

<http://idahoarchaeology.org/projects/sandcreekarchaeology/>

Sand Creek Byway Project: Unearthing the Story of Early Sandpoint

For decades a major north-south highway ran through the downtown of Sandpoint, Idaho, and as could be expected there have been years of traffic problems in the city. Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) made the decision to build a byway as a solution to easing traffic congestion. The proposed byway route, once completed would be built upon an area that was part of earliest settlement of Sandpoint. In short, there was almost three-fourths of a mile of history that was going to be buried or destroyed by the road construction. Following federal law, a team of archaeologists, headed by James Bard and Robert Weaver, designed and implemented a series of excavations which recovered large portions of Sandpoint's buried past.

The resulting archaeological project was unprecedented; it is arguably the largest project in Idaho's history, presenting archaeologists with a unique set of stories about life in the earliest years of Sandpoint. It is a project that tells a small town's early history –but it is also a project that tells the story of the American West.



The Sandcreek Byway Archaeological Project has produced one of the largest archaeological collections in the Northwest. Almost 600,000 artifacts were recovered from this project; a project that has spanned over three sites, three years of excavation and two years of lab work. Rather than excavating the entirety of historical Sandpoint, project excavations focused on selected areas identified through the historical research that was conducted prior to the start of fieldwork. The northernmost area excavated was the Humbird Lumber Mill Blacksmith and Machine Shop. Continuing southwards, areas of archaeological interest included the Pioneer Cemetery, the Humbird/Nesbitt Boarding House, a boarding house for laborers, Sandpoint's original Commercial Townsite, the Red Light District known to locals as the "Restricted District," a jail, and most southerly, a Chinese-occupied home/business. Artifacts recovered from these areas include an incredible array of objects representing a cross-section of life at the turn of the century. The most extensive excavations were undertaken at the former location of the Humbird Blacksmith and Machine Shop, the Commercial Townsite, the Restricted District and the Chinese occupied building; a closer look at these archaeologically distinct areas can be found through links at the bottom of the page.

This archaeological project does not end with just publications and curation. In addition to the technical report, special studies, and our synthetic analysis, Idaho Transportation Department archaeologists and their associates are excitedly planning to incorporate both archaeological materials and research findings into a museum exhibit, an audio-visual walking tour, teaching trunks, a coffee-table book about Sandpoint's historic Humbird Lumber Mill, and continuing community lectures about early Sandpoint. The large historic artifact collection will be available

for future studies, both as a hands-on learning tool for the public at large and as a resource for academic research. Just as Sandpoint has a long history as a crossroads, extending into the prehistoric and distant past, the archaeological collection has a long future of potential study.

Check out “Publications and Resources” to follow along as we share preliminary research and analysis findings.

For more on the Sandcreek Byway Archaeological Project’s history, visit the [Project Background](#) page.

To learn more about the archaeological sites within the project, visit the [Sand Creek Archaeology Sites](#) page.

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