



# The ASBC Pages

## ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS: the Site C Dam

It is well-known that the vast majority of archaeology in North America takes the form of cultural resource management (CRM), a.k.a. “salvage” archaeology. Whether as a pre-emptive survey or mitigation during construction, CRM is integral to development and, in this province, the majority of CRM is undertaken in relation to projects concerning resource extraction—logging, oil and gas, and hydro-electrical or “run of the river” projects.

On the Peace River, one of the largest of such projects is currently underway in B.C.—the Site C “Clean Energy Project” Dam. Despite the flurry of media attention that this controversial project has received citing environmental concerns, and the fact that large numbers of archaeologists have been employed conducting surveys in advance of its construction, there has been very little in the newspapers—let alone academic or public discussion—concerning the process or anticipated heritage impacts. Instead, information on archaeology in the Site C area is posted online in a “controlled-release” strategy by the project’s proponent, BC Hydro.

Just to give a sense of the scale of Site C, the dam itself is slated to be over a kilometre long with a reservoir stretching 83km behind it, creating a 9300 hectare pool. This means that an area larger than the Fraser Lowlands, from Vancouver, B.C. to Bellingham, WA and inland to Abbotsford, would be inundated.

Yet, of this truly vast area, only 200 hectares—2%—have apparently been identified as having archaeological site potential. Back in 1990, Arcas (1991:14) reported that 328 recorded “prehistoric and historic” archaeological sites were in or close to the project area. As of September 2011, archaeologists working for BC Hydro have revisited just 34 previously recorded sites and discovered 49 unrecorded sites, the product of 28,000 shovel tests and over 120,000 person days on the project (BC Hydro 2011:2-3).

Beyond these basic figures provided by the Crown Corporation, it is unlikely that many details about these sites—for example, the *kinds* of sites discovered, their relative *significance* culturally

and historically, or even the kind or extent of mitigating action or *conservation* taken in each case—will ever be made public. This, because it has apparently become routine for CRM archaeologists to sign non-disclosure agreements preventing them from speaking or writing about the sites that are encountered and often destroyed as a result of development.

In light of this, it was a surprise to find the article below, which details one historically significant site in the area that may be impacted. While focusing on just one site, this article raises a critical question concerning how all archaeological and heritage sites are valued: Is it the artifacts and scientific data produced through archaeology that is significant? Or is it the site itself, the history of a place and its rootedness, that is of importance? If it is the former—the “data”—that makes history meaningful, as David Conway, BC Hydro’s Community Relations Manager, suggests below, then the fate of archaeological sites in British Columbia has already been decided and it is only a matter of renting warehouses to house the thousands of artifacts, volumes of reports and disks of digital materials that are produced with every project. If, however, it is the latter—the “place itself”—that matters, then no amount of archaeology can ever make up for the heritage that is destroyed every day in this province.

Marina La Salle, Editor

### References

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### Site of first European settlement in BC threatened by Site C proposal: PRRD director wants area designated a National Park, BC Hydro argues "there's nothing there to see"

Reprinted from CJDC-TV, by Andre da Costa, 9 December 2011, Fort St. John

On the far banks of the Peace River, across from Fort St. John was another fort. The precursor to Fort St John, known as Rocky Mountain Fort.

There was an archaeological survey of the area in the late 1980s, investigating the site, which is believed to be built by fur trader John Finlay in 1794. Arthur Hadland, Area C Director with the Peace River Regional District says that site is so important to the history of BC that it

should be given National Park status.

“What I would like to do is have recognition of the heritage that this region has,” said Hadland. “Right now, it’s totally ignored as you can see. Two of those forts have never been designated even on a map.”

Hadland has written a letter to the Federal government asking that the site be granted park status, arguing that newer sites such as Fort St. James, built in 1805

has been designated as a National park. What makes this request urgent in his mind is that the Rocky Mountain Fort site, and the Rocky Mountain Portage Fort (also referred to as Rocky Mountain Portage House) near Hudson’s Hope, will be underwater if the Site C dam project proceeds.

Hadland says “These two particular forts, Rocky Mountain Fort and Rocky Mountain Portage Fort lie within the

proposed reservoir of Site C.” He says BC Hydro’s plan will put the archaeological and historical riches of the region under water. When Hadland approached BC Hydro staff about the issue, he says Hydro said they will “mitigate” the situation.

David Conway from BC Hydro says the Rocky Mountain Fort site, near where the Moberly River meets the Peace, was discovered by an archaeological survey done by BC Hydro in the 1970s. Conway argues that everything of value has been learned from the site, and preserving the location does not accomplish anything. He says the location “is not accessible by anyone,” and the value is in what has been gathered and taken away.

Evidence shows that humans have been living in the Peace River Valley for thousands of years. Arthur Hadland regularly finds artifacts on his farm. Most of them are typical of the Clovis culture, who were believed to have dominated this area as far back as 10,000 BC. Rocky Mountain Fort is recognized as the oldest European settlement in the province.

The Peace River valley was explored in the late 18th century as Europeans made their way toward the Pacific. Heather Longworth, Curator of the North Peace Museum in Fort St John explains, the Fort was established soon after. “Well, I guess 1793 is the first date, with Alexan-

der Mackenzie coming on his way to the Pacific coast by land and water.” She says “it was his idea to that there should be a fort somewhere in the Taylor flats—Fort St. John area.”

The Rocky Mountain Fort site is difficult to access. It has been quietly sitting on the western bank of the Peace River. The site has been quiet and relatively undisturbed since the mid-1980s.

Hadland wants protection for both the Rocky Mountain Fort, and Rocky Mountain Portage Fort—near Hudson’s Hope. Hadland points out that Fort St. James, which was built in 1805, has National Park status.

Rocky Mountain Fort itself operated for 11 years, between 1794 and 1805. The Fort was replaced by Fort D’Epinette, further downstream in 1806. That fort was renamed Fort St. John after the Hudson’s Bay company took over the Northwest Company. That Fort was abandoned in 1823, and traders did not return until a new Fort St. John was built in 1860, in what is now Old Fort.

Hadland says he will follow up with the Federal Ministers of Heritage and the Environment in the New Year, in hopes of giving history in the Peace region the recognition and protection he feels it deserves.

## BC Heritage + BC Hydro = a marriage of convenience?

“Energy. We need it to move, to see, to stay warm, to cook, and just to have fun. Without it, we couldn’t work, build or grow. We need energy to live.”

(<http://www.heritagebc.ca/heritage-week-2012>)

Heritage Week 2012, which took place across the province during February 20-26<sup>th</sup>, was themed “Energy in B.C.: A Powerful Past, A Sustainable Future.” It should hardly be any wonder, then, to find that Heritage Week was sponsored this year by BC Hydro. As communities all over British Columbia organized events to celebrate their local heritage, it seemed that BC Hydro wanted to remind citizens of what should really matter most to them: BC Hydro.

Actually, “The Heritage of Power Generation” was the theme encouraged by the Canada Heritage Foundation, a national charity mandated “to preserve and

demonstrate and encourage the preservation and demonstration of the nationally significant historic, architectural, natural and scenic heritage of Canada with a view to stimulating and promoting the interest of the people of Canada in that heritage” (<http://www.heritagecanada.org/en/about-us/what-we-do>). Since, they claim, “Canada is the world’s second-largest producer of hydroelectricity, and our per-capita power consumption is among the highest in the world” (<http://www.heritagecanada.org/en/visit-discover/heritage-day>), power is obviously a foundational part of Canadian national identity.

(Meanwhile, in Ontario and New

### Further Reading

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Church, M., N. Dusyk, M. Evenden, K. Forest, M. Griffin Cohen, A. Nether-ton and A. Peacock. 2009. FORUM: Site C: Considering the Prospect of Another Dam on the Peace River. *BC Studies* (161):93-114.

Society Opposes Hydro’s Plan to Dam Peace River. *The Midden* 14(1):15.

Brunswick, Heritage Week focused on the bicentennial of the War of 1812—a period of history that ensured Canada would not become the northern-most American state.)

In light of the Site C Dam and Rocky Mountain Fort situation—and, indeed, the ever-increasing number of CRM projects undertaken in advance of hydro-electric development in British Columbia—is there perhaps more than a hint of irony in this unlikely marriage of heritage and hydro?

Find out more about recent events here: <http://www.heritagebc.ca/heritage-week-2012>

**Marina La Salle, Editor**