

Across Time:

Artifacts from San Juan Island National Historical Park

Lying as it does at the crossroads of three great waterways, with sheltered harbors, open prairie and secluded woodlands, San Juan Island for thousands of years has been a magnet for human habitation. People have *wanted* to come here whether it be to stake a life, or to find rest and relaxation amid an abundant food source. The first inhabitants came here to gather clams, fish for salmon and establish villages or camps at Garrison Bay and the prairie above South Beach. They were driven off by Northern Indians from British Columbia and Russian America, who used the islands as rest stops to and from raids in the south. By the mid-19th century, British subjects and United States citizens had arrived on the island and were contending for the fertile plain overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Pressures built until armed forces from both nations nearly clashed after an American farmer shot a pig belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company. However, instead of a war, the nations agreed to a "temporary" joint-occupation of the island by British Royal Marines and the U.S. Army -- an occupation that lasted more than 12 years.

The joint occupation was the focus of archaeological work conducted on San Juan Island between 1970 and 1977 by the Laboratory of Anthropology, University of Idaho at Moscow and is the subject of *Across Time: Artifacts from San Juan Island National Historical Park*. While historical documents can tell us why the soldiers and marines came here, little is known about their daily lives -- what they ate, drank, wore; or how they worked and played. Archaeology can explain this through analysis of what was left behind. For example: a button pops off a soldier's frock coat while he gets dressed one morning at American Camp. He gets down on his hands and knees and searches desperately, knowing full well that the sergeant major is certain to scold him when it is discovered missing. There is no time left to search or to sew on a fresh button so the soldier rushes off to formation without it. The missing button has tumbled through a crack in the floor, only to emerge through a screen of dirt 137 years later. While the above scenario is pure speculation we do know that the button belonged to an artilleryman, that his coat was issued after 1858 and that he was here in the fall of 1859. A brass number "3" found close by confirms -- or at the very least leads us to presume -- that he was in the 3rd Artillery. Minie balls extracted from a rotten tree stump 150 yards from the redoubt reveal where soldiers cleared their weapons when they came off guard duty. Marbles and dominoes and thousands of liquor bottles tell us how the soldiers and marines whiled away the hours thousands of miles from home.

William Thacker of Friday Harbor performed the earliest recorded archaeological work in the San Juans. This resulted in a series of articles about prehistoric peoples based on objects he unearthed on "North Bay" on San Juan Island and a site on Lopez Island. More formal excavations on prehistoric sites followed over the years, the most extensive work being done at San Juan Island National Historical Park by the University of Washington and the University of Idaho. Prehistoric artifacts from the UW projects are being held in the Burke Museum, while the historic objects from the UI excavations are being stored at North Cascades National Park in Marblemount, Washington.

Artifacts featured in *Across Time* were unearthed in successive summers by students from the Laboratory of Anthropology, under the direction of Dr. Roderick Sprague. Specific sites included English Camp, San Juan Town, Bellevue Farm and the Parade Ground and Laundress' Quarters areas of American Camp. All of the sites date from the Pig War era, 1859-1872, with the exception of Bellevue Farm, which was established in 1853 by the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company. The students often lived in primitive conditions during the excavations, which lasted several weeks. However, they often were richly rewarded, such as when they discovered the remains of an ancient Coast Salish plank house under the site of the Royal Marine commissary; or when the flagpole was excavated at the same site, revealing not only an elaborate crib anchoring system, but another plank house. Crews also succeeded in determining the site of the Laundress' Quarters and found the flagpole at American Camp.

What has emerged from the excavations -- aside from the stunning array of objects -- is a body of research by University of Idaho students and faculty completed over the years that enriches our view of life at the camps and on San Juan Island in general during the 1860's.

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1.

American Camp Artifacts

Most of the items listed below were found in the vicinity of the Parade Ground, unless otherwise indicated.

1. Model 1839 Cartridge Box Plate. This lead-back plate once garnished a cartridge box designed to support the .58 caliber 1855 Harpers Ferry musket. Such box plates would have been used through the life of the camp.

2. Hat and collar insignia. Only "2s" and "3s" were found during the excavations. The large "3" served as collar insignia for a member of the 3rd Artillery (1859). The smaller "2s" indicate the 2nd Artillery (post-1865), while the large "2" represents the 21st Artillery (post-1872). The "F" signified a company in the 9th Infantry (1860-61, 23rd Infantry (1868-71), or 2nd Artillery (1868).

3. Buttons (left to right): The first two are "line eagle" buttons, characterized by a raised letter inside the shield. The pattern was established in 1823, but enlisted men were forbidden to use them after 1854. These buttons were found in the barracks area, which demonstrates that it was not uncommon for soldiers to wear unauthorized uniform items during the period. The remaining buttons are "general service," which became regulation for enlisted men in 1854 and continued through the 19th century.

4. Clay pipe.

5. Marbles: ceramic, wood and "sick" glass (see "Bottles" label). The dark green, mottled marbles are "Beningtons" and were originally made in England, but also were manufactured in Germany, France and the United States. The white marble with the green stripes was made in China and functioned as a unit of exchange in addition to being a gamepiece. It may have been swapped to an American soldier by a British Royal Marine. The marines arrived in the region from Hong Kong in 1858.

6. Skeleton key.

7. Brown whiskey bottle.
8. Glazed ware, large plate.
9. Glazed ware, small bowl.
10. Glazed earthenware mug.
11. Assorted bottles.
12. Chin strap buckle from 1858-model forage cap.
13. "Albert"-style chin strap buckle from 1854-model shako, later converted to forage cap.
14. Shoulder scale fragments. Scales actually were vestigial forms of armor, designed to ward off saber blows. However, they also served as ornaments and symbols of rank (see U.S. soldier mannequin) and were worn exclusively on the dress frock coat.
15. Knapsack hook, found in San Juan Town.
16. Minie bullets. The .58 caliber minie ball was designed for use with the Model 1855 rifled musket. It also was used with 1861, 1863 and 1841 (modified) muskets, all of which saw service on San Juan Island. Most minie bullets were found in the sand dunes east of Pickett's Spring Camp, above South Beach. Skeleton key.
17. Percussion caps. These copper caps, which came 12 to a paper packet, were charged with fulminate of mercury and sulfur. All the caps were found in the vicinity of the barracks, most being unfired, which indicates that it was where the soldiers charged their weapons in preparation for guard duty.
18. Section of Model 1866 rifled-musket, also called the "Allin Conversion." The piece has been crudely hacksawed (another cut is located just in front of the receiver). This piece was likely brought to English Camp during the joint occupation, or perhaps after the Americans took over the camp in 1872. This Model 1866 was one of 25,000 .58 caliber muzzle-loading Springfield rifles, reamed to .64 caliber, sleeved with a .50 liner and converted into breechloaders. The breech of the barrel was milled and a hinged breech block added, making it the first of a long line of trap-door rifles. The new rifle was chambered for a center-fire cartridge with a copper case called the .50-.70-.450 "Allin Conversions" arrived on San Juan island in 1868. (Adapted from *San Juan Archaeology*, essay by Andrew E. Masich.)
19. Cartridge box belt plate.
20. Assorted buttons.

2.

English Camp Artifacts

Most of the items listed below were found in the Garrison Bay parade ground and Officers' Quarters unless otherwise indicated.

1. British Royal Marine Light Infantry crest, probably worn on shako.
2. British warrant officer's rank insignia (wreath); and regimental infantry badge (horn with rope).
3. British Royal Marine Light Infantry buttons, worn on tunic. The smaller button was worn on cuff or vest.
4. Clear medicine bottle with cork and fluid.
5. Clear perfume bottle, "Layell's" perfume.
6. Pink perfume bottle, "Lundberg, New York."
7. Stoneware, tan and brown, beer and ale container.
8. Clear food product bottle, "Riddington & Co." and "Extracts" on sides.
9. Brown alcohol bottle.
10. Plain, white earthenware, molded into lily shape.
11. Clay pipes and stems.
12. Minie bullets for .58 caliber Enfield rifle. This ammunition was virtually interchangeable with that used for the .58 caliber Springfield rifle.
13. Small, blue transfer print bowl.

14. Buttons.

15. Nails. Archaeologists use modern pennyweights to identify nails, even though most of the nails found at English Camp predate the establishment of the pennyweight measure. The nail size determines the "finish quality" of the building, i.e. the extent to which the builders went to make the structure more livable. The largest nails were used for framing, the smallest for finishing touches such as molding. The types and sizes of nails found at English Camp indicate the Royal Marines already were employing the balloon frame (very much like modern frame) method of construction, contrasted with the Americans, who were still practicing mortise-and-tenon and pegs methods which required heavier pieces of wood.

16. Razor handle, bone.

17. Toothbrush without bristles, ivory.

18. Comb, wood.

19. Spectacles.

20. Domino piece, wood.

21. Metal match box.

22. Skeleton key.

23. Buckle.

3.

Bottles and assorted artifacts from American Camp and San Juan Town

Most of the items listed below, unless otherwise indicated, were found along the old main street of San Juan Town, which ran from the Griffin Bay shore along the lagoon to Cattle Point Road; Grandma's Cove, the Redoubt and the American Camp Parade Ground.

1. Blue glass bottle, "Parker & Son. New York."
2. Bottle stoppers: including "Lea & Perrins" sauce.
3. Medicinal bottle, "Gargling Oil. Lockport, NY."
4. Pipe found at Grandma's Cove (July 1996)
5. Minie balls (flattened) found in stump near Redoubt (March 1996).
6. Minie ball found near Grandma's Cove (July 1996).
7. Buttons found near San Juan Town.
8. Torpedo-shaped soda-pop bottle. Bottles were assembled from two pieces. The shape facilitated packing in crates for long sea voyages.
9. Black glass wine bottle.
10. Brown bottle, American Camp.
11. Chamber pot, found in vicinity of officers quarters.
12. Twelve-pound howitzer shell fragment, found in dunes area above South Beach.