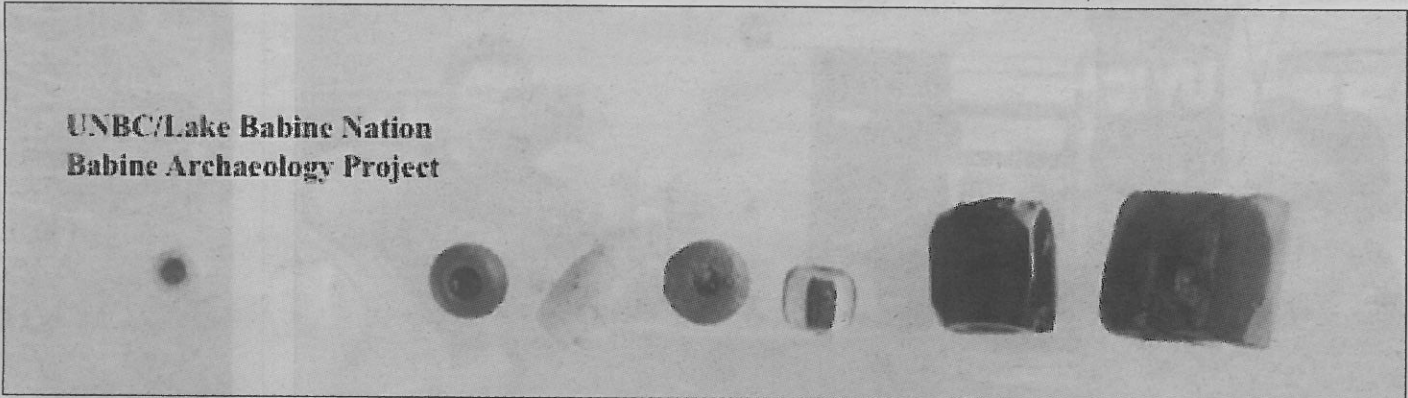


▼ COMMUNITY

Lake Babine excavations uncover hundreds of artifacts



UNBC/Lake Babine Nation
Babine Archaeology Project



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Babine Archaeology Project

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Artifacts found during an excavation project at Lake Babine Nation. The photo on top shows a selection of historic trade beads. The bottom photo shows a selection of chipped stone projectile points. Researchers say the beads likely date to the nineteenth century while the projectile points are several hundred years old.

UNBC researchers say LBN settlement is at least 1300 years old

Flavio Nienow

An ongoing partnership between Lake Babine Nation (LBN) and the University of Northern British Columbia's (UNBC) department of archeology is revealing some of LBN's history and confirming what ancestors had told LBN members.

Through excavation projects, UNBC researchers have already uncovered hundreds of centuries-old artifacts from LBN territory.

In 2010, a UNBC's archaeology field school revealed that LBN's settlement is at least 1300 years old. A major part of the project involved excavating an ancient village at Nilkitkwa Lake, just north of Babine Lake.

"There are literally hundreds of underground cache pits and earth ovens within the village," said UNBC anthropology professor Farid Rahemtulla, who directed the project. "This is one of the most amazing archaeological sites in the north-central interior."

As a result of those findings, LBN invited UNBC's department of archeology to conduct a more research-intensive excavation in 2012.

A crew including several UNBC student volunteers spent six weeks excavating

"We recovered a tremendous amount of interesting data, including over 400 artifacts made from stone, bone, bark and metal," said Rahemtulla.

The items found include weapons and domestic items used for daily living.

"The nature of these materials indicates potentially a large time span of use for the house, from ancient times to European contact and into more recent times."

Since 2012, UNBC researchers have conducted two other excavation projects - in 2014 and 2015 - and they have another one planned for the summer of 2017.

The excavation projects have revealed that LBN had at least two fishing weirs at one point and that they allowed LBN to become wealthy.

"It's very apparent that they [LBN] were fairly wealthy," said Rahemtulla.

The focus of UNBC's most recent research has been on exploring how these fishing weirs operated.

"We really want to understand how these fish weirs were operated and how they were constructed; it's such a fascinating thing."

"Not only were they able to catch fish for themselves, but it also became a huge trade item," he continued. "We found a lot of trade items in their village that come from very far away, even before the Europeans arrived."

Rahemtulla said one of the reasons that allowed LBN to catch lots of fish

bers [at Babine Lake]; when they come down the river, it [Babine Lake] is actually quite shallow, so it was a good place to have these weirs; that allowed LBN to capture thousands of fish."

Apart from the great location, Rahemtulla said LBN also found sophisticated ways of catching fish.

"We found a lot of things that would be related to the whole idea of maintaining the weirs, catching the fish, processing and smoking them."

In the beginning of the 1900s, LBN was prohibited from putting up their weirs and the village faced starvation.

Lake Babine Nation Chief Wilf Adam said this partnership with UNBC has been "fruitful."

"Many [items found] confirmed what our ancestors and elders have been saying about trade and use of the resources," said Chief Adam. "UNBC is an important partner and plays a valuable part in preserving our history."

In addition to providing training to UNBC students, Rahemtulla said UNBC hopes to provide training to the LBN community as well.

"We want to inspire them to do what we're doing; our goal down the line is to have them doing their own archeology."

The hundreds of items uncovered during the excavation projects are currently at UNBC. Rahemtulla said UNBC is holding the items temporarily until LBN builds a facility where they can be displayed.