



# The Selkirk College Sacred Places Plan

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## Abstract

The Sacred Places Plan seeks to define and develop a criteria for the evaluation of the sacred as it relates to the Selkirk College Castlegar Campus. Using factors such as water, trees, mountains, landscapes, ecological resources and cultural legacy, the Plan builds a case for the College grounds as a sacred place. It goes on to develop recommendations for how the sacred aspect of the College could be translated into the hearts and minds of those men and women who make decisions that will affect the future of the College and the sacred lands on which it is situated.

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# THE SELKIRK COLLEGE MASTER PLAN

## The Mission

**...to promote environmental  
stewardship and integrate  
educational opportunities through  
responsible development and  
preservation of land and community.**



## Goals & Objectives

As a component of the Selkirk College Master Plan, the Sacred Places Plan is being developed to inform and guide Selkirk College's operations and expansion process. Therefore the goal of this plan is as follows:

### ***Goal***

The goal of the Sacred Places Plan is to aid in the development of a deeper relationship and connection between the College, the surrounding community, and the land and water.

### ***Objectives***

Three objectives have been developed in order to help facilitate this goal.

#### ***Objective 1:***

Review traditional methods of evaluation/assessment of the land and introduce new criteria for the inclusion of the concept of 'sacredness.'

#### ***Objective 2:***

Instill a sense of the sacred into the decision making process surrounding the future of the College grounds.

#### ***Objective 3:***

Institutionalize the sacred concept in the College and promote it to the community.

## Part I: An Introduction to Selkirk College's Castlegar Campus

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The land on which Selkirk College has been constructed is a unique formation imbued with millennia of social, cultural and hydro-geologic significance. Situated as it is above the confluence of two great rivers, the College grounds occupy the center of a vast meeting place of mountains, valleys, water, weather, sky, wildlife and human movement. It is a fertile plateau infused with the spirit of the Lakes' people -- an ancient but forgotten nation. It is also the silent and ever-watchful observer of the ceaseless flow of the mighty Columbia and Kootenay Rivers, which have been greatly restricted by the posturing of men, but never beaten.

In many ways, the College grounds speak of a history of domination, control, and conquering. The First Peoples who used these fertile valleys and life-giving waters were forced out by the politics and greed of men from far off countries. These men came to strip the resources from above and below the earth, bringing with them disease and intolerance. Later, the rivers themselves were dammed and diverted, flooding the fertile valleys and erasing evidence of their ancient inhabitants while forcing out those that followed. But the genocide of the Lakes' people was not complete, and they have begun to return, seeking reconnection with the land. Even the grossly manipulated waters now speak to us of the power of nature's systems and cycles, reminding us that our grand achievements in engineering were shortsighted and ultimately destructive.

In spite of it all, however, the land here continues to reveal and highlight the intense natural beauty of this meeting place - this confluence. This place not only serves as a reminder of the events of the past, but also exists to provide the renewal of spirit and perspective inherent in the water, the rocks, the soil, and the human legacy. Selkirk College stands in a unique position as the guardians of this land, to highlight and enhance this function of renewal, which is becoming more necessary as technological trends increasingly remove us from the natural landscape, severing ties to the land and disconnecting us from the foundations upon which we stand. In the process of planning for the future of this land and the possible development of it for economic or educational purposes, the College must incorporate the concept of the sacred into the evaluation and assessment of its value. As a component of the overall Master Plan for the College, Endymion Environmental Consulting hopes that the following assessment and plan regarding the nature of the Selkirk College grounds as a sacred place will guide the men and women who control the fate of this land.

## Part II: The Concept of 'Sacredness'

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### ***Defining 'the sacred'***

The sacred can be defined as 'that which is the object of veneration and awe'. The term comes from the Latin word *sacer* meaning 'restricted' or 'set apart'. Throughout history, the term sacred has been applied to people, objects, buildings and places/landscapes that have held special and significant meaning for human populations/communities and are regarded as extraordinary or unique, often within a religious or otherwise spiritual context.

For the purposes of this document and the following discussion of the sacred, however, we must divorce it from the closely related concept of the 'holy' or 'numinous'. In putting forth the concept of the sacred aspect of the College grounds, we must be careful not to arbitrarily invest any additional meaning that cannot simply be claimed, but rather must be earned or acquired, usually after many decades or centuries of religious or spiritual devotion/veneration. We must not fall into the presumptive co-opting of the language and intent of legitimate spiritual communities (such as First Nations groups) if we are to maintain and establish the legitimacy of this planning process.

We will therefore restrict the concept of the sacred to its literal meaning as ***that which is awe-inspiring or set-apart or unique*** and will let individuals assess whether this involves any spiritual significance for themselves rather than imposing it upon them or assuming it for ourselves as an educational community and place. As an example, within this definition it can be seen that places such as National and Provincial Parks are imbued with a sense of the sacred for they are literally 'set apart' and are awe-inspiring and thus fill an important role in the modern world of providing places for us as a world community and as a species to reconnect with the land.



## ***Developing a Criteria***

Establishing a framework for the assessment of sacredness is not an easy task. It necessitates a significant subjective investment by the author and therefore should be done in consultation with a wide range of potentially affected interests and other people or organizations interested or invested in the subject. For the purposes of this document and in keeping with the scope of the present project (the Selkirk College Master Plan), the criteria for assessing sacredness will follow the general layout of that established by Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, who is a Professor of Art History at Sweet Briar College in Virginia, USA. Through extensive research and personal experience with places deemed or claimed to be sacred by various cultures all over the world, Professor Witcombe has concluded that the sacredness of a place is generally linked to the arrangement and/or presence of natural objects and features. He lists "trees, stones, water, mountains, caves, and forms in the landscape" as the most dominant physical features to contribute to the notion of the sacred. Of course, human activity on and with the landscape must also be included, for it is only the presence and actions of humans in community and the significance they attach to a landscape that allows for any notion of sacredness to be elucidated.

"One of my aims is to explore how and why places become invested with sacredness. In most cases, it can be shown that the sacredness of a place is linked in some way to natural objects and features such trees, stones, water, mountains, caves, and forms in the landscape."

*»Christopher L.C.E.  
Witcombe*

## Part III: The Existing Situation

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The Sacred Places Plan hopes to address both a problem and an opportunity.

### ***The Problem***

The problem as identified by Endymion Environmental Consulting involves traditional methods of assessment and evaluation of land and resources. This traditional method takes into account a variety of objective economic criteria including property values, infrastructure, access, services, and all of the tangible externals of a place.

However the total value a place is much more than just the sum of its parts.

This can be best explained using an example from the field of environmental economics and the analysis of true costs. Traditional methods of cost-analysis include the obvious internal costs such as those of production, transportation, overhead, waste disposal, etc. However, the true cost of a product or service also includes the costs that are external to the production, such as the environmental consequences of emissions, the degrading of environments for infrastructure, the health and social costs associated with a product or its byproducts throughout its entire life cycle. Here we can see that other factors must be considered in order to get an accurate picture of a cost-analysis.

In the same way, an analysis of the value of land and its resources, of position, place and function must include other factors beyond the traditional methods of evaluation. Factors that to some may seem somewhat intangible or subjective are increasingly valid and necessary.

This plan has been developed to evaluate, advocate and educate for the inclusion of the concept of the sacred into the assessment process as part of the solution to the problem of traditional evaluation methodologies.

### ***The Opportunity***

Selkirk College has before it an incredible opportunity to enhance and promote the sacred aspect of this land by including it in the decision making process and allowing it to guide and direct the direction that the Master Plan will take the College in the future.



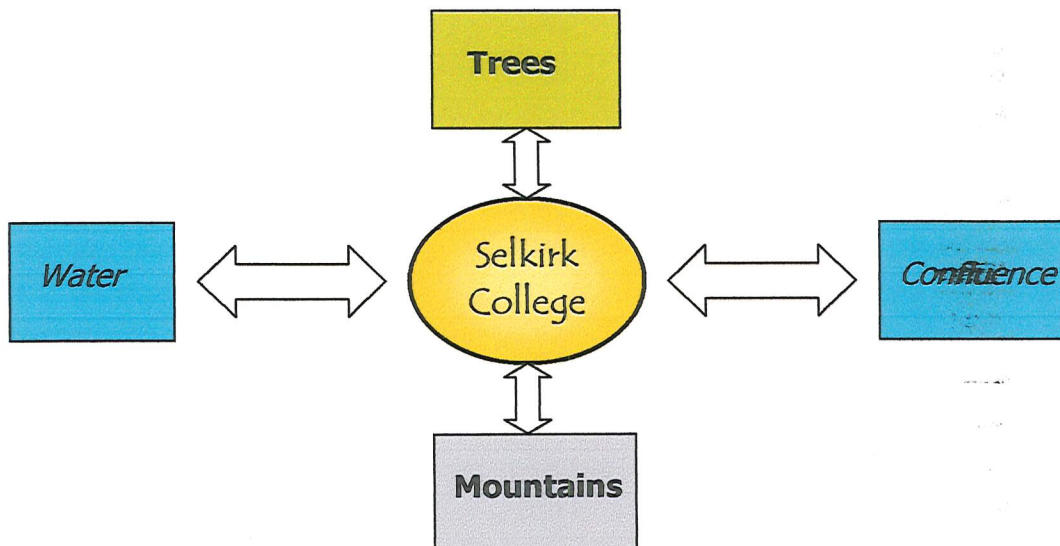
## Part IV: The College as a Sacred Place

In the truest sense of the word, no plan, firm, board or administrative body can claim sacredness for itself. Sacredness develops over time based on cultural and religious/spiritual significance and experience. However, a rough evaluation and assessment of that which contributes to the sacred can be applied to any place or situation, especially as defined above to mean simply that which is unique and awe-inspiring.



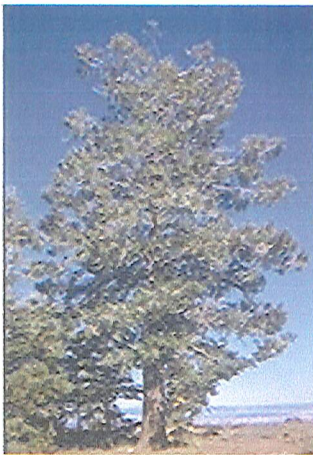
As discussed in the Introduction, the land on which Selkirk College sits is a unique and wonderful place. It occupies the center of a swirl of organic and inorganic activity and stands as the silent observer over it all. When viewed from above the College grounds stand out as the visual center of activity – a focal point for the convergence of mountains, valleys, and rivers.

If we even loosely apply the criteria developed using Professor Witcombe's research and experience it becomes obvious that the College grounds fit the description.



## Water

The College sits overlooking the confluence of two of the largest and most powerful rivers in western North America. The Columbia River Basin, which includes the Kootenay River, is North America's fourth largest basin, draining about 250,000 square miles and extending throughout the entire Pacific Northwest in four US states and the Southwest of one Canadian province.



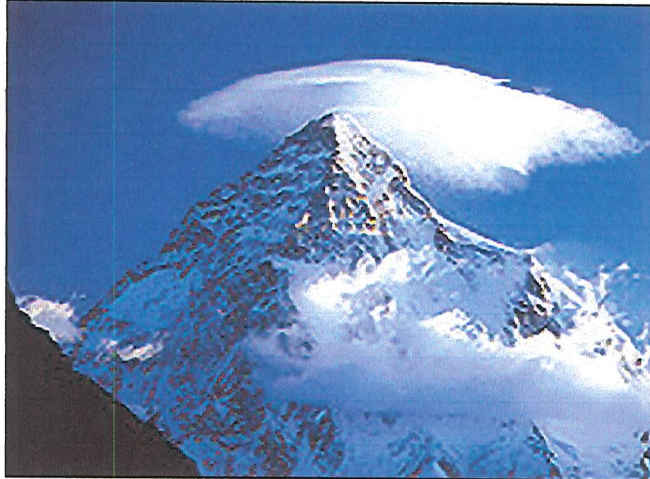
## Trees

The College occupies the center of converging valleys that contain some of the richest forest ecosystems in the world. The diversity of species found here is rivaled only by the tropical and coastal temperate rainforests. And the grounds themselves are richly forested and diverse, with numerous eco-sites that support diverse tree communities.



## ***Mountains***

Geologic formations also converge upon this place. Mountain ranges such as the Bonningtons, the Valhallas, the Norns, the Selkirks and Monashees all meet at this confluence due to the multi-millennium long action of glaciers, rivers, and the movement of the earth's crust.

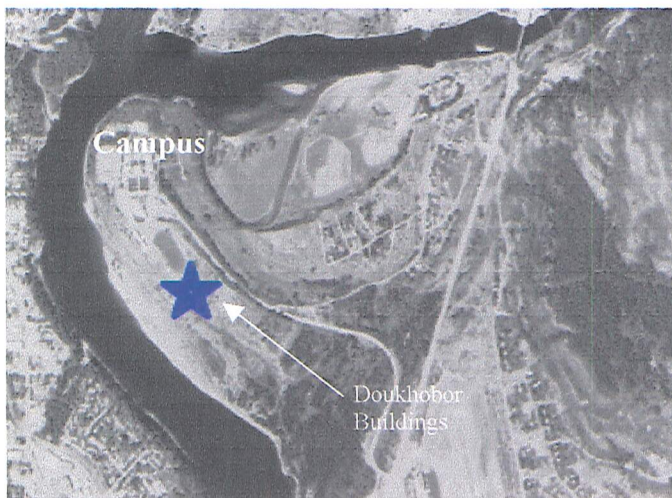


## ***Valleys***

The Columbia River valley meets the Kootenay River valley here, joining to become the Columbia River Valley that extends south to the Pacific Ocean at Portland, Oregon, USA.

## ***Human Legacy***

Little known and well-guarded evidence of the area's ancient inhabitants exists on the College grounds in the form of pit houses/kekuli (see Appendix I). These archaeological sites are a crucial piece in the puzzle of human occupation on this land. They also provide important cultural resources for Selkirk College that have the possibility to be utilized for educational objectives. It has been claimed that in addition to occupation and use of the land, there was a Sinixt Nation burial ground in the College grounds that was plowed into extinction by the agricultural activities of the Doukhobors. If this were true, the sacred aspect of the land would become increasingly legitimized. What we do know, however, is that the Sinixt (or Lakes') People lived here and used this land and the confluence of the rivers to sustain themselves for many thousands of years. Later came the Doukhobor settlers, who were spiritual refugees from a far off continent (Asia). They too chose this land to live on and sustain them, driving off the Sinixt who by that time were a fragmented and unhealthy population due to viral epidemics and mass migrations to the Colville Reservation in Northern Idaho. But the needs and pressures of an outside world would slowly pressure the Doukhobors as well, and eventually began to drive them off and fracture their traditional agrarian way of life as a spiritual community.



As with the Sinixt pit houses, the Doukhobor heritage is still present on the College grounds in the form of buildings and orchards left by the last residents on the plateau above Frank Beinder Way at the entrance to the College. These structures also provide a very important cultural resource for the College, especially as they are so closely situated to the Doukhobor museum directly adjacent to the South on Highway 3.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that the two main cultural legacies of occupation on this land (Sinixt and Doukhobor) prior to Selkirk College being established were highly spiritual communities.



## Part V: Putting the Pieces Together

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Viewed independently of one another, each piece of the sacred puzzle may not contribute to any special realization or discovery. However, when the combined weight of all the pieces are brought together and viewed as one picture, it becomes evident that the Selkirk College grounds has within it a special ecological significance and cultural legacy that contribute to the development of the concept of sacredness. There are significant cultural resources here that have left an enduring legacy on the land. There are also significant ecological and hydro-geologic features here that lend to the land's unique position as a center and as a silent observer over the passage of time and change.

### ***So, Now What?***

It is not enough to simply say the words, that the College grounds are a sacred place. Words alone will not transmute a sense of the sacred into the hearts and minds of those people in positions of power at the College or in the broader community. In order to realize the goals and objectives of this plan, which are in essence to incorporate a sense of the sacred into the decision-making processes surrounding the College, some action must be taken.

### ***Action Steps/Recommendations***

Endymion Environmental Consulting has developed three recommendations to be implemented as action steps toward the furtherance of the goal of the Sacred Places Plan.

#### ***In Brief***

##### Recommendation #1:

That a *Sacred Places Workshop* be held at the Castlegar Campus of Selkirk College. Participants would include all administrators, faculty, staff, and community partners of the College who were able to attend. The workshop would seek to establish a sense of the sacred aspect of the College grounds in the participants.

##### Recommendation #2:

That the administration of Selkirk College builds in a 'sacred protocol' into their decision-making process and strategic planning.



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### Recommendation #3:

That steps be taken to promote and/or enhance the sacred aspect of the College grounds in the form of public education displays.

### *In Detail*

#### Recommendation #1: The Sacred Places Session

To be held over two days during the summer off-season, the Sacred Places Session would provide participants with multiple opportunities to gain a sense of connection with the land and come to see College grounds as the unique and sacred place that it is through participation in interactive workshops.

#### **Possible Workshops**

1. *Defining the Sacred* → following the general guidelines set out by the Sacred Places Plan, a detailed discussion and exploration of what constitutes the sacred will be facilitated with multiple examples and opportunities for personal input from the participants. This session will help set the tone for the duration of the workshop.
2. *Campus Nature Walk* → a guided nature walk around the entire College grounds would provide first hand knowledge and experience of the unique ecological and cultural resources of the property. Time would be spent at both the Sinixt and Doukhobor cultural resource sites (as previously identified) with brief anthropological and archaeological discussions. Most of the time, however, would be spent identifying natural beauty and unique position of the grounds as a confluence of rivers, mountains, valleys, weather, and human interaction.
3. *Dove Hill Excursion* → participants would hike up to the top of Dove Hill in order to view the position of the College in relation to the town of Castlegar and the surrounding hydro-geologic features.
4. *Natural History* → to be conducted by Leslie Anderton, this session would provide a brief overview of the geologic processes that shaped the College grounds and the surrounding area.
5. *First Nations Cultural Legacy* → to be conducted by Marilyn James or another representative of the Sinixt First Nation, this session would provide a sketch of the First People's relationship to the land, in terms of their use and occupation of it as well as its spiritual significance to them.
6. *Doukhobor Cultural Legacy* → to be conducted by a representative of the Doukhobor community, this session would provide a sketch of the Doukhobor

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occupation of the land and their culture. This could include a visit to the adjacent Doukhobor Museum.

7. *The College as a Sacred Place* → following the conclusions reached by the development of the Sacred Places Plan, a discussion will be held on the sacred aspects the College grounds and how that may influence the future direction of planning and decision making for the College.
8. *Wrap-up* → a summary session will be held to review all that learned over the two-day period, with recommendations for how to take that knowledge back to the office and allow the concept of the sacred to infiltrate all aspects of work with and on the College (especially as relates to future development).

### Recommendation #2: A Sacred Protocol

In order to directly influence the decision-making process of the College administrators and other power brokers, some protocol must be built in to the very fabric of the process. Endymion Environmental Consulting suggests that a protocol of checks and balances be developed (if one does not already exist) that ensures adequate planning and consideration has gone into all major decisions. A major decision would be all decisions regarding new infrastructure development or the granting of leases, licenses, or legal permissions for use of the land by an outside party. Essentially, the protocol would involve running through a checklist of key factors that should be considered prior to the granting of any contracts or permission that could permanently alter the physical landscape or the nature of the College. One such step on the protocol check list would involve a consideration of the sacred aspect of the College grounds, and could read something like:

*>> Does the implementation of the proposed change, permission, or development interfere with present or future opportunities to promote, enhance, or develop the unique cultural or ecological features of the College grounds (as relates to the Sacred Places Plan)?*

While decisions will be made largely for other reasons, primarily those involving economic or practical realities, the inclusion of such a stage in the process would at the least ensure that some consideration was made, or some thought given, to the consequences of major decisions on those aspects of the College that contribute to a sense of the sacred.

### Recommendation #3: Promotion and Enhancement Steps

This recommendation speaks directly to the third objective of the Sacred Places Plan, which is 'to promote the sacred concept to the College and the community.' There are many options that could be pursued in order to carry out this objective. Endymion Environmental Consulting has focused in on just a few that appear to be most reasonable and most attainable.



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1. *Signage* → interpretive signs should be created and placed in key areas such as trail heads, view points, ecologically significant areas, and culturally significant areas (pit houses and Doukhobor buildings) in order to draw the attention of casual users of the College grounds to those aspects of the College that have been identified as unique and/or significant.
2. *Development of Visual Resources* → the College stands at an incredible viewpoint above the confluence, as well as toward the Lion's Head rock formation, Mt. Sentinel, the Arrow Lakes Valley, and all of the surrounding forests and mountains. Much could be done to accentuate and highlight the visual resources of the College for students, faculty, and visitors. This aspect is being dealt with in other plans being submitted, so we suggest Tyler Solomon's plan be looked at for further clarification.
3. *Development and Protection of Cultural Resources* → further plans could be commissioned to investigate and advise on the development and protection of the cultural resources previously identified. Of key interest is the possibility that Sinixt burial grounds may have been located somewhere on the College property. This possibility has strong implications for heritage values, cultural values, sacred values, and special significance. It is strongly recommended that the College work closely with the Sinixt Nation in establishing any plan to develop these resources (see #4 below).
4. *Reconciliation Ceremony* → due to the unique cultural legacy of the land, it has been deemed appropriate for some reconciliation ceremony to be held that will recognize the history of the land. The three generations of occupation (Selkirk College, Doukhobor, Sinixt) need to come together and publicly recognize what has taken place on this land. Most likely there is some healing and reconciliation that needs to take place, and this can only happen in a legitimate public forum. The ceremony should be open to the public and the media.

## Part VI: Conclusion and Summary

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The Selkirk College Sacred Places Plan has been a preliminary investigation into the evaluation of the concept of the sacred and how that may apply to the College grounds of the Castlegar Campus. It was found that many aspects of the College's physical position and cultural legacy contribute to the assignment of sacred values to the land. This conclusion led to the formation of recommendations on how to bring the concept of the sacred into the decision-making process surrounding the future of the College and any possible development that may occur here. It was recommended that:

- a *Sacred Places Workshop* be held at the Castlegar Campus of Selkirk College in order to establish a sense of the sacred aspect of the College grounds in the participants,
- the administration of Selkirk College build in a 'sacred protocol' into their decision-making process and strategic planning, and
- steps are taken to promote and/or enhance the sacred aspect of the College grounds in the form of public education.

Some suggestions were provided on how these recommendations may be carried out in order to fulfill the objectives of the Sacred Places Plan (see Part V above).

It is the hope of Endymion Environmental Consulting that this plan be incorporated into the collection that will be part of the Selkirk College Master Plan and that in so doing the sacred values of this land and of this sense of place will be preserved.

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Appendix I: British Columbia Archaeological Site  
Inventory Form

PLEASE CONSULT ACCOMPANYING GUIDE BEFORE COMPLETING

1. Site No. .... Dhqj 11

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHÆOLOGICAL SITE INVENTORY FORM

2. Previous designation(s) .... 77Cg 8

3. Site name(s) .....

4. Location (a) Sec. .... Lot .... Plan .....

(b) ... On the peninsular tip of the second terrace above the Columbia River, on the east side of the river on the north west margin of the south end of an old channel of the Columbia River, ca. 0.75 km N of the Hwy 3A Columbia R. bridge and ca. 550 m due west of the Selkirk College - Airport crossroads on Hwy 3A.

5. Access Same as for 77Cg 7, proceed south along western terrace margin until fine sediments are observed. Cultural deposit is within these fine sediments.

6. Province and districts .... B.C. (a) Regional District .... Central Kootenay

(b) Forest and Grazing District Nelson (c) Highways District .... 3 Rossland

(d) Provincial Park 3-1 W Kootenay (e) Resource Management Region Kootenay

7. Lat. 49 ° 17 ' 57 " N. 8. Long. 117 ° 38 ' 30 " W. 9. UTM IIUME

10. Air photo .... B.C. 7465 071-72 11. Map (a) Castlegar 82F/5 Ed. 2

(b) RDCK Zoning Map Z-C82F/5 - 18S

12. Drainage (a) minor .... (b) major .... 4

13. Elevation (a) .... 1420' ASL (b) ....

14. Cultural affiliation (a) Lakes Salish (b) ....

15. Site type general activity - campsite - possible circular cultural depression

16. Dimensions (a) exact .... (b) estimated 25m dia. + (larger if area of pit is included)

(c) original .....

17. Condition (a) present .... 90% (b) future rodent activity, deterioration, development

18. Priority .....

detailed information (a) vegetation on site grass, hazel, pine, saskatoon, bracken

(b) major vegetation Columbia Forest - Interior Western Hemlock

(c) cultural matrix cluster of fire broken rock

(d) depth of cultural matrix (e) non-cultural matrix  
aeolian tan sand - very weak soil development

20. Known finds and present location  
cluster of fire broken rock eroding out of western terrace margin.

21. Photo record

22. Published and unpublished references (a)

(b)

23. Site age and (or) date (a) ☐ absolute ☐ relative

(b) Source

24. Owner/Tenant

(a) Informant

(b) Observed by W. Choquette 10/8/77

(c) Recorded by W. Choquette 20/8/77

(d) Revisited by

~~Non-cultural pits in vicinity may be historic, or non-cultural. These should~~  
be tested to determine if they are prehistoric aboriginal cache pits or

dwelling pits. Some, but not all appear recent (i.e. historic, probably



Map Form

Site No. 100-000000

College

occupied  
Dukhobor  
settlementgravel bar  
(probably  
was site before  
stripping of fine  
sediments by  
1948 flood)

Columbia R.

hearth  
eroding  
from terrace  
margin

West Kentucky Power line

old channel

to  
Dukhobor  
MuseumHwy  
3A

BUILDING

FOUNDATION

ROAD

RIVER/CREEK

RAIL

HIGHWAY

DITCH

STREET LIGHT

WATER TOWER

## ADDITIONAL LEGEND

+ Selkirk College Landuse plan have placed a  
black PVC pipe in rock mound as marker  
This lies adjacent to the depressions. W. H. Bell  
Oct '86

MAP

DEC.

LAT.

LONG.

UTM GRID

SCALE:

1 in. = 500 ft

0

270

90

180

(4)

Doukhabor). If some are found to be prehistoric, sites 77Cg.7 and 77Cg.8 can be subsumed as a single site. If the depressions are non-aboriginal the two sites are separate.