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Just over the mountain: the archaeology of gold rush history in the Fraser Canyon

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Introduction

Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) completed its third field school season during summer 2013 in the Fraser Canyon between the communities of Spuzzum and Boston Bar. Ongoing goals of this project are to provide historic information to local First Nations communities, at their direction, to empirically investigate the colonial history of the Fraser Canyon in the 1800s, and to provide students an opportunity to work on a large-scale archaeology project using methods typical to the current cultural resource management (CRM) industry in B.C.

Of particular historic importance are relationships between indigenous, mining, and settler communities during that time, and especially the role of indigenous people in the pivotal historic events that took place between 1858 (the Fraser Canyon gold rush) and 1863 (the completion of the Cariboo Wagon Road). Past projects conducted by KPU have identified the first archaeological evidence of the Canyon War of 1858, and have accumulated detailed archaeological data related to the indigenous communities of Kopchitchin, Tuckkwiowhum, and Scaucy. Prior to the commencement of our project in 2009, none of these sites had even been recorded in the provincial heritage register (Pegg, Greenhalgh, Mainwaring and Vanderwel, 2009; Pegg, Besla, Coffey, Froese, and Haugo, 2011).

Research in 2013 was conducted at Kalulaa'Ex (DlRi-9), Lake House (DkRi-85), and two unnamed culturally modified tree (CMT) sites on Lake Mountain (DkRi-74 and -86). Kalulaa'Ex is a pre-contact habitation site extending to the Shuswap Horizon (3500-2400 BP). Lake House was a roadhouse constructed by miners in 1858 during the Fraser Canyon gold rush. All the sites are united by a shared history within the Fraser Canyon and are connected by the Tikwalus Trail, an ancient indigenous travel route which connected the communities of Tikwalus and Tuckkwiowhum via Lake and Gate Mountain, avoiding the more difficult route through the lower elevations of the Fraser Canyon (Figure 1). Fieldwork was completed under HCA Permit #2013-0088.

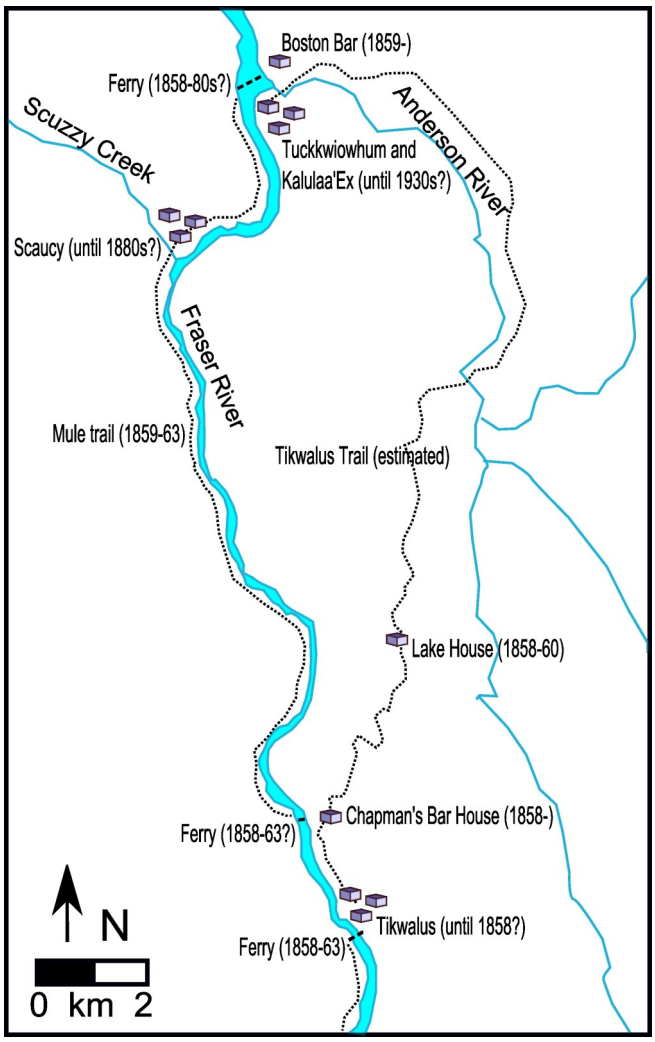

Figure 1. Reconstruction of the cultural landscape of the Fraser Canyon in the 1850s

Field Methods: CMT Sites

Survey and collection of dendrochronological samples was conducted at CMT sites DkRi-74, -85, and -86. For DkRi-74, survey teams were responsible for 100% coverage of 100x100m grid squares based on UTM coordinates. Students traversed each grid square following compass bearings and spaced 5m apart from each other, back and forth until the entire grid square was complete. The total area surveyed in this manner at DkRi-74 was 8.7 ha. DkRi-85 and -86 had far fewer

CMTs and were much smaller in area, and therefore did not require the same survey grid methodology.

When CMTs were encountered, they were recorded to the standards outlined by the CMT Handbook (Archaeology Branch 2001), a GPS waypoint was collected (minimum of four satellites and with averaging function turned on), and an increment borer was used to collect a tree ring sample. CMTs were given a unique number, which was attached to each tree with a plastic tag.

Locations considered to have potential for subsurface sites were tested using shovels and 6mm mesh screens. Criteria used to determine potential included the presence of high concentrations of rectangular CMTs, proximity to clean water, and flat, well-drained terrain. Subsurface tests were approximately 40x40cm in area, and were generally excavated to a depth of 30-40cm below surface, where glacial till was typically encountered. Subsurface tests were also waypointed with GPS and were refilled when complete.

Field Methods: Excavation

Kalulaa'Ex (DlRi-9) and Lake House (DkRi-85) were the subject of conventional excavations, utilizing a combination of natural and arbitrary layers and levels. Excavation units were 1x1m in area, were excavated by trowel and brush, and sediments were screened through 6mm mesh. Excavation units were judgementally located within areas of the site determined to have highest potential to provide baseline data, such as occupation date and depth, since neither site had been investigated previously in significant detail.

Lab Methods

Increment core samples from CMTs were glued to cardboard and sanded with fine-grit sandpaper. Scar dates were obtained using methods outlined in Barrett and Arno (1988) and Jozsa (1988) via binocular dissection microscopes or digital USB microscopes. Artifacts from excavations were identified and catalogued using Horn (2008), Jones and Sullivan (1985), Rousseau (2008), Sutton and Arkush (2007), Van der Flier-Keller and McMillan (1987), BLM /SHA (n.d.), and online search for historic artifact photographs.

Results: CMT Sites

At DkRi-74, 147 CMTs were documented, with 56 providing reliable dates for cedar bark harvest (Figure 2). The majority of the CMTs (n=82) were tapered bark-strips, but large numbers of rectangular bark-strips were also present. In addition, there were lesser numbers of girdled and aboriginally-logged CMTs. All were western red cedar, with the exception of a single subalpine fir CMT. A single CMT was recorded at DkRi-86, while 10 CMTs were recorded at DkRi-85 (Lake House). Subsurface tests at DkRi-74 were negative.

CMT dates show that peak cedar harvest occurred in the decades of the 1860s and 1870s, with a depressed period of harvest in the 1850s and the 1880s. The mean date for cedar harvest is 1860. The ten CMTs at DkRi-5 allowed four reliable dates ranging between 1805 and 1843. All of these dates are earlier than the construction of the historic structures present at this site.

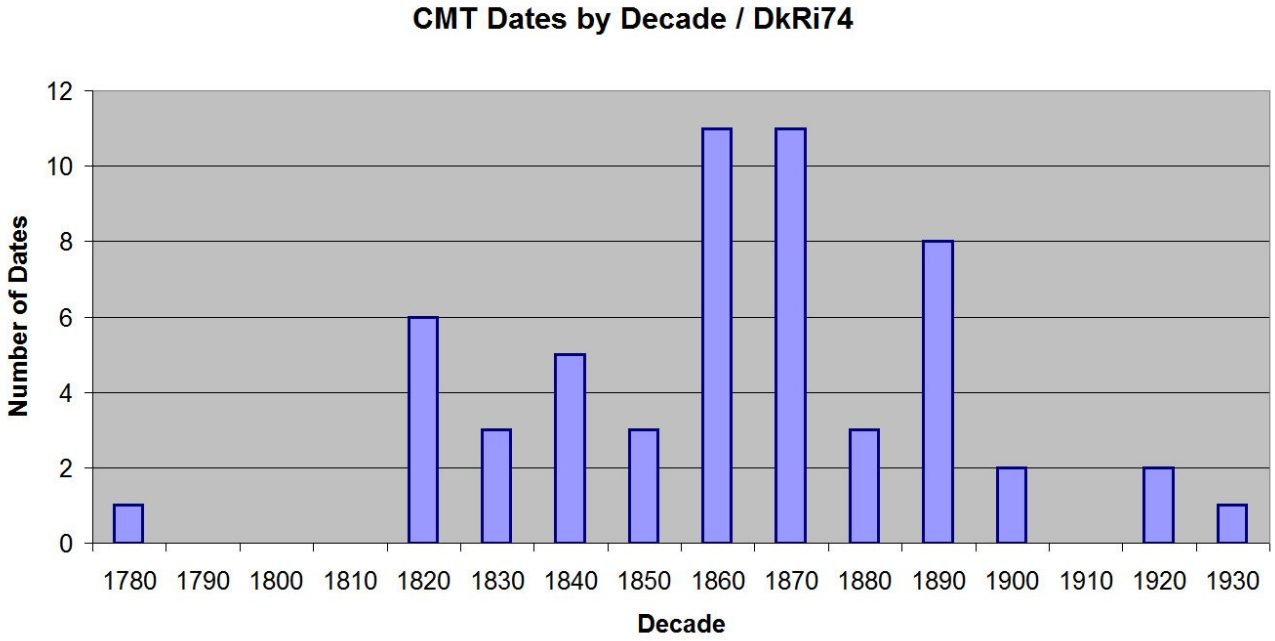

Figure 2. CMT dates (n=56) from DkRi 74.

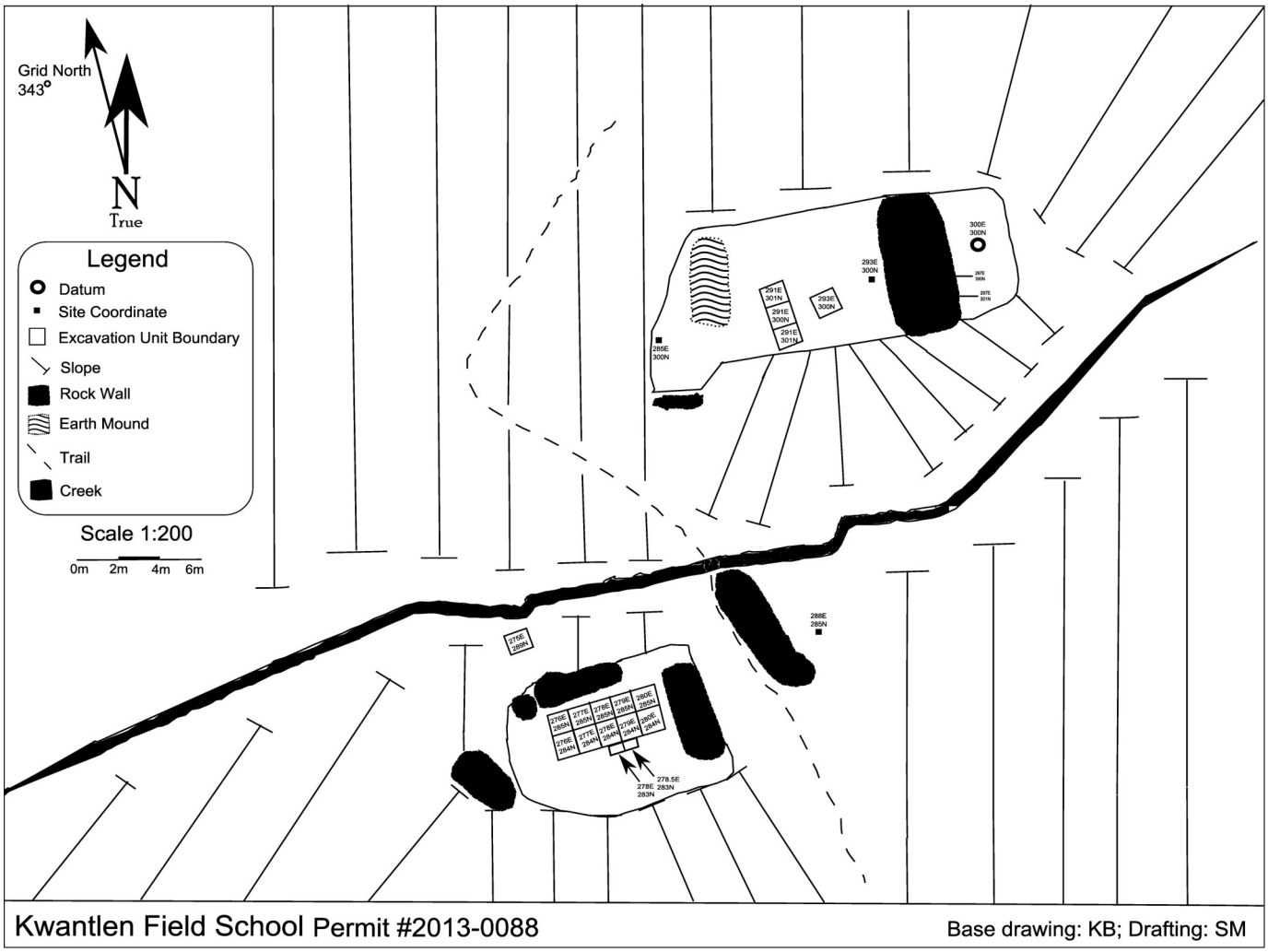

Figure 3. Excavations at Lake House (DkRi-85)

Results: Lake House

A total of 20m² of excavation units, primarily as conventional 1x1m units, was completed at Lake House (DkRi-85) within the remains of two structures on the opposite sides of a small creek. It is possible that the southern structure is the remains of a wall tent, while the northern structure is the remains of a log cabin (Figure 3).

Timbers and other wood features within both structures were consistently burned, including logs from the wall of the northern structure. This agrees well with primary documentary evidence pointing to Lake House having been burned in late summer 1860, contained in a letter written by W.H. Wetherill, who operated a ferry at Boston Bar starting in 1858. Errors are present in the original letter:

> *Dear Sir: I would be under great obligations to you, if you would informe me what course I must pearsue, as whether ther is any for redress of Government Officers of Burning my property the Lake House. Lake House was occupied by a man Gibson who moved in with out my concent ... was Gibson sold liquer to Indians but nobody ever swore to it on thes groundse Judge Sanders in place of arresting the man sent a officer up and destroyed the House by setting fire to it. I am not aware that this is Justice of Law in Enney Country and should be gratefull for the ..... advice of your Excellency - Your most obident servand WH Wetherill* (Wetherill, 1860).

A single pre-contact projectile point, dating to the Shuswap Horizon (3500-2400 BP) was identified in sediments underlying the 1858 construction. This projectile point was likely lost by a hunter using the Tikwalus Trail.

The remainder of material identified from the two structures at Lake House dates firmly to the late 1850s, with a total of 282 post-contact artifacts identified at this site. Artifacts include glass container fragments, solder seam cans, footwear, animal shoes, machine-cut square nails, buttons, ceramic pipes, coins, eating uten-

sils, and ammunition (Figure 4). Substantially lower artifact density within the northern structure, along with the presence of currency in the southern structure, leads to the interpretation that the northern structure acted as a bunkhouse while the southern structure was a store.

All livestock shoes came from the southern store structure and are summer shoes. During winter, the high elevation at Lake House made travel impossible for pack animals on the Tikwalus Trail. This trail climbs steeply from the bottom of the canyon to approximately 1000m asl as it traverses the height of land between the Fraser River and the Anderson (Figure 5).

An estimate of occupation date for the Lake House structures can be obtained via diagnostic artifacts (Table 1). Based on artifacts alone, it is reasonable to date the structures to the mid-1800s, probably the 1850s.

Three other primary documentary sources describe Lake House directly, and also help date the time of occupation. An unnamed San Francisco Bulletin correspondent writes about visiting Lake House in the early fall of 1858:

> *The Lake House, unlike its namesake near San Francisco, is nothing more than a large round tent, wherein you can get a good cup of coffee and beans adlibitum for one dollar. The lake is about 50 yards from the tent, and appears to poses nothing attractive. The owners of this half-way house seem to be making money, to judge by the number combing both coffee and whisky, which latter article was of the most villainous kind, as I was told. They originally came up the river, and arrived at Fort Yale "broke". They swapped off their whitehall boat for an old horse, which they packed with about as much as he could well stand under and who "gin out" at this place, where they concluded to stop and sell out what they had to passers-by.* (S.F. Bulletin, in Swindle, 2001)

Robert Frost, writing about events in late fall 1858, states:

> *We made Boston Bar that afternoon, beached the canoe as we could not take it through the canyon, we started up the mountain; night overtook us and we had to sleep in the snow . About nine o'clock next morning we made the Lake House on the trail, a mere shack; where the proprietor got us up a breakfast at $1.00 each. It consisted of hard tack, bacon, and beans with a raw onion. I thought at the time that it was about the best meal I had ever eaten. We started after breakfast, and made the river again just above Fort Yale, and stayed at Yale over night.* (Frost, 1931:209)

Figure 4. Selected artifacts from DkRi-85, from top left, clockwise: lock mechanism from a carpetbag; Chilean coin 1845; iron fork with wooden handle; summer mule shoe.

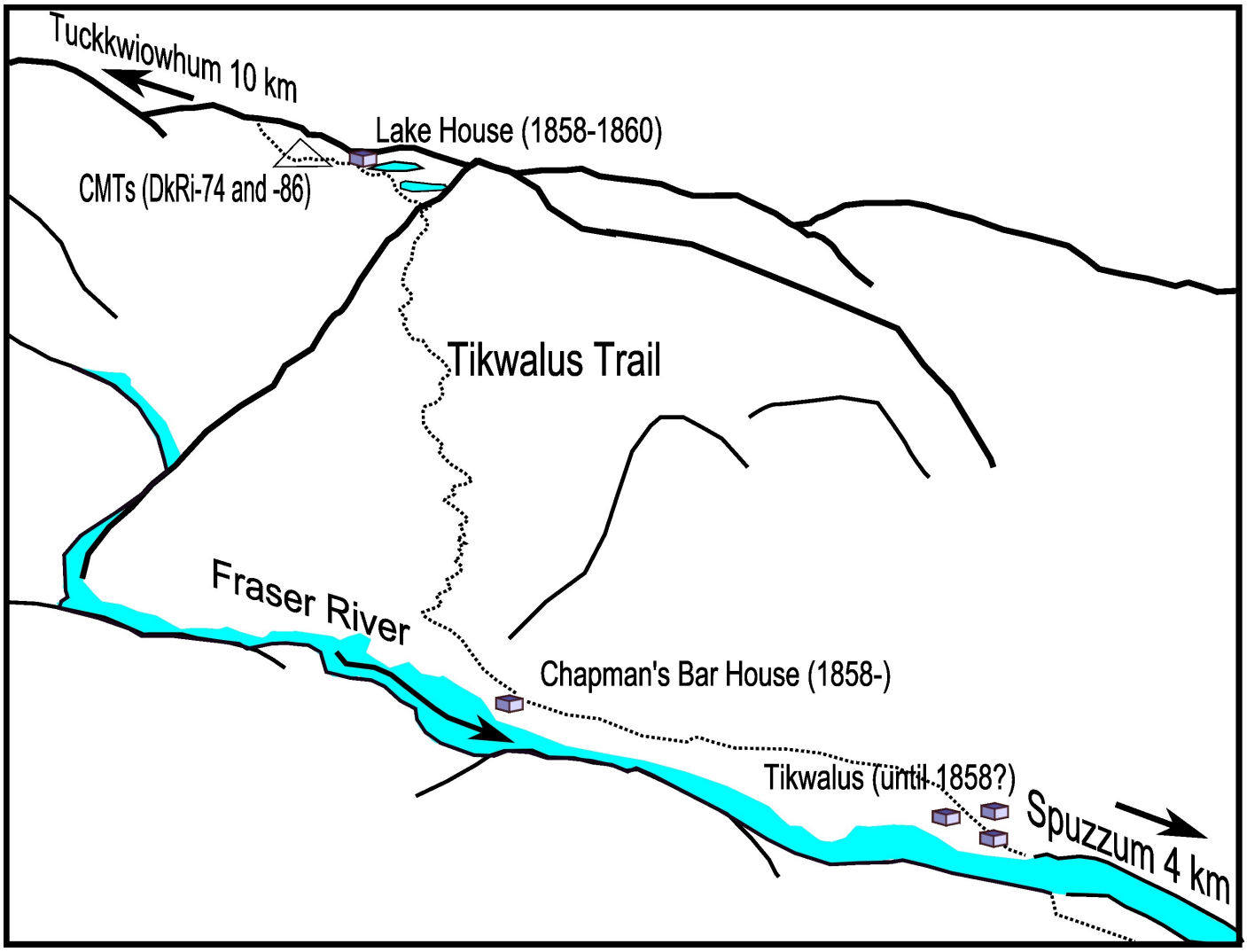

Figure 5. Landscape geography in the immediate vicinity of Lake House. The exact location of the Nlaka'pamux community of Tikwalus is currently unknown, and it may have been burned during the hostilities of 1858.

Artifact	Date
Prosser buttons (n=4)	Post-1849
Carpetbag (n=1)	Post 1840s
Chilean reales (n=2)	1844 and 1845
Flathead screw (n=1)	Post 1845
Machine cut square nails (n=85)	Mid 1800s
Glass dip molded liquor bottle fragments (n=49)	Mid 1800s, no later than 1860s
Cap and ball revolver ammunition (n=2)	Mid 1800s, probably 1850s

Table 1. Diagnostic artifacts from Lake House (DkRi-85).

Last, A.R. Lempriere of the Royal Engineers stayed overnight at this location on August 8 of 1859:

> *Left Boston Bar having procured 4 horses the day before and in the evening reached the Lake House situated on the top of a mountain. As it was very cold our men being tired we rushed to stay there the night: There was only one room in which we all slept with a lot of miners, Indians etc., in all numbering about 14 or 15: Bunks were arranged in three tiers all round the room, for the accommodation of travelers. I cannot say it was particularly agreeable.* (Lempriere, n.d. [1859]).

The Wetherill letter, along with the burned structural timbers at the site and the absence of artifacts clearly post-dating 1860 provide very firm evidence that Lake House was abandoned during that year after being burned on the orders of the judge in Yale. For dating the construction of the buildings at Lake House, it seems clear that it was built in 1858 by miners, probably American. There is no mention of construction at this location in A.C. Anderson's 1848 Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) journal (Anderson, 1878). The first mention of Lake House is the San Francisco Bulletin letter above (Swindle, 2001), which implies it was built in late summer or early fall 1858. The S.F. Bulletin statement also implies that there were two owners. One of them would have been W.H. Wetherill, who later went on to run the ferry at Boston Bar (Blakeborough, 2012; Patenaude, 1995:32).

Results: Kalulaa'Ex

This site is located adjacent to the historic Nlaka'pamux community of Tuckkwiowhum (Figure 1). Three 1x1m conventional excavation units were completed at Kalulaa'Ex (DlRi-9). Two of these units reached culturally sterile deposits at 1.5m below the surface, while the third was excavated to 1.1m below the surface. Artifacts documented at the site included diagnostic projectile points from the Shuswap and Plateau Horizons, showing occupation potentially from 3500 to 1200 BP (Rousseau, 2008). A total of 1645 artifacts was recovered, with an artifact density of 401 per m^3. Lithic artifacts were manufactured from vitreous and coarse grained basalt, cryptocrystalline silicates (chert or chalcedony), slate, and rhyolite. Coarse grained basalt and slate are available in the immediate vicinity of the site, while the higher quality vitreous basalt and silicates were probably imported, likely from the lithic distribution centre of Cache Creek.

Only modern post-contact artifacts were identified, and the site, although documented by Teit (1900), is not mentioned in the 1830 or 1878 censuses (Harris, 1997). It is unlikely that Kalulaa'Ex was occupied in the 1800s. This site contains undisturbed cultural deposits of a significant age and depth. Prior to the construction of the existing houses at Tuckkwiowhum IR#1, at least 30 housepits were evident at the site (Brolly and Howe, 1986; Pegg, 2003).

Discussion

The field investigations conducted by KPU in 2013 have provided significant information about the indigenous and colonial history of the Fraser Canyon which was previously unknown. It is now clear that Lake House was built in 1858, probably in the late summer, by miners involved in the 1858 gold rush. It was burned in 1860. It is highly significant that no indigenously sourced artifacts, such as basketry or salmon bones, were identified from the 1858-60 occupation at Lake House. These items would certainly have been valuable to the miners, and were popular trade items between Nlaka'pamux people and the HBC prior to the gold rush (Pegg and Kolaric, 2013). There was no commercial relationship between the miners and Nlaka'pamux people at this location.

The ideological and social differences between the miners and Nlaka'pamux people were very large. Miners did not look at the landscape in terms of food or sustenance, but instead in terms of adversity, gold, opportunity, and profit. Canned goods were probably the primary source of food at Lake House, and the remains of solder-seamed containers are abundant at the site. This is incredible considering that canned and imported food was much more expensive than the salmon which could have been obtained if relations between the miners and the Nlaka'pamux had been peaceful. Miners were paying $1.00 per pound simply to ship goods along the rough trails which existed in this area prior to the completion of the Cariboo Wagon Road in 1863 (Scholefield and Howay, 1914).

The dates for cedar harvest also document the often hostile relationship between Nlaka'pamux people and the miners. While bark harvest did take place in the vicinity of Lake House in the 1850s (Figure 2), it was in much lower frequency compared to harvest in the 1840s, or later in the 1860s and 1870s. Only two trees in the 2013 sample were stripped in the years which Lake House was utilized by the miners. Commercial opportunities for Nlaka'pamux people expanded significantly after the gold rush, however, and families living at the nearby community of Tuckkwiowhum in the 1860s appeared to be doing quite well (Pegg and Kolaric, 2013).

The adze, an indigenous tool with a deep history in south-west B.C., was used on a significant number of CMTs to cut away bark, up until 1924. Adze marks are from metal tools, of course, but they show that even when axes were easily available, familiar tools were still

of central importance. It is quite likely that Nlaka'pamux people had to make their own adzes out of imported metal, as it was probably not commonly stocked in local stores in Yale or Boston Bar.

Many stumps and logs were also identified at DkRi-74, including logs with plank removal scars and missing sections. These types of CMTs are much more common on the coast, where people were using cedar for the construction of longhouses. Aboriginally-logged CMTs are very rare in the Fraser Canyon. Their presence at DkRi‑74 shows that a fairly major structure was likely present during the 1800s, likely a post-and beam house with cedar bark for walls and roof. This corroborates oral history (Marion Dixon, pers. comm. 2013) documenting Lake Mountain and the Tikwalus Trail as not just important for cedar harvest, travel, or hunting, but also for families living on Lake Mountain for significant periods of time.

Considering the high frequency of cedar harvest in the 1860s and 70s, the Nlaka'pamux cedar economy can be said to have been quite healthy at this time. This agrees with data from Tuckkwiowhum showing indigenous success in the new cash-based commercial systems which really established themselves after the completion of the Cariboo Wagon Road in 1863 (Pegg and Kolaric, 2013; Lutz, 1992; LaForet and York, 1998). Cedar harvest declines and almost disappears from the area by 1900. This is probably because the growing power of the Canadian federal government, and the increased legal restrictions placed on aboriginal rights, title and well being (Tennant, 1990; Harris, 1997) impacted Nlaka'pamux economies much more seriously than the war of 1858.

'Archaeology has tremendous potential to address questions of historic significance in ways that go beyond the traditional methods of historians.'

At Lake House, miners were unknowingly connecting the Fraser Canyon to a vast global capitalist market economy. Miners from all over the globe were present in 1858, not just Americans. Chilean miners were present in significant numbers (Marshall, 2012), and this is supported by the two Chilean coins present at the site. Chile was also an important stop on the route from Europe and the eastern U.S.A. to the NW Coast, as ships travelling around Cape Horn would often stop here. In the 1850s, currency was made of precious metal, and was therefore much more easily exchanged in local businesses even when from a distant nation.

The carpet bag, introduced in San Francisco in the 1840s to 1850s, was an inexpensive luggage item that was often used by men. Technology in the 1850s was rapidly expanding the ability of people to travel longer distances at lower cost, and therefore enabled lower class people to travel to distant places to seek their fortune (Gates, 1977). The owner of the carpet bag at Lake House, and most of the miners in 1858, were lower class people who did not have very good financial prospects at home. Reading W.H. Wetherill's letter (Wetherill, 1860) relating to the destruction of Lake House, it is clear he was only semi-literate, and not from an upper class background.

Archaeology has tremendous potential to address questions of historic significance in ways that go beyond the traditional methods of historians. Because it does not depend on the written historic record, archaeology can address the histories of people who are well known to be underrepresented in that record. These include non-literate people, indigenous people, and lower class people.

Brian Pegg is part of the Anthropology Department at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He has been directing KPU's field school since 2009, and has seen many of his students move on to rewarding archaeology careers.

Jillian Elcock is a 4th year student at KPU, majoring in Anthropology. Following her graduation, Jillian plans to continue on to graduate school to pursue a Master's degree.

Nadine Martin is a senior student at KPU, majoring in Anthropology. She plans on pursuing a Master's degree in Anthropology with the intention of doing research in her native South Africa.

Colin Cromarty is a BA graduate with a major in geography and a minor in anthropology from UFV. This summer he pursued his life long interest in archaeology by enrolling in KPU's field school. Colin is currently working as an archaeologist in British Columbia.

Excavations underway at Lake House, DkRi 85

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