

ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

Parks Canada Budget Cuts called "Draconian"

The Canadian Archaeological Association issued a letter of protest concerning what its President William Ross called "draconian cuts" to the Parks Canada budget as part of Bill C-38.

As reported by *The Star's* journalist Josh Tapper, the Conservatives announced in April that at least "1,600 Parks Canada employees could lose their jobs as part of the federal government's ongoing belt-tightening measures."¹

In the CAA letter, Ross explained that the cuts would mean there would be "only 12 archaeologists and 8 conservators to support 218 national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas, many of these being UNESCO World Heritage Sites":

These sweeping reductions severely undermine Parks Canada's ability to contribute to the economy and to fulfill its mandate to protect

and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment to ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.²

CAA's Ross commented on the irony that such

a government that spotlights the war of 1812, restores the Royal to the navy and air force doesn't seem to care about anything else in the history of this country.

Letters were sent to the government by various other organizations, including The Society for American Archaeology who stated that the intended cuts "are drastic enough to amount to a de facto shutdown of Parks Canada archaeology":

These reductions in funding will

have a severely negative impact on archaeological research, and seriously undermine the preservation of Canada's extensive cultural and historic resources.

Response to the CAA's letter has so far been brief:

Please know that your e-mail message has been received in the Prime Minister's Office and that your comments have been noted. Our office always welcomes hearing from correspondents and being made aware of their views. Thank you for writing.

Web Sources

1. <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1180275--job-cuts-will-hurt-preservation-of-canada-s-past-say-experts>
2. <http://canadianarchaeology.com/caa/draconian-cuts-parks-canada/>
3. <http://www.saa.org/ForthePress/SAAnews/tabid/139/Default.aspx>

Looting as TV Entertainment: the Digging continues...

In February of this year, The Society for American Archaeology issued two letters opposing television shows featuring "amateur archaeology"—or, what many have described upon watching the shows simply as looting.

The shows included "Diggers," produced by the National Geographic Society, and "American Digger," produced by Spike TV. Spike TV describes "American Digger" as follows:

This new unscripted original series follows former professional wrestler turned modern day relic hunter Ric Savage, as he and his team from American Savage target areas such as battlefields and historic sites in the hopes of striking it rich and capitalizing on unearthing and selling bits of American history. The only thing standing in their way are the homeowners themselves, who Savage must convince to allow them to dig up their property using state-of-the-art metal detectors and heavy-duty excavation equipment. What artifacts they find, they sell

for a substantial profit, but not before negotiating a deal to divide the revenue with the property owners.¹

Ric Savage explained his motivation (beyond making a quick buck) to *New York Times'* Bill Carter as being about "touching history":

When you find something of value and hold it in your hands, that's what it's all about for me...It's about touching history. You can read or watch history, but the only way you can touch or feel it is to dig it out of the ground.²

As Carter points out, "That's about what the anthropologists and archaeologists would say as well. They just argue that this sort of entrepreneurial artifact hunting is antithetical to the more straightforward goal of preserving the past."

In response to the various protestations made by the professional community, Savage said:

I understand where the archaeologists are coming from...You've got two groups of people who want to be part of history, to dig it up

and hold it in their hand. The only difference is I'm doing it to make a living. They're doing it to write papers and make it to associate professor and get tenure.

The SAA's letters raised the questionable ethics and legality of the practices observed in both shows:

We ask in the strongest possible terms that you take steps to alter the message of the show, which, based on our review of the material on the program's website, is contrary to the ethics of American archaeological practice, highly destructive, and possibly illegal.³

It remains to be seen how the shows' producers will respond, besides a disclaimer about heritage protection laws added by National Geographic. For now, the American Diggers keep on digging...

Web Sources

1. <http://www.spike.com/shows/american-digger>
2. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/21/arts/television/spikes-american-digger-draws-concern-from-scholars.html>
3. <http://www.saa.org/ForthePress/SAAnews/tabid/139/Default.aspx>