

Rocky Mountain Fort: Archaeological Research and the Late Eighteenth-century North West Company Expansion into British Columbia

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A recent *BC Studies* article by K. F. Fladmark (1985) provides a summary overview of early fur trade history along the upper Peace River in British Columbia. This history begins with Alexander Mackenzie's voyage to the Pacific coast in 1793, and continues to 1823 when the occupants of St. John's, a post at the Beatton River mouth, were murdered by Beaver Indians. For all but three of these years (1820-23), the North West Company exercised monopolistic control. Fladmark notes that primary documents relating to this period are few, and confusion exists over the origins and location for the sites. This is particularly so for the earliest post, Rocky Mountain Fort; a number of provincial histories have failed to recognize it altogether (e.g., Ormsby 1958). Through the diligent efforts of Fladmark, this no longer can be the case.

In 1975, Fladmark (1985; also Fladmark, Finlay and Spurling 1977) rediscovered the location of Rocky Mountain Fort through descriptions left in David Thompson's journal for the year 1804. The site was situated on the south shore of the Peace River near its confluence with the Moberly River (figure 1). Test excavations in the 1976 field season (Spurling, Finlay and Fladmark 1976), combined with archival research (F. Finlay 1976), conclusively verified Fladmark's identification. Rocky Mountain Fort had been established by the North West Company in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and it was the earliest land-based fur trade site in British Columbia. Of equal importance, as Fladmark also notes, was the availability of a published journal (O'Neil 1928). The "Journal of the Rocky Mountain Fort" had been kept by an anonymous author for the trade season of 1799/1800 (O'Neil 1928). Descriptions in this document potentially facilitate the interpretation of archaeological remains and allow for a more complete understanding of Peace River fur trade history.

Since the publication of Fladmark's 1985 article, we have conducted two seasons of archaeological excavation at Rocky Mountain Fort. In the following paper we summarize the results of this work and place these data within a historical framework for the fur trade of the upper Peace River region.

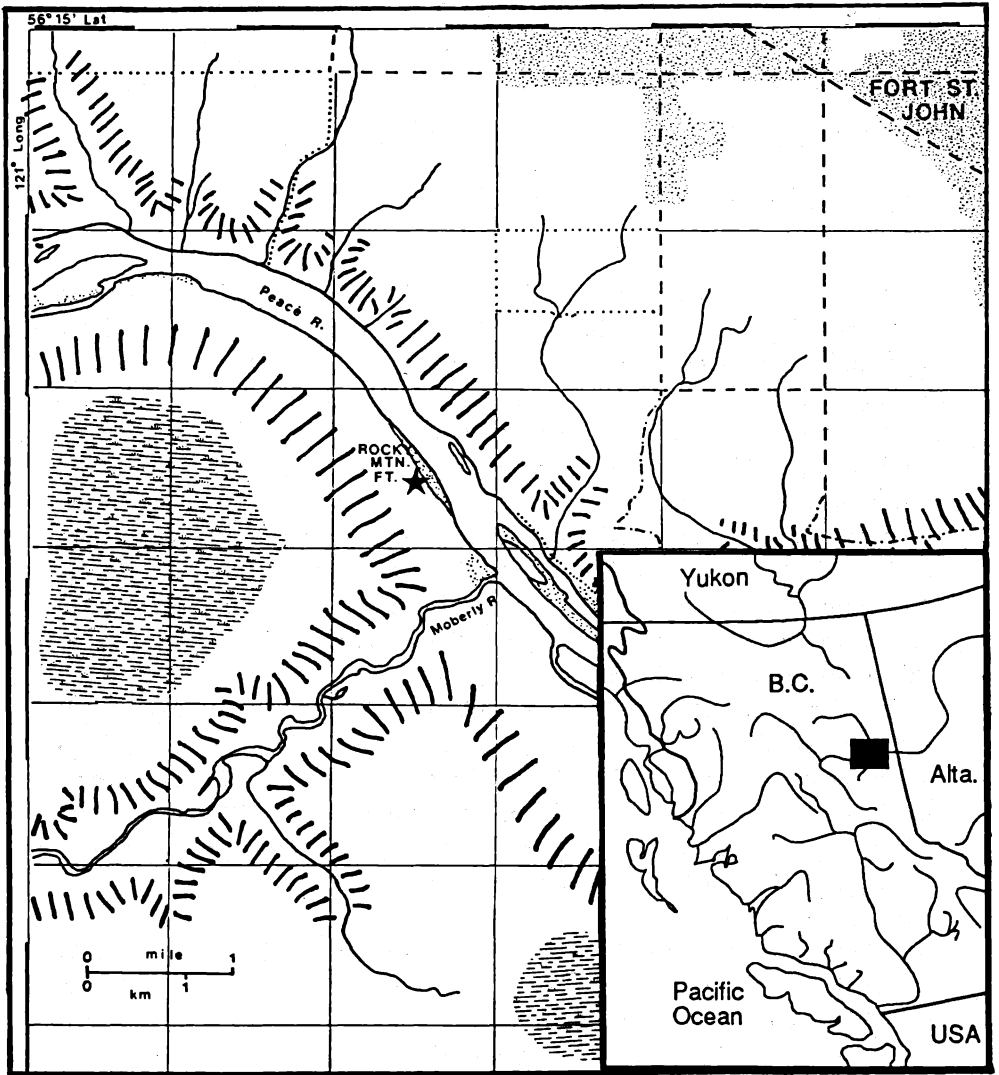


FIGURE 1
Rocky Mountain Fort Site Location

Rocky Mountain Fort and the Peace River Trade

In 1778 Peter Pond crossed Methy Portage and established the first of what would be many trading posts in the fur rich Athabasca District (figure 2). This district, for the next two decades, fell under the monopolistic control of the North West Company in its various incarnations. From the Athabasca Department, the “Nor Westers” systematically explored much of northwestern Canada while extending the fur trade into areas such as the Mackenzie River Valley, the upper Peace River valley, and, ultimately, New Caledonia. The Hudson’s Bay Company was unable to gain a trading interest on the Peace River until 1815; it took a further five years for them to move upriver into what is now British Columbia (Wallace 1929).

Of the events critical to North West Company expansion into British Columbia, the 1793 voyage of Alexander Mackenzie is most significant. In his quest for a navigable route to the Pacific Ocean, Mackenzie explored the Peace River valley and beyond. His observations about this country are succinct. Speaking of the area between present-day Fort St. John and Hudson’s Hope (as identified by MacGregor 1952: 89), he records the following observations on 16 May 1793:

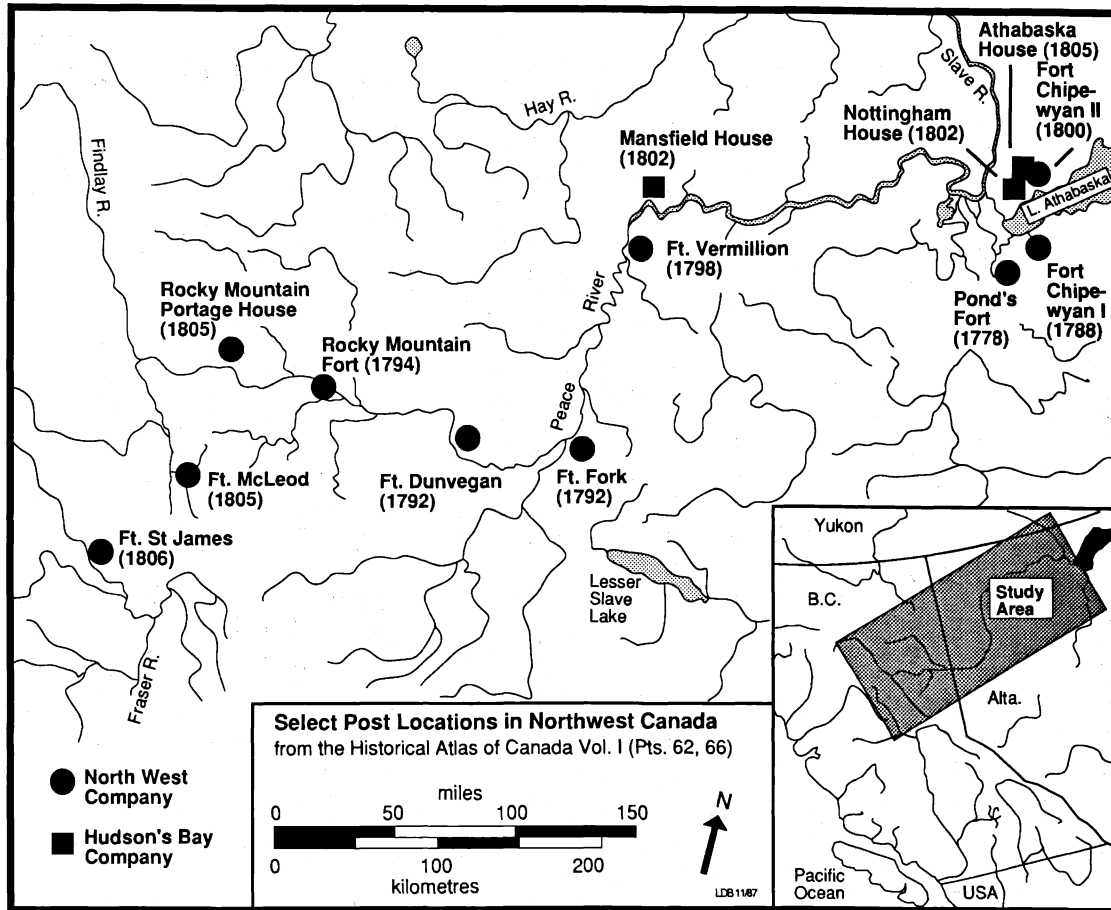
Here the land again appeared as if it run across our course, and a considerable river discharged itself by various streams. According to the Rocky Mountain Indian, it is called the Sinew River. This spot would be an excellent situation for a fort or factory, as there is plenty of wood, and every reason to believe that the country abounds in beaver. As for the other animals, they are in evident abundance, as in every direction the elk and the buffalo are seen in possession of the hills and the plains. . . . The country is so crowded with animals as to have the appearance, in some places, of a stall-yard, from the state of the ground, and the quantity of dung, which is scattered over it. The soil is black and light. (Mackenzie 1967: 60-61)

By the time of Mackenzie’s voyage, the North West Company had severely taxed its communication and resupply networks through expansion in the Athabasca region (Ray 1974: 126). Massive quantities of pemmican and other preserved foods were needed to support its system of posts and its annual canoe brigades. There can be little doubt that Mackenzie’s descriptions of animal abundance, combined with the potential for new trade, provided ample stimuli for even further expansion. Shortly following Mackenzie’s return with news of his discoveries, Rocky Mountain Fort was built at the mouth of the Moberly River.

The specific year in which Rocky Mountain Fort was established has been a matter of historical question (O’Neil 1928; Wallace 1929; F. Finlay

Select Fur Trade Post Locations in the Athabaska District

FIGURE 2



1976). Upon the arrival of the traders in 1799, the Rocky Mountain Fort Journal describes the presence of buildings that were in need of repair (O'Neil 1928: 257). This has led a number of historians to propose 1798 as the year of construction for the post and the year in which the North West Company securely established itself in British Columbia (e.g., Wallace 1929: 35; MacGregor 1952: 68). John Stuart, in an 1823 comment, provides evidence to push these origins back four years earlier. Passing the abandoned site of Rocky Mountain Fort, he reports, "... we encamped on the site of the Old Beaver [Moberly] River Fort, first established in 1794, and where ten years afterwards I wintered" (HBCA, B.119/a/1 as cited in F. Finlay 1976: 4).

Historical references to Rocky Mountain Fort during its early years of occupation are non-existent. This changes substantially in the fall of 1799 when, upon leaving the Forks of the Peace River *en route* to the Moberly River site, a North West Company officer begins a journal (O'Neil 1928). Who this officer may have been is unknown; identifications range from Alexander McLeod (F. Finlay 1976: 6) to Simon Fraser (Wallace 1929: 38). This journal provides insight into the post layout, the composition of the trading party, the Indians who were coming to trade, and all day-to-day events considered of note by the author. Based upon journal accounts, the fort can be described as having a shop, a hangard, men's houses including a "big house," a fur press, and a fifty-five-foot flagpole. Its complement of men, aside from one individual arriving in March to assist in canoe preparation, was fourteen; a minimum of four women and five children were also present (O'Neil 1928: 253). Daily entries in the journal are dominated by a record of trade, and the success or failure of the fort's hunter. These figures reveal that the importance of Rocky Mountain Fort lay as much in provisioning as in fur returns. During the course of the winter, the journal indicates that an Indian hunter, hired on a piece-work basis, brought in a minimum of 14,848 pounds of fresh meat, and this was amply supplemented by a trade for provisions with other Indians (see Hamilton 1987: 22, 139). Even with high levels of food consumption, we suggest this quantity far exceeds the needs of the post occupants, and was gathered predominantly for processing and export.

The "Journal of the Rocky Mountain Fort" illustrates the Moberly River establishment to be typical of North West Company wintering posts on the extreme far reaches of the fur trade frontier. The yearly cycle of a wintering post began in late fall with the repair, construction, and securing of the fort for the approaching winter. Throughout the winter, concerns at these posts were focused upon trade in pelts and meat, the

acquisition of supplies for immediate consumption, and the preparation of provisions for North West Company use. Spring break-up signalled an almost total abandonment of the establishment as the post complement, via canoe, travelled eastward to exchange winter returns for new supplies. Canoe brigades from the Athabasca Department initially had their rendezvous in northwestern Ontario at Rainy Lake, a distance in excess of 3,300 kilometres (Wallace 1934: 204). After a very brief rest period, the return trip began. Later, with the establishment of Fort Chipewyan as a trunk line depot on Lake Athabasca, these distances were considerably reduced (Innis 1956: 231). In 1799, the Rocky Mountain Fort contingent returned to their post on 13 October. To celebrate this arrival and mark the beginning of a new trading season, the men were ceremoniously given "each a dram" (O'Neil 1928: 257).

The fate of Rocky Mountain Fort, like its origins, lacks a direct historical account. Following the cessation of the journal in April 1800, only secondary references have survived. It is certain that the post continued in full operation through to the 1803/1804 trading season. As we have noted earlier, David Thompson visited the site in March of that year (Wallace 1929: 36). There is also reference to John Stuart having wintered here in either this or the following year (F. Finlay 1976: 4). In the fall of 1805, Rocky Mountain Portage House was established seventy-five kilometres further upriver at the head of the Peace River Canyon. This location was to facilitate further North West Company expansion into the British Columbia interior. Rocky Mountain Portage House, it would appear, also served as the replacement for Rocky Mountain Fort (Lamb 1960: 177).

Based upon indirect references and the single year of the Rocky Mountain Fort journal, a general chronology for early North West Company's exploits on the upper Peace River can be ascertained. Yet, specific details for the penetration of the land-based trade into British Columbia remain unclear, as do the activities carried out at Rocky Mountain Fort for a majority of its tenure. With this in mind, we turn now to recent archaeological research at the site.

Rocky Mountain Fort, Archaeological Research and Evidence for the Early Peace River Fur Trade

Using David Thompson's 1804 descriptions, Fladmark had little difficulty in relocating Rocky Mountain Fort near the mouth of the Moberly River in 1975. Initially, the site was thought to incorporate three spatially discrete groups of surface features spread over a distance of 180 metres

along a floodplain terrace (Fladmark 1985: 54). Test excavations carried out in 1976 identified two of these as belonging to later fur trade establishments (Spurling, Finlay and Fladmark 1976). These are the 1820 Hudson's Bay Company fort of James M. Yale and its contemporary North West Company opposition post under the direction of William McIntosh. Rocky Mountain Fort was isolated to a third, most easterly, group of features on the terrace. In his 1985 article, Fladmark describes these remains as follows:

It [Rocky Mountain Fort] includes three stone chimney mounds, three sizeable "cellar" depressions, and several smaller mounds and hollows, in an area approximately 30 x 15 m in size, paralleling the river bank. A magnetometer survey . . . clearly revealed a ca. 8-9 m wall outline, including a possible door, enclosing the two largest chimneys, as well as possible suggestions of a stockade line, not otherwise visible. . . . Test excavations around the periphery produced glass beads, gun-flints, a small brooch, an embossed steel button, a clasp-knife blade, part of a mattock-head (?), an iron arrowhead, file fragments, a gun lock-screw, lead shot, nails, fragments of sheet copper, and a fragment of an incomplete stone pipe bowl of so-called "Micmac" type. . . . this site is remarkably well-preserved and completely unaffected so far by modern disturbances. . . . It is possible, however, that some part of the front of the fort has been removed by riverbank erosion. . . . (1985: 55)

These findings served as background data for the structuring of a research programme to be implemented between 1985 and 1987.

With so little known of Rocky Mountain Fort prior to 1985, a majority of the proposed research centred upon the retrieval of basic site data. Information was sought concerning post layout and construction form, the frequency with which buildings had been refurbished, the types of activities that were being carried out, the nature of the trading assemblage, the diet of the site occupants, the manner in which refuse was disposed of, and the arrangement of living space within individual buildings. Beyond these, the nature of the Rocky Mountain Fort assemblage, and its limited occupation span, gave further opportunity to examine more general problems. Questions to be addressed included issues such as the impact of the fur trade upon local animal populations, the degree to which Indian peoples had become dependent upon European technology, and the dynamics of social interaction between the officer and his men in a fur trade hinterland (see Hamilton, Burley and Moon 1988: 122-54).

Fladmark initiated the 1985 field programme by undertaking a proton magnetometer survey and collecting topographic survey data for a detailed site contour map (McMillan 1986). The proton magnetometer measures variation in the earth's magnetic field at specific points above ground sur-

face. This variation can be caused by several factors including disturbances to underlying substrata from such activities as excavation or burning, and through the presence of items of ferric composition. With proper controls in place, the plotting of this variation serves as a highly effective form of remote sensing from which the presence of buried features and archaeological deposits can be ascertained (see Gibson 1983). Probe coring and test excavation verified a close relationship between identified magnetic anomalies and buried features associated with Rocky Mountain Fort. As such, proton magnetometer data became instrumental in the planning of an excavation strategy for the site.

In 1986 and 1987, site excavation was carried out under the direction of the authors. During this two-year period, approximately 150 square metres were excavated within and around the fort compound (figure 3). These excavations have produced a large assemblage of artifacts and a wealth of data about site features. They also reveal that a large portion of the site, perhaps as much as two-thirds, has been lost to erosion along the river bank. Surviving at Rocky Mountain Fort are the complete archaeological remains of one building, a small segment of a second structure, numerous refuse pits, and scattered concentrations of sheet midden refuse and ash. Focused investigation of these remains provides a basis for subsequent interpretations.

The Journal of Rocky Mountain Fort describes a hangard, a shop that had been appropriated by the officer in charge for living quarters, men's houses, and a number of activity-specific locations. Neither the journal nor our excavations allow for a conclusive interpretation of the spatial arrangement of these structures and areas. Of the building remains that have not eroded away, one structure faces the river bank, and the second is positioned at right angles to it. This pattern seems indicative of a U-shaped building arrangement with its open front oriented towards the Peace River. A U-shaped plan has been reconstructed at St. John's, an 1806 North West Company site a short distance downriver (Fradmark 1985), and it is characteristic of many other fur trade posts built in western Canada. If the proposed fort layout is correct, the building forming the western side of the compound has been destroyed by erosion.

The single intact structure at Rocky Mountain Fort formed the rear wall of the U-shaped compound. At St. John's, and others having a U-shaped arrangement, this building generally served as the officer's quarters and trade shop. This structure had been intentionally elevated on the top of a point bar terrace with its back wall parallel to an abrupt break in slope (figure 3). Based upon extensive excavation, the building is found

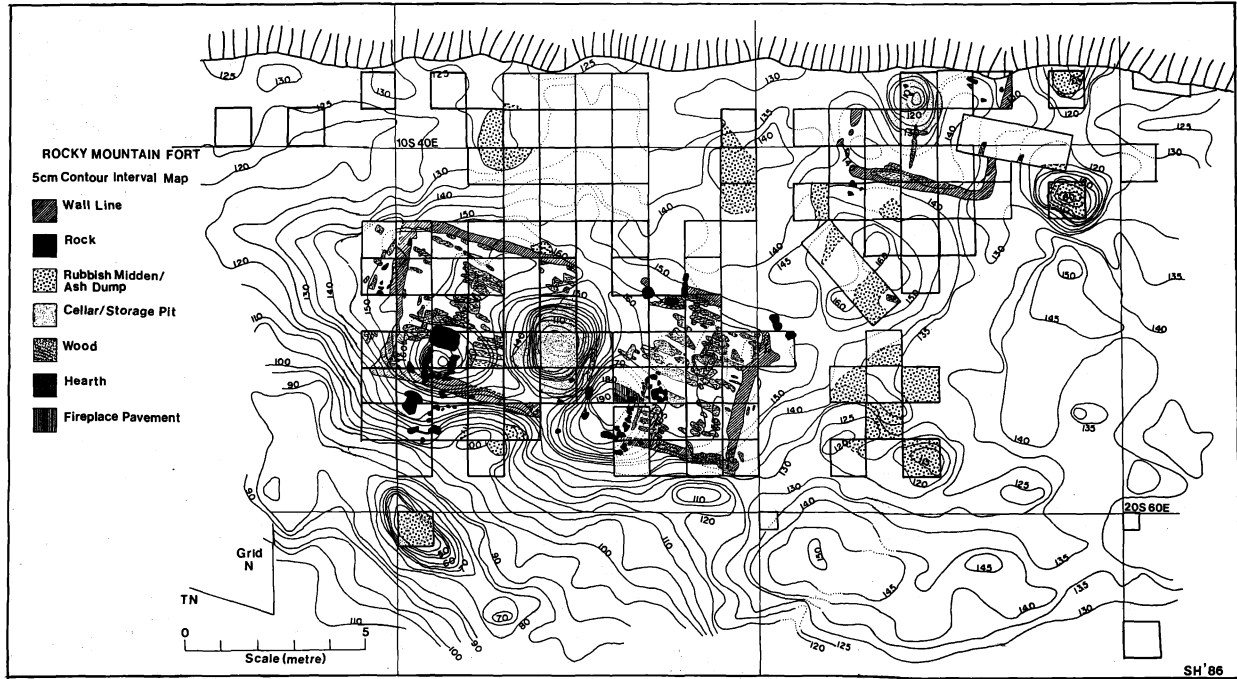


FIGURE 3

Rocky Mountain Fort Excavation and Feature Plan

to be 10.3 x 4.5 metres (33.6 x 14.7 feet) in size. It contained two rooms, each of which was heated by a fireplace positioned along the rear wall. A single uncribbed cellar was situated under the central portion of the building. At some point this cellar slumped inward and was later used for disposal of refuse. Charred floor boards and thermally altered soils indicate this building burned following its abandonment.

The second structure is interpreted as the partial remains of a row house. The building is not well defined in archaeological context, being marked by a shallow linear depression and scattered fragments of footer logs and chinking. It has a maximum width of four metres, with its long axis abruptly truncated by river-bank erosion. The remains of a single joist, covering an interior sub-floor storage pit, indicates the presence of a wooden floor. Several cobbles excavated from in and around the fill of this pit may have originated from a collapsed chimney. This building was rebuilt at least twice, with the last construction phase covering internal deposits of refuse.

Archaeological data from which to infer functional associations for either of the structures are not abundant. However, a small number of artifacts from the complete building seem out of place in the personal belongings of a voyageur. These, we suggest, can be used to support a proposed association with the company officer. Perhaps most striking are several fragments from a thin walled, clear glass goblet. The item's fragility, the distance over which it had been transported, the absence of other glass tablewares in site assemblages, and the importance of table etiquette for company officers, all seem indicative of a symbolic meaning tied to company rank. Similarly, all but one of the site's small sample of ceramic tableware fragments ($n = 12$) were recovered from the complete building excavation. The use of "foodways" as a visible affirmation of status is a documented element of fur trade society (e.g., see Pyszczyk 1987).

Aside from the structural remains described above, the Rocky Mountain Fort excavations were dominated by the exposure and recording of refuse disposal features. These consisted of pit middens, concentrated sheet midden deposits, and more widely dispersed sheet midden scatter. This site did not have a single location in which refuse was dumped. Rather, it was present in the courtyard compound, it was found adjacent to and beneath buildings, and it occurred in numerous locations behind and to the sides of the fort. This refuse, predominantly consisting of faunal remains, in many cases had been burned. Stratigraphic evidence also indicates that the fort compound had a layer of clean sediment placed over a mantle of existing garbage, perhaps during one of the site's refurbishment periods.

Widespread test excavations and the results of the proton magnetometer survey failed to find evidence for an enclosing palisade or picket fences placed between buildings. The absence of a palisade is important for it reflects positively upon North West Company perceptions of its relationship with Indian peoples in the early years of the trade. This is in marked contrast to the extensive stockade built at the later site of St. John's and to the palisade planned for Yale's House, the adjacent 1826 Hudson's Bay Company post (Fladmark 1985). These later contexts, we suggest, reflect deteriorating conditions with the local Beaver Indians that culminated in the 1823 St. John's massacre (Ridington 1979; Krech 1982; among others).

The artifact assemblage from Rocky Mountain Fort, exclusive of faunal remains, is in excess of 23,000 specimens. Over 92 per cent of these are trade beads, and half of the remainder consist of lead ball, shot, lead sprue, and small fragments of brass sheet metal. When compared to other fur trade assemblages (e.g., Klimko 1988; Kidd 1970; Kehoe 1978), including that excavated by Fladmark at St. John's, this collection is extremely limited in specimens larger than a gunflint, and even poorer in artifacts that occur in a complete state. The situation can be attributed to the extreme distances over which materials had to be transported and the intensity with which the initial trade was being carried out along the upper Peace River.

Because of the perishable nature of many potential trade goods, it is difficult to estimate the full composition of the Rocky Mountain Fort trading outfit. Almost all of the artifacts found on site occur in existing North West Company outfit lists for posts outside of the Peace River region (cf. Prager 1980). These include basic utilitarian items such as knives, awls, files, axes, razors, brass kettles, fish hooks, metal arrow heads, trade guns, gun parts, ball, and shot. The high frequencies of ornamental artifacts at Rocky Mountain Fort indicate they formed an equally important component for trade. These consist of beads, hawk bells, buttons, tinkling cones, pendants, brooches, finger rings, and earrings. The trading outfit, as indicated in the Rocky Mountain Fort journal, was also provided with quantities of spirits and tobacco.

The distance over which goods had to be transported undoubtedly affected the nature of the trading assemblage and the value accorded these materials by local Indian peoples. With a small number of exceptions such as the glass goblet, a limited suite of ceramic tablewares, or mirrors to be used in the trade, few items are of a fragile nature. We have found few personal artifacts exclusive of those present in a trading outfit, and little

to indicate heavy or bulky articles. On the other hand, the recovery of silver brooches, exotic shell, and elaborate wire spun beads illustrates the presence of compact, high-value materials. High degrees of re-manufacture and recycling also characterize the Rocky Mountain Fort artifact assemblage. This includes the sectioning of silver brooches into smaller objects such as pendants, as well as extensive recycling of sheet metal from brass kettles for projectile points, pendants, and tinkling cones. While evidence of these recycling activities is frequently encountered in western Canadian fur trade assemblages, we maintain that the remoteness of Rocky Mountain Fort required higher than normal levels of raw material curation and recycling. Research in progress indicates that the Rocky Mountain Fort brass metal scraps are considerably smaller in size than those from contemporaneous posts located in less remote locales. These activities seemingly indicate limited quantities of available goods and the efforts of the fur trader to extend his trade good inventory as far as possible. The absence of larger artifacts may also have resulted from scavenging at the site following its abandonment in the spring of 1804.

Of all components of the Rocky Mountain Fort excavated assemblage, the most informative are the faunal remains. These provide insight into patterns of subsistence and the intensity with which provisioning activities were carried out. They also provide information about animal populations in the upper Peace River valley during the initial period of intense fur trade exploitation. The Rocky Mountain Fort faunal assemblage includes over 136,300 specimens, of which 6 per cent can be identified minimally to anatomical element and species/size range (see Hamilton, Burley and Moon 1988: 122-38). Species representation within this assemblage is diverse, including a wide range of animals that would have been exploited for meat and/or furs.

Identifiable faunal remains, as expected, are dominated by large and medium ungulates. In the Rocky Mountain Fort journal of 1799/1800, the hunter is reported to have killed slightly more bison ($n = 21$) than wapiti ($n = 18$), although differences in body size between these two species suggests that bison were by far the most important food source (Hamilton 1987: 21). However, in the archaeological collection where species can be specifically identified, skeletal elements from wapiti (622) outnumber bison (174) three to one. We believe this variance is the result of differential intensity with which bison and wapiti bones were being processed for grease production in the provisioning trade. Bone grease, removed through the boiling of highly fragmented bone splinters (Zierhut 1967: 35), was an important constituent of fur trade diet, particularly

as a component of pemmican. Grease rendered from bison, as opposed to other species, was considered far superior in both texture and taste (Paget 1909; Merriman 1926). Whether of bison or other species, the intensity of bone grease rendering as part of Rocky Mountain Fort provisioning activities is documented in the tens of thousands of unidentifiable bone fragments. It also is graphically documented by a single entry in the Rocky Mountain Fort journal. After weighing provisions on 30 October 1799, the officer reports grease on hand as “2100^{lb}” (O’Neil 1928: 258).

Economically important fur bearers represented in the Rocky Mountain Fort assemblage include beaver, red fox, lynx, fisher, and wolverine. Beaver ($n = 656$), however, accounts for over three-quarters of the total. Such a high frequency of beaver, when compared to other fur bearers, suggests two things. First, it indicates that beaver populations within the immediate range of the fort were abundant and were actively hunted, either by Euro-Canadians or Indians. Second, we believe the relative frequencies of beaver, when compared to other fur bearers, indicates its use as a food source. Beaver, and particularly cub beaver, is documented as a much sought after dietary alternative in the fur trade (Ray 1974: 27). Other studies illustrate that humans living in cold climates with high meat diets require large intakes of fat; beaver substantially contributes to this necessity (Speth 1983; Hurlburt 1977). A disproportionate number of caudal vertebrae, in comparison to other skeletal elements, also indicates a culinary preference for beaver tail. The presence of the latter in the voyageur diet is recorded in the Rocky Mountain Fort journal when “32 Br Tails” were left as part of summer provisions for the year 1800 (O’Neil 1928: 269). The overall abundance of beaver remains at Rocky Mountain Fort attests to the richness of the local environment during the early period of the trade on the upper Peace River valley. The fact that local Indian peoples may have been trading this important dietary supplement, as indicated in the journal, strengthens such interpretation.

The overall range of species in the site faunal assemblage, with a few exceptions, is generally compatible with that in the region now. Bison are no longer present, and fur trade provisioning undoubtedly had a role to play in regional depopulation (Burley and Hamilton 1988). Also present is a single bone from the now extinct passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*). For interpretive purposes, the relative proportions of species representation may be more important than what is simply present or absent. Moose, for example, are rare ($n = 12$) in comparison to wapiti or bison. Equally significant are the low frequencies of rabbit ($n = 111$), when compared to beaver. The species are considered to be secondary resources

which were killed fortuitously, or sought only when the preferred alternatives, bison and beaver, were exhausted. Moose are solitary animals that, in the winter, are found in dense snow pack, while rabbits provide a low meat yield per animal and contain little fat. It is interesting to note that, at the later St. John's post (1806-1823), the proportionate abundance of moose and rabbit is not only higher, but significantly so (Williams 1978). Concomitantly, there is a dramatic reduction in the recovery of bison remains, and the proportion of beaver bones to other medium and small mammals is reduced. By the time this later post was established, both bison and beaver appear to have become decimated in the local region. Faunal comparison between Rocky Mountain Fort and St. John's will eventually provide important insight into fur trade ecological effects over a thirty-year period.

Conclusions

Prior to Fladmark's archaeological survey work during the mid-1970s, confusion existed as to the initial penetration of fur trade interests and the location of their establishments in the upper Peace River valley. Having recently completed two years of archaeological excavation at the earliest of these posts, Rocky Mountain Fort, we are beginning to acquire a better understanding of this important era in British Columbia history. These archaeological data are enhanced by a brief yet informative journal for the trading season 1799/1800, and by a small number of secondary references to this important site.

The North West Company had expanded its trading interests throughout most of the Athabasca Department by the early 1790s. While no doubt profitable in terms of fur returns, this expansion severely taxed the company's already over-extended logistical resupply and communications network. Annual canoe brigades travelling the 6,000-kilometre return trip to Rainy Lake were dependent upon large quantities of provisions. Alexander Mackenzie's 1793 descriptions of animal abundance on the upper Peace River provided ample incentives for a further expansion westward. In the fall of 1794, at the confluence of the Moberly and Peace rivers, Rocky Mountain Fort was founded.

North West Company historical accounts for the earliest period of Peace River trade no longer exist, if ever they were maintained. In October 1799, a journal was started that provides us both with historical verification of the fort's existence, and insight into the nature of the post. Rocky Mountain

Fort was a typical wintering post on the fringe of the fur trade frontier. It appears never to have been a substantial establishment, including a bare minimum of buildings to house the officer, men, and store surplus provisions. Although significant portions of the post are now destroyed through erosion, we believe the buildings once conformed to a U-shaped plan with an open courtyard facing the Peace River. The back of the U was formed by a two-room structure housing the officer and the trading shop. Along the eastern and possibly western flanks were row houses for the men. Centrally positioned was a fifty-five-foot flagpole and the fur press. The fort, for the entire length of its history, remained without a palisade.

The Journal of the Rocky Mountain Fort is dominated by accounts of the hunter's success. The officer in charge maintained a careful record of fresh, dried, and pounded meat, as well as grease, tallow, and other provisions on hand. The large volumes of meat being processed at this site went far beyond the consumption needs of the fort's contingent, indicating the importance of this site to North West Company provisioning efforts. The tens of thousands of splintered animal bones recovered from the archaeological excavation provide further testament to grease-rendering activities. After the amalgamation of the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, Governor Simpson had every expectation that the Peace River valley could continue to supply food to the New Caledonia brigades (Simpson 1968: 383). This expectation was never fulfilled, as the region became a net importer of provisions prior to the abandonment of Fort St. John in 1823 (Ray 1988).

Research at Rocky Mountain Fort provides at least limited insight into the dynamics of trade in a "pristine" environment with Indian groups who previously had limited access to European goods. From the Rocky Mountain Fort journal we know that tobacco and spirits were of primary importance, both as gifts and for barter. The journal also documents Indian participation in a system of credit that ultimately ensured a growing dependence upon European commodities (Ray 1974). From archaeological evidence, we suggest not only that trade was active but also that it led to shortages of goods. The recycling of brass kettle sheet metal and the re-manufacture of high-priced items such as silver brooches illustrate various attempts to stretch the outfit as far as possible. When the richness of the local environment is taken into consideration, we suspect the Peace River area to have been highly profitable to the North West Company, even with the considerable costs of transportation. Of central importance in this economic equation was a reliable supply of locally acquired "country provi-

sions" which were used to expedite the particularly long and arduous transportation system for the Athabasca Department.

In the fall of 1804, Rocky Mountain Fort ceased to exist as an active trading establishment. This, as far as can be determined, was occasioned by Simon Fraser's need to have a more strategically positioned fort for North West Company expansion into New Caledonia. Trade on the upper Peace was by no means exhausted. Within two years a second fort, St. John's, had been established at the mouth of the Beaton River. By 1820, the Hudson's Bay Company had finally broken the upper Peace River monopoly with their establishment of Yale's House, adjacent to the then abandoned Rocky Mountain Fort. While their hopes for this region remained high (see Simpson 1968: 383), relationships with the local Indians and profitability had deteriorated. In 1823, the St. John's massacre brought an abrupt end to the early fur trade history of British Columbia's upper Peace River.

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