

# The St. Mungo Cannery Site: A Preliminary Report

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## INTRODUCTION

The mouth of the Fraser River has long been a focal point of archaeological interest in the Northwest Coast. Through the excavations of C. E. Borden, a cultural sequence beginning in the first millenium B.C. has been established for this locality. Two problems in this sequence bear consideration. One problem is the origins and relationship of the two earliest phases, Locarno Beach and Marpole, and the second is the time gap between the Marpole phase and the more recent Stselax Phase. It was the hopeful intention of learning more about the latter period which led to the Vancouver Centennial Museum excavations at the St. Mungo Cannery Site in the winter of 1968 and summer of 1969. Surface finds at this large midden site on the South Arm of the Fraser River opposite New Westminster seemed to indicate a possible relationship to the Whalen II phase of Borden's sequence, radiocarbon dated to about 400 A.D. The excavations, however, yielded information of a much older occupation, and the data will, when fully analysed, considerably enrich our understanding of the origins and development of the Marpole phase and of early connections between the Fraser Canyon and the Fraser Delta.

## LOCATION AND ECOLOGICAL SETTING

The St. Mungo Cannery Site, DgRr 2, is located on the south bank of the South Arm of the Fraser River, British Columbia, about thirteen miles from its present mouth (Fig. 13). It is situated at the foot of a high ridge of glacial till, Panorama Ridge, and occupies a small plot of land about 27 feet above sea level that must once have been the most westerly area of habitable ground in the region. Everything west of the site on the south side of the river would even now be marsh land, flooded every year, except for the protecting dykes; 4,000 years ago, at

*Hammerstones:* Two types of hammerstones have been found although they are not abundant. One type shows pitting at both ends and sometimes on the faces close to the ends or in the centre. The second type also shows grinding or battering along the edges, giving them a rectangular outline. The distribution of the two types is not mutually exclusive. (Fig. 20).

#### *Artifacts of Other Materials*

*Tooth Pendants:* Pendants made of dog, wapiti and bear (?) canine have been found *in situ* and in disturbed areas. In the site they occur in the upper half of the main deposit. They are either perforated or grooved for suspension. An unusual find is a human molar with the roots ground off to the neck. There is no modification for suspension and it is probably a charm. (Fig. 16).

*Shell Pendants:* One shell pendant was found lying on the ochre floor. It is a long, slender, oval shape with two drilled perforations for suspension.

*Shell Cutting Blades:* Three fragments of cutting blades ground from *Mytilus californianus* were recovered from the central levels of the main deposit. One is probably an adze blade.

*Beaver Incisors:* Beaver incisors from the mandible with edges re-ground for use as carving (?) tools are relatively common in the main deposit, although splitting them lengthwise does not seem to have been practised. Two incisors also have the root ends ground, possibly to facilitate hafting. (Fig. 16).

*Ochre:* Apart from the red ochre floor, lumps of ochre were found throughout the deposit.

*Historic Goods:* One opaque blue bead; three Canadian silver nickels, two found just below the sod dating to 1899 and 1906, and one found on the beach dating 1905; a couple of buttons, an ivory handle; a few nails; and a few fragments of glass are all that remains of the historic occupation. ✓

#### *Artifact Distributions*

The vertical distribution of artifacts at the St. Mungo site indicates both the loss of some types and the addition of others through time. These distributions are as follows:

*Artifacts that occur at all levels of the site:* These artifacts might be termed basic "survival equipment" and include pebble tools, bone awls,