

Home
Executive Summary
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
Introduction
History
Material Recovered
Site Discovery
Site Description
Research Questions
Methodology
Public Education Prog.
Results
Stratigraphy
Material Recovered
Radio Carbon Results
Conclusion
Regional Perspective
References

## Archaeological Investigations at the Salmon Beds

### Executive Summary

The Salmon Beds Archaeological Site (EdQa 121) was an important campsite and food processing area occupied repeatedly over the last 1000 years. The site is situated along the Columbia River just north of the outlet from Windermere Lake.

Archaeological excavations were conducted over a one month period in the spring of 1999. Eighteen 1 x 1 meter units were excavated. All of the excavated soils were water screened to ensure maximum data recovery.

The objectives of the project were to recover preserved organic materials, to determine the nature of the cultural deposits, their age and cultural relationships, and to reveal information of the past utilization of the upper Columbia River basin. An additional objective was to establish baseline recording to facilitate monitoring the rate of river erosion.

Historic and ethnographic records indicate that the site was an important fishing station for the Ktunaxa and Kinbasket First Nations until the establishment of reserve lands in 1885. Fur traders lead by David Thompson in 1807 also fished salmon along the Columbia at the nearby Kutenai House. Recorded salmon runs began in mid August and continued to mid October.

The excavations revealed multiple occupations within the upper 70 cm of silt deposits. These date from the twentieth century historic occupation of Athalmer to approximately 1000 years ago. All of the material can be assigned to the Late Prehistoric and Historic Periods. Materials recovered include a variety of stone tools and stone tool detritus, fire broken rock and animal bones. Stone tools recovered include small triangular shaped side notched arrowheads, scrapers, a hammerstone, and other generic stone tools. The lithic assemblage is dominated by Top of the World Chert, a grey to black chert derived from a quarry approximately 80 kilometers to the southeast. Small amounts of other lithic materials include brown chalcedony, black chert and obsidian.

Animal bones provided an important record of the subsistence base of the Late Prehistoric inhabitants. Species identified were Chinook salmon, burbot, sucker, bison, white-tailed deer, elk, black bear, beaver, and dog. The Chinook salmon were identified from otoliths (n=8) (a dense earbone) which provide a unique record of a prehistoric salmon population. More detailed study on these are currently underway. The presence of salmon was anticipated but the relatively low numbers of represented individuals suggests that the runs may have been small, that this site was not used heavily or that erosion has removed significant portions of the site. The presence of white-tailed deer and elk indicates that the valley bottom of the Columbia was likely vegetated in mosaic of open meadows and grasslands interspersed with trees and shrubs. The presence of bison is indicated by several large bone fragments and a complete bison metatarsal. The bison were most likely hunted locally although ethnographically the Ktunaxa are known to have crossed to the east slopes of the Rocky Mountains to hunt bison there as well.

Two bone decorative items were recovered: a small bone bead and a deer incisor inscribed with 4 parallel lines. Bone tools included a bone flesher, an antler wedge, an elk antler tine, and an awl made of a bear fibula.

A large amount of fire broken rock (127.7 kg) indicates that processing of food resources was a major activity at the site. This likely included processing salmon as well as ungulates hunted near the site.

The Salmon Beds Site (EdQa 121) is one of a very few excavated sites in the Upper Columbia basin and provides a view of a segment of life in the time just before the arrival of white settlement. The occupants came to the Salmon Beds in the fall to catch the last of the Chinook salmon runs. They probably constructed a weir to funnel the fish into a containment area where they could be easily speared. Part of the group may have remained in the Upper Columbia trench hunting deer, elk, bear and bison into the winter when snows at upper elevations would have pushed the ungulate populations into the valley bottom. They obtained most of their stone for making stone tools from the Top of the World area. The predominance of this material indicates that they had easy access to it and probably obtained it first hand.

These excavations, while limited in extent, have contributed to a better understanding of the dynamics of First Nations' use of the Upper Columbia region in the last millennium.



Figure 4:  
Ktunaxa elder Phyllis Nicholas (centre right) said a prayer to the creator at the start of the excavations. (Parks Canada 9001T-126t).

[ [Home](#) ] [ [Executive Summary](#) ] [ [Acknowledgements](#) ] [ [Table of Contents](#) ] [ [Introduction](#) ] [ [History](#) ] [ [Prev. Investigations](#) ]  
[ [Site Discovery](#) ] [ [Site Description](#) ] [ [Research Questions](#) ] [ [Methodology](#) ] [ [Public Education Prog.](#) ] [ [Results](#) ] [ [Stratigraphy](#) ]  
[ [Material Recovered](#) ] [ [Radio Carbon Results](#) ] [ [Conclusion](#) ] [ [Regional Perspective](#) ] [ [References](#) ]