Chapter 3

Intensification of Food Production on the Northwest Coast and Elsewhere

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The techniques of plant food production described in the chapters that follow are very likely the result of an evolutionary process known as intensification, or, in other words, producing more food. The causes and possible effects of increasing food production are central research questions to many disciplines, Northwest Coast anthropology and archaeology among them. This chapter examines intensification on the Northwest Coast and among complex hunter-gatherers. I first very briefly outline several issues in the archaeology of the Northwest Coast and of complex hunter-gatherers to which intensification of food production is directly relevant. In the sections that follow, I place the concept of intensification in a broader perspective, both in terms of theory and application. From this general consideration of intensification, I discuss the intensification of plant food production on the Northwest Coast using models either developed by evolutionary ecologists or based on their work. One set of models is quite general in its application, and a second set of two models specifically focuses on the intensification of root harvesting. The archaeological record for intensification is then examined against the predictions of the general models. Following that discussion, I review the evidence for the intensification of root food production on the Intermontane Plateau of south central British Columbia and Interior Washington and Idaho. I also review the evidence for plant use during the Locarno Beach and Marpole phases of the Gulf of Georgia region of the southern Northwest Coast.

Issues in Northwest Coast Social and Economic History

It has only been within the last thirty years that the subsistence economies and ecology of Northwest Coast peoples have been of central concern to anthropologists and archaeologists working on the coast. Prior to that time, the coast was assumed to be an exceptionally rich and productive place, one