

**How Can the Boat Basin Foundation Proceed with Tourism
Operations in a Manner that is Inclusive to the Hesquiaht Community
and Sensitive to their Needs?**

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Introduction

The Temperate Rainforest Field Study Centre is situated within a culturally, historically, socially, ecologically, and politically unique space that is possibly unlike that of anywhere else on the planet. Positioned in the highly contested Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island lies 117 acres of land located in Hesquiaht Harbour. Nestled amongst coastal temperate old growth, is Cougar Annie's Garden. Ada Annie Rae-Arthur, known as Cougar Annie, cleared the land over one hundred years ago, and used it as a base to run a post office and plant nursery and ship a variety of plants across Canada. International interest in the garden has been growing steadily in recent years. The area, known as Boat Basin, is managed by the Boat Basin Foundation (BBF). BBF is based on a mandate not only to preserve Cougar Annie's Garden as a heritage site and place of learning for future generations but also to encourage respect and understanding of coastal temperate ecology. The BBF will have to face a myriad of issues attached to allowing outsiders into this very special place.¹ While tourism can be a wonderful way to share often vulnerable and rare cultures or ecosystems with people usually far removed from such a place, if allowed to flourish in an uncontrolled and unprogressive manner, the results can be detrimental to those same local cultures and ecosystems.

This paper explores some general issues that the BBF may want to look into before encouraging an increase of visitors to the area. As this paper is part of a course on "community-based research" (CBR) that partly took place at the Temperate Rainforest Field Study Centre², I also raise some opportunities for tourism development in Boat Basin to benefit from the current discourse on CBR. The information and views that I present are largely based on my exposure to the issues in Boat Basin through observation and discussion during the course. The BBF is in an interesting position, because as a non-profit educational conservation organization with a field centre to run, tourism could provide much needed financial resources to fund the educational portion. As well, it also faces great pressure from outside sources to share the garden with a number of fascinated parties, many of which may have no interest in the preservation of coastal old growth ecology and the traditional Hesquiaht way of life. However, I argue that if tourism is allowed to develop in problematic way, the consequences could be significant and long lasting.

Boat Basin Foundation's Primary Decisions

A limited number of visitors are currently able to enjoy the magic of Boat Basin, specifically Cougar Annie's Garden. Transportation from Tofino is available by water taxi to Stewardson Inlet, and then by truck to the garden, for larger groups. Smaller groups can arrange a float plane ride from Tofino or Gold River to Boat Basin directly.

¹ For more information on Cougar Annie's Garden and the Boat Basin Foundation see their website <http://www.boatbasin.org> and refer to *Cougar Annie's Garden* by Margaret Horsfield (1999).

² The course is ES 481A: Community-based Research in Clayoquot Sound. Summer Session 2005. School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria.

Before a tourism policy can be implemented it is necessary for the BBF to decide if it simply wants to ensure that tourism endeavours that are carried out in the region are not overtly destructive to the area's First Nations, or if they would like to explicitly attempt to implement a more progressive type of First Nations ecocultural tourism. The difference between the two could play a substantial role in deciding what the tourism operations in Boat Basin will look like. For instance, if the former approach was to be adopted, it would mean that existing tours to Boat Basin could carry on and be scaled up, with Cougar Annie's Garden acting as the main attraction. Perhaps local cultural and ecological knowledge would trickle into the tours, but the purpose of the tours of the area would not be to educate visitors about local Hesquiaht people or their Nuu-chah-nulth culture. The tours would ensue under a mandate of responsible ecotourism, with as little environmental damage inflicted as possible. The second approach aimed at embracing cultural tourism directly would look quite different. If the BBF were to take this route, the basis of all tourism in the area would be one of respect for local Hesquiaht people and Nuu-chah-nulth culture. If this path were to be pursued, the "Walk of the Ancients", a several kilometre long boardwalk through undisturbed old growth with numerous culturally modified trees, would perhaps be utilized as a key site of cultural tourism.

Perhaps before this decision of eco tourism or ecocultural tourism is discussed further, some underlying issues need to be addressed. In order for a long term, sustainable tourism operation to persist, a strong relationship between the Hesquiaht community and BBF is imperative. There is no way that any sort of tours or similar such operations can occur if the voice of the Hesquiaht community is not enshrined in the tourism policy of BBF. It is important for the BBF to have a clear tourism policy because while there may currently only be a moderate demand on the area and a limited number of people willing to pay the substantial cost of flying in for the day, the pressure could grow in the future. If the BBF does not have a strong stance on the issue when more tour operators from Tofino start approaching the Foundation, developments could easily ensue in a problematic way.

Hesquiaht empowerment is important for a variety of reasons. The BBF is an organization based on education and appreciation of temperate rainforest ecology. It would simply be hypocritical and backwards for a progressive foundation with such a mandate to encourage outsiders into the region without the support and approval of the local Hesquiaht community. If the Foundation allowed an increase in tourists in the area in a manner unapproved by the Hesquiaht, it could be argued that they would be profiting from traditional indigenous territory through the same agenda that allowed colonialism, and the subsequent macro level societal problems, to tear through the area. The BBF must be sure to include Hesquiaht views in creating a plan for tourism, as "without a sense of the unique challenges and opportunities that exist within indigenous communities, successful tourism development as defined by the communities themselves will be elusive, if not impossible." (Shultis and Browne, 1999: 2).

However, I understand that it is a lot easier to write about the importance of good Boat Basin Foundation-Hesquiaht communications on paper than to actually facilitate such a relationship. None of the BBF Board members live with the Hesquiaht community in Hot Springs Cove, although Peter Buckland (Director) does live at Boat Basin, which is in close proximity. Peter Buckland appears to have a sense of what some Hesquiaht people would like to see happen in the tourism sector in the area, but as director of BBF and the key facilitator of the Temperate Rainforest Field Study Centre, Peter Buckland may have to take it upon himself to create some sort of space in which Hesquiaht members with differing views can come together and voice their ideas, concerns, and visions for the future of Boat Basin tourism. Perhaps there would be great interest in the Hesquiaht community to participate in the "Walk of the Ancients" as a place

of cultural ecotourism. Perhaps there would be great dismay at the possibility of their backyard becoming over run with tourists. Surely these and a myriad of other sentiments would be expressed, but the point is that, despite different political agendas and environmental views, the interested parties must sit down, consistently and meaningfully, to discuss such matters.

A potential foreseeable problem is the possibility of the dominant voice of the Hesquiaht community being in favour of an increase in visitors to the area in exchange for much needed profits. Just as the community is apparently divided on issues surrounding logging (as illustrated by presentations that our class had from two Hesquiaht Band council members in support of partnering with Interfor on logging for economic reasons and views shared by a Hesquiaht elder who was against logging in the region for environmental reasons), it is reasonable to expect a division on the issue of tourism. Here is where the BBF's role can become especially helpful. While the age-old dichotomy of very limited tourism in the name of cultural protection as opposed to increased tourism in the name of the community's financial needs may certainly persist as factor in the near future, I believe it is possible to develop tourism in such a manner so as to provide opportunities for Hesquiaht people to choose to share their culture and educate the tourist masses but not turn the area into a Hesquiaht Disneyland. BBF, as a non-profit educational organisation, could facilitate the creation of culturally sensitive ecotourism endeavours because they not only have access to current information on the subject, but they also host student, natural history, and research groups in the area for several days at a time. While these visitors probably have a relatively limited knowledge of the culture and politics of the particular area, they are fresh minds that could help brainstorm ways that a Hesquiaht-Boat Basin-Cougar Annie's Garden product could be marketed so as to provide for the various interested groups (Hesquiaht, Boat Basin Foundation, tour operators, tourists).

Relevant Lessons From Elsewhere

Other than the necessity for consistent and meaningful input from local indigenous peoples, the next most important lesson to be taken from other successful eco-tourism operations around the world is to proceed with caution. Peter Buckland was quite clear that he is aware that there is no need to rush any tourism ventures along, as once those measures are in place, they are very hard to remove. The BBF is in a fortunate position in that they can look to educational groups, such as universities or other non-profit societies who wish to use the facilities, to provide basic operational funding. Often when communities implement tourism, they have done so as an alternative to resource extraction industries, compared to which, tourism almost always looks like the socially and environmentally friendly option. Because BBF has other potential sources of income, there is less need (than in places in the developing world for instance) to access all possible markets interested in visiting the region.

While there are examples from around the world of so called eco tourism threatening traditional indigenous cultures, one particularly alarming situation is that of the eco tourism industry in Thailand. Visitors are constantly in search of primitive, unspoiled, and remote locations and cultures in which they can visit on their vacation to Thailand. In reality, more than 20 companies offer tours into the same region and each one has contributed to the alarming rate of modernization of the area's indigenous cultures. "Trekking companies mask the cultural changes that occurred as roads were built in the hill country and indigenous agriculture was transformed. Tourism itself has hastened these developments, as native peoples encounter and interact with Western travelers" (Buchanan 1993: 84). Obviously, destruction of this scale is not a factor in the situation of Boat Basin. The area has already been home to a logging industry for many years, and it seems fair to say that most of the Hesquiaht community is very much "westernized". However, I do believe there are parallels to be drawn between the

alarming transformations that this particular region of Thailand has seen and the area and culture that is the subject of this paper. Anyone who has seen pamphlets advertising tours throughout the rest of Clayoquot Sound may notice that the same angles are often used to draw tourists to both areas. If the BBF and the Hesquiaht people choose to take a proactive approach towards tourism, they will have to find the delicate balance between articulating the true beauty of the area and capitalizing on the stereotypical view of the coastal temperate rainforest and its peoples. Perhaps one way this could be done would be to advertise tours to the area not as a chance to see pristine, delicate rainforest and the primitive people that live there, but to give visitors the opportunity to see how an entire civilization existed within the forest for thousands of years and how those ways are threatened by our current ways of social organization.

Potential Positive Outcomes of Continued Tourism Operations in the Boat Basin Region

At the very least, if a policy of responsible and respectful ecocultural tourism is implemented and adhered to, the operations could provide income for the BBF to carry out its educational goals. Visitors to the region would leave with a new understanding of the relevancy of colonialism and its effect on particular ways of life. Most importantly, Hesquiaht people would have an outlet to express and explore their culture, and would experience fair financial reimbursement for their part in the business aspect of the endeavor.

As a person who experienced the region for a few days, I truly believe there are a number of positive things one could gain from visiting Boat Basin. Most people today, especially those who are able to enjoy the luxury of traveling and tourism, reside in large cities. For the most part these urban centres protect people of European descent from the realities of colonialism. We are not shown or properly taught the cultural subordination that occurred many years ago, nor are we asked to think about its lasting effect on aboriginal people today. Even a short visit to Boat Basin and trip through the “Walk of the Ancients” provides the space for people to become aware of the cost of their privileged life. I found it unbelievably powerful to listen to Hesquiaht elder Steve Charleson explain the significance of the forest to his people, and the way in which that relationship has been seized by white settler society. Writing about their research of Aboriginal tourist sites in southern Alberta, Deutschlander et al. note that, “...while non-natives may reject responsibility for the plight of Native peoples in the formal political arena...they may be more inclined to accept it in the cultural arena, where the politics of guilt and responsibility can be pursued in symbolic or indirect form” (Deutschlander et al. 2003: 7). This would in part explain some of the tears and powerful emotions revealed in our class on our visit to Boat Basin. A visit to an environment in which the effects of the colonial agenda are so clear allows people to experience their “white guilt” in a healthy, productive, safe manner.

Continuing along on this sentiment, I believe a visit to Boat Basin has the power to inspire and educate a person to such an extent so as to alter aspects of their life when they return from a vacation. I know it certainly did for me. If tourists were guided through Cougar Annie’s Garden and the “Walk of Ancients” in a way that gently challenged hegemonic patterns of living and viewing the world, visitors would be outfitted with the tools to return home and perhaps work towards (or at least think about) the effects of their way of life. Sociologist Nelson Graburn insists that, “tourists are looking for a whole range of moral and recreational complements to their constrained roles at home and at work” (Graburn 2001: 150).

Potential Negative Outcomes of Continued Tourism Operations in the Boat Basin Region

Depending on the nature of the tourism operations that are permitted to flourish in Boat Basin, the potential negatives will obviously vary. Generally though, one possibility is that the BBF

increases the permitted visitors to Cougar Annie's Garden, and does so with little or no Hesquiaht input or participation. Essentially BBF would then be inviting masses of strangers into traditional Hesquiaht territory and enjoying all the benefits. If tourist endeavours grew in a manner insensitive to local First Nations issues, there is a risk that BBF, a private non-profit started by people of European decent, would have the decision making powers regarding tourist issues as well as enjoy the financial rewards for allowing tourists into the area. If this were the case, (another) white dominated institution (either universities and other affiliates of BBF or individual citizens) would have the opportunity to come and take what they please from the area, while the Hesquiat people stay down the road and continue to suffer the consequences of the colonial process. This possibility seems remote as Peter Buckland appeared to see Hesquiaht involvement as vital to any increased use of Boat Basin for tourism and saw the importance of limiting numbers of visitors to the region for ecological and practical reasons, such as limited accommodation and transportation facilities.

A specific concern that I have about increased tourism is the possibility of the Hooksum Outdoor school³ in Hesquiaht Harbour being jeopardized should beach space become a premium. I hope that it is an unlikely event, but it is important not to take existing operations for granted when imagining a future of increased tourism. If tour operators became interested in landing their boats or operating tours on the beach of Hesquiaht Harbour, it would be awful to think of Steve and Karen Charleson facing opposition to the operation of their Outdoor School as they are running an incredibly interesting and innovative business that is consistent with their traditional values and beliefs with an enormous amount of potential.⁴

Currently all over the west coast of Vancouver Island, indigenous people are participating in unsustainable logging and fishing practices. This is a complicated situation that is out of the scope of this paper, but in many remote communities, those resource extraction industries are the only option for First Nations communities to make an income on which they can survive and support their families. If ecotourism went ahead in the Boat Basin region in a manner exclusive of the local Hesquiaht community, the BBF would miss out on a valuable opportunity to incorporate the cultural aspects and the Hesquiaht First Nation would miss out on a coordinated effort to build an alternative industry to industrial logging in their territory.

Furthermore, if BBF went ahead with increased tourism without Hesquiaht participation, it is very possible the relationship between the two parties could be in jeopardy. The Hesquiaht community could legitimately become angry at the BBF for proceeding without their input, and thus the two parties would potentially become unfriendly towards one another. Besides being just a bad situation in general, it would be unwise for the BBF to be on the Hesquiat community's bad side. As long as Clayoquot Sound is the contested space that it is, politics and social relations in the area will never be a sleepy matter. No one knows what issues may arise in the future and it would be wise for both the BBF and the Hesquiaht community to stay allies in case something arises in the future that requires cooperation.

These foreseeable issues are only a mere sampling of the possible negative consequences of tourism development going ahead in Boat Basin without Hesquiaht participation or control. In reality the consequences may be much less clear until many years have passed. As well, there is surely many possible negative impacts that I have failed to outline here.

³ Hooksum Outdoor School is an Indigenous owned and operated company run by Steven and Karen Charleson (Hesquiaht First Nation) that runs outdoor leadership training programs. See www.hooksumschool.com

⁴ Unfortunately it is out of the scope of this paper to discuss the future possibilities for their school.

What can BBF take from the Discourse of Community Based Research before Proceeding with Tourism?

I understand community based research (CBR) as based on a mandate of conducting research for the use, assistance or betterment of a community. The cumulative experience of CBR, therefore, may be a rich source of lessons for the development of a tourism operation that seeks to provide an exciting, unique experience while enhancing and protecting the local community. Both CBR and community-based tourism approaches require a commitment to thinking about long term relationships and effects, an awareness of existing social power structures, and an ability to proceed with as much caution as possible while keeping in mind time and financial restrictions.

In order for CBR to be relevant and legitimate, a meaningful, long term relationship between the researchers and community members must be established. This is necessary so the researcher can ensure the research stays current according to what happens in the community and so the community can have access to the research and results for long periods of time. Once BBF begins allowing more tourism in the Boat basin region, the demand of people wanting to visit the region will not likely subside. Realistically, it will only grow as more and more people learn of Cougar Annie's Garden and the magical place that is Boat Basin. In order for the tourism process to continue for many years in an unproblematic manner, a continued relationship between BBF and the local First Nations is critical.

The discourse of CBR shows a high awareness of greater social and political power structures which are always factors in social relations, whether they are evident or not. The way in which history has shaped our mainstream society in Canada has resulted in a social order in which citizens of British background enjoy significantly more privilege than their colonized counterparts. This is often hard to think about, as the racial order is so deeply entrenched in our social institutions and ways of thinking that we are usually unaware when we are contributing to the further subordination of those more disenfranchised than ourselves. However, it is imperative for the members of BBF to remember that they are the living manifestations of a colonial process that nearly obliterated entire populations, and that they are indeed still enjoying the benefits. Though much too complicated and deeply entrenched for most people to usually speak specifically about, this social order should be kept in mind while a tourism plan is being developed, in order to (attempt to) curtail the silencing and marginalization that First Nations people have experienced as a historical and current reality in Canada.

Unfortunately, many relevant and important CBR projects are abandoned or finished in a rush due to the funding and time restrictions that plague universities today. Similarly, eco tourism operations are often implemented in a rushed manner because the beneficiaries are anxious to access the revenue that their tours will bring to the community. In both instances, a potentially exciting and progressive product (either a piece of research or method of income generation) are spoiled due to a lack of time and funds. BBF is in a fortunate position in that they do not have to rush into developing any tourism ventures because they can continue to operate as an educational center; they are not in the desperate position of having to implement tourism as quickly as possible in order to provide for the community (such as is the case in many developing countries). However, both CBR and the future tourism policy of BBF will no doubt continue to battle financial and time issues over the long term. Perhaps the expertise of universities and their ability to complete research under restrictive conditions can lend advice to BBF in their future time and money conflicts.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is human nature, perhaps it is a result of globalized imaginations, but many people in the developed world have an urge to visit and learn about places and cultures much different than their everyday surroundings. Boat Basin, including Cougar Annie's Garden and the "Walk of Ancients", has a long list of things that would of interest to many tourists who visit Tofino every year. While the BBF currently allows a limited number of visitors into the area, as word spreads and more people keep visiting the west coast of Vancouver Island, demand to see the area will only grow. While the potential negative consequences of increased tourism are almost too vast and alarming to imagine, it is important to be aware of the ease to which tourism operations could grow with little or no input from the local Hesquiaht community. If the BBF proceeds with caution and a desire to include the Hesquiaht community in any future developments, I believe the magic of Boat Basin could be harnessed in such a way so as to inspire and educate visitors while also supporting Hesquiaht families and invigorating their traditional culture.

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