



After the flood: Investigations of impacts to archaeological resources from the 2013 flood in southern Alberta

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ALBERTA

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 37

Report A Find: Three years later

Courtney Lakevold^{a*}

^a Historic Resources Management Branch, Old St. Stephen's College, 8820 - 112 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6G 2P8

*contact: courtney.lakevold@gov.ab.ca

ABSTRACT

This short paper offers a history of a public engagement initiative of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta called “Report A Find” that stemmed from the need to coordinate accounts of archaeological discoveries resulting from erosion during and after the 2013 floods in southern Alberta. The program launched in 2014 in an effort to create a portal for members of the public to convey information about potential disturbances to historic resources. In its short existence, Report A Find has hosted over 60 exchanges of information pertaining to artifact or fossil discoveries, site locations, and private collections.

KEYWORDS

Highwood River, flood, Quaternary, Alberta, archaeology, palaeontology

1. Introduction

The Archaeological Survey of Alberta launched its Report A Find program in the fall of 2014, over a year after large scale floods in Southern Alberta. The program was put into place when the Archaeological Survey saw a need for community effort in the recovery and documentation of flood-impacted archaeological resources. Since the area of flooding was so extensive, the public could potentially play an important role in identifying and reporting flood-impacted resources; the area impacted was simply too large for professional archaeologists to cover. The Report A Find program was therefore born with the main goal being to provide an accessible way for people to report their finds, specifically in relation to the eroded river deposits along major valleys affected by floods.

2. Discussion

In mid-September of 2014, a Report A Find page (Government of Alberta 2015) was added to the Alberta Culture and Tourism webpage that encouraged people to report any accounts of potential archaeological sites,

artifacts, fossils, or features detected on private or Crown land. The page outlines a request for photographs of any objects, the locations at which they were found, and a name and phone number if the person wishes to be identified. The information can be provided by phone or e-mail. A link to the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology's webpage (Government of Alberta and Royal Tyrrell Museum 2017) was also provided, as they had already established a similar system for reporting fossil finds. The Royal Alberta Museum often receives reports of artifacts or other discoveries; Royal Alberta Museum and Archaeological Survey of Alberta staff work together to ensure that these reports result in sites that are properly recorded and, where necessary, ensure that artifacts are delivered to the provincial repository at the Royal Alberta Museum.

Upon launching the webpage, it did not take long for the first report to be submitted. On September 24, 2014, a fly fisherman reported a large amount of bison remains eroding out of the bank of the Bow River, in a backchannel that had been carved out by the June 2013 floods. The

fisherman also kindly provided a map showing the location of the bones. After investigation, it was confirmed that what he observed was known site, EFPk-2 (FM Buffalo Jump), which had been visited earlier that summer by Lifeways of Canada while carrying out one of the flood-related surveys initiated by Alberta Culture and Tourism. The FM Ranch/FM Buffalo Jump would go on to be reported several more times in the summer of 2015, in part, because of its high visibility along the river banks and its proximity to locales well-known by fly fishermen.

In the summer of 2015, several more reports related to erosion associated with the June 2013 floods were made. A couple of the finds were single bones found in secondary context along the Bow River that did not have any signs of cultural modification. However, one of the reports proved to be very important. A man and his son observed bones eroding out of the bank of the Sheep River. He noted that the riverbank had been drastically impacted by the flood in 2013 and he described “quite a lot” of bone sticking out for about 60 yards, 3 to 4 feet below ground level (Figure 1). After following up and obtaining a location, it was determined that no site had previously been recorded here. Luckily, this location was already part of one of Alberta Culture and Tourism’s flood-related survey programs, so we knew that archaeologists would eventually be visiting this part of the Sheep River. The location of the finds was communicated to the consultants who obtained the contract, and later that summer, the historic resources consultants visited the site, along with the person who reported the find. Fieldwork yielded a significant, multicomponent bison kill site that was radiocarbon dated to 3020 ± 30 BP, 5400 ± 30 BP,

and 5980 ± 30 BP (EePn-97, recorded under Permit 15-136; Vivian and Amundsen-Meyer 2016). The site is discussed in Vivian et al. 2017. The site was named after Levi Brown, the boy who made the initial discovery, along with his father Terry.

It has been about three years since the program was launched and the Archaeological Survey of Alberta has received over 60 reports through the Report A Find program. The discoveries have come from all across the province and, while the initial intention was to hear about sites related to the 2013 floods, we have had many other sources of reports. Several have been from farmers who have found things in their fields, some from hikers, fishermen, and gardeners, and some from workers and students. Several of the finds reported have been from known sites, which can provide valuable information about the status and condition of previously documented resources. Other reports have turned out not to be archaeological artifacts/sites but are related to older fossils that proved significant to the Royal Tyrrell or Royal Alberta Museums, such as a dinosaur phalange found by an eleven year old student, and bivalves and shells that were washed out along Junction Creek during the 2013 floods and found by hikers.

A proportion of reports have been brand new archaeological discoveries that have resulted in the proper documentation of new sites. The program, as of September 2017, has resulted in 13 new sites being recorded, with a few more that look promising but require additional follow-up. The sites that have been recorded include tipi rings found on wildlife surveys (Figure 2), historic trout-rearing ponds dis-



Figure 1. Bison bone from the bank of the Sheep River, reported by Terry and Levi Brown (photo credit: Terry Brown). Photographs offer a valuable means of confirming the significances of reported finds.



Figure 2. Tipi Ring found during a wildlife survey (photo credit: Ted Nanninga).

covered while researching local history in the Coal Branch, a Besant arrowhead uncovered while digging a garden, a scraper encountered while out hiking, and two bifaces found on the shore of Lac St. Anne while digging and pouring a cement pad for a greenhouse. The program has also resulted in the donation of an impressive private collection that contains over 500 artifacts, including many diagnostic projectile points, lithic tools, and a perforated bone (Figure 3). Luckily, every find has associated locational information so this contribution will add a great deal to the archaeological record, primarily in the southern Alberta foothills including some flood-affected creeks and rivers.

3. Conclusion

The Report A Find program has been successful to date and has contributed to Alberta’s archaeological record. The webpage serves as a venue of communication and encourages more active participation and stewardship by citizens of Alberta’s historic resources. Reports concerning archaeological sites on river edges of southern Alberta are still incoming, which means we are far from finished dealing with the erosive impacts the flood had on archaeological and palaeontological resources. We hope to continue to receive reports in the future: interested parties can receive

brochures to disseminate and/or spread the word about the Report A Find program through the website link: <https://www.culturetourism.alberta.ca/heritage-and-museums/programs-and-services/archaeological-survey/report-a-find/>.

4. References

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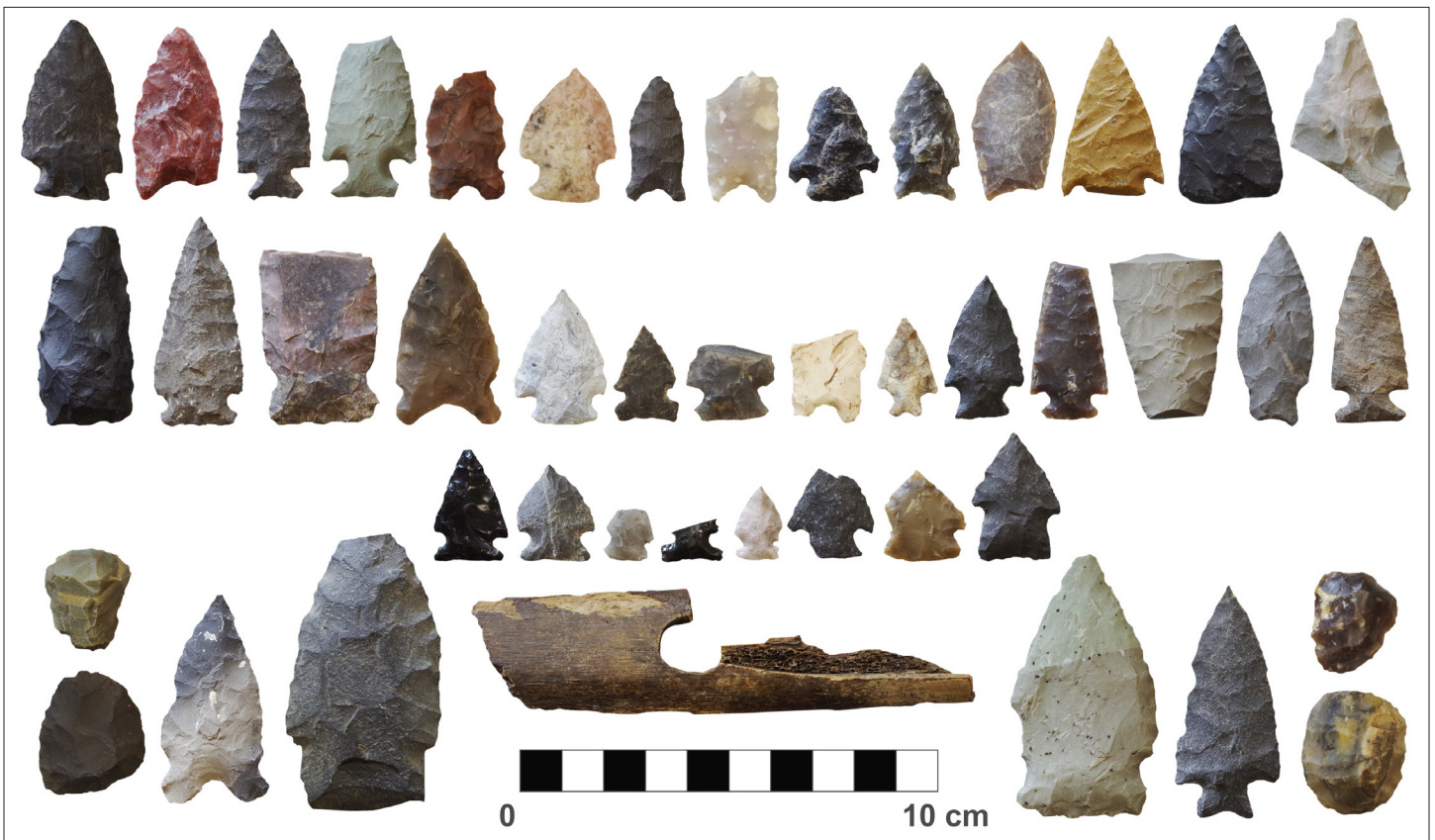


Figure 3. A representative sample of artifacts from a collection donated to the Royal Alberta Museum through the Report A Find program.