



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

January 2021 Online Lecture



Ancient Indigenous Dogs had a Taste for Seafood

By Dylan Hillis, M.A. Candidate

Lecture Available Online January 26th

Live Q&A over Zoom at 7 pm on November 28th

New archaeological research has shown that Indigenous peoples in coastal British Columbia raised their dogs almost entirely on seafood. Chemical analysis of dog bones and a host of other animals recovered from archaeological sites in the Broken Group Islands, Tseshaht First Nation territory, revealed that dogs were fed large amounts of salmon and forage fish, confirming that seafood was rich and abundant. This study offers the first detailed estimates of food consumption by dogs bred by Indigenous peoples in coastal British Columbia. Salmon, Pacific herring and northern anchovy represented as much as 65% of dietary protein. Data from four sites indicate that dogs appear to have been fed this way for the last 3,000 years in this area. These patterns also aligned with the proportion of animal bones at multiple sites in this coastal archipelago, providing a window into the past abundance of these fisheries and their role in Indigenous communities. In contrast to intensive grain-based agriculture practiced elsewhere in the world, Indigenous communities in coastal British Columbia are best known for their sophisticated marine harvesting and management strategies enabling the accumulation of abundant seafood. This study also reveals that thriving marine fisheries allowed communities to invest heavily in domestic dog husbandry, including breeding a type of small white-haired dog, which was raised for its wool and used in making valuable blankets and regalia.

Bio: Dylan Hillis (he/him) is currently a master's student working under the supervision of Dr. Iain McKechnie in the Historical Ecology and Coastal Archaeology (HECA) Lab at the University of Victoria. He completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Victoria in 2018, double majoring in Anthropology and Geography with a focus on environmental sustainability. In the final year of his undergraduate degree, Hillis conducted original scientific research for his honours, which examined dietary variation in ancient domestic dogs on the West Coast of Vancouver Island (Barkley Sound), Tseshaht Territory. Hillis' MA research aims to investigate ocean temperature change over the last five thousand years, on the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, using zooarchaeological data. Specifically, he is interested in how ancient fish populations have responded to dynamic ocean temperatures, and how fish populations will likely respond to a warming ocean in the current context of a climate crisis and what this means for the food security of coastal communities.

Link to Publication: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-71574-x>

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