

Executive Summary

Documentation of North Slave Métis Culturally Important Areas

Within the North Arm of Great Slave Lake.

Information Inventory

In the allocated four days of effort, the following information sources were found:

- ∞ digital video - 166 files in two specific folders located but not reviewed. Many of these files have non-descriptive file names and need to be opened, named, and filed. Unknown number of duplicates, or relevance to cultural inventory. There are also many video files mixed in with other file types throughout the filing system - if you could call it a system....
- ∞ digital photos - 14,845 files in 382 folders labelled as photos. 18 of those folders identified as specifically related to cultural values in the north arm. Selective review suggests that half of the folders and files may be duplicate copies. An additional 27,157 jpeg files are mixed in with other file types throughout the digital filing system. It is estimated, very roughly, based on spot checking, that 10% of the files are directly relevant to cultural values in the north arm, and that half of those may be duplicate copies.
- ∞ digital audio - archived in many formats - was not able to review.
- ∞ digital maps - 202 maps. Approximately 1/3 related to North Arm and culture.
- ∞ digital text - 9 collections of original data (2708 scrip records, 620 folders of genealogical records, 330 interviews, 3,293 interview questionnaires), 14 finished reports, 6 in-progress reports, miscellaneous reference documents (207 wpd, 1,118 pdf, 565 html), as well as miscellaneous documents on various obsolete computer hard drives (399 .wpd files, 23,932 .doc or docx files, 5,096 pdf files, and 6,554 htm or html files.) Spot checking suggests that ~5% of these documents might contain relevant information. Quality and uniqueness of information unknown. Many files do not have descriptive file names.
- ∞ ArcView shape files - 15 cultural themes.
- ∞ Hard copy books, reports, and miscellaneous papers. ~ 150 boxes. ~5% relevant.
- ∞ Audio tapes - 15 labelled 25 without labels. Various lengths. Of the labelled ones, 95% should contain relevant information.
- ∞ Video tapes - 3 labelled and relevant MiniDV, 13 without labels, not checked. 2 boxes of VHS tapes, mostly with illegible handwritten or missing labels, not checked.
- ∞ Maps - 2 closets full of rolled maps. Spot checking indicates they are all associated with traditional land use and knowledge interviews.

Cultural Values Identified.

∞ **Old Fort Rae (OFR).** Heritage, Ecological, Cultural and Socioeconomic Values.

Also known as Isle de Montagne, Mountain Island, Fort Rae and Rae Point, Old Fort Rae is by far the most frequently mentioned “place” in the proposed Kwetsootlaa National Wildlife area. Old Fort Rae is located on the edge of a unique geological formation that serves as an important landmark and plays an important role in the cultural landscape of the North Slave Métis.



One hundred and twenty years ago, in 1892, during a visit to Old Fort Rae, which was at that time being used by the Hudsons’

Bay Company as a provisioning post which supplied meat and vegetables for much of the northern fur trade, the explorer Frank Russel noted that *“Two hundred yards from the big house on the shore of a little cove called Sandy Bay, a few crumbling ruins of clay and stone chimneys mark the site of an ‘old fort,’ abandoned so long ago that nothing is known by the present inhabitants concerning it.”*

A hundred and three years before that, in 1789, famous explorer Alexander Mackenzie noted in his journal the existence of “the remains of an old fort” at Isle de Montagne.

Three companies are known to have been exploring northwards towards the west before 1789. We know that at least one North Slave Métis ancestor, Francois Beaulieu (grandfather of Francois Beaulieu II), came north with one of them, the *Compagnie des Sioux*.



The North Slave Métis Alliance believes that these old remains have been found and documented in an archaeological dig overseen by Professor Marc Stevenson in 2000.

In light of the archaeological and historic evidence, the most reasonable conclusion that can be drawn about Old Fort Rae's "old fort" at this point in time is that it is either a pre-1780 occupation of early Métis associated with the Company of the Sioux, or a late-1780s/early 1790s occupation of Métis associated with the heyday of NWC trading activity on the North Arm.

Another study was done in 2008-2010 to document the existing cemetery and old buildings, to collect diagnostic specimens, to map the site, to collect traditional Métis and Tlicho knowledge of the site, and to draft a heritage management plan.

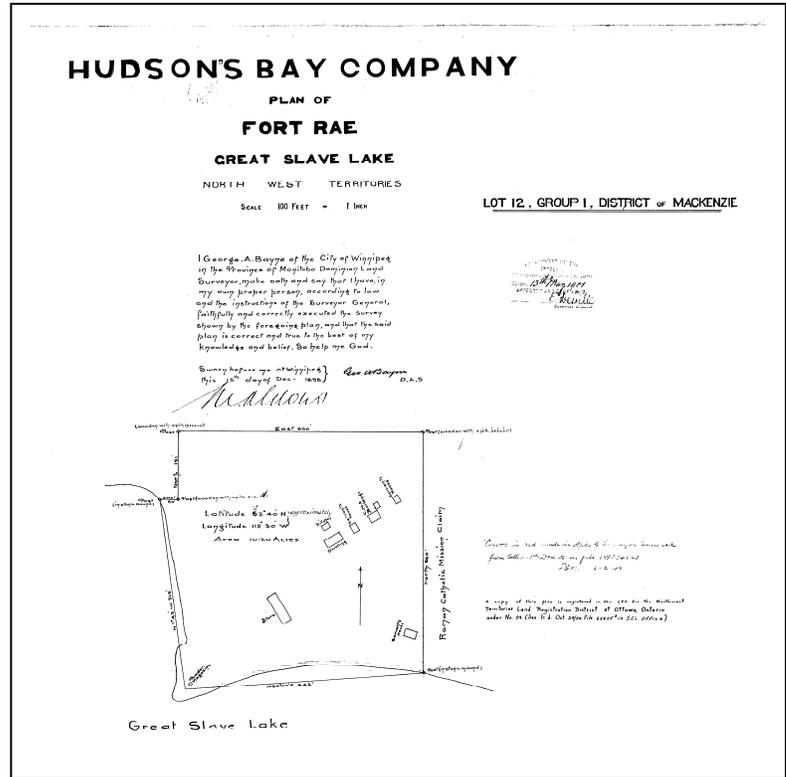
This site and its environs are of great historic interest, as well as spiritual and cultural importance to the North Slave Métis.

The area also provides plentiful fish, caribou, moose, bison, birds, small game, plants and materials. Cabbage, rhubarb, onions, and other cultivated plants remain as evidence of historic gardens.



The NSMA purchased the lot which had “belonged” to the Hudson’s Bay Company, and has built and operates a multi-purpose lodge and retreat on the site of their historic settlement.

The NSMA and its members were recently shocked and dismayed to discover that the surveyed lot does not include all of their historic settlement, but cuts it in half, separating the Roman Catholic Mission from the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post and leaving many of NSMA’s existing buildings and other improvements on lands that have now been transferred to the Tlicho by Canada as part of the Tlicho Settlement Agreement.



∞ **Old Fort Island.** Heritage, Ecological and Socioeconomic Values.

Old Fort Island was also mentioned in Alexander Mackenzie's 1789 Journal as the location of the "remains of an old fort", along with Isle de Montagne discussed above. This location was also noted on Aaron Arrowsmith's 1795 map as the "North Westernmost of the Canadian Settlements", and a good fishing place. (This map is available online from the United States Library of Congress¹.)

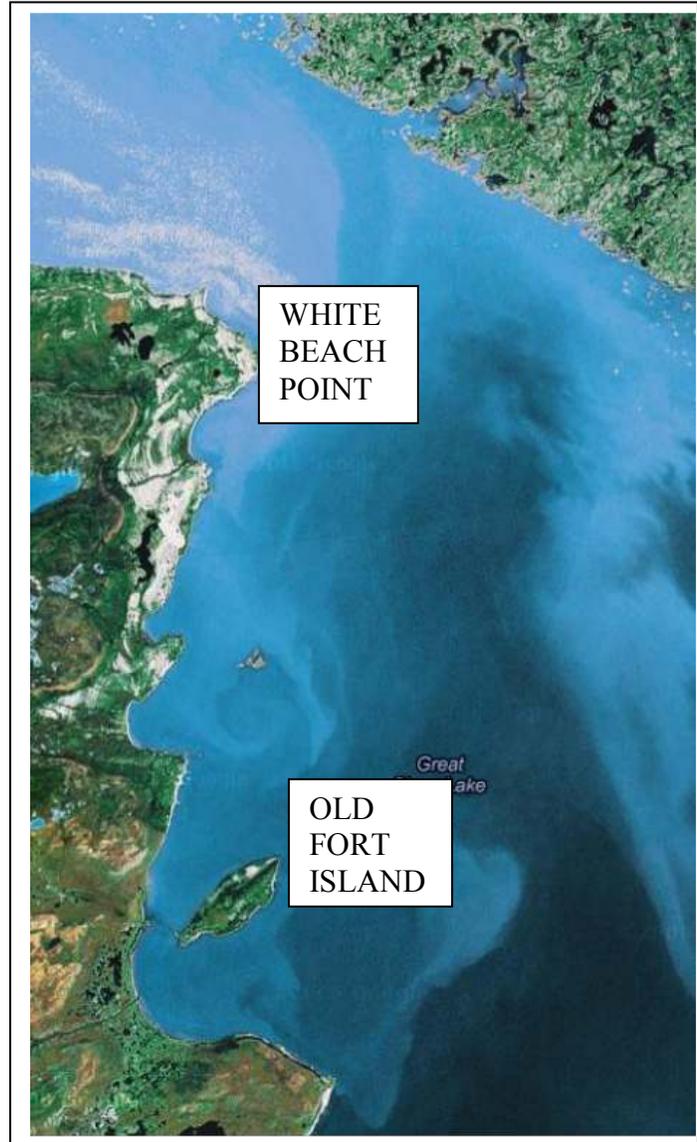
There is, therefore, no doubt that this site was occupied by French and French-Métis Canadians before the arrival of the Hudsons' Bay Company. It is likely that this settlement also pre-dated the arrival of the Northwest Company in 1786.



¹ http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_item.pl?data=/home/www/data/gmd/gmd3/g3300/g3300/ct000584.jp2&style=dsxpmmap&itemLink=D?gmd:4:./temp/~ammem_vxFy::&title=A%20map%20exhibiting%20all%20the%20new%20discoveries%20in%20the%20interior%20parts%20of%20North%20America%20%2f%20inscribed%20by%20permission%20to%20the%20honorable%20governor%20and%20company%20of%20adventurers%20of%20England%20trading%20into%20Hudsons%20Bay%20in%20testimony%20of%20their%20liberal%20communications%20to%20their%20most%20obedient%20and%20very%20humble%20servant%20A.%20Arrowsmith,%20January%201st%201795.

The North Slave Métis are rightfully proud of the role their ancestors played in the development of the North, and interested in recovering and preserving the history of their ethno genesis and cultural evolution. The North Slave Métis therefore place very high cultural heritage value on the “remains of the old Fort” and the “Canadian settlement” on Old Fort Island. Two archaeological sites have already been found on the island, and there are likely graves there.

The North Slave Métis place very high heritage, ecological, cultural and economic value on the island and the surrounding areas. It is an important landmark with a view of the unique geological formations at White Beach Point, and a traditional lake crossing. The area around Old Fort Island is an important component of the North Slave Métis environment which is very important to this day as a fishery, for harvesting geese, ducks and swans, and for gathering foods and medicines. This location is a preferred fish drying location as there is a good breeze. There is timber and firewood in the vicinity, ample moss, good hunting, and sheltered boat moorage.



∞ **Heritage Trails.** Heritage, and Socioeconomic Values.

The North Arm contains many trails which have been used by the North Slave Métis for centuries for harvesting, trading, guiding, transporting and supporting their extensive social networks. The North Arm is part of the well-known Idaa trail, and was used by Francois Beaulieu II in his travels between his camps and settlements on Great Bear Lake, Lac la Martre, Salt River and points farther south. Franklin passed through the North Arm, guided by Métis, on his second journey. The Métis delivered mail, called “the Packet: by dog team. The Métis worked as pilots, woodcutters, and freight handlers for the steam boat route. The Métis were also involved in the 1921 Treaty negotiations, including transportation and guiding, and continue to this day to guide people through the North Arm by dog team, canoe, skidoo, and motor boat.

∞ **Underground River.** Ecological and Cultural Values.

There is a story about a river, on the west shore of the North Arm, not far from Old Fort Rae, that flows underground and is populated by fish that do not have eyes. These fish are valued for their uniqueness, as is the river.

∞ **Trout Rock.** Ecological, Heritage, and Socioeconomic Values.

Trout Rock is a landmark with cultural, heritage and socioeconomic value as a traditional fishery.



∞ **The Cliffs that give children.** Cultural Heritage Value.

Cliffs such as the ones shown to the right exist on the west side of the North Arm, and are landmarks with cultural and heritage significance for their role in traditional legends. They are an important part of the cultural landscape.



Suggestions

While this study did not involve field work or interviews, and was done on a very limited budget, it is apparent that the area proposed to be protected is not large enough to incorporate all of the areas the North Slave Métis might like to see protected. As well, there is doubt that a National Wildlife Area is the appropriate type of protection for the heritage values identified.

Consultation with the North Slave Métis Alliance is clearly needed before making decisions about management and ownership of the North Arm of Great Slave Lake.

Further Reading

- ∞ 2001 Stevenson, Marc. Old Fort Rae's Old Fort - an Early Métis Settlement on Great Slave Lake.
- ∞ 2001. NSMA. Can't Live Without Work.
- ∞ 2008. NSMA Historic Places Report.
- ∞ 2008. Hayden, Shannon. Land Use and Heritage Management Plan for the HBC Trading Post Known Locally as Old Fort Rae. (ARI research database online)
- ∞ 2010. Hayden, Shannon. One Land, Many People. Archaeology, Agency and Landscape.
- ∞ 2010 Jones, Gwynneth. Historical Profile of Great Slave Lake Area's Mixed European-Indian Ancestry Community.