

Yukon Archaeology - Highlights of the 2002 field season:

Ice Patch Research Project

2002 proved to be another year of minimal snow melt in alpine areas of southwest Yukon. Yukon Environment and the Yukon Archaeology Programme continued mapping of reference ice patches (Granger, Thandlat, Friday Creek). Limited monitoring was carried out by Greg Hare (Yukon Archaeology Programme) in conjunction with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. In September, a large, fragmented throwing dart was recovered from the ice at Thandlat. The reassembled dart measured nearly 2m in length and still had the base of a stone point hafted into the shaft, tied with sinew. The dart has been dated at about 4300 BP. In the same month, Yukon hunter Shane Oakley recovered a complete arrow with antler projectile point melted out from a previously undocumented ice patch. A date of about 650 BP was obtained for the arrow.

In the early winter of 2003, a sample of artefacts from the Ice Patch collections was taken to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., where scientists were able to identify a number of the bird species whose feathers were used in the fletching of the spears and arrows. Results of this research will be published soon.

Tombstone Corridor and Ts'ok giitlin in Tombstone Park

Further archaeological inventory was carried out in the Tombstone Park and Tombstone Corridor in 2002 as a cooperative project of the Yukon Archaeology Programme and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Office. The field work was part of ongoing research to assist in development of management plans for these areas as required by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement. The Tombstone Corridor is designated as that section of the Dempster Highway which traverses the Tombstone Park, extending 500 m either side of the highway. Twenty sites were revisited in the Tombstone Corridor in the area between the Tombstone Mountain Campground and the North Fork Pass; two new sites were identified in the same area.



Inventory of heritage sites in the northeast portion of Tombstone Park, in an area called "Ts'ok giitlin" ('spruce fringe') was carried out with the assistance of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, Ingrid Kritsch, Research Director, and Walter Alexie, elder. The majority of sites in this area are camps and caches likely related to the early 20th century fall/winter caribou hunt when the Tetl'it Gwich'in and Han were hunting to supply meat to the Dawson markets.



Forty Mile

The historic townsite of Forty Mile is located at the confluence of the Fortymile and Yukon Rivers, about 49 miles down river of Dawson City. The site is identified in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement for designation as a Yukon Heritage Site heritage site, and is owned and managed by the First Nation and the Government of Yukon. The Forty Mile Archaeology Project has now wapped up its fifth summer of field investigations as a joint project of Yukon Heritage Resources and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, under the direction of consulting archaeologist T.J. Hammer, with the assistance of Chris Thomas. In 2002 the crew of six Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in students completed excavation of a test trench in prehistoric and contact/historic deposits of the site, and completed mapping of features in the historic townsite. As well, further testing of enigmatic depressions on Mission Island was carried out to determine if these may have been semi-subterranean dwellings. Testing was inconclusive, unfortunately. A significant find of the summer was the discovery of an intact section of the Fort Constantine palisade eroding out of the river bank.



Nordenskiold Wetland Habitat Protection Area

The Nordenskiold Wetland Habitat Protection Area was established the Little Salmon and Carmacks First Nations Final Agreement. The HPA is located just south of Carmacks, along the Nordenskiold River (Tsäwnjik Chu). Phase II of Heritage Inventory in the area was carried by consulting archaeologist, T.J. Hammer with the assistance of Chris Thomas, and two LSCFN students. The 2002 investigations focussed on testing of a microblade locality (JkVa-1) identified in 2001 and further mapping and documentaiton of a traditional camp in the study area to provide additional information on the human history of the HPA. The associaton of a side-notched point with the microblade componet at JkVa-1 is of interest, although component mixing is a possibility. Charcoal samples from a hearth feature (containing also calcined bone fragments and burned soil) have been submitted for dating. A total of 22 features were mapped at traditional camp locality, including brush camps, caches, a log cabin and tent frames. LSCFN elder Wilfred Charlie assisted in identifying site features and provided information on site history.



Lansing Post

Lansing Post was established as a heritage site under the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun Final Agreement. The site is located in central Yukon at the confluence of the Stewart River and Lansing Creek. Heritage investigations at Lansing Post in 2002 were intended to determine historic site boundaries and to attempt to locate a traditional village site reported to be just upstream of Lansing Post on Lansing Creek. Investigations were carried out by T.J. Hammer and Chris Thomas with the assistance of First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun members Steve Buyck and Stewart Moses, and Lansing resident, Bruce Mitford. Significant erosion has occurred along both Lansing Creek and the Stewart River. It is possible that the location of the village has washed away. A large portion of the original site of Lansing Post has been lost to bank erosion as well.



Other Projects

Greg Hare and Ruth Gotthardt (Yukon Archaeology Programme) undertook preliminary investigations and recovery of a WW II aircraft wreck near Squanga Lake in southern Yukon. In 1944, a P-39 Airacobra crashed in the area and initial survey work by Murray Biggins of the Yukon Transportation Museum Society indicated that a substantial section of the wreck was still buried at the site. Systematic field testing resulted in the recovery of hundreds of heavily burned and fragmented pieces of aircraft wreck, but no evidence of the fuselage or engine.



Projects by T.J. Hammer included a brief survey on the Yukon River between Dawson City and Deadwood Creek with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and a heritage resource impact assessment in the proposed Whitehorse Copper subdivision development area.



Public Involvement

Once again in 2002, members of the public worked with Yukon Archaeology Programme in locating archaeological sites and recovering artefacts at risk. Their efforts to preserve and protect Yukon's legacy of the past are greatly appreciated: David Jones reported a scatter of artifacts in the road right-of-way south of Carmacks (archaeological site KaVa-2); Lenny Charlie turned in a beautifully worked stone biface knife from the road through KbVa-11 in the Tatchun Lake area; Katherine Robinson recovered for the Yukon collection the proximal half of a very well made lanceolate point from JdVa-4 on Kusawa Lake; Colin Bearisto submitted a large obsidian cortex flake collected from JdVa-20 in the Takhini River campground; Catherine Kennedy submitted a chert chip from JeUs-26 in the McLean Lake area, near Whitehorse, Paul Mantle turned into the Archaeology office a partially worked and very waterworn stone tool from the Marsh Lake; and also from the shores of Marsh Lake, Raven Tsandaya submitted a small collection of stone tools which are being cast in the Heritage Resources Restoration and Reproduction lab for display in the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. office. As already mentioned, Shane Oakley recovered for the Yukon collection a complete arrow with antler projectile point while hunting in the alpine in August 2002. The arrow dates to about 650 years before present.