



UCLA Extension

FORT VERMILION ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT, CANADA

Course ID: ARCH XL159

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DIRECTORS:

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INTRODUCTION

The year is 1799. The Canadian based North West Company (NWC) had already established their line of fur trade posts from Lake Athabasca up the Peace River to today's Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada. For the next 22 years they would dominate the trade along this river and LaFleur's Post – later to become Fort Vermilion – would be an integral part of that trade network. With the union of the NWC and Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1821, changes came to the trade at those Peace River posts that had a profound effect on traders and First Nations people. The HBC closed many forts, reduced the number of employees and prohibited trade in liquor. When tensions between First Nations and traders rose, more posts were closed and abandoned along this long stretch of the Peace River. By 1826, Fort Vermilion was the last post still standing on the Peace River. Finally, it too was abandoned and moved downriver in 1830. This site is the subject of this project and archaeological field school.

Fort Vermilion is an ideal site to investigate both the history and cultural dynamics of the fur trade, and also act as an archaeological field school. The site is very well preserved in places, revealing stratified layers, rich and complex structural remains, artifacts and zooarchaeological remains. The archaeological evidence represents not only a Euro-Canadian presence, but also that of First Nations and Metis people who worked and lived at the fort or near it. The archaeological assemblage represents a culture contact

situation that has considerable potential to investigate how each culture potentially affected the other, or retained their identities. These assemblages can further be combined with a rich fur trade documentary record to gain insights into fort life, material consumption, and diet.

The surrounding region contains other historic period sites (some contemporaneous to Fort Vermilion) and prehistoric sites making it ideal for intra-regional comparisons and to explore the area's long indigenous history. Our aim is to continue to collect archaeological evidence to build on earlier studies (published in Pyszczyk 2015, which is the main textbook for the course) that investigate economic and social models of how Fort Vermilion and its people, as part of the northern fur trade, possibly differed from the people further south along the Saskatchewan Rivers in western Canada. Students will be exposed not only to this fort's archaeological and documentary evidence but how these data fit into a larger regional and temporal fur trade context. Since the site, and others like it, is eroding and endangered, issues and ethics regarding archaeological resource management will also be integrated into the overall investigative and research process.

The primary focus of the field school is to train students to become proficient in the techniques of excavation, observation, and recording (and to a certain level, interpretation of the evidence) which form the basis of archaeological inquiry. We will discuss how various field and recording methods are driven by different research paradigms and objectives that the site may offer. Students will also learn how to process and catalogue their finds in the field laboratory, carry out quantitative and qualitative analyses, and the reporting process as outlined by the Alberta Government.

This area of northern Alberta is stunningly beautiful. Students will experience the Canadian wilderness with many camp comforts, but also the challenges that come with it. There is nothing better than watching the Northern Lights dance across the night sky after a great day of field work. Students will be introduced to the people of the region, some of whom act as guides for field trips, and our neighbors, the Mennonites, who bring us fresh vegetables and baked goods.

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 12 quarter credit units (equivalent to 8 semester units) through our academic partner, UCLA Extension. UCLA is a top ranked research university and its archaeology program is ranked amongst the best in the country. All IFR field schools instructors and curricula are approved both by the corresponding academic department and the Academic Senate at UCLA. This field school provides a minimum of 192 direct instructional hours.

Transcripts: Transcripts are available through UCLA UnEX and instructions for ordering transcripts may be found at <http://bit.ly/2bDOZ3E>. Grades will be posted and transcript available usually within six weeks after the end of this field school. All IFR field schools are designated XL classes – courses that are equivalent to undergraduate courses offered by the UCLA regular session. All XL courses are transferable for unit and subject credit toward the Bachelor's Degree at all campuses of the UC and CSU systems. Classes numbered 100 to 199 are considered upper division (junior/senior). For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/2bjAqmy>.

UCLA students: Students can take classes through UCLA Extension to complete requirements. However certain considerations must be taken into account. For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/2bJWeHK>.

Credit Units Transfer: Most universities accept UCLA credit units – there are very few exceptions. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss the transferability of the credit units with school officials BEFORE attending the field school.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the course can be fit into the following general categories: 1) archaeological site discovery and evaluation; 2) excavation, recording techniques and interpretation of historic period sites; 3) basic artifact and faunal recording in the field; and, 4) lectures and field trips that introduce students to the region's and fort's natural and human history.

Archaeological Site Discovery and Evaluation: Students will be exposed to the challenges and rigors of searching for sites in the boreal forest and doing archaeology in this environment. The search for, identification of, and the site testing program in this landscape will emphasize the often physical nature of archaeology and the skills and techniques needed to do this work. One of the assignments requires teamwork and cooperation to search for and document a known standing historic resources. Students will also be introduced to non-invasive search techniques, and their general utility in a boreal forest environment. The use of Lidar imagery in the region, and the results found thus far, will be emphasized. The documentary and oral component of site discovery will also be examined using the known fort historic records and the recollections of people living in the area.

Excavations, Recording and Interpretation: Students will participate in guided excavations at Fort Vermilion (1798-1836). The excavations will focus on discovering and exposing architectural components of the fur trading post and unearthing the cultural remains. Since the site is uniquely stratified due to frequent overbank flooding, the excavations will also involve the separation of the fort's occupation levels. Students will be assigned to 1 x 1 meter units and will learn how to excavate the cultural deposits within their units. They will be taught how and when to use a shovel, small pick, trowel, brush, sieve, and other tools. They will become proficient with these tools and others by the end of the field school. Students will also be made aware of how different screening and sieving methods can potentially bias the recovery of archaeological remains. The field methods used at Fort Vermilion will be put in a broader perspective so students understand how historic period sites are excavated and treated as well as the need adjust methods depending on the excavation context.

Students will learn how to recognize and interpret archaeological features in both floor plans and profiles. They will learn how to draw level plans, measure and record the provenience of archaeological features, document the matrix surrounding the cultural remains, and draw stratigraphic profiles. They will also learn how to fill out feature and sediment (locus/layer) forms. They will be asked to write succinct, descriptive field notes that contain basic unit excavation data, as well as descriptions of features and artifacts. They will be introduced 3D imagery and the use of photogrammetric techniques at the site.

The students will also participate in experimental archaeology, an element of the project we incorporated in order to better understand the formation processes operating at this site. Previous experiments include soil alteration through hearth use and a trampling and sedimentation study. Our aim is to engage students in the different ways of understanding the archaeological record as well as what they are excavating.

Knowledge Acquisition and Interpretation in Historic Archaeology: The site contains a rich array of material culture that is unique to this period and the fur trade in western Canada. As artifacts, features, or faunal remains are found in the field, the instructors will explain these finds. The artifact's function, history and cultural context will be discussed, as well as its significance to the larger fur trade interpretive framework. Features, artifacts and faunal remains are also discussed in detail during lectures, which are designed to highlight their functions, cultural affiliations, and interpretive potential. Students will learn that the object's historic importance has different interpretative potential and meanings as units of fur trade time and space are changed.

This project gives students a unique opportunity to combine the documentary, oral, and archaeological records to examine questions in history. They will be introduced to both the deficiencies and strengths of these various forms of evidence, and how when combined, they shed light on problems which otherwise could not be investigated using only one type of evidence.

Laboratory Analysis: Scheduled laboratory workshops on historical artifacts (points, metal pieces, ceramics, beads, etc.), architectural remains, zooarchaeology, paleobotany, and sediment analysis will take place throughout the field school. Students will learn how to process the cultural remains they excavate from their units. They will clean, catalogue, and typologically identify these remains with guidance from the senior researchers of the project.

DISCLAIMER – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Archaeological field work involves physical work in the outdoors. You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms, or college town. This program operates in northern Canada. During the day, temperatures can reach above 30°C (85°F) or can be below 10°C (40°F). The evenings will be cool to cold. There will be nice days and rainy days. Work will continue at the site unless conditions are stormy. Layered clothing and rain gear are recommended. Sunscreen, a hat, and sturdy, closed-toe footwear are required on site. Daily travel to the excavation site requires walking through the forest and crossing the Peace River in boats. Students are required to stay with the group at all times and must wear a lifejacket in the boat. Wildlife, including bears, cougars, wolves, coyotes, deer, spiders, bees, misquitos, and other animals living in the region are encountered in the excavation area and at the campsite. For safety reasons, no student is permitted to leave the site or campsite without permission from a senior staff member.

If you have any health concerns, please consult with your doctor. All other concerns, please discuss with the project directors - as appropriate.

WORK SCHEDULE AND TASKS

Students are expected to arrive at the campsite on Sunday, July 23rd. There will be an orientation session in the late afternoon. The excavations begin on Monday, July 24th and run until Friday, August 18th. On Saturday, August 19th we will finish packing up the equipment, supplies, and cultural remains. Students are free to return home later that day.

We work at the site and in the camp laboratory six days a week. We leave for the site at 8:00 am. We excavate at the site from 9:00 am until 5:30 pm. Upon our return to camp, we unload the equipment and archaeological remains collected that day. Dinner is served at 6:30 pm. Lectures are held right after dinner (7:30 pm). The remaining time in the evening is spent in the camp laboratory processing the cultural remains or reviewing course readings. A number of task-related workshops take place in the field and laboratory. Additional mini-workshops are given as particular cultural remains are excavated.

Students are expected to help with camp tasks, such as food preparation, dishes, and cleaning, throughout the week. On Sunday, the off-day, students and staff do laundry, shopping, catch up on course readings, etc. Students are required to participate in all elements of the field school. Student success is correlated with work ethic, engagement, and attitude.

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for participation in this field school. Students will receive hands-on training in archaeological field work so will spend most of their time learning how to excavate and record their finds. Students must come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that the archaeological endeavor requires real, hard work in a camp environment. Some days will be hot,

temperatures can reach 30°C (85°F) and other days will be cold and rainy. Students will be taught how to use a variety of excavation tools, from shovels and wheelbarrows, to trowels, brushes, and sieves, and are expected to use all of them. Archaeology involves physical work and exposure to the elements, thus, requires a measure of acceptance that this will not be the typical university learning environment. Students will get dirty, sweaty, tired, and have to work closely with others. We hope that the thrill of discovering archaeological remains will outweigh the stiff muscles and exhausting days.

GRADING MATRIX

Students are required to participate in all components of the field school, including field work, laboratory work, workshops, and lectures. Their grades are determined as follows:

30% - Field work. Students will be assessed on the quality of their field work (i.e. their ability to effectively use the excavation tools, correctly articulate a cultural feature, trim a baulk, measure the provenience of an artifact, bag and tag artifacts, draw scaled level plans, draw sections, etc.).

20% - Laboratory work. Students will also be assessed on the quality of their laboratory work (i.e. how effectively they clean and label the cultural remains they find, their catalogue records, and their ability to typologically identify the remains).

10% - Assignment 1 – Site Survey and Field Mapping. Part 1: In survey teams, students will look for historic remains to the north and south of the Fort Vermilion site. Each team will create survey maps of the area, noting the cultural remains they discovered. **Part 2:** Individual students will identify site features and map them to scale. They will do this at the site level and at the unit level.

10% - Assignment 2 –Artifact Recording and Analysis. Based on the catalogued results from their laboratory work, students will plot discovery curves of the artifacts found in their units.

10% - Field Notebook. Students are required to record their finds in a field notebook that must be submitted to the project at the end of the field school. The notebook must include a scaled sketches, provenience records, matrix information, and notes on the day's excavation activities. Students must also note the significance of their finds as they learn more about them and the Fort Vermilion site.

20% - Final Examination. Students will take an exam in the last week of the field school. They will be tested on excavation techniques, the laboratory process, recording methods, and the context of the cultural remains they recovered at the site. They are expected to be able to link the lectures and readings to their field and laboratory work. Students will also be tested on their ability to typologically identify Historical remains.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT

The Fort Vermilion site is located in Northern Alberta, Canada. It is about 50 km south of High Level. The closest international airport is Edmonton, Alberta (YEG). Students arriving by air will be met at the airport in Edmonton by project staff members at 3:00 pm on July 22. Please wait at the Tim Horton's in the arrival hall.

If your flight is delayed or you miss the group's designated meeting time, please call, text, or email Dr. Shawn Bubel. Her cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

US citizens do not need visa to enter Canada. However, they need to have a valid passport, a return flight ticket, and proof of sufficient funds for entry. Although the Canadian government does not require that a passport be valid for three months from the date of entry, airlines routinely do so and may decline boarding if a traveler has less than three months validity on his or her passport.

ACCOMMODATIONS

During the field school the students and staff live at the campsite about 3 km south of the field site, on the opposite side the Peace River. Students must bring their own sleeping bag, air mattress, towels, and other personal items (shampoo, soap, etc.), and a tent. Shared tents are available for students that do not have a tent. A shower facility, kitchen, lecture room, a lab building, and outhouses will be constructed at the campsite. Lights and electricity are run through a generator that is turned on at 6:00 am and shut down at 11:00 pm. There is no internet or cell phone reception at basecamp. Students are able to access these resources a few miles down the road. Students and staff will take turns cleaning and caring for the campsite. Coin laundry is available in the town of La Crete and a nearby gas station.

The field school team prepares well-balanced, nutritious meals twice a day (breakfast and dinner) in the kitchen building. Since these are group meals, individual dietary needs cannot be accommodated, although there are a number of meat or dairy, vegetable, and starch (rice, potatoes, bread, etc.) choices. Lunches are packed in the morning and are taken to the site along with water containers.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- Excavation backpack
- Marshalltown pointing trowel (4 or 5")
- Clippers
- Tape measure (metric, cm)
- Rulers, pens, pencils, eraser
- Sturdy, closed-toe footwear
- Gloves
- Rain coat and pants
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray
- Personal tent (if you have one)
- Sleeping bag
- Air mattress
- Towels
- Flashlight
- Any prescription medicine

A detailed packing list will be sent to students accepted to the field school.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Students and staff arrive at the campsite. Those arriving at the Edmonton Airport (YEG) will be driven to basecamp. An overnight stay in Slave Lake will be needed (July 22).

July 23 – Basecamp arrival

- 2:00 pm: Arrival and set-up
- 4:00 pm: Preliminary introductions, course overview
- 6:30 pm: Group dinner

Weekdays (Monday – Saturday) – *Excavation on site*

- 6:30 am: Rise-and-shine
- 7:00 am: Breakfast
- 8:00 am: Travel to the excavation site
- 12:30 pm: Lunch break on site
- 5:30 pm: Return to campsite
- 6:00 pm: Unpack artifacts and equipment at camp
- 6:30 pm: Group dinner
- 7:30 pm: Evening lecture
- 8:30 pm: Lab work and other course work
- 10:00 pm: Generator turned off – lights out

Off-day (Sunday) – Laundry, shopping, camp chores, catch-up, and free time

8:00 am: Rise-and-shine

9:00 am: Breakfast

9:30 am: Camp chores

12:30 pm: Lunch break at camp

1:00 pm: Travel into La Crete to do laundry and shopping

6:30 pm: Group dinner

7:30 pm: Lab work and other course work

10:00 pm: Generator turned off – lights out

Workshops, Lectures, and Activities in Week 1

Camp Safety, Orientation, and Responsibilities

Site Safety, Orientation, and Responsibilities

Site Introduction

Excavation Grid and Unit Layout

Excavation Tool Use

Excavation Methods

Excavation Recording (Field Notebooks)

Unit Mapping

Provenience Recording

Assignment 1

Lecture – Overview of the Fort Vermilion Project

Lecture – Fort Vermilion in Context

Lecture – Alberta and Western Canadian History

Lecture – Overview of Week 1

Workshops, Lectures, and Activities in Week 2

Excavation Unit Profile Drawings

Survey Methods and Mapping

Assignment 2

Laboratory Safety and Procedures

Cleaning, Labelling, and Bagging Historical remains

Cataloguing Historical remains

Typologically Identifying Historical remains

Lecture – Historical Archaeology

Lecture – Fur Trade Archaeology Part I

Lecture – Historical Artifacts

Lecture – Overview of Week 2

Workshops, Lectures, and Activities in Week 3

Faunal Analysis

Glass Artifacts

Metal Artifacts

Beads and Shell Artifacts

Ceramics

Architecture of Historic sites

Geoarchaeology

Lecture – Geoarchaeology at Fort Vermilion

Lecture – Use of GIS for Archaeological Analysis
Lecture – Overview of Week 3

Workshops, Lectures, and Activities in Week 4

Site Photography
Excavation Unit and Area Clean-up
Equipment Cleaning and Packing
Artifact and Excavation Records Curation
Artifact Packing and Transfer to Storage
Lecture – What We Have Learned This Season at Fort Vermilion
Final Exam
Farewell Party

Saturday afternoon travel to Edmonton (an 8 hour drive) to fly home that evening or the next day (Aug 20)

REQUIRED READINGS

The required readings listed below will be posted on the field school website. Students are encouraged to read these prior to the field school. Copies will be available at basecamp.

Brink, John W.

2001 Carcass Utility Indices and Bison Bones from the Wardell Kill and Butchering Sites. In *People and Wildlife in Northern North America*, S. Craig Gerlach and Maribeth S. Murray (eds), pp. 255-273. BAR International Series 944.

Bundy, Barbara E., Allen P. McCartney, and Douglas W. Veltre

2003 Glass Trade Beads from Reese Bay, Unalaska Island: Spatial and Temporal Patterns. *Arctic Anthropology* 40 (1):29-47.

Cannon, Aubrey

1983 The Quantification of Artifactual Assemblages: Some Implications for Behavioral Inferences. *American Antiquity* 48(4):785-92.

Carter, Sue

2012 Artifact Typologies, the Issues. *Heritage Daily*.

Casteel, Richard W.

1977 Characterization of Faunal Assemblages and the Minimum Number of Individuals Determined from Paired Elements: Continuing Problems in Archaeology. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 4:125-34.

Deetz, James F.

1968 Material Culture and Archaeology - What's the Difference. In *Historical Archaeology and the Importance of Material Things*, Leland Ferguson (ed), pp. 9-12. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

Forsman, Michael and Joseph G. Gallo.

1979 Approaches to Fur Trade Archaeology, Project 77-22 in Part. In *Archaeology in Alberta, 1978*, J. M. Hillerud (ed), pp.159-188. Alberta Culture, Historical Resources.

Garth, Thomas, R. Jr.

1947 Early Architecture in the Northwest. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 38 (July):221-22.

Ives, John W.

1993 The Ten Thousand Years Before the Fur Trade in Northeastern Alberta. In *The Uncovered Past: Roots of Northern Alberta Societies*, Patricia A. McCormack and R. Geoffrey Ironside (eds), pp. 5-33. Circumpolar Research Series Number 3. Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta.

Peach, Kate

1993 Ethnicity and Ethnic Markers: A Fur Trade Example. *Manitoba Archaeology Journal* (3):1-21.

Pyszczuk, Heinz W.

1984 Site Occupation Length as a Factor in Artifact Assemblage Variability and Frequency. In *Archaeology in Alberta, 1983*. Occasional Paper No. 23, D. Burley (ed), pp. 60-76. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton.

1988 Consumption and Ethnicity: An Example from the Fur Trade in Western Canada. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 8:213-49.

1989 Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology: Fort Vermilion, Alberta. In *Proceedings of the Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermilion Bicentennial Conference*, Patricia A. McCormack and R. Geoffrey Ironside (eds), pp. 45-52. Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, University of Alberta.

1992 The Architecture of the Western Canadian Fur Trade: A Cultural - Historical Perspective. *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, Bulletin* 17:32-41.

1993 A "Parchment Skin" is All: The Archaeology of the Boyer River Site, Fort Vermilion, Alberta. In *The Uncovered Past: Roots of Northern Alberta Societies*, Patricia A. McCormack and R. Geoffrey Ironside (eds), pp. 33-44. Circumpolar Research Series Number 3. Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta.

1997 The Use of Fur Trade Goods by the Plains Indians, Central and Southern Alberta, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 21(1): 45-84

2015 *Last Fort Standing: Fort Vermilion and the Peace River Fur Trade 1798-1830*, Volume 14 Occasional Papers of the Archaeological Society of Alberta.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Brown, Jennifer

1980 *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Campbell, Marjorie Wilkins

1983 *The North West Company*. Douglas & McIntyre, Toronto.

Deetz, James F.

1977 *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. Garden City, New Jersey, Anchor Press.

Dempsey, Hugh

1973 *A History of Rocky Mountain House*. Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History No. 6. Canadian Historic Sites. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, Ontario.

Devore, Stephen

1992 *Beads of the Bison Robe Trade: The Fort Union Trading Post Collection*. Friends of Fort Union Trading Post, Williston, North Dakota.

Francis, Daniel and Michael Payne

1993 *A Narrative History of Fort Dunvegan*. Watson and Dwyer.

Innis, Harold A.

1975 *The Fur Trade in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Kennedy, Margaret A.

1997 *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains*. Peter Lang, New York.

Klimko, Olga and John Hodges

1993 *Last Mountain House. A Hudson's Bay Company Outpost in the Qu'Appelle Valley*. Desktop Publishing, Western Heritage Services Inc., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Losey, T. C., Heinz Pyszczyk, Lan Chan, Karie Hardie, Peter Seto, and Peter Bobrowsky

1978 Archaeological Investigations Fort George, 1977. Manuscript on file, the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Pyszczyk, Heinz W.

1978 *The Fort Victoria Faunal Analysis: Considerations of Subsistence Change of the Fur Trade Era in North Central Alberta*. M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

1980 *Identifiable Bone Weights for Determining Taxonomic Elements, Minimum Numbers, and Variety*. M.S. on file, Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton.

1983 *Archaeological Investigations at 1805-1878 Fort Dunvegan, Alberta*. Permit 82-096. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

1985 *The Role of Material Culture in the Structure of Fur Trade Society. Status, Structure and Stratification*, Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Chacmool Conference, Marc Thompson, Maria Teresa Garcia and Francois J. Kense (eds). Calgary, Alberta

1987 *Economic and Social Factors in the Consumption of Material Goods in the Fur Trade of Western Canada*. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby.

Williams, Glyndwr

1983 *The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870. The Beaver (Autumn)*.