

Archaeological Investigations at the Salmon Beds

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Conclusion

The Salmon Beds Site was a large fishing station locality utilized by First Nations people over the last 1000 years until the establishment of reserves in 1885. The development of the town of Athalmer, B.C. and the utilization of the riverbank for warehouses and steamship docks likely had a considerable impact on the river banks nearest Windermere Lake. The portion of the site test excavated is the most intact of the remaining portions of the site. On-going erosion of the Columbia River continues to degrade the site and it is probable that considerable portions have already been lost.

Eighteen square metres of deposit were tested in 1999. This is a small sample of the total site area. The test units were dug in the most easily excavated, less water saturated portions of the site. Whether these tests are representative of the larger site is unknown.

The investigations in 1999 show that the site resulted from repeated occupations within the last millenium. In that time, peoples of the Late Prehistoric Period utilized the site in fall and winter as a fishing station for Chinook salmon and hunted white-tailed deer and elk in the valley bottom. They may also have hunted bison as well. However, because of the references to the Ktunaxa crossing the Rocky Mountains to hunt to bison, there is a possibility that selected bison bones may have been brought to the Salmon Beds Site for working into bone tools. Nonetheless, several recent finds in the broader area suggest that there was a local bison population in the Upper Columbia area. Several bison bones have been identified in local collections and bison bone is also known from the Wild Horse River Site near Cranbrook (Blake 1981) and from Idaho (Cannon 1997). Similarly bison remains have been found at Lake Louise in the upper Bow Valley (Langemann pers. comm.) and bison blood has been identified on stone tools in Kootenay National Park (Heitzmann 1999).

Top of the World chert was the most commonly used material for making stone tools. Other stone types were used in only minor amounts. Most of the stone tool production at the site consisted of resharpenering or finishing stone tools and resulted in large numbers of small retouching flakes. Two exhausted cores, one Top of the World chert and one black chert indicated that primary manufacturing of tools was not a major activity at the site.

The large amounts of fire broken rock and the smashed bone fragments indicate that food processing was a major activity at the site and probably consisted of boiling salmon for oil extraction and animal bone for marrow extraction. No processing pits were found suggesting most of the processing occurred utilizing leather bags or baskets.

The bone tools recovered from the site and in particular the bone points collected from the erosional surfaces in the past indicated that most of the salmon was obtained by spearing. Historic references to weirs at or near this location suggest weirs were likely used to funnel the salmon into a confined area where they could be speared. Only one possible net sinker was found suggesting that netting was not a common fishing technique at this site.

The absence of house pits at the Salmon Beds should be seen as a reflection of the seasonality of use of the site in the fall and possibly early winter. As pit houses were utilized in the coldest parts of the year, their absence at the Salmon Beds should not be taken as an indicator of possible tribal association. Winter pit houses are known from elsewhere in the Upper Columbia. In addition, because of the close proximity to the

water table, it is unlikely that house pits would be excavated on this terrace.

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