

White Rock Fort Revisited

Their names have been erased from the official records but the legend of their ordeal still lives on in this land of memories.

The legend tells of crisis, strength and survival.



October 22, 2006: It takes us 45 minutes to reach our destination.

We are a group of fifteen.

Men, women and children, we have followed our guide to this mysterious place.

On this cool autumn afternoon, our steps scatter the early fallen leaves and sink into Nature's damp carpet.

Our excursion of discovery has a rich gold and maroon palette.

It has taken us through a tunnel, up a hill, down a ravine and along a stream.



We are anxious to finally see the place. We know the basics of the story, we can imagine the rest....



251 years ago, today, in this place of refuge...

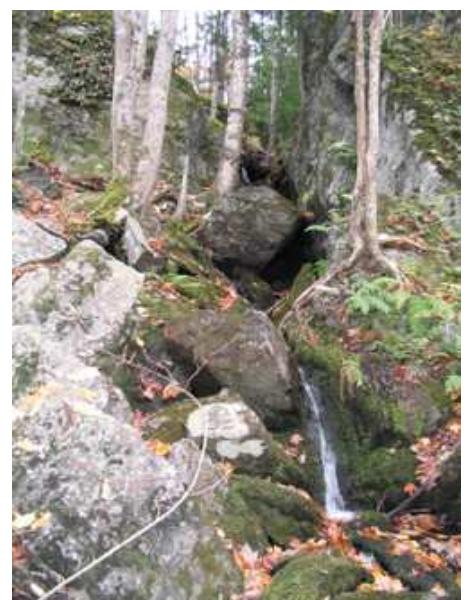
The stream flowing from the 20 ft waterfall winds its way down to the empty village and ultimately into the Grand Habitant River.

The Acadian refugees have used its powerful flowing energy to power their mills for 80 years but in the autumn of 1755, the mills have become piles of charred wood.

The smoke from their homes, barns and churches has lingered in the air for weeks. They sense the danger and loss.

Their decision to flee was taken with information and intuition. Their single-minded goal was the preservation of the family unit at all costs, even exile.

Mi'kmaq scouts, their friends and relatives, keep a close watch on the activities in their village and the neighbouring villages of Grand-Pré and Rivière aux Canards. They have confirmed that the transport ships visible from the lookout point on this rock ridge are from Boston.





After lying at anchor in the Minas Basin for weeks, suspiciously high in the water, they are now being loaded with their human cargo.

For some of the Acadians in this secluded rock fort, they know that could mean their mothers, fathers, cousins, grown children... grandchildren.

They don't want to believe their ears. The old menace has come to pass after hanging over their heads for years.

These Acadian refugees now know that they made a mistake by allowing themselves to believe that the threats for exclusive allegiance from the English and French were just meant to keep them under their tenuous control and could never be carried out.

The British authorities are following through now. Could this really be the end of life in their paradise?

For now, this place will shelter them for the coming winter. It is a natural fortress. Its rock walls will encircle the families with its protection. Its high vantage point will provide a lookout into the nearby forest and Minas Basin beyond.

God and/or the Great Spirit Glooscap have placed the fire-pit in the centre of this new hamlet and there is enough clear area to set up shelters. Noises from the rock enclosure are muffled and silenced by the time they reach the ridges of this rock bowl. There is an escape route in case it becomes necessary.

Once the winter is over, they will assess the situation and decide what their next step will be. It doesn't look good; they will need to use all of their strength and tenacity. Perhaps, becoming so dependant on nature, they will absorb the quiet strength of their hiding place as they face the coming months.

Our modern-day group has naturally gravitated to the centre of this circular fortress. We are awed by the beauty of nature and by the obvious spiritual connections we are feeling as we share our observations.



Some say that "diviners" have been here with their y shaped rods and have sensed the presence of burial sites. We all agree that a winter in exile here would take a toll especially on the young and the elderly.

We remark that the ancient stone fire-pit has been used lately. This is obviously a great place for present-day hunters to take a break and share stories of camaraderie and of the 'ones that got away'.

Our guide remembers stories that her brother told her, of Scout outings to this place in his youth.

Lately, there has been talk of a developer buying this land and placing its future legacy in question. Archaeologists have been contacted and asked to confirm the presence of a fort but there is obviously no traditional fort here.

I wonder if this could be a place where language is causing confusion, not allowing us to see what is right before our eyes?

It seems to me that the Mi'kmaq usually have practical names for places. I suspect their word for this place would mean "A good place to find shelter".

The English language of the soldiers and Planter colonists who have preserved the 'White Rock Fort Legend' defines a fort as: a fortified place or building for military defense.

The French language of the Acadians has 11 definitions for the word "fort", among them are included; large, solid, resistant, courageous, extraordinary, strong, intense, forceful and, of course, fortress. They all seem to apply here. Human characteristics mixed in with those of the natural world.

It is hard not to reflect on whether places like this, where there has been so much pain and un-reconciled anger and guilt are doomed to continue to be places of upheaval? Is there hope for peace and tranquility in this place or will this latest threat be the end?



The future is always uncertain, even in our perceived peaceful times. Sometimes we are lulled into a false sense of security and miss the warning signs. Is that what happened to the Acadians of Rivière St Antoine in 1755 before it became New Minas? Did their survival instinct lead them here or was it carefully planned? We will probably never know.

It was time to return to the present.



Our day of discovery was drawing to a close. Our group posed for photos to help us remember the beauty of this day and reluctantly, left the "French Fort" with its secrets and with an innate respect for them.

Susan Surette-Draper
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