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Figure 5. Excavation of fill in cellar of structure to southeast of present house.

THE FORKS
by
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The junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (The Forks) in downtown Winnipeg is now generally recognized as having played an important role in the European exploration and settlement of western Canada. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada first recognized the historical importance of the major fur trade posts which once stood there and more recently recognized the historical importance of the location more generally through its involvement in a number of exploration and development activities.

The Forks did not, however, become an important location with the arrival of the first Europeans. Though Fort Rouge was constructed there in 1738 by a member of the La Vérendrye expeditions, it was not until 1800 that the location began to play an active role in the fur trade. In that year Northwest Company canoe brigades from various parts of western Canada began to meet there on their way to and from Fort William. Occasionally, Hudson's Bay Company canoe brigades would also stop there, meeting a Northwest Company brigade.

By 1810 the Northwest Company had begun construction of Fort Gibraltar to serve as their headquarters in Red River. The loss and destruction of this fort in 1816 was followed in 1817 by construction of a second Fort Gibraltar. When the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies amalgamated in 1821 this second fort, renamed Fort Garry, became the Red River headquarters until the construction of Upper Fort Garry, begun in 1835. An effort to replace Fort Garry's function with construction of Lower Fort Garry, 30 km downstream on the Red River, was unsuccessful. After 1835 the immediate area of the Forks continued to play a role in the company operations at Red River but emphasis shifted to the upper fort. After the 1852 flood the remains of Fort Garry may have been dismantled.

After the decline of the fur trade, the area played a role in the development of Winnipeg by providing a temporary home for immigrants arriving during the 1870s. Several immigrant sheds were erected for this purpose but other, more temporary, shelters also sprang up.

By the late 1880s the area began to be developed as a railway yard and by 1889 a repair shop and roundhouse had been built. Other railway installations followed, one of the most significant for archaeology being the early introduction of fill to raise and level the area.

Although the area between Main Street and the Red River was developed for railway purposes, the fur trade occupation sites close to the Red River were not the focus of major activities other than the shop and roundhouse. A number of smaller buildings appeared and also disappeared and numerous tracks were laid. More recently, the probable area of Fort Gibraltar I became part of a building materials and supplies operation, resulting in the deposition of additional fill.

The possibility of creating a park at the Forks and interpreting its historical significance was greatly enhanced by its inclusion in the Canada-Manitoba Agreement for Recreation and Conservation for the Red River (Red River ARC). Since no above ground resources predating the railway period remained, it became the responsibility of archaeology to investigate the site, especially in view of the possibility of extensive disturbance by railway activities.

The possibility for archaeology was tempered by the fact that the land in question was still part of a working railway operation and access for excavations was not feasible. This situation prevailed until May 1984, when the land owner (Canadian National Railways) turned over approximately 10 acres to Parks Canada.

A two-part field program was initiated for the summer of 1984. Investigations began with soil testing to determine gross stratigraphy and assist in developing excavation strategy, followed by two months of test excavations. The latter was undertaken in two areas considered to have a high potential for containing archaeological remains. These were the supposed location of Fort Gibraltar I and probable location of Fort Gibraltar II (Fig. 1).

There had not been any previous archaeology at this site, so the objectives of the field work were to locate and identify resources and to obtain artifacts which may be used in on-site displays. The work would indicate the archaeological potential and demonstrate the problems associated with the investigation of the site.

Briefly stated, this work located the remains of two nineteenth century historic structures, possibly associated with the Forts Gibraltar, a variety of features associated with the railway occupation and evidence of a number of prehistoric occupations. The areas investigated were located immediately at the junction of the two rivers (Fort Gibraltar II) and slightly downstream on the west bank of the Red River (Fort Gibraltar I); the latter consisted of two separate areas (Fig. 1).

Soil testing established the presence of gravel, cinder and coal deposits of varying thickness. It was apparent that the ground level had been raised by these deposits and that the riverbank edge had shifted towards the river. Artifacts contained in these deposits included a variety of railway hardware fragments. The extent of railway fill eliminated some areas from consideration and required a backhoe to open others (Fig. 2).

Evidence of prehistoric use was found only in the Fort Gibraltar II area. A total of 9 and possibly 10 stratigraphically discrete occupational events were recorded, in part below historic features and in part disturbed by them. These events are generally recognized by the presence of some artifacts and faunal remains, or occasionally by the presence of faunal remains alone. Some of the strata were darkened by the introduction of organic materials from occupation events; others are similar to sterile sand and sandy clay layers. Each occupational deposit was separated from others by a sterile deposit of sand or sandy clay. It was apparent that flooding had been a regular occurrence, resulting in burial of the occupation zones and preventing any extensive development of an organic zone on the surface.

The artifacts included a number of cord marked ceramic containers, all considered to be of the Blackduck culture (Fig. 3). These occur in the lowest or earliest deposits as well as the more recent, indicating that the prehistoric occupations recognized so far at the Forks are part of the same cultural tradition and probably represent a number of occupations separated by flooding. Faunal materials include remains of various mammals, but the most noteworthy remain was a centimetre thick deposit of fish scales in the lowest cultural layer, indicating the importance of fish in the diet.

One of the occupation zones also included a small area of post molds (Fig. 4). The posts were of small diameter and the bottom ends had been pointed before being driven into the ground. These posts extended only a short

distance into the ground and their arrangement does not suggest any obvious structure. The presence of fish remains, although found in other levels, may indicate these posts supported some form of drying rack.

Three carbon samples from two of the deposits, submitted to the Saskatchewan Research Council, produced the dates 1225 ± 160 years: A.D. 725 (S-2563), 1440 ± 165 years: A.D. 510 (S-2564), and 1105 ± 160 years: A.D. 845 (S-2565). A weighted average of these three is A.D. 697 ± 93 , a somewhat early date for Blackduck in Manitoba.

Excavations at Fort Gibraltar I recovered remains and features dating to at least six basic time periods:

- a) a period of modern surface deposition (ca. 1950-1984);
- b) a period of late nineteenth and twentieth century railway-related deposition and land-filling activity (ca. 1880-1950);
- c) a pre-railway/post-Fort Gibraltar I time period (ca. 1826-1880);
- d) an immediate post-Fort Gibraltar I flood period (ca. 1826);
- e) a Fort Gibraltar I contemporary period (ca. 1810-1816, and
- f) a pre-Fort Gibraltar I period (ca?-1810).

Modern surface deposition consists of 20-40 cm of uncompacted sand, gravel, lime, mortar, broken concrete and building debris associated with the Building Products installations originally located at the site and demolished in the summer of 1984. This surface layer immediately overlies and mixes easily with an underlying 1.0 to 1.5 m of railway fill (ca. 1889-1950), a layer obviously deposited in two different stages - one in 1889 before railway tracks were established and another around 1940 when the existing railway tracks were abandoned. The fill layer consists of uncompacted ash, cinders, sand, gravel, coal and railway related refuse. It contains a number of trench, cinder pit, in situ track fragments, refuse and non-refuse pit features, most of which are associated with the early railway period (ca. 1882-1889). Few modern and railway period features affect the underlying earlier period features and disturbance is minimal considering the drastic amount of land alteration that occurred at the site around the turn of the century.

A series of flood events and pre-Railway/post-Fort Gibraltar I cultural activities (ca. 1826-1880) preceded deposition of the railway fill. Most flood events appear

as single or multi-banded layers of grey-brown silty clay or cross-bedded sands. Between 4 and 24 cm of light grey-brown silty clay containing early railway artifacts immediately underlies the railway fill layer and probably dates to the flood of 1882. It is followed in turn by another 1 to 2 cm of darker grey-brown flood deposited silty clay often found in association with a layer of manure at the site. This layer probably dates to the flood of 1861 and is restricted to the south-central section of the site immediately overlying the structural remains believed to be Fort Gibraltar I. The 2 to 4 cm thick layer of manure recovered at the site is roughly contemporary with and may slightly pre-date this 1861 silty-clay flood layer. The manure layer (1852 to 1861) also has a restricted distribution and is found only in the south-central portion of the site overlying the structural remains plus the central northwest section of the site.

Below the flood and manure layers is another very distinctive 12 to 32 cm thick layer of cross-bedded flood sand. This layer probably dates to the flood of 1852 and provides a natural stratigraphic and temporal control at the site. Other than two flood-deposited fragments of wood, the layer is virtually artifact and feature free. Immediately below this flood sand and above the silty-clay layer probably associated with the post-Fort Gibraltar I flood of 1826, a picket post fence/trench line was uncovered running north-south across the southeast quarter of the site (Fig. 5). This fence line dates between the two floods (1826 to 1852) and may be associated with the Experimental Farm period at the site (1836 to 1841). The north-south line and the small east-west spur fragment (found about two metres west of the north end of the main fence line) truncate portions of the underlying structural features and the remains of two charred wooden planks that pre-date the Fort period.

The 16 to 30 cm thick silty-clay flood layer (1826) immediately underlying the 1852 flood sands and pre-dating the picket fence line contains flood-mixed artifacts and structural debris contemporary to the fort. It universally covers the entire site area and, next to the actual midden features, produced the majority of artifacts and faunal material recovered at the site. It is also this flood which seems responsible for the final collapse of the fort structure, cellar and chimney features.

The structural remains believed to be Fort Gibraltar I were uncovered immediately below this 1826 silty-clay layer running east-west across the southern end

of the site. They include sections of three outer walls (Fig. 6), a section of what appears to be an inner wall, charred plank flooring (Fig. 7), a floor joist, a stone fireplace base, remains of a limestone chimney (Fig. 7), an uncribbed cellar and tangled masses of structural debris (charred beams, fire-reddened chinking, fire-reddened/chinking stained sand, ash, mortar, charcoal and charred wood) on top of the floor and inside the cellar area.

The uncovered portion of the structure appears to be part of a row-housing complex and is approximately 4.5 m wide by 7.0 m long. The fireplace base is mid-wall along the north wall of the room and the cellar is directly in front of it along the south wall of the structure. The entranceway appears to have been in the southeast corner. A floor joist originally ran east-west midway through the room providing support for the floor boards and forming part of the sill along the front opening of the cellar. Floor planks were too badly charred to determine individual plank widths but the direction of the grain indicated that the flooring was laid in a north-south direction. Fragments of flooring and other structural debris indicate that the building was constructed of locally available materials such as ash, poplar, white oak and elm. No other structural features or the remains of the eighteen foot high palisade said to have surrounded Fort Gibraltar I were recovered. Artifact recovery was also surprisingly low. The structural area is truncated by a modern railway - period trench (ca. 1950) running north-south through the west side of the building and by the 1836 to 1841 picket post fence/trench line running north-south through the east end of the building.

Two fort contemporary midden-like areas were uncovered, one north and one south of the structural area. The larger north midden area, 8 to 10 m north of the northeast corner of the building contains the largest single concentration of artifacts and faunal material (in particular, dense matted concentrations of fish bone and organic material) recovered from Fort Gibraltar I. It was found in association with and within a 2 to 10 m radius of nine hearth-like features and two pit features. The nature of both the deposits and the artifacts recovered suggest that the area is part of a fort associated [native] encampment area.

The south midden-like area is five metres south of the southwest corner of the building and is represented by a much smaller concentration of large, identifiable pieces of large mammal bone. This midden-like concentration was found

in direct association with a pit feature and about five metres southeast of a hearth feature also surrounded by large fragments of large mammal bone. While the northern midden, hearth and pit features may represent a fort associated native encampment area, the southern features either represent inside fort related activities or, perhaps, as indicated by depositions of faunal material inside the abandoned fort cellar, they may actually represent an encampment area immediately post-dating the Fort Gibraltar I occupation.

More than two metres of tan clay, characterized by 1 to 2 cm black organic bandings every 8 to 10 cm throughout the layer, directly underlie all deposits and features at the site. With the exception of the remains of two charred wooden planks which clearly pre-date the fort structure (ca. ?-1810), the layer is essentially artifact and feature free.

Relative dates for both the flood events and cultural features were arrived at via the use of recorded flood events (eg. Erhlich et. al 1976), temporal indicators suggested by the types of artifacts recovered and natural stratigraphic relationships. These suggested dates may be modified by subsequent research and excavation.

Excavation in the Fort Gibraltar II area examined a number of 19th century features and encountered a number of 20th century railway installations. Fill in the area was a metre or less in depth and included concrete floor slab fragments of a railway building which had once stood in roughly the same location as our excavation.

The 19th century features consisted of two trash filled pits and a cribbed cellar. The two pits were relatively shallow and showed no signs of having been cribbed. They were adjacent to each other but there were no other features located in their vicinity which would assist in their identification. The majority of artifacts from the Fort Gibraltar II period were recovered from one of these pits. Artifacts include a number of ceramic types including creamware, a brass ramrod guide from a British military issue flintlock, a flintlock lock plate, a large copper-alloy pot lid, numerous glass trade beads and an ivory whistle. Few artifacts were present in the small portion of the second pit that was investigated.

The cellar was rectangular with an earthen floor and log cribbing. Sufficient cribbing remained to recognize a post-in-ground type of Red River frame construction. The

upper courses had been burned. The fill at the bottom of the cellar was first a layer of burned log or planking, covered by a thick layer of baked chinking. Subsequent deposits comprised sandy silts or clays, further layers of baked chinking and a thick lens of gray/white ash. There were no recognizable remains of a superstructure associated with this feature.

Railway remains in the Fort Gibraltar II area consisted of a number of shallow utility installations, usually in wooden housings, and a series of posts set on heavy timber footings. The latter had extensively disturbed the area and removed evidence of one side and two corners of the cribbed cellar. The posts formed a rectangle and had presumably served as footings for an as yet unidentified 20th century structure.

Excavation of a small area on the west side of the Fort Gibraltar I area exposed a section of limestone foundation from the 1889 roundhouse turntable (Fig. 8). The limestone was bonded with concrete and set on a poured concrete base. The inside of the foundation had a number of sockets for joists but the entire interior of the feature is now filled with cinders.

The relatively brief investigation at the Forks demonstrated the presence, nature and condition of archaeological resources and identified problems associated with excavation of the site. Except for the turntable foundation, the features located have not been conclusively identified although it is considered probable that the remains are associated with the two Forts Gibraltar. Further excavation would define the total extent of each feature and establish its relationship to other structural remains and known historical installations.

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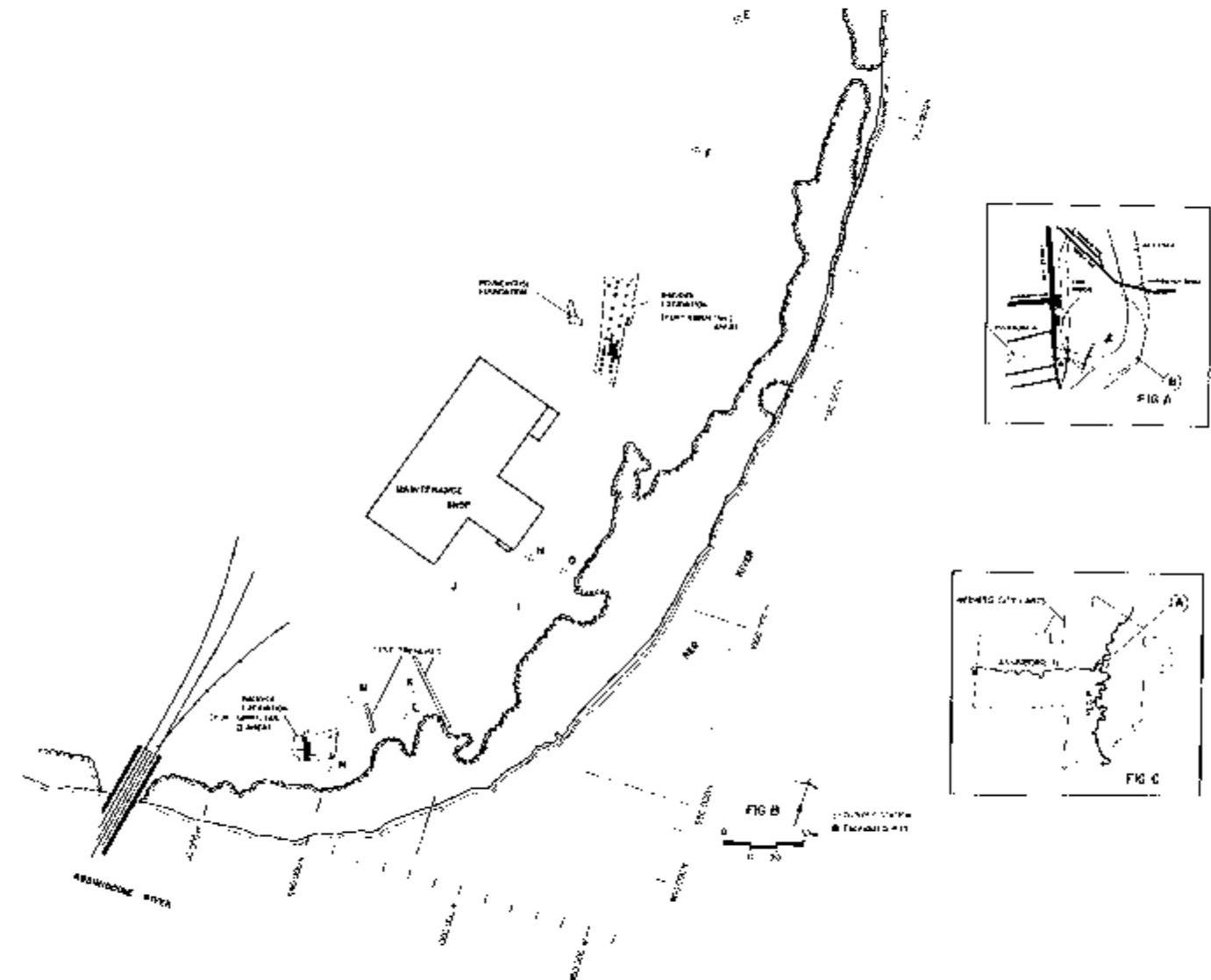


Figure 1. Areas of investigation at the Forks.



Figure 2. Fort Gibraltar I area, showing extent of railway fill (removed by backhoe).



Figure 3. Blackduck rim and body sherds in situ on hearth.

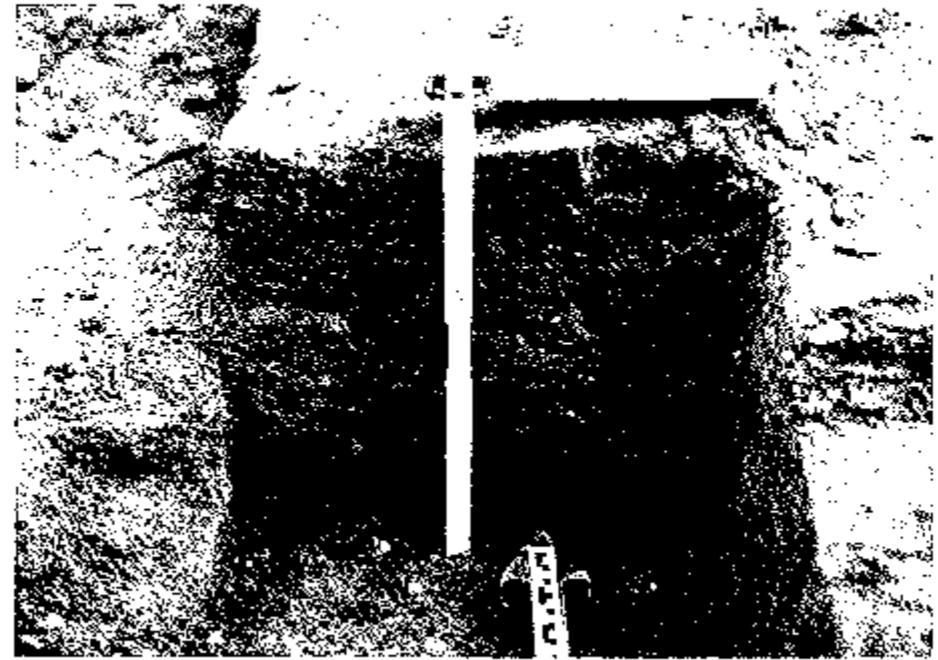


Figure 4. Cross section of two pointed posts in the prehistoric occupations.



Figure 5. Trench and palisade post dating and cutting through Fort Gibraltar I remains.

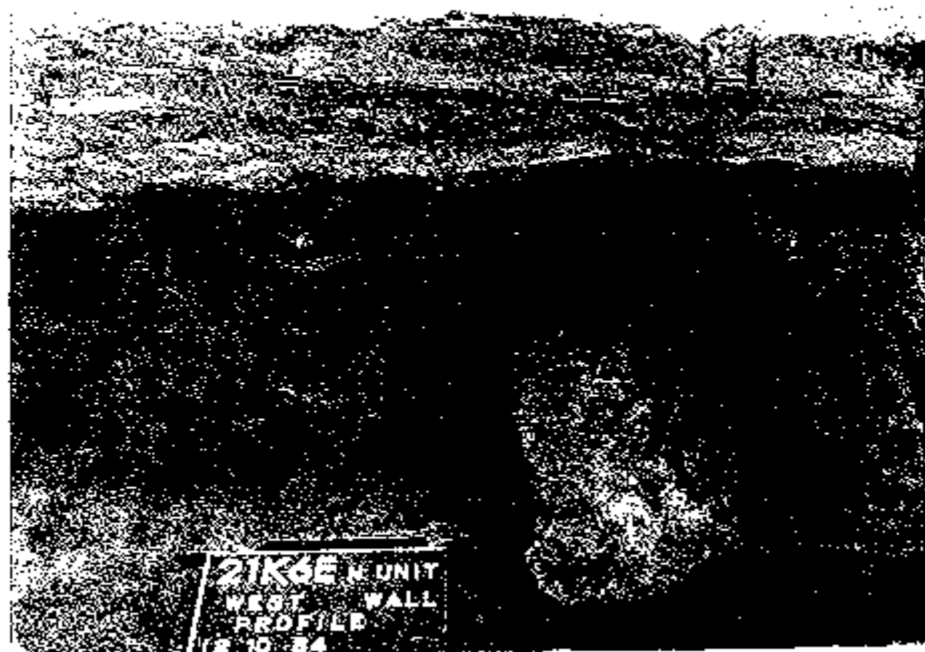


Figure 6. South wall of Fort Gibraltar I structure, showing ends of charred floor and trench (wall line) filled with baked chinking.

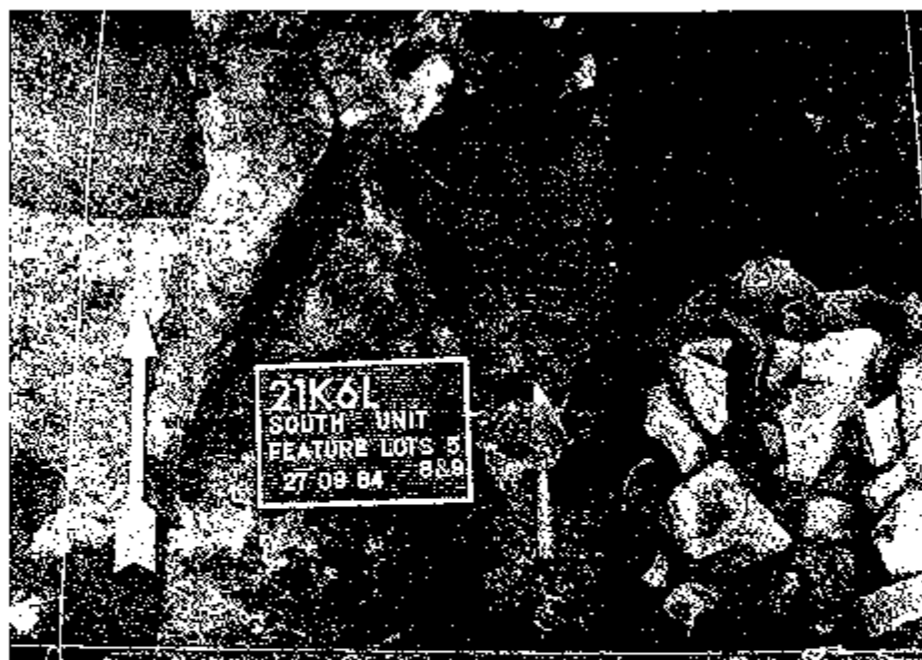


Figure 7. Fort Gibraltar I structural remains, consisting of charred flooring, baked chinking and chimney collapse.

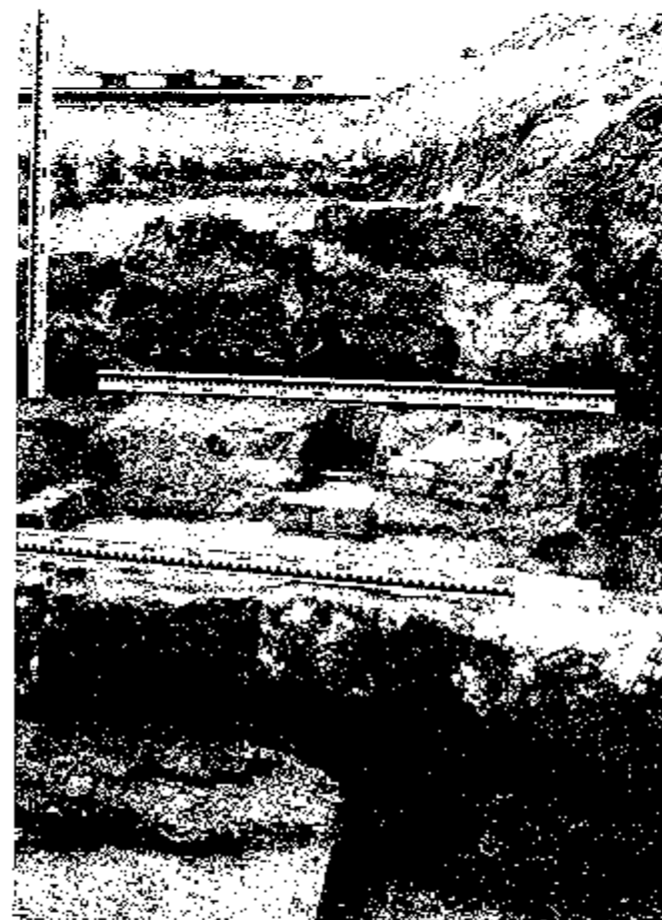


Figure 8. Section of limestone footing for round house turntable (1889), viewed from inside of turntable area.