



INSTITUTE OF PRAIRIE AND
INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

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Resource Guide to Ordering Aerial Photos for Residential School Research

This document is intended to act as a guide to viewing and ordering aerial photos for communities engaged in work around unmarked graves at residential schools. If you need additional help, often people that work in Land Use or Consultation are familiar with the systems described below and can provide assistance. The IPIA can also assist with ordering appropriate aerial photos for the area around the school of interest. If assistance is required, please contact ipiafoa@ualberta.ca.

Basics:

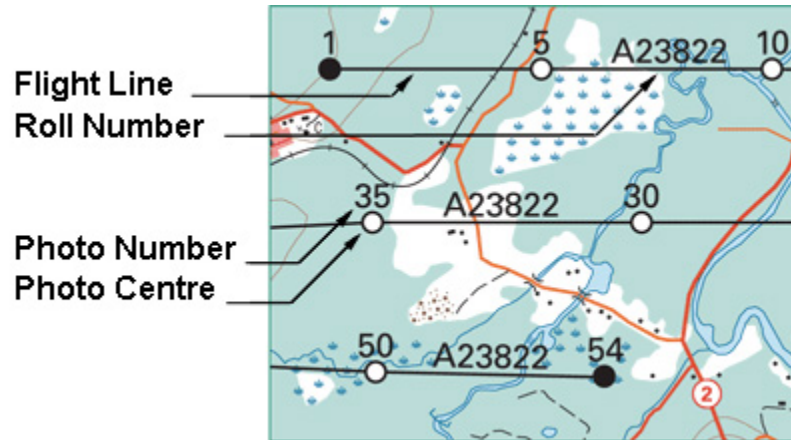
- Aerial photographs will almost always be black and white. These photographs generally go from the early 1900s up to the 2000s, where (generally) they have been replaced with satellite imagery. The earliest satellite images are from the 1990s, so often imagery of residential schools through time will only be recorded through aerial photographs.
- The most important information for requesting aerial photos is the **Legal Land Description** of the area that you are interested in. This will help you locate the area of interest on an index map. If you are unsure of the land description, you can search the place name in the [Canadian Geographical Names Database](#), which will then provide you with the legal land description.
 - You should record this down to the Section (Example: 34-50-23-4 is a legal land description beginning with the Section and followed by the Township, Range, and Meridian).
- You will also need the **National Topographic System** (NTS) map number. This is listed under the information found in the Canadian Geographical Names Database, but can also be found by searching for the area of interest in [Toporama](#).

- The NTS is a system of mapping that subdivides the country into successively smaller blocks or areas of land – like zooming in.
- The country is divided into large primary blocks (1:1,000,000) which are assigned numbers starting in the east and increase west and northwards. Each of these maps is, in turn, subdivided further. The smallest scale of NTS maps are 1:50,000 – an example would be **74D/11**.



- You will use the legal land description to find the appropriate area on an **index map** (which is usually an NTS map number) for aerial photographs from any given year. Aerial photos are usually taken in a designated flight line, which are then listed on an index map related to that particular set of aerial images (often called a job number or roll number). When ordering aerial photos, you will need the **photo number, flight line, roll or job number, and index map** in order to get the specific photo related to that particular area. Generally, only every fifth photo will be mentioned on an index map.

- We recommend that you get photos that show the surrounding landscape in addition to the specific area of interest to ensure you have sufficient overlap of the photos to give a complete picture of the area.



- **One or two photographs of the area per decade** is a good estimate of the information required. If there are specific years (the school was opened or closed, construction occurred, important local events, etc.) that may help, try to get an aerial photograph that was taken close to those years.
- For this work, it is better to have **large-scale maps** to see details in the landscapes and changes in the building or surrounding areas. An example of a large-scale map would be 1:50,000.
- A more detailed explanation of the basics of aerial photography can be found [here](#)

Information Required When Ordering Aerial Photos:

1. Legal Land Description
2. NTS Map Number (1:50,000 Scale)
3. Dates (which year(s))
4. Index Map
5. Roll or Job Number (sometime required, sometimes not)
6. Flight Line
7. Photo Numbers

Where to Find Aerial Photos:

- Aerial photos are usually held by the Government or Institutions. Some aerial images may be free of charge (usually through Universities or other local Institutions), others will come at a cost (through Government agencies).
- The [University of Calgary](#) has put together a great list of Online Aerial Imagery Repositories (some of which are free). This is a great place to start looking.
- [Cameron Library](#) at the University of Alberta has a large collection of aerial photos, but will take **in-person** requests only.
- Provincial Governments will have access to aerial imagery, often a quick Google Search will bring you right to their website. The website for Alberta's Aerial Imagery Library is [here](#).
- The [National Air Photo Library](#) hosts an archive of aerial photos that cover all of Canada starting in the 1920s