

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lesson 4: Fishing, Hunting, and Gathering at West Point . . . . .	40
The West Point Artifacts. . . . .	45

## LESSON 4: FISHING, HUNTING, AND GATHERING AT WEST POINT

### **SUBJECTS**

Social Studies, History, Geography, Washington State, Archaeology

### **DURATION**

30 to 45 minutes

### **CLASS SIZE**

10 to 30 students

### **OVERVIEW**

This lesson explores what archaeology can teach us about how the people at West Point lived and provided for their basic needs. Students will learn about the archaeological material that provides evidence of various activities such as fishing, hunting, and gathering, and explore how and when these activities took place.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To learn about how archaeological evidence can be studied to gain a better understanding of how the people of West Point lived
- To explore various activities that archaeologists believe took place at West Point such as harvesting shellfish, fishing, gathering plants, and hunting animals
- To examine during which seasons various activities took place at the West Point site and how this changed over time

### **MATERIALS**

Artifacts; books *Stone, Bone, Antler, and Shell*, *Eye of the Changer*, and *People of Salmon and Cedar*; and field guides "Washington Wildlife", "Northwest Coastal Invertebrates", "Northwest Trees", and "Edible Plants".

### **VOCABULARY**

**Procure** – to get by special effort; obtain or acquire; such as procuring resources by hunting, gathering and fishing.

**Subsistence** – the activities required to meet the basic needs, usually referring to the quest for food.

## BACKGROUND

One of the major goals of investigating the West Point site was to gain a better understanding of how the people of West Point lived. Archaeologists collected material from the site in order to understand what activities took place at West Point and during which seasons these activities took place. Some of the most important material collected included massive amounts of shell, fish bones, and animal bones. Archaeologists also analyzed the soil samples for small and sometimes microscopic remains of seeds and plants. The remains of these fish, shellfish, animals, and plants along with artifacts and other information gleaned from the site allowed archaeologists to interpret what activities took place at the site and during which seasons these activities took place.

The archaeologists that studied West Point determined that people used the site differently during different time periods. During the earliest periods of occupation, people used West Point as a place to harvest shellfish, fish, hunt, and gather edible plants. The people of West Point utilized the broadest variety of natural resources from the immediate area and the surrounding areas and probably stayed at West Point year-round. As time passed, people came to West Point for fewer seasons of the year to do specific activities such as catching salmon and drying clams.

Archaeologists found that one of the principal activities that took place at West Point was harvesting shellfish. During the earliest occupations of West Point mussels were the most common shellfish harvested. Mussels were best to harvest during winter or spring. Mussels could be harvested from the rocky beach adjacent to the area where people camped. Gradually, the environment of West Point changed. The rocky beach where mussels thrived began to be covered over with sand and the colonies of mussels began to diminish. The new sandy beach was a more hospitable environment for clams and cockles than mussels. People continued to harvest some mussels but focused more on harvesting clams and dogwinkles. These shellfish were probably harvested year-round but most intensely during spring, summer, and fall. Eventually, the amount of mussels and dogwinkles harvested decreased significantly. People focused on harvesting clams in spring and summer. The most abundant clams harvested at West Point were butter and native littleneck clams. Some barnacles, cockles, and horse clams were also harvested in smaller quantities.

Fishing was another activity that took place in various habitats surrounding West Point. The people of West Point used various techniques and types of technologies to fish including using a hook and line, trolling, spearing, and netting. Archaeologists recovered the greatest quantity and most diverse variety of fish bones from the earliest occupation of West Point. This evidence suggests that during the earliest occupation of West Point people fished for the greatest variety

of fish probably during all times of the year. The most abundant fish remains from the early period of occupation were flatfish such as English sole, starry flounder, and rock sole. Archaeologists found that during later periods of occupation the quantity of fish bones decreased and became less diverse. This evidence suggests that as time passed, the people at West Point fished less and became more focused on fishing for fewer types of fish. During the later periods of occupation there was a much greater emphasis on fishing for several varieties of salmon and sculpin.

The people of West Point gathered wood from several types of trees as well as edible berries and nuts from various plants. Evidence of gathering plant materials is difficult to recover from archaeological sites because this material decomposes so rapidly in most Puget Sound environments. However, archaeologists found evidence that the people at West Point used coniferous trees and hardwoods for fires to keep warm and prepare food. The bark from Douglas fir and other pine trees appeared to be the most prevalent plant material used to build fires for warmth. Hardwoods such as alder and maple were probably used to build fires for smoking fish and clams. Remains of edible plants were also recovered from West Point including elderberries, bitter cherries, Indian plum, goosefoot, blackberries/raspberries, bedstraw fruits, and hazelnuts. The most common berries found at West Point were bitter cherry and elderberry. Berries and nuts were probably gathered throughout the summer and early fall. Berries such as bitter cherries and blackberries/raspberries probably would have been gathered between June and August. Elderberries, goosefoot, and hazelnuts probably would have been collected in late July through September.

People at West Point also hunted for a variety of large and small animals. West Point was a suitable site for hunting deer, elk (wapiti), smaller terrestrial animals, and sea mammals. During the earliest occupations hunting probably occurred year-round although certain seasons would have been better for hunting particular animals. Many deer were hunted and seals were brought to the site for processing. Archaeologists found remains of porpoises and dolphins indicating that these animals may have been hunted or perhaps taken when convenient. During the later periods of occupation, evidence suggests a decrease in deer and wapiti hunting. Hunters at West Point became more focused on smaller animals such as rabbit, beaver, and mountain beaver.

## PROCEDURE

1. Explain to the students that the archaeologists who investigated West Point wanted to learn how the people of West Point lived, what activities took place at the site, and during which seasons these activities took place.
2. Ask the students how the archaeologists could figure out answers to these questions.
3. Suggest that the archaeologists could answer these questions by studying the materials they found at the site such as the artifacts, as well as, other materials including shell, fish bones, animal bones, and plant remains.
4. Explain that based on studying these materials archaeologists determined that some of the activities that took place at West Point included harvesting shellfish, fishing, hunting, and gathering plants.
5. Discuss how all of these activities involve procuring resources in order to meet basic needs. Compare to how we procure resources today.
6. Ask the students to answer the following questions based on their knowledge of the natural resources available at West Point from Lesson 3:  
What shellfish could the people at West Point have harvested?  
What fish could they have caught?  
What edible berries and nuts could they have gathered?  
What animals could they have hunted?
7. Ask the students what tools people would have needed to harvest shellfish, fish, gather plants, or hunt.
8. Then have the students examine the artifacts in the kit to see if there are any artifacts that could have been used for fishing, hunting, or gathering.
9. Ask the students during which seasons the people at West Point could have done the various activities. Discuss the best seasons for harvesting shellfish, fishing, gathering berries, and hunting.
10. Examine each of the activities of harvesting shellfish, fishing, gathering plants, and hunting in more depth. Use the books, *Eye of the Changer*, and *People of Salmon and Cedar* to examine the ways Native people harvest shellfish, fish, gather, and hunt.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Weave a basket like those that could be used for harvesting shellfish or gathering nuts and berries.
2. Go on a gathering field trip where students can collect edible berries and identify plants that are not edible. Invite people from the community or elders to go along on the trip to help students identify edible plants and berries.
3. Take a fieldtrip to harvest shellfish such as mussels or clams.
4. Make a trolling hook like those used by the people of West Point to catch fish. Try attaching the hook to line made of dried kelp and baiting it with a clam or cockle.
5. Go fishing.

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## THE WEST POINT ARTIFACTS

These descriptions of the artifacts included in *The Archaeology of West Point Kit* will help you teach about each artifact, its object type, material type, and context. Older students or adults might be interested in reading these descriptions.

### ED 1 Jasper Projectile Point

This projectile point is made from a type of stone called jasper that is dark red in color. This type of point is called triangular because it is shaped like a triangle. The blade of this point is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom with relatively straight edges and its base is slightly rounded without a stem. One other projectile point of this type was recovered at West Point. The two examples of this type were probably not used as projectiles but instead might have been hafted to a handle and used as a knife. This projectile point was found in Block 3 of the West Point Site in Unit 7. The point was recovered from a black sandy layer that was interrupted by several archaeological features such as pits and rock clusters that indicated a distinct period of occupation at the site. This layer contained dense deposits of fire modified rock, mammal bone, fish bone, debitage, and other lithics. Using radiocarbon testing, two samples of burned wood collected from this layer were dated to be 3602 to 4065 years old and 3734 to 4197 years old. This projectile point is therefore associated with Component 1 and could be 3550 to 4250 years old. Eleven projectile points found at West Point were dated to Component 1. (Catalog # B3-764.01)

### ED 2 Petrified Wood Projectile Point

This projectile point is made from a piece of petrified wood. The nearest source of petrified wood was probably eastern Washington. The blade of the point is triangular in shape. The stem of the point narrows and contracts. The corner of the point between the blade and the stem has a wide notch. This point is therefore characterized as a shouldered triangular contracting stem projectile point. This type of point is called a Rabbit Island stemmed projectile point. Rabbit Island stemmed projectile points are most commonly found in eastern Washington. Four other projectile points of this type were recovered at West Point. This projectile point was found in Block 1 of the West Point Site in Unit 15. The point was recovered from a layer containing a high density of the oldest culturally deposited shell in Block 1. Other artifacts found in this layer included over 6,000 fire modified rocks, nearly 700 mammal bones, over 1600 fish bones, 3 modified

bones, and nearly 50 worked lithics. This projectile point is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. This type of point and the material from which it is made suggest that people from the Puget Sound acquired materials from eastern Washington thousands of years ago. (Catalog # B1-1003.01)

### **ED 3 Basalt Projectile Point**

This projectile point is made from a type of volcanic stone called basalt. It is dark gray or black in color. The blade of the point is triangular in shape. The stem of the point narrows and contracts. The barbs refer to the bottom corners of the blade that extend down toward the stem. This point is therefore characterized as a barbed triangular contracting stem projectile point. One other projectile point of this type was recovered at West Point. This projectile point was found in Block 1 of the West Point Site in Unit 2. The point was recovered from a black, clayey, silty layer with a high percentage of shell. This layer contained other material including fire modified rocks, mammal bones, fish bones, modified bones, debitage, and other lithics. This projectile point is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. Twelve projectile points found at West Point were dated to Component 2. (Catalog # B1-715.01)

### **ED 4 Slate Projectile Point**

This projectile point is made from slate. It is dark gray or black in color. The blade of the point is triangular in shape. The stem of the point is broken. The edges of the blade have been ground. This point is therefore characterized as a squared triangular ground slate projectile point. It is similar to points found in southern British Columbia that are considered representative of the Locarno Beach culture (3300 to 2500 B.P.). Ground slate points were also found across the Puget Sound from West Point at the Old Man House site on the Kitsap Peninsula. This projectile point was found in Block 1 of the West Point Site in Unit 20. The point was recovered from a fine-grained, black-gray, silty-sand layer. This layer was deposited in a stream channel that cut through the site during an earlier period. Other material recovered in this layer included fire modified rocks, mammal bones, fish bones, modified bones, debitage and other lithics. This projectile point is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. (Catalog # B1-1378.01).

### **ED 5 Chalcedony Projectile Point**

This projectile point is made from a type of stone called chalcedony. It is a light in color and sometimes translucent. The blade of the point is triangular in shape. The stem of the point narrows and contracts. The corner of the point



between the blade and the stem has a wide notch. This point is therefore characterized as a shouldered triangular contracting stem projectile point. It is a type of point called a Rabbit Island stemmed projectile point. Rabbit Island points are commonly found in eastern Washington. Four other projectile points of this type were recovered at West Point. This projectile point was found in Block 1 of the West Point Site in Unit 5. The point was recovered from a layer of black, silty and sandy matrix that filled in a stream channel that cut through the site during an earlier period. Large numbers of artifacts were recovered from this layer including over 4,000 fire modified rocks, nearly 500 mammal bones, over 200 fish bones, 3 modified bones, a significant amount of debitage, and two other projectile points. Organic material recovered from this layer was dated from 2708 to 2375 years old. This projectile point is associated with Component 3 and therefore is 2350 to 2700 years old. Four projectile points found at West Point were dated to Component 3. (Catalog # B1-165.01)

#### **ED 6 Nephrite Adze Blade**

This adze blade is made from a black stone called nephrite. The adze blade can also be called a celt because both sides of the blade have been ground and highly polished. One end of this blade has been dulled, this is called the hafting edge. The hafting edge is the end that would have been attached or hafted to a handle. Dulling this edge allowed the hafting material to be wrapped around the blade. If the edge was not dulled, eventually the sharp edge would cut through the hafting material. The edge opposite the hafting edge is called the cutting edge. The cutting edge on this adze blade shows three kinds of wear; chipping, crushing, and polishing. The blade could have been used for woodworking, tool making, or butchering. This is the only stone adze found at West Point. The adze blade was found in the North Area of the West Point Site. The blade was found *in situ* so the exact coordinates of its location were recorded. It is associated with Component 4 and is therefore 750 to 1450 years old. (Catalog # NA-390.01)

#### **ED 7 T-shaped Labret**

This labret or lip plug is called T-shaped because it looks like the letter "T". It is made from a light gray colored stone called steatite or soapstone that has been smoothed and polished. The stem of the labret is rounded and the plug of the labret is solid. This labret might have been worn by a young woman before the hole below her lip stretched enough to use a bigger labret like the button-style labret. This labret was recovered from Block 2 of the West Point Site in Unit 23. The labret came from the oldest layer in Block 2. This layer consisted of coarse beach sand from a beach surface that appears to have been used intensively. Other material associated with this period of occupation included over 2,000 fire

modified rocks, 32 stone tools, and mammal and fish bones. The labret was actually found in the laboratory when sorting the material collected from a 1/4" mesh screen in the field. This labret is associated with Component 1 and therefore is 3550 to 4250 years old. (Catalog # B2-1161.02)

#### **ED 8 Button-style Labret**

This labret is called a button-style labret because of its round shape. It is made from a type of stone called steatite or soapstone. The stone is a dark green color and highly polished. This labret was recovered from Block 1 of the West Point Site in Unit 8. Archaeologists found the labret while using a 1" screen. The labret came from a thin layer of fine-grained, black, silty sand. Other items found in this layer included fire modified rock, mammal and fish bones, debitage, and other stone artifacts. The labret is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. (Catalog # B1-1277.01)

#### **ED 9 Beaver Tooth Graver**

This tool is made from the lower incisor tooth of a beaver. One end of the tooth has been ground and shaped into a beveled edge. This sharp edge could have been used for incising fine lines, engraving, decorating or scoring wood, stone, bone, antler, or shell objects. Beaver incisor gravers were usually hafted to a handle to be used as precise tools for fine woodcarving tasks or incising. This beaver tooth graver was recovered from Block 2 of the West Point Site. Only two beaver incisor gravers were found at West Point. Both were associated with Component 1 and therefore are 3550 to 4250 years old. (Catalog # B2-807.01)

#### **ED 10 Bone Bipoint**

This small bone bipoint was shaped from a bone splinter of a mammal. Each end of this point was modified. One end is pointed and one end is blunt. The midsection of the point is thicker than the ends and one side of the point is flattened. This bipoint was probably used for tasks related to fishing. It was most likely attached to a fishhook or a shaft with twine made from cedar bark or nettles. This bipoint was recovered from Test Unit 8. It is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. (Catalog # T-170.01)

#### **ED 11 Bone Gaming Piece**

This piece of bone was incised on one side with a cross-hatch design of X's. The other side is smoothed and polished but not decorated. The gaming piece was found in a test unit east of the main block excavations. It is one of two gaming pieces found at West Point. This gaming piece is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. The other gaming piece found at West Point

is even older than this one, dating from 3550 to 4250 B.P.. Both pieces are decorated with the same type of design and suggest that gaming took place at West Point for a very long time. (Catalog # E1-1197.01)

### **ED 12 Bone Pendant**

This pendant was carved from a piece of bone. The pendant is decorated or incised with a cross-hatch design of X's and has a small perforated hole at the top. This is one of the most elaborate pendants ever found in a southern Puget Sound archaeological site. The pendant might have been worn everyday or only on special occasions. The pendant was found in an area north of the main block excavations. This was the youngest area in the West Point Site. The pendant is associated with Component 4 and therefore is 750 to 1450 years old. (Catalog # SB-123.01)

### **ED 13 Shell Bead**

This small white bead is made from shell. The bead was probably made from a clamshell although the species of shell cannot be definitively identified. This type of bead is called a disc bead because it is flat on each side and round in shape. This bead was made by taking a shell, incising a square shape on the shell, drilling a hole through the center of the square from both sides, and then snapping the shell along the incised lines. The edges of the perforated shell were then ground and smoothed to create a round bead. A total of twenty-seven beads were found at West Point including seventeen stone beads, eight shell beads, and two wood beads. Beads were probably strung together and worn as jewelry. Beads may also indicate a trade network between the people of West Point and people from British Columbia between 2700 and 4250 years ago. Stone, shell, and bone beads were also recovered from a site near the mouth of the Duwamish River. This bead was recovered from the far west side of Block 2 of the West Point Site in Unit 26. The bead was found during laboratory analysis by sorting material excavated from the site through a 1/4" mesh screen. The bead is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. (Catalog # B2-2008.05)

### **ED 14 Bone Awl**

This bone tool is called an awl. Like most awls, the sides of this bone tool are smooth and taper to a sharp point. This awl might have been used for sewing but could also have been used for perforating holes in hides or for basket weaving. It was made from the long leg bone, called a metapodial, of a deer. To make the awl, the bone was split in half vertically, the edges were ground, the tip was sharpened, and the awl was smoothed. A total of seven awls were found at the West Point Site including four complete awls and three awl fragments. This awl

was recovered *in situ* from the west side of Block 2 of the West Point Site in Unit 28. The awl was carefully removed from a dark-grayish black sandy clay layer. This layer also had dense deposits of shells and fish bones indicating this area had been actively occupied during Component 1 between 3550 to 4250 years ago. (Catalog # B2-2091.01)

## ED 15 Antler Wedge

This tool is called an antler wedge. It is made from the main stem of an elk or wapiti antler. The wedge has been grooved and a portion of the antler has been removed to shape the wedge. The top end of the wedge, also called the butt end, show signs of being impacted and crushed, probably by a heavy stone maul. This end also appears to be smoothed and polished from being held in someone's hand. The bottom end of the wedge, also called the bit, has been shaped or beveled into a 30° angle. Wedges were used with mauls and adzes for heavy tasks such as splitting trees, planks, and beams for longhouses and canoes. A total of thirteen antler wedges were recovered from the West Point Site. Several bone wedges were also found. Antler wedges were usually used for heavier tasks than bone wedges because they were generally stronger than bone wedges. This wedge was recovered *in situ* from Unit 28 in the far northwest corner of Block 1 of the West Point Site. The wedge was found in a gravelly layer of black silty sand matrix. The wedge is associated with Component 2 and therefore is 2700 to 3500 years old. (Catalog # B1-2203.01)

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