A Site-Based Approach to Divergent Heritage Practices and their Effects

Heritage is increasingly defined not as a static thing to be passed down through the generations, but as a social process through which people re-create values and meanings through the past. However, many heritage studies still start from a priori assumptions about what counts as heritage, rather than asking how particular sites, objects, and practices come to be treated as heritage through real action that plays out on the ground. Here, I use a case study to explore the processes by which particular places on the landscape become activated as heritage sites. This research rests on the work of other heritage scholars who have insisted that heritage sites, objects, and practices do not just inherently exist as heritage (Byrne 2013; Smith 2006; Waterton and Smith 2010) they must be made to signify, made to mean something about how the past relates to the present. Importantly, who controls heritage activity at a site influences the kind and content of information produced about the past and who owns that knowledge.

Pithouse Villages in the Slocan Valley

Up until the turn of the 19th century, the region was home to Aboriginal people who, according to the archaeological and ethnohistorical interpretation, lived in villages of semi-subterranean houses in the winter and moved to various seasonal camps during the rest of the year. In the Slocan Valley, there are two large winter villages, which are today controlled by different groups and used for different heritage activities. Both villages have, at some point since the 1960s, been the subject of archaeological investigation. Sinntist activists have been occupying Sinntist since 1989, using the site for meetings, organizing, cultural and spiritual activities, and even educating the local community. The Slocan Narrows village, on the other hand, remains a site of authorized heritage activity today, namely an academic archaeological field school. These two villages make for an ideal case study contrasting forms of heritage. Who has access to these places? What uses do they make of these sites in their heritage practice? The timeline at right lists activities & outcomes at Slocan Narrows and Sinntist from the 1960s to the present.

Valville Site (DQ/1) nkwewi xewn?

This village site is controlled today by the Sinntist Nation Society, the organization of Lakes activists working to maintain their cultural traditions in Canada and be recognized as Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The Sinntist were once recognized in Canada as the Arrow Lakes band but were declared extinct in 1956 after the death of the last registered band member living on the Outpost Reserve, despite the survival of Lakes people elsewhere.

In this study, I examine the ethnohistorical and archival research to examine the past thirty years of heritage activity in the Valley. I consider the perspectives of archaeologists, First Nations leaders, local residents, artifact collectors, and others) in order to contribute to emerging understandings of the interaction between subaltern and authorized heritage practices in the Slocan and elsewhere.

Slocan Narrows Pithouse Village (ka’ntna)?

This site, located south of the village of Slocan, consists of two archaeological sites registered with the BC Archaeology Branch. DQ/1 is located on the north side of the river on the public land, and is accessible via the Slocan Valley Rail Trail. DQ/17 is on private land on the east side of the river. Excavations have been carried out at the site, and there is interpretive signage on the nearby rail trail.

Valville Site (DQ/1) nkwewi xewn?

In 1996, Arrow Lakes Road is declared extinct for the purposes of the Indian Act. Gordon Made conducted the first excavations at the Valville site. In 1997, he founded the Valville Archaeological Park Society to advocate for the creation of an interpretive center at the site. This museum is well-attended by the Valley today, as both Natives and non-Natives.

During the 1990s, Lakes people challenged the site's restriction for the first time in their history. As late as the early 1990s, the Kootenay Lake Bridge was still closed to First Nations people.

In 1999, a group called the St. Regis Park Society was formed to work to save the site. This group included students, historians, and resource managers. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of the St. Regis Park Association. The park was opened to the public in 1999. Today, the park is open to the public and is well-maintained.

Archaeological finds and export reports appear in Canadian. British Columbia.

SNAP 2005: Hamilton College Archaeological Field School. Test excavations at Warka (O'gara, public event, architect's recreation drawings)

SNAP 2015: 3rd Annual Hamilton College Archaeological Field School. Restoration of a house and ruin (DQ/17). At the site of the site, restoration of the former park (photo by the author).

SNAP 2015: 3rd Annual Hamilton College Archaeological Field School. Excavation of a house (DQ/17). At the site of the site, restoration of the former park (photo by the author).

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