



June 20, 2002

In an interview with Turtle Island Native Network, the Chief of Lyackson First Nation expressed his concern about an announcement by the British Columbia Government about a new park on Valdes Island.

Chief Rick Thomas wonders about protection of his peoples' cultural, sacred and burial sites on Valdes Island - their traditional homelands that also include two of their Indian Reserves.

Last year the cemetery was desecrated again and the First Nation worries that a park would be an invitation for more people to come and abuse Lyackson culture.

The provincial government's announcement came as a surprise because Lyackson interests have not been addressed, including adequate consultation related to Aboriginal Rights and Title issues.

Although the land that is targeted is so-called fee simple/private land that the province would turn into Crown Land for a park, Lyackson has never been allowed to survey the land to identify sacred sites or ancient burial grounds of their ancestors.

Many such sites have already been identified elsewhere on Valdes Island.

There is a positive opportunity to the establishment of the park, and that is the possibility of jobs and economic opportunities if Lyackson were to operate or at least co-manage the park.

Lyackson is a member of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group that issued the following news release.

Provincial Park Creation Jeopardizes Honour of the Crown

-Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

Ladysmith BC, June 20th, 2002

The BC Government has announced plans to create a new provincial park on Valdes Island. The government purchased private property at Wake's Cove in order to create the new park which it believes will create new Recreational opportunities for British



Columbians. The Wake's Cove property has been the source of a bitter land dispute with the Lyackson First Nation since 1876. The land was alienated from Lyackson First Nation when the property was subject to a large military land grant given to retiring British Navy Officer Captain Baldwin Wake.

"The creation of this park is an outrage", stated Lyackson First Nation Chief Richard Thomas. "Valdes Island is within our traditional territory and is full of Traditional use sites as well as sacred sites to the Hul'qumi'num Mustimuhw. There has been no consultation with Lyackson First Nation, even though the law requires it, and we are very concerned that the creation of this park will lead to more visitors on the island that may have a detrimental impact on our sacred sites."

Robert Morales, Chief Negotiator for Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group stated, "This decision is another glaring example of this governments competing mandates. The honour of the crown is at stake in these negotiations, and if you look at the decisions this government has made regarding land (Federal Park Reserve on the Gulf Islands, Small Business Forestry License, BC Park Creation) you would not know that they are supposed to be negotiating a treaty in good faith."

"This provincial government has got to get serious about negotiating at the table in good faith, and stop their departments from creating back door deals like this. If they don't, you will see increasing discontent and opposition from the First Nations Communities to not only the Treaty Process, but to all activities on crown land", concluded Morales.

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For more information contact:

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Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, Robert Morales
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION
PREVIOUS REPORTS BY TURTLE ISLAND NATIVE NETWORK

From: Tehaliwaskenhas-Bob Kennedy

Date: Mon Apr 2, 2001 1:37 pm

Subject: Lyackson People Shocked! Cemetary Desecrated!

Lyackson People Shocked!

Mounties Investigate Desecration of First Nation Historical Cemetary in BC's Gulf Islands

Lyackson First Nation sacred site damaged, desecrated by vandals on Valdes Island. Gabriola Island RCMP are investigating the vandalism they say was caused by a group of people sometime during the spring break period.

A historical cemetery of the Lyackson First Nation at Shingle Point, Valdes Island was desecrated by vandals who damaged several important historical graves, then removed and scattered human remains.

This vandalism occurred as the Lyackson were completing a heritage conservation project to officially document their ancestral cemetery, one of the earliest First Nation/Christian cemeteries in the Gulf Islands.

It is not the first time the Lyackson people's sacred sites have been desecrated. This most recent incident is only one of a series of acts of vandalism inflicted upon the Lyackson's burial grounds on Valdes Island, within the last five years.

The Lyackson cemetery at Shingle Point on Valdes Island is a significant heritage site exhibiting a unique blend of Coast Salish and Christian religious traditions in funerary architecture.

If you have information please contact Gabriola RCMP at 250-247-8333. There is a reward.

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
March 31st, 2001

First Nation Historical Cemetery in Gulf Islands Desecrated

Chemainus, B.C. --- A historical cemetery of the Lyackson First Nation at Shingle Point, Valdes Island, was desecrated last week during spring break by vandals who damaged several important historical graves, then removed and scattered human remains.

This vandalism occurred as the Lyackson were completing a heritage conservation project to officially document their ancestral cemetery, one of the earliest First Nation/Christian cemeteries in the Gulf Islands.

It is not the first time the Lyackson people's sacred sites have been desecrated. This most recent incident is only one of a series of acts of vandalism inflicted upon the Lyackson's burial grounds on Valdes Island, within the last five years.

" This offense is not only painful for myself", stated Richard Thomas, hereditary chief of the Lyackson First Nation, "but for all the many descendants of the Lyackson people whose relatives have been disturbed."

"The Lyackson cemetery at Shingle Point is a significant heritage site exhibiting a unique blend of Coast Salish and Christian religious funerary traditions," said archaeologist Eric McLay who discovered the recent vandalism on March 25. He was leading the heritage conservation project with the assistance of a British Columbia Heritage Trust grant. McLay called the vandalism appalling. "Protection against such acts of vandalism and senseless destruction to cultural heritage sites should be of concern to all British Columbians," he said.

The Gabriola RCMP investigating this crime believe the vandalism occurred over spring break by a group of three or more persons traveling by boat to the isolated, Gulf Island location. A reward is offered by the Lyackson First Nation for any information leading to an arrest and conviction.

Please contact Gabriola RCMP at 250-247-8333.

For Further Information
Contact: Chief Richard Thomas, Lyackson First Nation
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Eric McLay, Archaeologist, Coast Research
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March 28, 2001

Constable Ed Houlihan
RCMP Gabriola Division
P.O. Box 100
Gabriola Island, B.C.
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Dear Constable Houlihan,

As discussed by phone, this letter report describes my observation of recent vandalism to the historical cemetery of the Lyackson First Nation at Shingle Point, I.R.4, Valdes Island. I am an archaeologist who has worked with the Lyackson on Valdes Island over the past six years. We recently obtained funding from the B.C. Heritage Trust to conduct a feasibility study to conserve and restore the Shingle Point cemetery, one of the earliest First Nation Christian cemeteries on southeastern Vancouver Island. Unfortunately, this cemetery has become severely damaged by repeated acts of vandalism over the last fifty years. We began our field project on Dec.11-15, 2000, to clear, map and record the cemetery. On Sunday, March 25, 2001, I returned to Shingle Point to complete final recording details.

Upon entering the cemetery on the morning of March 25, I first discovered a large tomb (Grave Monument 3) had been very recently vandalized. The lid of the tomb had been pried open using tree branches, several which still remained underneath the lid. After a thorough inspection of the site, I concluded that at least four graves in total had been vandalized at the Shingle Point cemetery. This vandalism involved both physical damage to the monuments and disturbance to human remains. The following describes the vandalism to each affected monument, in order of the severity of physical damage.

Grave Monument 3

Grave Monument 3 is a large, above-ground brick tomb originally covered by a thick, white marble slab. A weathered marble headstone is inscribed, "George Oshe Died July 13, 1877 Aged 18 Years". In 1955, vandalism to this grave necessitated the Lyackson community encase the entire brick tomb in cement and cover it with an 8' x 4' thick limestone slab. In February 1998, this grave was more recently vandalized. The limestone lid had been pried open, the underlying marble slab broken into several large pieces, the headstone knocked off base, and the exterior cement wall cracked in two places. It was this vandalism to the monument in 1998 which began our discussions how to best protect the cemetery site, leading to the present conservation project.

On March 25, I observed Grave Monument 3 had once again been recently vandalized and evidently pried open. Two large tree branches and a broken section of marble remained left propped underneath the limestone lid. At least five freshly broken branches from a nearby fallen grand fir and two old wooden railings from the cemetery fence were used to pry open the lid, as observed from the broken remains of these branches and railings left snapped off inside the tomb and strewn around the outside perimeter. The cement exterior wall had been cracked apart on the SW, SE and NE corners, where the branches had been used to lever the limestone slab. The SW corner of the exterior cement wall had been completely detached from the rest of the monument. Four freshly broken bricks from the original brick

interior wall lay cracked into smaller pieces outside of the tomb. The lid had evidently been completely removed by the vandals, and later carelessly replaced. Although no damage was sustained to the heavy limestone cover, the underlying marble slab had been broken into at least eight or more smaller pieces, as viewed from the propped open side. The marble section holding up the SE corner of the lid originally derived from the centre of the tomb, where a large hole had apparently been dug. In this hole I observed loose earth, brick fragments and suspected disturbed human remains. The marble headstone had been slightly chipped on the north hand side and had been knocked off-centre from its granite base, dangerously tilting the headstone to the east by about 5 degrees. The cement support for the headstone had further been completely cracked in three places.

In summary, Grave Monument 3 sustained the following physical damage:

- Cement exterior wall completely cracked open in three places; SW corner broken off and detached from rest of grave monument;
- Interior marble cover broken into at least eight or more small pieces; one section of marble used to prop open lid on SE corner;
- Interior brick wall damaged, scattered brick outside of tomb;
- Hole dug in centre of tomb, human remains suspected to have been disturbed, possibly removed;
- Marble headstone sustained minor chipping
- Headstone knocked dangerously off-centre of granite base;
- Cement support for headstone cracked in three places;

Grave Monument 1

Grave Monument 1 is a large, above-ground brick-vaulted tomb. An inscription on the west face of the monument records, " R.I.P. Deid [sic] Aug.13, 1877 In Memorium, Josephine, Aged 18". This is one of the oldest grave monuments at the Shingle Point cemetery. This tomb was reportedly first vandalized sometime in the mid-20th Century. This monument was most recently vandalized in 1997 along with Grave Monument 2 (see below). At that time, the south wall of Grave Monument 1 was completely dismantled and human remains allegedly removed. This vandalism resulted in the Lyackson community performing a traditional reburial ceremony at the cemetery in August 1997. All remaining, fragmented human remains were removed, wrapped in a blue, woolen blanket and replaced inside the tomb. The loose bricks of the collapsed wall were used to fill in the hole.

In the present case of vandalism, Grave Monument 1 had evidently been entered, scattering loose bricks and human remains outside of the tomb. The SW corner of the tomb had been dismantled, and later repiled in a different arrangement. Two elements of human remains were observed scattered immediately outside of Grave Monument 1, including a large, proximal end of a femur, and a smaller unidentifiable long bone fragment. The blue woolen blanket wrapping the human remains could still be seen inside the tomb, although obviously disturbed and having several brick fragments fallen on top. The inscription on the west face of the monument, however, appears undamaged.

In summary,

- South wall dismantled; loose bricks repiled in unstable arrangement;
- Broken brick fragments scattered around base of monument.
- Human remains disturbed; two bone elements observed outside of tomb; human remains possibly removed from site.

Grave Monument 2

Grave Monument 2 is an above-ground, brick-vaulted tomb, very similar to Monument 1. No inscription is apparent on Monument 2, although the construction suggests a similar early age for the monument dating to the late 1870's. Grave Monument 2 was also vandalized in the mid-20th century which completely dismantled the west wall of the tomb. Most recently in 1997, the Lyackson community rewrapped the interred human remains from Monument 2 and roughly repiled the loose bricks of the west wall during the reburial ceremony.

Similar to the recent vandalism of Grave Monument 1, the west wall of Monument 2 was observed to

have been partially dismantled and later rearranged. Human remains, a vertebra, was observed lying atop the monument, indicating vandals had disturbed human remains from the tomb. Several broken bricks and fragments were found scattered in front of the west wall of the tomb.

In summary,

- West wall dismantled; loose bricks repiled in relatively stable arrangement;
- Broken brick fragments scattered around base of monument;
- Human remains disturbed; one human bone element observed outside of tomb; human remains possibly removed from site.

IGrave Monument 5

Grave Monument 5 is a large, cement slab or 'ledger' tomb. The 8' x 4' cement slab lies atop the ground surface covering an interred grave. The roots of an abutting Douglas-fir tree have over time naturally-cracked the cement ledger into three large pieces, as recorded in December, 2000.

Immediately adjacent to Grave Monument 3, it is evident that vandals also lifted or pried up the broken centre piece of Monument 3, further cracking the piece in two. It does not appear that the vandals attempted to dig underneath the cement slab. No human remains were disturbed.

In summary,

- Cement ledger centre piece lifted and further cracked.

DISCUSSION

The majority of the recent vandalism at the Shingle Point cemetery appeared to concentrate at Grave Monument 3. The vandal's effort to lever the enormous limestone slab off Monument 3 certainly caused the most physical damage to any of the cemetery's monuments.

The tree branches used as levers appear very freshly broken suggesting the act took place within at least the last two weeks. The use of green tree branches and old fence post railings indicate the people who committed the vandalism were not well-prepared, and probably did not pre-arrange to commit this offence prior to arriving on site. Thirdly, the enormous limestone slab overtop Grave Monument 3, measuring 8' x 4' in size, would have been very difficult to remove without several persons involved. I suspect at least three to four persons or more were involved in this vandalism, most likely young males given the nature of the offence. As it was spring break with relatively good weather last week, it is reasonable to suspect the offence occurred very recently, perhaps by high school students or college students with access to a boat.

I closely inspected for any evidence of recent, related partying activity in the abandoned house at Shingle Point belonging to the Thomas family. I did not observe any evidence to suggest persons had occupied the house since some time between September-November, 2000. Therefore, no physical evidence was collected.

Before leaving the cemetery site on March 27, I tried to clean up most signs of vandalism. I replaced human remains from Grave Monuments 1 and 2 inside their respective tombs, collected up scattered brick and cement fragments, and replaced the loose bricks in a more stable arrangement. I replaced the marble section propping open the lid of Grave Monument 3 back into the tomb, removed all broken branches from the interior of the monument, and with great difficulty managed to lever the limestone lid carefully back into the position it was prior to recent vandalism (sitting slightly to the right atop the NW corner of the cement wall). Finally, I stabilized the marble headstone as best as possible, and cleaned up the area of broken tree branches, fence railings and brick fragments.

In the last five years now there has occurred three separate incidents of vandalism to the Shingle Point cemetery. Based on the results of the feasibility study, we hope to soon obtain funds to implement specific recommendations to restore and hopefully protect these monuments from further vandalism. In the meantime, any assistance the RCMP can afford to help guard this heritage cemetery site would be very appreciated. Thank you very much for your assistance. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Eric McLay, M.A.
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