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Archaeological Investigations at the Salmon Beds

Introduction

The Columbia Basin covers a huge area that includes much of southeastern British Columbia and parts of northern Montana, Idaho and Washington. It includes all the areas drained by Columbia River and the Kootenay River above their confluence ([Figure 1](#)). Northwest to southeast mountain ranges separate narrow valleys. One of the largest valleys, the Columbia Trench, marks the western side of the Rocky Mountains. The Columbia River has its source at Columbia Lake and then winds its way northward along the Columbia Trench for several hundred kilometers before making a large bend to move southward towards the Pacific Ocean. The upper part of Columbia River has a very low gradient which forms an extensive network of wetlands along the Columbia Trench. This area is recognized as an important ecological habitat and flyway for migratory birds in the spring and fall. The area is also significant as a wintering area for elk, deer, mountain goats and mountain sheep. Historically it was also productive for salmon in the 1800s, and likely earlier as well. Dams constructed in this century now prevent the migration of spawning salmon.

The Salmon Beds site is located just downstream of Windermere Lake along the Columbia River and is an important source of archaeological and ecological information. The valley floor near the site is dotted with oxbow lakes and ponds and for much of the summer is covered by water. The Salmon Beds, themselves, are covered by water from May through to September.

Archaeological Excavations were conducted at the Salmon Beds, near Invermere B.C from March 17 to April 16, under the direction of Rod Heitzmann, Archaeologist, Western Canada Service Centre, Parks Canada, Calgary. The project is supported through the Living Landscapes Program of the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Columbia Basin Trust, Kootenay National Park, the Western Canada Service Centre of Parks Canada, and by a private donor. The project is also supported by the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council. On March 17, Columbia Lakes First Nation Elder Phyllis Nicholas provided a blessing for the start of archaeological excavations.

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