



Wok Fragments, Opium Tins, and Rock-Walled Structures: An Historic Chinese Camp near Lytton

Bill Angelbeck and Dave Hall

During a recent archaeological impact assessment of a proposed run-of-river hydroelectric project on Kwoiek Creek just south of Lytton, we had the opportunity to record an unusual Chinese camp containing 11 oval-shaped, rock-walled structures. The occupants of the camp had set up the camp within a large boulder field on a portion of the large alluvial fan located at the mouth of Kwoiek Creek. The walls exhibited careful selection of appropriate rock shapes and tight construction, which in part, is why these walls still stand to this day (Figure 1). Rodney Garcia and Tim Spinks of the Kanaka Bar Indian Band had led us to these structures during our archaeological survey of the Kwoiek Creek Valley. A wok fragment and scatters of Chinese ceramics and opium tins identified the camp as being distinctively Chinese in origin, while the thick green and brown glass bottles and square nails present suggested a 19th century origin. As these structures were located adjacent to an old railroad bridge and culvert, we originally had assumed that the camp was associated with the Chinese railworkers who built the CPR rail line along the right bank of the Fraser in the 1880s. And that might be the case, although it's also known that many groups of Chinese miners also traveled up the Fraser Canyon during the Fraser River Gold Rush, a couple of decades earlier than that. Here, we'll describe our investigations at this camp, provide our interpretations of when these structures were built, and also put forth some additional lines of inquiry for future investigations at the site.

The Chinese camp represents a portion of the late component at site EaRj-67. The camp is situated upon a prominent terrace that contains an expansive scatter of lithic artifacts associated with

numerous short-term camping locations associated with travels up and down the Kwoiek Creek valley, fishing camps along the banks of the Fraser River, and possibly, external activity areas associated with the large pithouse villages located on the high terraces both north and south of the confluence of Kwoiek Creek and the Fraser River (Angelbeck and Hall 2008). An isolated housepit is also present at the site. It is located approximately 100 metres east of the rock-walled structures closer to the terrace edge that drops sharply down to the Fraser River (Figure 2). Another isolated pithouse was also identified to the west of the site, further up the Kwoiek Creek valley. During our investigations, it was not uncommon to uncover bottle glass, leather strap bits, and bucket fragments immediately above or even mixed with dacite biface thinning flakes and other lithic artifacts and debitage. The site also contains the remains of a single historic structure located between the Chinese camp and the eastern housepit, although no distinctively Chinese artifacts were identified in that area. Two collapsed historic log cabins, also non-Chinese in origin, were also identified to the west of the existing railroad bridge that overlooks the site.

The Chinese camp is the only one with low boulder-walled house features and the only area where artifacts of distinctly Chinese origin were identified. Many of the rock-walled structures enclose depressions. Historic materials, including distinctly Chinese artifacts, were identified in our shovel tests to depths

Figure 1 (above). Rodney Garcia adjacent to Structure H, facing south (Photograph by Dave Hall).

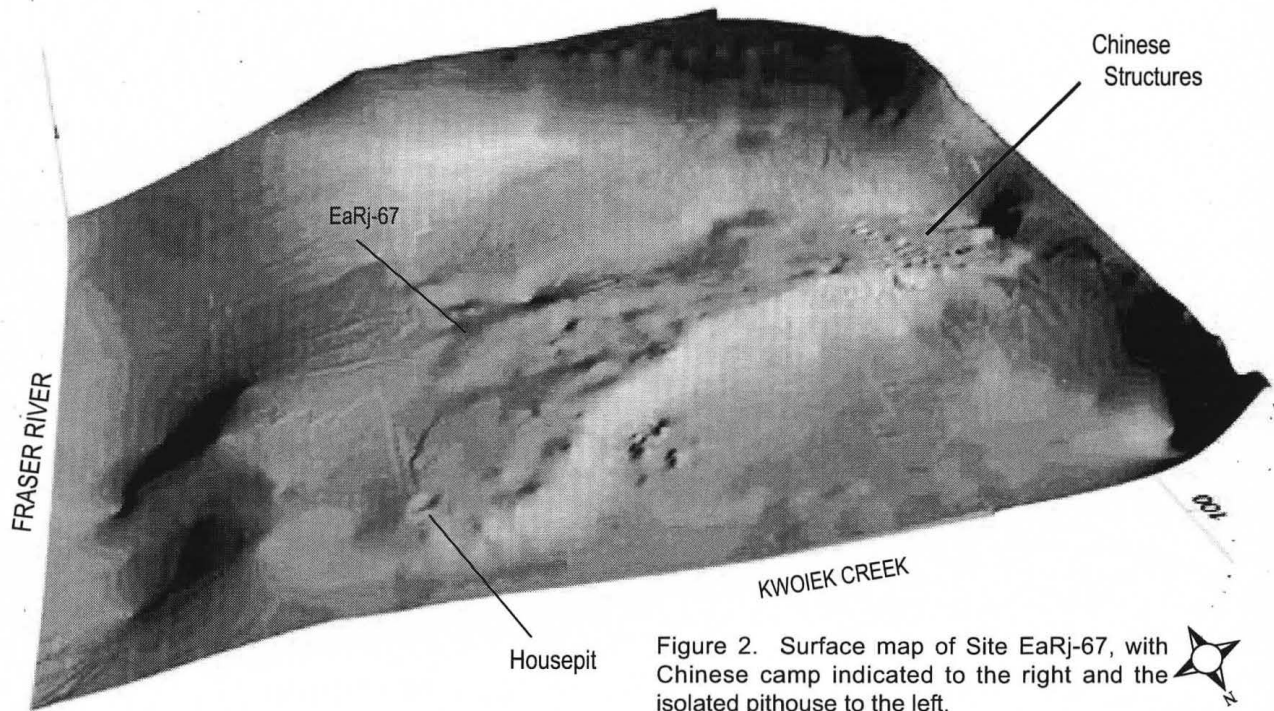


Figure 2. Surface map of Site EaRj-67, with Chinese camp indicated to the right and the isolated pithouse to the left.

Chinese Archaeology in the Northwest

For information on the archaeology of Chinese sites, be sure to see Priscella Wegars' (1993) edited volume, *Hidden Heritage: Historical Archaeology of the Overseas Chinese*, a signature treatment of Chinese archaeology in North America. She also has provided bibliographies (Wegars 1985, 1993). Previous archaeological research concerning early Chinese immigrants has been conducted in B.C. has focused upon a variety of topics including early mining camps. A major work concerning Chinese miners in B.C. is Chen's (2001) dissertation concerning Chinese miners around the gold-rush town of Barkerville from the 1860s to the 1940s. That work was subsequent to an extensive survey documenting 34 Chinese sites in the North Cariboo district that was conducted by Hobler and Chen (1994). A faunal analysis of a Chinese site associated with a community hall in Barkerville has also been conducted as a master's thesis (Koskitalo 1995).

Additional investigations of Chinese mining sites have occurred south of the border in Idaho (Wegars 1993; Sisson 1993; Fee 1993; Longenecker and Stapp 1993). Other archaeological investigations concerning early Chinese immigrants in B.C. includes an investigation of a structure with an late 19th/early 20th century Chinese occupation (Will and Rousseau 1994), an analysis of a Chinese and Japanese refuse dump associated with the Glenrose Cannery National Historic site (Wilson 1987), and two surveys of Chinese cemeteries (Sauer and Pasacreta 2001; Witt 1998).



Figure 3 (above): Wok fragment from plaza area (Photo by Dave Hall). Figure 4 (below): Opium tin with Chinese inscription in center near House H (Photo by Bill Angelbeck).

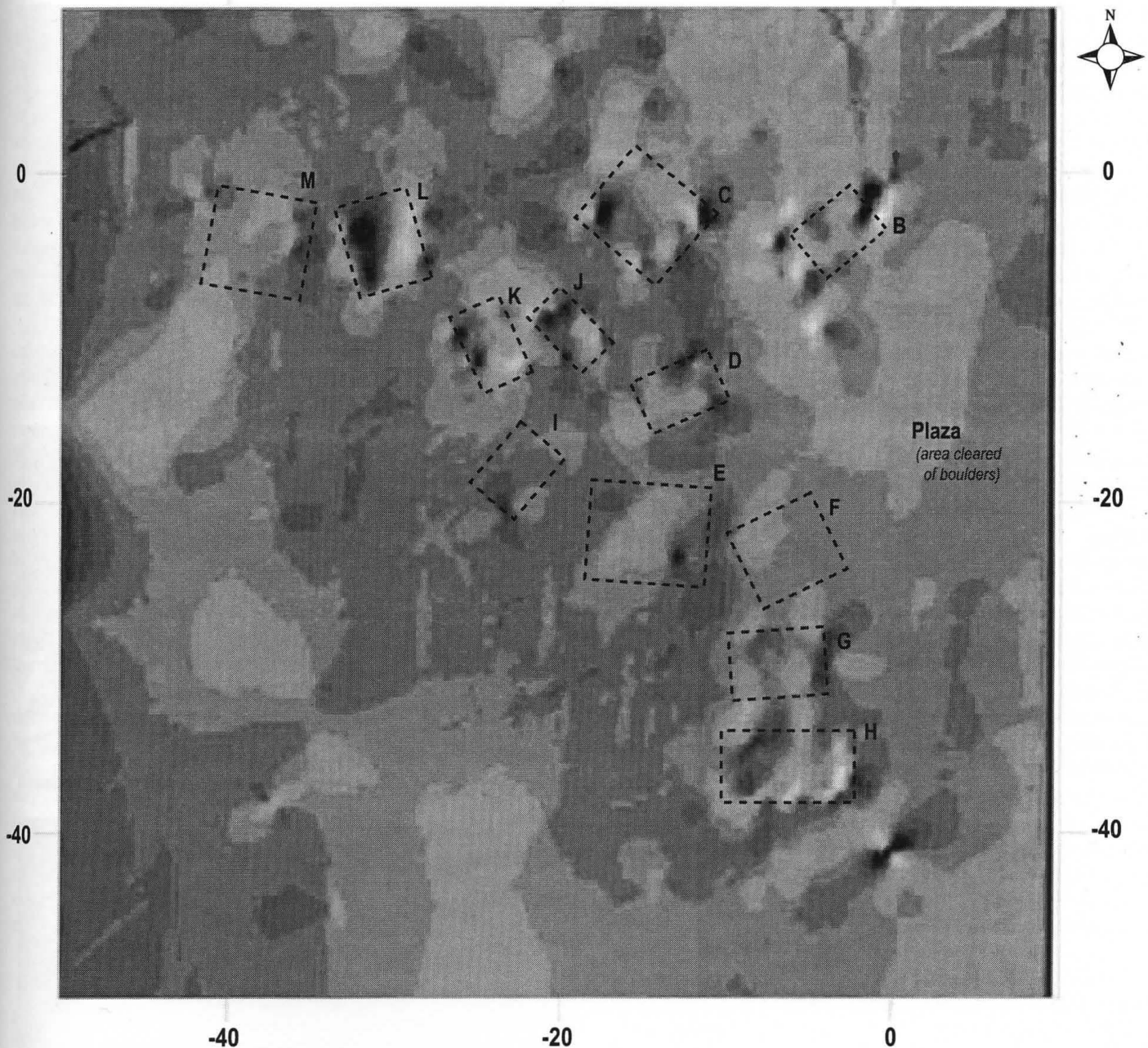


Figure 5. Shaded relief map of historic Chinese camp with stone-wall structures indicated.

of 30 cm below surface. We identified 11 structures (HSs B to L; Figure 5) concentrated in the western portion of the terrace, roughly oriented around an apparent open plaza area that also had been cleared of boulders. Most of the low walls, again, were well-constructed (Figure 1).

The rock-walled structures on average, measure 5.6 m long, 4.6 m wide, enclose an area of approximately 27 m², and have a 64 cm wide entrance. The largest structure is 7.6 m long, 6.7 m wide, and encloses an area of approximately 48.3 m², while the smallest is 4.7 m long, 2.6 m wide, and encloses an area of approximately 12.4 m². The height of the walls reached 1 m in a couple of structures, while in others the height is as low as 20 cm, possibly dependent upon the somewhat uneven nature of landform on which they were sitting. These walls undoubtedly

were set beneath a roof of some form, perhaps a canvas cover stretched across beams or a full timber roof.

Similar rock-walled structures have been identified at Chinese Miners' sites in the East Kootenays Gold Rush (see Figure 7) and in Idaho (see Figure 8). Historic photographs of Chinese railworker camps associated with the construction of the CPR (see Figure 6) do not display such structures but this does not necessarily indicate that they are not related to the CPR construction as different structures may have been built in different areas for a variety of reasons, dependent upon the length of stay.

The historic artifacts at the Chinese camp, both surface and subsurface, included metal, ceramic, glass, and rubber fragments associated with a variety of functions: There were architectural materials such as square nails and bolts, formal tools such as a

large axehead, kitchen cookware and dining utensils including a wok fragment (Figure 3) and numerous brownware and white-ware ceramic fragments, and clothing materials such as metal buttons and clasps. Of particular interest were the opium tins displaying a variety of Chinese inscriptions (Figure 4) similar to those described by Wylie and Fike (1993:287-88, Figure 67b). There were also numerous bottles and glass fragments. Much of the unidentified metal fragments consisted of sheet metal, likely representing bucket and tin fragments, stove pieces, and so on.

While the artifacts recovered from within and surrounding the rock-walled structures are clearly Chinese in origin, it is not possible based on the archaeological evidence recovered to date to definitely establish whether or not the camp is associated with railway construction or mining activities. Only through further archaeological research at the site can this be firmly established. Some archival photographs do provide some information regarding the period and provide some insight into early Chinese housing during the late 19th century. A photograph from a Chinese gold rush camp in the East Kootenays shows a similarly constructed rock-wall structure with boulders stacked into low walls (Figure 7). This particular structure has a wooden entry and superstructure for roofing and may be indicative of how the structures at site EaRj-67 were constructed. Another example comes from the work of Priscilla Wegars, who recorded Chinese rock-walled houses associated with the gold rush along the Lower Salmon River in Idaho (Figure 8). Alternatively, there is a photograph from around 1883 of a Chinese railworkers' housing area near Mt. Cheam along the Fraser River to the south (Figure 6). It shows rows of well-made log cabins, whereas our site contained rock-walled structures, that likely were covered in tarps or otherwise more temporary wooden structures overhead. These log cabins were likely intended for longer-term use, as opposed to the short-term nature of the work on the railroad through the Kwoiek Creek area.

Some additional lines of inquiry

This site shows great promise for further investigations concerning the historical archaeology of early Chinese immigrants in B.C. Many questions lingered for us, not to mention the main question of narrowing down whether the camp is associated with gold rush miners or railway workers. If the site does represent a Chinese railworker camp, then the camp is likely associated with the construction of the CPR railroad in the 1880s and would likely represent an occupation of a single season. As the construction extended past the Kwoiek Creek Valley, another camp would have been constructed further down river causing the abandonment of the site. If the site represents a gold mining camp, then the site also was occupied for a relatively short time period with it being established in the late 1850s or early 1860s. In either case, this site should be of interest to historic archaeologists, not only for its Chinese character, but also its relatively narrow period of occupation.

Moreover, there are some other possible avenues of historic archaeological investigations at the site. As mentioned previously, there is another historic camp on the west side of the railroad bridge. It is smaller, composed of only two log buildings, and contains the remnants of a large steel stove. Otherwise, the



Figure 6 (top): Housing built for Chinese labourers working on the CPR, around the Fraser-Cheam area to the south, ca. 1883 [Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, I-30869].

Figure 7 (middle): Abandoned remains of a Chinese miner's cabin on the north side of the Wildhorse River, East Kootenays (N. L. Bill Barlee, Photographer, 1969) [Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, I-60906].

Figure 8 (below): Historic Chinese rock house near Half and Half Rapids, Lower Salmon River, Idaho (Photo by Priscilla Wegars, used with permission).

thick green and brown bottles and other artifacts appear similar to those identified at the Chinese camp, although no wok fragments, opium tins, ceramics, or other artifacts of distinctly Chinese origin were identified at this location. Instead of low-rock wall structures, the structures present are typical log cabins with large timbers acting as foundations for the walls. We posit that it is possible that these structures could have been occupied at the same time as the rock-walled structures with occidental workers and/or line bosses being camped on one side of the bridge with the Chinese workers camped on the other, suggesting a horizontal separation based on race which appears to be reflected in the horizontal distribution of artifacts and features on either side of the railway bridge.

Another line of investigation could involve the investigation of the possible relationship of the rock-walled structures to the prehistoric component that underlies the Chinese camp. Some of the rock-walled structures are deep, enclosing small basin-shaped depressions excavated into the surface to create a relatively flat floor. It is possible, given the distribution of isolated housepit structures approximately 100 to 150 m to the west and east of the structures, that the occupants of the site may have utilized an already pre-existing depression (or depressions) in order to build their structures. We tested one such house looking for a possible housepit housefloor within the structure with negative results. However further structures could be tested to establish if pre-existing housepit depressions were recycled by the makers of the rock-walled structures.

Finally, while this is certainly a unique site, it almost certainly does postdate 1846, and accordingly, it therefore is not protected by the *Heritage Conservation Act*. As we are all aware, B.C. unlike other jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S., does not afford any protection to historic sites. However, this site almost certainly merits further investigation and protection. The site is unique in that the component represents an intensive occupation with numerous structural remains that likely represents only a season or several seasons of occupation over a matter of weeks or a few months in the mid to late 1800s.

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Athapaskan Migrations

The Archaeology of Eagle Lake, British Columbia

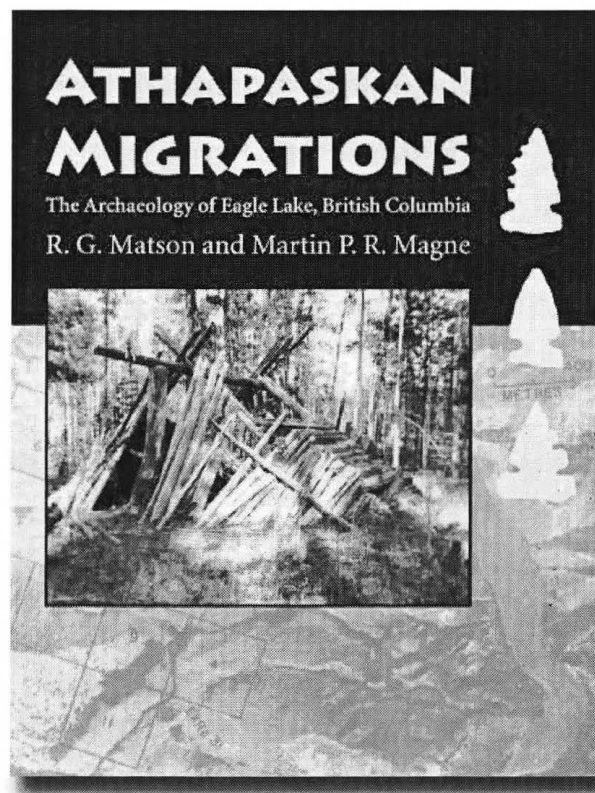
By R.G. Matson and Martin P.R. Magne

University of Arizona Press, Tucson, AZ. 224 pp., illus., online appendices. ISBN 978-0816524891 (hardcover). US\$65.00. 2007.

Anthropologists have long been fascinated with the problem of Athapaskan migrations. No other socio-linguistic group in North America has moved such great distances and adopted such disparate life styles. Athapaskan peoples harvested moose and caribou in the northern Subarctic, hunted sea mammals on the Northwest Coast, collected salmon in the streams and rivers of the Canadian Plateau, drove bison on the Great Plains, and became horticulturalists and pastoralists in the American Southwest. Yet, despite separation of hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles between groups, the spoken language and some idiosyncratic cultural practices remained virtually identical. How could this be? When did it happen?

Many archaeologists have sought to answer these questions and unfortunately, a large proportion failed typically due to weak methodological approaches and slim data. One of the main problems, perhaps *the problem*, derives from the nature of those movements and the apparent ability of many Athapaskan groups to shift the fundamentals of their basic socio-economies to adjust to local settings. If the Athapaskans lived by the dictum "When in Rome..." then recognizing their appearance in new environments might be virtually impossible from an archaeological standpoint. This could be particularly true if they not only shifted their basic food-getting tactics but altered many of their artifact manufacture styles as well. So, is it game over? Do archaeologists once again look to the cultural anthropologists and historical linguists to fill in the gaps?

Fortunately, the answer is no. During the 1970s, archaeologists R.G. Matson and Martin Magne undertook a long term study of Athapaskan archaeology in interior British Columbia with the intent of expanding our understanding of Athapaskan migrations within this province and by proxy elsewhere in North America. Their research program has persisted for over two decades and now culminates in the publication of *Athapaskan Migrations*. The book and its associated web-materials provided a wealth of data, much of it previously unpublished, on the archaeology of the Canadian Plateau with a focus on the Eagle Lake region. In order to avoid problems encountered by previous researchers, the authors take a multi-pronged approach to identifying and tracking the Athapaskan people in the archaeological record. The result is an important new contribution to Athapaskan archaeology and



to the archaeological study of ethnicity in general.

Matson and Magne present their analytical strategy, termed the "Parallel Direct Historical Approach" in their introductory chapter. This clever methodological approach permits the authors to compare cultural chronologies from adjacent regions, one with a likely Athapaskan presence, the other without. Recognition and interpretation of Athapaskan cultural patterns is enhanced by a thorough review of historical, ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological studies of the Chilcotin people in Chapter One. Linda Burnard-Hogarth's description of ethnoarchaeological research in the Eagle Lake region is a particularly significant contribution in this context. Chapters Two and Three summarize results of field surveys and excavations conducted at the Mouth of the Chilcotin, Eagle Lake and Taseko Lakes. These chapters provide a rare detailed examination of the Plateau Pithouse tradition (PPt) and late period Athapaskan settlement and subsistence patterns. It is truly fascinating to recognize indicators of PPt and "Lillooet Phenomenon" occupations in the Chilcotin area clearly associated with distinctive Athapaskan populations during the closing centuries of the prehistoric period. The final chapters of the book are dedicated to teasing out evidence for Athapaskan occupations and subsequently considering implications for understanding Athapaskan migrations on a more grand scale.

Archaeologists (particularly from the Great Plains) have often relied upon projectile points and other stylistically sensitive artifacts as markers of ethnicity. Matson and Magne have been contributors to this approach and this research is reprised and expanded in the current effort. Multivariate statistics are applied to their projectile data set to discriminate Athapaskan from PPt projectile points. Results of the projectile point study

are then tested with two subsequent analyses focusing on lithic tool and debitage assemblages. The reader will need a significant amount of training in statistical analysis to fully appreciate these studies. And while aficionados may quibble over some details of variable definition and model development, results are clearly provocative. Whether examined from the standpoint of features, tool assemblages, projectile points, or even debitage, the conclusion is inescapable that a culturally distinct pattern of occupation appears in the Eagle Lakes area during the terminal late prehistoric period, presumably the direct ancestors of today's Athapaskan speaking Chilcotin people.

After an exceptionally detailed review of the archaeological literature on Athapaskan migrations spanning the Subarctic to the Southwest, Matson and Magne consider the implications of their findings for tracking and explaining the broader pattern. One of the important implications of this discussion concerns the visibility of the Athapaskan groups despite their significant socio-economic transformations. The authors suggest that certain idiosyncratic practices and stylistic markers might survive the sometimes dramatic cultural transformations undertaken by the Athapaskans. Such things as northern forest adapted settlement and subsistence behavior, rectangular houses, contracting stemmed projectile points, and certain shield warrior rock art designs could serve to differentiate Athapaskans from other superficially similar groups. These conclusions permit the authors to propose that the Athapaskan groups may have traveled to the Southwest via the western mountains rather than the Great Plains (e.g., the Avonlea complex) as has been so often argued by others.

While this book offers an exciting new approach to tracking ethnic groups and offers significant implications for understanding Athapaskan movements, it also opens up many new questions. Some proposed markers of an Athapaskan presence such as settlement patterns and lithic tool and debitage assemblage variability could be identified not as unique ethnic markers or emblems as much as byproducts of adaptive strategies that happen to be utilized by these Athapaskan peoples. The archaeology of the Great Plains Middle Missouri area tells us that multiple socio-ethnic/linguistic groups (ancestral Cheyenne, Arikara, Mandan and Hidatsa) could participate in a single adaptive strategy (in this case Plains village horticulture), thus making it difficult to recognize ethnicity from the standpoint of functional variation in lithic assemblages. In the Chilcotin case, it could mean that a more northerly derived collector settlement and subsistence strategy was transported into parts of southern British Columbia effectively replacing the previous PPT winter-village strategy but, unlike the Middle Missouri case, not crossing any ethnic boundaries (e.g., from ancestral Athapaskan to Salish populations). However, this does not mean that sometimes particular artifact styles could not be transmitted between groups providing ambiguity in some sites. Future researchers will benefit from careful consideration of these issues. Meanwhile, Matson and Magne offer us an innovative and significant contribution to the archaeology of ethnicity and Athapaskan migrations.

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