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ANTHROPOLOGY COLLOQUIUM SERIES



Seamarks and Sightlines: fishing as landscape learning on the Northwest Coast

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The underwater landscape of the Northwest Coast is largely concealed from direct perception by human senses. Except in a literally shallow and transient way, humans cannot visit this hidden environment. Yet, Indigenous communities held accurate and granular mental models of the deeper seafloor and its affordances, such as halibut banks, lingcod reefs, and dentalia grounds. I argue that fine grained and specific knowledge of the sea floor was gained by probing the bottom with fishing gear or other instrumentation, necessarily practiced from watercraft, and therefore bottom fishing is simultaneously an act of subsistence and an act of perception. Crucially, this hidden landscape can be georeferenced to the terrestrial landscape, often through a form of triangulation. Drawing on theories of the environment and the maritime world developed by Tim Ingold, Penny Howard and Hein Bjerck, I will argue that canoe-borne fishing practices embedded a practice of “remote sensing,” which itself enabled Indigenous cartographies and enculturations of the deep.

EVERYONE WELCOME

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