

# CHAPTER 19

## An Overview of the Port Douglas Town-Site (DkRm-1)

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### Introduction and Background

From 1858 to 1865 the township of Port Douglas was one of several important early settlements in the Colony of British Columbia. Located on the north shore of Little Harrison Lake (Figures 1 and 2), Port Douglas was situated at the center of the only route offering access to the upper Fraser River gold fields. This chapter considers the township within a broader political and social context, and discusses two prominent factors that contributed to the geographical placement of Port Douglas and the Harrison-Lillooet road. They include: (1) threat of American influence over British held territory during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; and (2) violent confrontations between miners and members of the *Nlaka'pamux* Nation during the "Fraser Canyon War" and persistence of *Nlaka'pamux* territorial authority within the mid-Fraser Canyon.

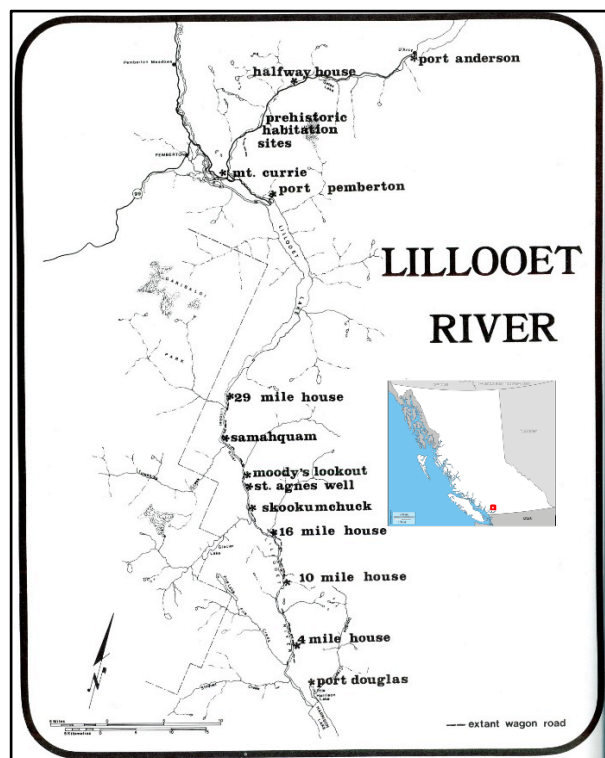


Figure 1. Map showing location of Port Douglas on the Harrison-Lillooet road, including nearby Gold Rush era settlements, landmarks, and developments. Map from HCB (1980: Volume I: 49).

Attention is also drawn to the potential of the Port Douglas locality to yield archaeological evidence of pre-contact, proto-historic, Gold Rush era, and early 1900s industry occupations and activities. Detailed archaeological investigations within selected portions of Port Douglas would provide data reflecting regional and global historic forces during these periods, and augment existing knowledge of indigenous utilization of the Harrison-Lillooet valley. The Harrison-Lillooet Valley includes the area from the south end of Harrison Lake to Lillooet B.C., encompassing Harrison, Little Harrison, Lillooet, Anderson, and Seaton Lakes, and the Lillooet River (Figure 1).

This chapter deals primarily with early post-contact period colonial interest at Port Douglas (Figures 3 and 4), and its archaeological research potential and heritage significance. While this locality was once a major economic and strategic focus for European colonial development, First Nation peoples have occupied Little Harrison Lake and adjacent Harrison Lake and Lower Lillooet Valleys since time immemorial, and their participation in the local colonial process should not be overlooked or understated.

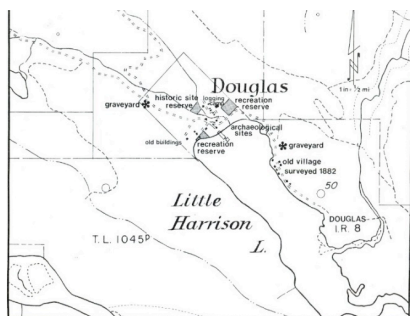


Figure 2. View of Port Douglas town-site at the north end of Little Harrison Lake, looking north.

### Gold Rush Era – Historical Context of Port Douglas

The township of Port Douglas developed in the wake of the 1858 Fraser River Gold Rush, a phenomenon that had

cascading social and political ramifications. For Colonial officials, the Fraser River Gold Rush created a pressure to amalgamate the Vancouver Island colony with territories on the mainland. The development of transportation infrastructure was central to this end, and construction of a reliable system of pedestrian and wagon-road routes across the Coast Mountains into the mainland interior was considered with a sense of urgency. Transportation infrastructure was needed to, "...improve the internal communications of the country...", and in regard to the mountain pass beyond Fort Yale, "...interpose an almost insurmountable barrier to the progress of trade" (Douglas 1858 in Sterne 1998: 103). Prior to completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, and several well-engineered wagon roads in the 1860s, the only transportation route to the interior's open county was via treacherous pack trails ill-suited for the heavy traffic of a burgeoning Gold Rush (Johnson 1996:176-179). To encourage growth of British controlled resource-based economies, an aggressive program of trail and road development was initiated. This provided access to previously inaccessible lands and resources which stimulated ranching and industry and, most notably, encouraged traffic through the newly amalgamated British colony.



**Figure 3. Location of Port Douglas town-site at the north end of Little Harrison Lake indicating local infrastructure. Map from HCB (1980, Volume I: 59).**

The Oregon Treaty of 1846 solidified the boundary between American and British territory along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. However, fear of American annexation of British held land had renewed by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Oliver 2010: 117). Several factors made British Sovereignty appear vulnerable to American influence in the northwest. For instance, in 1859, a proliferation of Euro-American settlement had begun in Washington territory following the violent resolution of conflicts between the US military and indigenous Nations (Little 1996:69; Harris and Warkentin 1983:304-5).

As settler populations were increasing just south of the border, upwards of 20,000 American gold seekers began ascending the Fraser River, travelling mostly from San Francisco (Belshaw 2009:36). Prior to construction of the Harrison-Lillooet road, the most practical access to the Upper Fraser gold fields saw miners pass through American

territory via the Whatcom and Okanagan Trails. This inhibited the Colonial government's ability to regulate resource extraction and monitor Americans entering British territory (Harris and Warkentin 1983:304). In 1859, relations between the US and Britain in the northwest were tense. Territorial disputes over San Juan Island (situated on the boundary of American and British land) nearly escalated into physical violence (Little 1996:69). From 1857 to 1858 British authority was further undermined by an ongoing conflict between American miners and members of the *Nlaka'pamux* Nation. A series of violent confrontations, known as the "Fraser Canyon War," demonstrated the Colony's lack of authority in the Fraser Valley beyond Yale and the persistence of *Nlaka'pamux* cultural hegemony (Forsythe and Dickson 2007; Marshall 2002; Harris 97:109-114). At the onset of the 1858 Gold Rush, British colonial authority in the northwest appeared uncertain.

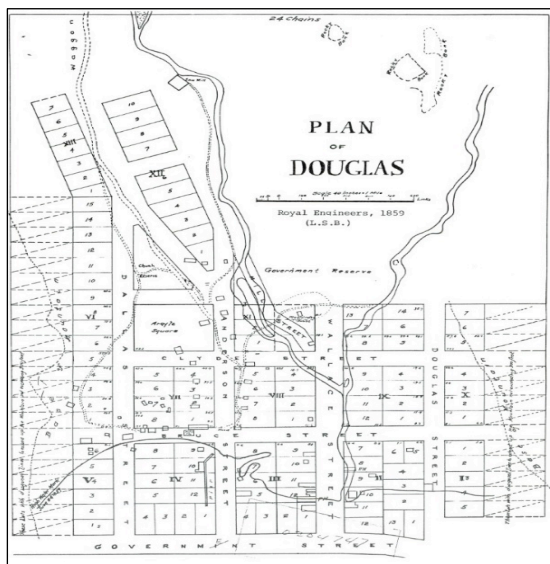
Establishing transportation and commercial infrastructure held symbolic and strategic significance. Infrastructure was an expression of British territorial dominance, "...no expense was spared to build a system of roads that would guarantee British commercial and military control of the mountainous interior." (Little 1996:75). Not only would transient miners be required to purchase mining licenses in Victoria, thereby allowing the colonial office to share in potential profits (Meen 1996:109), use of the roads would enable the colonial government to monitor foreign traffic.

Infrastructure was a statement of power in remote areas where the dominance of Britain was, at least initially, fleeting (Forsythe and Dickson 2007:49-69; Oliver 2010:117). The Royal Engineers, a British military corps, were tasked with initial construction of this infrastructure, which included cutting a survey line through the wilderness between British and American territory at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. They subsequently demarcated the landscape according to European ideological and legal doctrine by use of cadastral survey, town planning, and road construction (Oliver 2010). It was during this building phase the Harrison-Lillooet road and Port Douglas were surveyed and constructed, the new route became the first British controlled means of transportation to the Fraser drainage gold fields.

### **Post-Contact Occupation of Port Douglas and the Harrison-Lillooet Valley**

Early colonial use of the Harrison-Lillooet Valley was facilitated by pre-existing transportation infrastructure, which included a network of trails developed and travelled over thousands of years by First Nation peoples. Early commercial success depended on an existing trail system and willing First Nation participation. This was especially true during the Fur Trade era (Fisher 1977), gold rushes, and during early industrial development (Arrowstone 2010:15-16; Marshall 2002; Knight 1996; Fisher 1977). After a reconnaissance of the "Harrison and Lillooet Route" in 1859, Lieutenant Palmer recommended a road be constructed over an existing indigenous trail which, "...runs along the right bank [of the Lillooet River] the whole way

from the Harrison Lake to the Tenass Lake.” (Palmer 1859:230). Palmer also concluded, that since, “...Indian trails throughout North America invariably follow the best line of travel through a wild country... at least a great portion of the [Harrison-Lillooet] road should be carried along that bank.” Colonial developments, including construction of Port Douglas, often involve and reflect First Nation land-use patterns, and “indigenous settlement histories” (Belshaw 2009: 36).



**Figure 4. City plan map of Port Douglas produced in 1859 showing streets and property boundaries. Map from Royal Engineers (1859).**

Early European accounts of the Harrison-Lillooet Valley detail how fur traders sought a connecting route between Hudson Bay Company’s Fort Kamloops and Fort Langley that avoided difficult terrain within the Fraser Canyon. In 1827, Francis Ermatinger was the first documented fur trader who entered the Harrison-Lillooet Valley, travelling south from Seaton lake; in 1830, James Yale travelled north from Fort Langley. In 1846 A.C. Anderson arrived in Mount Currie after having followed a “very good trail” south through the Harrison-Lillooet Valley from the lake which later bore his name (Decker et al. 1977:47). When miners arrived at the north shore of Little Harrison Lake indigenous communities offered numerous services in exchange for goods, and facilitated economic development by freighting goods and people by canoe (Arrowstone 2010:14-17).

The need to construct a reliable road for the growing foreign traffic was quickly realized, “though passable in the first instance only for pack horses .. such a road might, I think, be carried through the valley of Harrison’s River, at a moderate expense, to a point near the Great Falls of Fraser’s River [and] eastward of the mountains in question.” (James Douglas 1858 in Stern 1998: 103).

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, mainland settlement populations varied considerably. In 1861, New Westminster had 1000 inhabitants; Yale, 5000; and Fort Alexandria, 250. In 1862,

Lillooet had 431 occupants and in 1863 there were at least 10,000 people in Barkerville (Belshaw 2009:37-38). At its demographic peak, permanent residents at Port Douglas numbered between 200 (Belshaw 2009:41) and up to 300 by 1860 (HBC 1980); and it hosted a significantly larger transient population including miners and entrepreneurs. Port Douglas reflected an ethnic diversity typical of early Gold Rush boom towns. In 1861 there were approximately 97 Chinese, 40 American, 20 Mexican, 17 European, and six people of African descent (HBC 1980).

In late summer of 1858 the first iteration of the Harrison-Lillooet road was under construction, the route roughly followed an established indigenous trail. Approximately 500 miners were hired for this initial construction, each of whom paid a 25-dollar deposit to ensure their assigned work was completed, and received no monetary compensation for their labor.

“The Government having merely to supply them with food while employed on the road and to transport them free of expense to the commencement of the road on Harrison’s lake, where the money deposit of 25 dollars is to be repaid to them in provisions, at Victoria prices, when the road is finished.” (Dispatch, No. 8 [34], p.27-28, Governor Douglas to Lord Stanley, August 19, 1858 [In Sterne 1998: 106]).

The road followed the valley north from Port Douglas to Little Lillooet Lake (Tenas Lake), where a sternwheeler ferried travelers to the head of Lillooet Lake at Port Pemberton. From here they portaged to Port Anderson. Two more sternwheelers and two short portages negotiated lakes Anderson and Seton. The route terminated on the mid-Fraser River at the village of Lillooet. The entire route required eight freight transfers between steamship and wagon. The original construction quality of the road was poor and measured one-meter-wide; in spite of this limitation, it facilitated the passage of thousands of miners to gold fields further north (Barman 2007; Little 1996:75-77). Initially, the Harrison-Lillooet Valley was considered the most accessible and easily travelled route as terrain is less steep and treacherous than the Fraser Canyon.

The influx of miners and workers stimulated development of numerous road-side boarding houses, hotels, camps, and small farms. The Victoria Gazette noted that, “...good boats are running in all lakes, while farms have been taken up in many favorable locations, and numerous houses of public entertainment are open all along its line.” (Victoria Gazette, 18 December 1858, in Barman 2007: 71). Port Douglas was the main settlement along the Harrison-Lillooet road; its location was largely determined by the northernmost access point of steamboat Umatilla, which bore passengers from New Westminster (HCB 1980: 185). Port Douglas prospered between 1858 and 1860, then comprised of nine packing and merchandizing companies, three hotels (one with a saloon), a restaurant, one trader, one general store, a toll collector, wheel and wagon maker, constable, blacksmith, magistrate, postmaster, courthouse, and an Anglican Church.



In 1860, the second iteration of the Harrison-Lillooet road was constructed by the Royal Engineers. The route was widened and made more reliable, enabling the passage of higher levels of traffic and a larger transient population. The Royal Engineers also surveyed Port Douglas, demarcating streets and property boundaries (Figure 4). The arrival of the Royal Engineers from Britain was, "...a prominent manifestation of the region's new status..." as a Colony (Meen 1996:110). The Royal Engineers upgraded the road for a third and final time in 1863 (HCB 1980).

Despite efforts of the Royal Engineers, by 1865 the Harrison-Lillooet road proved logistically impractical and, consequently, politically irrelevant. Environmental factors contributed to its decline. Judge Begbie lamented the geographically unworkable location of Port Douglas and its inaccessibility by boat for more than five months a year. Due to its partial submersion during spring runoff, Begbie recommended the town-site be relocated to the northwest corner of Harrison Lake (HCB 1980).

Any boat travel on Douglas Creek was also considered, "...a great deal too tortuous, narrow, and shallow, to admit of the passage of steamers of the class at present running on the Fraser except at high stages of water..." (Palmer 1859:224). Boat travel north of Port Douglas could only be enabled by the construction of a costly dam across the Lillooet River.

Navigating to or from Port Douglas by road was hindered by deep snow, steep hills, and frequent landslides. Such evidence convinced Lieutenant Palmer that Port Douglas was "...a very badly chosen spot for a town, and a poor terminus to what [was] likely to form the main head of communication with the Upper Fraser." (Palmer 1859:225). The Colony's strategy to provide reliable, British controlled, transportation through the Harrison-Lillooet Valley was undermined by an unyielding and unpredictable landscape.

By 1864, the Cariboo wagon road had been constructed through the Fraser Canyon (from Yale to Barkerville), which completely bypassed the Harrison-Lillooet Valley and fated Port Douglas to be a short lived Gold Rush boomtown (Forsythe and Dickson 2007). By 1873, Port Douglas had but one settler remaining (HCB 1980: VIIA 185-224). Exhaustion of gold resources in the 1870s caused a widespread economic decline, and contributed to the eventual abandonment of Port Douglas. As the gold boom ended, those populating more remote areas of the Colony left or settled in coastal areas following greater economic opportunities (Belshaw 2009: 41).

Port Douglas and the surrounding locality have remained sparsely populated relative to its Gold Rush florescence. Industrial development increased in the 1890s when timber harvesting began in the Harrison-Lillooet Valley, usually staged from the head of Harrison Lake. The logging industry has persisted with fluctuating intensity until the present (McCombs and Chittenden 1988; Sleight 1990). In recent decades, numerous hydroelectric projects have also been initiated.

### **Previous Archaeological Investigations at Port Douglas**

Several heritage resource inventories and impact assessments that have taken place in or near Port Douglas have recorded and detailed the extent of Port Douglas town-site, its structure foundations, extant sections of the Harrison-Lillooet road, roadside buildings, refuse dumps and cemeteries.

The Port Douglas site (DkRm-1) was recorded by Freisinger in 1973, and an assessment of its heritage resources was subsequently conducted by Sneed and Smith (1977). Seven standing historic log cabins were recorded, one of which contained archaeological materials post-dating the gold rush era that are likely associated with homesteading or early logging.

Two concentrations of surface and subsurface refuse (dump sites) were exposed after a diversion ditch was excavated in 1989 to redirect water from Courthouse Creek. Post-contact period artifacts that predate 1880 were observed at each dump site. A map reserve was established which encompasses the Port Douglas town site (File #022977[1]9), and coincides with District Lot 6620 (Arcas 1989; 2009: 74). The first dump site is located 25 meters downstream of a small bridge, and east of the Courthouse Creek diversion ditch. It is associated with a demolished two story house and two outbuildings (Sneed and Smith 1977) which may correspond with the initial settlement of Port Douglas and/or subsequent homesteading (HCB 1980). Modern debris at this dump site includes milled lumber fragments, rubber, plastic, metals, and clear glass, which is mixed with materials from the antecedent historic period. Historic materials include: square-head nails, cast iron wood stove fragments, and black glass bottle fragments exhibiting pontil marks (Archaeology Branch 2016). Pontil marks indicate a glass blowing method practiced prior to 1880 (Society of Historic Archaeology 2015).

Another concentration of early post-contact period material was observed approximately 25 meters south of the first dump site. Artifacts were observed in both sides of the machine excavated diversion ditch to a maximum depth of 50 cm below surface. An associated back-dirt mound west of the ditch also contained historic artifacts including two styles of black bottles (neck and base fragments), olive glass, aqua and "sun colored amethyst" glass, a scythe blade, door lock, and a clay tobacco pipe. Post-contact period materials were mixed with discernibly modern refuse (e.g., clear glass) (Arcas 1989; 2009:74). The majority of artifacts infer 20<sup>th</sup> century occupation and activities, however considerable evidence remains reflecting an earlier colonial habitation (e.g., black glass bottles with pontil marks and a rock foundation).

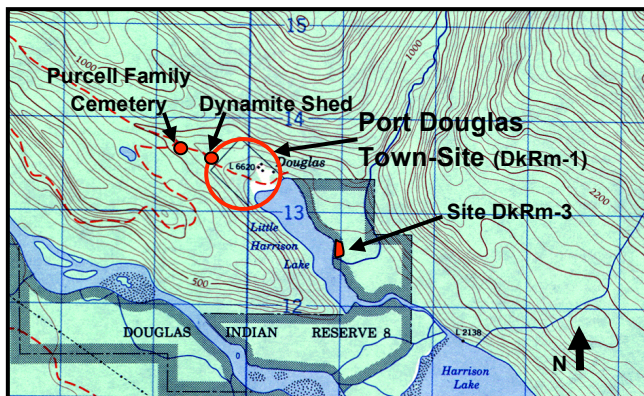
Despite a large fire destroying many buildings at Port Douglas in 1860, some wood frame structures persisted until the 1980s. In 1989, remains of several historic structures and a stone foundation were demolished and burned by Metals Research Inc. during mining-related operations. The stone structure foundation may have been the house of the

provincial magistrate (Arcas 2009:74; Smith and Sneed 1977: 27-30).

Arcas revisited the town-site in 2008 and identified mostly disturbed archaeological deposits including both historic and pre-contact period habitation features. They suggested that intact pre-contact period archaeological deposits may also be present (Arcas 2009:35).

Archaeological monitoring was conducted by Amec in 2010 after the construction of an electric distribution line between Little Harrison Lake and Lillooet Lake. Amec recovered historic bottle glass and a transfer-print ceramic sherd; no pre-contact archaeological materials were observed (Amec 2010).

Antiquus Archaeological Consultants Ltd. visited the town-site and several nearby locations in 2006 during a hydro-electric project overview survey (Rousseau et al. 2007). Numerous structure foundations, several refuse scatters, and a small standing structure known locally as the “dynamite shed” were observed and noted (Figure 5). These are all still readily visible today.

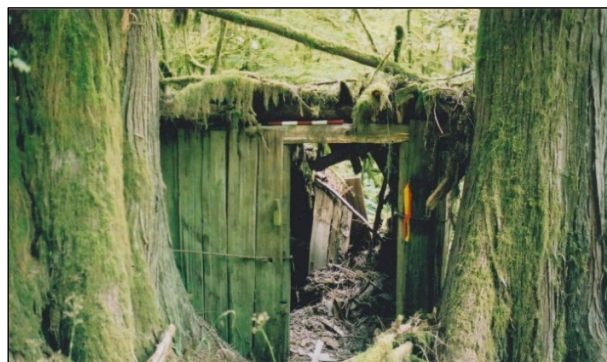


**Figure 5. Location of early post-contact period town-site of Port Douglas (DkRm-1), the "dynamite shed", Purcell family cemetery and archaeological site DkRm 3.**

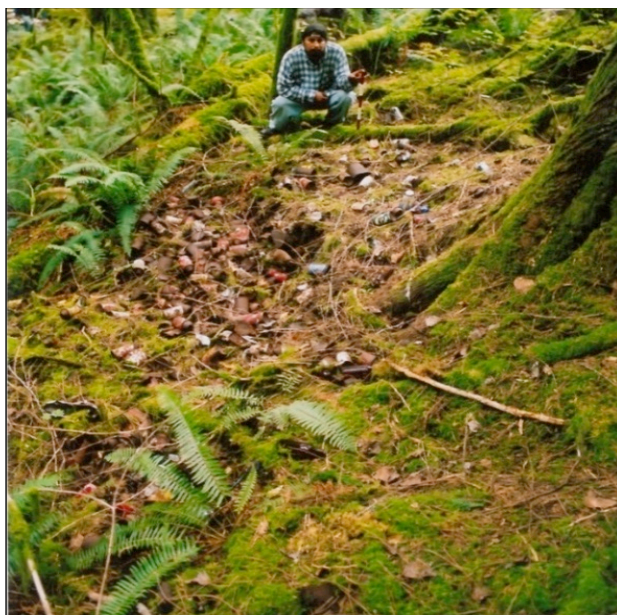
The “dynamite shed” is located approximately 600 meters north of the north end of Little Harrison Lake and is adjacent to the east side of the main Port Douglas access road (Figures 5 and 6) (Rousseau et al. 2007:60). The shed measures about 1.75 m high, 2.5 m wide and 2.0 m deep, and is constructed by vertical cedar planks and cable wire. The shed roof is sloping to the east, and the doorway, which measures 1.5 meters high, is oriented west toward the access road. According to local informants, the shed was constructed sometime in the mid-1900s, and was used to store dynamite. This shed is one of a few remaining “heritage” structures at the Port Douglas town-site.

A locally important early post-contact period cemetery is located approximately 1.0 km north of Port Douglas on the west side of the main access road (Figures 3 and 5). This cemetery was established in the 1880s by the Purcell family, and is still in use today. It is situated on gently sloping terrain above a steep slope approximately 25 m above the road. Burials in the graveyard include members of the Purcell family of Port Douglas, who have familial ties with

Douglas First Nation. There are several standing grave markers made of wood, stone, and concrete, and several low and elongated earthen mounds which appear to be unmarked graves.



**Figure 6. A 2006 view of the “dynamite shed” in the northwest aspect of Port Douglas town-site, looking east.**



**Figure 7. A domestic refuse dump in the northwest aspect of Port Douglas town-site, looking southwest.**

In 2006, Rousseau et al. (2007) visited nearby archaeological site DkRm-3, where they observed cultural materials on the ground surface. This site is located about 1.2 km south of Port Douglas on Douglas Indian Reserve 8 and is situated on the east shore of Little Harrison Lake (Figure 5). Low to medium density scatters consisting of approximately 20 siltstone and chert flakes, fire-altered rock, and charcoal. Two formed biface fragments were recovered. Early post-contact period artifacts were also observed on the ground surface in low to medium density scatters, which included: bottle glass and ceramic shards, various metal artifacts, two “cobalt blue” glass “trade” beads, and a clay pipe stem fragment which likely dates to the mid- to late 1800s. Rousseau et al. (2007) suggests that inhabitants of DkRm-3 and Port Douglas may have interacted during the late 1800s

and early 1900s. Further study, and detailed excavation at DkRm-3 is warranted, and may corroborate this speculation.

Despite having been subjected to fire, logging, structural demolition, various machine land-alterations, seasonal flooding, and decades of looting, archaeological deposits are still likely present at Port Douglas. Many structural foundations and other cultural depressions are also still readily evident (Rousseau et al. 2007).

### Summary and Directions for Future Research

Port Douglas facilitated travel and communication between coastal and interior regions via infrastructure built and monitored by British colonial officials. Constructing transportation infrastructure in this valley was a decision founded on both political and practical rationale. A contextualization of Port Douglas in early colonial politics, and the haste with which Port Douglas and the Harrison-Lillooet road were constructed, suggests construction of Port Douglas and its supportive infrastructure was motivated by a preoccupation with demonstrating British hegemony within the nascent colony. The British colonial strategy was, "...profoundly influenced by its primary aim of discouraging American penetration of this last stronghold on the Pacific." (Little 1996:73-75). Arguably, Port Douglas and the Harrison-Lillooet road were constructed to this aim regardless of its impractical location and difficult access.

The Harrison-Lillooet Valley was elected for development over the Fraser Canyon due primarily to perilous terrain north of Yale. However, this decision may also have been influenced by the strategic avoidance of that area during the "Fraser Canyon War." Additional confrontations and the threat of violence to any construction effort would likely jeopardize the already fragile image of British colonial authority.

A thorough archaeological investigation of Port Douglas is warranted. Further research may enhance our understanding of regional and global historical forces that shaped the Colony of British Columbia. Port Douglas is a multi-component site containing archaeological materials and features that reflect the proto-historic and fur trade period, the pivotal Gold Rush era, later homesteading in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the development of early lumber and mining industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Detailed investigations would provide a more robust understanding of shifting historic economic prerogatives occurring in the tributaries of the lower Fraser River region.

Specifically, I suggest that future heritage/archaeological research programs and impact assessments conducted at Port Douglas and elsewhere in the Lower Lillooet River Valley should attempt to:

- (1) Reconstruct estimates of local human population densities before, and at the time of contact, through detailed systematic inventory of pre-contact period sites in the Harrison-Lillooet Valley.
- (2) Determine how, and the degree to which, gold-rushes and early colonial development strategies depended on established First Nation settlements, population, and transportation

infrastructure using the initial Euro-Canadian development of the Harrison-Lillooet Valley as an example. Possible sources of information include: non-confidential oral histories offered from local residents, early fur trade journals relating to the adoption of indigenous infrastructure, and future archaeological investigations at sites containing proto-historic (Contact) cultural deposits (e.g., site DkRm 3).

- (3) Provide an accurate digital cartographic representation of remaining building foundations and refuse dump sites at Port Douglas, and link them with specific names of residence occupants and/or commercial enterprises.

- (4) Create a comprehensive map of the Lower Lillooet River Valley showing all extant portions of the mid-1800s Harrison-Lillooet Road identifying its associated settlements, rest areas, and structural remains.

- (5) Undertake detailed systematic data recovery (hand-excavation) programs within intact portions of the Port Douglas town-site that contain early post-contact period deposits in order to secure and document information regarding the use and occupation of specific structures. Emphasis should be placed on recovering the contents of refuse dumps, which often contain temporally sensitive artifacts, with a demonstrable association with particular structure foundations. Small-scale behavioural patterns, the function, age, and occupational history of individual structures may be gleaned from analyzing the resulting data. Identifying individual residents and workers may even be possible by triangulating data from archival sources. Dump sites likely contain post-contact period domestic artifacts and faunal remains resulting from food preparation and consumption, which are strong indicators of family size, wealth, health, social status, religion, and personal habits.

- (6) With permission and guidance from local residents, compile a genealogical history for the nearby Purcell family cemetery, including the identification of those resting in unmarked graves, to preserve local family histories.

- (7) Assess public interest of a proposal to designate the Port Douglas town-site as an historic park.

- (8) Further explore and explain the regional political, social, economic and cultural ramifications of the "Fraser Canyon War" following Marshall (2002), and its role in inciting the hurried development of Port Douglas and the Harrison-Lillooet road.

- (9) Investigate, through systematic data recovery, the distribution of cultural materials and how they might reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity known to exist at Port Douglas (HBC 1980) between 1858 and 1865, and identify any sections of the town-site that may have been ethnically segregated.

- (10) Study the faunal remains contained in refuse dumps which could provide important information concerning the availability and variety of domesticated animals, raising of livestock within or near the town-site, and the nature and degree of dependence on locally-hunted wild game species.