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Authors

Prentiss, Anna Marie

Caporaso, Alicia

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The Last House at Bridge River: The Archaeology of an Aboriginal Household in British Columbia during the Fur Trade Period

Anna Marie Prentiss (ed.),
Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017,
368 pp., ISBN 9781607815433, \$59.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Alicia Caporaso

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, New Orleans, LA

The Last House at Bridge River: The Archaeology of an Aboriginal Household in British Columbia during the Fur Trade Period presents a seemingly strange dichotomy: a mid-nineteenth-century site occupation with no direct written history. It is a site that may appear ancillary to traditional history, but that in and of itself contains a rich, deep-time material culture. This edited volume is a complex study of place in the greater economic and social landscape of the Northwestern North American Fur Trade imposed on pre-existing indigenous social and economic systems, both of which are at the same time supported and constrained by a local and industrially modified ecosystem. At its core, this volume is a material culture study of local and regional negotiation and change.

The volume opens with an introduction to the St'át'imc people of the Middle Fraser Canyon in British Columbia, and to the history of archaeological research in the region. Extensive research in regional ancient history—and on the Bridge River site in particular—has been carried out over several decades; however, little work has focused on later, post-contact archaeological remains, especially during the period of the Fur Trade. The research presented in this volume, on the last of seventeen occupations of a single pit house (Housepit 54), is the first such study to be completed. The two ultimate goals of the research were (1) to examine St'át'imc culture and lifeways during the Fur Trade from the perspective of the archaeological record at this site, and (2) to examine patterns of continuity and change over time between that occupation and those at this site and elsewhere that predate the colonial period.

To achieve these broad goals, the individual authors structure their particular analyses of artifact and feature classes into a historical-ecology paradigm, taking into account local environmental constraints, pre-contact

subsistence resource use, the impacts of early colonial European contact on local societies and the environment, the effects of introduced disease, and the effects of social, economic, and ecological stresses imposed on indigenous peoples during the Fur Trade. The indigenous subsistence and trade activities analyzed include local salmon fishing, seasonal hunting rounds, seasonal plant collection, and scheduled trade excursions. Externally imposed activities in which the St'át'imc people participated and/or by which they were directly and indirectly impacted include the Fur Trade and the later Gold Rush. As Walsh (p. 37) states in Chapter Two, “The last inhabitants of Housepit 54 were perhaps uniquely positioned at a crossroads of social and environmental change during a turbulent phase of British Columbia’s Colonial history.” This is the ultimate focus of this volume.

Technical chapters follow that describe the excavation of the Fur Trade-period winter occupation (floor, roof, and midden strata), lithic artifacts, European artifacts, faunal remains and artifacts, plant remains, and the geochemistry of the Fur Trade-period strata. The chapters on lithic artifacts, faunal and plant remains, and their analyses in an ecological historical framework are particularly exceptional. They provide an excellent literature review of typology, local use, and integration into local lifeways without sinking into mere old-fashioned culture/history or type/morphology description. They discuss competing explanations for the makeup of the extant archaeological assemblage. Indigenous agency is the primary factor in each analysis. The authors seek to identify the roles played by technology (lithics) or composition (fauna and plant remains) in the adaptive strategies of the winter pit house occupations, and the effects of local integration into the Fur Trade economy (actual and peripheral) on technological and collective behaviors. These analyses also indicate the persistence of traditional subsistence strategies at a time of social and environmental change in the greater region.

The recovery of only 51 artifacts of European manufacture, most of which were either beads for adornment or tinkling cones, renders the study of imported colonial objects difficult. The authors of that chapter hypothesize that the distance between the Bridge River site and regional trading posts may have reduced the opportunity for such objects to reach this seasonally-occupied locale; however, given the long-term presence

of indigenous trade networks in the region, remote though the site may have been, such a small number (0.4% of the entire artifact assemblage) is surprising. The discussion of the beads and cones is well done; however, there is only one specimen of several artifact categories, and therefore little can be said about their presence. The authors consider this in their discussion of an apparently thrown horseshoe recovered in the roof strata. They hypothesize that its presence at the site might imply that it was given a symbolic meaning, though they present little evidence for why this might have been so. While the chapter is complete (given the paucity of objects available for analysis), it would have greatly benefited from a theoretical discussion as to why certain European-produced materials, tools, and objects might have been locally rejected, removed from the site by the occupants, or collected at a later date.

The volume concludes with a spatial analysis of the Fur Trade-period strata at Housepit 54, followed by an expanded spatial analysis of indigenous St'át'imc households. These are the first chapters in the book to really introduce the inhabitants to the archaeological record of Housepit 54, and they are what make this volume unique and a truly important contribution to

Fur Trade archaeology. The GIS-based spatial analysis of distribution and organization is well-defined and described, although the graphic presentation of the data is very difficult to parse and understand without careful study. The spatial analysis provides a great deal of important information, not obtainable through more traditional research methods, on such topics as activity areas, gendered spaces, and patterns of storage and discard.

The authors of this study succeed in their ultimate goals—to place St'át'imc culture, and its peoples' responses to external social, economic, and environmental pressures during the period of the Fur Trade in the Middle Frasier Valley—into a local indigenous context. They show through artifact and spatial analyses that St'át'imc peoples successfully maintained traditional lifeways while participating in greater regional activities, including the Fur Trade, however peripheral they may have seemed to be to the colonial world and its associated contemporary written history. This volume should be considered a model for how to approach future archaeological investigations of indigenous sites occupied by peoples who actively participated in and/or were directly affected by the colonial Fur Trade.



Chieftoms: Yesterday and Today

Robert L. Carniero, Leonid E. Grinin,
and Andrey V. Korotayev (eds.),
New York City: Eliot Werner Publications, 2017,
400 pp., ISBN 978-0989824989, \$34.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Scott D. Sunell

Department of Anthropology, UCLA,
375 Portola Plaza, 341 Haines Hall,
Box 951553, Los Angeles, CA 90095

As with many other edited volumes that rely on previously published material, *Chieftoms: Yesterday and Today* struggles to find a unique voice and to make a contribution beyond its source material. At its best, *Chieftoms: Yesterday and Today* approaches cultural evolution with a historical eye that demonstrates the value of thinking beyond the state in both past and present.

The individual chapters, written largely by established scholars, are excellent. This work also provides an additional venue for English-language access to Russian scholarship on these issues, beyond the journal in which they were originally published. The drawbacks of the book unfortunately outweigh these positive factors. The editors hew too closely to theory that has been revised significantly in recent decades, narrowing the overall scope of the volume. This book may be of interest to scholars focusing specifically on the issues addressed, but the framing of the work is too constrained by its treatment of chieftoms to be of general appeal. These papers would therefore have been best left in their original context rather than republished here.

The book is organized into five sections, the first and last stating the goals of the editors and framing the work (the only material unique to this volume). The middle