Backgrounder for the UVic-Tsawout 2023 Archaeological Field School at TEL,ItĆE (Cordova Bay)

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Key information:
UVic and Tsawout First Nation have partnered to run the 2023 summer archaeology field school and around the ancient village site of TEL,ItĆE in Cordova Bay. This will be the first research-focused archaeological project ever done at the original village site of the South Saanich Treaty (one of the Douglas Treaties). The collaboration will bring UVic undergraduate and graduate students together with youth and cultural workers from WSÁNEĆ communities for a deeper understanding of Indigenous histories of and relationships to Cordova Bay. The project will take place on waterfront lands held by the District of Saanich in the Cordova Bay area, who are supporting the work in the spirit of the ÁTOL,NEUEL Memorandum of Understanding with WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council.

What
The 2023 UVic-Tsawout Archaeological Field School will map out the footprint of the ancient TEL,ItĆE village and surrounding areas of Indigenous use and occupancy on District of Saanich lands in Cordova Bay. This will include exploratory excavations at locations including Agate Lane, McMorran, and Cordova Bay Parks, archaeological evaluation and mapping of waterfront road ends, and a close examination of intertidal archaeological rock features in Cordova Bay. The project will provide robust baseline mapping (through Ground Penetrating Radar, soil probes, and shovel tests) for elements of the village site and associated cultural landscapes in these areas, as well as evidence of the lives of Indigenous peoples in Cordova Bay through the artifacts, features, and other footprints of daily life. Alongside the archaeological work, we will be attending to oral histories and ceremony, honouring the ongoing connections of WSÁNEĆ peoples to this ancestral cultural landscape.

When
The field school will run from June 28 to Aug 2nd, 2023 as UVic ANTH 343/344.

Why
Our research project is to establish baseline information in support of better understanding the ancient village site at TEL,ItĆE (which is the “village and enclosed fields” mentioned in the South Saanich Treaty 1852). We will work to see what we can say about the age of this village site (through radiocarbon dating) and describe any significant architectural or related features that may be located on lands stewarded by the District of Saanich. We will archaeologically document artifacts and features from this area to support the further understanding of the “right to fish as formerly” and inherent rights that flow from this original use and occupation of the Cordova Bay area. Deepening this knowledge will provide invaluable information to help further the relationship between the District of Saanich and the WSÁNEĆ Nation communities, including in areas of parks management, governance, and site protection. It will be a catalyst for new, better-educated public conversations in the Cordova Bay community generally, centred on
recognition and reconciliation. The work is being done in conjunction with oral history and archival research and will provide significant insight into Indigenous histories, values and teachings related to Cordova Bay that will be a legacy for the future.

How
We will begin our work with a ground penetrating radar survey of the area in the spring of 2023 to identify any possible burials or anomalies, which will be mapped so that care can be taken to avoid those areas in our work. Our full field school team will begin the excavation and mapping work at the start of July, where our crew will practice standard archaeological techniques including soil probes, shovel tests, and excavation units, as well as intertidal archaeology in and around the stone features. We will only excavate small areas of the sites, and the areas will be restored by the end of the summer.
Where
While most of the footprint of ȾEL, HĆE has been impacted in some way by private land development, the undeveloped parcels in the municipal park at Agate Lane provides a base for this research. The village site is in close relation to many other nearby archaeological sites, including the McMorran Park, Cordova Bay Park, at the road end at Waters Edge Road, and the intertidal areas below.

Who
The work is under the direction of Professor Brian Thom (UVic Anthropology) and senior archaeologist Heather Pratt, with formal approvals from BC Archaeology Branch, Tsawout First Nation, and the District of Saanich. The field school will have 12 undergraduate students, 2 graduate students from UVic. There will be also opportunities for youth and cultural workers from W̱SÁNEĆ and Ləkʼəwən communities to participate as paid field assistants. On the job training for all crew members will be provided, including the opportunity to complete RISC certification for working on archaeology crews in the future (RISC is “Resources Information Standards Committee Archaeological and CMT Inventory Training for Crew Members”).

These investigations are being done at highly visible, public beach sites, and we anticipate a robust interest from the broader community. While there will not be opportunities for the public to participate directly in the excavations, we will be running a “public archaeology” campaign, where students will lead site tours and provide drop-in information to visitors. We will be organizing a few special events for invited guests during the work. The Cordova Bay Association of Community Affairs (the local neighbourhood association) has been a key partner in helping communicate what is happening to the local community, and we appreciate the support of the District of Saanich Parks staff in these efforts.
Next Steps & Financial Goals

It will cost a total of about $45,000 to run this field school, with approximately $10,000 we anticipate to be covered through in-kind contributions already secured at UVic. We have a fundraising goal of $35,000 to support the work, including fulsome participation of indigenous community members, public information campaign, radiocarbon dating, practical security on site during the field school, and some minor equipment. Students will be charged a fee of between $800-1000 to attend the field school, in addition to the usual tuition. If we are able to exceed our fundraising goal, the student fees will be lowered (step 1 stretch goal) and we will hire an Indigenous-run catering company to provide healthy boxed lunches for the archaeology crew (step 2 stretch goal) during the field school.

The University of Victoria is accepting donations in any amount to support the archaeological excavations at ȾEL¸IȽĆE. You can make your cheque payable to ‘University of Victoria” and indicate it is for “Cordova Bay Archaeology Project” and 100% of those funds will go to support this particular project. UVic will issue you a tax receipt for whatever you donate, so thank you! Donations from businesses and community members to support archaeological collaboration will make all the difference! Please donate before April 30th for greater impact! If you have any questions about making donations, or want to make a larger donation, please contact the UVic Development Office soscdevt@uvic.ca and they can help with all the details.