



SURVEYING ON THE PLAINS IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA, CANADA

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Archaeology in Alberta. When I first interviewed to work in here, I had just completed a stint of 8 months in northern Italy, doing pre-publication work for an exciting Roman site complete with statues, coins, mosaic floors, structures, etc... This came after some years of working in the UK, where the [archaeology](#) has always fascinated me. When I came home, I was warned that I would be bored.



But guess what? Archaeology in Alberta can be both fun and exciting. Archaeology here is well regulated by the provincial government and the *Historical Resources Act*, which basically says that any and all historic resources must be addressed by developers with potential for conflict or impact. In some cases, field assessments are necessary.

Enter the archaeologist... on a quad! This is one thing that I didn't have the opportunity to do in Europe; it's hard to be bored ripping around on an ATV. Of course, we do our best to respect the environment, minimize our impact, and we stick to our development area outside of main trails.

Today, on the Day of Archaeology 2011, we surveyed a lengthy development for the presence of archaeological resources. The entire project area was traversed by ATV, with periodic stints of foot traversing and surface assessment of upturned soils, as well as shovel testing for buried cultural material. Unfortunately, we didn't identify any artifacts, but we did find a stone feature site or two. One was just a single cairn; as always, it had a fantastic view of the surrounding prairie.



Stone feature sites mark the presence of prehistoric people, traveling along similar corridors. They are easily identified by an unnatural patterning of well-buried lichen covered rocks, some of which are arranged in a circle, an arc, or a round mound. Stone feature sites are found throughout the Plains; more famous ones include [Majorville Medicine Wheel](#) and [Sundial Hill Medicine Wheel](#).

In southern Alberta, the majority of historic resources identified are stone feature sites. While there are many to be found, all are protected under the *Historic Resources Act*, and must be avoided or mitigated; most developers choose to avoid and preserve. Some have been identified after development; [these](#) have been protected from future potential impact.

Our Day of Archaeology here in Alberta was great. Sunny skies, buried sites and good times. Of course, we would've loved to find more, and it certainly would've been great to find some Bronze Age burials, jade masks or terracotta armies, but that's not our reality. Our reality consists of continually identifying and preserving local prehistoric sites, and yes, that is exciting.