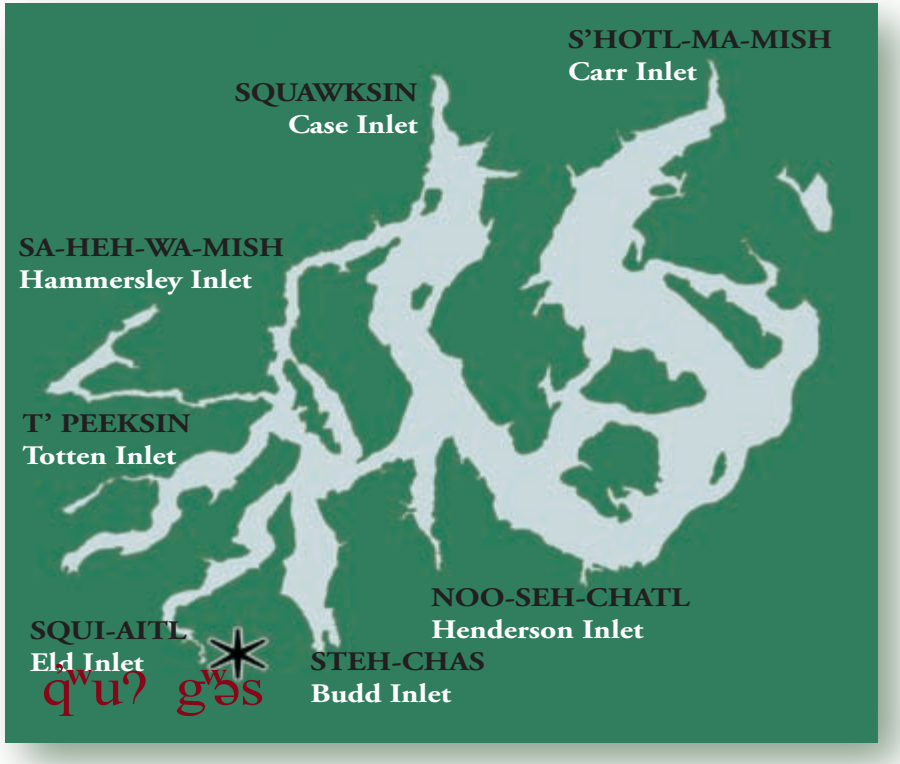
NOTES

WELCOME TO q̓ʷuʔ gʷəs!

qʷuʔgʷəs is located at the head of Eld Inlet in an area known as Mud Bay. This major ancient harvesting and processing site is one of several ancestral locations of the Squi-Aitl people who inhabited the entire Eld Inlet watershed. The site was recently given a new name, pronounced "*quot gwes*," meaning "*Gathering Place*."

Today's Squaxin Island tribal members are the descendants of the maritime people who lived and prospered along the shores of the southernmost inlets and watersheds of Puget Sound for untold centuries. Because of our strong cultural connection with the water, we are also known as "*The People of the Water*." The present-day Squaxin Island Tribe is composed of the people native to the inlet watersheds shown below.



NOTE: The "amish" ending to a word means "The People Of." It is likely that the Squi-Aitl were known as the "Squi-Aitl-Amish" with various interpretations of the spelling. Squi-Aitl means the "Place Where You Break Open Shellfish." So the Squi-Aitl were "The People of the Place Where You Break Open Shellfish."

SHELLFISH & FISH

qʷuʔgʷəs was most likely located near the primary village of the Squi-Aitl people, who also occupied numerous other major villages and camps throughout the entire Eld Inlet watershed.

The lives of the Squi-Aitl people were centered around the rich resources of the sea. One or more longhouses may have been located at qʷuʔgʷəs, close to the water's edge on the flat, grassy field where canoes could be easily beached. The site was also near the mouth of a stream, where fresh water flows into the salt water. This provided the people with more than one way to fish. Specific areas at the site were set aside for processing salmon, clams and oysters which were also highly prized trade goods. Tools that have been found at the site include a vast array of stone, bone, wood and fiber implements, such as weirs, nets, baskets, arrows, spears and weights, etc. Most of these tools were designed to ease the daily tasks of fishing, gathering shellfish and processing their catches.

Standing near the shoreline perfumed by a salty, forest-scented fog, looking across the tidelands and marshes to the small cove peppered by remnants of an ancient fish weir, you can sense the presence of our ancestors who remain an integral part of this environment.

Graphic illustration by Hilary Stewart in her book Stone, Bone, Antler and Shell Artifacts of the Northwest Coast.

HARVESTING SITE

Photo by Edward Curtis

"The delicacies offered from the Heart of the Earth (the sea), have always been highly respected by our people. The aquatic creatures that sustain us and give us life offer much more than mere physical nourishment; they provide spiritual sustenance as well."

- Squaxin Island Heritage and Culture Committee

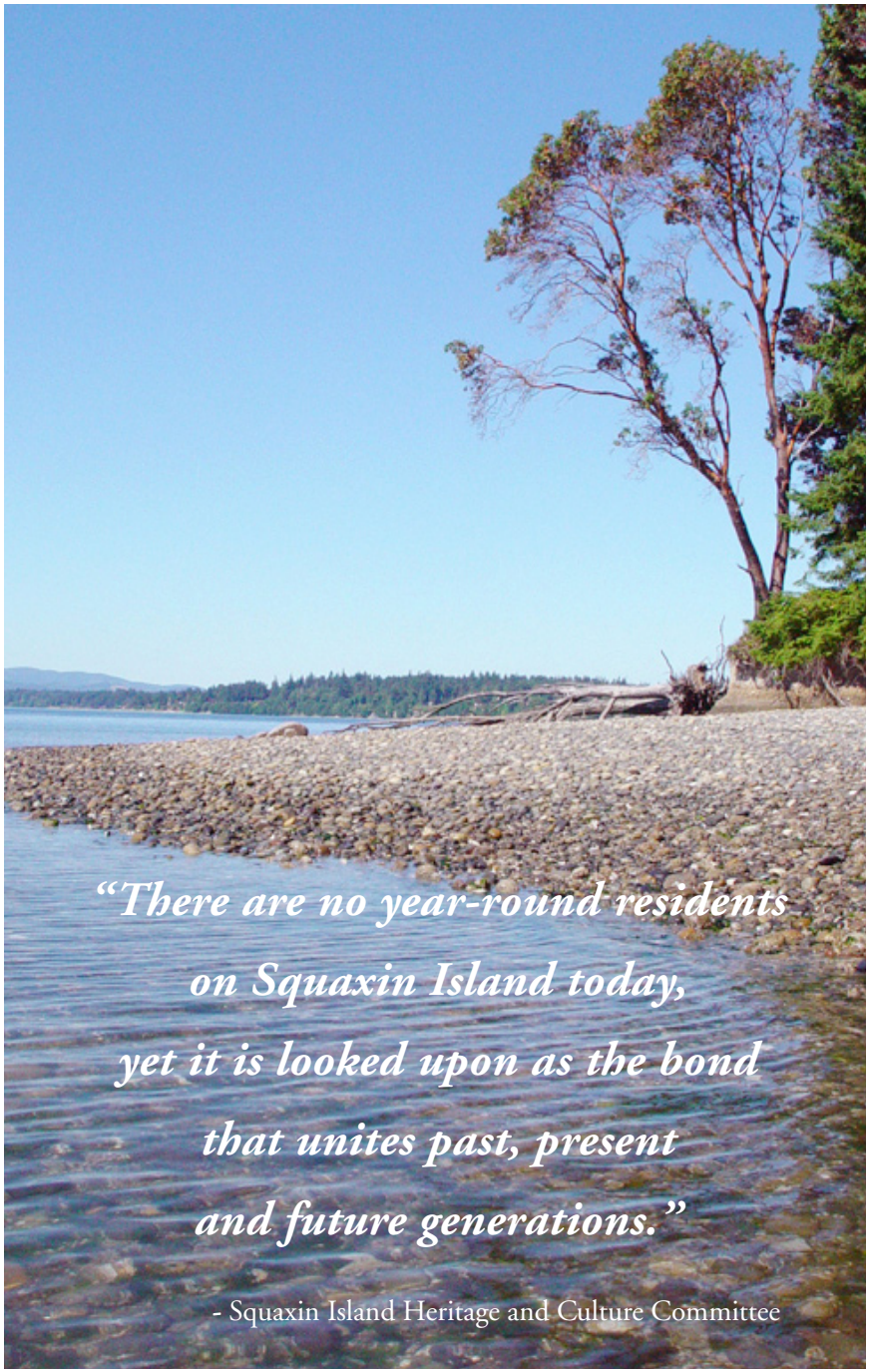
SQUAXIN ISLAND . . .

On Christmas Day, 1854, the Treaty of Medicine Creek was negotiated between the native people of South Puget Sound and the United States government. Approximately 600 people attended the negotiations, although it was raining and miserably cold. This treaty, signed on December 26, was the first in Washington Territory. The treaty was negotiated in Chinook Jargon, a trade language that was inadequate to convey the complex issues of treaty making. As a result, out of the thousands of square miles encompassing the ceded area of our people, only a small island, four and a half miles long and one-half mile wide, was retained as the main area for all of our people to reside. The island was given the name of the Squawksin people of Case Inlet, and became known as Squaxin Island.

The Indian agency wanted to make farmers of our people, and tried unsuccessfully to force them to settle down in one place and raise crops. However, this was not a satisfactory way of life for people oriented to the rich resources of the land and sea. Therefore, our people resumed their traditional way of life, harvesting berries and roots such as camas during the summer and returning in the fall to their original homes near the salmon runs. By 1962 the number of island residents had dwindled to 50. By 1959 only four year-around residents lived on the island.

The Treaty of Medicine Creek, 1854

HOW IT RELATES

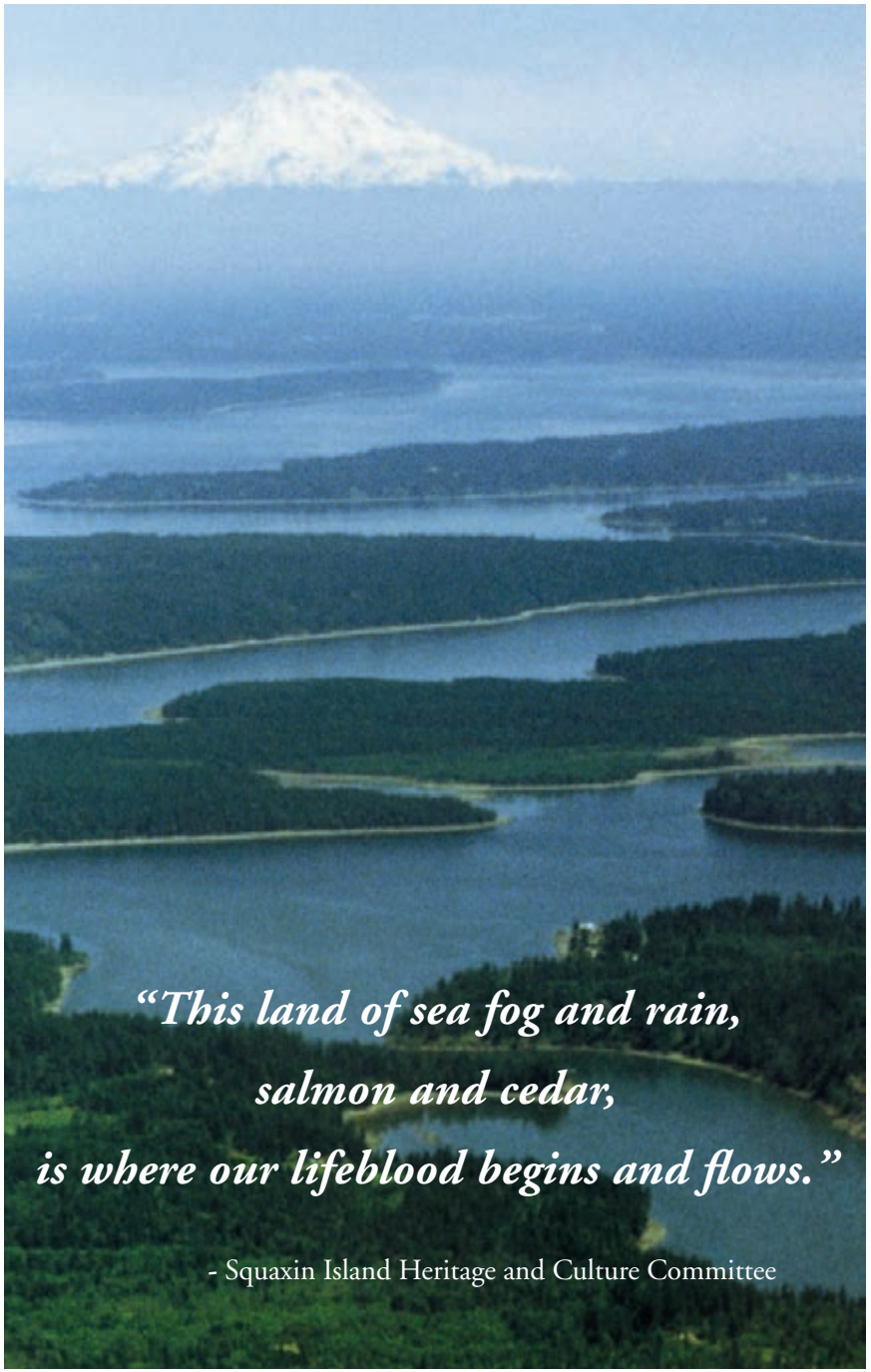


THE WATERWAYS

The waterways were our highways, and our people traveled extensively along them, as far north as Vancouver Island and south along the Pacific Coast. Songs sailed out across the waterways as our ancestors paddled their magnificent cedar canoes on their way to gather, trade or attend a family potlatch. Throughout childhood, youths would listen to the elders tell stories that were passed down through many generations and taught important lessons about life and proper conduct, as well as an understanding of belonging to the people.

The Squi-Aitl people traveled the extensive trade routes of Northwest America, taking well-established trails across the Cascades into Yakama Country, the Columbia River Basin and far beyond. One of these trade routes ran from the Pacific Ocean, up the Chehalis and Black Rivers to Black Lake and around the Black Hills to Steh-Chass at the head of Budd Inlet and Squi-Aitl at the head of Eld Inlet. Many of today's highways were built along existing trail routes, worn deep by years of continuous use.

OUR HIGHWAYS



THE FISH WEIRS

For thousands of years the Squi-Aitl family managed the natural resources and only took what was needed. They used many types of fishing techniques and gear, including fish traps/weirs, nets and harpoons.

Located inside the small bay and creek drainage along the northeastern side of qʷuʔgʷəs is a very well-preserved, waterlogged, set of intertidal fish traps made of cedar stakes. The remains of more than 440 wooden stakes are visible in two separate, but very close locations. Although they are not joined, the fish traps were used in conjunction with one another to capture salmon returning to the creek to spawn.

Fish Trap A is in a small, natural, bowl-shaped cove along the south shoreline of the small bay and main channel of the creek drainage. It is a side trap to the main weir that extends across the entire bay. It contains 108 visible stakes that formed an enclosure running across the mouth of the cove. This side trap was used first. A door in the stake wall was opened at high tide, allowing the salmon to swim inside. When there were enough salmon in the trap, the door was closed, trapping the salmon until low tide when they could be harvested easily.

Fish Trap B contains 332 visible stakes, running in one row across the small bay and main channel of the creek drainage. When the door to the side trap was closed, the door to the main fish trap remained open, allowing salmon to swim farther up into the small bay. When the tide began to recede, the door was closed. This trap never went completely dry, but the fish were trapped behind the door when the water level was very low, which allowed for quick gathering.

CATCHING SALMON

South Puget Sound Fish Wier, ca, 1890-1895 Photo courtesy of University of Washington Library

Each fish trap stake is a split cedar post, approximately 4x4 inches (10 x 10 cm) in cross-section, with the end sharpened for placement. Some of the stake points were cut with metal axes as evidenced by sharp angled cuts. These were replacement stakes made after European contact. Along this part of the coast, the first known contact with Europeans bearing metal blades was the 1778 English expedition under Captain James Cook. The majority of the stakes, however, were cut by stone adzes. The angle of these cuts is much less sharp. The outer ring of one of the stone adzed stakes was submitted for C14 carbon dating, which returned an estimated date of 1490 a.d. It is possible that the stake sent in for carbon dating was also a replacement of a much older stake. In general, the style of tools used at this site appears to be from a period up to 1,000 years old.

A RARE FIND

During excavations in 1999, portions of an ancient cedar bark gillnet were unearthed at qʷuʔgʷəs. This was a very rare find. Only two other sites have been discovered along the entire Northwest Coast that have cedar bark gillnets. A Squaxin Island tribal basket weaver immediately recognized the net's fiber as the inner bark of a western red cedar. Also, as a tribal fisher, she noted the 5 inch stretch mesh, 12.5 cm web mesh size (the distance between knots), and concluded that it must have been used for catching smaller species of salmon such as coho, blueback and/or steelhead.

The qʷuʔgʷəs net is made of string-gauge cordage, formed into a net using square knots, sometimes called reef knots, or, if collapsed, lark's head knots. This no-slip knot is very practical for making nets by hand without the use of a netting needle. The cordage was made by twisting two strands clockwise to the right and plying them together with a counter-clockwise left twist. This forms what is known as Z-lay cordage. There are also a few S-laid (twisted in the opposite direction to Z-lay), two-strand cordages in the web. This type of net would have been used for drifting (floating in and out with the tide) or for use with a landline (connection to the beach on one or two sides).

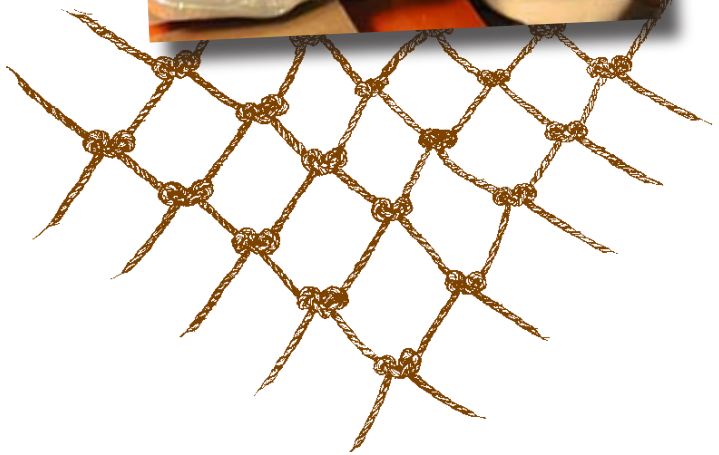
As the net was uncovered, it became immediately apparent that something was out of the ordinary. Hundreds of Coho salmon jaws were still in the net. No fisher in their right mind would leave salmon in a gillnet. It would take one person more than eight months to make a net like this. Leaving salmon in the net would cause it to rot very quickly. Something happened that was not normal.

THEORIES TO EXPLAIN THE SALMON JAWS INCLUDE:

- A sudden disaster that quickly covered the gillnet
- An underwater snag that forced the fisherman to cut the net, leaving a portion underwater and unreachable
- A young fisherman being overwhelmed by the large amount of salmon in the net and unable to bring it to shore

THE CEDAR BARK GILLNET

Drawings by
Candra Thomas, Navajo



BASKETRY

THREE PRIMARY TYPES OF BASKETRY FOUND AT qʷuʔgʷəs:

Cedar bark checker weave matting
This weave type is the most common and is versatile for making mats, soft cases and bags.

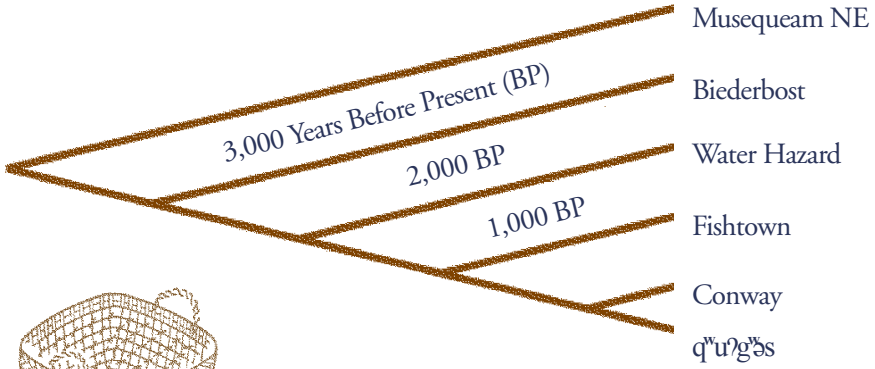
Fine twill and checker plaited ornamental basketry

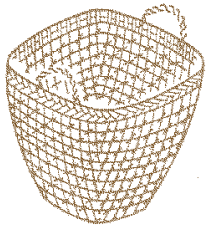
Open-twined pack baskets of cedar splints *(from roots or boughs)*
Open twined pack baskets are utilitarian and made to haul heavy items. The handles were woven in a special way to handle heavy loads. They are double looped with opposing two-strand cordage. The handles were necessary because the baskets were lifted and moved many short distances while collecting shellfish. A strap, also known as a tumpline, could be attached to the handles, allowing the carrier to sling the basket over her shoulders and back, or over the forehead with the basket hanging down the back. Most clam baskets were built to hold at least 40 pounds. In addition to the strengthened handles, the pack baskets were made with looped rims.

A WOVEN HISTORY

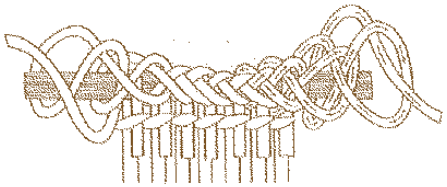
The basketry found at qʷuʔgʷəs dates back 1,000 years. However, there is a demonstrated similarity between the basketry at qʷuʔgʷəs and basketry found at other sites in the Pacific Northwest from South Puget Sound north to the Fraser River. These sites date back up to 3,000 years.

NW COAST BASKETRY SITES





The basic shape is constant over a large time period and extensive geographic area.



A similar top handle weave pattern is found in all 1,000 year-old Puget Sound area sites.

Note the similarity between the qʷuʔgʷəs baskets (left page) and this basket found at the Water Hazard site dating back nearly 2,000 years. A main difference is that the handles on the 2,000 year-old examples (at Biederbost site too) are placed on the sides of the basket instead of the top.

WHAT IS A WET SITE?

Waterlogged archaeological sites are called "wet sites." These sites provide excellent preservation of wooden and fibrous artifacts because water is present all the time, keeping oxygen from reaching the artifacts. Organisms that cause decay, such as bacteria and fungus, cannot survive without oxygen. Therefore wooden and fibrous artifacts can be preserved for thousands of years in a wet site.

A Northwest Coast wet site, such as qʷuʔgʷəs, can include a large number of artifacts because approximately 90% of things produced by Northwest people were made of wood or fiber. These artifacts may include planks from longhouses, foundation posts, house posts, canoes, clothing, woven mats, wooden boxes, baskets, nets, rope, eating utensils and much, much more. In non-waterlogged sites, these types of priceless artifacts are lost to decomposition.

A good clue that you are at a wet site is gray/blue-colored silt and clay soils. In waterlogged soils, the iron mineral has not oxidized or "rusted" which creates the common brown to reddish color of most soil. Also, on the Northwest Coast, these sites usually are on a slope, where water flows through the ground, keeping the site area waterlogged. Northwest soils are often acidic, so hair, hides, skin and other soft animal matter do not preserve in these wet sites.

Excavation in wet sites requires specialized archaeological equipment. Traditional shovels and trowels cannot be used because metal tools would cut right through the wood and fiber. Instead, water from fine-adjust hose nozzles and water pumps works best to delicately uncover these perishable artifacts. This system also works well for uncovering stone, bone and shell artifacts. Screening of the excavated material is best done by running water over the excavated material on screens, ensuring that artifacts can be easily seen and recovered without being damaged.

Once wooden and fibrous artifacts are removed, they must be soaked for extended periods of time in a special preservative called Carbo-wax (polyethylene glycol), a chemical that drives the water out and replaces it in the cell structure of waterlogged materials. If the artifacts such as baskets or nets were simply allowed to dry out, they would shrink, crack and eventually disintegrate.

FIBROUS MATERIALS

Squaxin Island tribal member Sally Brownfield

PARTNERSHIP

The Squaxin Island Tribe, property owners Ralph and Karen Munro, and South Puget Sound Community College faculty and students have forged a unique partnership. In 1999, Ralph contacted the college expressing interest in further study of an area near his home where he and Karen had discovered numerous artifacts. About the same time, Rhonda Foster, director of the Tribe's newly formed Cultural Resources Department, began taking anthropology classes with Professor Dale Croes at the college. Everything fell into place at exactly the right time. College and tribal officials agreed to conduct a cultural resource survey and record the site on the Munro property on Mud Bay that summer. Since that time the partnership grew.

"It is truly amazing what is accomplished when people and organizations work together for a common purpose under the guidance of the Creator," said Rhonda Foster, Squaxin Island Tribe Director of Cultural Resources.

"We would like to thank the Squaxin Island Tribe and South Puget Sound Community College for the wonderful relationship that has been developed from our archaeological site agreement," Ralph Munro stated. "We consider it a privilege to live on Triple Creek Farm. As a family who loves to swim in Puget Sound, it is especially exciting to actually know that Native American children were enjoying the opportunity to swim off the same beaches one thousand years ago."

Karen Munro adds, "We also are very gratified to see the artifacts from our farm on display at the Squaxin Island Tribal Museum. Finally, it is a great pleasure to watch native and non-native students learning how to conduct wet site archaeology and making new discoveries about the tribe's cultural heritage."

Ralph and Karen Munro (L), Dale Croes (top right) and Rhonda Foster

Funding for this project was provided by Humanities Washington through an award received by Karen Munro.

AN ANCIENT SITE