

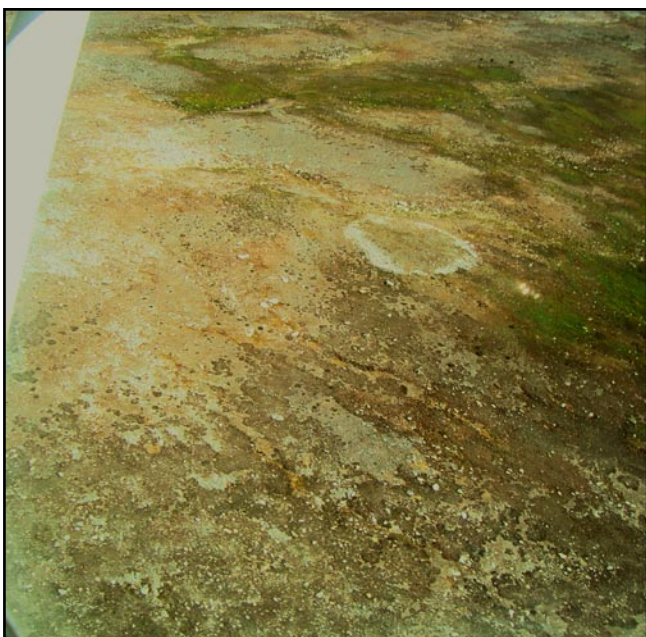
REPORT

Unusual stone circle in British Columbia

High above the Coast Range of British Columbia, Canada, a small float plane circles over a ring of stones before descending to the Nuk Tesli Alpine Experience, a group of log cabins situated by the side of Whitton Lake, some 500 m below. On board are two geologists, Michael Czajkowski, a lecturer with the Open University, and Andrew Okulitch of the Canadian Geological Survey.

They were there to investigate a circle of stones that is 50 m in diameter (it can be seen on Google Earth), situated above the tree line about 160 km in from the Pacific coast and 900 km north of Vancouver. Composed of pale felsite, the circle lies on a plateau veneered with glacial debris on top of darker, coarse-grained, sheared granite and granodiorite. The investigation suggested that a single large felsite block was transported by a glacier, possibly several kilometres. After most of the glacier had melted away, the isolated block protected a pedestal of ice that melted more slowly within the basal glacial debris. Freeze-thaw then caused break-up of the block, which was probably already fractured, and the fragments then slid off the sides of the ice mound to form the ring of stone debris.

Although solifluction has caused minor modification of the landscape, lobes and mounds inside the circle do suggest that an ice mound remained here for some time. Clasts that are larger and more numerous on the south side may reflect melting from that direction, creating a slope down which much of the rock fragments could slide. The circle's position on a gently inclined plateau ruled out an origin in circular patterned ground associated with pingo development. A literature search has found no report of any other structure of its type.



The stone circle seen from the air.



The terrain of the Coast Ranges; the stone circle is on top of the mountain to the right.

Local people had previously suggested causes for the circle that ranged from a meteorite crater to a man-made structure. Had the latter been proved, it would have had tremendous ramifications for ideas of migration of humans into North America. Man-made stone circles are rare in North America. A few known in the United States are smaller and contain spokes from a central hub. A few suspected man-made structures in British Columbia are much smaller, and all are found near known archaeological sites. This one is too high, even allowing for a warmer mid-Holocene environment, and no evidence of ancient man has ever been found in the area.

Even as a natural feature, the stone circle and its investigation were widely reported in the Canadian media. The full report, with more detailed discussion, was published in the Canadian Journal of Earth Science in 2011 (v48, pp1523-1529), and can be downloaded from www.nrcresearchpress.com.

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Andrew Okulitch and the author standing on the stone circle.