

BCAPA Standard of Practice Defining Site Boundaries in the Field

Adopted
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Preamble

For effective site management purposes, the full extent of archaeological sites will be determined wherever possible during archaeological assessment fieldwork. However, this ideal must be balanced against the constraints imposed by project limitations, existing impacts, and administrative boundaries, as well as the desire to minimize site impacts from subsurface testing.

A. Standards for Defining Site Boundaries in the Field

The following standards shall apply to the field definition and reporting of site boundary limits:

1. Archaeological site boundaries will be defined on the basis of natural, observed, or arbitrary limits, or any combination thereof, according to the following hierarchy of priority:
 - a. **Natural** boundaries are those defined by the extent of a natural landform or physical feature, where it can be reasonably deduced that the extent of archaeological remains is constrained by geomorphological site formation processes.
 - b. **Observed** boundaries are those determined on the basis of the horizontal extent of archaeological remains observed during a field study.
 - c. **Arbitrary** boundaries are those that reflect artificial and/or administrative boundaries (such as property lines or rights-of-way), the presence of existing disturbance or developments, or where sites extend beyond project area boundaries.
2. The type of boundary limit(s) (natural, observed, or arbitrary) used to define each site identified and assessed by an archaeological study will be clearly indicated on site maps, and described on site forms and in accompanying reports.
3. Wherever appropriate or practical, preference should be given to defining site boundaries on the basis of natural limits.
4. HRIA site forms and permit reports should indicate if and how boundaries have been marked in the field.
5. Where the Global Positioning System is used to map site boundaries, the margin of error should be indicated (in +/- metres).
6. The identification of boundary limit types is intended to supplement and not replace the requirements for indicating the basis of site dimensions on HRIA site forms.

B. Guidelines for Applying Boundary Limits

1. Natural boundaries

- a. For boundaries based on landforms that extend beyond the extent of observed archaeological remains, use of the entire landform as the defined boundary needs to be clearly justified in the site report.
- b. Where landforms are used to define a site boundary, care should be taken to ensure that some aspect of the defining landform does not post-date formation of the archaeological site.
- c. Where a natural landform forming part of a site boundary is significantly larger than the observed extent of one or more clusters of archaeological materials, professional judgement may be used to delimit or separate sites located on that landform on the basis of a set distance established in consultation with the permitting agency.

2. Observed boundaries

- a. Observed boundaries are determined through surface inspection, documentation of above-ground features, identification of subsurface archaeological remains exposed by post-depositional natural or cultural processes, and subsurface investigations.
- b. Professional judgement is to be used in grouping archaeological evidence into a single site, or dividing archaeological remains amongst separate sites.
- c. In the case of forest utilization sites comprised of culturally modified trees, the regulations of Archaeology Branch Bulletin 12 will apply.
- d. Observed boundaries are established at the furthest extent of observed archaeological evidence.
- e. Where sites cannot be delimited by natural boundaries, and where surface and exposed subsurface archaeological evidence are inadequate, subsurface investigations are required.

3. Arbitrary boundaries

- a. Arbitrary boundaries may be used where natural and observed boundaries cannot be fully established, or where sites extend beyond permitted project boundaries (including on private lands where access has not been granted), as per contractual limitations and in consultation with the permitting agency.
- b. Establishing boundaries to the full extent of a site beyond a project area is encouraged, if permit and contractual conditions allow and permission is granted from landowners and agencies.
- c. Arbitrary boundaries also can be established in cases where access to a property is not possible but the presence of archaeological remains can be identified through other means, including but not limited to documentary evidence, previous inspections, reliable accounts, aerial imagery, remote sensing, or passive and incidental observation.

- d. In certain circumstances where sites extend beyond potential impact zones but remain within project areas, an arbitrary boundary may be established in consultation with the permitting agency.

4. Site Buffers

- a. Site buffers are management tools. Site buffers extending beyond identified site boundaries are to be determined in consultation with the Archaeology Branch and other stakeholders.
- b. Site buffers should be identified on site maps in relation to the defined site boundary.

C. Explanatory Remarks

For an excellent background on methods and examples for defining archaeological site boundaries, refer to the Appendix of “Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties”, National Register Bulletin published by the US National Park Service (available online at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/boundaries/appendix.htm). The following points have been adapted from this document:

1. The level of effort and principles used to define the limits of archaeological sites should be explicit in project methods. Once defined, methods should be consistently applied to each archaeological site identified, revisited, or otherwise investigated.
2. Site boundaries often are reasonable distinctions that may not always reflect the spatial concepts implicit in certain theoretical perspectives, notably those of “nonsite” or “distributional” archaeology. However, boundary determinations require clear understanding of how the mutual relationship between geomorphological and anthropogenic processes form a “site”. In the context of CRM practice in B.C., this requires the archaeologist to use professional judgement in determining the density and spatial relationships of archaeological evidence necessary for a specified area to be considered part of a discrete “site”.
3. Some sites include both horizontal and vertical boundaries. For management purposes, horizontal boundaries of all sites must be clearly marked in two dimensions. Although this Standard of Practice does not apply to the identification of vertical limits established or predicted through subsurface investigations, vertical boundaries can be used to help evaluate site significance.
4. Lastly, absolute boundary definition may be unachievable. Boundaries usually represent compromises reconciling theoretical perspectives and field conditions, in order to provide agencies and stakeholders with the necessary information for presenting appropriate management options.