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Provincial archaeologists frown on artifact trade

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PROVINCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY experts aren't happy with people who traffic in native artifacts.

The problem, says the director of the provincial archaeology branch, is what people might do in order to acquire the artifacts in the first place.

Justine Batten's comments follow questions about the branch's contact with Howard Roloff, a Duncan-based dealer and expert in native artifacts.

"We have indicated to Mr. [Howard] Roloff that creating a market for these items does encourage looting of sites," said Batten in comments provided via email.

"... We have strongly advised him to halt such transactions," she continued.

The sites referred to by Batten are locations protected through the province's Heritage Conservation Act or from burial sites.

"While a sale per se is not illegal it is contrary to the legislation to remove heritage objects from heritage sites postdating 1846 or from burial places," says Batten.

"It is also a breach of the legislation to remove from BC heritage objects so protected."

The year 1846 is used in the heritage conservation legislation as that's the year that Great Britain and the United States, through the Oregon Treaty, agreed that the 49th parallel was to be the boundary between the United States and British North America.

The treaty, therefore, is considered the beginning of Britain asserting sovereignty over what was to be Canada.

Roloff's position is that he trades in artifacts only when he's certain of ownership.

And if someone wants to sell an artifact, Roloff says making it available to a private collector or to a museum ensures it will be preserved.

Batten said the provincial government does not itself have a budget to purchase native artifacts which may come up for sale.

And she says there's no sure way to determine if an artifact offered for sale has been in a person's possession for some time or was recently discovered or recently removed from a protected site.

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