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Exploring the Archaeological and Geographical Past of Fort Spokane: A Proposal

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Background

Fort Spokane was built in 1880 by the US Military just east of the Columbia and Spokane River confluence (Riser and DePuydt 2012). The Fort was occupied by the US Military until 1898, three years after the construction of Fort George Wright, located closer to Spokane City. After the US Military ceased operations, Fort Spokane became a boarding school for the local Native American children, run by the Colville Indian Agency. In total there were 30 permanent buildings, including barracks, guard houses, a schoolroom, ice house, and a two-storied administrative building (Riser and DePuydt 2012).

Fort Spokane was incorporated into the National Parks Service in 1960. At this time, only four of the original 30 buildings were still standing (Gilbert 1985). Since the 1950s, there has been a handful of archaeological excavations done at the site, several of which were archived at Eastern Washington University's library. The last recorded excavation undertaken at the fort was in 2000, and focused on an area near the historical boundary of the Fort, but not within (Riser and DePuydt 2012).

Although there has been numerous investigations at the fort, key questions remain on the significance of the Fort's Location, the social status of the fort's inhabitants, and how the fort structured relationships with the local indigenous communities. The focus of this project will be to address those questions and to open the door for a new archaeological chapter for Fort Spokane.



Soldiers standing in front of barracks. Fort Spokane was built and operated by the U.S. Army in 1880. (NPS historic photo)

Research Questions

1. What is the significance of Fort Spokane's location?
 - a. What advantages did the military have for placing the Fort at a river confluence, and how did that dictate its development?
 - b. After it was abandoned, what impacts to the fort and its environs have shaped our understanding of its archaeological and cultural significance?
2. Can visibility analysis combined with legacy datasets of previous excavations help us better understand the importance of the fort's spatial location in shaping sociocultural interactions between the US Military, Native American tribal groups, and Euroamerican settlers?
3. The fort today is an attraction for the National Park Service as part of the Lake Roosevelt National Scenic Area. How can a reanalysis of the Fort and its significance, using modern methodological and theoretical approaches aid in the mission of public interpretation and access?

Methods

This project will be using several methods in order to explore and capture the full scope of Fort Spokane's past.

1. The site will be explored using methods and theories developed by Landscape Archaeologists such as Matthew Johnson, Chris Tilley, and Mark Gillings.
2. Using spatial analysis, viewsheds, geodatabases and elevation models to explore the geographical location around the greater Fort Spokane area. Application of ArcGIS will be used to catalogue and analyze the data.
3. Expanding on the already existing knowledge Fort Spokane has and presenting it in a way that can be utilized by the National Parks Service and applied to tourist guidance using the area of Public Archaeology as a base.



Old Fort Spokane in 1880's, credit to washingtonruralheritage.org for the photo.



Confluence of the Columbia and Spokane River near Fort Spokane (washingtonruralheritage.org)

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Proposal

This project is still in the early stages of development. This poster is meant as a proposal and objectives, questions, methods, and materials are subject to change as the project develops. All images on this poster are credit either to the National Parks Service, or the Washington Rural Heritage archives.

