

1) This presentation discusses archaeological investigations conducted by the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist in 2011 investigating Fraeb's Post in southern Wyoming. Henry Fraeb was a fur trapper and trader working in Wyoming and Colorado during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historical accounts mention a Fraeb's Post in southern Wyoming, dating to the early 1840s. However, our current understanding of fur trading activities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggest that constructing a post in this area, during this time, would have been unusual. So to further investigate this, archaeological survey and dendochronological studies were conducted.

2) This work is an outgrowth of a larger project conducted by this author. I was working on the development of a Multiple Property Document for the National Register of Historic Places. This document was part of a larger initiative spearheaded by the Planning and Historic Context Development Program within the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to increase the number of nominations of archaeological sites to the National Register of Historic Places. The Multiple Property Document I worked on examined 19<sup>th</sup> century trading posts in Wyoming.

Wyoming's fur trading posts were involved in a number of significant historical developments in the West including the exploration of the region, the establishment and maintenance of trade relationships with tribal groups in the area, the facilitation of westward emigration, and the development of a local transportation and communication infrastructure. Due to the connection of the posts to these important historical developments it was determined that trading posts in general culturally significant and should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Multiple Property Document was created to provide guidance to individuals seeking to list a trading post on the Register.

3) This research identified at least twenty nine 19<sup>th</sup> century trading posts in Wyoming in addition to the references to Fraeb's Post. While at first Fraeb's Post was considered to have been a functioning 19<sup>th</sup> century post, when compared to our current understanding of 19<sup>th</sup> century fur trading activities this designation came into question. The location and timing of the post's construction were considered unusual. Many of the trading posts constructed in Wyoming during this period were located on the region's major waterways and trails systems, for the purpose of capturing the burgeoning emigrant trade. The 1830s and 1840s saw a transition from an economic model focused primarily in engaging Native Americans in exchange to one which began to include passing Euroamerican emigrants and travelers. The construction of a post in southern Carbon County at the end of the 1830s would have been at odds with this developing economic model, calling into question the nature of activities at this site. For this reason historical and archaeological investigations were conducted so as to gain better insight as to the nature of Fraeb's trading activities during the 1840s.

4) We began with a review of historic documents regarding Henry Fraeb. Very little was known about his early life, the earliest reference located came from 1829. By 1829 Fraeb was already working in the Rocky Mountains and by 1830 he was part owner of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. After the sale of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1834 Fraeb continued to trap in the West returning to St. Louis in 1835-1836. By 1837 he was partnered with Peter Sarpy and operated Fort Jackson on the Southern Platte in Colorado. The post was sold in 1838 and Fraeb again returned to St. Louis. Fraeb partnered with Jim Bridger in 1840 for the purpose of

transporting supplies to the Rendezvous for sale to the trappers and tribes. After the Rendezvous he left to trade in California, returning to the Green River region in July of 1841 to meet back up with Bridger who was busy constructing a post for the partnership between the mouths of Big Sandy and Black's Fork. Fraeb left the Green river region and headed south toward the Yampa River in Colorado to hunt buffalo. What exactly happened after they traveled southeast is not entirely clear, but Henry Fraeb never returned to finish building his trading post with Jim Bridger. Rather, accounts tell of a battle with local tribes in the Little Snake River Valley which led to Fraeb's death.

5) Chronicling Fraeb's movements during the 1830s and 1840s indicate that he was likely familiar with the Little Snake River Valley, and indeed was there in 1841. However, none suggest that he was operating a functional trading post in the area. Still, contemporary documents mention the presence of a post or fort in the area associated with Fraeb. So we turned to the historic documents to provide some clarity.

Rufus Sage wrote in *Scenes from the Rocky Mountain Mountains* in 1846 that they "passed a fort, formerly occupied by a company of trappers under the command of Frapp [Fraeb], near which himself and four other whites were killed".

Basil Clement, a participant in the fight which killed Fraeb, recounted the battle of 1841 some 60 years later saying "We had a fight with the Sioux and Cheyennes there. Old Frapp [Fraeb] was killed there, he was one of the three partners. We went there (from Black's Creek) on a buffalo hunt to make jerked meat. We got meat of the Sioux and Cheyennes, with 47 men. After we had plenty of meat they made a dash for us. We defended ourselves. That was in the morning about 8 o'clock. This was about July, some time in early July. We fought them from the morning about 8 o'clock until dark. They killed 10 of our men, and killed 110 head of horses that belonged to us; and of the 45 head of horses alive there was only five not wounded. All that we had to protect us was the dead horses, we made a fort of them."

Jim Baker recounted the battle in the 1880s. "we camped on the very creek where I live now – Snake River we called it then – and there we had a lively fight with a party of about 500 Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes." He also is recorded as saying that "It was the hardest battle I was ever in. It was not on that mountain [Battle Mountain], but down in the valley at the mouth of Battle Creek at its junction with the Snake. I can show you some of the rifle pits there yet. The whites with their allies, the Snakes, were fortified at that point."

In 1850, Bridger told Howard Stansbury that Fraeb and his party "were encamped about 2 hours from where we then were, with their squaw partners and a party of indians. Most of the men were absent hunting buffalo, a band of 500 Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho....Fraeb had about 40 men; but they instantly 'forted' in the corral attached to the trading post, and stood their defense."

Three of these reports come from individuals who were there, although the interviews came many years after the battle. One came from Bridger, Fraeb's partner who was not there. There is no agreement in these references as to the nature of a trading post. However, three mentioned

fortifications of some type, one referencing an actual fort, and another distinctly describing a trading post.

6) While the historical documents were unclear as to the nature of a 19<sup>th</sup> century structure in the Little Snake River Valley associated with Henry Fraeb, they did provide useful information. Historical references allow for the identification of two locational attributes that may help us find either the trading post, if it exists, and/or the battlefield. Landmark references in the contemporary texts place the battle and possible associated trading post in the Little Snake River Drainage at the foot of Squaw Mountain. Using this locational data we were able to narrow the location of the possible post to a 2 square mile area of the Little Snake valley in the vicinity of the mouth of Battle Creek.

7) Using the locational attributes from the historic documents we conducted a simple reconnaissance survey in the spring of 2011. The survey focused on portions of the Little Snake River Valley drainage near the mouth of Battle Creek. Investigators walked the riverbottom and T1 terraces searching for archaeological materials. On close examination of the area, including exposed cutbanks failed to yield positive data. Field investigations and conversations with local property owner revealed that much of terrace portions in the vicinity had been plowed for agricultural use. However, it was clear from the survey that some of the area remained undeveloped and there were intact sediments capable of containing insitu archaeological materials.

8) This preliminary reconnaissance investigation of the region identified terraces, or portions of terraces, which could contain archaeological remains from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Still the survey area was large and the active nature of the river valley raised the question as to whether remains from the Fraeb encounter remained intact. In an effort to further narrow down the search field a dendrochronological study was conducted in the fall of 2011.

9) The purpose of this study was to identify terrace portions that would be old enough to contain 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeological deposits. The dendrochronological study focused on terrace portions north of the Little Snake River. Using a 40 cm coring bit cores were extracted from the largest trees on the terrace at 50 to 100 meter intervals. Areas with dense tree growth were sampled every 50 meters while terrace portions with sparser growth were sampled approximately every 100 meters. The target age for cottonwood cores was 170 years in order to locate one dating to construction of Fraeb's post or defensive site.

10) A total of 10 tree cores were extracted. Lab analysis indicated that the cores represented between 91 and 131 years of tree growth. Unfortunately, when comparing tree widths and core lengths it became clear that we had only sampled between  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the actual tree radius. This suggested that should the center of each tree been reached, the coring would have returned older dates. Samples were limited by the extremely large size of the trees, the thickness of the bark in some cases was up to seven cm, and the length of our coring tool. A regression curve capable of extrapolating estimated tree ages was generated. This work showed that trees sampled in this study ranged in age from 100 to 200 years, suggesting that there are in fact stable terrace portions in the study area which date to the Fraeb encounter.

11) Tree ring data was combined with satellite imagery to identify terrace portions which are eroding and aggrading. This work serves to inform future investigations in the area by helping to identify sections of the landscape which may be at risk, to now contain 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeological deposits, or contemporary to the Fraeb battle. As you can see from the map there are significant terrace portions which are not only stable, but also have the possibility of containing undisturbed sediments dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century or before.

12) To date archaeological investigations have not uncovered any materials or features related to the Fraeb battle and possible post. Still, as work has shown that there are portions of these terraces that are old enough to contain the post the possibility remains that this evidence exists. Moving forward there are several techniques which could be employed to find the battle site and post. First, intensive additional survey should be conducted. The southern terrace has seen less investigation, as have areas to the east and west of the survey area. Work in these regions may yield positive results. Geophysical testing and shovel/auger probes could also prove useful.

13) While, based on historical trends, it is unlikely that a fully functioning trading post was located in the Little Snake River Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this does not preclude the presence of some other type of structure. Henry Fraeb was familiar with the region and may have been trapped in the area for years. It is possible that a cabin or other structure was present and was used by Fraeb when he visited the valley. It is also possible that an expedient structure was established to defend against the pending attack. Regardless of the true nature of a "trading post" in the valley, archaeological investigations have shown that archaeological deposits from the 19<sup>th</sup> century could be present.