



Fort St. James National  
Historic Site  
parkscanada.gc.ca

Lieu historique national  
du Fort-St.James  
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# Fact Sheet

Également offert en français

## What's New at Fort St. James National Historic Site?

SIMON FRASER SIGNATURE ROCK AUTHENTICATED BY PARKS CANADA



### WHO WAS SIMON FRASER?

Simon Fraser (20 May 1776 – 18 August 1862) was a fur trader and an explorer, employed by the North West Company, charted most of British Columbia. By 1805, Fraser had been put in charge of all the company's operations west of the Rocky Mountains and was responsible for building and establishing New Caledonia's original network of first trading posts. In 1808, he explored the Fraser River south to the Pacific Ocean, a journey that was fraught with dangers and perilous conflict along the way. Thinking the river he was on to in fact be the mighty Columbia, Fraser was disappointed to arrive in the Vancouver region only to realize he was too far north. The river had not been the

Columbia, but actually a new and uncharted river entirely. Simon Fraser left New Caledonia shortly after completing this historic journey, moving on to govern the Red River district of Northwest Company operations in Manitoba. The mighty Fraser River, Fraser Lake and several British Columbia communities and institutions bear his name as a remembrance of his achievements in Western Canada.

### WAS IT FRASER OR WASN'T IT?

For years in the Fort St. James region, on the shores of spectacular Stuart Lake, a mystery has stood the tests of time. In 1806, Simon Fraser signed his name to a slab of limestone in present day Mount Pope Provincial Park. Faded over 200 years, this sketch is a lasting reminder of Simon Fraser's influence on central BC's early European exploration history. The signature that reads 'Simon F' was, inscribed with reddish coloured ochre. Over 200 years of limestone erosion, calcium carbonate has impaired the clarity of the sketch and likely eroded the remainder of the name 'Fraser'. The rock's authenticity and signature match to Fraser himself was never possible until recently. BC Parks has identified the signature location, along with nearby pictographs as important cultural resources. They are now protected as part of Mount Pope Provincial Park, a Class A park in the BC parks system of protected places.

#### Photographic Analysis Using DStretch Software



1994 Image, without DStretch



1994 Image enhanced using

### 1806 OR 1808?

Although for many years local Nak'azdli First Nation people knew of the sketch, there was uncertainty in regards to its authenticity. Was it in 1806 or 1808 and why was this important? Historical records show that Simon Fraser was in the Fort St. James area in 1806. If the signature was found to be 1808, Parks Canada would assume it was forged.



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In 1994, Parks Canada archaeologists photographed the site using various different photography methods. Photograph analysis at the time could not authenticate the signature date. In 2009, the introduction of decorrelation stretch or DStretch software for the analysis of pictograph and rock art around the world, enabled Parks Canada to obtain enhanced images of the signature. DStretch clarified the signature pigmentation and allowed Canada archaeologists to conclude:

- Analysis of the red ochre concludes to be similar to nearby area pictographs (hematite).
- The presence of a calcium carbonate layer over the signature indicates authentic aging. Even if it had been a forgery, it was an old one.
- Handwriting analysis closely matches the writing samples of Simon Fraser in his journal entries and letters from 1806. The flowing nature of the signature supports the notion that the mark was free flowing and not an attempt to copy another example of Simon Fraser's writing.

Though handwriting analysis of the signature is somewhat based on opinion, the combination of the age of the signature, authenticity of materials used and fact that Fraser himself in the vicinity during this time period, all lend support to the genuineness of the rock.

### WHY DID SIMON FRASER SIGN THIS ROCK?

No one is entirely sure, but certainly it was the practice for some explorers to leave their mark in lasting ways such as this. For instance, Alexander Mackenzie's first overland crossing of Canada was recorded on a rock near present day Bella Coola, BC. The location where Simon Fraser recorded his name is just down the shoreline from a highly sacred site of pictographs attributed to local Nak'azdli First Nations, possibly influenced by the fact that local people were already presently using this area for similar purposes as his own.

### WHERE ELSE CAN I GO TO LEARN ABOUT SIMON FRASER?

Parks Canada operates two National Historic Sites with relevance to Simon Fraser in British Columbia. When in BC, why not pay a visit to:

**FORT ST. JAMES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE:** 1806-1950's fur trade post, established by Simon Fraser for the Northwest Company. Check out the Simon Fraser interpretive program new for 2011 and visit the largest collection of original wooden buildings representing the Fur Trade in Canada. An incredible visit on the shores of spectacular Stuart Lake.

**FORT LANGLEY NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE:** Established in the 1820's on the banks of the mighty river that Simon Fraser navigated on his historic journey in 1808. Fort Langley is the location of where British Columbia was proclaimed and was part of the complex network of New Caledonia fur posts during this time. A fun and charming visit in the heart of the Fraser Valley.

