University of Lethbridge News Release

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U of L alums documenting Waterton archaeology sites

Last summer's Kenow Wildfire destroyed more than 19,000 hectares in Waterton Lakes National Park and the resulting loss of vegetation has revealed archaeological sites that were previously hidden in the underbrush.

Working alongside Parks Canada archaeologist Bill Perry, Rachel Lindemann (BA '05), Alanna Shockley (BA '16), Kevin Black Plume (BSc '18) and Tatyanna Ewald, a graduate student from the University of Calgary, have been conducting post-fire assessments in Waterton as Parks Canada employees since May. Black Plume, who's from the Kainai First Nation, helps ensure elders are called in to help interpret sites when necessary.

"Archaeology doesn't happen in a vacuum," says Perry. "Through the support of Parks Canada, Waterton Lakes National Park staff and researchers, surrounding communities and Indigenous bands, an ambitious post-fire archaeological survey project is underway in the burn zone of the Kenow Wildfire within the bounds of the park."

The survey will revisit and assess as many known, and record many new, archaeological sites impacted by the wildfire. The work will help evaluate the significance of the resources and how best to manage them.

"The sheer amount of archaeological visibility available in the areas of intensive fire is staggering and allows us to focus primarily on the last 1,000 years of human history in the park to tell the story of Waterton and the surrounding regions," says Perry.

The park has about 375 known archaeological sites; 255 of those are within the burn zone, and the crew is trying to visit as many as they can before the end of August. Most of the previous data on Waterton's sites dates back to the 1960s and 1970s when archaeological work was first done in the park. Now, with the visibility provided by the wildfire, the group has found additional sites and added more information to existing ones, such as one near Red Rock Canyon.

"It had been quite a minimal site where they'd only found a couple of artifacts," says Lindemann. "We found a protohistoric component—that transition when Europeans are just

coming in and we're starting to see First Nations adopting some of the technologies of the Europeans, such as trade beads. We found seed beads and metal trade points. That's a huge indicator that they're still using bow-and-arrow technology and haven't switched over to guns."

Metal points, shaped like an arrowhead, were mass-produced by trading companies like the Hudson's Bay Company. First Nations people also fashioned their own metal points using the metal strapping from barrels or other objects.

In addition, the archaeologists found more than 20 small hearths surrounded by debitage, or flakes of stone broken off in the process of making or refurbishing tools.

"People basically sat at the campfire and sharpened their tools, camped for a few nights and moved on to do hunting or proceed through the passes into B.C. or the United States. This is a component of the site that's massive but, with any sort of vegetation, would be lost," says Lindemann.

Along with arrowheads made of flint, they've found others made from chert and obsidian, which may have come from B.C. or from the U.S. The team has uncovered outfitter camps with scattered tin cans, wagon parts and tent foundations. They've also explored relief camps that were set up during the Depression that provided room and board in exchange for physical labour.

"They were doing things like blasting for the Akamina Parkway," says Lindemann. "We went in with the perception that it was a bunch of men utilizing this area and we found snuff cans for Copenhagen, beer bottles, ax heads and shovel heads. And then we found a Boy Scouts of Canada button. Either someone was a Scout leader or someone had their children present. We also found some very feminine artifacts like mother-of-pearl beads and a bottle of Frostilla, which was a pink hand lotion for ladies."

In addition, the crew has found some First Nations' pottery, a rare find since the pottery typically doesn't hold up well. As they clamber up and down the slopes, the archaeologists make note of wherever they see bison remains to determine how they used the land and how widespread they were.

"We have a really good opportunity here to rewrite portions of the archaeology in Waterton simply because we have such good visibility and clarity of what's going on," says Lindemann. "I'm hoping some new interpretations and use of the landscape come out of this. We're creating lots of new avenues for research projects for future students and researchers."

This news release can be found online at Waterton Archaeology.

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