

# The Archaeology of the Mediterranean World

September 24, 2014

## The Seven Wonders of the Bakken Oil Patch

The title of this blog is blatant click bait, but I do want to talk about the Bakken and my current project. I spent most of the last five days putting fingers to the keyboard and trying to finish a draft of my *Tourist Guide to the Bakken*. My primary intent was to create a basic, descriptive itinerary focused on a series of routes through the oil patch.

Here are the routes:

Route 1: Minot to Ross

Route 1a: White Earth

Route 2: Ross to Tioga

Route 3: Tioga to Williston

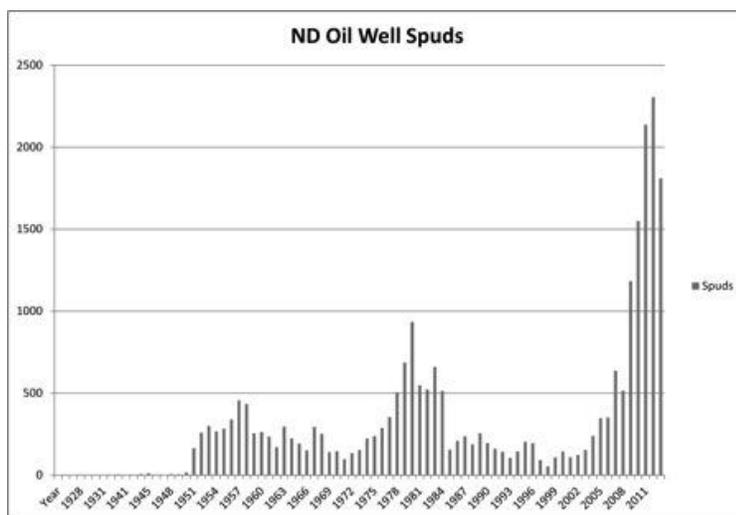
Route 3a: Wheelock

Route 3b: Wildrose and Crosby

Route 4: Williston to Watford City

Route 5: Watford City to New Town

I've also worked on a basic introduction to the Bakken and to the concept of industrial tourism. For the former, I provide a brief history of the industrial landscape in Williams and McKenzie counties arguing that the arrival of the railroad in the first decades of the 20th century initiated a period of booms and busts that continue to this day. This seeks to put to bed the idea that western North Dakota was some kind of pristine prairie and replace it with the idea that industrial practices fundamentally shaped the post-statehood landscape of this region. I then briefly discuss the impacts of the 1951-1959 and 1978-1985 oil booms on settlement and population in the region. I also made this nice chart based on state data for spud dates:



The first, and rather rough draft of the introduction also worked through the concept of industrial tourism. I locate it at the intersection of three trends (1) industrial archaeology, (2) the reuse and preservation of industrial monuments, and (3) “urban” exploring and abandonment porn.

The Society for Industrial Archaeology has worked to elevate the standing of industrial monuments in the eyes of archaeologists and the public. Some of the growing appreciation for industrial past stems from more and more industrial sites crossing the informal 50 years barrier to become eligible for official heritage recognition or enrollment in the National Register of Historic Places. The increased number of industrial sites requiring archaeological assessment before redevelopment has accelerated development of the fields of historical archaeology (or archaeology of the contemporary world).

Both the recognition of an industrial past as part of a shared history and the monumental scale of certain kinds of industrial buildings (train stations, factories, warehouses, etc.) has led to the redevelopment of these spaces in ways that commemorate historical industries. Cities now have warehouse districts, science centers in refitted factories, and museums in neoclassical train stations. At the same time, still function industrial sites like the Hoover Dam continue to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, and many factories continue to offer occasional tours to the curious public.

Finally, the interest in abandonment porn, urban exploring, and “infiltration” has a clear industrial focus. Sites like the Packard Plant in Detroit and the Belle Isle Power Station outside Richmond, Virginia have become famous with urban explorers who trespass and take risks to photograph and document the recent industrial past. Many of the photographs seek to capture the failed grandeur of these buildings as either romantic commentaries or as ironic gestures. As the West moves toward a post-industrial future, the industrial past and present become opportunities for critical reflection on a set of values that simultaneously celebrates the achievements and even virtues of industry at the same we push it out of sight and mind into the third or (ironically termed) “developing” world. The concept of the developing world serves as a useful reminder that historicizing an industrial past implies a path to a present development that we export as freely as industry itself.

So, my *Tourist Guide to the Bakken* seeks to focus attention on the diminishing historical present by approaching it through the eyes of the tourist. It’ll ask the question (always tacitly) whether our industrial present justifies arguments grounded in an industrial past by superimposing the two. What kind of future do we see in the rapidly vanishing present?

I hope to have a draft of the tourist guide ready by October 4th and to ground truth it over a few days then.

Oh, and I guess I do owe everyone baited to clicking on this link a list of the seven wonders of the Bakken Oil Patch. Williston might be a bit overrepresented, but this list is provisional and I more than open to any suggestions!

1. Hess Gas Plant – Tioga
2. Indoor RV Park at Watford City
3. The Bakken Buffet
4. Target Logistics Williston Compound (Williston North Lodge, Bear Paw Lodge, Williston Cabins)
5. Whispers Gentleman’s Club – Williston
6. Williston Foxrun RV park
7. Williston Walmart