

PIECES OF THE PAST

Here's an astounding thought — some of the artifacts stored at your community museum predate Columbus's arrival in the New World by as much as five millennia.

And at the Sunshine Coast Museum and Archives' upcoming exhibit, *Pieces of the Past: Squamish Stone Artifacts* from Ch'kw'elh and Schen'k, opening in early October 2011, visitors will have a chance to see and learn about these artifacts for the first time. The exhibit, developed jointly by the museum and the Squamish Nation, highlights an outstanding collection of stone tools that includes mauls, projectile points, adzes, celts, and anchor stones found on Squamish territory in Howe Sound. The artifacts, most of which were gathered from private collectors in the early days of the Elphinstone Pioneer Museum by local historian Lester Peterson, show that the land around Gibsons has been home to the Squamish (Skwxwú7mesh) people for thousands of years.

The exhibit is significant for more than just its outstanding collection of artifacts — what it symbolizes, in fact, is the beginning of a fruitful relationship between the museum and the Squamish Nation. Guest curator Damara Jacobs-Morris (Siyamiya Cha7awtenaat), who recently co-curated *Entwined Histories: Gifts from the Maisie Hurley Collection* at the North Vancouver Museum and Archives, and SCMA curator Kimiko Hawkes developed it with the input and support of Squamish Nation elders and language experts, and much of the exhibit text and labels will be printed in both English and the Squamish language (Skwxwú7mesh snichim). Jacobs-Morris sees *Pieces of the Past* as being about “breaking down barriers,” adding that “there seems to be a little bit of a disconnect between the First Nations communities in the area and the rest of the community.”

Indeed, the Gibsons area has not had a significant Squamish population since the early days of European settlement here. The Joint Indian Reserve Commission, travelling the Strait of Georgia in 1876 and 1877, delineated Indian Reserves 26 and 26A along the shoreline between Gibson and Soames Creeks, where two Squamish villages were located.

By **MATT CAVERS** These villages were not inhabited for long after settlers began acquiring neighbouring parcels of land in the late nineteenth century, however, and until very recently, were leased out for housing. The Squamish Nation has kept a low profile on the Sunshine Coast, but, explains Jacobs-Morris, the two Indian Reserve sites are of outstanding archaeological significance. “There's a lot of history right there along the waterfront.”

And much of that history is embedded in the artifacts themselves. In late October, 2010, the SCMA and Squamish Nation enlisted Archaeological Society of British Columbia president — and a team of volunteers — to photograph, catalogue, and analyze the collection. According to a report penned by Reimer, the collection of over two hundred tools and ceremonial items includes several projectile points

that date to the earliest period of Northwest Coast settlement — that is, over 5,500 years before the present.

Most importantly, Reimer's team was able to separate Squamish from Sechelt artifacts, as well as identifying the artifacts by purpose and rock type. Their work, Hawkes explains, was invaluable to the SCMA. Early acquisitions by Lester Peterson prevented valuable artifacts from being lost to history on people's mantelpieces, she says, but they often came with little to no written information on the artifacts themselves — something that a museum curator can do little without. “With the archaeological expertise that Rudy and his team provided,” says Hawkes, “we were able to gain a deeper understanding of what the tools were, how they were used, and therefore how to exhibit and interpret them.”

Besides evoking the lengthy history of Squamish life on Howe Sound, the artifacts displayed in *Pieces of the Past* are worth viewing simply as beautiful craft works. “We want people to think about the aesthetics,” says Jacobs-Morris. “They're artistic pieces. And the fact that [they're] stone... think of how long it would take to make some of these things.” Indeed, the quality of crafting behind the pieces ... points to the ingenuity of a people superbly attuned to the potential of the natural materials around them.

Squamish Nation councillor Julie Baker, who has been involved with *Pieces of the Past* since its conception in the summer of 2010, sees the value of the exhibit in its potential for building community. “It's very important for us, as neighbours, to get to know one another and share our history with the citizens of Gibsons.” **CL**



Squamish stone artifacts from the SCMA collection, from top: A flat-top maul, and sandstone bowl; A nipple-top maul and two circular sinker weights; A nephrite adze blade.

KIMIKO HAWKES

Learn about the Squamish peoples at a new exhibit at the Sunshine Coast Museum