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1979 Archaeological Investigations

at the Seafort Burial Site

by

Donald N. Steer and Greg Lutick

1980

Beads w/ burials 13, 14, 17, 19

Abstract

During July and August, 1979 archaeological investigations were carried out at the Seafort Burial Site. Twelve historic burials were excavated and recorded. Data obtained from these burials and other burials excavated in 1969 and 1971 from the site suggests the burial ground dates to the first half of the 19th century. All individuals were placed in wooden coffins and interred in shallow graves. These individuals were of both Indian and white derivation. Both sexes were represented ranging from foetal to old age. A description of the skeletal remains and associated artifacts is presented.

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Glass beads are classified according to the typology established by Kidd and Kidd (1970). The description of each bead type includes the Kidd's identifying code, followed by shape, size, diaphaneity, colour, number of specimens and condition of the ends. Examples of the identifying code are Ia (drawn, tubular, monochrome) beads and Wlb (wound, round) beads. A second numerical digit following the code, e.g., Wlb1, indicates the bead type number already assigned by the Kidds. An asterisk (*) replaces the number in the cases of those bead types not recorded by the Kidds.

Included under shape are tubular beads (round cross-section), circular beads (round cross-section, ring- or barrel-shaped bead), round beads, oval beads and faceted, circular beads. Tubular beads are separated from circular beads by the criterion that length of the former is greater than the diameter.

The diaphaneity of the glass is described employing the terms opaque, translucent and transparent (clear). Opaque glass is impervious to direct light except on the thinnest edges. Translucent beads allow light to pass through, yet diffuse light so that objects observed through them are indistinct. Objects observed through transparent beads are distinctly visible.

The following size categories are provided by the Kidds: very small, under 2 mm; small, 2-4 mm; medium, 4-6 mm; large, 6-10 mm; very large, over 10 mm. These size groupings refer to the diameter of the bead. The diameter and length ranges are given for each bead type.

Colours are designated using the names and codes in the Color Harmony Manual (Jacobsen, et al. 1948). Also included are colour code equivalencies found in the Munsell Book of Color (Munsell Color Company 1960). An example would read:

bright navy (13 pg; 7.5PB 3/4). The colours were determined using transmitted fluorescent light. In some cases Jacobsen's codes are not given due to the unavailability of the Manual.

In the case of drawn beads, their ends may be broken or rounded. The latter are formed by subsequent reheating and agitation of the beads in a metal drum or pan (Karklins n.d.).

Burial Number 13

Type of Burial

Primary inhumation, lying on back, coffin burial, oriented slightly west of north-south with head towards north (Fig. 3).

Condition

This burial was badly disturbed by heavy equipment. It was one of three burials initially discovered in 1979. A significant amount of bone breakage occurred to the skull, mandible and long bones. In addition, some skeletal elements were lost. Approximately one-quarter of the recovered bone was found several metres east of the grave. Some coarse dark brown hair (braid) was associated with the remains.

The coffin was almost totally destroyed and the grave extensively disturbed by construction (Fig. 4).

Sex

Male - based on morphological features of the sacrum and pelvis.

Age

Approximately 45 years old.

Racial Affinity

Indian

Variations and Anomalies in the Skeleton

Both right and left capitulum of the humerus were polished which represents evidence for osteoarthritis which may be as a result of normal ageing. Other evidence for osteoarthritis was in the form of lipping of the vertebrae, fusion of several vertebrae and lipping on the proximal ends of each humerus and femur.

Grave

Because of extensive disturbance the grave outline could not be distinguished.

Coffin

This coffin was constructed of spruce (Picea sp.). Traces of wood from the badly disturbed coffin indicated that the bottom and sides were constructed of sawn planks approximately 1.6 cm (as found) in thickness. Only one corner (northeast) of the coffin could be distinguished. The north end of the coffin measured 78 cm in width. The coffin was fastened with a limited number of hand-wrought nails. The bottom of the coffin was approximately 65 cm below surface. Wood remnants present on certain nails indicated that the coffin lid or bottom was approximately 2 cm in thickness.

Artifact Associations

Artifacts recovered from this burial include six glass beads, two complete nails and five nail fragments.

The six glass beads (not illustrated) are tubular drawn beads which have been rounded by means of a reheating process. They are classified as follows:

11a* circular; small size; opaque; medium blue (16 le; 7.5B 5/6); 3 specimens (17R13A1-7).

Diameter Range - 2.5 mm to 2.8 mm

Length Range - 1.8 mm to 2.1 mm

11a* circular; small size; opaque; (5B 5.4); 3 specimens
 (17R13A1-6)

Diameter Range - 2.6 mm to 2.9 mm

Length - 1.8 mm

These are similar to some, but identical to none of the beads found at the excavated Rocky Mountain House fort sites. The beads appear to have been from leggings.

Seven nails were associated with the coffin. Two complete nails and five nail fragments are all hand-wrought. One complete specimen has a clasp head, sharp point and is 81.2 mm long (Fig. 5a). The other complete nail (17R13A1-5) is indistinguishable as to form due to adhering wood fragments (not illustrated). Of the five nail fragments, two have clasp heads, two have rose heads and one is unidentifiable as to head type (Fig. 5b-f).

Hand-wrought nails were commonly used at all of the Rocky Mountain House forts, although machine-cut nails were the usual type used at the latest fort, site 1R (1865-75). This is indicated by the fact that hand-wrought nails accounted for 97.5 per cent of the specimens recovered from site 16R (1799-1821), 91.5 per cent of those recovered from site 15R (1835-61) and approximately 34 per cent of those from site 1R. A recent re-examination of the nails from site 13R (1799-1835) indicates that all or nearly all of the nails recovered are hand-wrought. This latter statement is in disagreement with the original interpretation of nail types recovered from site 13R (See Noble 1973). The type of nail most commonly used at a postulated fifth fort site (1864-68) is unknown. It appears, however, that machine-cut nails were not popular or available in the Rocky Mountain House area until the latter years of, or after the site 15R occupation. The absence of machine-cut nails from this burial suggests that it was most probably associated with either site 16R, 13R or 15R.

Burial Number 14

1835-61

Type of Burial

Primary inhumation, probably lying on back, coffin burial, oriented slightly north of east-west with head to the west.

Condition

This burial evidenced the greatest disturbance by heavy equipment. It was one of three burials initially discovered in 1979. Notable bone breakage, shifting and loss of bone elements occurred. Approximately 50 per cent of the recovered bone was found several metres east of the grave. A braid of medium brown hair was found associated with the burial (Fig. 9c).

The coffin and grave were almost totally destroyed by construction (Fig. 6).

Sex

Female - based on morphological features of the sacrum and pelvis.

Age

Between 23 and 30 years old - Third molar had erupted but did not show the same amount of attrition as the other teeth - Anderson (1969): 17 to 25+; Brothwell (1965): 21+. Long bones - epiphyseal on femur had fused: +20 (Brothwell). All sacral bodies had fused: 23-32.

Racial Affinity

Indian

Variations and Anomalies in the Skeleton

Malpositioned upper second premolar.

Grave

Due to extensive disturbance only a portion of the grave could be distinguished. The pit appeared to reflect the

exact shape and size of the coffin. The fill consisted of a light brown silt mottled with naturally occurring white ash and wood fragments. The grave base was approximately 65 cm below surface.

Coffin

This coffin was constructed of spruce. Because of extensive disturbance no dimensions could be recorded. The coffin was fastened with hand-wrought nails. Wood remnants attached to two of the nails indicated that the lid or bottom of the coffin was approximately 2 cm thick. Artifact Associations
Artifacts recovered from this burial include 17 glass beads, one complete nail, four nail fragments and various fragments of fabric and leather.

All of the beads recovered (not illustrated) are moulded and faceted. They are classified as follows:

MP9* Moulded; faceted; medium size; transparent; very light blue-grey; (2.5PB 9/2); 6 specimens

(17R14A1-13)

Diameter Range - 5.5 mm to 6 mm.

Length Range - 4.8 mm to 5.3 mm.

MP9* Moulded; faceted; large size; transparent; very light blue-grey; (2.5PB 9/2); 1 specimen (17R14A1-14)

Diameter - 9.4 mm

Length - 8.2 mm

MP9* Moulded; faceted; Very large size; transparent; very light blue-grey; (2.5PB 9/2); 5 specimens (17R14A1-15)

Diameter Range - 10.7 mm to 15.1 mm

Length Range - 9.5 mm to 14.2 mm

MP8* Moulded; faceted; Very large size; transparent; amber; (10YR 6/10); 1 specimen (17R14A1-16)

Diameter - 15.3 mm

Length 14.2 mm

MP8* Moulded; faceted; large size; transparent, but patinated and crizzled; amber; (10YR 6/10); 2

specimens (17R14A1-17)

Diameters - 6.5 mm and 7 mm

Lengths - 5.4 mm and 5.6 mm

MP* Moulded; faceted; Very large size; transparent, but patinated and crizzled; amber; (10YR 6/10); 2 specimens (17R14A1-18)

Diameters - 10.7 mm and 11 mm

Lengths - 8.5 mm and 9.6 mm

The beads of the first three types have faded from a somewhat more blue colour which was present when they were first exposed. Of the four Rocky Mountain House sites excavated, moulded beads were recovered only from site 15R. The beads recovered from the burial were found in disturbed contexts, but probably formed part of a necklace.

One complete nail and four incomplete nails (Fig. 8) are hand-wrought. The complete nail has a rectangular head and is 69 mm long. The incomplete nails include two rose-headed fragments, one clasp-headed fragment and one fragment with an unidentifiable head. The largest of these fragments is 124 mm long. The absence of machine-cut nails from this burial suggests that it was most probably associated with either site 16R, 13R or 15R.

Remains of cloth and leather were associated with this burial. The most noteworthy and best preserved was a large piece of woollen tartan cloth (Figs. 9b,10) which was located in the pelvic region. This chequered cloth was pleated and evinced several fabric colours, including various shades of brown and deep red. The piece was probably from a skirt. The remains of a tartan garment was found in association with Burial Number 9 in 1969. It was tentatively identified as a shroud.

A small piece of woollen cloth (17R14A1-1) from a second garment was found in the lower chest area. This

piece (not illustrated) was of a tighter, coarser weave. The fabric was predominantly light brown in colour, however, portions were dyed dark blue. In all likelihood this piece of cloth formed part of the individual's shirt. This felt-like material was found in association with fragments of brown silk and tartan cloth.

A third fragment of material (17R14A1-3) found in the pelvic region appeared to be a remnant of a small pouch (not illustrated). The material was identified as blue-dyed felt. The fragment was somewhat oblong in form and evinced stretching holes.

A fourth piece of material from the upper body probably is what remained of a knitted shawl (Figs. 9a,11). The garment consisted of two different woollen yarns appearing in alternating panels. The coarser yarn is of a dark brown wool. The other is a light brown degraded wool.

A small portion of leather (17R14A1-4) was noted in the pelvic region (not illustrated). It may have been part of a side pouch or strapping.

The combination of beads and nails recovered suggests that this individual was probably interred during the occupation of site 15R.

1835-61

Burial Number 15

Type of Burial

Primary inhumation, lying on back, coffin burial, oriented northeast-southwest with head towards the north.

Condition

This skeleton was somewhat disturbed by heavy equipment. It was one of three burials initially discovered in 1979. The

evident that the sectioned logs were simply placed into the pit as a lining (cribbing). No nails were used to secure the wood.

Artifact Associations

No artifacts were found in association with this burial.

Burial Number 17

Type of Burial

Primary inhumation, lying on back, head turned to right, hands on pelvis, coffin burial, oriented northeast-southwest, head towards southwest.

Condition

This burial was undisturbed. Only a few ribs and the right pelvis were broken. Hair, fingernails, leather and other fabric was preserved to varying degrees.

The coffin and grave were clearly visible and well preserved (Figs. 17-20).

Sex

Female - based on morphological features of the skull, sacrum and pelvis. Garb and adornment artifacts were also indicative of a female.

Age

23 to 28 years old. Sacrum - S₁ and S₂ show no evidence of fusion while all others have fused: 23-32. Pelvis - all bones fused: +23. Third molar had not erupted: 17-25.

Racial Affinity

Indian - based on general morphological features, incisor shovelling, clothing and adornment items.

Variation and Anomalies in the Skeleton

None noted

Grave

The grave was much larger than the coffin and tapered irregularly towards the foot. The southwest end of the grave had a width of 78 cm, narrowing to approximately 40 cm at the northeast end. The length was 2.13 m (Fig. 22). The grave fill consisted of a medium brown silt mottled with flecks of white ash. The base of the grave was approximately .85 cm below surface.

Coffin

The coffin was somewhat rectangular tapering very slightly towards the foot. It was constructed of sawn white birch (Betula papyrifera) and spruce planking. The bottom, sides, ends and left half of the lid were made from birch. The right half of the lid was made from spruce (Figs. 17,19). The coffin was fastened with small hand-wrought nails. The overall length was 1.84 m and the maximum width 52 cm and minimum width 38.5 cm. Some collapse of the sides and northeast end had taken place. The left half of the lid was approximately 2 cm in thickness, while the right half was at least 3.2 cm thick.

Artifact Associations

A large number of artifacts were recovered from this burial. They include 779 glass beads, six multi-component earrings, fragments of one gilt copper alloy necklace, four brass finger rings, four silver finger rings, four brass buttons, one possible shell-handled knife, two bone combs, portions of a leather pouch, four silver-plated brass pins, two silver wrist bands, 70 nail fragments and various pieces of fabric.

All of the glass beads (Fig. 231) are drawn (See below, multi-component earrings). They are classified as follows:

1a5 Tubular; small size; opaque; white (a;N 10/0);
160 specimens.

Diameter Range - 2.3 mm to 3 mm

Length Range - 2.5 mm to 3.5 mm

11a14 Round; small size; opaque; white (a;N 10/0);
619 specimens.

Diameter Range - 2.3 mm to 3.4 mm

Length Range - 1.7 mm to 3 mm

Both types of beads are identical to those recovered from site 16R and 13R. The site 15R and site 1R collections contained beads of type 11a14, but not of type 1a5. These beads were found near the feet and lower portions of the legs and may have served as decoration on leggings or moccasins.

Portions of two multi-component earrings and four complete multi-component earrings were recovered. The two incomplete earrings consist of a combination of four medium blue (7.5B 5/6) wire-wound glass beads, three silver cones (fourth cone missing), four small silver globes, two large silver globes, and silver and brass wire fragments (Fig. 23a). Each of the four complete earrings consist of a brass ring-like attachment device with a circular glass inset and one brass cone-shaped setting with a tear-drop shaped glass set (Fig. 23b,c). The four earrings appear to represent two pair, each pair differing only in the colour of the glass sets. One pair has sets which are a slightly darker orange than those of the other pair. All the glass sets of one pair are of the same colour (10R 5/10). The other pair has circular sets with a slightly different shade of orange (2.5YR 6/10) than the tear drop sets (2.5YR 6/14). Multi-component earrings containing cone-shaped silver pendants similar to those recovered from this burial were recovered from site 16R. One silver cone-shaped pendant was recovered from site 13R.

The absence of machine-cut nails from this burial suggests that it was most probably associated with either of sites 16R, 13R or 15R.

Burial Number 19

Type of Burial

Primary inhumation, lying on back, hands crossed over pelvic region, coffin burial, oriented slightly west of north with head towards north.

Condition

This burial was slightly disturbed by levelling activities (Figs. 32,34). The skull and several cervical vertebrae were displaced. Most of the ribs had broken under the weight of the overlying soils. All other bones were in situ.

The northeast corner of the coffin and grave were destroyed by levelling activities.

Sex

Female based on morphological features of the sacrum, pelvis and skull.

Age

Approximately 50 years of age. The third molars were in place and all teeth showed a great deal of wear. First sternobia and manubrium had fused indicating old age. An examination of the symphysis pubis indicated an age over 50.

Racial Affinity

Indian

Variations and Anomalies in the Skeleton

None noted

Grave

The grave was slightly larger than the coffin. The maximum width of the grave was 47 cm. The length was at least 1.2 m. The fill consisted of a compact, light brown clayey silt matrix mottled with flecks of white ash. The base was approximately 95 cm below surface.

Coffin

This coffin was somewhat rectangular in shape and was constructed of longitudinally sectioned spruce logs approximately 4 cm in thickness. It was apparent that the pit was lined with logs. Only two hand-wrought nails were recovered. These were found in the head and lower leg areas and may have been used to secure the lid. The overall length of the coffin was 1.1 m. The top width measured approximately 43 cm and the foot width 39 cm.

Artifact Association

Artifacts recovered from this burial include 41 glass beads, one bone button and two nails.

The glass beads (Fig. 33) include both drawn and wire-wound types. The drawn beads are faceted while the wire-wound beads are round. They are classified into six types as follows:

- 1f* faceted; large size;
 (7.5PB 2.5/4); 1 specimen.
 Diameter - 7.1 mm
 Length - 6.8 mm
- 111f* faceted; large size;
 bright Dutch blue (131a; 7.5PB 4/10) over
 opaque (2.5PB 7/6); 22 specimens.
- W1b* round; large size;
 (7.5PB 4/6); 11 specimens.
 Diameter Range - 6.1 mm to 7.7 mm
 Length Range - 5 mm to 6.6 mm

- Wlb* round; large size; opaque;
strong blue (13 1/2 ne; 5PB 3/8); 3 specimens
Diameter Range - 6.2 mm to 6.7 mm
Length Range - 5 mm to 5.1 mm
- Wlb* round; large size; opaque (7.5PB 2.5);
2 specimens.
Diameters - 6.2 mm
Lengths - 5.2 mm
- Wld* doughnut; large size; opaque; strong blue
(13 1/2 ne; 5PB 3/8); 2 specimens.
Diameter Range - 7.8 mm to 8.1 mm
Length Range - 3.5 mm to 4.9 mm

All of the bead types except Wlb* (7.5PB 2.5/10) are identical to beads recovered from site 15R (Steer, Rogers and Lutick 1979). None of the above six types are identical to beads recovered from either of the other Rocky Mountain House sites. The beads were recovered from the neck area and upper portion of the rib cage, suggesting that they formed part of a necklace.

One four-holed bone button (Fig. 33) has a convex back and a concave face with a rounded rim. It has a diameter of 14.6 mm. The button is identical to 46 specimens recovered from site 15R and nine specimens recovered from site 1R.

The two complete nails that were recovered are hand-wrought (Fig. 33). They have rose heads, sharp points and lengths of 7.5 cm. The absence of machine-cut nails from this burial indicates that it was most probably associated with either site 16R, 13R or 15R.

The combination of beads, buttons and nails recovered suggests that this individual was interred during the occupation of site 15R.

Summary and Conclusions

Archaeological investigations to date at the Seafort Burial Site have revealed 24 burials of which 26 individuals are represented. The individuals ranged from neonate to old age, the former being most prominent representing 38.5 per cent of the population. Both sexes were represented. Detailed analysis of skeletal remains, in particular, with regards to the remains found in 1969 and 1971, has indicated that both Indian and white were present. Individuals of mixed racial origin cannot be ruled out and considering the time period (fur trade era) is a distinct possibility.

There can be little doubt that the Seafort Burial Site contains individuals of disparate racial backgrounds, and, quite possibly amongst the Indians, of different tribal derivation. This phenomenon could reasonably be expected to have occurred in the "culture contact" situation at Rocky Mountain House....where Indian trappers from several tribes were trading at a post manned by Europeans (Skinner 1972: 127).

All the burials excavated in 1979 were interred in wooden coffins. The shapes of the coffins took on two forms, either rectangular or tapering towards the foot. Where identifiable, the taper appeared to be quite uniform. The coffins were constructed of either spruce or birch, or both, as was the case with Burial Number 17. In most cases the coffins were constructed of sawn lumber fastened with hand-wrought nails. However, in certain instances longitudinally sectioned logs were utilized. In the latter

case, two of the graves were lined (cribbed with the sectioned logs and not secured with nails.

The process of acculturation was quite in evidence at the Seafort Burial Site. This phenomenon was most evident with respect to religious values, patterns of dress and other material culture.

Primary inhumation in coffins is a standard European burial practice having significant and strong religious connotations. As nine of the eleven identified Indian individuals from the 1969 and 1971 investigations and all the Indian individuals from the 1979 excavations were buried in coffins it is strongly suggested that most, if not all, of these individuals had been Christianized to cause survivors to perform coffin burials. The presence of Christianity is further reinforced by the presence of brass crucifixes.

Euro-American artifacts and patterns of dress showed that the interred individuals were well entrenched in the ways of the traders. Caps, shirts, dresses, ribbons and other items were associated with the native burials. In addition standard trade items were common throughout the burials. These items included glass beads, earrings, bone combs, silver, buttons and other miscellaneous artifacts.

As noted earlier the Seafort Burial Site appears to date primarily to the first half of the 19th century. The large number of burials would tend to support the fact that the site was used as a graveyard for a long period of time. The above period is mainly supported by the artifact assemblage. The main of the artifact assemblage falls within the 1835-61 period, the occupation period for the Hudson's Bay Company Rocky Mountain House site 15R. However, later periods of occupation, 1864-68 and 1865-75, cannot be ruled out. It seems unlikely that the graveyard

was used after 1875, the last year of fort occupation in the area.

It would appear that the reference by Reverend Thomas Woolsey in 1857 to" ...one of the cities of the dead..." (See p. 8) was a comment regarding the Seafort Burial Site and that the graveyard was still being used at that time.

Probably one of the most noteworthy occurrences stemming from the 1979 excavations was the discovery of trade silver items (wrist bands and earrings) in Burial Number 17. By 1821 silver had almost disappeared from the trading system, and even prior to that time it was almost exclusively traded through the North West Company. As commented on previously the Robert Cruickshank silver wrist bands would date (manufacturing) to the 1779-1809 period. However, post-1809 use of the bands cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, the inference that Burial Number 17 was interred sometime between 1799 (first occupation of the area) and 1809, or at least pre-1835, cannot be eliminated from interpretative thought.

Table 1
Historic Site Designations, Rocky Mountain House
National Historic Park

Site <u>Name</u>	Period of <u>Operation/Use</u>	Parks Canada <u>Site Designation</u>	Borden <u>Site Designation</u>
NW Co. Rocky Mountain House	1799-1821	16R	FcPr-4
HB Co. Acton House/ HB Co. Rocky Mountain House	1799-1821 1821-35	13R	FcPr-1
HB Co. Rocky Mountain House	1835-61	15R	FcPr-3
HB Co. Rocky Mountain House	1865-75	1R	FcPr-2
Seafort Burial Site	ca. 1799 - ca. 1861	17R	FcPr-7

Table 3
Probable Site Associations and Interment Dates for
Seafort Burials Numbers 13 Through 24

<u>Burial</u> <u>Number</u>	<u>Probable Site Association and Interment Date</u>
13	16R, 13R or 15R (1799-1861)
14	15R (1835-61)
15	15R (1835-61)
16	-
17	16R (1799-1821)
18	16R, 13R or 15R (1799-1861)
19	15R (1835-61)
20	15R (1835-61)
21	15R (1835-61)
22	15R, 1864-68 fort, or early years of fort at site 1R. (1835-1868?)
23	16R, 13R or 15R (1799-1861), probably 15R (1835-61)
24	15R (1835-61)

32 Burial Number 19. Skull, mandible and upper vertebrae were disturbed during clearing operations.

33 Glass beads and hand-wrought nails from Burial Number 19

a	Bead Type 1f*	(17R19A1-2)
b	Beads Type 111f*	(17R19A1-1)
c	Beads Type W1b*	(17R19A1-3)
d	Beads Type W1b*	(17R19A1-4)
e	Beads Type W1b*	(17R19A1-5)
f	Beads Type W1d*	(17R19A1-6)
g	Bone button	(17R19A1-7)
h	Hand wrought nails	(17R19A1-8,9)

