



GIDIMT'EN CHECKPOINT

RESPECTING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -
SEPTEMBER 23, 2021**

COASTAL GASLINK DESTROYS ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE ON CAS YIKH TERRITORY

SMITHERS, BC: On September 22, 2021, after days of conflict between Gidimt'en/Cas Yikh Chiefs and members, Coastal GasLink and the RCMP, contractors completely cleared an archaeological site which has been destroyed with heavy machinery for the construction of a methane gas pipeline.

Gidimt'en chiefs and supporters have been defending a number of culturally significant archeological sites from destruction on unceded Cas Yikh (Grizzly House) territory belonging to the Gidimt'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en people. The Coastal GasLink pipeline company has obtained a Site Alteration Permit (SAP) from the BC Oil and Gas Commission (OGC) through a flawed and ineffective consultation process and without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs. The Wet'suwet'en have argued for years that the pipeline route endangers critical species, cultural use and heritage sites, and is not supported by Wet'suwet'en land use plans, particularly around the development of climate change policies. This archaeological site in particular, is significant to the Wet'suwet'en in the protection of our cultural heritage for future generations and for protecting our oral histories and heritage values for ongoing rights and title negotiations.

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The company continues to violate their own regulations and conditions set forward by governing bodies such as the OGC and their own Environmental Assessment Certificates. Neither CGL nor the BCOGC undertook consultation with Cas Yikh or the Office of the Wet'suwet'en for the permit. The consultation process and the permitting system is deeply flawed and acts merely as a rubber stamp process to allow industry to continue. For example, files sent to the Office of the Wet'suwet'en were password protected and unable to be opened. Thus the information contained inside was never able to be reviewed, let alone consented to. Silence does not equal consent and to push forward with destroying a culturally significant heritage site is deeply disturbing and violent.

An archeologist working with Cas Yikh recently stated, about the cultural site that CGL is now threatening:

A site alteration permit was granted for the purpose of clearing GbSs-8 to make way for the Coastal GasLink pipeline, but no information on the proposed work/clearing activities has been shared with OW, Wo'os, Cas Yikh, or this report's author. What is known about the archaeology of Ts'elkay Kwe Ceek is dismal. This is especially concerning given the sheer intensity with which the landscape was inhabited and used (according to oral and written testimonies) and the concentration of habitation and use sites (lithics, trails, and cultural depressions). As a result, any destruction to archaeological heritage in Ts'elkay Kwe Ceek should be seen as a gross miscalculation on behalf of the proponent and their archaeologists.

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Indeed, given that no consultation or consent was granted for the site alteration permit, the course of site destruction is highly irregular and likely illegal.

Many measures were taken to prevent the destruction of this site, including a Cease and Desist letter sent to all parties, including provincial ministers in charge of lands and forests, in which hereditary chief Dini ze' Woos stated:

To be clear, we do not authorize or consent to the removal of, or any "alteration" or impacts to, our archaeological heritage.

According to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – a declaration implemented by the BC Government under Bill C41, which states:

4. Article 11 (1). Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. (2). States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs. (Emphasis added).

The work that is continuing just hundreds of meters from Gidimt'en Checkpoint, a reoccupation site belonging to Cas Yikh, is in violation of the provincially legislated DRIPA. It is happening without the consent of Cas Yikh and therefore we demand that the permit be revoked and a proper consultation process begin.

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