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\$50,000 fine for bones used in road

Developer given largest-ever penalty for violation of B.C. heritage act; band sees it as a matter of 'respect'

Richard Watts

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A South Pender Island hotel development where construction workers once used First Nations bones in road surfacing has been fined \$50,000.

The fine, levied against Bedwell Harbour Hotel Ltd. in provincial court, is the largest ever for a violation of the B.C. Heritage Conservation Act. The company pleaded guilty to disturbing a site inhabited prior to 1846 while constructing a phase of Poet's Cove Resort and Spa four years ago.

Robert Morales, chief negotiator with the Native Hul-qumi'num Treaty Group, said he was glad to see the province prosecute the company, but \$50,000 is a long way from the \$1-million maximum.

Morales said he visited the site under construction and found crews had dug up ancient material, shells, bones and other fragments, and spread it out as a road surface. Later, the bones were identified as human.

"It comes down to having respect," he said, noting B.C. regulations forbid even playing games in a cemetery.

Poet's Cove Resort and Spa, a combination resort and marina, disturbed the ancient site between Dec. 1, 2002, and Jan. 31, 2003.

Peter Parmar, president and general manager of the company, said he

couldn't comment on what happened on the construction site, since he wasn't there.

But Parmar said the resort hopes to work with First Nations as neighbours and even, it hopes, economic partners. "The hand is open," he said.

John Blackman, who handled the case against Poet's Cove for the Crown, said the \$50,000 is not technically a fine, since the money is earmarked for the B.C. Archeology Branch, while a fine would go straight to the provincial treasury.

Grant Keddie, curator of archeology at the Royal B.C. Museum, said Poet's Cove was the site of a long-buried village, dating back 3,000 years, that yielded artifacts not used for 2,000 years.

Keddie said the resort's developers knew about the archeological site, which he likened to a precious, rare book. They even hired an archeologist to conduct a survey, then paid little attention to the information, an all-too familiar story, he said. "Even though they know there is a site there, they go ahead and bulldoze it."

Keddie said municipal regulations may offer the best protection for archeological sites,

noting the Islands Trust is already working on bylaws to protect the hundreds of heritage sites scattered across the Gulf Islands.

Stan Hagen, minister of tourism, sport and the arts, which is responsible for the Heritage Conservation Act, said in a written statement he was glad to see the developers accept responsibility for violating the act.

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