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## Review of *In Search of Ancient Alberta* by Barbara Huck and Doug Whiteway

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**In Search of Ancient Alberta.** Barbara Huck and Doug Whiteway. Winnipeg: Heartland Publications, 1998. 287 pp. Photos and illustrations. C\$24.95 paper (ISBN 1-896150-00-4).

Using the backdrop of geological, palaeontological, and archaeological data, the authors state their objective as offering “readers an accessible, route-oriented approach to more than 65 outstanding sites in the province, before it was a province.” The book is a guide providing basic descriptions of these sites, lavishly supplemented with numerous color photographs and information on how to visit each one. In attempting to strike a fine balance among its different themes, it is neither overwhelming in its detail, nor so superficial as to be useless to all but the complete novice. As an academic and an archaeologist, I approached the book with some trepidation, prepared to be disappointed by what I expected to be a shallow and out-of-date treatment of what I know about Alberta’s prehistory. Fortunately, my doubts in this regard were completely unwarranted: the archaeology is as up-to-date as it needs to be, and I learned a great deal more about the geology and palaeontology of this diverse province.

In a lengthy preliminary section the authors set the human and natural context for the remainder of the book. Topics covered include the geological origins of the province, its palaeontological past, and its early human history. The latter includes a current and useful state-of-the-art discussion of the controversial topic of the initial peopling of North and South America. For decades most experts have maintained that aboriginal people arrived here from Northeast Asia sometime after 12,000 years ago. A few dissenting

researchers, however, have taken a contrary view that this important event must have occurred much earlier. Commendably, the authors mention the Monte Verde site in Chile, which supports this earlier chronology, adding more fuel to the debate, but also illustrating the currency of the information. Other time periods are covered to round out the history of Alberta before the arrival of Europeans, and a supplementary section at the end describes some of the more interesting aspects of stone tool technology.

The remainder of the book is divided into a series of eight routes for the traveler to follow combining visits to archaeological, geological, and palaeontological sites. Alberta is fortunate in having two UNESCO World Heritage sites that are known worldwide. With its spectacular view of the Rockies, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump near Fort McCleod (part of the Ice-Age Corridor route) has an interpretive center that presents an integrated western scientific and aboriginal view of the more than 5,000 years of hunting at this cliff-side location. Dinosaur Provincial Park (on the Trans-Canada Highway route) along the Red Deer River east of Calgary is no less spectacular, with its rugged badlands topography and the richest record of dinosaur remains in the world. Almost as impressive is Writing-on-Stone, with its numerous rock carvings executed over hundreds of years by aboriginal people on bedrock panels, surrounded by sandstone Hoodoos carved by wind and water along the Milk River. Less well-known localities are also featured along with several archaeological sites known mainly by the archaeological community (for example, the Hawkwood site in Calgary; Dry Island Buffalo Jump, located southeast of Red Deer; and the 9,000-year-old James Pass site in the Alberta Foothills) or geologists and naturalists (such as Okotoks Erratic, Cypress Hills, and Cold Sulphur Spring northeast of the town of Jasper).

Many more locations are described (including Columbia Ice Fields, Mount Edith Cavell), but most are from the southern half of the province. The only route north of Edmonton, the Lake Peace Route, briefly mentions Lesser Slave Lake, the Peace River, and an archaeological site outside of Grande Prairie. This southern bias is my major criticism of the book. It would have been appropriate, I think, to mention the Fort MacMurray area, with its vast reserves of tar sands, but perhaps this was a bit too industrial. Nevertheless, the region has its own rich archaeological record.

Perhaps even Wood Buffalo National Park, on the border between Alberta and the Northwest Territories, or the Hays Lakes area in far north-western Alberta could have been included for the truly adventurous heritage traveler. More maps rather than lengthy descriptions (one-third of a page in

one instance) probably would have offered readers greater help in getting to the various locales. The photographs, however, are gorgeous, the text is well-written, and a laudable extended credits page explains who contributed what to the book's development.

*In Search of Ancient Alberta* represents an increasingly popular type of guide that feature various aspects of human and natural heritage. And with good reason: heritage sells, or at least it should. This book and others like it are welcome additions to the traveler's repertoire. With the increasing leisure time of about-to-be and now retiring baby boomers, I believe there will be an insatiable demand for similar guides. I plan to make use of this impressive book this coming summer. **Raymond Le Blanc**, *Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta*.