending Aboriginal land claims on the site that were being negotiated through the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission (1913-16, 138).

Other colonial agents and processes contributed to the direct and indirect erasure of Indigenous gardening practices. Missionaries played an active role in the elimination of traditional gardening activities by encouraging potato cultivation and the relocation of Native peoples to mission settlements far from their estuarine gardens. Simultaneously,

<sup>1</sup> These views are echoed in *Delgamuukw v. The Queen*: in his Reasons for Judgment, Chief Justice Allan McEachern (1991, 31) suggests that the absence of agriculture and other civilized practices in the ethnographic record indicate that BC Aboriginal “civilizations, if they qualify for that description, fall within a much lower, even primitive order.” Presented with evidence of sacred sites, sedentary villages, and the long-term clearing, tending, and land tenure on plots of food plants, McEachern (1991, 24) nonetheless relies heavily on the early accounts of colonial explorers and nineteenth-century academic anthropologists. On this basis, he asserts: “the primitive condition of the natives described by early observers is not impressive” and dismisses the land claims on plant resource sites that came before him at this time (Fisher 1992).



colonial surveyors travelled along the coast, assessing the extent of First Nations occupation and identifying lands suitable for European reoccupation. These surveyors visited and documented several estuarine garden sites, and there are numerous references to “Indian cultivation” in unpublished notes pertaining to these sites (Galois 1994; Corrigan 1895; Cotton 1894). Nonetheless, the published reports seldom acknowledge the presence of any form of cultivation or plant food production.

#### THE KINGCOME RIVER ESTUARY AS CONTESTED SPACE

The Kingcome River estuary in many ways epitomizes the ways in which First Nations have been systematically excluded from their traditional lands and resources, and prohibited from participating in customary forms of resource stewardship. Since time immemorial there has been a village consisting of four clans of Kwakwaka'wakw people – together representing the D'awada'enux<sup>w</sup> (Tsawataineuk) Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation – centred at Gwa'yi (Kingcome Village). The village's oral history, passed down the generations, clearly situates it in this place. Traditionally, people of this village had access to the resources of the Kingcome Valley (Figure 2). These included the dense forests of western redcedar, berry patches, and crabapple stands along Kingcome River. Resource harvesters also traditionally utilized an extensive boggy meadow upriver called *ceskina'es* – a “big field, as far as you could see,” where people went to hunt swans, ducks, deer, and other game, and to gather highbush cranberries, bog cranberries, sphagnum moss, Labrador tea, and a variety of other plant resources (Adam Dick, personal communication, 2002).

“We really looked after the river,” Kwaxsistalla stated. His ancestors (those who held the name Kwaxsistalla before him) had the particular responsibility to guard the river during the annual runs of eulachon (*Thaleichthys pacificus*); to make sure that the eulachon had a chance to spawn; and to ensure that no one polluted the river or scared the fish during spawning time. Salmon, also, were carefully stewarded.

The root gardens, covering the large tidal marshes of the Kingcome estuary, were among the most widely known gardens in the entire Kwakwaka'wakw world (see Turner, Deur, and Lepofsky, this volume). Root vegetables produced at this site – especially springbank clover, Pacific silverweed, and northern riceroot (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*) – were not only important foods for the village but also a significant trade



Figure 2. View of Kingcome River Valley, 2008, showing the estuarine flats, forested hillsides, and mountainous backdrop. River delta tidal flats, such as those shown here, were among the few extensive cultivable lands along much of the BC coastline. Prior to European reoccupation, these flats were the locus of a root gardening tradition that was sustained by regular floods and sedimentation and that provided First Nations with one of their principal sources of dietary carbohydrates. During colonial settlement of the coast in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European peoples prioritized these same locales, reoccupying and diking them to support cattle ranches, hay production, and other agricultural pursuits. Photo by Victoria Wyllie de Echeverria.

item that contributed to its wealth and prestige. Kwaxsistalla, who as a boy participated in all aspects of the garden maintenance and harvesting (Figure 3), recalls:

Everybody had their own [gardens] ... They have poles [approximately three metres] ... on the four corners of the garden. And they tied the knots on there, the cedar bark. Yeah, at the marker. And we got to have at least one fathom in between the next one, so you can be able to work on the garden. And we go there, you know, in the early fall [to harvest the roots]. And the early spring we were there to clean them up. What they call *sixa* [weeding] ... They sure left it ... just nice and clean. If you see something else coming up [weeds or grasses] you pick it up, root and all, so you don't want it there.



Figure 3. Clan Chief Kwaxsishtalla, Adam Dick, examining the former site of his family's root gardens, which were occupied by Euro-Canadian settlers a century before. His mother and other family members took him to dig roots at this site in his youth, in spite of colonial pre-emption, to ensure that he would have first-hand knowledge of traditional cultivation practices and the location of his family's enduring claims on particular resource lands. In the course of recent visits, Kwaxsishtalla has been able to identify a number of former garden sites and to oversee root digging by young members of the Kingcome community. Wooden stakes still found on the tidal flats, some dating from before colonial pre-emption and others from recent times, mark boundaries of certain traditional plots; mountain peaks in the distance are traditionally used to locate unmarked garden plots. Photo by Nancy Turner.

The people at Kingcome were subjected to the same colonial influences as were Aboriginal peoples elsewhere on the BC coast. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their lands were surveyed and small parcels at the site of the village and at major camps were allotted as reserves. The rest of their traditional territory was appropriated as Crown land and was made available for private settlement or resource exploitation. Archival evidence makes it clear that certain colonial-era writers were aware of the importance of the "root grounds" on the Kingcome River tidal flats to the diet, trade, and ceremonial lives of the people of Kingcome Inlet (Dawson 1887, 65; Newcombe n.d. 24/6, 1552). While the Crown did seek First Nations testimony on the location and significance of their resource sites, very few of the traditional root gardens

were protected from dispossession. In short order, this confiscation of estuarine cultivation sites soon led to the displacement of First Nations harvesters. As the primary cultivators, women were disproportionately affected as their roles and their contribution to traditional subsistence was undermined. In turn, as is discussed more fully here, the prohibition of harvesting generated considerable intercultural conflict and changes in Kwakwaka'wakw diet and social activities – changes that are still being felt today (Raley 1897; Turner and Turner 2008).

Partly, this was due to the Kwakwaka'wakw's lack of understanding of, or access to, the colonial legal system. Contemporary elders report that, to their grandparents and parents at the time, land alienation was simply inconceivable. Some refused to participate in the process, saying that there was no reason that their own title to the land should be challenged. Different Kwakwaka'wakw villages retain oral traditions describing the arrival of Crown reserve commissioners and surveyors during this time. These officials explained plans to cede new resource lands to the Crown as a first step to the establishment of industrial-scale forestry. Speaking of events at Kingcome Village, Kwaxistalla recalls:

They called a meeting there, and said “How much [are you going to] claim around your [houses]?” ... when the surveyors went up there. And [translators] tried to tell the people, “You better [do something] you know.” And the [people] got up and said, “What? What is he saying? What is he talking about?” [to] whoever was the interpreter of the room. And they told him what the guy said. “Ahhh,” [the chief] said, “only *Dzonokwa* [the powerful wild woman of the woods] can pack those timbers out of here!” ... Oh, they said they didn't believe him. “No we're not going to do anything about it.” And ... they took all that land.

As Kwaxistalla explains, many people believed the trees in the valley to be so big and so numerous that no human could possibly remove them. To the people of Kingcome, the colonizers' claims seemed foolish, and the villagers did not feel compelled either to respond or to identify their own resource interests in their valley. Thus, their competing claims remained largely undocumented, and much of the land surrounding Kingcome Village – including the vast gardens on the Kingcome River tidal flats – was designated as unused and open for settlement by outsiders.

The appropriation of these lands essentially began with their formal survey. The estuarine expanses of Kingcome, including the root gardens,

were surveyed in October 1894, and private lots were plotted out over the entire area in February 1895.<sup>2</sup> Kwaxsistallas family's root gardens were located on an estuarine island in Lot 144, where the surveyor noted "Indian houses" but demarcated lots for colonial pre-emption nonetheless. Two brothers, Ernest and William Halliday, settled on the block of lands that included these root gardens and digging houses in 1893, and they were soon joined by several other settlers. The flats, where most of the estuarine gardens were concentrated, represented the largest level meadow area, and one of the only sites suitable for animal husbandry, in the entire Kwagiulth Agency. Soon after their arrival, therefore, the Hallidays established a cattle ranch on the "wild" meadows of the delta (Kwagiulth Agency n.d., 1648:407-10, 572). Their ranch included the tidal flats on the western side of the estuary, where, according to numerous contemporary elders, estuarine gardens with roughly rectilinear plots, churned soils, and cedar posts marking plot boundaries were still present and highly visible (see Figure 3 in Turner, Deur, and Lepofsky, this volume).<sup>3</sup>

Still, the Hallidays informed the people at Kingcome that they (the Hallidays) had legally acquired the tidal flats on which the gardens sat. In response to the villagers' concerns about the loss of their gardens, Kingcome oral tradition notes that the Hallidays promised that their access to the gardens would not be hindered. However, surveyor A.F. Cotton (1894, 801-2) reported in 1894 that, to prevent "their fields from flooding during the summer freshets and monthly high tides, Messrs. Halliday and Kirby, who have been there for over a year, say a 3-foot dike is sufficient to protect it against the highest water they have seen [thereby making available for cultivation] about 800 acres of grass land without timber of any kind."

According to the testimony of contemporary Kingcome residents, Ernest Halliday had, by 1895, constructed his dike, eliminating the seasonal inundations that had "fertilized" the gardens with regular inputs

<sup>2</sup> The surveyor's maps were annotated, showing details of First Nations use and occupation, and can still be seen in the BC Crown Land Registry Services, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Province of British Columbia, in Victoria (surveyor's book, Lots 138-147; 12 October 1894 A.F. Cotton plotted February 1895 by Cecil M. Roberts; survey gazetted 21 February 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Shortly after, in 1897, William Halliday moved to Alert Bay, where he taught at the residential school. In 1906, he was appointed as the Kwawkw'wath Indian agent, a position he held until the early 1930s. As Indian agent he was one of those colonial officials who vigorously suppressed the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, which he condemned as a waste of people's time and resources (Halliday 1935). His brother and descendants continued to live at Kingcome until the 1970s.

of marine and riverine detritus, and allowing his cattle to graze on the village's prime estuarine gardens. As retold to Kwaxsishtalla:

The Hallidays took over everything ... They built a dike right around there. They claimed the whole flats ... And they covered the [traditional root] gardens that the old people used to have ... It was *all* gardens all over that field there. And they put a dike around it. They took the whole flat. (Kwaxsishtalla, recollections from 1999)

As elsewhere on the coast (Smith n.d. 5/3:11; Turner and Kuhnlein 1982), introduced livestock fed on the tended root grounds, trampled estuarine plots, and effectively obliterated large sections of the original gardens, leaving only small remnant patches of these plants. Tensions grew, and there was talk of reprisals by the residents of Kingcome Village. Asked if the people at Kingcome responded in any way to the Hallidays' occupation of their gardens, however, contemporary elders suggested they could do very little:

Because of the imprisonments [tied in with the banning of the potlatch, with violators of the ban being subject to imprisonment and with the Indian agent playing a major role in enforcement]. They had to be really careful ... The brother was the Indian agent. That is why we can't do anything about it. They gave him the okay: "You take that land." If you complained you ended up in jail somehow. (Daisy Sewid-Smith, personal communication, 1998)

Contemporary First Nations consultants at Kingcome recall oral traditions suggesting that the Hallidays kept guard dogs for a time and that these dogs used to walk the perimeter of the ranch to keep the Kwakwaka'wakw away.

Over the latter part of the nineteenth century, then, the Kingcome estuary was dramatically changed. A locale that had previously served as a locus of Kwakwaka'wakw food production – root foods, crabapples, waterfowl, fish and small game – was transformed into a place that supported settler agriculture and animal husbandry. William Halliday became the Indian agent shortly before the onset of the First World War but continued to reside for substantial periods at the Halliday ranch. There, he presided over the administration of enforced Kwakwaka'wakw cultural change, simultaneously benefitting from the material dispossession of Aboriginal resource lands and the displacement of traditional food plant production. With his connections and considerable political clout in the colony of British Columbia, William Halliday established a

profitable cattle ranch at Kingcome, with stock boated to markets in the growing new settlements of Vancouver Island's east shore. Local oral traditions suggest that William Halliday, even after he became Indian agent, was an ongoing participant in the conversion of alienated land. Noting that the tidal flats possessed rare opportunities for the expansion of future commercial agricultural operations, he actively promoted land sales and speculation in the Kingcome flats generally (Halliday 1910, 245). Though his actions were not always directly tied to his duties as Indian agent, Halliday used the considerable influence of his position to support his family's economic ambitions. In short, he had a clear conflict of interest because his own personal development undermined, and benefitted from, the loss of economic security of the very people he was enlisted to oversee. In turn, this eroded the food security, economy, and culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw under his jurisdiction – a phenomenon that occurred elsewhere in British Columbia and beyond.

Simultaneously, the archival record makes it clear that William Halliday became a vocal opponent of “Indian land claims” and the growing crescendo of grievances being expressed by First Nations in response to colonial land occupation. In his memoirs, Halliday (1935) frequently notes that he had played a pivotal role in efforts to eliminate the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch and other ceremonial traditions that were seen to undermine efforts to Christianize the Indians and to incorporate them into the frontier capitalist economy. He aided in establishing intensive policing and surveillance operations near some of the larger Kwakwaka'wakw communities, forcing many traditional practices “underground” or into hinterland locations. Some traditional leaders took to clandestinely training certain children – including co-author of the current article, Kwaxsisalla, Clan Chief Adam Dick – at hidden settings along the coast, imparting the skills to allow these children to become traditional clan chiefs, “uncorrupted” by the influences of colonial culture and the residential school system (Cole and Chaikin 1990; Sewid-Smith 1979).

William Halliday's views, as expressed in his letters and official reports, were typical of those reflected widely in the colonial discourse of the day: the “whiteman” was superior to the “Indian,” and, in any case, Indians did not really need the lands they occupied. They had never needed land in order to survive in pre-contact times, it was argued, and there was no reason they should need it in postcontact times. Halliday and other colonial leaders maintained not only that the Indians did “not till the soil” traditionally but also that they had “made their living

very easily, that is so far as the actual necessities are concerned.” Their diet consisted almost exclusively of fish, he notes, and the “waters of the coast teem with fish” (Halliday 1910, 238, 248). It was therefore easy for the Hallidays and other officials and settlers to rationalize their appropriation of Kwakwaka’wakw territory:

The Halliday Farm took over the whole thing [the main island at Kingcome River estuary]; they claimed that. After that it disappeared. [The villagers] quit doing this [cultivating] ... The only thing it’s covered in now is the grass ... It just grows wild all over on the left-hand side where we went to. It was just loaded with the *dliksam* [Pacific silverweed] and all that. Nobody’s looking after them [the root gardens] ... Those vegetables that the old people used to dig. Can’t find them any more. (Kwaxistalla, recorded in 2000)

Having seen what the Hallidays had done, the people of Kingcome Village began to resist further encroachments onto their estuarine gardens. As early as May 1896, just after the first settlers had taken up land, Alert Bay Indian agent R.H. Pidcock reported:

On my visit to Gwayi the summer residence of the Tsa wawtieneuk Indians, my attention was called by a number of Indians of the fact that all the land which they have cleared and cultivated and from which they obtain a large quantity of clover roots which they use as an article of food, has been taken from them by the white settlers who have recently acquired land at the head of Kingcome inlet. They had torn up some of the posts of a settler named McKay who was fencing in a portion of the land they claim, and I had some difficulty in getting them to allow him to go on with his fencing. There are about five acres altogether of this land which they have cleared, and as a large quantity of the clover root is annually dug here in the month of October, I am afraid that there will be some trouble with the settlers who have preempted the land unless some compensation is made them. (Pidcock to Vowell, 19 May 1896, Kwagiulth Agency n.d.)

Pidcock recognized that these gardens were important to the livelihoods of the people of Kingcome Village but seemed to feel that their claims could be bought off with “a small present.” In his opinion:

It would be advisable to give a small amount to each occupant as the five acres are divided into many small plots, each claimed by a separate family and till the present year they have remained unmolested and naturally do not feel inclined to give up the source from which they



derive a portion of their living ... As nearly if not all, the small plots are claimed by the women of the several families, I think a small present to each would settle the difficulty, as the plots are a source of revenue to them from the sale of the roots to other tribes. (Pidcock to Vowell, 19 May 1896, Kwagiulth Agency n.d.)

The colonial appropriation of land in Kingcome occurred in parallel with the implosion of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. Missionaries proselytized, and children were sent away to residential school. As the fishery was commercialized in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and traditional fishing practices were discouraged, the people of Kingcome Village had to either take up commercial fishing or work in the canneries. Some residents found work at distant canneries, as far away as Vancouver, while several worked at the Kingcome Packers, Ltd. Cannery, which operated between 1903 and 1933 at the mouth of Charles Creek downstream from Kingcome Village.

From the latter decades of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth, the Tsawataineuk people of Kingcome continued to struggle with significant environmental, social, and economic changes. By the early part of the twentieth century, Whitford and Craig (1918, 355) noted that, "on the deltas at the mouth of Kingcome and Wakeman rivers there is some land of agricultural value, aggregating perhaps 5,000 acres ... There is about 8 sq. miles of land in this district which may be classified as agricultural land. About one-half of it is open land and the remainder is timbered." The estuarine lands, historically and culturally so important to the Tsawataineuk, were now almost fully converted to grazing land; only the most marginal harvests of berries, crabapples, or roots persisted on the periphery of these new agricultural operations. In part from necessity, the Kwakwaka'wakw traditional diet moved away from native plant foods, estuarine root foods in particular. Kingcome Village residents became increasingly dependent on outside sources of carbohydrates, such as potatoes and wheat flour, which gradually became dietary staples in the community, alongside salmon and other animal foods (Turner and Turner 2008). The cost of these "imported" staples in such a remote setting was considerable, accelerating Kingcome residents' entry into the cash economy and their participation in wage employment, trapping, and other non-traditional economic activities. In many cases, families relocated or were fragmented as people sought such employment in fishing, lumbering, and other industries. As women's roles in traditional economic activities eroded with the loss of the tidal root gardens, some women sought work in

the fishing industry while others became increasingly marginalized within the emerging economic order; in some cases, this accelerated the adoption of nuclear family household structures and gender roles more typical of the Anglo-Canadian world.

#### KINGCOME ESTUARINE GARDENS INTO THE PRESENT

Although the circumstances of colonial reoccupation changed in the years following the Hallidays' claims, the exclusion of the Kwakwaka'wakw from their estuarine gardens continued throughout the twentieth century and persists in attenuated form today. The Halliday ranch was abandoned as markets changed in the early decades of the twentieth century, and commercial agriculture became more capital-intensive and more geographically concentrated in the valleys of southern British Columbia. In time, the Hallidays sold their property to an American buyer, without consulting with the Kwakwaka'wakw people of Kingcome Village. These new owners, apparently recognizing Kingcome residents' interest in reoccupying the land, sought to eliminate those resources that would still draw people from the village to these lands:

When they left, when they sold that farm to an American, they took every fruit tree they had. They poured diesel on the blackberry bushes, and burned them ... And they keep going back and make sure they're all chopped and burned ... [T]here's about sixty cows left that's all gone wild, that's all over the valley. (Kwaxsisalla, recorded in 2000)

The wandering cows are still hunted – sometimes by brown bears but as often as not by Kingcome Village residents. In this sense, cattle continue to support a kind of unregulated subsistence hunt that has facilitated some degree of adaptation to a changed and contested landscape. Meanwhile, the fences and dikes constructed by the Hallidays and their neighbours have become overgrown and have fallen into disuse, now being visible but slowly decomposing facets of the cultural landscape.

In the 1980s, the Kingcome estuarine lands were sold to the Nature Trust and administered by Ducks Unlimited as a wetlands nature preserve; subsequently, the BC provincial government has overseen certain management functions relating to these lands. Once again, the Kwakwaka'wakw were excluded from the planning for these key subsistence lands. In an area in which the skies were once darkened by migrating flocks of geese and swans, over-hunting and habitat destruction has reduced the number of these birds drastically, and a new conservation ethic was imposed on the landscape. This is an ethic

that ostensibly views certain environments as “pristine,” untouched by humans, when, historically, they were anything but (cf. Clapperton 2012). Clearly, humans had been an active part of the ecosystem of Kingcome flats for countless generations before European arrival, and oral traditions suggest that robust bird populations once flourished alongside traditional root gardens. Ironically, in recent years, requests by the people of Kingcome Village to use these flats for subsistence and other purposes were initially rebuffed by the conservation organizations, which view such uses as being largely incompatible with their conservation mandates and inconsistent with their (arguably) incomplete understandings of the historical condition of the estuary (Williams 2001; Cronon 1995). (In the last decade, these organizations also rejected formal efforts by Kingcome Village to build a road along a former trail route linking the village with its saltwater boat landing.) Relations have thawed somewhat, but access continues to be a point of contestation. Village residents have continued to use these lands but have often been forced to do so clandestinely, in a manner that echoes what occurred in earlier times. Within the past decade, under Kwaxsishtalla’s authority and leadership, there has been a concerted effort to revitalize food harvesting, including recultivating his family’s estuarine root garden plot (cf. Turner and Turner 2008; Lloyd 2011). Village residents have participated in the restoration of garden plots, reclaiming the land not with legal title but with their labour, accepting certain risks in order to stake claims, materially and symbolically, to their ancestral root grounds on the Kingcome tidal flats.

#### DISCUSSION: TRADITIONALLY MANAGED LANDSCAPES AS CONTESTED SPACES

The story of Kingcome Inlet could be repeated for numerous Aboriginal communities throughout British Columbia. First Nations lands were appropriated with the justification they were not truly needed or being used. Beginning with the journals of James Cook, and reiterated in report after report into modern times, Northwest Coast peoples were depicted as the primitive and indolent beneficiaries of an abundant environment, with little incentive to modify the landscape. Elements of estuarine root gardening received occasional mention in the earliest explorers’ and anthropologists’ accounts, but gardens were commonly assumed to be natural features. The human agency that produced and maintained them was overlooked by each successive generation

of itinerant chroniclers. The view of the landscape as “pristine” or as “wilderness” contributed significantly to the colonial project and has continued to undermine First Nations efforts to maintain or reassert their ties to traditionally managed landscapes into recent times (cf. Furniss 2000; Cronon 1995; Denevan 1992).

In time, this fiction became useful to the colonizers, who began to appreciate the dietary and strategic importance of estuarine root gardens to coastal First Nations. Despite occasional documentation of estuarine cultivation in both academic and official literatures, the view of Northwest Coast First Peoples as “hunter-gatherers,” incapable of plant cultivation, took on a heightened significance. This convenient assumption served as a cornerstone of *textual* dispossession that was employed in the almost total *legal* dispossession of Indigenous garden sites. First Peoples were confined to small reserves, usually around traditional fishing places but seldom incorporating their main plant harvesting or seafood harvesting areas. The systematic alienation and exploitation of their traditional resource production areas – forests, fisheries, intertidal areas, wetlands, and meadows – was paralleled by concerted efforts of church and government to acculturate them to European ways and to convert them all to speaking the English language (Claxton and Elliott 1994, 49). Their cultures, languages, and lifestyles were seen to be inferior, and their detailed systems of knowledge of the environment and resources, their spirituality and respect for other life forms, were not recognized. Their “gardens,” as seen through European eyes, were simply undeveloped wastelands.

Although potatoes and other European crops had replaced most Indigenous crop plants during the late nineteenth century, and even unoccupied gardens had often fallen into disuse, a few gardens were maintained, and claims to both active and abandoned garden sites were made to the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission. The Kwakwaka'wakw, for example, petitioned the commission for some twenty-nine “garden” sites in 1914 (McKenna-McBride Royal Commission 1913-16).

The transcripts from the McKenna-McBride proceedings make it abundantly clear that the misrepresentation of Indigenous subsistence in this region tremendously confounded inter-ethnic negotiations. Commission members and Indigenous informants spoke past one another.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Daisy Sewid-Smith explained that the elders have very different understandings and ways of discussing relative time than what are found in European cultures and languages; Moses Alfred, who was her maternal grandfather, would have assumed that the question pertained to whether there was cultivation occurring at that particular time, and that is why he answered “no.” By this time, the gardens being addressed were no longer in regular use.

Asked whether a particular site was “cultivated,” Kwakwaka’wakw elder Moses Alfred insisted that it was not. However, he noted, it *was* used to grow potatoes. When told by Chief Humseet of long-standing First Nations use and ownership of garden sites that their “forefathers had planted,” the commission noted that cultivation did not exist in pre-contact times on this coast and proceeded to officially designate cultivation on this site as a “proposed” or “potential” use of the land (McKenna-McBride Royal Commission 1913-16, 181-82). The commission may have recognized that, if unchecked, these claims would hamper colonial resettlement along much of the coast.

Invoking the Northwest Coast anthropological literature, and echoing the words of Halliday, the commissioners (quoted in Galois 1994, 74) concluded that access to the sea was necessary for the survival of Native people but that resource lands were not “reasonably required.” Among the various “cultivated landscapes” of coastal First Nations, only potato gardens within existing villages were granted protection within the Indian reserves created during this final phase of tribal land allotments. Claims on estuarine garden sites were summarily denied, except in those few cases in which a site claimed for gardens coincided with other, protected property classes, such as a village site. Strongly influenced by the “non-agricultural” designation of Northwest Coast peoples, the Crown confirmed only a dispersed pattern of small reserves encompassing occupied village sites and little else (Brealey 1995; Tennant 1990).

Once the Crown had formally excluded estuarine garden sites along the coast in the early 1900s, these areas could be subject to alienation and colonial occupation on a scale not seen in the previous century. As some of the only level, unforested lands along the entire coast, estuarine areas were in high demand by industrialists and settlers for logging, mining, and farming operations. Tideland garden sites were diked and sometimes filled for cattle grazing in numerous smaller marshes, as had been done by the Hallidays and other settlers at Kingcome in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elsewhere, garden sites were converted into log sort areas and permanent and temporary mill sites – often being partially covered in fill materials, with piers and roadbeds constructed to facilitate these uses (Craig and Smith 1997; Joseph 2012; Pukonen 2008). Even sporadic use of the remaining root gardens largely disappeared through the mid-twentieth century as First Nations food systems changed and the effects of tideland alienation hastened the dietary, cultural, and economic transformation of these peoples.

Yet oral traditions persisted. Surviving Kwakwaka'wakw elders of the early twentieth century, the last witnesses to intensive estuarine cultivation, made efforts to impart knowledge of these places and these practices to the succeeding generations. Such information was included in the traditional training of clan chiefs of the early twentieth century. Kwaxsiṣtalla stressed that "it was important to them that we learned that ... everyone had gardens!" With the gardens no longer existing, however, the oral traditions surrounding them are being passed to contemporary children with less frequency. Today, elders like Kwaxsiṣtalla worry that the younger people, generations separated from their lands, do not know what the estuarine garden plants look like, what their roots taste like, what time of the year they should be harvested, or how the gardens should be maintained (Craig and Smith 1997, 36; Drucker n.d. box 1, 2/2). Ironically, most recently this distancing of communities from their traditional harvesting areas and resources has been perpetuated by conservationists in efforts to establish protected areas and to return lands to an imagined "pristine" condition. Often, in these conservationist narratives, the role of Indigenous peoples like the Tsawataineuk at Kingcome in shaping and maintaining these ecosystems goes unrecognized, in effect echoing some of the same culturally bound concepts of nature and wilderness that contributed to Aboriginal displacement a century or more earlier.<sup>5</sup>

Territorial dispossession, colonial representation, and Indigenous resistance cannot be understood in isolation from each other. In the imperial and colonial periods, European representations of Indigenous subsistence on the Northwest Coast were inextricably tied to the assumptions and objectives of the colonial project. The claims made about traditional First Nations subsistence by colonial occupiers are intertwined with colonizers' overarching assumptions regarding the racial and cultural inferiority of colonialized peoples as well as the general insignificance of "women's work." As such, the biases in their accounts obscured the importance of estuarine gardens and hastened their dispossession. Estuarine gardening was alien to the peoples of Europe. It was also carried out primarily by women and was not featured prominently or sympathetically by early observers because of the masculinist bent of the imperial and colonial projects. In turn, on the Northwest Coast, the representation – by scholars, policy-makers,

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<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, such oversights are being corrected with the establishment of a new type of protected area – conservancies – in which Indigenous peoples are key in planning and decision making, and in which their relationships with their territories are maintained (Turner and Bitonti 2011).

and settlers alike – of Indigenous peoples as “non-cultivators” served to undercut land claims on terrestrial resource sites. This facilitated the alienation of lands, the displacement of Native peoples, and, ultimately, the loss of many traditional practices and much traditional knowledge.

Throughout the colonial world, Indigenous peoples – often lacking the means for organized or forceful resistance – have opted to resist these changes in numerous, often subtle ways (Scott 1987). Their maintenance of traditional subsistence practices in the face of colonial opposition and obstruction has sometimes served as part of this more general pattern of resistance. So, too, the Indigenous peoples of the BC coast have exerted their agency, resisting change and redefining the cultural significance of traditional lands and resources. On three separate occasions, in 1999, 2005, and 2008, Clan Chief Adam Dick, Kwaxsishtalla, organized village root harvests on the Kingcome people’s traditional gardens. He returned to his own family’s plot and oversaw the digging of the estuarine roots, which still appear there in spite of over a century of disturbance and neglect, by both Kingcome Village residents and visiting students. Young people from Kingcome Village attended and were taught the old gardening traditions (cf. Lloyd 2011). Concurrent with these events, Kwaxsishtalla hosted traditional root feasts incorporating traditional clan songs and naming ceremonies to acknowledge the labours of root harvesters and to carry forward the imperiled knowledge of traditional harvests.

Kwaxsishtalla and many others along the coast continue to express the hope that these traditional foods will once again uphold their importance as a prestigious potlatch food and as a component of the living diet of coastal First Peoples. Consumed in public contexts, such traditional foods now serve as potent reminders of First Nations resistance to this history of colonial appropriation and to the ingenious and sacred practices of the ancestors in producing nutritious food over countless generations.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special and respectful *Gaylakasla* from Doug Deur and Nancy Turner to our co-authors Kwaxsishtalla, Mayanilth, and Oqwilowgwa for sharing their knowledge, experiences, and insights with us in writing this article and on countless other occasions. We also thank the past and present leaders and village members of Kingcome Village for welcoming Kwaxsishtalla home and for hosting us during our visits to the root gardens, and to T. Abe Lloyd and our other graduate students for their contributions. Nancy Turner’s work is supported through grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and through

the Tula Foundation, with special appreciation to Dr. Eric Peterson and Christina Munck. Sincere thanks also go to Dr. Dana Lepofsky and Dr. Richard Mackie for their ongoing help and interest in bringing this special volume to fruition.

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