

Laws of the time prohibited Asians from taking out licences to cut logs on Crown land

Continued from page 1

While the bottles provide an approximate date for the camp—many are from the 1920s—it's the bowls that offer clues about the men who worked here. Glazed in white and decorated with delicate blue characters and patterns, the bowls were made in Japan.

"There was definitely a Japanese presence," says Muckle. "We found a lot of what I call rice bowls. We also found one bottle of Japanese beer, and another bottle with Asian characters on it—some kind of trademark, I think."

Commercial logging began in the Seymour Valley in the late 1870s and continued into the mid 20th century. Loggers felled cedar trees and bucked them into "bolts," sections of log just over four feet long. These bolts were pulled by horse-drawn sledges along skid roads to flumes, wooden troughs filled with water. The sections of log were tipped into the flumes and, caught by the rush of water, transported downhill. They wound up in Burrard Inlet, where they were gathered together in booms and taken to mills to be cut into shingles.

Most of the loggers were European, but Chinese, Japanese and East Indians also felled trees and worked in the shingle mills and sawmills, typically for a fraction of the wage a European received. Anti-Asian sentiment was rife in Vancouver, and the laws of the day prohibited Asians from taking out licences to cut timber on Crown land. Asian entrepreneurs got around these discriminatory regulations by purchasing forested land outright.

One of these men was Eikichi Kagetsu, who in 1920 purchased Lot 922, some 160 acres of privately owned land along the Seymour River. Kagetsu set up a logging camp that probably included a bunkhouse and mess hall, and employed other



Horse-drawn sledges haul shingle bolts along a trestle bridge on a logging skid road in the Seymour Range in 1915.

photo courtesy North Vancouver Archives, NVA 9094

Japanese men as loggers. In 1921, Kagetsu purchased another 480 acres of land along the Seymour River and chartered a ship to carry cedar and fir logs and square-cut timber to Japan. He continued to log in the Seymour Valley until 1924.

While the first property purchased by Kagetsu was upriver of the site Muckle is excavating, Muckle wonders if the second property Kagetsu purchased might have included the logging camp where his dig is taking place. He's recently been in touch by mail with Kagetsu's son Jack, who lives in New York, trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Jack Kagetsu has sent copies of photographs of his father's logging operations, including one that shows Japanese loggers and another that shows the crude wood-framed buildings that made up one

of their camps.

"There's a potential [our site] might be his," says Muckle. "The site where I'm working isn't Lot 922, but it's close. I'm still thinking it might be [Kagetsu's] camp."

MUCKLE, WHO RECEIVED his MA in archaeology from SFU and has worked as an archaeologist since the mid-1980s, previously concentrated on the archaeology of B.C.'s First Nations peoples. When he moved away from prehistoric archaeology toward what's known as historic archeology, he found he was one of only a small group.

"This is a whole new thing for me, and I find it fascinating. Very few archaeologists in B.C. focus on historic archaeology, and nobody else is doing the archaeology of logging camps."

The logging camp excavation was

one that landed in Muckle's lap. In 1999, a programmer with the Greater Vancouver Regional District—which manages the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve—called Muckle to ask his advice on an educational program he was planning. The programmer wanted to organize an archaeological dig for children from elementary and secondary schools.

Muckle tactfully informed him that turning kids loose on an archaeological site would be unprofessional. Instead, he suggested that Capilano College's archaeological field school—a seven-week training session for archaeology students—might set up the actual excavation, which the school children could then visit on field trips. The programmer readily agreed, and the Seymour Valley Archaeology Project was born.

In May and June of 2000, Muckle and 15 field school students made a preliminary survey of the site and cleared away the underbrush. The site was carefully mapped, and artifacts on the surface were photographed in situ, then collected. The students made note of skid roads, a trash dump and planks on the ground that may have been boardwalks or the floors of buildings.

The work continued through the summers of 2001 and 2002. Excavation of the site began, and a metal detector was brought in to search for artifacts. Using it, students discovered a metal pipe that had carried water to the camp from a creek 60 metres away. They also discovered a saw blade that had been warped by intense heat and several charred boards, suggesting a fire had swept through the area at some point.

"One of the things I'm interested in determining is whether the camp burned down and therefore they abandoned the camp, or whether the camp burned down after it was abandoned," says Muckle. "These camps were probably only operational for a couple of years, and then it wasn't worth staying there any more—they had to travel too far [to reach standing trees]."

About 350 artifacts have been found at the logging camp; of these, 100 were right on the surface. Some, including rusted tools and ceramic bowls, are currently on display in a glass case at the college. Other artifacts, each neatly numbered for cataloguing, are stored in cardboard filing boxes in Muckle's office.

Reaching into one box, Muckle pulls out a clear glass bottle filled with murky brown liquid. The bottle, about the size of a mickey of liquor, still has its metal cap.

"This is one of my favourites," he

Continued on page 5