



We knew that in the fall, the ancient Japanese Jomon people would store large amounts of acorns in storage pits so that during the passing winter they would have food. However, there is a difference between how Eastern and Western Japan went about this. Eastern Japan Jomon put their storage pits on top of a hill, and the West puts it at the bottom of a hill in a muddy, wet place. We didn't know the reason for this. When I asked Dale about the acorn pits, we hoped that we could get some ideas through this Oregon work.

I've been part of the Higashimyo wet site research advisory board, Saga City Board of Education, coordinating the excavations and research since 2004. On the Ariake Sea, with the Kose River running along it, the early Jomon people lived there 7000 years ago. We found six shell middens, and around their bases we found 200 acorn storage pits. What surprised me was how many of the baskets were still preserved. By the time the excavation was over, the total number had risen to 730 basketry examples.

With the formation of these ancient Jomon communities, even more than now, global warming was a problem, and as a result the land went under the water and people were forced from their homes. The sites were covered in thick clay, similar to the initial deposition, and now once more, with excavation, the shape of these sites are visible again.

The Sunken Village wet site is approximately one hour North of Portland in the silty intertidal banks of the Columbia and Willamette River slough, located on the west side of Sauvie Island. The Columbia River empties into the Pacific Ocean about 70 km west of the site location, but even so, during high tide the site is submerged. When the water is pumped through garden hoses and fine adjust nozzles, you spray water to clean off the surface, and you can see the outline of frequent and overlapping acorn pits, so I'm sure you can imagine how long it would take to excavate this site where we located 114 acorn pits in a week of work. Through the center of the site runs an underground aquifer that comes from

fresh, spring water. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they are so concentrated in only this one area. We realized that the construction of the storage pits was adjacent to the water. First, they were 0.5 – 1 meter from the river bank. Lining the acorn pits were hemlock boughs, then they were concealed by woven basketry. The acorns here are in the white oak family so they are deciduous and have tannic acids in them. Before you eat them you have to crack and soak them in moving ground waters. Dale is doing an experiment where he made a model acorn pit in an aquarium and runs water through it, experimenting with methods to make the acorns edible. Last year, the storage pits we mapped had radio-carbon dates from 130 to 700 years old (as best as we can tell). I am sure if we dug deeper, we'd find even older materials, since our coring at the site revealed cultural layers to 3.5 meters deep!

The people of the Northwest made coiled baskets, wooden bent-wood boxes, and/or skin bags in pits to put water in, and used white-hot rocks to boil the water. It seems like they did not have any trouble cooking using these hot stones. On the American Northwest Coast, they can capture abundant fish and shellfish, depositing huge piles of shell midden sites. Inland, they would have acorns and upriver migrating salmon. As hunters and gatherers, these Columbia River people had an extremely rich economic prosperity. They had a high population density (the Portland Basin, where Sunken Village is located, has been considered the largest population north of Mexico), a highly stratified class system (nobles, commoners and slaves), and their quality of life, making a living by hunting, fishing and gathering, was well known, and no other tribes in recent times can be compared with these rich cultures. I'd like to point out that there was a similarity between the ancient Jomon's prosperous years and those seen on the American Northwest Coast.

To me, being able to directly compare the separated American Northwest Coast and ancient Japanese cultures has been a dream of mine since my student days, and I look forward to continuing this collaborative effort into the future.