Coast Salish [and Makah] “Woolly Dogs,” ca. 1972 [not 1792…]

Great mid-twentieth century photos of woolly dogs. In the Spring Semester of 1972 I had the great experience of hanging out in Neah Bay taking probably the best graduate semester class ever learning Makah basketry from two Master Weavers, sisters Isabell Ides and Lena McGee Claplanhoo, at the K-12 school. This afforded me the wonderful opportunity to be a part of the Neah Bay community for about 5 months straight, and I photographically documented what I would argue was an abundance of “woolly dogs” descendants in the area in 1972 (not 1792). I also learned more in this basketmaking class than in any course available anywhere in the world for my graduate degrees (see history in Carriere and Croes 2018).

As some old-timers know (like Quentin’s brother Al Mackie) I also picked up a “wool dog” rescued as an about-to-freeze puppy in the winter of 1970 from the Ozette garbage dump. An Ozette crew member picked him up from the road as he drove into Lake Ozette and hiked him into the site inside his sleeping bag in his pack. The feral pup lived under the Ozette houses and slowly tamed down, when I adopted him and named him Fred [this is sounding weirder and weirder]. I attached these pictures of Fred.

Fred with cm scale and me weighing him (conducting science) on the FCR scale in the Hoko Rocksheter

While in Neah Bay basket classes spring semester ’72 I started noticing this kind of dog, often with matted hair (not shorn anymore), of good quality for making yarn, all over town and started taking pictures of them. They were of all colors and sizes, and all shared the proper hair quality. I suspect that in ancient times new born puppies were examined more for the hair quality they might produce, than their color or size. These would have been placed on islands such as Ozette Island and Waadah Island and feed well (salmon scrapes, etc.) to produce the hair quality desired. Here are some of the pictures from around area in 1972—none of these are my dog Fred.
Varieties of woolly-like dogs at the school house (with other rez dogs) and some were not owned (upper right) and lived off scrapes on the beach.

With Susan Crockford’s work and Paul Gleeson 1970 Ozette MA Thesis on the ancient dog remains, it became clear that there was active breeding to create a distinct, and typically smaller, “woolly dog” vs. a typically larger village dog for at least 1000 years (as mentioned in a comment, Susan might even give it 4,000 years). I actually was given a female “hair” dog in Neah Bay, I named Hylida, and breed the two for pups in Pullman. I also noticed, because of the size difference, Fred could not breed with a larger dog (though he’d try) and Hylida, my female dog, would have a rough time breeding with a large male. This alone would tend to preserve some of the genetic results of this husbandry into today’s world, that appears to have been happening for at least a millennia from Susan’s work.
From other historic references it became quite clear that these woolly dogs were quite common at contact. In brief these observations were located:

1792: Captain George Vancouver—Port Orchard: “shorn as close to the skin as sheep are in England...with very fine long hair”

1792: Joseph Whidbey observed native people “walking along the shore” of Camano Island “attended by about 40 dogs in a drove, shorn close to the skin like sheep.”

1792: Spanish: Gabriola Island: “the great number of dogs they keep in their villages, most of which were shorn” “of moderate size, resembling those of the English breed, very woolly, and usually white.”

1806: Simon Fraser observed shorn dogs and blankets made from goat and dog hair.

1824: seamen of the William and Ann observed that the Makah kept their woolly-dogs isolated “on a little island a few miles from the coast” where they feed them every day.

1826: James McMillan observed a flotilla of 160 Cowichan canoes on the Fraser River returning from fall salmon fishing upstream, each canoe with “about half a dozen dogs more resembling Cheviot Lambs shorn of their wool” [the math brings this to about 1000....]

1847: Paul Kane described woolly-dogs with long black, brown, or white hair that was sheared with a knife, Lower Elwha Klallam.

It should be pointed out that in the entire American continent only two Native peoples domesticated an animal for its hair for spinning wool to make their textiles as wealth items: the ancient Peruvians (massive Incan agricultural Civilization) bred alpacas as a source of wool and the ancient Salish Sea peoples, as non-agricultural peoples, bred woolly dogs from the common dog to establish control over the production of the yarn they needed for blanket weaving. The Northern Northwest Coast people collected mountain goat wool, but on the Central Northwest Coast, where mountain goats are not native to the Olympic Peninsula and possibly Vancouver...
Island (Rebecca Wigen, personal communications), the Salish Sea people domesticated and used active husbandry to control this critical aspect of their yarn production and production of wealth—the blanket as essentially currency in both areas (Peru and NWC).

This was a much bigger industry than understood; at the Ozette village wet site only 23 elaborately carved wooden spindle whorls (averaging 7 per house!) were recovered, six wooden yarn spools, some with sculpted human heads on end knobs, were found (Daugherty and Friedman 1983:192–93). Fourteen decorated and slotted wooden loom uprights and loom roller bars were also uncovered, meaning that an average of three true looms were found per household—again emphasizing the industry of blanket weaving on complex shuttle looms, and not hanging looms as seen to the north; the people of the Central Coast (Salish Sea) developed true double-bar looms (the Northern Northwest Coast Tlingit [Chilkat] and Haida use single-bar hanging looms woven like baskets). Ten wooden weavers’ swords/batons, possibly used as shuttle sticks, were also recorded, some with wolf-like carvings on their handles (Ibid 192; Figure 2.6, right). And another isolated find of a waterlogged wooden loom upright was found in the lower Skagit River, central Salish Sea (see all these illustrated in Croes 2015).

I also should point out I have captured pictures of this general kind of dog elsewhere, for one on Quadra Island, B.C. while visiting Hilary Stewart (pictured below).

On an entirely different Pacific Coast scale, there are essentially two kinds of native dogs breed by the ancient and current Inca of Peru: a hairless large greyhound looking dog (often with a distinct “Mohawk” looking hair do on top of its head) and a Chocko smaller breed that is surprising woolly dog-like and may reflect a Pacific Coast wide spread of the general breed of dog. Nowhere does it say they use the wool from this dog in Peru, where they have an abundant source of wool from the Alpaca that was breed for hair quality. I took these pictures of two Chocko dogs while on a trip to Peru with my son a few years back.
Anyway this Q post gave me an opportunity to let this all out. Of course there is a lot of DNA work yet to be done by someone. I actually have published descriptive aspects of this (with Ozette artifacts) that can help fill in my running narrative (Croes 2014, 2015). I mostly wanted to emphasize how dynamic this entire blanket weaving industry was in the Salish Sea, and how poorly it is recognized in terms of this distinct husbandry for the source of yarn and the abundant use of true double bar looms in the Ozette ancient houses as well as other sophisticated equipment mostly limited to the Salish Sea region on the Northwest Coast (Croes 2014, 2015).

Carriere, Ed and Dale R. Croes

2018 Re-Awakening Ancient Salish Sea Basketry, Fifty Years of Basketry Studies in Culture and Science. Journal of Northwest Anthropology Memoir 15, Richland, WA.

Crockford, Susan J.

1997 Osteometry of Makah and Coast Salish Dogs. Archaeology Press, Burnaby, B.C.

Croes, Dale R.

2014 Showing the Wealth on Paper, Echoing the Archaeological Past. In Susan Point Works on Paper, text by Dale R. Croes, Susan Point, and Gary Wyatt, pp. 9-17. Figure 1 Publishing, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.


Daugherty, Richard and Janet Friedman

Gleeson, Paul