

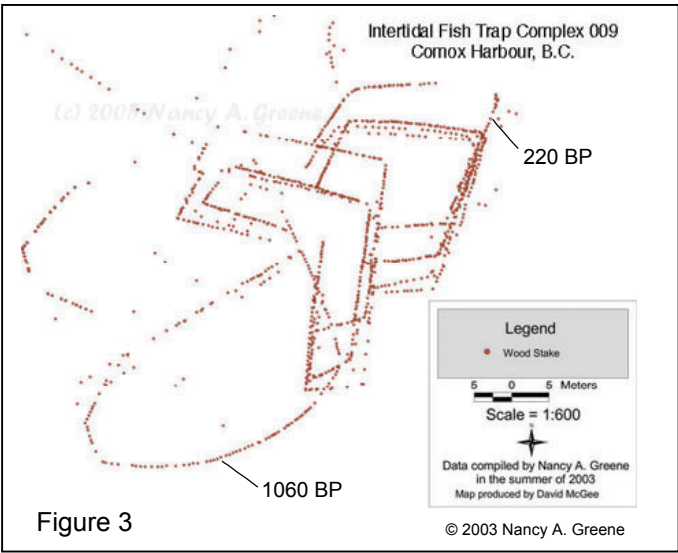
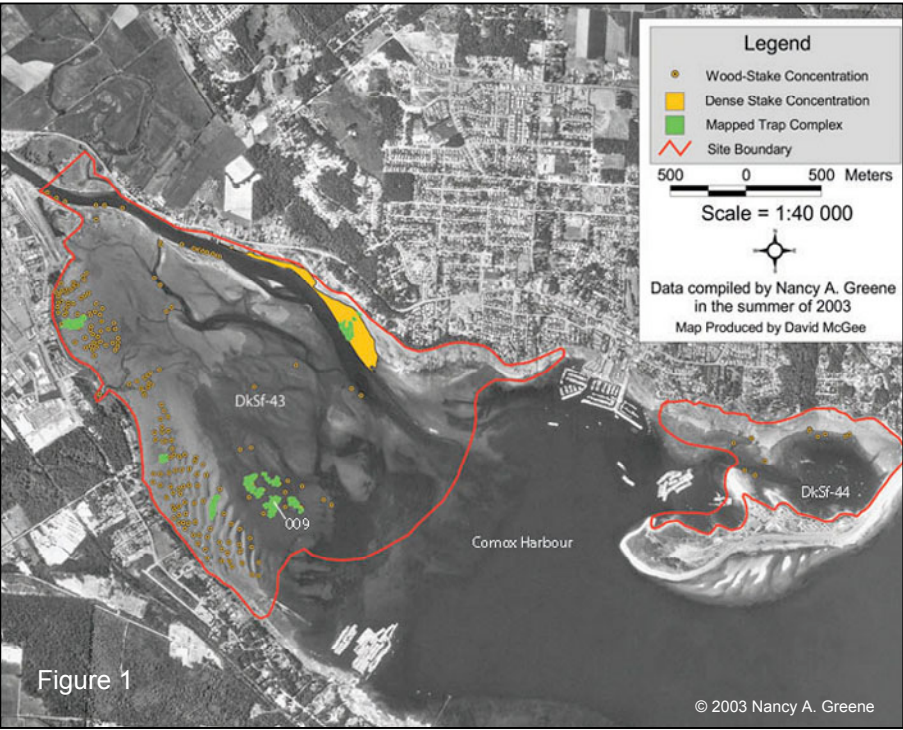
Comox Harbour Fish Trap Site

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A multi-year independent mapping and research project at Comox Harbour on the east coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia has recorded the remains of a significant, large Aboriginal intertidal wood stake fish trap site.

The large sizes, shapes, numbers and extensive distribution of the trap features are unique for coastal British Columbia, and possibly for the Northwest Coast culture area.

We collected 11 wood stakes from trap features for radiocarbon analysis in 2004. The results suggest the site was used for about 1,000 years between approximately 1220 BP and 110 BP. More recently, samples of an additional 46 stakes were collected to broaden the scope of the research. Those results are pending.



Many of the trap features are remarkably well preserved and display functional attributes. Following mapping and radiocarbon dating of selected trap features, two morphologically and temporally distinct trap technologies were identified (Figures 3 and 4). The traps appear to have functioned independently, or as connected components of mass harvest fishing systems capable of catching immense numbers of fish. The enclosed area of one heart-shaped trap is approximately 1,200 m². The large sizes, numbers and technological sophistication of the traps provide evidence of extensive resource intensification at Comox Harbour during the late prehistoric period.

Left: To date, locations of approximately 200 trap feature sites (orange points), each representing as many as a thousand upright wood stakes, have been recorded on the tideflat. To precisely map the trap features, coordinates of nearly 14,000 individual stakes were recorded at 19 of the sites using a total station (areas denoted by green polygons).

Above: Complex 009 was one of the feature sites selected for more precise mapping. Note the patterns formed by intersecting linear alignments.

Above Right: Following GIS analysis of data collected at complex 009, a map was produced and the two trap types were identified. The multiple images of the chevron-winged trap type suggest the building and rebuilding of individual traps over time.

Below Right: Schematic diagrams of the wood stake fish trap types at Comox Harbour. The heart-shaped trap type is the older technology.

During survey of the tideflat, we collected a fragment of basketry, a wooden wedge with a cordage collar, and fragments of cordage. The artifacts, including a wood stake, are being analyzed and conserved by Dale Croes and Kathleen Hawes at the archaeological lab at SPSCC.

