

The Quest for Pasquatinow: An Aboriginal Gathering Centre in the Saskatchewan River Valley

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ABSTRACT. Pasquatinow is a Cree toponym which is recorded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts pertaining to the Saskatchewan River valley. The prominent portrayal of Pasquatinow on nineteenth-century maps and repeated references to it in the fur trade and other writings suggest that this location was important to the aboriginal occupants of the Saskatchewan River valley. This site, which occupies a well elevated, sandy valley top at the western edge of the Saskatchewan River delta, was recently located. Extensive archaeological deposits (Site FkMs-2) are present here, stretching almost a kilometre along the valley rim. Pasquatinow is interpreted as the location at which a regional band (perhaps 200-400 persons) congregated annually in pre- and post-contact times. As such, it is one of several such centres, regularly spaced along the Saskatchewan River.

SOMMAIRE. Pasquatinow est un toponyme cri qui apparaît dans les compte-rendus du XVIII^e et XIX^e siècle ayant trait à la vallée de la rivière Saskatchewan. La place importante accordée à Pasquatinow sur des cartes du XIX^e siècle et les nombreuses références à ce site dans la traite de la fourrure et dans divers récits prètent à penser qu'il s'agissait d'un site important pour les Autochtones occupant la vallée de la rivière Saskatchewan. Ce site qui occupe le haut d'une vallée sablonneuse sur l'extrémité ouest du delta de la rivière Saskatchewan a été récemment retrouvé. On y trouve des dépôts archéologiques importants (site FkMs-2) qui s'étendent sur près d'un kilomètre le long de la vallée. On pense que le site de Pasquatinow est l'endroit où une bande régionale (peut-être de 200 à 400 personnes) se réunissait chaque année avant et après le contact avec les Européens. En tant que tel, c'est l'un de plusieurs sites de ce genre qui s'échelonnent le long de la rivière Saskatchewan.

Introduction

In the late 1600s, those Europeans who began to trade with the residents of northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba found that thousands of locations and landforms throughout the boreal-forest region had been named by the first peoples. Since the Cree language was the *lingua franca* of the fur trade in interior western Canada, most of the European traders gained some grasp of this tongue and learned from the Crees the local place names. In particular, they used and recorded a series of Cree toponyms along the Saskatchewan River¹ (Figure 1). Most of these referred to the locations at which the largest annual aggregations of peoples occurred.

"Pasquatinow" was one of these named places. It appears on nineteenth-century maps as "Pasquatinow"² or "Pasquatinow Hill,"³ positioned on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, a few kilometres downstream from Tobin Rapids (Figure 1). One of the authors, David Meyer, has long been intrigued by these references to Pasquatinow. Therefore, during the summer of 1989 he, with another of the authors, Terry Gibson, travelled to the central part of the Saskatchewan River valley to try to locate the site. They were encouraged by the results of their 1989 visit and returned in the summer of 1990 to make a more formal investigation of the region. The following is a presentation and analysis of historical, geographical, archaeological and ethnographic information relating to this location. In particular, Pasquatinow will be discussed as an example of a seasonal aggregating centre, in relationship to the larger settlement pattern of the aboriginal hunters and gatherers of the Saskatchewan River valley.

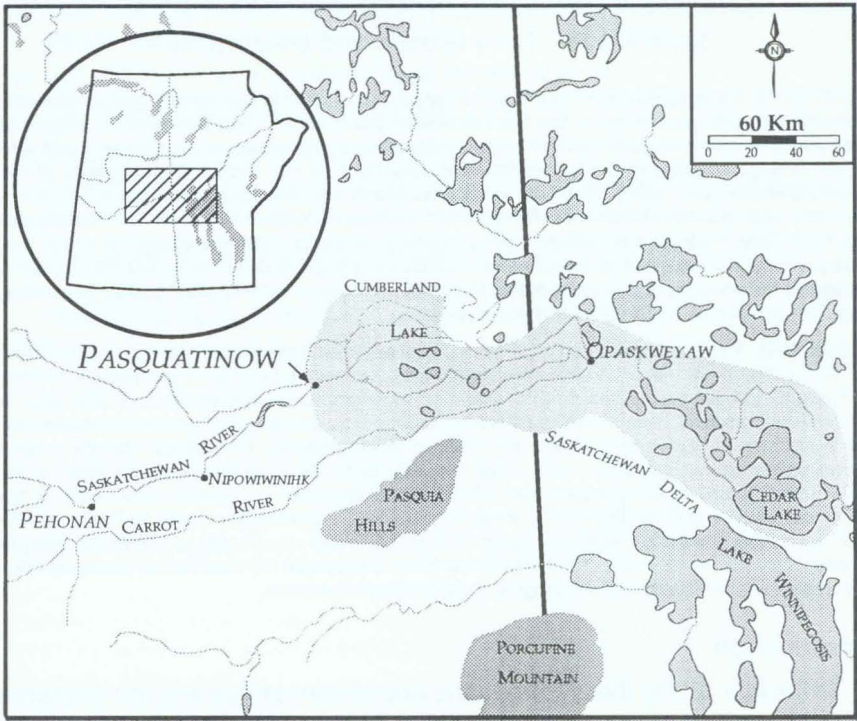


Figure 1. The Saskatchewan River valley, showing the extent of the Saskatchewan River delta. Some Cree place names are also shown.

Topography of the Pasquatinow Area

Pasquatinow is located on the Saskatchewan River, precisely at the point of transition between the Carrot River lowlands on the west and the Saskatchewan River delta (or, Cumberland Lake lowlands) on the east.⁴ This part of the Carrot River lowlands lies on the flat (former) bed of glacial Lake Agassiz. It is an area of very low relief, characterized by the sandy strandlines of the latter glacial lake and by the remnants of distributary channels through which the waters of the Saskatchewan River flowed into this glacial lake.

Travelling downstream in 1910, William McInnes of the Geological Survey of Canada described the descent into the Saskatchewan River delta in this way:

For a short distance, where the river contracts at Tobin and Squaw Rapids, the banks are again steep and high, but below the rapids fall away to a height of 10 feet or less and continue low to the mouth. This long stretch of river-valley extending to Grand rapids near the mouth, has the character of an estuary, in which the low, flat land is broken only by a few ridges of boulder clay... The elevation of the land above the general river level is not more than 10 feet, and in many places is much less, so that in periods of flood the river overflows its banks and spreads over nearly all this low-lying land.

The low, flat country forms a broad belt along this part of the river, extending northerly from the river for 15 miles, and southerly for 25 miles to the base of the Pasquia Hills.⁵

More generally, the Saskatchewan River delta has been described as "a gently sloping plain about 30 miles wide and 120 miles long,"⁶ extending from just below Tobin Rapids east to Cedar Lake. Almost all of the elevated land within the delta consists of levees which border either the Saskatchewan River or channels in which it has flowed in the distant past.⁷ Levees also border a number of smaller streams which flow into the delta. One of the former channels of the Saskatchewan River is the Sipanok, which trends southeast and eventually joins the Carrot River (Figure 1). The latter river empties into the Saskatchewan River at The Pas. Also within the delta are numerous lakes and marshes.

Historical Accounts

In order to understand the historical references to Pasquatinow and environs, it is necessary to consider some of the changes in the course of the Saskatchewan River which have occurred over the past two centuries (Figure 2). Just downstream of Pasquatinow, the Saskatchewan River once executed a sharp 5 km long turn to the north. This produced a tongue of land which was known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Mosquito Point.⁸ In the first half of the 1870s there was a dramatic natural event (an "avulsion"), the exact details of which do not seem to have been recorded; however, due to some combination of ice jams the spring floodwaters of the Saskatchewan River were diverted north from Mosquito Point, following Zig Zag Creek for 4 km. At this point the river waters left Zig Zag Creek and surged northward, eroding a new, 1.5 km long channel through to the Torch River.⁹ Either at the same time, or within two or three years, the river also gouged a "trench" across the base (south end) of Mosquito Point, forming the "Cut-off."¹⁰ As a result, Mosquito Point became surrounded by river channels and now appears on topographic maps as Anderson Island. At present, the new channel (post-1873) carries most of the water of the Saskatchewan River, emptying it into the west end of Cumberland Lake. The old channel (pre-1873) only flows during periods of high water.

Pasquatinow regularly appeared on nineteenth-century maps, the earliest of which accompanied Sir John Franklin's account of his travels published in 1823.¹¹ On that map it is shown as a prominent hill on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, opposite the mouth of the Sipanok Channel. Other nineteenth-century maps, such as the Palliser end map,¹² also show "Pasquatinow Hill"; however, it is evident that the information on this latter map, and others, was recopied from the information on the Franklin map. Pasquatinow Hill also appears on Dominion of Canada maps produced in the 1880s under the direction of Edouard Deville, chief inspector of surveys of Canada.

We have not attempted an exhaustive search for historical accounts of Pasquatinow but have reviewed several references to this location. The

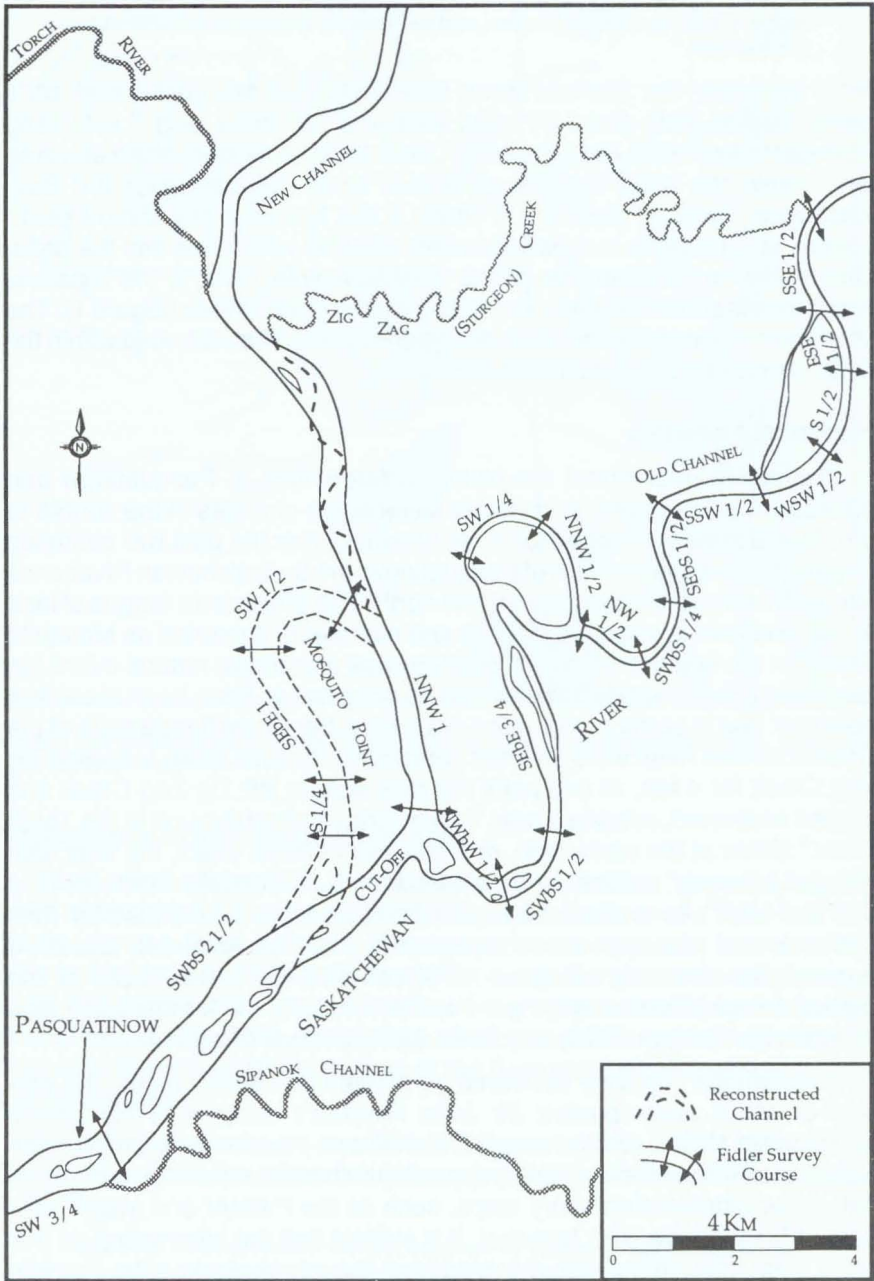


Figure 2. Saskatchewan River and Zig Zag Creek reconstructed to their approximate, pre-1870s channels, showing Peter Fidler's survey courses.

earliest of these is by a Hudson's Bay Company employee, Matthew Cocking. According to the unpublished version of Cocking's journal, in the course of journeying up the Saskatchewan River in 1772, his party portaged across the base of Mosquito Point on 6 August.¹³ Just before camping for the night, they passed the head of the Sipanok Channel. It is possible that they camped at Pasquatinow, because in his log entry for the next day Cocking noted: "the Natives call this part Pusquatinow from its being the termination of the woody Country."¹⁴ The next reference to Pasquatinow occurs five years later, again by Cocking. By this time he was in charge of Cumberland House and on 13 May 1777 he made this journal entry:

Two Indians arrived having left their Canoe in Saskachiwan River, brought little or nothing with them: They tell me that they came from the Place called Puskwatinow (i.e.) high bare ground — about One Third of the way between this Place and the Pedlers nearest Settlement.¹⁵

Cocking's observations, therefore, place Pasquatinow just upstream from Mosquito Point and provide a translation of the Cree name. We also learn that Crees were camping here in the spring.

More precise locational information is provided some years later by another Hudson's Bay Company trader and surveyor, Peter Fidler. His account of a survey trip up the Saskatchewan River in the autumn of 1792 is held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.¹⁶ Traversing the western portion of the Saskatchewan River delta, his observations of compass directions and distance estimates for each stretch of the Saskatchewan River make it reasonably straightforward to follow his course (Figure 2). His notations of landmarks such as islands and creek mouths are also very helpful. On 12 September 1792, Fidler's party reached "the head of Sturgeon river on North side — sometimes pass thro it in canoes, but it is farther about than to keep the Saskatchewan — it is partly supplied by this river — & 2 small rivulets that fall into it from the North."¹⁷ In other words, they had passed the head of Zig Zag Creek, at the northern extremity of Mosquito Point.

Fidler's party canoed on for another one-half mile on a southwesterly course and then put up for the night. As indicated by the following quote, Fidler's first courses for the morning of 13 September were SEbE1 and S1/4, at which point they reached a small island (judging by contemporary aerial photographs and maps, this island no longer exists):

At 4 1/2 AM, got underway, went SEbE 1-S 1/4 a small Isld. SWbS 2 1/2, a pretty high bank on the North side, called Pes coo tin naw — a stony shore — T_?_ etc — this is the first appearance of a good dry place since we left Oo pas qui aw [The Pas] — it only extends about 1/4 mile along the river & is the termination of a small hill from within — put out the Tracking Line & Tracked the Canoes — all below, paddling & _?etting with poles. low _?_ steep banks, etc. — & several small willow Islands — went along the North side SW 3/4 the head of Sepannuck or the Carrot river on South side that falls into this river a little above Oo pas qui aw ...¹⁸

Fidler's account, therefore, indicates that Pasquatinow ("Pes coo tin naw") is on the north side of the riverbank, and in the vicinity of the head of the Sipanok Channel.

Additional information about Pasquatinow is provided by the travel diary of Alexander Henry the Younger. In August 1808, his party travelled up the Saskatchewan River. Having passed Mosquito Point, Henry wrote:

At this place, which is called Barren hill, commences the first range of high land on this river; on the N., where the land is elevated near 100 feet, the soil is yellow sand covered only with short grass. The hill is a delightful spot, compared with the low marshy country we have passed, but the surrounding country looks wretched; it is overgrown with the same wood as below, which in many places appears to have been ravaged by fire, the trees lying across each other in every direction.¹⁹

While Henry does not refer to this location as Pasquatinow, the editor (Coues) does propose this identification. This is almost certainly correct since Pasquatinow is the Cree word *paskwatinow*, "bare/bald hill" and it is apparent that Henry has simply provided an alternate English translation ("Barren hill").

A more recent reference to Pasquatinow occurs in the official report of Otto J. Klotz, a surveyor employed by the Canadian government. He travelled the Nelson and Saskatchewan rivers in 1884 and made this observation:

About opposite the head of the Sepenock Channel there is an elevation called Pasquatinas, meaning, in Cree "the little bare hill"; Sepenock meaning "a narrow channel making an island."²⁰

It is puzzling that Klotz employed this variant form, "Pasquatinas," with the diminutive suffix — evidently *paskwatinis*, which Klotz correctly translated as "the little bare hill." However, the fact that Klotz recorded this place name in the diminutive is evidence that he obtained his information locally, and did not simply refer to existing maps.

Therefore, these accounts and maps indicate that the rise of land named Pasquatinow is on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, approximately across from the entrance to the Sipanok Channel. It is composed of a deposit of yellow sand that forms a valley side which rises nearly 30.5 m (100 ft.) above the river and on its summit is/was a meadow. As well, the riverbank at the base of this elevation is rocky — the first appearance of a stony river's edge on the western edge of the Saskatchewan River delta.

The Search

During our initial visit to this region on 15-16 July 1989, we walked about 1.5 km of valley side and found one location which we thought could be Pasquatinow (Figure 3). This was on the north side of the Saskatchewan River valley, roughly opposite the head of the Sipanok Channel. In the winter of 1989-90, we decided to organize a more formal project and subsequently obtained the requisite archaeological research permit. We intended to expand our walking reconnaissance, to dig some trowel holes, and to collect artifacts as warranted. In particular, we had noted a topographic high mapped just west of the south end of Anderson Island

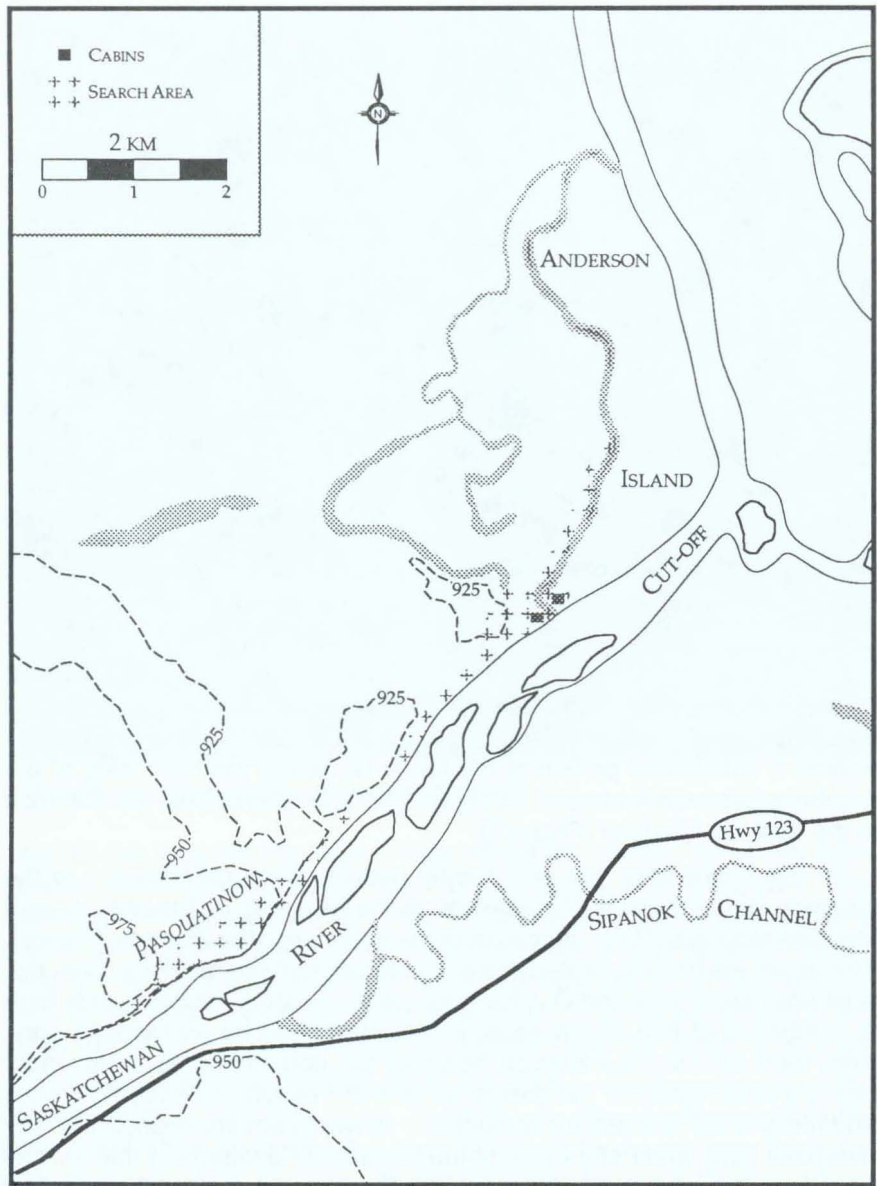


Figure 3. Map showing twenty-five-foot contour lines and section of riverbank searched between Anderson Island and the area across from the head of the Sipanok Channel.

(Figure 3). It seemed that this could be the location of a hill (and, therefore, Pasquatinow) and so we determined to examine it in the summer of 1990.

Upon our return, on 25 August 1990 we first searched the forest on the west side of the entrance to the abandoned channel on the west side of

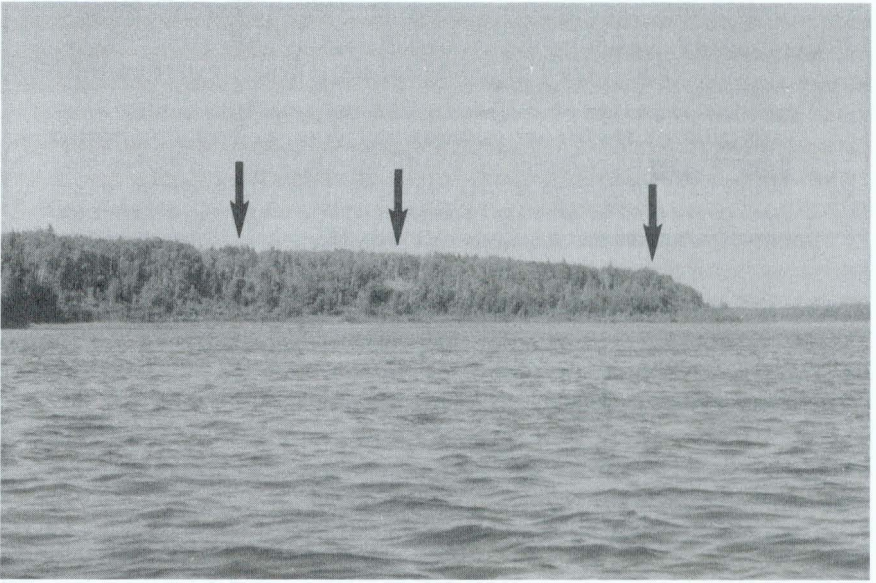


Figure 4. View of Pasquatinow from the Saskatchewan River, looking northeast. The arrows in the centre of the photograph indicate the locations of two grassy openings on the valley edge. The arrow on the right indicates the eastern end of Pasquatinow, beyond which is the Saskatchewan River delta.

Anderson Island. We found that there was no elevated area and that the topographic high shown on the map was not evident on the ground. We walked a substantial portion of the forest bordering the north side of the riverbank between Anderson Island and the area across from the entrance to the Sipanok Channel (Figure 3).

In this entire area, the only terrain feature which corresponds to the historical descriptions of Pasquatinow is the valley top on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, across from the entrance to the Sipanok Channel. Therefore, we have accepted this as the location of Pasquatinow: first, this is where Peter Fidler and O.J. Klotz located it; second, the valley side here is composed of fine yellow sand, just as described by Alexander Henry; third, there are two meadows on the valley top, corresponding to Alexander Henry's observation of the grassy summit of Pasquatinow; fourth, stones and rocks which are absent immediately downstream are abundant on the riverbank here, and Peter Fidler noted that it is at Pasquatinow that the first stony shore appears; fifth, this locale is the first high land on the western edge of the delta, just as described by Alexander Henry; sixth, there is a major archaeological site at this location, which would be expected of an important camping place. The official archaeological designation of this site is FkMs-2.

A Description of Pasquatinow

When we first visited this area, our attention was immediately drawn to the treeless openings (Figure 4) along the valley summit across from the



Figure 5. Meadow on the valley top at Pasquatinow, looking west.

head of the Sipanok Channel. These meadows on the valley rim were obvious even from a distance of a kilometre away, out on the river. The valley summit is about 15m (50 ft.) above the river, with one small area rising above 23m (75 ft.) (Figure 3). The valley side here is a huge deposit of yellow sand, the edge of a large area of stabilized sand dunes which stretches away to the north. While this dune area becomes quite hummocky a few hundred metres north of the valley rim, at the rim itself the terrain is fairly flat.

The valley rim here supports a fringe of poplars which gives way on the north to an open jack pine forest. There is very little shrubbery within the latter forest, although blueberries and bearberries form a mat over the forest floor. In two locations, both hugging the valley rim, there are small meadows (Figure 5). In both cases, young poplars appear to be invading the margins of these grassy areas.

One of the meadows extends east-west along the valley edge for 30m and is 18m wide north-south. The second meadow is positioned some 60 m to the west and is larger, stretching along the valley rim for 45 m. We collected two samples of grasses from the former meadow. Dr. Vernon Harmes of the Fraser Herbarium, University of Saskatchewan, has identified one of the samples as Kentucky bluegrass, an introduced European



Figure 6. The sandy valley side at Pasquatinow, looking north. Note the rocky shore and the figure standing at the water's edge.

species, and the other as sand reed grass, *Calamagrostis longifolia*, a species characteristic of the Prairies to the south. Dr. Harmes pointed out that this location is an extension of the known range of the latter species, as the nearest known occurrence is some 80 km to the southwest, south of the town of Nipawin. Sand reed grass is the dominant grass of both of the small meadows.

The valley side at Pasquatinow is steep and, except for the upper quarter, supports a forest of young aspens, with willows just above the riverbank (Figure 6). The upper part of the valley side is sparsely vegetated, and sand is exposed in many areas; however, judging by the many rocks exposed on the river's edge here (Figure 6), this deposit of sand must rest on glacial till.

Archaeological Observations

A 375 m long stretch of the outer edge of the valley rim is exposed in a narrow "cutbank," up to .5 m high, below which is a steep slope of slumped sand (Figure 7). Some portions of the upper valley side have been trampled by the resident elk and are free of vegetation. Apparently, these elk search out areas near the valley top where they can stand in the breeze in an attempt to escape their insect tormentors. There are, therefore, some sizeable areas of open sand here, which we examined for visible archaeological remains.



Figure 7. The eroding upper edge of the valley side at Pasquatinow, looking west.

Along the cutbank we observed an intermittent scatter of archaeological materials (Table 1), all originating from the thin, exposed "A" horizon (topsoil) within a few centimetres of the surface. These included bone fragments, bits of fire-cracked rock and some lithic debitage. A well-incised elk trail follows the valley summit, while another, roughly parallel trail is situated deeper in the forest (up to 40 m north of the valley rim). We walked these trails and regularly observed fire-cracked rock. Indeed, some pieces of fire-cracked rock were noted on the forest floor outside of the elk trails. It is very unusual to find visible archaeological materials in undisturbed areas within the boreal forest. We must conclude, therefore, that the occupational remains here are prolific and concentrated.

We examined the eroding edge of the valley rim very carefully and set up a temporary datum from which to take measurements. This datum is a poplar tree which is located on the east side of a rise (1.5 m) in the central area of the site. We blazed this tree on its east and west sides to allow its identification over the next few years. Since the cultural materials in the cut bank tended to occur in clusters, we measured the distance from the datum tree to each of the concentrations, made notes on the materials visible in each concentration and collected some samples.

Table 1
Observations of Archaeological Materials

Distance from Datum	Cutbank Exposure	Elk Trail Exposure
0 m E	4 pieces fcr*	1 piece fcr
15 m E	scatter of unburned and calcined bone fragments	
18 m E	4 pieces fcr	
22 m E	1 piece fcr	
24.5 m E	1 fragment clamshell	
33 m E	1 piece fcr	
42 m E	1 piece fcr, 1 unburned bone fragment, 2 SRC** flakes	
45 m E	3 small unburned bone fragments	
48.5 m E	exposed hearth – 2 pieces fcr, ashes, many small fragments of calcined bone	
50 m E	many small fragments of calcined bone	
56.5 m E	1 piece fcr, 1 burned and 5 calcined bone fragments	
61 m E	2 large mammal long bone fragments, 1 piece fcr	
64.5-66 m E	2 SRC flakes, 1 quartz flake, 1 shale flake, 1 bird bone fragment, many small fragments of calcined bone	
70.5-72 m E	1 piece burned limestone, many small fragments of calcined bone	
75 E	major hearth exposed – 13 pieces fcr, charcoal fragments, 3 fragments of unburned bone – including one section of large mammal rib	
77.5 m E	1 rim sherd, 1 basalt flake, 1 fragment unburned bone	
86.5 m E	1 SRC uniface, 1 burned and 6 unburned bone fragments	
96 m E	1 flake SRC, 1 flake basalt, 2 fragments burned bone	
108.5 m E	1 flake SRC, 1 piece fcr, many small fragments of calcined bone	
115.5 m E	numerous small fragments of burned and unburned bone	1 piece fcr
142.5 m E		10 pieces fcr
167 m E	1 fcr	
9.5 m W	1 fcr	
11.6 m W	1 fcr	
41.8 m W	1 split phalanx moose, 1 unburned bone fragment	
45 m W	1 SRC flake, 1 piece beaver mandible, numerous unburned bone fragments	
47.3 m W	1 fcr, numerous bone fragments	
62.5 m W	1 shale gouge blade, 1 endscraper	
	2 pieces fcr, numerous calcined bone fragments	
81-85 m W	1 shale core fragment, 1 piece schist, 1 piece fcr, numerous fragments of unburned and calcined bone	
159 m W	4 pieces fcr	
165-166 m W	numerous fragments unburned bone	
197-199 m W	4 SRC flakes, 1 burned and several unburned bone fragments, 1 first phalanx deer	
207 m W	1 piece fcr	
* fire-cracked rock	**Swan River chert	



Figure 8. Fire-cracked rocks and ashes eroding from a hearth exposed in the valley top at Pasquatinow.

The materials observed within and beyond each of the clusters are listed in Table 1. Most striking are the major hearths, at 48.5 m east and 75 m east (Figure 8); however, several smaller hearths are represented by smaller concentrations of fire-cracked rock in association with burned and calcined bone fragments.

Of particular interest is a pottery rimsherd which we found at 77.5 m east of datum. This rimsherd (Figure 9a) has a maximum thickness of 10 mm and tapers to a thickness of 4 mm at the narrow, uneven lip. Both the interior and exterior surfaces are essentially smooth, although the interior bears some broad striations, evidently a result of wiping with a coarse material. The exterior does not bear any striations but is not perfectly smooth. The broken edges of the sherd reveal the presence of two fragments of grey rock. These are rounded pebbles which, with some other white flecks, may have been natural inclusions in the clay. There is no evidence of the grit temper which is characteristic of pre-contact pottery in central Saskatchewan. All of the exterior surfaces are yellow-brown to reddish, evidence that this vessel was fired in an oxidizing atmosphere. Generally, the interiors of such vessels, and the interiors of individual sherds, are black (fired in a reducing atmosphere). The fact that the breaks on this sherd are yellow-brown in colour is evidence that this vessel cracked in the course of firing and the surfaces exposed by the cracks were also oxidized.

We also recovered three stone tools. At 62.5 m west of datum we found a gouge and an endscraper, in association with a cluster of calcined bone

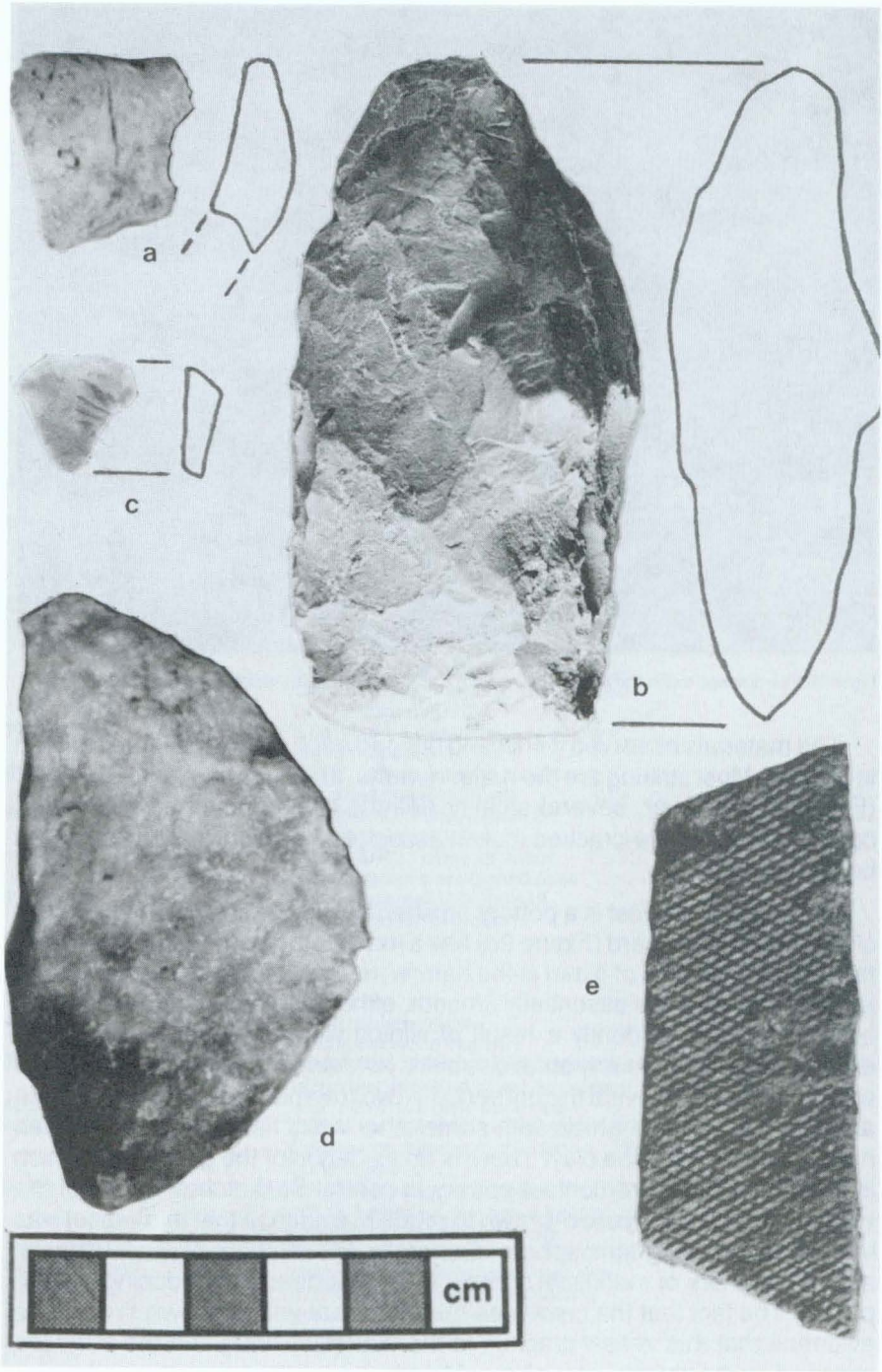


Figure 9. Artifacts from Pasquatinow: a) rim sherd; b) gouge; c) end scraper; d) uniface; e) file fragment.

fragments and two pieces of fire-cracked rock. The gouge (Figure 9b) is of hard, gray-green shale which has been bifacially flaked on all of its margins. One surface is flat, the other convex, resulting in a plano-convex cross section. The working edge was flaked to form a hollow bit which had been lightly ground on the dorsal surface. The cutting bits of these tools are believed to have been periodically reflaked and then ground to a sharp edge. It appears that one last attempt had been made at reshaping the bit on this tool. When it became apparent that this would not be successful, the tool was discarded. This gouge is 81 mm long, 42 mm wide, and 29 mm thick. With the gouge was a tiny endscraper of fine-grained Swan River chert (Figure 9c), 16 mm long, 16 mm wide, and 5 mm thick. The ventral surface is unworked, with all flaking restricted to the working edge which has an angle of 55°.

We found a third stone tool 86.5 m east of the datum. This is a large, relatively thin flake of coarse Swan River chert (Figure 9d), the longest margin of which has been unifacially flaked, as has a portion of an adjacent margin. The ventral surface is not worked and this tool is 77 mm long, 46 mm wide, and 11 mm thick.

Lithic debitage was observed in relatively modest numbers. This totalled eight flakes of Swan River chert, one flake of white quartz, one flake of hard shale, and two flakes of basalt. Also present was a core fragment of hard shale. All of these materials are characteristic of this part of Saskatchewan, as evidenced by the results of the large-scale, multiyear archaeological work which was conducted in the Nipawin area in the first half of the 1980s.²¹

At 61 m east and 6.5 m north of the cutbank edge, we noted two pieces of fire-cracked rock protruding from the surface. We trowelled away the humus and found another three pieces of this rock. Then we dug a small trowel hole, about 20 cm across and 15 cm deep. All that this produced was a section of a broken file (Figure 9e). In width, this fragment tapers from 26 mm to 23 mm and it is 6 mm thick. According to Olga Klimko: "The sides are double cut with about 20 teeth per inch, while one edge has a float or single cut with about 20 teeth per inch. The other edge is too corroded for observations."²² Because files have changed very little over time, it is not possible to determine the age of this specimen; however, the heavy encrustation of rust present on some parts would be consistent with a date in the nineteenth century or earlier.

With regard to the faunal remains, the larger pieces were sections of ungulate bones which had been smashed, often producing spiral fractures. The faunal remains also included a section of a beaver mandible, the first phalanx of a deer, a split phalanx of a moose, and a fragment of a bone from a large bird (Table 1).²³

As noted above, the site datum is on the eastern edge of a slight rise on the valley rim. This undulation is about 20 m wide (east-west) and about 1.5 m high. The exposed edge of the valley rim here revealed an almost continuous exposure of bits of burned and calcined bone, along with some

pieces of fire-cracked rock. It is possible that this slight rise contains the greatest concentration of occupational remains at this site. In any case, it is evident that archaeological materials are particularly abundant in the area extending east from this rise for about 115 m. To the west of this low rise, the exposed archaeological materials are less frequent, becoming very sparse beyond 85 m west. In short, the main occupation here extends along the valley edge for about 200 m, between 85 m west and 115 m east. However, we found evidence of occupation well beyond this central concentration. Very intriguing is a set of three depressions, around 164 m east of datum. Two of these are 5 m apart and 37 m north of the valley rim. The more easterly is about 1.5 m in diameter, its sides sloping down to a depth of about 40 cm. A stone protruded from the leaf mold on the south side of this depression and upon trowelling away the humus, we found four more stones. As well, a sixth rock was found on the north side of the depression. This is not fire-cracked rock, four being limestone and the remainder Precambrian rocks. The depression on the west is slightly larger but we found no rocks here, despite probing the soil with a trowel tip. Some 10 m to the south is a smaller depression, about 40 cm in diameter and 20 cm deep, with no rocks in association. Even more distant from the central section of the site is a cluster of fire-cracked rock on an elk trail 256 m east of datum and 30 m north of the valley rim.

Looking to the west, in the course of our 1989 visit we followed the elk trail along the valley rim for 1,040 paces, nearly a kilometre west of the datum point. At 546 paces west we encountered a concentration of five pieces of fire-cracked rock while there was a similar cluster on the trail at 624 paces. At 700 paces west we began to ascend the topographic high shown on the topographic map (Figure 4). The valley rim at this point rises over 24 m (75 ft.) above the river; however, the river, at a distance of .4 km, is hidden by trees and one has the sense only of being in the midst of a large forest. At present, therefore, this location is not attractive for camping because the river is not readily accessible.

Archaeological Interpretation

It is apparent that a very large archaeological site is present at Pasquatinow, extending at least .9 kilometre along the valley rim. A central area about 200 m in length appears to contain the greatest concentration of archaeological remains. Most of these remains appear to be pre-contact in age, including lithic debitage, three stone tools and a rim sherd. Many of the hearths, as well, are likely pre-contact. The only evidence of post-contact occupation is the piece of a file.

The most puzzling features here are the three previously described depressions which are grouped 30-40 m north of the valley edge. It is possible that these depressions are natural (for example, uprooted trees); however, the cluster of stones at one of these reflects human involvement as stones do not occur naturally in the dune sand.

On the basis of the limited recoveries, it is difficult to assess either the

time period of the pre-contact occupation(s) or its cultural affiliation. The gouge blade is similar in size, workmanship and material to adze and celt blades found in Laurel and Selkirk assemblages in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan. However, the puzzling aspect of this artifact is the fact that this is the first gouge blade to be recovered from northern Saskatchewan. The potsherd is also puzzling. It narrows to the lip, a characteristic of Laurel (and Avonlea) pottery. However, given the strong curvature of the sherd it is likely that it derives from a small bowl and it is probable that it was simply a quickly made "pinch" pot. This interpretation is supported by the lack of the normal grit temper, suggesting that the usual careful preparation of pottery clay did not occur. Pinch pots need not conform to the usual pottery-making styles, and so this pot could as likely be a Selkirk as a Laurel vessel. In the Saskatchewan River valley, Laurel occupations generally date about A.D. 500-1000, while Selkirk occupations date ca. A.D. 1450-1700.²⁴

Although we recovered only a few identifiable faunal remains, these reflect the hunting of birds and a variety of animals, including beaver, moose and deer. These materials are too few to allow a determination of the season(s) during which this site was occupied.

Congregating Centres in the Saskatchewan River Valley

Hunters and gatherers throughout the world employ systematic seasonal rounds by which they endeavour to position themselves appropriately within their territories as food resources become available for harvesting.²⁵ Through much of the year these peoples live in small social units, often composed of several closely related families (25-40 persons), in relative isolation. These groups are sometimes referred to as "local bands."²⁶ At least once a year, all or most of the local bands in a particular region may congregate at some location within their territory. This grouping of local bands has been termed the "regional band."²⁷ These gatherings may involve a few hundred individuals and serve vital cultural and social needs.²⁸ Major religious ceremonies are celebrated, marriages are arranged, and disputes are settled.

The Cree who occupied the Saskatchewan River delta in the 1700s and 1800s were hunters and gatherers whose social organization conformed to the above outline. During some periods of the year, the population was dispersed in small social units; at other times, larger social aggregations occurred. The fur-trade and church-missionary accounts provide evidence that in the late winter/early spring (before breakup) the occupants of various parts of the Saskatchewan River valley moved to gathering places such as Opaskweyaw (The Pas), Nipowiwinihk²⁹ (Nipawin) and Pehonan (Ft. à la Corne)³⁰ (Figure 1). In the historic records, these gatherings were sometimes referred to as "rendezvous."³¹ At these locations these Cree built new (or refurbished old) canoes and waited for the waterfowl to return. Then, with the onset of the major spring fish-spawning runs, this food resource was harvested.³² In particular, fish weirs were extensively used within the Saskatchewan River delta.³³ They were often maintained into the summer,

when sturgeon became an important food source.³⁴ Major ceremonies, such as the Goose Dance,³⁵ were held at these gathering centres. For example, the Reverend Henry Budd described the annual spring ceremonial round at Pehonan.³⁶ Eventually, the spring aggregation broke up into smaller groups for the latter part of the summer. It should be noted, also, that small numbers of people could be found camping at the congregating centres at almost any season — if local food resources were abundant.

In contrast to Pettipas,³⁷ we see the various regional bands of the Saskatchewan River valley as oriented to central bases, in both pre-contact and historic times. Indeed, the congregating centres may have been occupied for two months or more, each spring and early summer. A smaller scale aggregation sometimes occurred at the gathering centres in the autumn, before the winter dispersal.

This contact period seasonal round may be considered a useful analog for pre-contact times. Indeed, archaeological investigations at Nipowiwinihk, Opaskweyaw, and Pehonan provide evidence that the cultural deposits in each case are massive and extensive. Opaskweyaw has been used for at least 3,500 years³⁸ and Nipowiwinihk for at least 5,000 years.³⁹ At the latter location, the authors have been involved in extensive excavations of Selkirk sites (ca. A.D. 1400-1700) and found them to have been occupied in the spring. A small amount of archaeological work was conducted at Pehonan in the summer of 1985,⁴⁰ sufficient to show that the extent and age of the archaeological remains there are comparable to those at Nipowiwinihk.

Pasquatinow as a Regional Centre

We do not have for Pasquatinow the substantial historical documentation which exists for locations such as Opaskweyaw, Nipowiwinihk and Pehonan, nor the extensive archaeological data which are available for Opaskweyaw and Nipowiwinihk; however, our archaeological observations do confirm it as a major regional camping place. Indeed, aside from the archaeological evidence, the fact that its summit is described historically as bare of trees and covered with grass may be taken as an indicator of intensive camp use. In the boreal forest, trees are largely absent from regularly occupied camp sites — such as those in contemporary use along the Churchill River. The trees are cut down for tent poles and for firewood, or they are simply removed to enlarge the space available for tenting and camp activities. Grasses become established as a result.

We would hypothesize also that, like the other named gathering places, Pasquatinow was occupied primarily during the spring. Indeed, residents of the western part of the Saskatchewan River delta may have found it necessary to move to higher land in late winter/early spring to avoid floods, particularly those associated with ice jams. Beyond this, the fact that Pasquatinow is a sandy valley top would also make it attractive for camp use (at any season). The sandy soil would result in good drainage during rains,

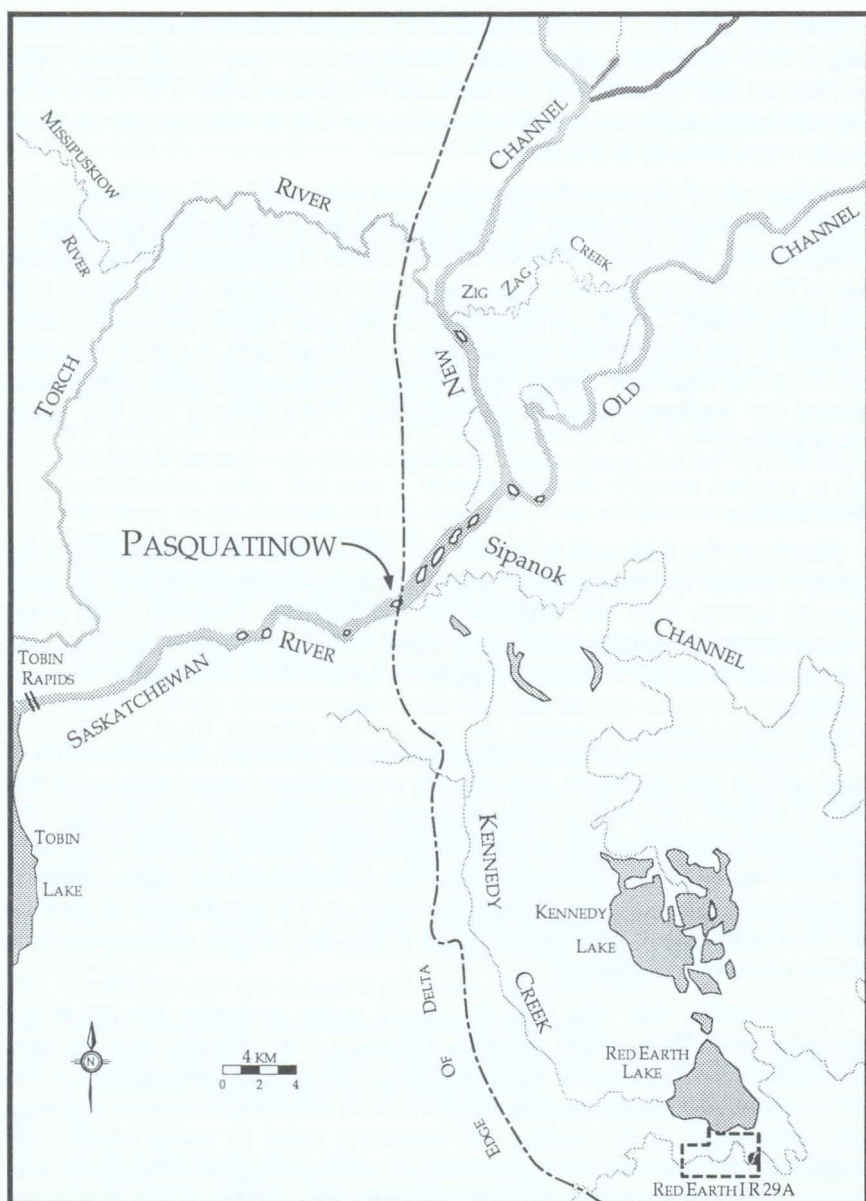


Figure 10. Map of the Pasquatinow region.

providing a relatively dry tenting area. As well, if occupied into the summer, its elevated nature would subject it to breezes and so keep insects at bay.

It is apparent that Pasquatinow was well positioned in terms of travel routes in the four cardinal directions (Figure 10). Of course, people could come to Pasquatinow from the east and the west simply by following the Saskatchewan River, but there was also a route to the site from the north

(Figure 10). This involved a 1.5 kilometre portage from the Torch River to Zig Zag Creek⁴¹ and then south to the Saskatchewan River at Mosquito Point (Anderson Island). Similarly, the Sipanok Channel was used for travel from the southeast, while Kennedy Creek (Figure 10) provided access from the region more directly to the south.⁴²

These travel routes provide suggestive evidence of the territory which could have been occupied by the peoples who seasonally gathered at Pasquatinow. Stronger evidence in this regard is provided by a consideration of the territory over which the Red Earth Cree hunted and trapped until the early 1900s.⁴³ Red Earth territory in the late 1800s and early 1900s encompassed an extensive region centred on Red Earth. In part, it extended north up the Kennedy Creek and Sipanok Channel systems and thence across the Saskatchewan River (including Pasquatinow) into the Torch River system.⁴⁴

Summary

Based on the historical accounts, we believe that we have identified the location known as Pasquatinow. It is a well-elevated section of sandy valley summit across from the entrance to the Sipanok Channel. The small meadows which are present here were probably larger in historic and pre-contact times as a result of regular camp use, with associated removal of trees.

Pasquatinow now appears as a large archaeological site, with a 200 m long central concentration, and sparser occupational remains beyond this core. It is likely that several cultural phases are represented at this site. The gouge blade and rimsherd which were recovered relate to either a Laurel or a Selkirk assemblage. Only one specimen, a broken file, provides evidence of post-contact occupation of this site; however, it is very likely that opening an excavation block here would result in the recovery of numerous items dating to the historic period.

Pasquatinow was only one of several major gathering places in the Saskatchewan River valley. All of the members of a particular regional band (perhaps 200-400 persons) would travel to their congregating centre at the end of winter. With breakup they began to hunt returning waterfowl and then took advantage of the spring fish-spawning runs. In many cases, this aggregation lasted into the early summer. Archaeological investigations at several of the aggregating centres have provided evidence that they have been gathering places for thousands of years.

NOTES

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