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Archaeological Research at Batoche N.H.S. -
1983 Field Season

Ellen Lee

Archaeology, Prairie Region, Parks Canada, Winnipeg

Archaeological investigations were continued at Batoche N.H.S. during the summer of 1983 as part of the implementation of Parks Canada's management plan for the site. In late May, I carried out a resource inventory and mapping project on the west side of the river with a crew of surveyors. The outcome will be a resource inventory of the west village and recommendations concerning the preservation of archaeological resources in this area.

From 30 May to 12 August 1983 with archaeologists Dana-Mae Grainger, Douglas Proch and Peter Nieuwhof, I carried out a program of survey and excavation at Batoche. We were assisted by a crew of eight local Metis. Within this program, areas to be disturbed by the construction of a visitor reception centre, parking lots, access roads and utility corridors were surveyed and tested in order to ascertain that no archaeological resources would be destroyed by construction. Two Metis rifle pits were excavated in order to provide information for the construction of a life-sized model of a rifle pit for display. In addition, two cellars associated with the Caron Sr. house were excavated in order to provide information for the restoration of this Metis farmstead to the late 19th century. A 45 m square area inside the zareba was tested to assess the potential for further research on activity areas within the military earthworks. A small amount of salvage work was carried out in the area of the rectory annex and store room which are being reconstructed by a Parks Canada restoration crew (Fig. 1). A field lab was set up on site and all artifacts recovered from the survey and excavation were processed, inventoried and coded onto computer forms.

The resource inventory and mapping project which was carried out in Batoche village on the west side of the South Saskatchewan recorded the foundation outlines of four buildings, two cellar depressions, two unidentified depressions, a well, and 15 Metis rifle pits. Permanent benchmarks were established in the village area and master grid coordinates transferred over from the east side of the river. The only



immediate danger to the site seems to be from the cattle which graze in the area. Already the cows' hooves have gouged the sod and topsoil off a cowpath through the middle of the village and continued grazing around the building remains will cause more damage particularly to fragile wooden remains. Therefore, it has been decided to rebuild the barbed wire fence around the village area to keep the cows out.

Salvage work carried out in the area of the rectory was necessitated by the activities of the restoration crew responsible for restoring the rectory and reconstructing the annex and store room. In order to construct masonry foundations under these buildings, the crew dug trenches along the existing walls of the rectory and in the areas where the annex and store room foundations were to be constructed. In addition to uncovering portions of the original annex and storeroom foundations which had already been investigated in 1981 (Brandon 1981), some other features were found in areas which had not been previously uncovered. These included the northwest cornerstone of the store room foundation, the remains of a row of fenceposts along the south end of the rectory, and a deposit of coal and gravel along the east side of the store room.

As part of the Environmental Assessment and Review process conducted by Parks Canada at Batoche, environmental screening of areas to be disturbed by park development was carried out. To this end, areas to be disturbed by the construction of the Visitor Reception Centre maintenance compound, parking lots, access roads and utility corridor were subjected to archaeological screening. These areas were all surveyed and tested in the same manner - using a systematic sampling design and a mechanical auger. The area encompassed by the VRC, maintenance compound and associated parking lots was roughly 300 m long (E-W) and 250 m wide (N-S). This was gridded off at 10 m intervals and grid points were excavated using a mechanical post hole auger with a 12 inch bit. The same sampling interval was used in the survey of access roads with a row of grid points along the centre line and a row 10 m out along either side of the centre line. As well as checking the earth from the test holes, the survey crew surface collected the areas between grid points. Since the utility corridor was narrow and consisted of only one row of grid points, a smaller interval of 5 m was used. The profiles of all test holes were examined and classified as to profile type based on a series of typical profiles which were recorded in the area.

Very few artifacts were recovered during these surveys, and the majority of those recovered could be attributed to farming in the area in the early to mid 20th century. Some evidence of decayed and burned tree roots was found in the open field where the VRC is to be built. This seems to confirm the reports of local residents that this area was covered with bush in the early 20th century. Results of this

archaeological assessment performed in accordance with the EARP requirements, indicate that the construction of contemporary features will have no significant impact. However, as a safety measure, construction will be monitored.

A similar sampling design was used to test a 45 m square area within the zareba. This was done in order to determine the feasibility of further research on artifact distribution patterns in support of the interpretation of the layout and use of the area by the military. Here the sampling interval varied from 2.5 m to 5 m. The artifact recovery was very low but some stratigraphic evidence of the historic well was found at the lowest point of the so-called hospital area. As a result of the evidence from this testing pattern, it was concluded that any future archaeological research on the zareba should focus on the well area, the earthworks and gun emplacements.

Two depressions thought to be Metis rifle pits were excavated to provide information for the construction of a life-sized model of a rifle pit in the Visitor Centre, and to also provide features which would aid in the ground interpretation of the battle. One was located in a small clump of bushes in a hayfield on the upper edge of the slope above the village on the east side of the river (Fig. 2). Descriptions of the battle mention a whole line of rifle pits along the edge of this slope but, as a result of cultivation, very few remain today. No artifacts were recovered from the excavation of this rifle pit which was 3 m long and 1.7 m wide. The top of the earth mound along the southeast side of the pit stood a maximum of 0.95 m above the floor of the pit which was relatively level. According to descriptions of the battle, this pit was probably in use on the third day when one of Middleton's guns was set up a few hundred yards east-southeast of this pit and engaged in a gunfire with the Metis (Hildebrandt 1983: pers. comm.). No evidence of any wooden components was found in the excavation of the pit, but this could be due to disturbance or decay.

The second rifle pit excavated may have raised more questions than it answered. It was a fairly large depression in the slope of the bank on the north side of the Carlton trail between the east village and the river. Prior to excavation, it was thought that this pit would have been well located to fire on anyone travelling up the Carlton trail to the village or down to the ferry crossing. A considerable amount of early to mid-20th century garbage was recovered from the excavation of the pit fill, probably associated with the last occupation of the village. The pit itself, when uncovered, was very large and deep, about 6 m long (N-S) by 1.8 m wide (E-W) with a depth ranging from 2.5 m at the north end in the bank to 0.5 m at its shallow

end adjacent to the Carlton Trail. For a man standing in its middle and upper end, it is too deep to fire out of. None of the artifacts recovered can definitely be associated with the battle. However, a contemporary description of the caves dug for the families to hide and live in during the battle seems to fit this feature: "Caves had been dug - ten, fifteen, twenty feet long - five or six wide, and four or five deep - and these were carefully covered with trees and brush and earth. In these, during the four days struggle, the families lived, and ate, and slept if they could." (Mulvaney 1886: 272).

Plans to restore the Jean Caron Sr. farmstead to the late 19th century, necessitated the excavation of areas adjacent to the extant house in order to provide information for restoration, and to salvage areas which will be disturbed (Fig. 3). A cellar depression northwest of the existing house had been tentatively identified as the remains of the original Caron house burned in 1885 (Donahue 1977: 24). Upon excavation, this turned out to be a mid-20th century cellar possibly of a milk shed. The cellar walls were double cribbed with a space between the boards in each wall and a 5 cm to 8 cm thick layer of sawdust covered the floor. The shed which stood over the cellar may be one of the two sheds shown in this area in a 1959 air photo of the site.

In excavating a trench adjacent to the foundation of the extant house, the outline of another cellar was discovered. No cellar depression or outline had been visible here prior to excavation. This cellar was approximately one metre northwest of the extant house, roughly 1.9 m long, 1.8 m wide and 0.75 m deep. The material comprising the fill included burned wooden building components, ash, and burned chinking. A silver five cent piece dated 1880 was recovered from one of the lower levels of pit fill, along with faunal remains and other artifacts dating to the late 19th century. Given the evidence of burning and the relatively early date of the associated artifacts, it is probable that this cellar represents the remains of the house burned on the first day of the battle in 1885. Further investigation of the Caron Sr. house area will be carried out in the 1984 field season to search for further evidence of the early occupation of this site.

The 1984 field season at Batoche will also include monitoring of construction activities, and complete excavation of Letendre's Store in the east village in support of restoration.

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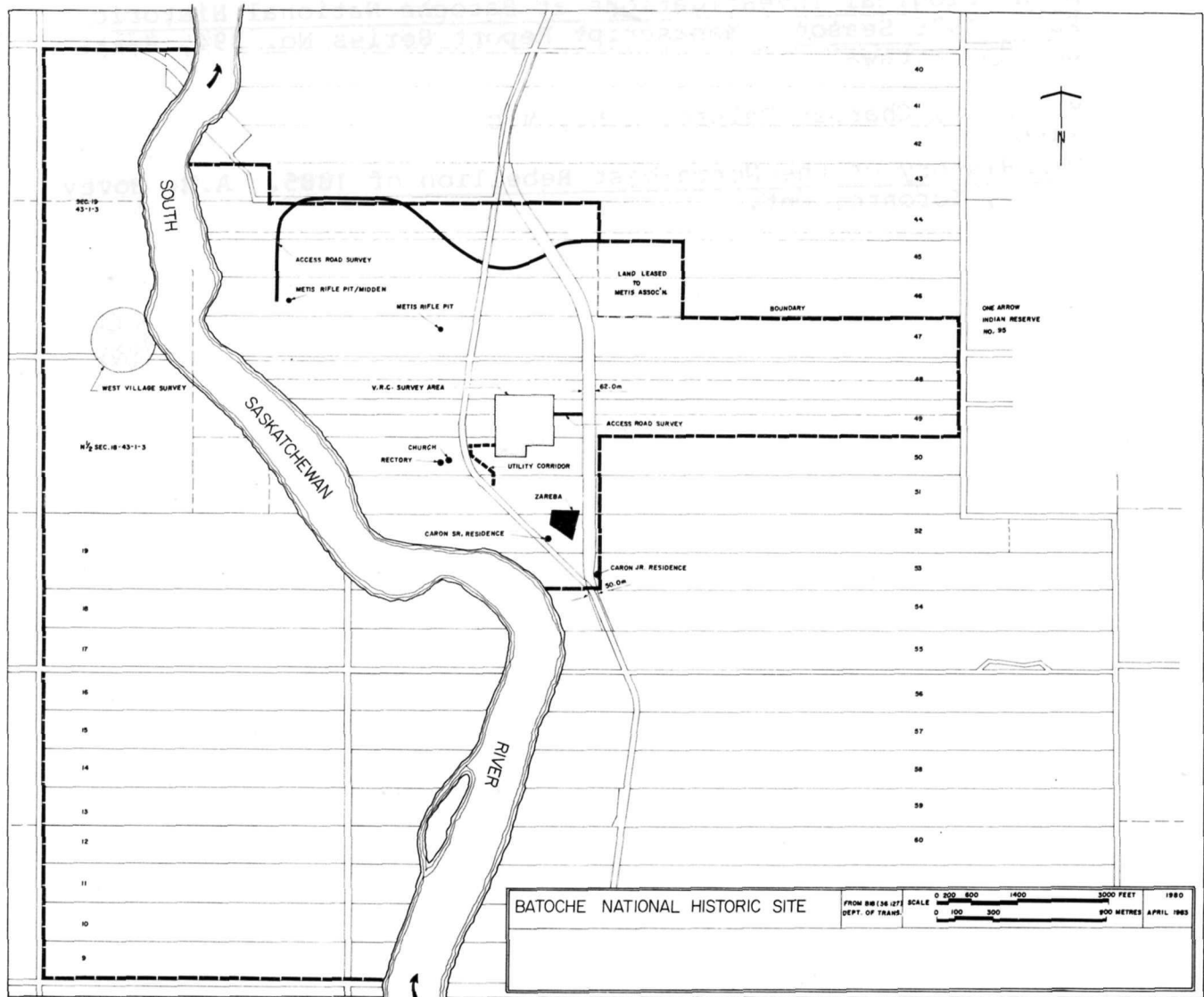


Figure 1. Map of Batoche National Historic Site showing the areas which were investigated archaeologically during the 1983 field season.
(Drawing by D. Elrick)



Figure 2: Metis rifle pit located near the crest of the hill overlooking the village of Batoche on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River, looking southeast. (Photo by E. Lee)



Figure 3: Overall view of the Jean Caron Sr. house and two associated cellar pits, looking southeast. The cellar in the foreground appears to date to the mid-20th century, while the cellar adjacent to the house in the right background dates to the late 19th century. (Photo by E. Lee)



Figure 3: Metis rifle pit located near the crest of the hill overlooking the village of Lacochs on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River, looking southeast. (Photo by E. Lee)



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Figure 3: Overall view of the Jean Caron rifle-pit and the associated cellar pit, looking southeast. The cellar in the foreground appears to date to the mid-19th century, while the cellar adjacent to the house in the left background dates to the late 18th century. (Photo by E. Lee)