

A DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN ALBERTA'S PARKLAND

June 30, 2012 duncans Archaeological Propection, Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Prehistory, Survey Alberta, CRM

Hello!



Excited with my find... no, really.

Last year's Day Of Archaeology saw me on a rather disappointing, but entirely typical urban project in York. This year sees me on the other side of the Atlantic embarking on an entirely new venture. In fact, the Day of Archaeology coincides (almost) with my first ever day working in commercial archaeology in Alberta in western Canada, and I'm both excited and nervous. My

Friday was taken up with a rather uneventful first aid course so I have taken the liberty of documenting Monday, which was my first day, and was much more interesting.

My day begins at 8am when I'm picked up from a friend's place in Edmonton by Marg, who runs [Circle Consulting](#). We travel out to Stony Plain, where we meet Stephanie, an environmental consultant, who is accompanying us on our archaeological survey. A further half hour drive takes us to the first of the mile long segments along the route of a water pipe that is to be surveyed.



Tailgate talk (done on the bonnet, but nevermind)

The first job is to do various health & safety paperwork; a standard risk assessment, but here called a tailgate talk... or something. Then we tool up. I have been in archaeology a while, but I lack a lot of the PPE that is necessary here, (thanks Marg for the loan). It includes the boots, gloves, eye-protection, and sturdy long-sleeved clothes that I'm used to, as well as a sturdy red vest/equipment harness, 2litres of water, insect repellent (not enough as it turns

out), hat (protection from the sun and ticks), gaiters (swampy ground and ticks again), bear horn & bear spray (funnily enough for bears), that I'm definitely not used to, as well as a lightweight spade.

We set off on the first of the survey transects. This part of Canada was originally surveyed in mile by mile "sections", each divided into 4 "quarter sections" measuring half a mile square, and encompassing 160 acres. Most of our survey transects were a mile long, and therefore a two mile round trip back to the truck. This sounds easy, but as I was to discover, the terrain was extremely variable, and often very difficult.



An easy start to the job.



Shovel testing

In places along the route that have a higher potential for human occupation, such as near watercourses, on southfacing slopes etc. we dig occasional shovel test-pits, each circa 30cm by 30cm, and only as deep as the sterile natural geology, and examine the upcast for artefacts. The positions are marked with a hand-held GPS, notes are taken about the deposit depths and make-up, and if no artefacts have turned up we move on. On the second transect I find a

bifacial tool fragment, which was the only stone of any sort in all of the shovel test pits I dug. I find it hard to gauge how common or uncommon this sort of find is during survey work, but I get the impression that it is towards the uncommon end of the scale.

This is the shovel test pit, so it really seems like needle-in-haystack stuff. If an artefact is found in a test-pit, the next step is to dig a pattern of further test pits around the find-spot to determine if it is part of a larger scatter of artefacts and if so, how far it extends. [Video here.](#)



Sadly, we don't find anything in these test-pits, which I assume means that the bifacial tool was discarded or lost, and is not part of a occupation site. [Video here.](#)

After our second mile long transect, 4 miles hiked so far, we have a welcome lunch in the truck. [Video here.](#) And we plan our next phase of work. [Video here.](#)

The third transect turns out to be where a road was started, the ditches were dug and the ground built up, but no surface was laid. This therefore, is disturbed ground where there is little to no chance of finding an occupation site. This bit was not going to be productive, however the wildlife more than made up for it. [Video here.](#)



This transect was a long one, so we moved a vehicle to the far end so that we needn't hike it twice. Here is a [video](#) of the different type of terrain. On this one we quite often lost the marked route of the pipeline. [Video here.](#)

At the end of the day we try to find a historic house that the pipeline passes. We weren't successful on this occasion, but here is a pic from the next day when we did find it. It was built in the 1920's by a skilled stonemason who used local stone (glacial erratic boulders I think), and is entirely unlike the other historic buildings out here. I like it, but it looks a bit modern to my UK biased eyes.



I've had a great day, but I have no idea if it is typical of the work I'm going to be doing over the next 4 or 5 months. Six miles, 33 shovel test-pits, some strange finds, left, and ([video here](#)), lots of insect bites, but no tick or bear encounters thankfully, and I'm knackered but pleased.

That's my day, thanks for joining me on it!