

ŁU ZIL MĀN) FISH LAKE



Uncovering the Past

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Cover Photo:
View south of the divide between Fish Lake (left) and
Bonneville Lake (right). An old foot trail crosses the
saddle between the two lakes.

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DEDICATION



This book is dedicated to the Elders of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation who have shared with us their knowledge of the country around Fish Lake. We hope that this will be a beginning to writing down their history.

INTRODUCTION

Fish Lake, located only 15 km from the territorial capital, is seldom mentioned in the histories of Whitehorse or the Yukon. There are few traces of old camps or cabins here, and no record of early settlements. However, elders of Kwanlin Dün tell us that this lake was a very important resource area in their annual seasonal round. In the summer of 1993, Kwanlin Dün elders and students, and Yukon Heritage Branch archaeologists set out to document the history of the Fish Lake area.

There were two aspects to this research: oral histories and archaeology. A number of Kwanlin Dün elders were interviewed who recalled using the area extensively both before and after the construction of the Alaska Highway. The oral histories

provided the framework for the archaeological component. Places identified as traditional camps or resource areas in the recent past have probably been important sites for many generations, and archaeologists have learned to turn their attention to the places recommended by First Nation elders.

The combined archaeological and oral history research brought to light new knowledge about the past, including patterns of land use and settlement which span thousands of years in the Fish Lake area. Through the elders' accounts and through the exploration of the ancient sites on the lake, a new understanding of former lifeways has begun to emerge. A silent landscape with few historical features is now seen to have both a rich and varied cultural history.

The crew sets out on survey. Left to right: Jerry Taylor, Greg Hare, Henry Taylor, Azalea Joe and Donna Hagen



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The 1993 Fish Lake Archaeology Project was a joint project of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Yukon Heritage Branch. The principal objective in undertaking the project was to begin to document the history of the Fish Lake region, which has been for Kwanlin Dün one of their core resource areas. The account of traditional life in the Fish Lake area presented in the following pages was provided to us by Kwanlin Dün elders; the more distant past has been reconstructed from archaeological survey and excavation. The Fish Lake Archaeology Project was funded by the federal Department of Communications “Access to Archaeology Programme”, with additional support from the Northern Research Institute of Yukon College, the Yukon Heritage Branch and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

The archaeological and oral history research conducted during the Fish Lake Project represented the first steps towards preserving Kwanlin Dün history and heritage sites. “It’s important that our youth learn about this area and that the general public know this,” said Chief Lena Johns. Chief Johns said a study of this area is particularly important because of its proximity to the City of Whitehorse.

According to Kwanlin Dün chief land claims negotiator Pat Joe, the results of the dig “don’t reveal everything about our past but it is a start, a beginning towards an understanding of our history.

“Our teachers and our students need these materials to educate themselves on the history of the local area,” Joe said. She sees the dig as

a seminal experience for the future managers of Kwanlin Dün’s heritage lands. “We can only benefit from this project. The training our students receive from the Fish Lake area study showed them what’s involved in heritage management and will give them direction for the future,” she said.

The project was carried out over a six week period in July and August 1993. Pat Joe was the project coordinator for Kwanlin Dün, with the assistance of Patti-Ann Finlay; Donna Hagen was community researcher and project coordinator, with the assistance of student archaeologist Donna Lindsay Dillman. Student participants were: Azalea Joe, Henry Taylor and Jerry Taylor. Elders who assisted in documenting the history of Fish Lake were Mrs. Jessie Scarff, Mr. Don McKay, Mrs. Julia Joe, Mr. John McGundy, Mr. Louis



Irvine, Mrs. Polly Irvine and Mrs. Gladys Huebschwerlen. Additional information about traditional activities and stories was adapted from Catharine McClellan. Ruth Gotthardt supervised the archaeological component of the project, with the assistance of Greg Hare and T.J. Hammer (Yukon Heritage Branch). Special thanks to Chief Lena Johns for her support and encouragement throughout the project.



Kwanlin Dün community members and archaeologists at Fish Lake.

TRADITIONAL AND HISTORIC OCCUPATIONS AT ŁU ZIL MÄN

Catharine McClellan was one of the first people to begin to write down information on the traditional history of the Kwanlin Dün and their neighbours based on her work in the Whitehorse area some forty years ago. At that time, she described the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün together with those of the Ta'an Kwachan as extending from the lower end of Marsh Lake (which was shared with Tagish people) to Lake Laberge and downriver to Hootalinqua. One of their main fish camps was located on the Takhini River, at the mouth of Little River, just west of Whitehorse. The camp was called "Łu'déy yAL" - or "white dirt bank" in the Southern Tutchone language. The settlement also had a Tlingit name "yełdA' k'ú" (crow house [?]) in commemoration of the purchase of a piece of beaten copper by the Crow chief from Chilkat

traders. A second principal fish camp was located just below Miles Canyon ('Unilyin). Whitehorse itself was called "K'wan'dlln".

From these traditional salmon camps, many old trails lead to Fish Lake, called Łu Zil Män in the Southern Tutchone language, after the whitefish (Łu zil) which spawn here in the fall. In the old days,

whitefish were one of the most important and reliable food resources for people, ensuring survival through the long winter months. An old Tagish story tells of two giant fish, a male and a female, that live in Fish Lake and keep the lake supplied with fish all the time. These fish, they say, can still be seen on warm, calm summer days.



Seasonal Round

In the traditional seasonal round, late summer and fall were the time when most families would travel to their camps at Fish Lake. The month of September was the time of the trout spawn; Mrs. Jessie Scarff and her aunt, the late Mrs. Jenny Laberge, always set their fish nets for trout at Fox Point. In fact, they called the lake Moon Lake—*Dis Hini* (Tlingit language - preliminary transcription), because they set their nets according to the phases of the moon. According to Mrs. Scarff, they would set the nets along the shore, straight out from the point, or in an “L” shape, depending on the moon, and this ensured they would always get fish.

Right: View to the west of Fish Lake showing Fox point.

Opposite page: Mrs. Jessie Scarff at the Main Camp site at the north end of Fish Lake, pointing out where the old trail to Bonneville Lake went.





Whitefish spawned later, in October and November. Mrs. Scarff recalled that people set their nets for whitefish north of Fox Point, around the mouths of the small streams coming into Fish Lake, and at the mouth of Fish Creek, at the north end of the lake. Before the Gold Rush, the only kinds of nets people used were short sinew nets, but these quickly got soft and stretched and could only be left in the water about an hour at a time. When the fish were spawning in the shallow creeks, people used most often fish traps made of spruce and willow poles.

Fall was also the best time to snare gophers. Mrs. Scarff said that Fish Lake, at the north end, was always a good place for gophers (and remains so today); Robinson, too, had lots of gophers.

View northwest of the north end of Fish Lake.

Moose, caribou and sheep hunting was done mainly in the fall-time, before and after the trout and whitefish runs. Old foot trails used to run all around Fish Lake to peoples' hunting areas at Bonneville Lake, the Ibx Valley, and Primrose and Rose (Mud) Lakes. Before the road was built to Fish Lake in the 1940s, people travelled to their hunting grounds around Bonneville Lake with dog packs, and returned with dog sleds. Caribou, sheep and marmot were plentiful in the high country here. Moose were hunted at the south end of Fish Lake: according to Don McKay, moose were like cattle here, there were so many. This is where his father built his meat caches. Their family used to hunt and trap around Jackson Lakes, Fish Lake,



View southwest of the south end of Fish Lake and the Coast Mountains.



down the Ibex Valley, and south of Fish Lake to Primrose Lake, Coal Lake and over to Lewes Lake and Robinson.

In winter and spring, many people stayed at Fish Lake and continued to fish through the ice, hunt for moose and caribou in the mountains and trap. Beaver and muskrat were especially important in early spring in the area around Fish Lake, Rose Lake, the Ibex Valley, Johns Lake and Little Takhini areas. The Bonneville Lakes, especially the third lake, were known as good beaver country.

Grayling spawned in spring and the best place for fishing was Bonneville Lake. Mrs. Scarff described how they used to stretch a gunny sack across the lake outlet, in

View southwest over the Bonneville Lakes.

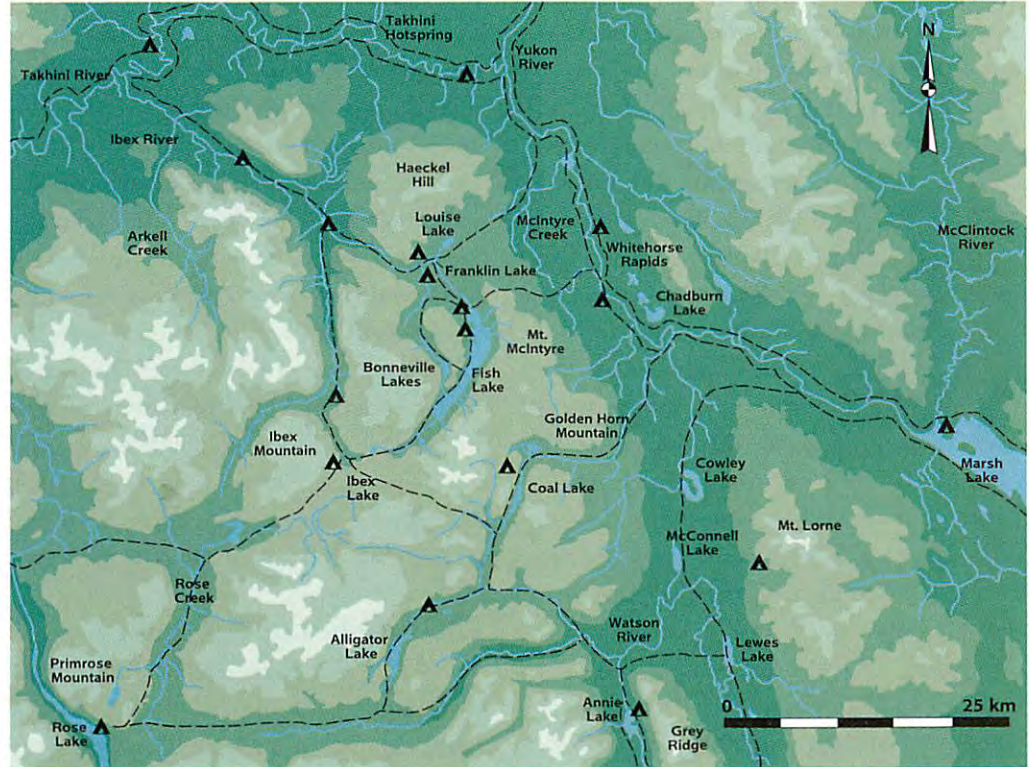
SKETCH MAP OF SOME OF THE TRADITIONAL TRAILS AND CAMPS AROUND FISH LAKE

the creek, and get lots of fish every time. Don McKay said his family fished for grayling in the spring in Jackson Creek and Franklin Lake, as well.

Traditional Trails and Camps

The main Kwanlin Dün camp at Fish Lake was at the north end of the lake. Most people camped in tents or bush camps but there is still evidence of some old cabins. From here, foot trails went in many directions. A good trail existed between the lake and Whitehorse long before the road was built.

Trails connected with other camps located on the south end of Fish Lake as well. John McGundy said there used to be a shelter here, made out of tree bark. One old cabin can still be seen there now. One cabin, called Halfway Camp, was built



by Don McKay's grandfather about midway down the east side of the lake.

The foot trail from the north end of Fish Lake to Bonneville Lake connected eventually with the old Dalton Trail. Hunting camps on Bonneville Lake were used by the Shorty, Charlie and Scarff families. In the old days, camps were also located at Louise Lake (Polly Irvine's family) and at Franklin Lake, where the creek comes in.



Many of the traditional camps around Fish Lake were flooded when the dam was built in 1949 and lake levels rose about one metre. The construction of the dam on Fish Lake changed the drainage of the lake: the former drainage was through

Jackson Creek and the IbeX River to the Takhini River; Fish Lake now drains via Franklin and Louise Lakes down McIntyre Creek to the Yukon River.

In about the 1930s, a fox farm was set up on Fox Point. As in other places in the Yukon, the fur farming industry heavily depleted fish stocks at Fish Lake. The high elevation of the lake combined with the cold temperature of the waters prevented the lake from recovering fully from this over fishing. Due to its low productivity, the lake was closed to commercial fishing in 1964. Probably for this reason, people have used the lake less and less in the past 30 years.

The Families of Fish Lake

Mrs. Jessie Scarff remembers Fish Lake as a summer gathering place where people fished, hunted and held potlatches. Even

today, many families continue to fish and hunt around Fish Lake. Mrs. Scarff first went to Fish Lake with her Aunt Jenny Laberge in 1949, and remembers Shorty Austin used to trap around the lake in the fall. Champagne people also used the lake in the past; other families she recalls coming here were the Boss family, the McKay family, the Irvine family, the Clethero family, the Petersons, and her Auntie Margaret, and her sister, from Carcross. And one time, she remembers a whole group of women including: Violet Storer, Amy, Polly, Agnes, Carrie Peterson, Jennie Townsend and Margaret McKay who got together at Fish Lake and tanned 18 hides.

Mrs. Gladys Huebschwerlen recalled her uncle Jack McIntosh and his wife Carrie always used to fish here; and Randal and Rose Bill still go to Fish Lake.

John McGundy, who was born on the McGundy River, just past Little Salmon, first came to Fish Lake in 1935. He remembers going there for the summertime gatherings and potlatches with Charlie Smith.

Polly and Louis Irvine recall also that “Big Lake Jim” from Carcross used to come to Fish Lake with his family, and also David Jackson, who was Polly’s brother-in-law, and his family. Jimmy Jackson always went to Jackson Lake where he had his trapline.

Mrs. Julia Joe said she used to go to Fish Lake in the summertime with her husband John Joe. Mrs. Emma Burns was staying on the lake at that time too.

Don McKay’s family always trapped and fished around Fish Lake. Mr. McKay recalls other families that were using the lake at that time: the Scarffs, the Irvines and the Chambers. Bonneville Lake, he remembers,

was the hunting area used by the Shorty, Charlie and Scarff families.

These memories and traditional patterns of land use at Fish Lake provide a starting point for the exploration of the more distant past. Beginning with the traditional camps identified by elders, archaeologists examine the landscape for evidence of long ago people, evidence such as old brush camps, cooking fires and stone tool fragments.



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ŁU ZIL MÄN



An Introduction to the Archaeological Record

Most of the traces of ancient occupations around Fish Lake consist of stone tools, and the chips and flakes which are the byproducts of stone tool manufacture. The soils of the Yukon are acidic so bone, wood, antler and other organic materials rarely preserve in the ground more than a few hundred years. Only charcoal and burned bone last for longer periods, sometimes thousands of years, depending on local conditions of burial.

Like time detectives, archaeologists try to solve the mysteries of the past based on

Left: Excavations at the Main Camp, Locality 2, at the north end of Fish Lake. Here the excavations are coming down to the level of the early post-glacial beach gravels.

Right: Azalea Joe recording and collecting artefacts from the excavation at the Main Camp, Locality 2, at the north end of Fish Lake.

very limited clues, such as stone tools and chips and, perhaps most importantly, where in the landscape they were found. The depth of tools below surface and the location of a site may indicate when and why people were present at a particular spot. Remains of old campfires may also permit precise radiocarbon dating of archaeological sites.

In southern Yukon, archaeologists recognize four broadly defined “technological” or stone tool making traditions which span the period from the end of the last Ice Age to historic times. Archaeologists define these traditions based on differences in the kinds of stone tools that made up people’s tool kits, and the way in which the tools were made.

The First People: The Northern Cordilleran Tradition

The oldest evidence of human occupation of southern Yukon at the end of the last Ice Age, between 8,000–10,000 years ago, is called the Northern Cordilleran tradition. The name comes from the mountain ranges of the northern Yukon, where tools of this tradition were first recognized. Typically, Northern Cordilleran

tools include large lanceolate spear points with round bases, tools made on blades (long, parallel-sided flakes), and large burins (whittling/shaving tools, probably used to work bone and antler). Traces of these first people in southern Yukon are very shadowy indeed and, prior to the investigations at Fish Lake, have been recognized only at the Canyon site, on the Aishihik River, and at Annie Lake.

The Northwest Microblade Tradition

Between about 8,000 and 5,000 years ago, “microblade” technology was common in southern Yukon. As the name indicates, microblades are very small, narrow stone blades, about 4–6 cm long and about 1 cm wide. Microblades were used as insets in composite tools — tools made of antler or bone where the small microblades were

inserted in a groove to form the cutting or piercing edge of the tool. Very much like disposable razor blades, microblades could be removed and replaced when the edge became dull. Other tools of this technology include finely retouched and flaked stone spear points, scrapers and burins. Archaeologists call this technology Northwest Microblade tradition or, in the southwest Yukon, the Little Arm Phase.

The Northern Archaic Tradition

After about 5,000 years ago, the style in stone tools changed once again. The most characteristic tool of the Northern Archaic tradition is the “notched” stone spear point, although other stemmed, lanceolate and leaf-shaped points were also popular. End scrapers were also very common. These are stone flakes which have been chipped or



retouched on one end, and which were used to work hides, or wood and antler. And appearing for the first time in the tool kit of this period are notched stone net sinkers, providing the first evidence of people fishing in the distant past. In southwest Yukon, the Northern Archaic tradition is also called the Taye Lake Phase.

The Late Prehistoric Period

At about 1,500 years we see the introduction of the bow and arrow to the tool kit of Yukon people and, for the first time, people began making small notched and stemmed stone arrow points. Also new in the technology of the time were tools and ornaments made of native copper, which was obtained in the form of small nuggets from sources in the headwaters of the White River. Despite these innovations, there is strong

continuity of both technology and land use patterns from the Northern Archaic tradition, about 5,000 years ago, to the historic people of the southern Yukon.

The Changing Environment

The changes we see in stone tool technology partly reflect how people were adapting to changes in the environment since the last Ice Age. In the period immediately following deglaciation, forests only gradually returned to the land and open country animals such as caribou and bison were the major game of the time. Fish were probably not an important resource until about 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. The return of fish to the lakes and rivers of southern Yukon occurred only after the silts and sediments from the melting glaciers

had flushed through the waterways.

The stability we see in technology and land use after 5,000 years ago suggests that by this time the environment had recovered from the effects of glaciation and was much the same as the present. Yukon people had developed a specialized way of life based on hunting and fishing in the northern forests – the same pattern as seen in traditional times. It should be noted, however, that while caribou and moose were probably the major large game species, it now appears that bison continued to live in some localities of the Yukon until as late as a few hundred years ago.

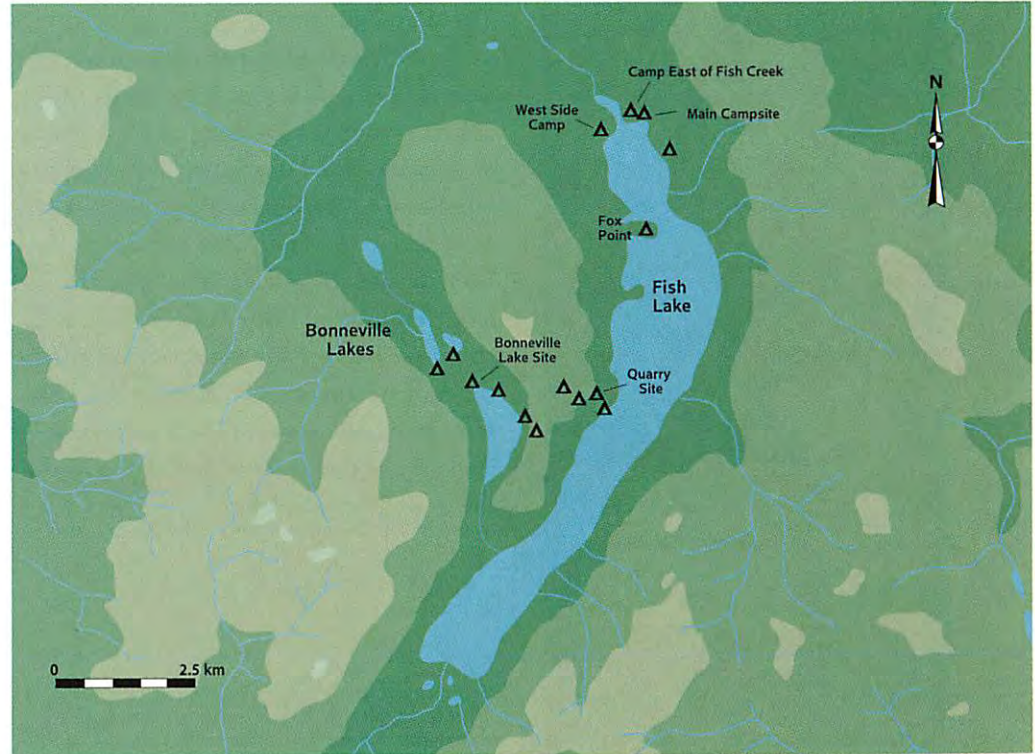


ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE FISH LAKE AREA

The Archaeological Sites on Łu Zil Män

The Sites on the North End of Fish Lake

Because the north end of Fish Lake was identified by Kwanlin Dün elders as their principal camp, it was here that we began our study of the archaeology. Three large archaeological sites lie buried along the shoreline at the north end of the lake, on both sides of Fish Creek. Thousands of chips and flakes and numerous stone tools were seen almost everywhere here, and even at first glance, the kinds of tools present immediately reveal a long history of habitation at the lake outlet, spanning many centuries.





The West Side Camp

Although we inspected the site on the west side of Fish Creek only briefly, flakes and chips from ancient camps were seen over a very wide area, from the small knoll on the lakeshore to well back of the lake, where more recent Kwanlin Dün fish camps have been set up. It is from here that the old foot trail to Bonneville Lakes begins; today this is a horse trail which leads to the third, or northernmost, Bonneville Lake. Unfortunately, parts of the site have been damaged by the construction of the road to the west side of the lake.

Henry Taylor supervising young visitors from Kwanlin Dün on "Children's Day" at Fish Lake. This is at the old campsite on the east side of Fish Creek.

The Camp on the East Side of Fish Creek

On the east side of Fish Creek is a broad, low knoll which was the site of a second major camp. This ancient site was almost completely destroyed when the road was built down to the boat launch at Fish Lake. On the edges of the road, and exposed in the ground where the turf has been scraped away, however, were found a large number of stone flakes and tools which indicates this was once an important camp site. Also visible in the ground were traces of old camp fires or hearths. Small test excavations were dug on the undisturbed east slope of the knoll to attempt to discover artefacts still buried in the ground, which might give some indication of the age of the occupations of the site. Although little was found in the tests, we did recover a few artefacts at different levels below surface,

which tell us the site was reused a number of times over several thousands of years. Of particular interest is a flake which clearly relates to microblade technology which was found deeply buried in one test. Even this slim evidence is sufficient for us to conclude that people have been using this site for more than 5,000 years.

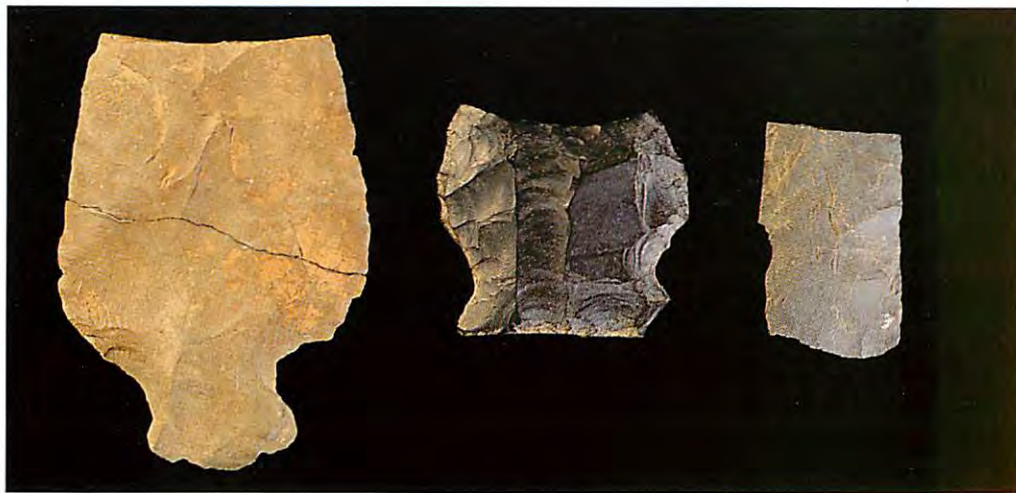
Tools relating to later occupations were more common, including side-notched and leaf-shaped spear points, scrapers, stone knives, wedges, and large hide scrapers. The large number of end scrapers recovered on the surface of the site seem to point to occupations by Northern Archaic tradition peoples, who were very partial to this tool

A sample of stone spear points from the old campsite on the east side of Fish Creek. These probably represent Northern Archaic tradition technology.

type. The variety of tools also suggest this was a kind of base camp where daily activities included fishing, hunting, repairing or making tools, preparing and drying fish and meat, and working hides.

The Main Camp at the North End of Fish Lake

The largest archaeological site at the end of Fish Lake occupies most of the northeast shore, over a distance of about 200





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metres. Within this site we can see three areas which were probably the main camping areas. The first of these areas we described as Locality 1-2, which are in the area of what is now the public campground; Locality 3 is a broad knoll about 50 m east of the campground; and Locality 4 is about 75 m east of Locality 3.

Judging by the concentration of artefacts, Locality 1-2 is the largest of the campsite areas. A total of 9 test excavations measuring 1 m² were made on top of the knoll. Unfortunately, soils here are very thin and a very long history of occupation by

Above: A sample of stone end scrapers from the old campsite on the east side of Fish Creek. End scrapers were one of the most popular tools of the Northern Archaic tradition.

Opposite page: The Main Camp, Locality 2, on the north end of Fish Lake. View east of the excavation area on the small knoll.



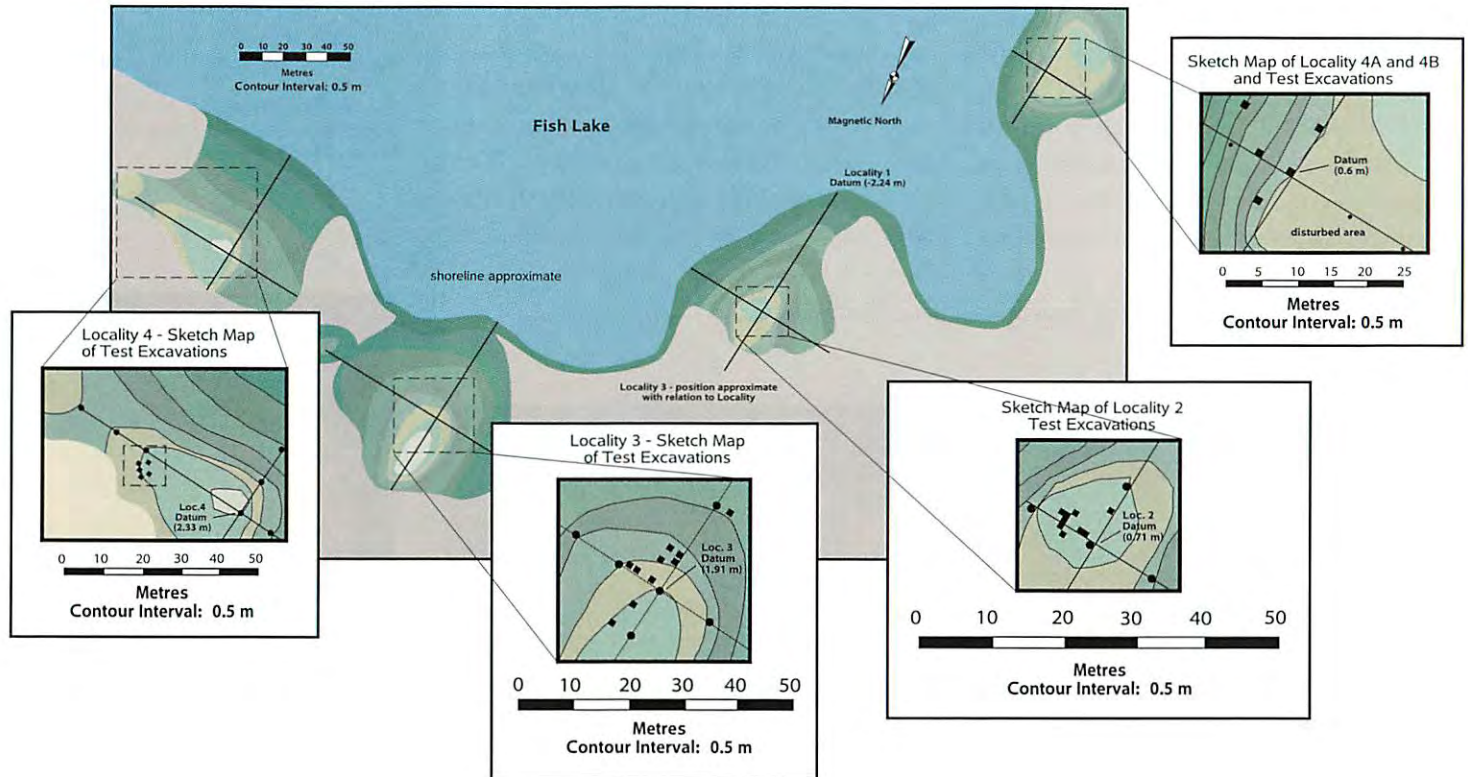


ground squirrels as well as by people at the site has resulted in significant disturbance of the soil layers. As a result, depth of artefacts is no longer a good indicator of their relative age. Artefacts that appear to be thousands of years old, based on the technology, occur on the surface in areas where little soil development had occurred, or where ground squirrel burrowing has turned up buried materials. And even though traces of old camp fires were found in the excavations, together with burned bone and charcoal, soil disturbance made the association of tools with these features very uncertain. As a consequence, no direct radiocarbon dating of the artefacts was attempted.

The artefact sample from Localities

Azalea Joe and Henry Taylor excavating at the Main Camp, Locality 2, on the north end of Fish Lake.

SKETCH MAP OF TEST EXCAVATIONS AT THE MAIN CAMP AT THE NORTH END OF FISH LAKE



1 and 2 appears to represent principally occupations within the past 5,000 – 6,000 years. Microblades represent the earlier occupations, and various types of stone spear points and end scrapers indicate the later Northern Archaic tradition and Late Pre-historic period technologies. Only very ephemeral traces of the oldest occupations

appear in the form of one blade fragment. It may be that prior to about 7,000 years ago, lake levels were higher than at present as the last glaciers of the Ice Age melted. With higher water, the sites on the north shore of Fish Lake may very well have been flooded and people had to seek more elevated ground for their camps.



Below left: Microblade sample from various localities at the Main Camp on the north end of Fish Lake.

Below: Northern Archaic tradition spear point and point fragment from the Main Camp, Locality 2, on the north end of Fish Lake.



As was the case with the campsite east of Fish Creek, the kinds of tools found at these localities indicate a long term campsite where hunting, fishing and domestic activities, such as hide working, took place. And almost certainly, gophers were snared here in the fall. Tool making appears also to have been an important activity at the site, judging by the number of unfinished tools recovered. Generally, this activity is most common at a site when people have a nearby source of stone suitable for making their tools. As we shall see later in our discussion of the Fish Lake sites, this indeed proved to be the case.

Localities 3 and 4 of the main site were apparently smaller camps, probably used less often because they were located farther from the water's edge. Ten small tests (50x 50 cm) were made at Locality 3. The



Spear Points from the Main Camp, Localities 3 & 4, on the north end of Fish Lake. The point on the left was found just above the old lake gravels in the test excavations.

artefacts excavated here were almost all just below the ground surface, suggesting this area was used only within the past 2,000 or 3,000 years. Many artefacts were in fact found on the surface in the road or on horse trails, which may indicate the site was most heavily used within the past few hundred years. Like Locality 2, however, a range of activities, including tool manufacture, seem to be represented at this site.

Locality 4, on the northeast corner of Fish Lake, was almost completely destroyed when the Fish Lake Road was constructed. All that remains is a small "island" of undisturbed ground, where five 1x1 m test squares were excavated. What proved to be of particular interest at this locality was the recovery of a number of the artefacts, including a large lanceolate spear point, from very deep in the ground, just

above the layer of gravels. These gravels are the remains of an old lake floor, dating probably from early post-glacial times. The traces of camps just above the old lake gravels are a strong indication that people had begun to live in the Fish Lake area very soon after the end of the Ice Age. A few microblades were also found at this locality, indicating occupations later in time as well, to about 5,000 years ago. Locality 4 is well back of the lake shore and, significant for our reconstruction of higher lake levels, it is more than 1.5 m above the elevation of Locality 2 and the site just east of Fish Creek. Locality 4, therefore, may have been a favoured camp site in the period following deglaciation when lake levels were higher than at present.



Fox Point

At Fox Point we documented the remains of a number of recent camps, including the camp where Mrs. Scarff stayed with her aunt, Jenny Laberge, on the north side of the point. The remains of much older camps at Fox Point were uncovered on the south side of the point, and along the old beach terrace on the east side. Stone tools, and chips and flakes were collected here on the ground surface, and in test holes up to about 10 cm below surface. The types of tools found at Fox Point and their depth in the ground indicate that people were using this site at least since Northern Archaic tradition times. However, these stone tools and chips were not very numerous, suggesting that Fox Point was never a major campsite, but was more likely a short term fishing site that has been used for many centuries.



View north over Fish Lake. Fox Point is in the middle ground.

The small sample of tools from Fox Point is made up of two broken side-notched points (one is small and may be an arrow point); a hide scraper made on a chipped shale tablet; and a stone wedge, for splitting wood or bone/antler. A moose skin scraper found at the north end of the Fox Point, probably where Mrs. Laberge had her camp, likely represents one of the last stone tools used at Fish Lake. Also recovered from the site were shale tablets and flakes which indicate some tool manufacturing was also taking place at Fox Point in the past.

Below: Moose skin scraper from the historic camp on the north side of Fox Point (left) and unfinished tool found on the trail on the east side of Fox Point (right).

Right: Collection of chipping debris from the east side of Fox Point.



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The Quarry Site

Located high on a bedrock knob about halfway down the west side of the lake, we discovered the source of the grey shale from which most of the Fish Lake stone tools were made. Like an untidy workshop, the ground was littered with half-made tools, waste flakes, and broken tablets and blocks of shale quarried from the exposed outcrops. It was difficult to walk without stepping on stone artefacts. From this high vantage point, people could keep a look out over the entire lake valley, as they prepared the shale blocks for flaking and roughed out their tools. Tool blanks and rough-outs were carried away to the main camp or hunting camps for

View north over the north end of the Quarry Site. Fox Point can be seen in the middle ground extending out into the lake.





Flakes, chips and tool-making debris together with a cobble hammerstone on the ground surface at the Quarry Site.

finishing, and those pieces that were not well shaped or that broke while being chipped were discarded on the ground. Because of the alpine setting, there is almost no soil development at the Quarry Site, and half-made stone tools still lie on the surface where they were dropped many thousands of years ago. Walking from knob to knob, we were able to identify dozens of small workshops all around the main quarry site. And climbing upward on the hill, we noted evidence of quarrying and stone tool making even on the highest points of land, more than 300 m above Fish Lake.

The discovery of such a quarry provides a rare opportunity to study the early

stages of stone tool making. This particular site is especially important because of the presence of a number of stone blades and blade cores. These tool types are seldom found in southern Yukon and represent a technology used by the first people to inhabit the country around Fish Lake at the end of the Ice Age. When these people arrived, the landscape would have looked much different than today. Fish Lake and Bonneville Lakes were probably still one large glacial lake and bison and caribou would have roamed the alpine tundra. The tools of later occupants were also present at the Quarry, indicating that it had been used throughout the centuries.



Samples of blades and blade-related technology from the Quarry Site.



Unfinished tools discarded at the Quarry Site. Some of these may have been intended as blanks for spear points, or were being prepared as large stone knives.



The Bonneville Lake Site

The north end of Bonneville Lake is an extensive sand dune area and, as at the Quarry Site, the evidence of many centuries of human occupation may be seen still on the ground surface. Stone tools and chips from old camps are scattered in blowouts on both sides of the creek which links Bonneville Lake to the Second Bonneville Lake to the north. Some of the oldest tools in Yukon prehistory, blades and burins, are found here,



together with examples of later technology including microblades, notched points and scrapers. The kinds of tools themselves suggest a camp to which people returned season after season for fall hunting and very likely in the spring for the grayling spawn, even as people did in historic times. What we also see at Bonneville Lake, more than any of the other sites in the Fish Lake area, is the use of a wide variety of stone for making tools. In addition to the local shale,

Far left: View south of the divide between Fish Lake (left) and Bonneville Lake (right). An old foot trail crosses the saddle between the two lakes.

Near left: Henry Taylor (foreground) and Jerry Taylor (background) on the trail between Fish Lake and Bonneville Lakes. The photo is taken from the top of the saddle between the lakes, looking east to Fish Lake.

This page: Henry Taylor collecting artefacts from the blow-outs at the Bonneville Lake site.



tools were made on a variety of cherts, chalcedonies, quartzites and obsidians. While certain of the black and grey cherts may have been obtained from sources in the Coast Mountains, the obsidian and chalcedony were very likely received in trade from neighbouring people who had access to

these stone types in the St. Elias Mountains. Once again we see that traditional patterns extend far back into history: the old-time trade between the Champagne and Aishihik people and the Kwanlin Dün seems to be one that has gone on for many centuries.



Far left: A sample of spear points from the Bonneville Lake site. The large point on the left had traces of old blood left on it. This was found to be from caribou and hare.

Near left: An angle burin made on a grey chert flake from the Bonneville Lake site.

THE PLACE OF FISH LAKE IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF SOUTHERN YUKON

The preliminary testing and survey that was carried out in the Fish Lake area in 1993 provides a window into the long history of this region. The accounts of the Kwanlin Dün elders describe a seasonal round of hunting and fishing on the lake which extends to the distant past, to a time when the land was newly emerged from the ice sheets: the sites which elders point to as their traditional camps are also the same sites which their ancestors have used over thousands of years.

The presence of shale bedrock in the country around Fish Lake provides also an opportunity to explore questions of past traditions of stone tool making among the former inhabitants of the Fish Lake. How people made and used their stone tools is almost the only evidence we have for reconstructing events in the very distant



past. The variety of tools that have come from the Fish Lake sites permit us to trace connections between Fish Lake peoples and peoples from Annie Lake, Kluane, Champagne and even further afield. Even the types of stone that the tools were made of can tell us of ancient trade networks and travel routes.

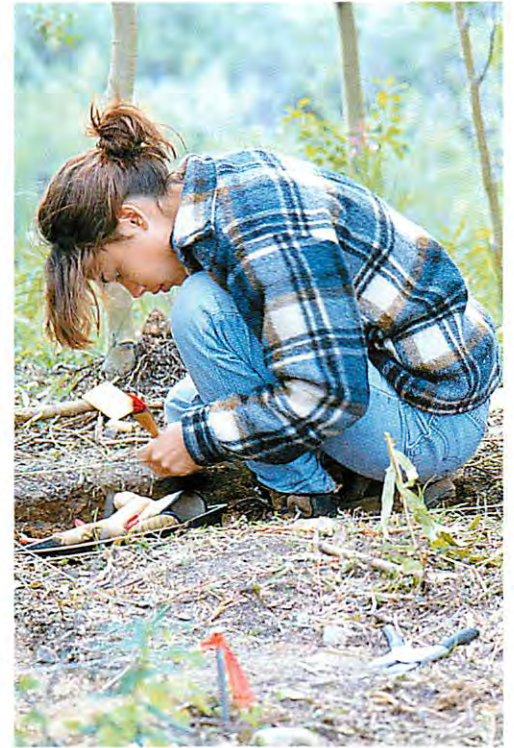
The archaeology at Fish Lake also reminds us that the long history of Yukon First Nations still resides in the landscape of Yukon. It should not be forgotten that the land which appears untouched and remote is, and has been for thousands of years, home to Yukon First Nations.

FISH LAKE AND THE KWANLIN DÜN FIRST NATION TODAY

“Archaeology projects such as the Fish Lake project,” said Chief Lena Johns, “are critical to the preservation and protection of our heritage. So much of our history has been ignored. Here was a chance to explore an area that was so vital to us – vital as a source of hunting and fishing for the Kwanlin Dün people.”

Chief Johns also stated that heritage areas as close to Whitehorse as Fish Lake are especially vulnerable to the threat of development, and stressed the importance of documenting First Nation’s histories before they are lost for everyone.

Azalea Joe watches closely as her trowel uncovers new traces of the ancient camps at Fish Lake.





The Kwanlin Dün First Nation