

# Plan of the Rocky Mountain Vaults and Archives abandoned subsurface excavation on Mt. McGillivray, near Exshaw, Alberta

Tunnel was driven in Palliser Formation massive limestone not far above the Trans-Canada Highway at the base of McGillivray Slabs, beside an obvious crack in the cliff

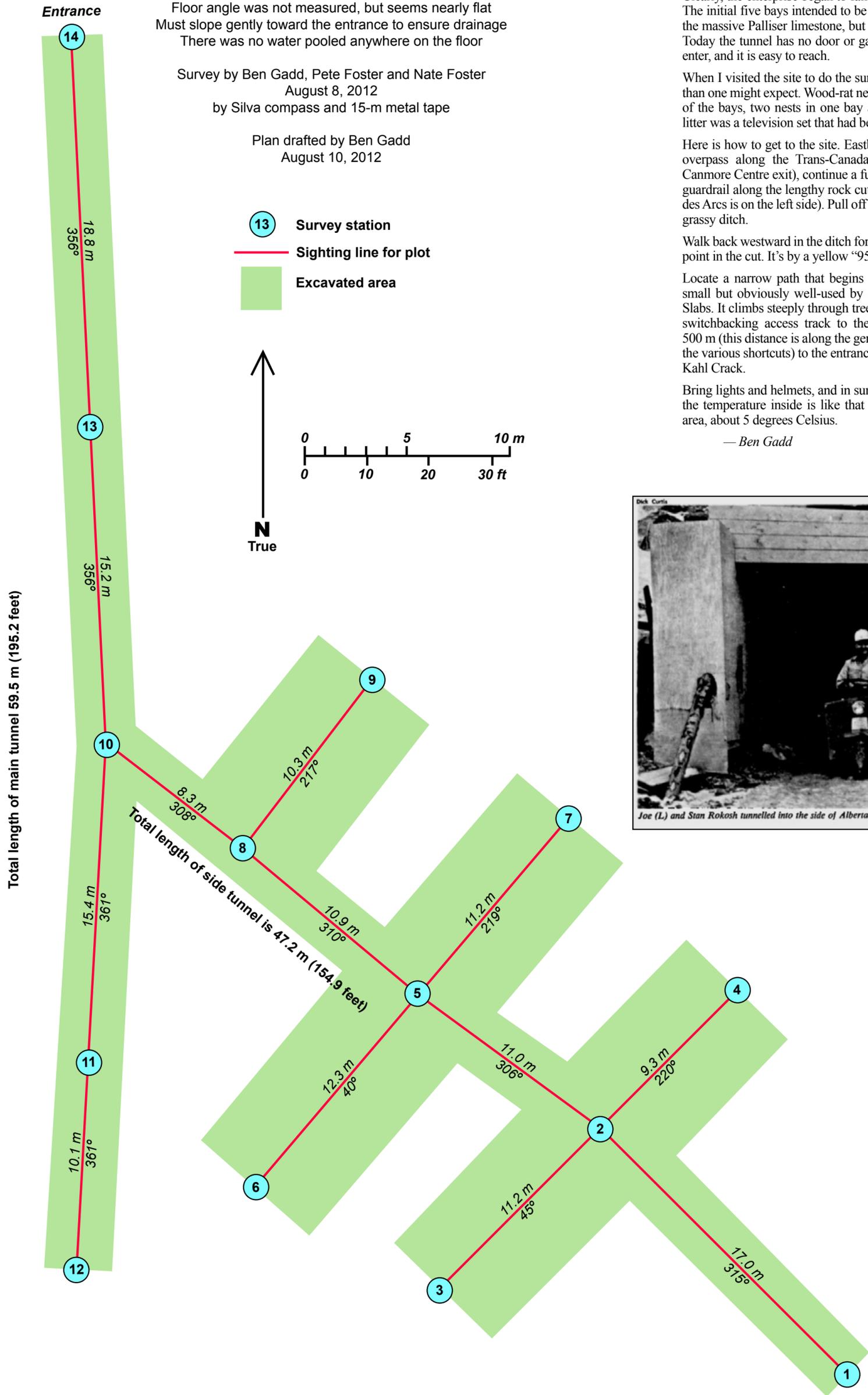
**Location of entrance**  
 N 51 degrees 02.834 minutes  
 W 115 degrees 11.269 minutes

Total length of tunnels and bays 161 m  
 Tunnel cross-section is roughly square, 3 m x 3 m (10 ft x 10 ft)  
 The five bays are roughly 6.7 m wide and 3 m high  
 Depth is 9.3 m to 12.3 m

Floor angle was not measured, but seems nearly flat  
 Must slope gently toward the entrance to ensure drainage  
 There was no water pooled anywhere on the floor

Survey by Ben Gadd, Pete Foster and Nate Foster  
 August 8, 2012  
 by Silva compass and 15-m metal tape

Plan drafted by Ben Gadd  
 August 10, 2012



The history of this odd project is uncertain. What is on record is that in 1969 a company called Rocky Mountain Vaults and Archives received two necessary permits from the Alberta government, one to build the access track and the other to begin the blasting. (The work might already have begun.)

According to a glowing article about the project in the 6 June 1970 issue of *Weekend Magazine* in the *Windsor Star* (I have a copy of this article on file), two brothers, Stan and Joe Rokosh, of Rokosh Engineering and Construction in Calgary, were the principals, investing a total of \$250,000. This was during the Cold War. The idea was to rent out nuke-proof space for securely storing business and family documents. Money or other easily negotiable valuables were excluded.

The article has a photo, reproduced below, of the two brothers at the entrance of the excavation, which author Linda Curtis describes as "recently completed." The complex was to have been finished inside, with bank-like vaults, concrete blast doors, utilities, a meeting room, office, lounge and kitchen, and a guard on duty 24/7.

Clearly, the enterprise began to fail soon after the article was written. The initial five bays intended to be the vaults had been blasted out of the massive Palliser limestone, but they were left entirely unfinished. Today the tunnel has no door or gate. It remains open for anyone to enter, and it is easy to reach.

When I visited the site to do the survey, I found less litter and graffiti than one might expect. Wood-rat nests were located at the back of two of the bays, two nests in one bay and one in another. The strangest litter was a television set that had been painted pink and smashed.

Here is how to get to the site. Eastbound from the Dead Man's Flats overpass along the Trans-Canada Highway (9.3 km east of the Canmore Centre exit), continue a further 5.7 km to the east end of the guardrail along the lengthy rock cut on the right side of the road (Lac des Arcs is on the left side). Pull off the paved shoulder and park in the grassy ditch.

Walk back westward in the ditch for about a hundred metres to the low point in the cut. It's by a yellow "95 km/hr" warning sign.

Locate a narrow path that begins behind some bushes. The trail is small but obviously well-used by climbers en route to McGillivray Slabs. It climbs steeply through trees for 50 m, where it intersects the switchbacking access track to the tunnel. Follow the track uphill 500 m (this distance is along the gentlest line rather than taking any of the various shortcuts) to the entrance at the base of the cliff just left of Kahl Crack.

Bring lights and helmets, and in summer a sweater or light jacket, for the temperature inside is like that of natural limestone caves in the area, about 5 degrees Celsius.

— Ben Gadd

