

INDIAN INVOLVEMENT IN HERITAGE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:

A SASKATCHEWAN EXAMPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Indian participation in archaeological research and especially the establishment of heritage parks dealing with prehistory is a relatively recent phenomenon in Canada. After years of mistrust and even confrontation concerning archaeological issues, it appears that more interest on the part of the Native community concerning archaeology is finally beginning to see the light of day. This is important because, if nothing else, it signals a renewed interest in cultural heritage. At the same time, interest in Indian history and culture is increasing among non-Indians to the point that facilities, such as heritage parks dealing with prehistory, attract very high visitation levels and can become successful tourist attractions. Perhaps as a sign that these kinds of issues are becoming more popular, the Canadian Archaeological Association held a workshop concerning Indian participation in archaeology at its annual conference in Toronto in April of 1986. More recently, the Canadian Conference on Historical Resources held in Lethbridge, Alberta, during October, 1987, focussed on Native involvement and dealt with issues such as heritage resource development, interpretative development of Native sites, education and the interpretation of Native heritage, the public trust and Native materials, as well as Native history and research.

Recently, one such heritage park development has been proposed for the Saskatoon area which is primarily concerned with Northern Plains prehistory. Referred to as Wanuskewin (WAH-NUS-KAY-WIN), meaning "a refuge or a place of harmony," this facility is expected to open in 1990 and hopefully will become a focal point for all segments of society to begin to appreciate Native culture and history. Despite the fact that the park is only now proceeding through detailed planning stages, the project has already received widespread public attention. On February 20,

1984, the Wanuskewin Heritage Park was officially designated as provincial heritage property by the Government of Saskatchewan. In November of 1986, the federal government, on behalf of the National Heritage Sites and Monuments Board, announced that Wanuskewin had been designated as a National Historic Site. Appropriately, the site was formally dedicated as such on October 19, 1987, by Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II during a visit to the site (Plate 1).

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Wanuskewin Heritage Park project with special emphasis on the role of the Indian community. Although this particular aspect of the project has attracted considerable attention in its own right, the approach described here is not meant to serve as a model as to how such developments might proceed. The Wanuskewin approach works because of a unique set of circumstances that might not be conducive to duplication elsewhere. Instead, the intent of this paper is to present pertinent background information about a particular project and to describe the nature of Indian involvement in the overall development plan.

THE WANUSKEWIN PROJECT

The site of the proposed Wanuskewin Heritage Park is located approximately three kilometers north of the City of Saskatoon immediately adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River. Physiographically, the area consists of undulating, eroded till plains and glaciolacustrine plains. These uplands are deeply dissected by the South Saskatchewan River and its tributary Tipperary Creek. Coulee depressions along the valley walls as well as terraces and point bars in the valley bottom, contain a large number of archaeological sites which span the past 6000 years of prehistory.

The archaeological sites that are found within the Wanuskewin Heritage Park include a boulder alignment site, a tipi ring site, four bison procurement sites, and numerous habitation areas. The boulder alignment, also known as "medicine wheel," consists of a central cairn of stones surrounded by a peripheral



PLATE 1: Procession of H.R.H. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip at Wanuskewin Heritage Park on October 19, 1987.

ring of stones analogous to the hub and rim of a wheel respectively. Smaller stone cairns lie outside of the peripheral ring. This structure is probably about 1500 years old and certainly one of the more northerly boulder alignment structures of this type on the Northern Plains. Immediately adjacent is a series of tipi rings which consist of rings of stones that were used to secure the covers of conical lodges or tipis. Along the steep valley walls and in some of the adjacent coulees, the vertical drop is sufficient to allow the capture of bison by a variety of methods. These bison kill sites include actual jumps where animals were stampeded over a precipice as well as the use of a pound or corral-like structure into which the bison were maneuvered. The processing areas associated with these bison kill sites are also represented nearby. Given this type of prehistoric activity, it is not unusual to expect to find campsite or habitation areas of which there are numerous examples. Many of these are multicomponent and deeply buried, indicating use over thousands of years.

Given the varied nature of these archaeological resources, the fact that most are completely intact with little or no recent disturbance, the fact that the natural environment is similarly only marginally altered, and the fact that these archaeological deposits are located adjacent to a major urban area, provide an excellent opportunity for interpretative development. The Meewasin Valley Authority, a conservation agency which is located in Saskatoon and which owns the proposed park property, has been instrumental in promoting the development of this unique park. This has been done in conjunction with a research team centered in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Saskatchewan, which is involved in scientific investigation of archaeological deposits within the park. The master plan prepared for the heritage park calls for establishment of a visitor center associated with a system of trails which would allow access to the archaeological and natural resources of the park. On-site interpretation would be accomplished through a combination of interpretive signage, guided tours, active archaeological

participation, audio-visual presentations, and live dramatics. Indian people are expected to form a core of the interpretive staff as well as fulfill other roles within the administrative and operational infrastructure.

The goal of this project is to promote and establish an internationally-recognized heritage park dealing with prehistory that serves as a major tourist attraction and contributes to increasing public awareness and understanding of the cultural legacy of the Northern Plains Indians. Four major objectives dominate this development plan proposed for the Wanuskewin Heritage Park. These objectives include: 1) scientific research; 2) public education; 3) tourism development; and 4) cultural development primarily involving the Indian community of Saskatchewan. Cultural development in this sense involves the provision of a focal point for the expression of the cultural heritage of Northern Plains Indians by preserving the archaeological resources and natural environment as well as by providing opportunities for ongoing ceremonies and other events that promote and strengthen Plains Indian culture. Clearly the thematic emphasis of the park is on the prehistory of the Northern Plains areas via a series of seven subthemes related to traditional Indian life. These subthemes are concerned with topics such as: 1) spiritual foundations; 2) Native perspectives and philosophy; 3) prehistoric hunting behaviour; 4) the gathering of indigenous plant materials; 5) human habitation and social organization; 6) archaeological interpretation; and 7) changing Plains culture.

INDIAN INVOLVEMENT IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Indian involvement in the Wanuskewin project has grown dramatically from the early planning years. Original Native involvement in 1983 was limited to a single member on the master plan development team and a single member on a master plan steering committee. Soon after, an embryonic group of Indian representatives was formed consisting of three individuals. One of these was a senator from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian

Nations, one represented the Saskatchewan Indian Languages Program, while the third worked with elders from the Saskatchewan Cultural Center. Together they constituted the Wanuskewin Indian Planning and Development Committee, established on December 10, 1985. Once it was recognized that full involvement of the Indian community was vital for a heritage park project of this nature, the committee was expanded to ten members. This group currently includes a cross-section of the Saskatchewan Indian community, with each administrative district of the province and each cultural group (Cree, Sauteaux, Dakota, and Dene) having representation.

The purpose of the Indian Planning and Development Committee is to oversee the planning process and to ensure that the needs and aspirations of the Native community are met. This Committee also serves to promote the projects as well as participate in the lobby for funding. All ongoing ceremonial activities are organized and/or sanctioned by the Committee. In the immediate future, the members of the Committee will play a critical role in the process of interpretative program design to ensure its accuracy and acceptability. This is especially the case where the theme related to spiritual foundations is concerned.

Indian students have also been involved in the actual archaeological research carried out within the park. This includes field assistants and members of a field school program held each year (Plate 2). Ultimately, it is hoped that this type of participation can be greatly expanded not only including university students, but also students from other institutions, as well as elementary and high school students.

In terms of Indian involvement in actual archaeological research and the training of personnel to carry out such research, the best examples are undoubtedly from the American southwest. The Navaho Tribal Council maintains an active interest in all archaeological research conducted on the reservation and, in fact, through the office of the Tribal Archaeologist stationed at Window Rock, Arizona, carries out internally much of the impact assessment research. Many Navaho tribal members have extensive

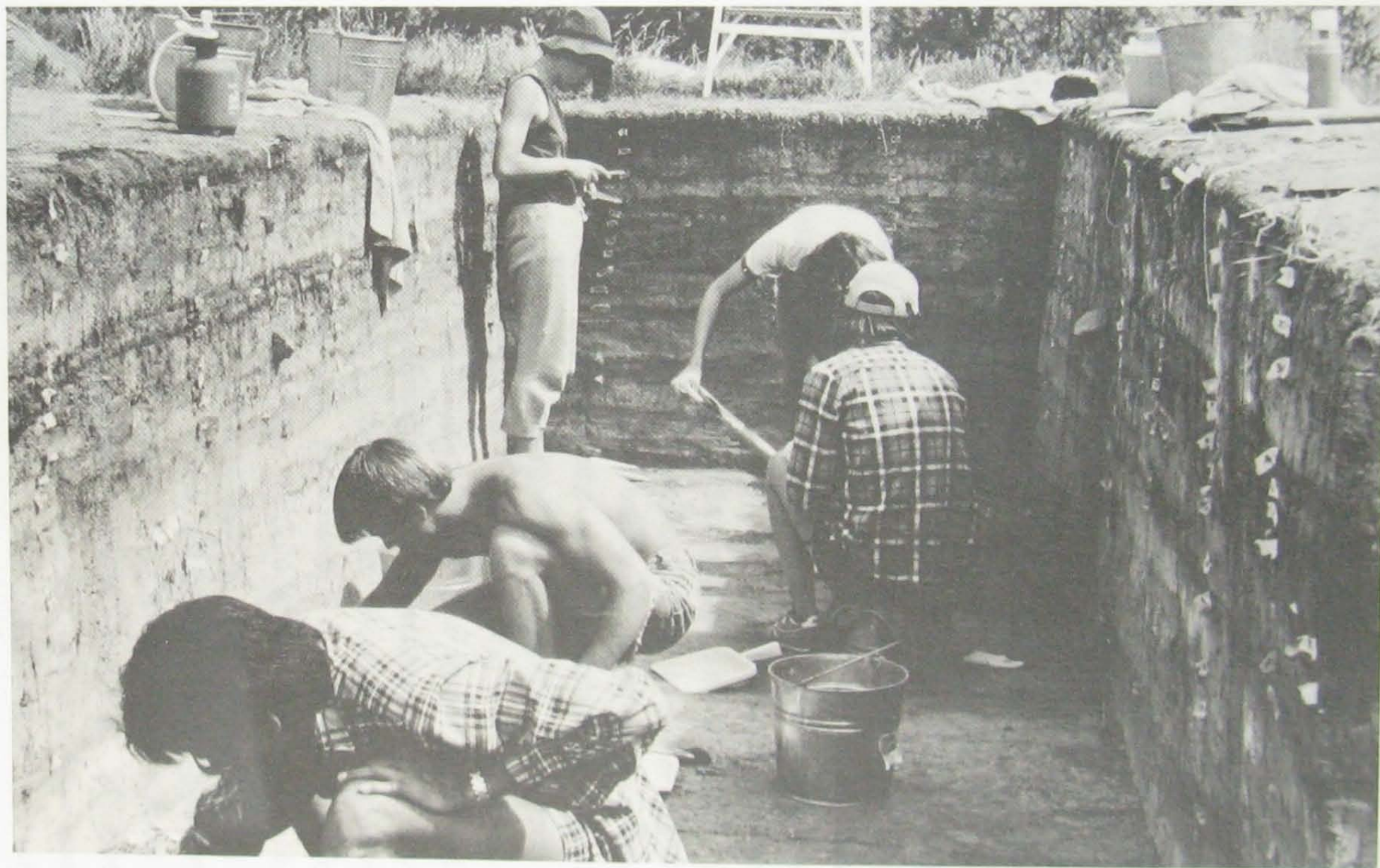


PLATE 2: Indian and non-Indian research field assistants at the Tipperary Creek site, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, 1985.

experience in the local archaeology and obviously these types of research projects serve as a vehicle for employment on the reservation. Since the Navaho Tribal Council oversees all archaeological research on reservation lands, their level of involvement is longstanding and intensive. The neighbouring Hopi are also involved in archaeological research on their reservation, but to a lesser degree than the Navaho. Farther north, the Paiute Tribal Council at Cedar City, Utah, has been involved in archaeological research, but again at a much less intensive level. Some programs do exist for training Indian people in archaeological resource management techniques. For example, both the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona and the Zuni Indian Reservation in New Mexico have offered such training programs. In Canada, this sort of involvement is only in its embryonic stages and really only consists of hiring a few Indian field workers on a sporadic basis. There is a genuine need to establish these types of paraprofessional training programs in Canada and to provide the stimulus for professional academic training for Indian students in archaeology. Accordingly, the Canadian Archaeological Association has recently established an award for a Native student aimed at promoting this type of participation in archaeology.

DISCUSSION

Currently, there is extremely high non-Native interest, both nationally and internationally, in North American Indian history and prehistory. This is especially the case internationally and primarily in Europe, as evidenced by the plethora of art exhibits, cultural exchanges, book publishing, and tourist packages that have taken place or developed in recent years. Such interest seems to be expanding almost as rapidly within the Indian community itself albeit for somewhat different reasons. The appalling ignorance on the part of the non-Indian community concerning traditional aboriginal lifestyles and cultural values stands to be corrected and historical park developments, particularly those dealing with prehistoric themes, have a definite role to play in this regard. Even more gratifying, however, is the new found interest among

Indian people themselves, especially when resurgence of self-esteem and cultural pride lies at the basis of this involvement. Such participation not only involves reclamation of their own culture history, but also some decisions as to how this culture history will be portrayed to the community at large. In many instances, this may involve a move away from a museum facility to a land-based format in keeping with the traditional and even contemporary Native experience.

Also of some interest here is the whole question of archaeological sites and historic parks as tourist commodities. The involvement of Indian people necessitates that the economic benefits are not confined to one segment of the community. As such developments proceed, new doors are opened to the Native community via interpretative training and spin-off economic development. Increasingly, individual bands in Saskatchewan are looking at various ways of developing portions of reserve lands to tap the tourist market, thus creating employment and developing an economic base at home where currently none exists. Historic park development is but one option available.

One final note has to do with the whole question of models. As some of these developments, such as the Wanuskewin project described in this paper and the Head-Smashed-In project at Fort McLeod, Alberta, come into fruition, the question is always asked about which is the model approach. The consensus of those who have already been involved in such ventures is surely that no model exists, but that each project must adapt to the local situation.

The Wanuskewin project is in many ways unique and has tremendous potential for scientific investigation and public education. The park area shows continuous occupation over many thousands of years with virtually every type of archaeological site encountered on the Northern Plains represented. With proper management and promotion of these heritage resources, the Wanuskewin Heritage Park can become a showcase for heritage park development dealing with Native prehistory and a focus for Indian cultural activities throughout Saskatchewan.