Has archaeological investigation and sampling on the Central Coast been representative of the size, variety, and distribution of recorded shell middens?

To evaluate this, I have compiled all previous archaeological work in the area, including the academic and private sector, to see how the proportion of subsurface sampled shell midden sites and their features compare to all recorded middens. I inventoried the subsequent analysis of extracted materials to assess the intensity of investigation.

22% of shell middens have been sampled. Investigations tend to be clustered, with the least amount of work done in the southern portion of the study area.

Most excavations were conducted prior to 1990. Since then, only one new shell midden (EJTa-4) has been excavated. After 1990, excavations fell out of favor and were replaced with less intensive subsurface sampling techniques such as using cores and augers.

Around 50% of sampled shell midden sites are dated and/or have faunal analysis. Small sites have received the least analysis of sample midden material.

Archaeological investigations are not representative of the variety of shell midden sites in respect to their distribution and features. Research since the 1990s has begun to rectify this, but the narrow scope of excavation projects prior to then remains the dominate contributor to the framework of the area. Our understanding of the Central Coast’s archaeology will be improved if future work targets smaller sites and more spatially dispersed shell middens.

Data Sources
GeoBC & the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, Government of British Columbia