
Book Review: *Forgotten Things: The Story of the Seymour Valley Archaeology Project* by Robert Muckle

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Abstract

Forgotten Things: The Story of the Seymour Valley Archaeology Project highlights the importance of sharing the knowledge resulting from archaeological excavation and analysis. The book disseminates not only the methods used in archaeology but also clearly distinguishes what was discovered during excavation and how artifacts were interpreted. Because one of the main goals of the Seymour Valley project field school was education, Robert Muckle outlines a teaching approach that demonstrates ethical behaviour, training the next generation of archaeologists to avoid recreating and reinforcing discriminatory, exclusionary and unsafe practices. I would recommend this book for anyone who is seeking to learn about archaeological field work and excavations, and also for anyone who wants to learn about the early 20th century history of the Lower Seymour Valley in British Columbia. It's an engaging, accessible read with clear language combined with plenty of maps and drawings to help situate the story of people of the past within this specific archaeological site.

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Robert "Bob" Muckle is an Archaeologist who was a Professor at Capilano University in BC for 35 years in the Anthropology Department, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and is now retired from teaching (Capilano University, 2025). He has written many books on topics such as the history of B.C.'s Indigenous peoples, "contemporary trash and skate parks" (Capilano University, 2025, para. 14). A search for Bob Muckle was more successful than one for Robert Muckle, and it's his acceptance picture on the landing page for Capilano University's listing of retired professors granted Emeritus status, suggesting how well liked he is at the University. Bob Muckle's LinkedIn page (n.d.) lists his role as "Archaeologist, Anthropologist, Writer, Educator" ("About" section). Throughout the book there is a refreshing lack of ego, and Muckle (2022) often mentions his lack of expertise as the catalyst to reach out to other researchers and community members to rely on their expertise (pp. xxii, 75, 83.)

Summary

The main argument of *Forgotten Things: The Story of the Seymour Valley Archaeology Project* is to disseminate not only the methods used in archaeology but also highlights the importance of sharing the knowledge resulting from excavation and analysis. It details archaeological field work carried out in the Seymour Valley, B.C., on sites occupied by settlers and Japanese

Canadians (Nikkei) in the early 20th century. The book is a running description of the project and clearly distinguishes not only what was discovered but how. It also describes the field methods of excavations and archaeological interpretations embedded in a narrative of the daily lives of the past residents. Muckle also lists five key takeaways from the Seymour Valley Project, including that 'finding stuff' "is not the end game of archaeology" (Muckle, 2022, p. 120).

Analysis and Significance

Tiffany J. Fulkerson and Shannon Tushingham discuss multivocality, defining it as "empowering underrepresented groups to present their understandings" (2019, p. 381). They discuss throughout their work how women's voices are underrepresented in academic writing. During a community tour of the site, Muckle is asked by a local resident and member of the Nikkei community where the bath house is, as there must be one if this is a Nikkei settlement. Instead of dismissing this comment, as the woman is not an archaeologist or historian, Muckle listens to her, and this leads to the discovery of a bath house (p. 82). It is worth noting that Muckle ensures that the woman's voice and knowledge are both represented in this work.

Matthew C. Emerson provides recommendations on how to change the culture of fieldwork for the better, including communication, governance and team-based learning (2021). In his book, Muckle advocates for team-based learning that incorporates inclusivity and judgement-free learning, allowing students to learn through mistakes (p. 69). Muckle discusses fostering a positive field work culture in the preamble, and thoroughly discusses ethics in the second chapter, but doesn't explicitly discuss issues like discrimination, harassment and harm caused by students in the site environment until the fourth chapter. However, Muckle does make explicit anti-harassment statements in the final chapter, where he discusses these issues with field work culture in the context of being one of the "hard truths" about archeological field work in its present state (p. 121).

Carol E. Colaninno, Shawn P. Lambert, Emily L. Beahm and Carl G. Drexler discuss how students are particularly likely to experience discrimination, harassment or assault in a field school setting due to the hierarchical organizational nature of sites (2020). Muckle made sure that all students who participated in the field work are listed in an appendix in the back of the book and notes their individual contributions where appropriate. This appears to be a genuine attempt to combat the hierarchical nature that can sometimes occur in academia (Muckle, 2022, pp. 127-8). I think it is significant that Muckle directly and specifically addresses cultural problems within field schools, like the overconsumption of alcohol, harassment and assault. Because one of the main goals of the Seymour Valley project was education, this approach demonstrates ethical behaviour and has a likelihood of training the next generation of archaeologists to **avoid** recreating and reinforcing discriminatory, exclusionary and unsafe practices.

Relevance and Intended Audience

I think this book would be useful for teachers of grades seven and up, it is clearly written and uses accessible language. Because it focuses on teaching careful and ethical excavation methods, it could be a good way to counter stereotypical ideas of 'Indiana Jones' methods as

archeology. The easy to understand language and illustrations could help counter narratives of looting as archaeology based in pop culture references like movies. I think this book would also be useful to anyone who runs field schools, because it seeks to inform ethical field practice, as Muckle makes explicit anti-harassment, abuse and assault statements (Muckle, 2022, p. 121).

Methodology and Sources

Muckle's hypothesis that the Seymour Valley likely contained sites of logging camps and homesteads in the 1900s and sought to determine when they were occupied and where they were located appears to be valid (p. 24). Muckle also sought to "find those things buried and forgotten, and to tell the stories" (pp. 19). To answer their question, field work was undertaken consisting of surface surveys, test pits, and excavations over fourteen seasons (p. xviii). When additional information was needed, Muckle did not hesitate to call in experts in other fields and subjects, and noted occasions where they didn't know the answer, often because the evidence was not sufficient to analyze the data and reach a likely conclusion (p. 77).

Applying Schick & Vaughn's (1995) "SEARCH" method's Criteria of Adequacy, Muckle's hypothesis is testable through excavation and analysis and is supported by local oral and written histories. The hypothesis was fruitful, as the excavations found several sites relating to both settler homesteads, a logging camp, a Nikkei settlement, and many artifacts and features. Muckle's combined goals of education and training were achieved by holding field schools over multiple years. Alternative claims are considered as the project took a surprise turn with the discovery of Nikkei artifacts while searching for the location of white settler homesteads (which were better known through records).

Critique and Recommendation

I would recommend this book for anyone who is seeking to learn about archaeological field work and how excavations work, and for anyone who wants to learn about the early 20th century history of the Lower Seymour Valley. It's an engaging, accessible read with clear language combined with plenty of maps and drawings to help situate the story of people of the past within specific sites and excavations. The chapters follow a logical flow from planning to dissemination of knowledge, and the book includes a description of what happens to artifacts once the excavation ends. Muckle lists the significance of each site and seeks to educate through dissemination of findings and interpretations, and the description of the excavation process is thorough yet simple. Each chapter begins with a clear set up of what will be discussed, then discusses methodology and procedures, and then talks about the "how and why" of interpretation. For example, a feature was identified as belonging to a kitchen because a stove was found within its walls (p. 58). Muckle provides clear, detailed explanations of the excavations of each site, with little scatterings of interesting details, like a hundred-year-old Nikkei rice bowl found cradled within the roots of a tree (p. 57).

Throughout the book, knowledge gained about the sites is shared with diverse individuals including historians, students, the media and the public, bringing archaeological knowledge somewhat out of the 'ivory tower' of academia (Muckle, 2022, p. 105). There also appears to be a desire to foster collaborative work and ethics between future archaeologists,

teaching that field work always needs to take an ethical approach and be a safe space both physically and mentally (p. 33). Muckle's book also does a good job of describing how field work can be back breaking, exhausting, and sometimes exhilarating, and gives good insights into the incredible amount of work that goes into a site before a shovel even hits the earth.

Through its contributions to local history, education and focus on outcomes rather than the discovery of "things" (p. 116), *Forgotten Things: The Story of the Seymour Valley Archaeology Project* simultaneously teaches sound anthropological methods while telling an interesting story about a little-discussed piece of local history. The field work described in the book uncovered information about the lives of Nikkei loggers who experienced a forced evacuation in 1942 because of the Canadian government's Japanese Internment policies of that time (p. 95). It is a piece of Canada's history that is not often discussed or brought to light, and for that reason this book is a significant contribution to existing works.

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