Implementing Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy

Commemorating the Cold War in Canada: Considering the DEW Line

DAVID NEUFELD

Introduction

The Cold War has yet to become an integral part of the Canadian national identity. The postwar period of nuclear tension remains largely uncommemorated in any official or practical sense, and the limitations of national commemoration policies militate against any quick designations. Canadian federal heritage properties legislation is circumscribed by a forty-year rule, and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada

DAVID NEUFELD has worked as the Yukon and Western Arctic Historian for Parks Canada since 1986. He has worked extensively in the field of community-based history with both Yukon First Nations and newcomer groups. Recent work includes the development of a historical research protocol for the Yukon Territorial Government's new Environmental Protection Act, a review of the national commemoration programs in the Canadian northwest, and research into the synthesis of western historiography and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. His publications include *Chilkoot Trail: Heritage Route to the Klondike* (co-author with Frank Norris, USNPS, Whitehorse, Lost Moose, 1997), *Make It Pay! Gold Dredge #4* (co-author with Pat Habiluk, Missoula, Pictorial Histories, 1994), and articles on cultural commemoration.

The author would like to thank Gordon Bennett, Parks Canada, his peers at the 1997 National Council on Public History Conference in Albany, and the readers for *The Public Historian* who provided interesting and challenging suggestions for the improvement of the original paper. The project was jointly funded by Parks Canada and the USAF Legacy Program.

The Public Historian, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter 1998)

(HSMBC), the body responsible for recommending individuals, events, and sites for national commemoration, is rightfully cautious in dealing with near-contemporary history. Even so, there are important reasons for the low profile of the Cold War in the Canadian scrapbook of the recent past.

In the United States, large and powerful groups like the military and the media, for example, have a vested interest in using the forty-year Communist-Capitalist conflict as a meaningful construct to organize the recent past. In Canada, where no similar interests make use of the Cold War, political parties and their leaders tend to be the most effective constructors of the Canadian recent past. Postwar Canadian history thus focuses on them as high-profile voices reporting on the development of the modern social-welfare state and on the rising temperature of regional tensions within Canada between English and French and between East and West. Those historical works specific to foreign policy and the Cold War tend to focus on either Canada's contributions to international peacekeeping through the United Nations and the balancing act between European and North American military commitments or the harsh treatment meted out to suspected communists within government service. Social justice and the celebration or querying of the national cultural mosaic are the central elements of Canadian postwar identity. The Cold War has thus far had only limited use in the construction of the past in Canada.

Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the fundamental importance of this global near-clash in shaping Canada's modern history. In 1994, Canadian Forces Station Carp closed the Central Emergency Government Headquarters as part of a general defense cutback. Nominally an army signals site, the Headquarters was in reality the home of the "Diefenbunker," the not-so-secret underground bunker designed to house the Governor-General of Canada, the Prime Minister, and members of the Cabinet, as well as a large complement of military and bureaucratic officials, in the event of a nuclear exchange. Almost immediately, the HSMBC reviewed the site and recommended that it be commemorated as "symbolic of the Cold War and the strategy of nuclear deterrence as well of a people's determination to survive as a nation following nuclear war." A local group has taken over the bunker and is planning to open it to the public as Canada's Cold War Museum.[1]

The Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line is another significant relic of the Cold War. The glowing white radome and dark metal antennae piercing upwards, nailing the site to the sky, have become icons of northern Canada's role in the Cold War. Over the last ten years I investigated the relationship

1. HSMBC Minutes for June, 1994. The "Diefenbunker" and the history of the national programs for the survival of government structure in event of war are summarized in the Parks Canada manuscript, *The "Diefenbunker": The Central Emergency Government headquarters at Carp and Continuity of Government* by David McConnell, staff historian; 1994. The progress of the "Diefenbunker" museum can be followed at their web site <http://diefenbunker.ottawa.com/indexe.htm>.

between this electronic fortress and Canadian identity through a study of BAR-1, a DEW Line radar station now in Ivvavik National Park. This article describes how Parks Canada's new cultural resource management policy and the associated concept of commemorative intent have been used to define the values and purpose of a site.[2] That is, the paper describes my efforts to identify the historic values of the DEW Line station at BAR-1 and make recommendations for the protection and presentation of these values as I became aware of the long-term cultural purposes served by this place.

Commemorative Intent[3]

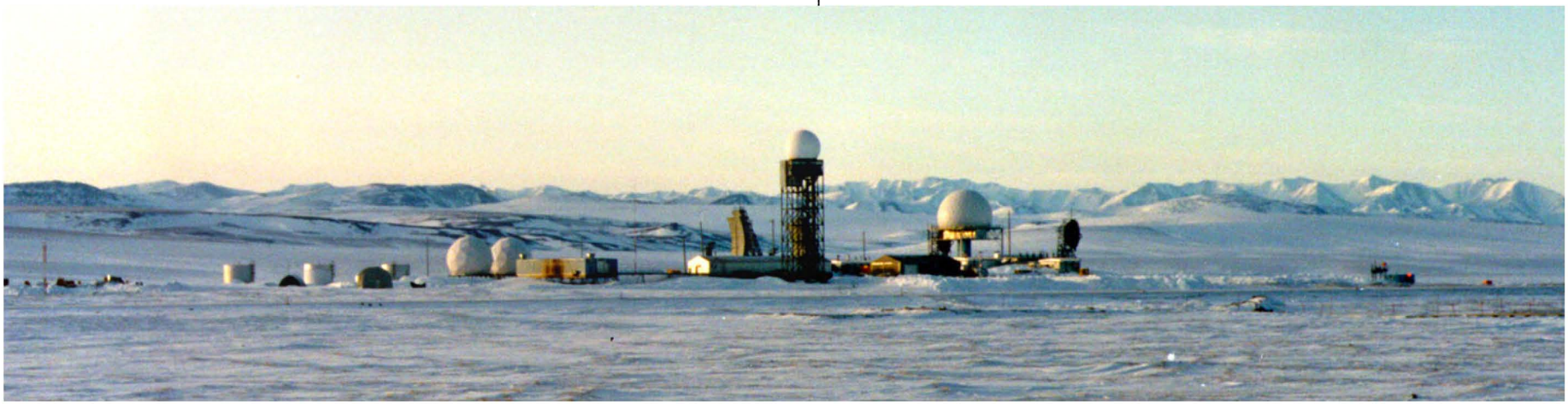
Parks Canada's new cultural resource management policy describes the objectives, values, and methods to be used in the management of heritage places. A Commemorative Integrity Statement (CIS) must also be on file for each heritage place of national historic significance under the management of Parks Canada. This statement describes the specific purposes for which the site is recognized and outlines fundamental protection and communication objectives to ensure that the site fulfills its commemorative function. The focusing element of the CIS is the description of commemorative intent.

The commemorative intent description outlines the specific cultural purposes served by the site and the reasons for its identification as a heritage site. This description is generally based upon extensive research on the history of the site and its associations. Commemorative intent not only outlines the reasons for significance, but also forms the basis for the subsequent identification of those physical and symbolic cultural values that should be protected and the messages that should be communicated to the public. Commemorative intent therefore defines purpose and is the foundation for the subsequent management of the site.

Commemorative intent is an important cultural resource management tool. Often cultural resource assessment and management, particularly in their early stages, are driven by a general knowledge of the place or its context. As the site is studied, its character and content can assume an increasingly important role in the direction of research and management. Sometimes this detailed work obscures the purposes for which the site was originally identified. Further, institutional mandate, usually only a vague guide for the protection and presentation of specific sites, is over the long

2. "Part III Cultural Resource Management Policy," Parks Canada, *Parks Canada: Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1994), 99–115.

3. Parks Canada uses "Commemorative Intent" to refer to national significance, specifically to the reasons for national historic significance. In this paper I have used the content of this policy concept and applied it more broadly to assist in the determination of site values and purpose which are not necessarily of national historic significance.



BAR-1 Auxiliary radar station of the DEW Line near Komakuk Beach, Yukon Territory in February 1993. (Courtesy of the author)

term occasionally overwhelmed by the immediate operational needs associated with the running of the site. Commemorative intent, tied to the institutional mandate for commemoration, offers a site-specific statement of values and purpose that can assist in maintaining and enhancing the mandate for the site.

Commemorative intent thus provides a clear vision and a permanent statement of purpose that can direct protection of the site's resources, communicate its messages, and engender respect for the historic values of the site. According to Parks Canada's policy for National Historic Sites, "protection and presentation are fundamental to commemoration since without protection there can be no historic site to be enjoyed, and without presentation there can be no understanding of why the site is important to our history and, hence, to all Canadians."[4]

The DEW Line and BAR-1

The northernmost extension of a continental air defense system, the DEW Line was one of the symbols of the Cold War. This symbol grew out of the fears of aerial attack that developed soon after the end of World War II. The testing of the first Soviet atomic weapon in 1949 surprised western observers, and the successful development of a jet bomber with transcontinental delivery capabilities a few years later turned surprise into genuine fear. From the late 1940s, the American military recommended and developed an expanding system of aircraft detection systems to defend the United States. As the perceived capabilities of Soviet aeronautics grew, the remaining gaps in the continental air shield drew attention. In the early 1950s, both the American and Canadian governments began work on a series of radar defense lines to close off the previously undefended transpolar route into the continent. Canadians built the mid-Canada Line along the 55th parallel; the Americans undertook the more northerly, and far more expensive, DEW Line.

Built in the mid-1950s, the DEW Line was a chain of isolated radar-detection stations stretching across North America at the 70th parallel. Designed to provide a first warning of any Soviet aerial attack over the pole, the DEW Line, combined with other radar pickets and lines surrounding the continent, was connected with anti-aircraft gun and missile batteries and interceptor bases. The DEW Line was part of a continent-wide system lending credibility to the retaliatory nuclear threat used by the United States and NATO to contain feared Soviet aggression.

The continental air defense system erected through the immediate postwar decades can be best understood as an integrated technological fortress. Its chief components consisted of a detection and battle-direction system, largely based upon radar and communications networks, and interception and destruction units, generally jet fighters and guided missiles.

Canadian technical and engineering contributions to the interception/destruction component included the Avro Canada CF-100 Canuck and CF-105 Arrow jet fighters, the Sparrow anti-aircraft missile, and the continued development of the Astra I fire-control system. Much of the detection/battle

4. "National Historic Sites Policy," Parks Canada, *Parks Canada: Guiding Principles and Operational Policies* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1994), 78.

direction system was built on Canadian territory, and hence its importance was largely socio-cultural, with additional economic and technological influences.

BAR-1 was an Auxiliary radar station of the DEW Line. Located on the Yukon north slope, just east of the Yukon-Alaska boundary, it was completed in 1954. BAR-1 was an experimental unit in the first section of the DEW Line—to test equipment, structures, and logistic needs in the arctic. The success of this section guided the final design and deployment of the rest of the Line.

The station consists of a main building including residences, mess hall, radar, workshops, and power generators. A large warehouse and a fully equipped garage supported the station's activities. These buildings, a network of connecting roads, a year's supply of fuel oil and diesel, and an airstrip are built on a three-meter-thick pad of gravel floating on top of the permafrost. The station is visually dominated by the various radar and communication antennae surrounding it. Beyond the station perimeter, there is tundra.

BAR-1's primary function was radar coverage of the arctic airspace and early warning about hostile aircraft. Capable of a 500 kilometer range, the radar was originally supplemented by the McGill Fence, a Canadian-designed electromagnetic field used to confirm an aircraft's speed and heading. A sophisticated tropospheric scatter-communication system was also developed to ensure secure and reliable contact between stations and, south, to NORAD. Operated by a crew of between eight and fourteen, the station included redundancies in both personnel and equipment to ensure continuous operation. The sites were largely self-sufficient units, tightly integrated into a network of neighboring stations providing overlapping radar coverage across the arctic from Alaska to Greenland.

When the BAR-1 station shut down in June 1993, part of the general closure of the DEW Line, the site and buildings were transferred by the United States Air Force back to Canada. There were many issues to be dealt with after shutdown, including environmental cleanup and the running of perhaps the most remote garage sale ever. My own responsibility was to prepare a cultural resource management plan.

The Cultural Resource Management Process at BAR-1

In considering the management of the BAR-1 Auxiliary station as a cultural resource, my first question related to its historical significance for Canadians. I first referred to the Parks Canada thematic outline of Canadian history. During this review, several obvious items struck me:

The *international relations* theme describes Canada's place on the world stage. The negotiation of continental defense agreements with the United States for the DEW Line fit nicely. But perhaps its value was diluted by the

fear created by the American military presence in the Canadian north and the feared loss of sovereignty—Canada as "the world's most northerly banana republic," according to one contemporary Canadian journalist. And in looking at the details of the DEW Line, it is clear that Canadians wanted little to do with it. Budget constraints and NATO commitments in Europe in the early and mid-1950s meant that Canada steered clear of the expensive DEW Line project. Canadian politicians made a hasty commitment to the much less expensive, and wholly Canadian, Mid-Canada Line in 1954. They used this as the national contribution to continental air defense, an excuse for avoiding any bills for the DEW Line. The DEW Line Treaty of 1955 explicitly describes US responsibility, especially fiscal, for all aspects of the Line.

The DEW Line included new radar technologies, new construction techniques, and logistics methods to meet the challenging environment of the arctic. These *Science and Technology* developments were largely American military ones, however, the direct Canadian contributions to the DEW Line being limited to the land for stations and the McGill Fence. The DEW Line abandoned this technologically attractive but temperamental system in the mid-1960s, as radars were upgraded. The Mid-Canada Line, which also used the McGill Fence, is perhaps the better place to discuss this technology as part of Canadian history.

The *Economic Development of the North* theme acknowledges the construction and subsequent operation of the DEW Line. The introduction of this southern infrastructure supported radical social and economic change in the Canadian arctic. The DEW Line also resulted in a huge infusion of cash into the Canadian economy—the postwar structure of the Canadian airline and air transport industry was largely shaped by the high profits of the airlift to the DEW Line sites through the 1950s. This theme seemed to offer a little more material that was specifically Canadian, but the whole story is wrapped up in what Eric Hobsbawm refers to as "the Golden Age" of the western democracies. Whereas some specifics are clearly linked to the DEW Line, the economic development of the period offers a much broader canvas, and northern development in Canada is also represented by the fur trade, gold rushes, and timber.

In fact, in considering the site by making the station the centerpiece of analysis, it became clear that BAR-1 and the DEW Line as a whole ranked pretty low on being Canadian. The construction and operation of the Line were effectively abandoned to the Americans, and Canadians straight-armed anyone who tried to involve them.

Rethinking the Process

Of course, Canadians did get involved, and the DEW Line became an important aspect of twentieth-century arctic history and a major contributor

to Canadian identity. My approach to this point, that is with the station at the center, had been driven using "frontier" as an analytical metaphor. I had carefully described the DEW Line's role as part of an advanced weapons system, highlighting elements such as defense, enhanced security, advancing knowledge, and gaining control. I was frustrated because the work seemed merely to commemorate the psychological and technological cage of terror that North Americans had constructed for themselves during the Cold War.

In the search for meaning, I moved from the study of the physical resource and began to analyze the site as a cultural construct. In literary criticism, I found some different ways of looking at the site and considering its values. Margaret Atwood, in her survey of Canadian literature, *Survival*, admonishes those thinking about what Canadians are:

> Canada is an unknown country for those who live in it . . . I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost.
>
> What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature [and I think history fits here just as well] is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. *For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.*[5]

With Atwood's helpful guidance, I switched to a survival metaphor, that is, focusing on the people in the place, instead of the thing. The "literature" of the DEW Line is made up of the stories and perspectives of the two peoples, Euro-Americans and Arctic Indigenous, as "we" moved to share knowledge of place.

There had been a five-year community-based oral history project with the western Arctic Inuvialuit in the early 1990s. A few told stories of their impressions or work on the DEW Line, but most did not. They focused on their lives along the coast, their knowledge of the animals they hunted, their affection for partners, their love of the children they bore and raised, and their own place in the land. And they spoke of the challenges they faced in ensuring their children and grandchildren remained Inuvialuit. How could they pass on the centuries-old skills of the land and knowledge of place; in fact, how could they ensure that Inuvialuit cultural identity survives?

Interviews with DEW Line staff, most of them "lifers" with service of ten to twenty years or more, revealed an entirely different understanding of place. They spoke of the chaos of nature around them—the caribou migrations, the harsh winds and polar bears, the company regulations on-site that measured their every movement, the separation from people close by and from people far away. They worried that their own social identity might not survive.

5. Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press, 1972), 18–19. Emphasis added.

Man making a sled for his grand-child at DEW Site 13, June 1956.
(Courtesy of the photographer, J. D. Ferguson)

The place, and the map, were taking shape. Canadians are a northern nation, but before the 1950s, the Arctic and the Inuit voice were not a part of that nationality. Southern Canadians had only an incomplete understanding of what the arctic was.

For southerners, the DEW Line experience was shaped by the character of environment and the challenges to individuals there, the loss of connection, the loss of intimacy, the struggle for social survival.

For the indigenous population, there were adaptations to newcomers but the pervasive and continuing contact with European cultures undermined their own sense of identity. They worked for their cultural survival.

Based upon the intertwining of these two forms of survival, *the shared knowledge of place*, I now had a statement of commemorative intent:

> The BAR-1 Radar Station, a symbol of the Cold War in arctic Canada, is valued as a representative element of the DEW Line and its role in changing southern Canadians' thinking about the arctic and in the identification and incorporation of Inuit identity into Canadians' vision of themselves.

Recording Inuit fiddle tunes at an impromptu dance in a Quonset hut at a central Arctic DEW site in the summer of 1956. (Courtesy of Indian Affairs—Northern Development Canada, J. D. Ferguson)

With this guideline, it became easier to establish the values and elements of the BAR-1 DEW Line station that we should be managing for. What to preserve and present became a more straightforward question.

Conclusion

In reviewing the long-term commemorative purposes of the BAR-1 DEW Line station, it is important to recognize the limited utility of the Cold War as a construct in postwar Canadian history. Military and political activities of the Cold War period have become foils for investigating the major themes in Canadian contemporary affairs—social justice and introspection of the national cultural mosaic.

The DEW Line is helpful in addressing intra-regional cultural tensions. What is of importance is not the content or purpose of the station but its role in bringing together two different cultures and their exploration of new environments and new ways of understanding the world. What needs to be preserved, therefore, is not the technology or the purposes of the station,

although these need to be acknowledged, but rather the fact that the DEW Line existed and was a part of a cultural-contact process.

To ensure that some physical record of this existence remains, the cultural resource management plan recommended the retention of certain site elements. Although the clean-up of arctic military sites in Canada is still in progress and no final plan for the BAR-1 site has been confirmed, it seems likely that this existence will be marked by the in-situ preservation of the gravel pad and the foundation footprints of the various structures and antennae. To support these remains, an artifact and document collection has also been assembled. Artifacts include both technical and domestic materials reflecting the range of activities at the station; an extensive collection of both record and historic photos, a complete set of as-built drawings, and a selection of the station files have also been preserved.[6]

Associated with the preservation of these physical remains is the need to present those elements of the cultural contact that give the site meaning for Canadians. The "maps" created by the different groups have been investigated and are being prepared for presentation in a book. Oral history and photographs have so far proved to be the most important indicators of this relationship; archival records provide other valuable perspectives as well. The value of the site is its ability to focus visitors' experience on the human memories and experiences that are an important part of the development of a modern Canadian identity.

So the Cold War in the Arctic for Canadians is not about relations with the Soviet Union, nor even very much about those with the United States. Rather it focuses on the southern themes that define us as Canadians: social justice, the amelioration of cross-cultural differences and intra-regional tensions, and the definition of a nation.

6. A CD-ROM BAR-1 DEW Line Radar Station—Ivvavik National Park—Cultural Resource Description (Whitehorse, Parks Canada, 1996) is available to researchers. It includes essays on the history of the DEW Line and the cultural resource management process for the site; finding aids to the artifact, archival, drawing, and photo collections; and an interactive sample of some 200 images and drawings of the site.