

EXCAVATIONS AT THE CURR SITE

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1977 from May through July, archaeological excavations were conducted at the Curr site (EdRa 22), a prehistoric house pit village on the north shore of the South Thompson River near Kamloops, British Columbia. Very brief test excavations were also carried out during July at another house pit site (EeRa 4), approximately 3.2 km downstream from the Curr site. Archaeological excavations were conducted at these sites for a number of reasons. First, both are imminently threatened by the proposed straightening and widening of Shuswap Road which runs directly parallel to the sites, and which has in fact already partially destroyed some of the cultural depressions on the northern boundaries of the Curr site. Consequently the major objective of the project was salvage. Secondly, as the Curr site is in close proximity to the city of Kamloops, it logistically provided an excellent place to carry on the archaeological field school for Cariboo College, which was scheduled for six weeks in May and June. Collaboration between the College and the Office of the Provincial Archaeologist therefore ensured the salvage of the Curr site, and at the same time provided field personnel for the excavations, and a field school for Cariboo College. A third objective of the project was to instigate an experimental program in public education, as an 'archaeological resource conservation' measure. In the Kamloops area, destruction of sites through relic collecting activities is very severe, and some form of public education dealing with the conservation of archaeological sites was deemed beneficial. As stated by Lipe (1974: 216):

More stringent legislation is not the answer; we have much more legislation than we use now. But if more of the public understood and respected archaeological values, greater self-restraint would be exerted . . .

Consequently a program providing a full-time field and lecture person to act as site-guide and conduct tours with various groups of local school children, was initiated. The program was extremely successful in terms of local response (Byers 1977).

Funding, in the form of a contract administered by Cariboo College, was allotted to the project by the B.C. Department of Highways through the Office of the Provincial Archaeologist. The government Youth Employment Program (YEP) also provided funding to hire a full-time field technician from the Kamloops Indian Band. Research was conducted under permit #77-4.

Research Goals

The primary requirement of the salvage project was recovery of threatened archaeological data, and identification and assessment of cultural resources due to be affected by the proposed road construction. A detailed descriptive report is the minimum obligation for salvage research. This must include description of all recovered cultural materials and determination of the age of the site. Finally, the site must be placed within a regional archaeological framework.

Despite the salvage nature of this archaeological project, and built-in constraints, e.g., shortness of time, research did not focus solely on culture history. Very little ethnographic information is recorded for functional specialization, and size variation of structures in a winter village site. Also, little is documented in terms of activity areas and community patterning in areas outside the house pits. For this reason, research focused on two specific problems:

- (a) Determining the function of small, shallow saucer-shaped depressions at the site; and
- (b) Detecting activity patterning outside house pits.

Most archaeological excavations in this area have concentrated on large deep 'house pit' depressions, to the exclusion of other areas and smaller depressions within winter village sites. Small saucer shaped depressions ranging in size from approximately 2.5 to 4.5 m in diameter, are often commonly thought to represent 'mat lodges', 'menstrual isolation huts', or 'sweat lodges', even though detailed investigations of these features and their archaeological remains have never been intensively undertaken. For these reasons, it was thought that new types of information could be gained about the archaeology of village sites within this area by digging in areas outside house pits, as well as in the small depressions of dubious function. Unfortunately, lack of time and funding permitted only brief salvage test excavations at EeRa 4, and all problem oriented studies were focused on the Curr site.

Research Area

Both EdRa 22 and EeRa 4, are on the north shore of the South Thompson River, approximately 18, and 15.5 km, respectively, east of the confluence of the North and South

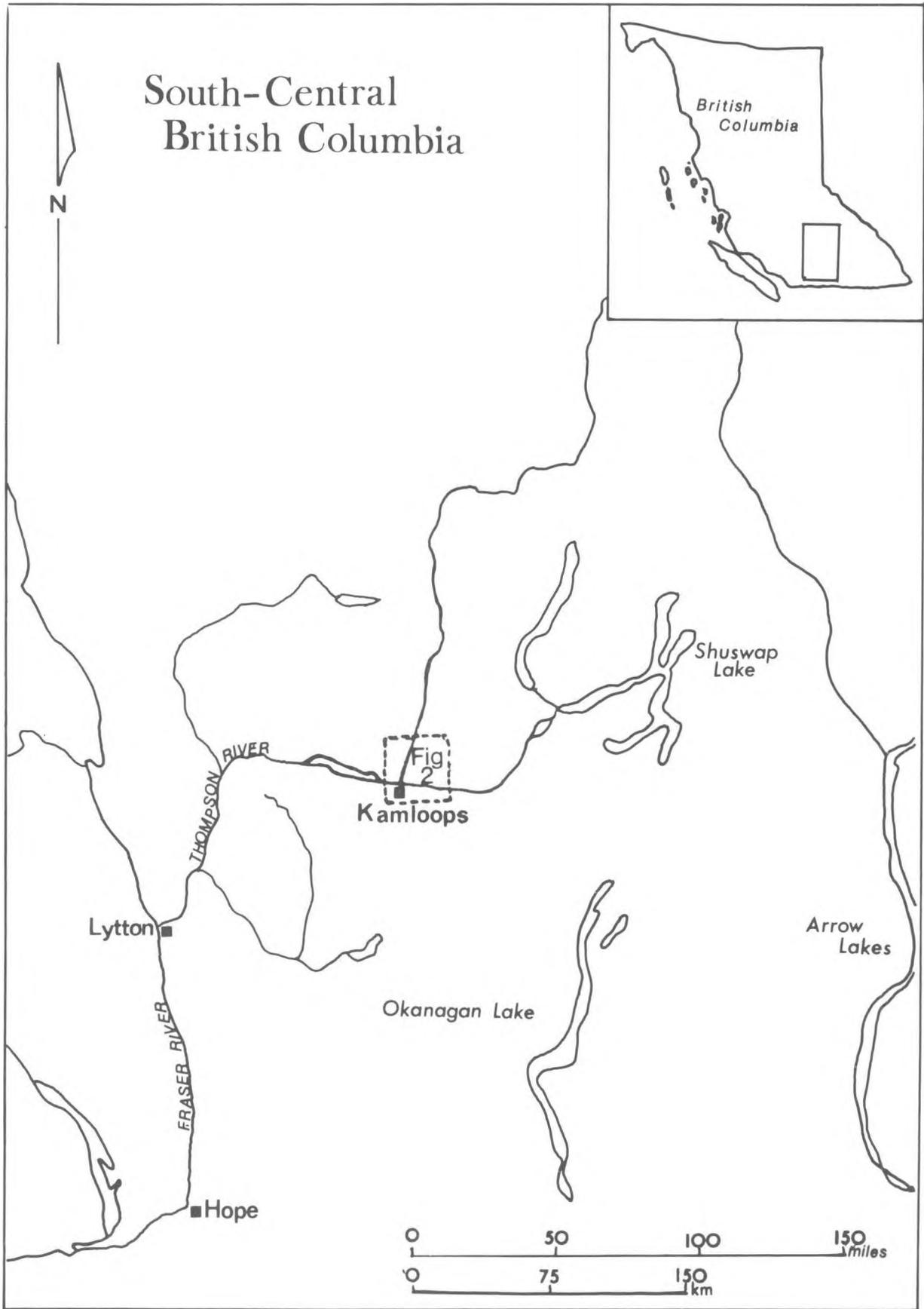


Fig. 1. South-Central British Columbia.

Thompson Rivers. EdRa 22 lies at $51^{\circ} 39' 47''$ N, $120^{\circ} 06' 20''$ W, at an elevation of 340 metres above sea level. EeRa 4 lies at $50^{\circ} 40' 20''$ N, $120^{\circ} 08' 20''$ W, at an elevation of 350 metres above sea level. Both sites are within the boundaries of the City of Kamloops.

The Curr site (EdRa 22) is a winter house pit village containing a total of 29 surficial cultural depressions ranging in size from small 1 m diameter 'cache pits', to 8 m diameter 'house pits', all circular in shape. The depressions are arranged in a linear pattern approximately 2–4 m from the edge of the river terrace, which rises about 6 m above the summer level of the river. The eastern extent of the site is bounded by a small intermittent creek. Little cultural material was observable on the surface of the site.

Site EeRa 4 is situated on the east bank of a creek draining Scheidam Lake, at its confluence with the South Thompson River. Surficial cultural depressions are arranged in a semi-circular pattern, approximately 10 m from the edge of the river bank. Nine circular cultural depressions are observable, ranging from 1.5 to 7 m in diameter. The house pits at this site are on the average approximately 50 cm deeper than those at the Curr site, and house pit lips are better defined. Some basalt chipping detritus is observable on the surface of this site, but not in great quantity.

Ethnographic Settlement Data

Wilson in the accompanying paper summarizes Shuswap ethnography. However, it does seem appropriate to describe summer lodges here.

During the warmer months of the year when the Shuswap were not occupying winter pit houses, summer lodges made of a framework of poles covered with mats or bark, were used. Circular lodges covered with mats were the most common type utilized in the South Thompson River area. The framework for the lodges consisted of four moderately heavy poles with forked ends, which were interlocked above the area that had been cleared, with their butt ends placed outside the cleared circle (Teit makes no mention that the "cleared area" was in any way excavated into any form of shallow pit). Smaller poles were then placed around the circle to fill in the gaps, and mats covered the framework (Teit 1909). Teit states that mat lodges of the Thompson Indians were similar in construction to those of the Shuswap, and gives a useful diagram of construction variations of the lodge frames (Fig. 5, Teit 1900: 197).

The description of specialized structures such as the sweat lodge is not well documented. According to Teit (1900), the lodges, usually found close to water, were

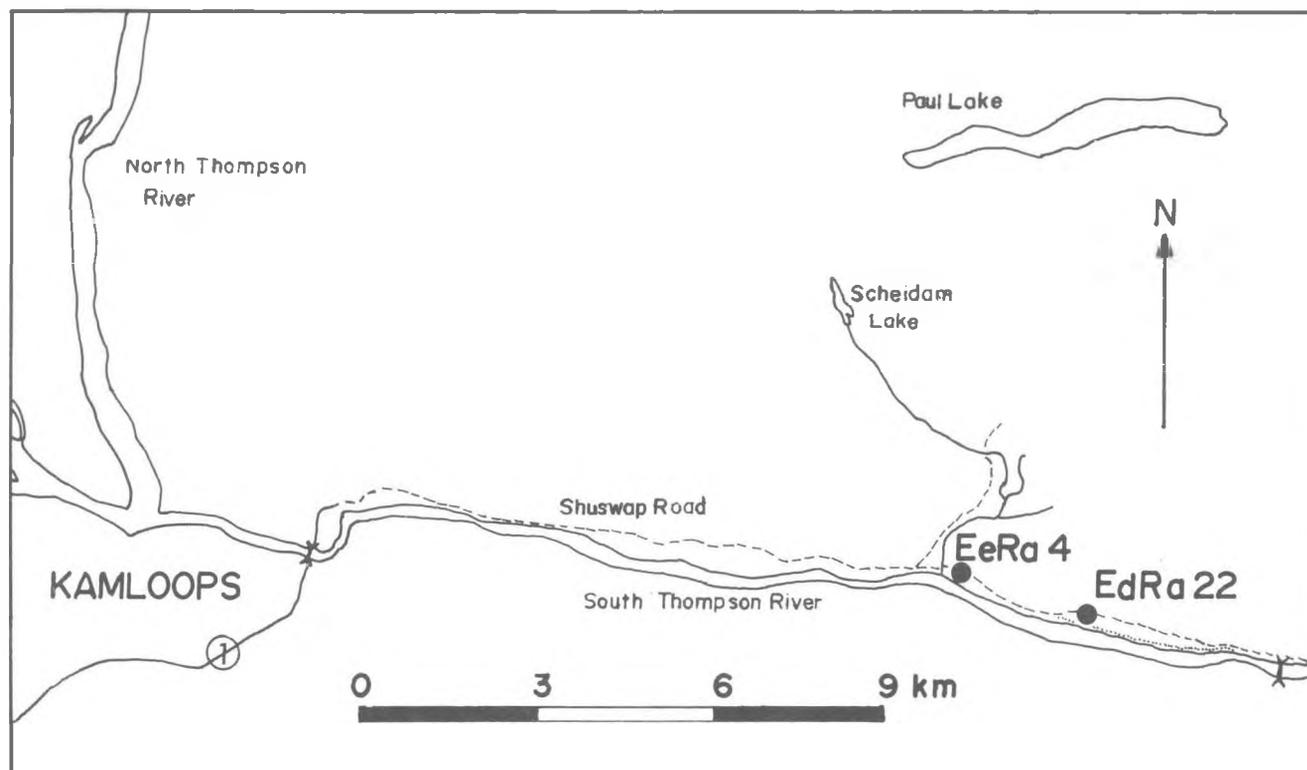


Fig. 2. Investigated Sites (1977) Kamloops locality.

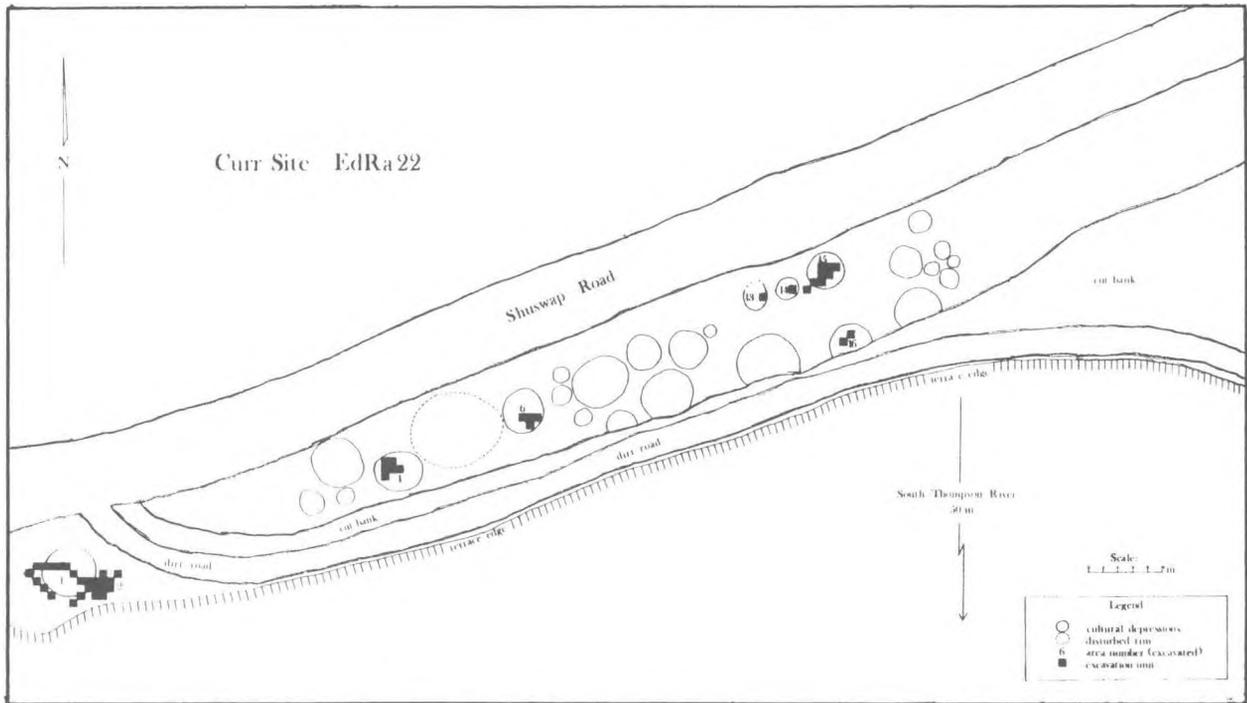


Fig. 3. Curr Site EdRa 22.

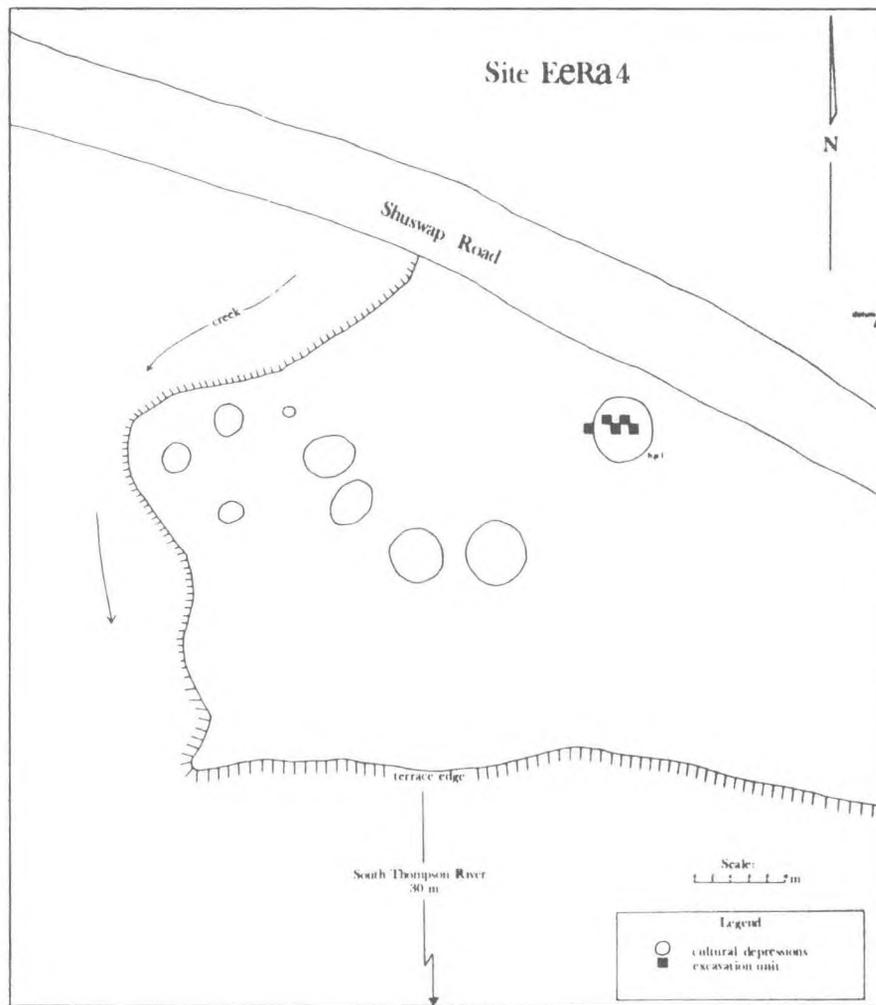


Fig. 4. Site EeRa 4.

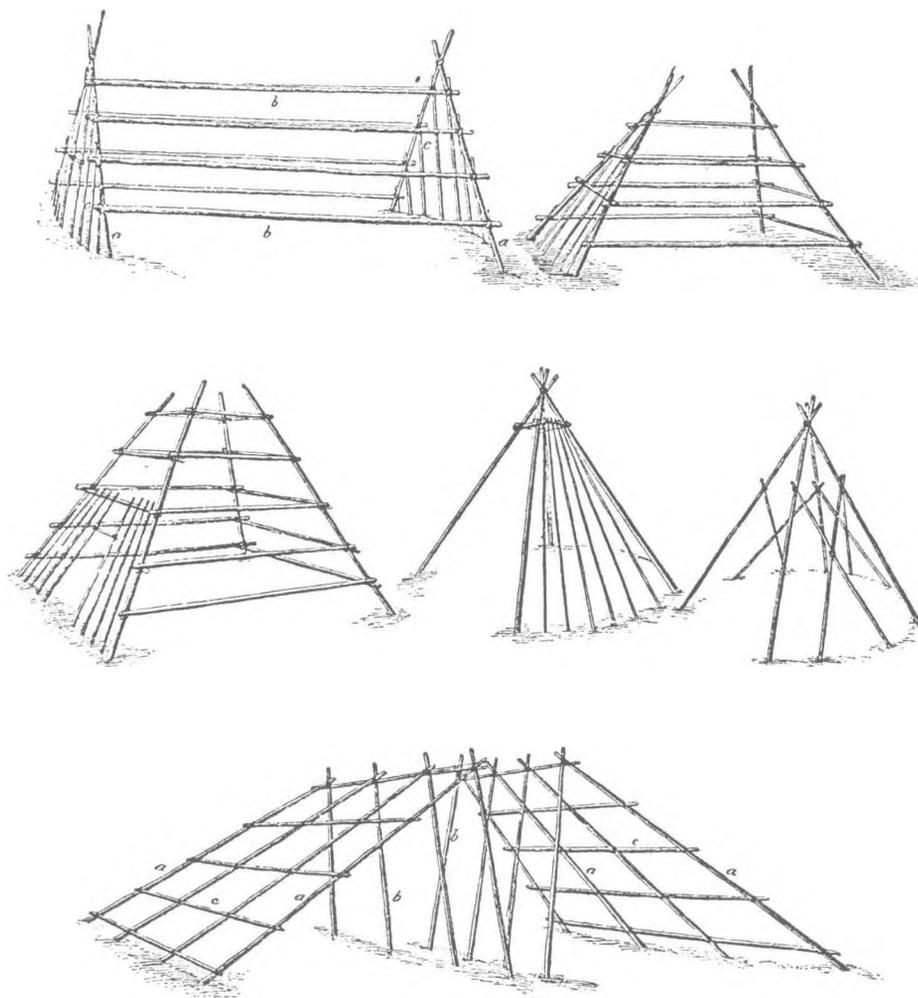


Fig. 5. Ethnographic Summer Lodge Frameworks (Teit 1900).

constructed of a number of willow wands stuck in the ground in a circle and bent over and tied at the top. Other wands were interwoven between these. The structure was then covered with dry pine needles and a thick layer of

earth. A hole approximately 30 cm square was dug to one side of the entrance to accommodate the hot stones (Teit 1900: 198).