CHASING THE MOVING POLICY TARGET: DIRECTIONS IN THE FORT WALSH ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

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Abstract

Parks Canada has conducted various forms of archaeological investigations at Fort Walsh National Historic Site for almost three decades. Naturally some of this work is being questioned in light of Parks Canada's current policy. This paper examines the phases of Parks Canada's evolving policy directions and the resulting effect on the Fort Walsh archaeological program. The first phase of the Fort Walsh archaeological program was "historicalist" in nature with the goal of identifying building techniques and fort layout for the purpose of period reconstruction. This approach had its basis in the 1972 National Historic Sites Policy which stated "faithful reconstruction of the original is the single most important asset in providing educated enjoyment of a national historic site". Subsequent Canada-wide provincial heritage legislation and the development of the Archaeology Heritage Policy Framework and Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy have altered the way archaeology is seen by site managers. Beginning in the 1980s the second phase of archaeological work at Fort Walsh focused on individual site impacts; following a decade of the discipline struggling to understand archaeological sites within a regional context. During the latter part of the 1990s efforts to manage sites within their landscape setting evolved as seen in the current Fort Walsh landscape management approach. Although this trend has lessened our myopic focus on the fort compound and may prove to be more effective in site management, it has left us with little knowledge about the range of sites within the National Historic Site. The problem we currently face is discovering the Site's diverse human history in an inclusive manner which truly shows the value of archaeological research.

Résumé

Parcs Canada a procédé à différentes études archéologiques au lieu historique national du Fort-Walsh pendant près de 30 ans. Il va de soi que certaines de ces recherches sont contestées compte tenu de la politique actuelle de Parcs Canada. Nous nous intéressons ici aux différentes phases des orientations stratégiques changeantes de Parcs Canada et à leur effet sur le programme archéologique de Fort-Walsh. La première phase de ce programme était à vocation « historisante », son but étant de déterminer les techniques de construction et le tracé du fort à des fins de reconstitution d'époque. Cette démarche prenait sa source dans la politique sur les lieux historiques nationaux de 1972 selon laquelle la reconstitution fidèle de l'original était le facteur le plus important si on voulait permettre la jouissance éclairée d'un lieu historique national. Les lois provinciales adoptées ultérieurement dans tout le Canada en matière de patrimoine et l'élaboration du cadre stratégique pour le patrimoine archéologique ainsi que de la Politique de gestion des ressources culturelles de Parcs Canada ont changé la façon dont les gestionnaires des lieux considèrent l'archéologie. À partir des années 1980, la deuxième phase des recherches archéologiques à Fort-Walsh a été consacrée aux différents impacts qui s'exerçaient sur le lieu; elle a été suivie d'une décennie pendant laquelle les spécialistes se sont efforcés de situer les sites archéologiques dans leur contexte régional. Dans la dernière partie des années 1990, les efforts déployés pour gérer les lieux dans le cadre de leur paysage ont évolué pour déboucher sur la formule d'aménagement des paysages actuellement en vigueur à Fort-Walsh. Si cette tendance nous a rendus moins aveugles à ce qui ne se trouve pas exclusivement dans l'enceinte du fort et a des chances de se montrer plus utile pour la gestion du lieu, elle nous laisse sans guère de connaissances sur l'éventail des sites qui se trouvent sur le territoire du lieu historique national. Le problème qu'il nous faut résoudre maintenant, c'est celui de découvrir dans toute sa diversité l'histoire humaine du lieu historique de manière à montrer tout l'intérêt de la recherche archéologique.

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Figure 1. Map showing the location of Fort Walsh.

Observing government organizations in "action" can be a very frustrating experience for outsiders and obviously Parks Canada is no exception. There often appears to be an inordinate amount of time spent "toing and froing" with regard to decisions involving site management. Finally a decision is made and a direction is established. In the meantime there will be a "paradigm shift" and a completely new orientation is contemplated and set before the previous goals are reached. In essence a dilemma is created and we find ourselves traveling along a separate and unrelated path prior to reaching our previous destination. A review of the Fort Walsh archaeological program provides an excellent case study in understanding how Parks Canada's historical archaeological program has shifted in relation to the broader program and policies established by the organization. The three decades of archaeological investigations at Fort Walsh have been

clearly tied to Parks Canada's evolving policy and planning directions which are naturally reflective of a broader governmental and social milieu.

Background

Fort Walsh is located in the Cypress Hills which straddle the Saskatchewan-Alberta border (Fig. 1). It includes a portion of the West Block of the Cypress Hills in southwestern Saskatchewan about 55 kilometers southwest of the town of Maple Creek. Initial interest in this site revolved around the 1873 Cypress Hills massacre and the catalyst this event provided in establishing Fort Walsh as a major North-West Mounted Police Post in 1875.

Fort Walsh was first identified as a site of national historic significance in June of 1924 and was to be commemorated by means of a plaque. Between 1943 and 1968 the site was used by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a remount station to train and raise horses for the Musical Ride. Their facilities were constructed at the location of several 1875-1882 structures. (Fig.2) In 1968 the force decided to close the site and the National Historic Parks Board began the process of acquiring the land. Fort Walsh National Historic Site was formally established in 1972 under the National Parks Act.

Figure 2. View of Fort Walsh showing Remount Ranch buildings.

Archaeological Research at Fort Walsh and its Relation to Policy and Planning

Phase 1

The first phase of the Fort Walsh archaeological program began in 1972 and was "historicalist" in nature with the goal of identifying building techniques and fort layout for the purpose of period reconstruction. Early planning documents show that this research was based on a decision to reconstruct the fort compound in its entirety to 1880. This approach was completely consistent with the 1972 National Historic Sites Policy which stated "faithful reconstruction of the original is the single most important asset in providing educated

Figure 3. Block excavations in the fort compound.

enjoyment of a national historic site" (Parks Canada 1972:8). Even within a broader context reconstruction was a common method of interpretation for historic sites in North America. Historic Archaeology as it developed in Parks Canada during the expansion of the Historic Sites Program in the 1960s primarily centred on data gathered for this purpose. The Fortress of Louisbourg and Lower Fort Garry are two sites that come immediately to mind. In fact in October of 1971 Jean Chrétien made a commitment for major development of Fort Walsh which would be comparable to that at Lower Fort Garry (McCullough 1993:68). From such a commitment a task force was struck and recommended "a phased program of reconstruction of the original Fort structures to be undertaken based on an exhaustive historical and

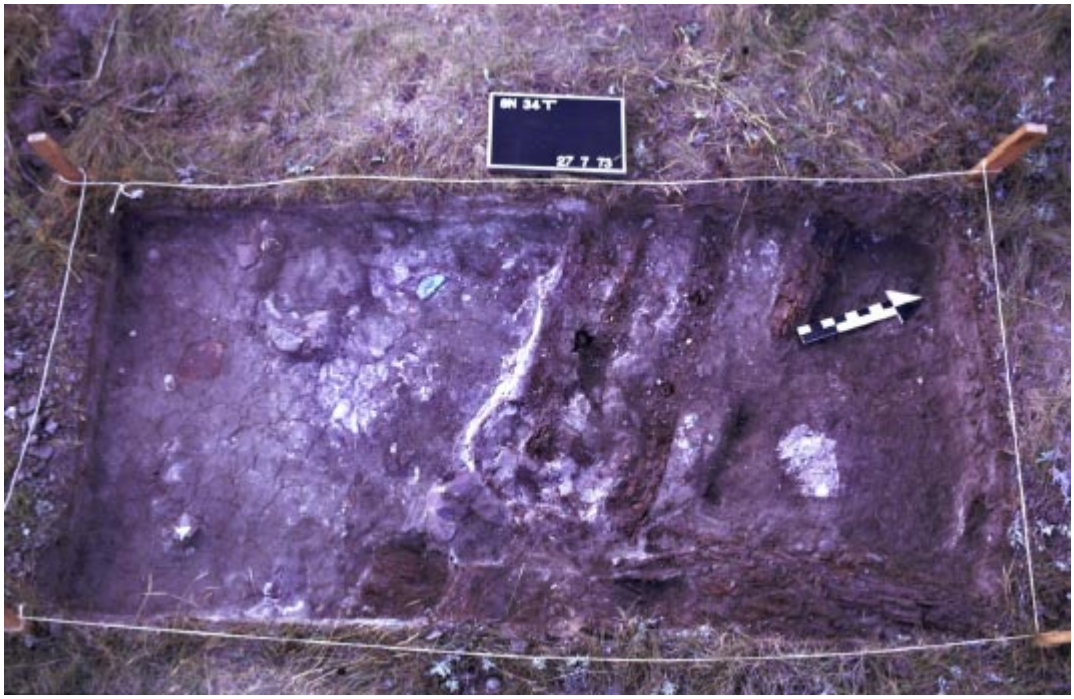

Figure 4. Test excavation conducted in the townsite area.

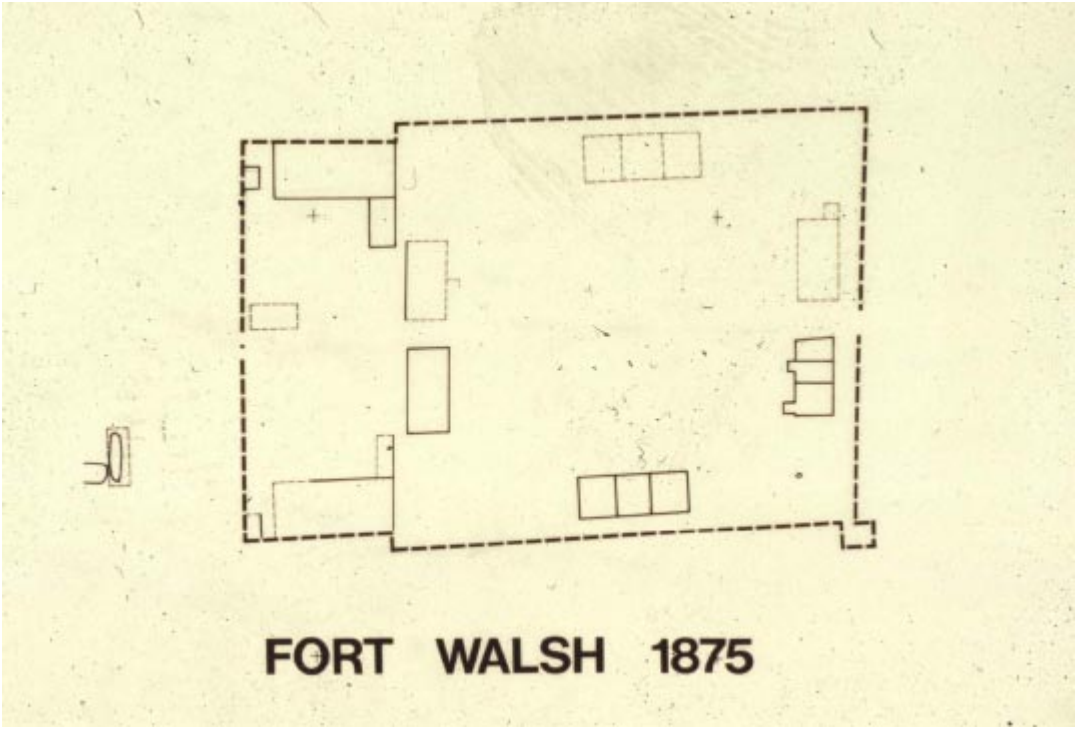

Figure 5. Fort layout in 1875.

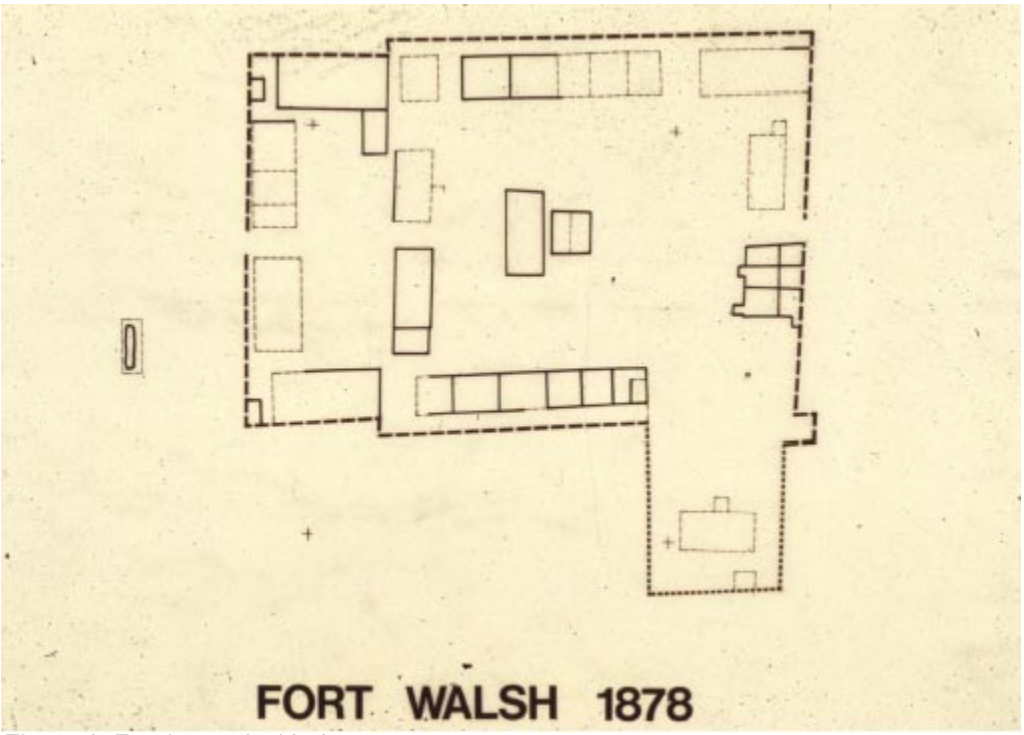

Figure 6. Fort layout in 1878.

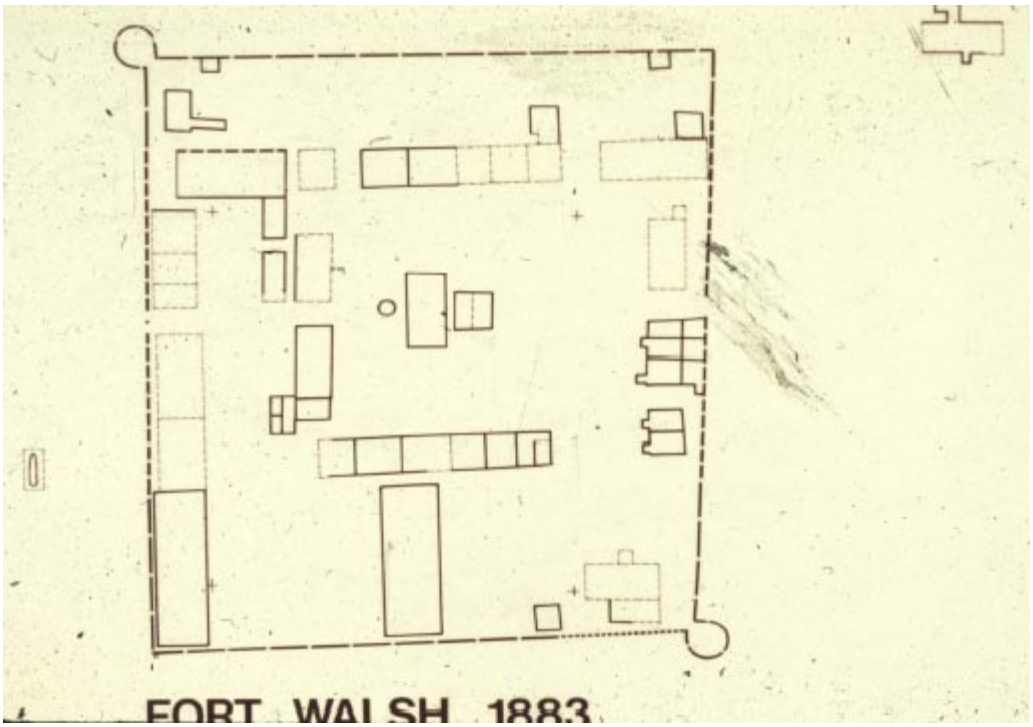

Figure 7 Fort layout in 1883.

archaeological research program" In this context began a period (1972-79) of intensive archaeological investigation at Fort Walsh.

This work resulted in 35 of 46 structures built between 1875 -1883 by the NWMP being investigated and over 100,000 artifacts being recovered using a system of broad block excavations. A rough estimate would be that close to 75 % of the fort compound was excavated (Fig.3). In terms of current policy this means 75% of the *in situ* resources identified in the draft commemorative integrity statement as level 1 cultural resources have been removed.

What is particularly interesting is that concurrent with this effort was a major shift (some would say a revolution) in archaeological theory. Allison Wylie in a paper presented as a keynote address at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology in 1993 describes her involvement in the Fort Walsh program during the 1970s and the struggles field director Jim Sciscenti had as a "died in the wool new archaeologist straight from the University of Arizona" (Wylie 1993:5). Attempts to understand the community and social organization of Fort Walsh by investigating the townsite using stratified random samples of surface features etc.(Fig. 4) resulted in disciplinary memos from Ottawa with the archaeologists essentially being chased back to the fort compound to establish exactly where those building walls had actually stood. The mandate of Parks Canada's historic archaeological research was made clear.

In many ways the archaeological research of this period was a success. The investigations established the locations and dimensions of structures as well as information related to construction techniques. It also provided information regarding the fort's structural chronology. (Figs.5-7) The archaeologists in an attempt to enliven their work placed it into the broader theoretical framework of the time by conceptualizing a larger problematic in which the descriptive details were being recovered. Information relating to material culture was used to gain understanding of social relations among officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted men showing that as the fort was expanded, the spatial and functional differentiation of men by rank was

Figure 8. Reconstruction of the Palisade (note pre-contact hearth feature in background).

Figure 9. View of reconstructed Fort Walsh.

much more rigidly enforced. This was in part demonstrated by the cuts of meat and the extent to which they were able to supplement their diets with wild game likely butchered by Métis or Native suppliers.

Reconstruction activities began in 1977 on the palisades and the circular bastions but outside factors and circumstances started to alter this initiative (Fig.8-9) The times were changing and Parks Canada was formalizing a new direction.

Phase 2

By 1978 a shift in the archaeological emphasis at Fort Walsh occurred reflecting changes in policy, associated planning directions as well as the fact that construction of a Visitor Reception Centre (VRC) was completed. The large quantity of money spent on the VRC led to it becoming the interpretive focus for Fort Walsh. This naturally raised concerns about spending additional money on fort reconstruction if the purpose of reconstruction was to be primarily a tool of interpretation (Fig.10). This period also saw the beginning of a management planning initiative which emphasized alternatives for development. These alternatives reduced considerably the scale of reconstruction proposed for the fort and began to place an emphasis on historic landscape, trails and archaeological resources. Furthermore, the approval of the 1979 Parks Canada Policy (The Beaver Book) made reconstruction difficult to justify as this "new" policy made it clear that reconstruction was to occur only when "no appropriate alternative action can create public understanding" (Parks Canada 1979:30). This policy also indicated that Parks Canada would preserve or restore the environment of a national historic park to it authentic historic form (Parks Canada 1979:30). Although the plan alternatives were never approved it was in this context that a broader archaeological survey and further investigation of the townsite was initiated in concert with a landscape history (Scace and Associates 1978). The landscape study resulted in 26 recommendations one of which was the removal of subsequent historic ranching facilities consistent with the concept of restoration of the historic environment but contrary to present cultural resource management principles.

It was also in the context of the new policy that alternatives for the presentation of historic resources led to archaeological excavations being formally used as an interpretive tool. In 1979, rather than excavate the entire structure to understand building dimensions etc., the middle room of the NCO's quarters was excavated and preserved for presentation (Fig.11). Unfortunately flooding of these remains two years later resulted in them being damaged and subsequently buried. At the same time management planning and development stalled at the site. In the Prairie Region other initiatives such as planning and development at Motherwell Homestead and Batoche National Historic Site took precedence.

It was during this hiatus in activity at Fort Walsh that the Federal Heritage Buildings Policy was approved by Cabinet. This 1982 policy provided a means of evaluating alterations or disposal of federal buildings 40 years or older which may have heritage value. By the mid-1980s most of the remount buildings at Fort Walsh had reached 40 years of age and were evaluated by the Federal Heritage Building Review Office (Fig.12). Two buildings: the commissioners residence and the stable received "Recognized" status re-enforcing the realization that the remount station buildings had heritage value themselves and dismantling them for reconstruction purposes would not be appropriate.

To be consistent with policy, discussion turned to stabilizing and rehabilitating the remount buildings to use in the interpretive program. In otherwords, the approach was to protect the remount buildings and use them as a vehicle to interpret Fort Walsh to the public. This was a major focus of the management planning process which was resurrected from the ashes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Such an emphasis placed

Figure 10. Visitor Reception Centre at Fort Walsh.

Figure 11. Interpretation of *in situ* archaeological remains in the Non-Commissioned Officers' Quarters.

Figure 12. Two remount structures reviewed by FHBRO

Figure 13. Box containing personal artifacts located during stabilization of the Non-Commissioned Officers' quarters.

archaeology in an impact assessment role as it was to focus on specific site impacts as a component of building rehabilitation projects.(Fig.13)

It is interesting to note that this role regarding impact assessment was also occurring in a broader context with the advent of Canada-wide provincial heritage legislation and the inclusion of cultural heritage into federal environmental assessment processes. The effect on archaeology was one of confining investigations to site or feature specific levels. This was in stark contrast to theoretical discussions within the archaeological community which had tended to move from a site specific emphasis to a greater effort to understand archaeological sites within a regional context. Impact assessment requirements were specific to "significant" sites similar to the days of culture history but with the focus on mitigation. It is only recently with a greater emphasis being placed on cumulative effects assessment which require regional analysis that archaeological sites again have a greater opportunity to be seen again in a broader regional context. Environmental Assessments such as those being conducted for the oil sands developments in Alberta can attest to this.

Phase 3

With the failure of Federal Heritage Legislation during the 1990s Parks Canada has relied solely on its 1994 Cultural Resource Management Policy for guidance in the management of archaeological resources. One of the offshoots of the policy was the development of Commemorative Integrity Statements (CIS) to

Figure 14. Overgrown cellar depression likely from a Métis wintering camp.

Figure 15. Over-grazed area with horse licks present.

Figure 16. Horse trail through stone ring.

Figure 17. Construction activities during upgrade of access road.

identify which resources are of national significance. Ironically the resources which have been identified in the draft CIS are the very resources that were excavated in the 1970s as a tool of reconstruction. Much of what is left of these resources exist as paper records. The very resources identified for the highest level of protection under the policy have been removed.

Another component of this policy was the need to present the past in a manner that accurately reflects the range and complexity of the human history commemorated or represented in a national historic site (Parks Canada 1994:105). It also placed a greater importance on Parks Canada valuing natural ecosystem features as an integral part of the history and landscape of national historic sites (Parks Canada 1994:103). During the latter part of the 1990s efforts to manage sites within their landscape setting evolved as seen in the current Fort Walsh landscape management approach. This work has centred on using the survey conducted in 1978 as a baseline for identifying processes that have affected various cultural and natural features during the intervening years. In 1999 all cultural sites and associated features were revisited, and attempts were made to identify the factors underlying change. Some observations have included:

- vegetation encroachment of certain site areas and along some historic trails;
- overgrazing of some site areas due to the placement and leaching of salt licks causing surface erosion from continual licking;
- impact to some features and alteration of traditional trail use patterns through uncontrolled vehicle use and horseback riding;
- site development activities such as road upgrades, construction of a water reservoir, and special event use; and
- erosion along Battle Creek, particularly in the area of the townsite. (Figs. 14-18)

Recommendations regarding use of historic trails, more thoughtful placement of salt licks to control animal use, and guiding current site use can help managers minimize negative effects to the landscape. The goal has been to establish a framework for site management which reflects the thousands of years of people-environmental interactions, so that visitors can grasp the long term historic use of the site.

Although this trend has lessened our myopic focus on the fort compound and may prove to be more effective in management of a more diverse range of cultural sites, we are left with little detailed specific knowledge concerning the range of sites within the National Historic Site. The problem we currently face is discovering the Site's diverse human history in an inclusive manner which truly shows the value of archaeological research. The emphasis has been on managing sites for future generations with little knowledge as to what we are actually managing.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

The importance of protecting our *in situ* cultural resources for the benefit of future generations is a generally accepted principle but there is also the responsibility to achieve high-quality interpretation and the advancement of knowledge. At present Fort Walsh National Historic Site contains a wide range of cultural resources covering thousands of years of human activity much of which we know very little about. Within the landscape are remains of precontact sites, tent rings, cairns, trails, a buried townsite and buried structural remains likely related to Metis wintering camps. However, we continue to interpret the RCMP remount buildings to the period of Fort Walsh along with the reconstructed trading posts.

Table 1. History of Archaeological Investigations at Fort Walsh National Historic Site (1972-1999)

1972 Excavations	Solomonís Post	Farwellís Post
1973 Excavations	1875 Barracks Tests in townsite*	1880 Barracks tested
1974 Excavations	1880 Barracks 1875 Officerís Quarters 1875 Office 1877 Washroom 1877 Veterinary Office 1880 South Palisade	1881 Library 1880 SE Bastion 1875 Division Store 1877 Baths 1875 Barrack/Mess
1975 Excavations	1880 Stables 1880 Powder Magazine 1880 Saddlery 1879 Well 1877 Orderly Extension 1880 NCO Extension 1877 Shoemakerís Shop 1877 South Stable tests Auxiliary structures to South and North Stable	1880 North West Bastion 1880 NCO Privy 1880 North Stables 1877 Quartermaster Stores 1877 Guardhouse (walls only) 1880 Commissionerís Privy 1875 Northwest Privy 1880 North Palisade Extension
1976 Excavations	1875 West Palisade Gate 1875 South West Privy 1880 Harness Room 1881 Hospital 1875 Sawpit 1875 Auxiliary Structures to North and South Stables	1875 East Palisade Gate 1877 Cookhouse 1880 Officersí Privy 1875 Enlisted Menís Latrine 1880 Enlisted Menís Latrine
1977 Excavations	1875 West Palisade 1880 Flag Pole 1877 Commissionerís Kitchen	1877 Commissionerís Privy 1877 South Palisade
1978 Excavations	1877 Commissionerís Residence Precontact site along north palisade	Surficial survey of historic and preconta sites in the entire site*
1979 Excavations	Central Room of NCOsí Barracks	
1992 Excavations	Salvage Excavations of eroding features at the townsite*	
1994 Mitigation	Officersí Mess Rehabilitation	VRC Bus Loop Construction*
1996 Mitigation	Regrading around structures within the palisad	
1997 Mitigation	Superintendentís Residence Rehabilitation	Fort Walsh Road Upgrade*
1998 Mitigation	NCOsí Rehabilitation	
1999 Monitoring	Landscape Study	

* Work undertaken outside the Fort Walsh palisade and outside Solomon's or Farwell's Post
Adapted from McCullough (1993:182)

Figure 18. Erosion along Battle Creek.

Fort Walsh will be undergoing another phase of management planning next year which will again establish the direction of any archaeological work within the context of the broader program. Discussions are underway to develop hiking trails which will take visitors past the wide range of resources present at the site, but how can they reasonably be interpreted without some form of ongoing research? It is during this management planning process that new direction and initiatives can be established. As a means of setting some level of research priorities to enable heritage presenters to provide the public with meaningful information concerning this vast range of sites, researchers interested in the area, local aboriginal communities, along with Parks Canada archaeologists will need to have input into this planning process. It is time to set the direction for some level of research at selected sites while protecting the remaining resources for the future. In so doing Parks Canada can fulfill a long time requirement for both the protection and presentation of natural and cultural heritage.

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