Désdélé Méné'

The Archaeology of Annie Lake

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Cover Photos:
Dèsdélé Méne' (Annie Lake)
(right corner) Mrs. Dora Wedge and Art Johns share traditional knowledge with participants of the Annie Lake Archaeology Project.

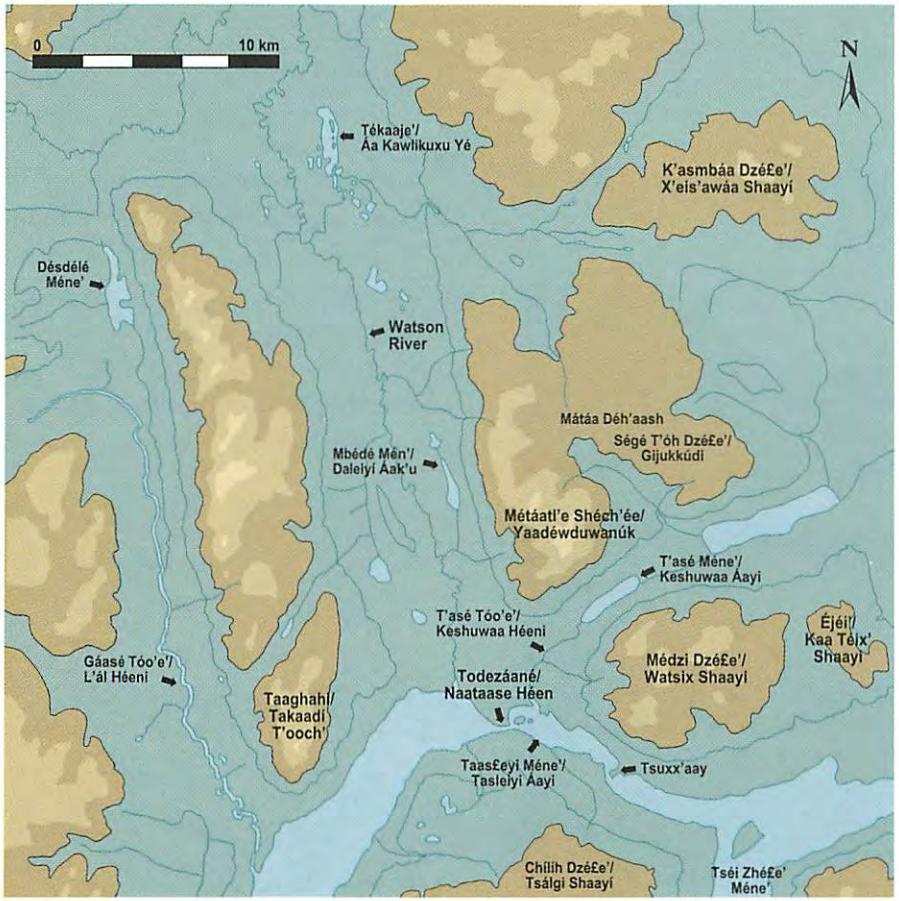
Back Cover Photo:
Near the base of the excavation, students from the Carcross-Tagish Nation, Cindy Beattie, Tagish Johns and Christle Wiebe, construct some cultural features of their own.

Table of Contents

From Mrs. Angela Sidney (1980)

Tagish	Tlingit	English
Désdélé Méne' Red Sucker (?) Lake		Annie Lake
Tékhaaje' stumpy bottom	Áa Kawlikuxu Yé drained out place	Lewes Lake
K'asmbáa Dzéłe' ptarmigan mountain	X'eis'awáa Shaayí ptarmigan mountain	Mount Lansdowne
Mátáa Déh'aash game gather there, go through		
Ségé T'óh Dzéłe' golden eye eagle nest	Gijukkúdi golden eye eagle nest	
Mbédé Méne' Rainbow Trout Lake	Daleiyí Áak'u Trout Lake	Spirit Lake
Métáatl'e Shéch'ée wind blowing on the forehead	Yaadéwduwanúk blowing against the face	Caribou Mountain
T'asé Méne' Grayling Lake	Keshuwaa Áayi Grayling Lake	Chootla Lake
T'asé T'óo'e' Grayling River	Keshuwaa Héeni Grayling River	Chootla River

Tagish	Tlingit	English
Médzí Dzéłe' Caribou Mountain	Watsíx Shaayí Caribou Mountain	Nares Mountain
Éjéi heart	'Kaa Téix' Shaayí heart mountain	Nares Mountain (east peak)
Todezáané	Naataase Héen Naataase River	Carcross
Taaghahi facing the water	Takaadí T'ooch' rockslide charcoal (black)	Grey Ridge
Taasłeyi Méne' Pike Lake	Taasleiyí Áayi Pike Lake	Nares Lake
	Tsuxx'aay (moose) corral point	Ten Mile Point
Gáasé Tóo'e' Jackpine Creek	L'ál Héeni Jackpine Creek	Wheaton River
Chílíh Dzéłe' gopher mountain	Tsálgi Shaayí gopher mountain	Montana Mountain
Tséi Zhéłe' Méne' howling rock lake		Windy Arm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Tékaaje'/
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Mátáa Déh'aash
Ségé T'óh Dzé£e'/
Gijukkúdi
Mbédé Mén'/
Daleiyi Aak'u
Métáatl'e Shéch'ée/
Yaadéwduwanúk
T'asé Méne'/
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Éjéi'/
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Médzi Dzé£e'/
Watsix Shaayi
Taaghahi/
Takaadl
T'ooch'
Todezáané/
Naataase Héen
Taas£eyi Méne'/
Tasleiyi Áayi
Tsuxx'aay
Chílih Dzé£e'/
Tsálgi Shaayi
Tséi Zhé£e'
Méne'

This book is dedicated to the Elders of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation, who shared their knowledge of traditional ways and places, and to the Carcross-Tagish First Nation students whose weeks of hard excavating the Annie Lake site in 1992 helped to uncover the past: Clayton, Cindy, Christle, Tagish, and in memory of Shane.

Annie Lake, in the Watson/Wheaton Valley

Many people have contributed directly and indirectly towards the production of this book.

Our understanding of Carcross-Tagish history and traditional land use comes principally from the many stories Carcross-Tagish Elders shared with anthropologists Catharine McClellan and Julie Cruikshank. Place names and the biography of Mrs. Annie Austin were provided by the late Mrs. Angela Sidney, with additional information from Mrs. Dora Wedge. Elders Art Johns and the late Johnny Johns directly contributed to the identification of old sites in their country, and along with Mrs. Lucy Wren and Mrs. Dora Wedge, to the understanding of traditional land use practices in the Annie Lake and Coast Mountain area.

The first archaeological excavations were conducted at Annie Lake in 1982 by Sheila Greer, with the permission of former Carcross-Tagish Chief Stanley James. Carcross students Lisa Barrett and Michelle Sutton assisted in the excavations.

Greg Hare and Ruth Gotthardt of the Yukon Heritage Branch supervised the 1992 archaeological investigations. Karyn Atlin of Carcross-Tagish First Nation was the project coordinator for the band and an important stabilizing influence. We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of student participants: Shane Wiebe, Christle Wiebe, Cindy Beattie, Clayton Johns and Tagish Johns, and of field assistants T.J. Hammer and Gordon MacIntosh.

We would also like to thank for their support of the 1992 excavations: Chief Patrick James, Carcross-Tagish First Nation; Bev James and Linda Toews, transportation; Louise Profeit LeBlanc, Yukon Heritage Branch, for assistance in oral history interviews; Scott Smith, Agriculture Canada, for soils analysis; and Dr. Les Cywnar, University of New Brunswick, for pollen analysis.

The 1992 archaeological research at Annie Lake was funded by the Yukon Heritage Branch, the Northern Research Institute of Yukon College, DIAND Northern Scientific Training Program and the Circumpolar/Boreal Alberta Research Program. Student wages were funded through the Government of Canada "Challenge" program and the Yukon Government Student Training and Employment Program. Funding for the publication of this book was provided by the Yukon Government Heritage Branch.

The early history of the Annie Lake region has intrigued archaeologists for many years. Since the first investigations in the 1950's, traces of a long record of human occupation have been observed on the landscape—in the form of old brush camps, hunting blinds, ancient campfires and stone tools. With the help of Elders, archaeologists have now begun to bring to light many of these clues to the past. This book is a first attempt at writing down the archaeology and traditional history of the people who lived in the Annie Lake region—the ancestors of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation.

Located at the gateway to the Klondike Goldfields, the Carcross-Tagish people were among the first Yukon people to feel the effects of the human stampede that swept over the Chilkoot Pass. They contributed significantly to the discoveries of the time, and were in turn greatly affected by the migration through their territory. But the Carcross-Tagish people also have a history of their own that is separate from the Goldrush. This book touches on that history.

In the following pages we will see how archaeological excavations are used to teach us about the past and how the stories and memories of our Elders provide a direct link to lives of our ancestors. This book is about discovery and rediscovery—for the students of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation, for the archaeologists who puzzle over the meaning of stone tools buried in the ground, and for the people of the Yukon who can now read a new chapter in the long history of the territory.

The book is organized in three sections—dealing with general information on Carcross-Tagish people, traditional knowledge related to the Annie Lake region, and the archaeology of Annie Lake.

Mrs. Dora Wedge and Mrs. Lucy Wren stand beside a traditional brush camp along the Annie Lake Road.

Traditionally, the Carcross Tagish people were hunters and fishermen of the Southern Yukon and Northern British Columbia. Throughout the year, they travelled their territory at the headwaters of the Yukon River in small groups, made up of a few families. The land provided them with all they needed—food, clothing and shelter. Furs, hides and feathers were used for making clothes, blankets and containers. Their tools were made of wood, antler, bone and stone. They were skillful with bow and arrow and spears, and especially adept in the construction of snares, deadfalls and traps.

Sheep hunting blinds such as this one high in the Coast Mountains were important for the communal hunts of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation.

At certain times of the year, the Carcross-Tagish people would come together for hunting and fishing. Here, they would build brush fences, rock hunting blinds and fish traps. Traces of these old structures, along with the remains of meat drying racks and hide stretching frames at hunting camps, can still be found in less travelled locations.

In the old days, people travelled through the traditional territory mainly on foot. Small dugout canoes, rafts and skin boats were made and used, but the large lakes of the region are notoriously dangerous and were usually avoided during times of open water. Snowshoes were a necessity for winter journeys and hunting.

By the time the first whitemen arrived in the country, the Carcross-Tagish people had established their main camp on the Tagish River, where they stayed at different seasons of the year. Throughout the rest of the year they moved often to harvest the plants and animals in their territory; and during these travels they lived in brush camps or skin tents.

Mrs. Dora Wedge displays some traditional stone and bone tools.

In order to ensure that there would always be food to eat, the Carcross-Tagish people had to know their country very well. At different times of the year, they travelled to places where they knew game or fish would be abundant or berries ripe. When food was plentiful, it was necessary to preserve and cache enough to get through times when food was scarce. This traditional pattern of travelling to different resource areas to hunt, fish and cache the surplus is called the "seasonal round."

Spring and Summer

Most of what we know about the Carcross-Tagish traditional seasonal round comes from our Elders. In early summer families would gather where fish were running. Here they would fish and hunt small game and waterfowl. In late summer, many people would travel to McClintock River to catch salmon. Other places, such as Tagish, have fish all year round and people would often gather there. When at summer fish camps, Carcross-Tagish people were visited by Tlingit from the coast who came to trade furs.

Fall

Towards the end of summer, fish camp broke up and small groups of two or three families would move to the high country to hunt marmots, caribou, moose and sheep. Through the fall, meat was dried and cached for the long winter months. Berry picking and preserving were also important fall activities.

Art Johns leads the way to an old brush camp in the upper Wheaton River Valley. Short term shelters such as this one were important to Carcross-Tagish people as they moved throughout their territory.

Winter

In early December, most families came back to Tagish. This was the most important time of year for story telling and games. By late January, the families moved again out into the country to trap, hunt and fish. In this season, food was particularly scarce and it was important to have enough cached to make it through the winter. The able-bodied men travelled long distances hunting for moose and caribou, while old people, women and children stayed on the lakes to fish and hunt small game near the camps. When springtime came, and the whitefish and waterfowl were plentiful, people were happy.

The Annie Lake site in early winter. Winter was an important time for social gatherings, stories and games.

Trading was a very important activity for Carcross-Tagish people. Elders' stories tell of how the coastal Tlingit made trips to the interior every year to trade European goods for top quality Yukon furs. Even before the coming of Europeans, there was active trade between the coast and Carcross-Tagish. From the coast, shells, eulachon oil, dried clams, wooden boxes and seaweed were carried across the high mountain passes to trade for furs, tanned hides and clothing and special lichens or mosses used for dye. The Carcross-Tagish people traded these newly acquired goods to other native groups in the Yukon, as far away as Ross River. The trade with coastal people led to numerous marriages and many Tlingit came to live in the interior. Today many people can trace their roots back to the Alaskan coast. For example, those who are members of the *Deisheetaan* nation are descendants of a coast Tlingit woman, originally from the Angoon area, who married into the Yukon. Links between the groups were so strong that today the cultures of the two peoples are blended together.

Shells from the coast, such as this one excavated at the Annie Lake site, were important trade items for the Carcross-Tagish people.

Some of the best traditional hunting and trapping areas for the Carcross-Tagish people are in the regions around Annie Lake. In the Tagish language, this lake is called *Désdéné Méne'* or *Désdélé Méne'*, after a small red sucker found there.

Annie Lake is named for Annie Austin (Tlingit name *Sadusgè*). She was a member of the Tlingit *Deisheetaan* (Crow) Nation, and had two brothers, *Skwáan* and Billy Atlin (Tlingit names *Káa Goox Éesh* and *Tláwch'*). Her mother was Annie Joe (Tlingit names *Sakinyáa* and *Sa.éek*) and her father Atlin Joe (Tlingit names *Tleisha.oox* and *Xiná*). Annie's first husband, *Káa Goox* (Dawson Charlie) was one of the original discovers of gold in the

The late Johnny Johns brought international recognition to the Yukon and the Coast Mountain region through the development of big-game outfitting.

Klondike. Dawson Charlie died in 1908. Annie's second husband, Shorty (Charlie) Austin, came to the Yukon in 1898 as a Northwest Mounted Policeman. Annie and Shorty raised an adopted son, Bobby Austin. They had a home on Millhaven Bay and hunted and trapped in the area around West Arm of Bennett Lake and the Wheaton River and Annie Lake valleys.

People came to Annie Lake in the spring to get muskrat, hunting them on the ice and with canoes. Mrs. Dora Wedge recalls hunting muskrat here with her aunt Mrs. Austin, as a young woman. In those days, they put a black fungus powder, called *Kaakwat*, on their faces to prevent sunburn when travelling on the lake.

Mrs. Lucy Wren tells of when Carcross-Tagish people camped just north of Annie Lake, on the Watson River, to hunt beaver in the spring. Grayling were also taken in the creeks around the lake. Lynx, fox, mink and otter were trapped in the valley of *Gáasé Tóoé* (Jackpine Creek in the Tagish language), also known as the Wheaton River. Goats and sheep were taken high on the surrounding mountains, while moose and grouse were hunted lower down.

Carcross-Tagish Elders tell many exciting and happy stories of hunting in the Coast Mountains area. The late Johnny Johns made the region well known internationally when he pioneered big-game outfitting in the Yukon. Mrs. Dora Wedge shot her first goat on Grey Ridge, above Annie Lake, when she was a young lady camping with her aunt. Earlier in this century, Mrs. Annie Austin and Mrs. Patsy Henderson are said to have killed a sheep with a butcher knife. At the time, they were camped with their families in the Wheaton valley and the men were out trapping foxes, taking the guns with them. The women sneaked up on the sheep at a lick; one lady grabbed and held the sheep, while the other slit its throat.

A Wealth of Knowledge

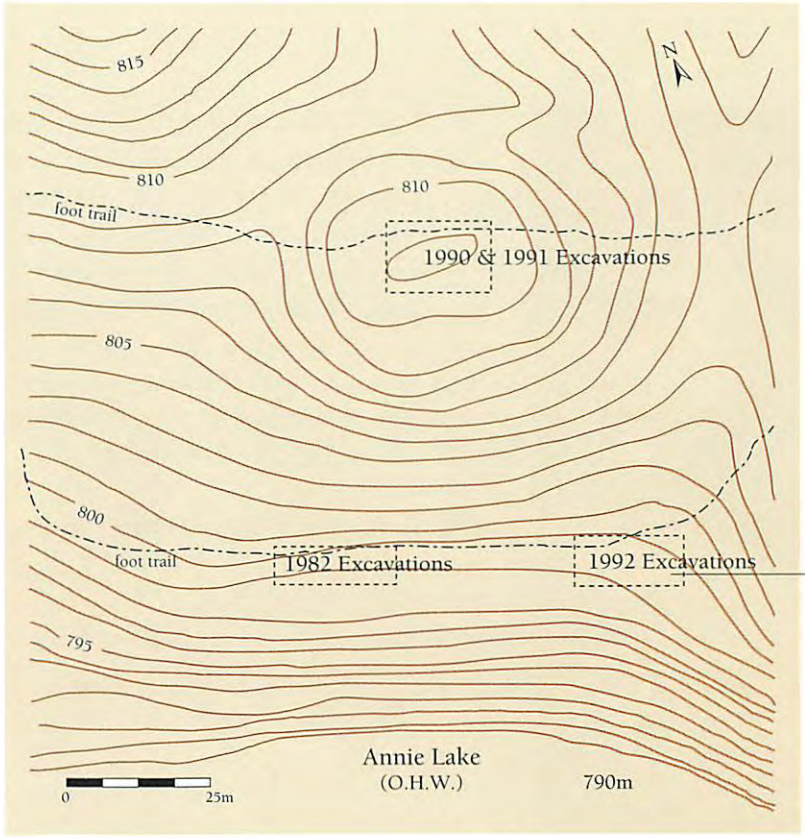
Information on traditional life and stories from the past gives us brief glimpses into the lives and history of Carcross-Tagish people. More detailed accounts are in the works, but more interviews and research need to be done. Our Elders possess a wealth of knowledge that may one day be forgotten if it is not recorded soon.

Excavations at the Annie Lake site in 1992 revealed a very long history of occupation at Annie Lake. Clayton Johns and Cindy Beattie slowly work their way back in time.

The early history of the Carcross Tagish Tlingit is found not only in the stories and memories of the Elders, but also in the traces of old camps that their ancestors left behind: the stone tools, tent rings, ancient campfires and the bone fragments of the game they hunted. This evidence is called the archaeological record, and it is to the archaeological record of Annie Lake that we now turn our attention.

Old Campsites & "Living Floors"

In the summer of 1992, five students from the Carcross-Tagish First Nation, along with archaeologists from the Yukon Heritage Branch, spent nearly two months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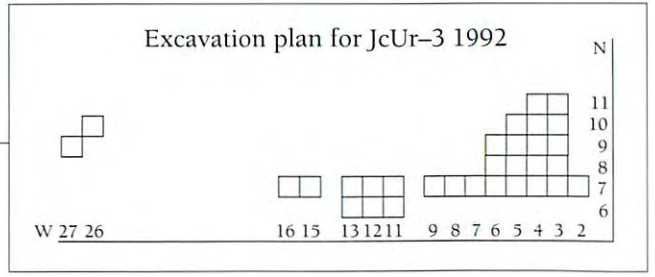
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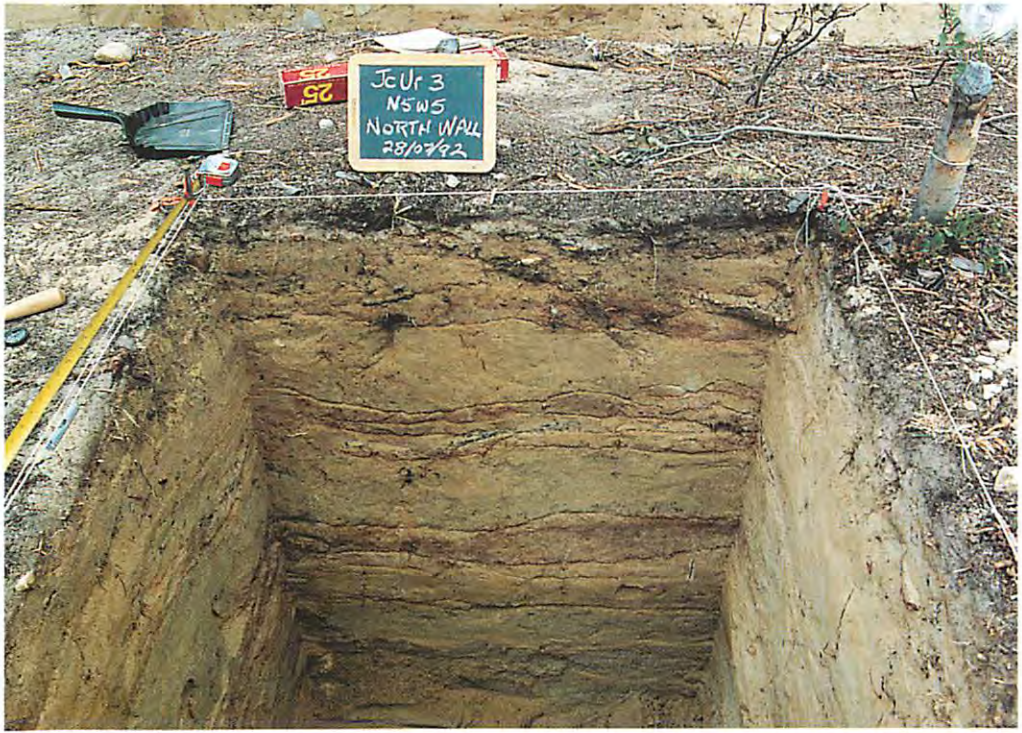
painstakingly uncovering some of the most ancient evidence of human occupation yet discovered in the Yukon. Equipped with trowels, paintbrushes and dustpans, this crew carefully scraped through the layers of earth to reveal a series of "living floors" from the past—the remains of hunting camps from different points in time, dating back even to the last Ice Age.

A Journey Through Time

The excavation of an archaeological site is a journey through time. Like the rings of a tree, the layers of the earth are built up, year by year. Depending on the climate of the centuries, the layers will take on different colours and thicknesses—from organic-rich brown sands to pale yellow wind-blown sands. These sands contain traces of the people who lived there throughout the past. The job of the archaeologist is to sort through the clues sealed in the earth to discover how these people lived.

The 1.5 metre deep soils of Annie Lake contain the cultural evidence of almost 500 generations. As we move deeper into the ground and back further in time, we see changes in the kinds of stone tools that people used, in the bones of the animals they hunted, and even in the climate and landscape of the Yukon. Through its archaeology, the Annie Lake site provides brief glimpses into the lives of long-ago people.

The Annie Lake site is located at the north end of the lake on an old glacial river terrace.



Before the Whiteman

Peeling back the mosses and grass near the centre of the site, we find the remains of camps that date to the time just before the coming of whiteman. A moose skin scraper is found where it was dropped, perhaps 150 years ago; a scallop shell traded from the Coast Indians lies now in many pieces; and small shards of obsidian, traded from the Kluane region, are scattered on the ground. Hundreds of pieces of shattered, burned bone from sheep, caribou and beaver tell us that these people were making bone grease. To make this grease, long bones were pounded into fragments and boiled to extract

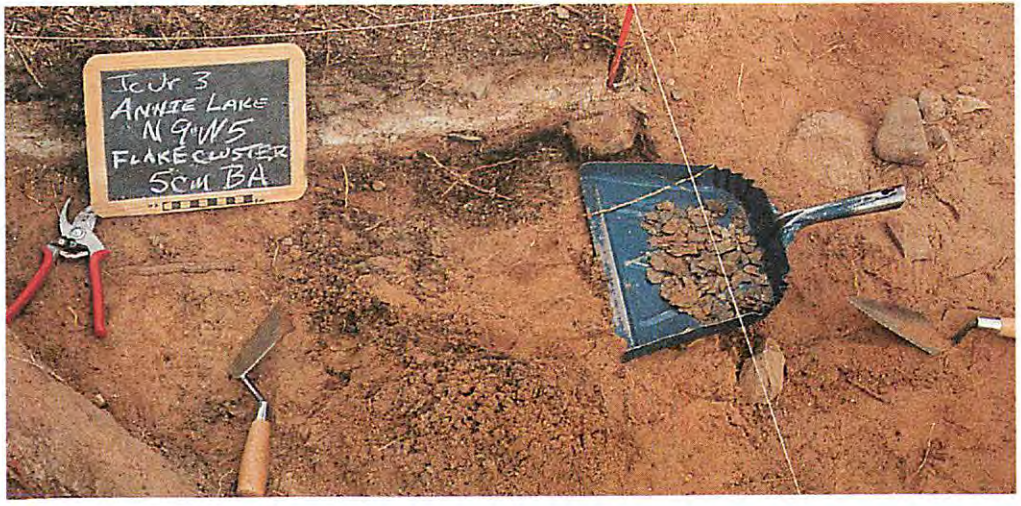
The Sands of Time—the sand of the Annie Lake site contains the cultural and environmental evidence dating back to the last Ice Age. The dark layers of sand indicate times when local vegetation was extensive and people were able to live at the site.

the marrow. Lying nearby are the cracked and burned stones that people heated to boil water. Stone tools such as arrow points, scrapers and sharp flakes lie below the moss. At this level, the tools are often rough, made from the coarse rocks found on the nearby hills—used once or twice but not worth carrying away to the next camp. Hundreds of stone flakes scattered about tell of the many people who stopped here and made tools. The soil is black and dusty, suggesting a dry climate very much like the Watson/Wheaton valley of today. Over most of the site, this layer is less than 5 cm thick, yet it contains more than 1,000 years of history.

Archaeologists and students carefully scrape through the sands and record artifact details during the 1992 excavation.

The White River Volcanic Eruption

Below this black soil lies a thin layer of white ash from a massive volcanic eruption that occurred near the headwaters of the White River 1,250 years ago. This event was one of the largest volcanic explosions the world has seen over the past 10,000 years. Most of central and southern Yukon was covered by the ash, and traces can be found even in the Northwest Territories. With deposits more than one metre thick near the source, the White River eruption was an ecological disaster. It killed many plants and animals and probably forced people to move away from the area near the eruption for many generations, until plants and animals began to return. At Annie Lake, however, the ash is thin—only several centimetres, and it is possible the impact of the eruption was not so severe here as in other places in the Yukon. Perhaps the main result of the White River eruption was that new people moved into the Annie Lake area from regions hard hit by the ash.



The white ash in the soil is the remains of the White River eruption of 1250 years ago. The dustpan contains just a few of the many thousands of waste flakes that lay immediately under the ash.

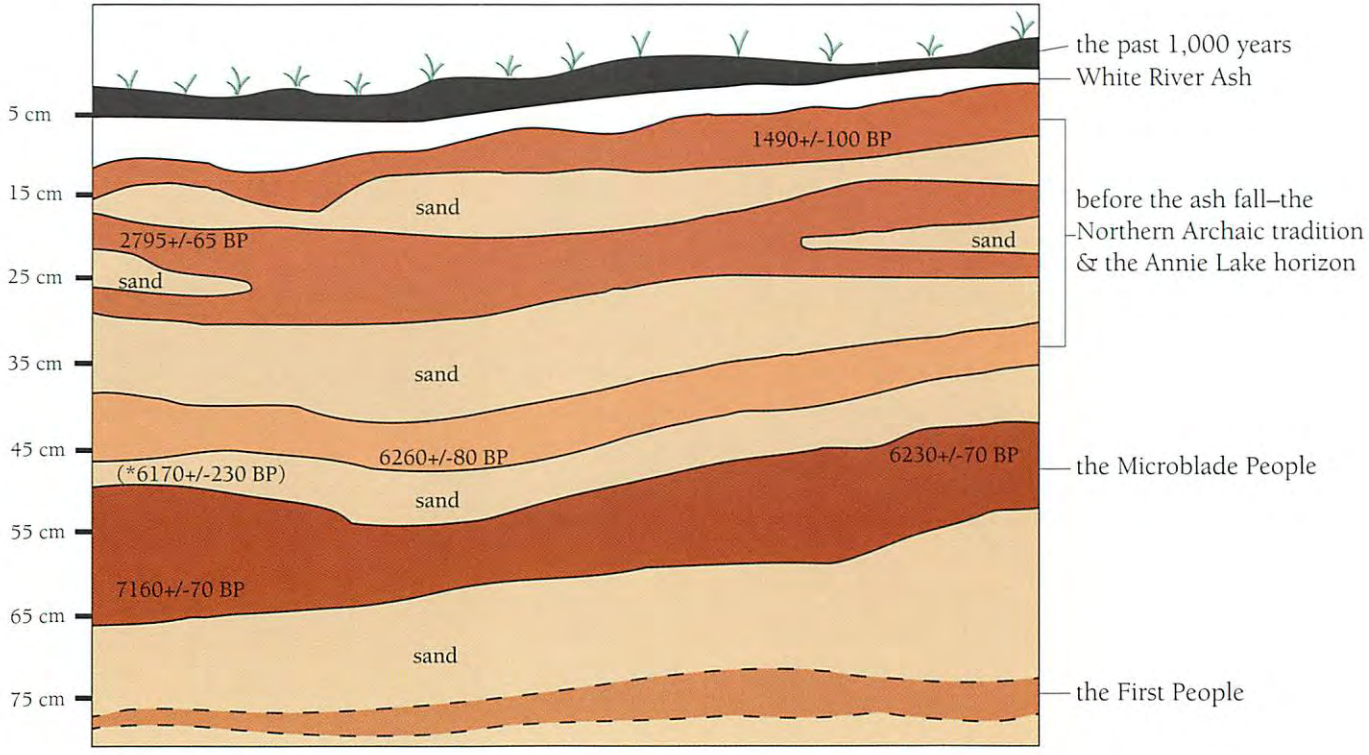
Before the Ash Fall

Beneath the White River Ash, we encounter a layer of red sand many centimetres thick. At this level, the ground is densely covered with stone tools, tool fragments and remains of old campfires. This is the major "living floor" at the Annie Lake site and is now known to be 1,500 years old. The number of spear and arrow points indicate that this was an important hunting camp - probably for sheep, goats and caribou. Unfortunately, bones are not often preserved in Yukon soils and it is not possible to tell exactly what animals people were hunting. Several stone knives and hide scrapers are scattered around where people cut meat and dressed hides. As in the layer above the ash, the tools are made of coarse, local stone; although there are some fine quality obsidian and chert pieces. Near the centre of the site, a very large mound of boulders is uncovered, arranged in a rough circle. Some of the stones have been burned by fire and bits of charcoal are collected. Mrs. Dora Wedge suggests that this is the remains of an old-time sweat house. Study of the soil chemistry of this level tells us that this was a time of higher rainfall than today with more spruce trees and thicker bush.

Spear and arrow points from the Annie Lake site. Those in the top row are the distinctive side-notched spear points of the Northern Archaic Tradition.

Seen from over head, this large boulder feature may be the remains of an old sweat lodge.

Sketch of Living Floors & Layers in the Annie Lake Site Excavation



BP–date in years before present
* from disturbed stratigraphy

Sand Dunes Build Up

Under this layer, with its abundance of tools and old campfires, and further back in time, we find evidence of a period of change. The thick layer of sand here contains no trace of people, plants or animals. Instead, we see a steady build up of sand—layer upon layer, perhaps over many centuries. The sands suggest that this was a time when forests did not cover the hills of the Watson/Wheaton valley. Perhaps a large forest fire had burned through the valley, and dry climatic conditions made it difficult for trees and plants to grow back. Certainly, the winds blew strongly at this time, picking up sands from the exposed hillsides, blowing them down the valley and causing sand dunes to build up at the north end of the lake. During this time, it appears that people looked for more sheltered campsites and did not come to camp at the Annie Lake site.

Cindy Beattie carefully screens sand from her square to capture even the small chips of stone or bone.

A New Style of Spear Point

With our trowels and dustpans, we slowly remove the sterile layers of sand to uncover another living floor. At this level, however, we see less activity than before—there are fewer stone tools and only traces of old campfires. The thick red/brown sand layer tells us that for several thousand years the climate was wetter than present, and black spruce was the most common tree. Side notched spear points are found at both the bottom and top of this layer. These points are one of the distinctive tools of people before the White River Ash fall. These points belong to a tool tradition archaeologists call the Northern Archaic. However, in the middle of

Concave Based Spear Points from southern Yukon. Those on the far left are classic Annie Lake points.

this layer, an unusual kind of spear tip appears for the first time. It is a delicate and finely crafted point with a shallow notch at the base for hafting to a spear shaft. It is named the Annie Lake point, because it was at Annie Lake the point was first discovered. Since then, archaeologists have found Annie Lake points at a number of sites in the southern Yukon including Kusawa Lake, Marshall Creek and Airport Lake. Because it is so distinctive, archaeologists wonder whether newcomers may have arrived in the Yukon at this time from the Northern Plains, or whether Northern Archaic people were simply experimenting with new styles of making stone tools.

The only bones found this deep in the soil are those of a small gopher that died in its den many thousands of years after the sands were laid down.

The last of the red/brown sands of the Northern Archaic living floor is scraped into the buckets and taken up the hill for screening. As the sands sift through the screen, tiny stone chips from tool sharpening and retouching are picked out. Even such tiny pieces can provide information on activities at a site. Distinct types of stone can reveal ancient trade networks among Yukon peoples and beyond; and even the shape of small chips can show differences in how stone tools are made.

End scrapers such as these recovered from Annie Lake were used for cutting and scraping hides.

A Time of Winds

As we move down through the layers of the site, we encounter yet another thick lens of wind-blown sand. Once again, it appears that we are looking at a time of little rainfall and strong south winds in the Watson/Wheaton valley. New sand dunes are forming throughout this time, which may have persisted for centuries. Unlike the sand lens above, however, this one shows thin lines of reddish sand. These lines suggest brief periods of time when the winds died down and more rain fell, allowing plants to take root. Game and plants were probably scarce, however, and people had to cover large areas to find enough to eat. In one of these thin red sand

Clayton Johns nears the microblade level of his square. Using a trowel and dustpan, it could take more than one week to dig a hole like this.

Archaeologists use distinctive tools for time markers—as peoples' tools often changed through the centuries. The small microblades in the lower row are 7,000 to 8,000 years old, while the large blades above are even older.

lenses, we see evidence that a small group of hunters stopped at Annie Lake briefly, to cook their meal and sharpen stone tools. Charcoal from this fire has been dated to more than 6,000 years old.

Microblade People

Beneath the windblown sands, we arrive at the final and deepest lens of red/brown sand. This thick, dark layer tells us of a time when shrubs and forest are just becoming established in the Annie Lake area, following the retreat of the glaciers. The landscape of the Watson/Wheaton valley 8,000 years ago is much different from today - with open parklands and semi-open prairies in upland regions. Caribou and bison are abundant. Fish are only beginning to move back into the newly created rivers and lakes, and are not yet an important source of food. At Annie Lake, as in other places in southern Yukon, people are making and using microblade tools. These microblades are small, slender stone blades, placed in a row along the edge of a bone or antler knife or spear point to give it a razor edge. When the blades are dull or broken, they are simply replaced. When examined under a microscope, broken microblades of fine chert collected from this level show evidence of being heavily used.

The First People at Annie Lake

As we screen the last buckets of soil from the "microblade" level, we enter a time that belongs to the first people of the Watson and Wheaton valleys. During this period, large glaciers—remnants of the last great Ice Age—choke the mountain valleys. Only the higher hillsides sit dry above the meltwater lakes and rivers. No fish swim in the enormous glacial lake which covers much of southern Yukon; and the Annie Lake site sits on a bend of a large river flowing north into the Yukon basin. Strong winds blow constantly down narrow valleys. The climate is dry—cold in winter and warm in summer, warmer

The excavation at Annie Lake was featured in a NEDAA documentary on Yukon archaeology. Christle Wiebe, Tagish Charlie and Cindy Beattie stand by as Clayton Johns "discovers" an arrow point in this scene.

even than today. Poplar trees begin to grow along shorelines and sage covers the open countryside. Soon after, small spruce trees and juniper bushes begin to grow in the area. During these early days, the first people enter the country following herds of caribou and bison moving down from the unglaciated north. These early people are specialized big-game hunters who move frequently and rarely establish large camps. The First People in southern Yukon are a shadowy presence in this most ancient time. Traces of their old camps, their typical long, thick spear points, and large "blades" of stone are seldom recovered. Within the deepest sands at Annie Lake, we find two large stone blade tools, which offer the only evidence of their presence.

Below this point there is nothing left to see. Ten thousand years ago the Annie Lake site was under the water of melting glaciers. Before that, it was under the ice itself, for many thousands of years. The gouging glaciers erased all traces of any life that may have existed before them. Beyond the archaeological record, we are back to the time of which the Elders speak, when Crow made the world.

The alpine country high in the upper Watson/Wheaton basin represents what conditions may have been like at Annie Lake shortly after the Ice Age ended. Many centuries passed before plants and animals were able to move into the newly created landscape.

Old beach lines of Glacial Lake Carcross are still visible high on the hills around Carcross. These beach lines were left behind when the lake drained about 10,000 years ago.

Carcross/Tagish First Nation