

SACRED PLACES

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EDGEWISE

Ethnographic mapping is more than dots pointing to cultural sites. It's a research process that records and represents local meanings and knowledge about culturally significant places and landscapes. These maps make visible what otherwise might be missed as "nature" or "empty space."

Faculty and graduate student researchers in UVic's Ethnographic Mapping Lab partner with Indigenous communities on projects that use Google's geo tools – like Google Earth Pro, Google MyMaps, Fusion Tables and StreetView. Info: <http://ethnographicmapping.uvic.ca>

Xwixwyus or XIXYES: this name for the area around Winter Cove refers to the "narrow passage" between Saturna and Samuel Islands. For Coast Salish peoples, it's a significant gathering place and jumping-off point to destinations across the Salish Sea.

Tth'umuqwa' or SXEXEĆO,ŦEN: Russell Island, just outside Fulford Harbour on Saltspring Island, is the site of a significant clam garden, as well as many culturally important plant and tree species.

SKĒLTĀMEN: Sidney Spit on the northern tip of Sidney Island is known to SENĆOŦEN-speaking peoples as a place for stopping over during the change of tides. It includes some remarkable and fragile archaeological sites.

In partnership with Indigenous communities, UVic researchers are involved in a wide range of projects—in areas such as language, law and governance, the environment, health and economic development—to understand, preserve and celebrate Indigenous culture and traditions in Canada and around the world.



Penelakut Elder Auggie Sylvester sharing Indigenous histories of Portland Island with students Mike Graeme and Tessa Gaudet. PHOTO: BRIAN THOM

Mapping tools help Coast Salish communities and Parks Canada protect ancestral sites

by Anne MacLaurin

Have you ever been to Xwixwyus? Or Tth'umuqwa'? Or SKĒLTĀMEN?

We're betting you've visited at least one of them. They're more commonly known as Winter Cove (Saturna Island), Russell Island (near Saltspring Island) and Sidney Spit (Sidney Island) and they're all Coast Salish ancestral sites in what is now the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve.

They're sacred places that Parks Canada and many Coast Salish communities are working together to protect.

University of Victoria anthropologist Brian Thom has long worked with Coast Salish First Nations and Parks Canada on cooperative management in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. Recently, Thom saw an opportunity to more fully integrate Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into co-management efforts.

"Mapping culturally significant landscapes is an essential way to re-story this national park reserve," says Thom. "By documenting Indigenous landmarks, traditional use sites and stories, Coast Salish communities have a powerful tool for collaboratively managing their territories with Parks Canada."

This fall, Thom organized a series of field mapping excursions to the park reserve with his fourth-year anthropology students. Coast Salish Elders and knowledge-holders shared oral histories with the students who used Google's MyMaps, GPS and audio recorders to document culturally significant landscapes.

"By experiencing first-hand the process of connecting this knowledge to the land students learn the value of Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and contribute to dialogues of co-management," says Thom.

"This field work was both rewarding and challenging—we had to think on our feet and adapt to conditions in a way not possibly understood in a classroom setting," says student Tessa Gaudet.

During one trip, students learned about the cultural landscape at Saturna Island's Winter Cove from Parks Canada cultural program assistant David Dick.

"Xwixwyus was a gathering place because you could launch your canoe in any direction," says Dick. "It is one of the success stories," he adds when asked about how Parks Canada's cooperative management of sites like this is impacted by Indigenous knowledge. "Parks Canada really made an effort to route trails away

from our ancestors' resting place, following the teachings of the Elders."

For Penelakut Elder Auggie Sylvester, the exchange with Thom and his students is a way to honour his grandparents' stories and teachings.

"Everything I know comes from my grandfather. He taught me about the medicine found on all of these islands. Every island has got medicine; if you go there, you don't just go and walk all over it because something you walk on might be medicine and it won't come back," he says.

Thom and his graduate students have been sharing their research expertise with Indigenous communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island who are working with Parks Canada. Their research is part of a broader cross-Canada research project about conservation practices in Canada's national parks.

"These projects are all about understanding the world from an Indigenous point of view," says Thom. "We're applying an anthropological sensibility to big questions like how can Indigenous communities and Parks Canada share knowledge to manage a protected area together."

"The public is starting to see park landscapes more reflective of Indigenous relationship to their territories, but there's still much to learn."