

Kajewski Site Slide Presentation -- 2014

Intro. (5 min. approx.)

Title Slide. Good _____. My name is Jack Elliott and I worked on various archaeological research projects in the Cypress Hills from 1966 to 1972. 1966 was a prehistoric site survey on the Alberta side the Hills, 1967 and 1969 were cabin excavations at an historic Métis buffalo hide-hunter winter camp west of Elkwater Lake, and 1972 was the excavation of the historic Cypress Hills Massacre site near Ft. Walsh in Saskatchewan. Does everyone understand the terms *Hivernant*? The French term *Hivernant* loosely translates as “winter traveler,” i.e. nomadic Métis people who hunted and trapped out on the plains year round, in all seasons.

Today, I’m gonna discuss the archaeology investigation of the 19th century Head-of-the-Mountain hivernant cabin site in the Cypress Hills.

Slide 1. Northwest Plains Hivernant wintering sites & Cypress Hills hunting territory.

Slide 2. The Cypress Hills are a flat-topped plateau left untouched as the remainder of the northern plains were carved and remodeled by glaciers during the last ice age. The Hills are about 85 miles east-west, about 25 miles north-south, 1/3 in Alberta and 2/3 in Saskatchewan. “Head of the Mountain” at the west end is 4810 ft. above sea level and the West, Center & East Blocks trend eastward toward the “the Tail,” 3500 ft. above sea level near Eastend, Saskatchewan. Elkwater is the same elevation as Banff, with a similar subalpine climate. The Hills sit upon a mixed grass prairie, are forested along north facing slopes & interior creek valleys, and have a grass & pine savannah on the flat plateau top. Once an island in an ocean of glacier ice, more recently the Hills became an island in an ocean of grass, and provided a lush & unique environment which sheltered people, animals & plants for thousands of years. (Describe buffalo analogy used for the Hills.)

Slide 3. In 1967, a cluster of 6 historic cabin remains were initially located and one cabin (Cabin A) was excavated near the headwaters of Gros Ventr Creek on the Kajewski Ranch, after the landowner Lawrence Kajewski first drew attention to the site. Cabin A (dated 1865-1879) was immediately noteworthy, with an unusual mixture of historic white trade goods & prehistoric-style aboriginal stone tools associated with the log cabin remains. In contrast, prehistory ended much earlier on the northern plains, by 1770. The unusual artifact assortment and a search of historic records led to the conclusion that Cabin A was part of an historic settlement of Hivernant hide hunters. This is a wide angle shot of the settlement site at the Kajewski Ranch (point out general location & landmarks). Further investigation was needed to explore the settlement and verify the unusual findings from Cabin A.

2 more cabins were excavated in 1969 (Cabin B, dated 1866-1879) & (Cabin E, dated 1860-1879). We also found surface indications for 13 more cabins -- a total of 19 cabins loosely clustered in a settlement on a series of benches along the forested northwestern slope below “Head of the Mountain. Extermination of the northern buffalo herd by Métis commercial hide

hunters, followed by starvation and loss of income, most likely led to abandonment of the settlement by 1879. The excavated cabins also showed evidence of being burned, possibly by the many forest fires that were recorded after the cabins were abandoned.

There is an eye-witness description of this particular settlement. A report by the NWMP surgeon, Dr. John Kittson, noted that during a general typhoid epidemic which swept the Hills seasonally from 1876 to 1879, only one of five Half-breed hamlets in the hills escaped the epidemic. Kittson wrote: *At 'Head-of-the-Mountain', twenty-one miles west of Fort Walsh, some twenty and odd families generally gather there in the early fall to make their homes for the winter in a secluded spot ... where a spring of clear, pure water wells forth in their very midst; not one person in this community ever had the fever.* (in Elliott, 1970:77-78)

In effect, there were several historic Métis settlements in the Cypress Hills -- the previously described settlement at Kajewski Ranch -- a 2nd settlement in Four Mile Coulee on the Saskatchewan side of the Hills -- a 3rd settlement at the mouth of Chimney Coulee near Eastend, Sask. -- a 4th settlement possibly near Ft. Walsh after it was established by the NWMP -- a 5th site with several cabin remains at the head of Willow Creek on the south side of the plateau which may be either a small Métis settlement or a NWMP outpost -- and possibly a 6th settlement, where several cabins were said to have been destroyed on the north slope above Elkwater during the original construction of highway #41. This last bit of information came from Harry Peters, from one of the pioneer Elkwater families, who worked as an early forest ranger in the Cypress Hills.

Slide Show. (25 min. approx.)

Slide 4. Head-of-the-Mountain (Kajewski) settlement site map

Slide 5. Vegetation cover on the site. Site map being surveyed and drawn to scale.

Slide 6. Visual evidence on the forest floor for cabins consists of walls outlined by low linear mounds of clay chinking, circular chimney mounds of clay in one corner or centered on a back wall, and associated pit depressions. All these sites are situated in coulees or on forested, flat slump blocks along small streams with easy access to water, firewood, building materials and protection from winter blizzards.

Lets take a look at the 1969 excavations of cabins B &E at Kajewski Ranch, and if you would, I'll ask you to please save your questions until after the slides are finished.

Cabins were grided into 6 foot squares. Excavation was done by hand. (Note the chimney mound.) Artifacts were recorded and initially left in place. Plastic sheeting was then used to cover the open excavations to prevent the features from drying out & discoloring until we could map, photograph & finally remove the artifacts.

Slide 7. Wide-angle shot of Cabin B. Note walls, partial floor, two fire places, two rooms, butchering activity inside & outside the cabin, pit feature, etc. 3 distinct occupations occurred between 1866 and 1879.

Slide 8. Planview map of Cabin B.

Slide 9. The same Cabin B location photographed again on May 26th, 2010. The location has been almost totally obscured by forest growth since 1969.

Slide 10. Historic 1874 photo of a large multi-room Métis cabin in Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, east of the Cypress Hills.

Slide 11. Historic 1862-63 drawing of a smaller single-room Métis cabin, also in Saskatchewan. This was likely the more common winter cabin size & style.

Slide 12. Excavated Cabin B chimney mound x-section & fire place base. Note the colors. The fireplaces were framed with green log frames & covered over with the local light-grey to white-colored kaolinite clay, which changed to red color from the heat. During the 20th century Medicine Hat's Medalta Pottery Co. mined this same kaolinite clay commercially to produce pottery and building bricks.

Slide 13. Historic 1913 photo of one of the log frame & clay chimneys common to Métis winter cabins. This was an overnight stopover serving frontier travelers of the time, basically your early bed & breakfast.

Slide 14. Saddle-notched corner construction detail in Cabin B. Lab analysis indicates conifer and poplar logs were used for construction.

Slide 15. Red River-style post & beam corner construction detail in Cabin B.

Slide 16. Refuse pit outside Cabin B.

Slide 17. Cache pit outside Cabin B. Note whetstone for sharpening steel tools at pit edge.

Slide 18. Wide-angle shot of Cabin E. Note walls, partial floor, fire place, one room, butchering activity mostly outside the cabin, etc. (nearest end wall outside the photo). At least 2 distinct occupations occurred between 1860 and 1879.

Slide 19. Planview map of Cabin E.

Slide 20. The same Cabin E location photographed again on May 26th, 2010. Note the pits on the right which are the only remaining visible evidence for the location of the 1969 excavation.

Slide 21. Cabin E door sill.

Slide 22. Possible Red River-style corner construction detail in Cabin E (badly burned).

Slide 23. Closer view of a Cabin E butchering activity area.

Slide 24. Stratigraphic test pit excavated to verify vertical relationships of artifacts deposited in the ground. Archaeologists record & analyze both horizontal & vertical positions of artifacts during an excavation. Horizontal artifact distributions provide information to interpret activities & occupations within a site, while vertical artifact distributions provide information to relatively date artifacts & occupations within a site, e.g. earlier vs. later in time.

Slide 25. Fragment of a flaked bifacial stone “knife” in the test pit. The stratigraphic test pit helped verify the co-relationship of prehistoric-style stone artifacts and historic trade artifacts.

Slide 26. Stratigraphic x-section through a multiple-year refuse pit outside Cabin E.

Slide 27. Cache pit outside Cabin E. The pit contained the remains of a buffalo front shoulder with an associated lead musket ball and stone cobble chopping tool.

Slide 28. Another cache pit outside Cabin E.

Slide 29. Faunal remains. Note the butchering marks, likely from a steel edged tool, on both the canine vertebrae and the buffalo mandible -- e.g. from severing the tongue.

Slide 30. Faunal remains, incl. domestic sheep humeri, and a dog or coyote mandible. Interestingly, a few sheep remains were found in each of the excavated cabins.

Slide 31. Hunting & defense artifacts, incl. stone projectile points, cartridge cases & musket balls dated 1860-1874, flintlock gun frizzen spring, damaged gun cleaning rod.

Slide 32. Trapping & commerce artifacts, incl. steel trap jaws, I. Orillard lead bale seal (note 3 parts), 1877 USA quarter dollar coin. Not shown are numerous fragments of lead sheet originally used to line tea chests & likely recast for musket balls on occasion.

Slide 33. Close-up view of the 1877 quarter dollar coin.

Slide 34. Cutting & butchering artifacts, incl. steel trade axe, folding pocket knife, teshoa hide dressing tool & flaked stone biface tools.

Slide 35. Cobble stone teshoa hide working tool (1 of 4 recovered).

Slide 36. Whetstones used for sharpening steel trade tools. Note the sandstone whetstone recovered from the edge of the Cabin B cache pit, shown earlier.

Slide 37. Harness & tack artifacts, incl. hoof pick, etc.

Slide 38. Quartzite hammerstone & waste flakes, from making & resharpening stone tools.

Slide 39. Bone, stone & steel hide working tools.

Slide 40. *Copeland* pattern chinaware manufactured in England 1847-1867. By 1876 English goods were being imported directly from England to Ft. Benton under cash bond to avoid US tariffs & provide cheaper prices for British North West Métis & Aboriginal customers, who had previously traded for the same goods at HBC posts at 25% higher prices.

Slide 41. Household artifacts, incl. a fire steel (or possibly a cabinet handle), assorted hardware, glass bottle neck, spice shaker lid, table utensils.

Slide 42. Ornamental artifacts, incl. pces. of buff & red colored mineral ochre, pce. brass sheet, jingler for a dress fringe, and a selection of glass trade beads & various buttons.

Slide 43. Handmade tin dish, possibly a tallow lamp.

Slide 44. Gambling & handicraft artifacts, incl. flattened musket ball gaming counters, reused cartridge cases, pce. sheet brass, scissors handle, stone incising tool.

Slide 45. Last but not least -- triangular steel files, fragments of US trade clay pipes, plus various unfinished preforms & finished fragments of handmade pipes recovered outside Cabin B & made from local Frenchman Formation sandstone which outcrops approx. 1/2 mile from the settlement (according to lab comparisons). One is a trade pipe copy, another fragment is similar to ceremonial Plains Cree style pipes. According to fragments found in refuse pits, pipe making occurred during all three occupations in Cabin B, and incidentally is yet another example of stone artifacts created by these particular Hivernants.

Cougar Slide.

Thank you. Questions & Answers (10-15 min. approx.)

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