Rocky Mountain House

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
OF CANADA

Management Plan

Paul Kane Painting of Rocky Mountain House

Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Canada

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Paul Kane Painting of Rocky Mountain House
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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Parks Canada
Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada : managementplans / Parks Canada.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.
Issued also in French under title: Lieu historique national du Canada du Rocky Mountain House, plan directeur.
Issued also on CD-ROM.
ISBN 978-0-662-45549-3
Cat. No.: R64-105/75-2007E

1. Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site (Alta.)--Management.
2. Historic sites--Canada--Management.
3. Historic sites--Alberta--Management.
4. National parks and reserves--Canada--Management.
5. National parks andreserves--Alberta--Management.
I. Parks Canada. Western and Northern Service centre
II. Title.

FC3664 R62 P37 2007 971.23’32 C2007-980145-5

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

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Management Plan

October 2007

Foreword

Canada's national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas offer Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast unique opportunities to experience and understand our wonderful country. They are places of learning, recreation and fun where Canadians can connect with our past and appreciate the natural, cultural and social forces that shaped Canada.

From our smallest national park to our most visited national historic site to our largest national marine conservation area, each of these places offers Canadians and visitors unique opportunities to experience Canada. These places of beauty, wonder and learning are valued by Canadians - they are part of our past, our present and our future.

Our Government's goal is to ensure that each of these special places is conserved.

We see a future in which these special places will further Canadians' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Canada, the economic well-being of communities, and the vitality of our society.

Our Government's vision is to build a culture of heritage conservation in Canada by offering Canadians exceptional opportunities to experience our natural and cultural heritage.

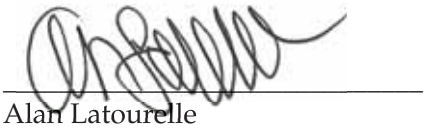
These values form the foundation of the new management plan for Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada. I offer my appreciation to the many thoughtful Canadians who helped to develop this plan, particularly to our dedicated team from Parks Canada, and to all those local organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.

In this same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan.

John Baird
Minister of the Environment

Recommendations

Recommended by:



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A VISION for ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA

Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada (NHSC) remains for all time a protected heritage place associated with the fur trade, early western exploration, and Aboriginal peoples. The structures that once stood here have long disappeared but the evocative cultural landscape, preserved archaeological resources, well known personal programs, memorable visitor centre and engaging interpretive approaches strongly connect people to this special place. Local, national and international guests understand and take pride in the country's foresight in commemorating this special place along the North Saskatchewan River.

The site's character is welcoming and reminiscent of its early beginnings. Its cultural and natural resources are secure and the reasons for its national historic significance are effectively communicated. Aboriginal stories are an integral part of the site's presentation. Off-site learning opportunities and a greater availability of published and website information foster an appreciation and understanding of this special place and entice people to visit. Visitation is significantly higher than 2006 levels with a positive economic impact on the surrounding community.

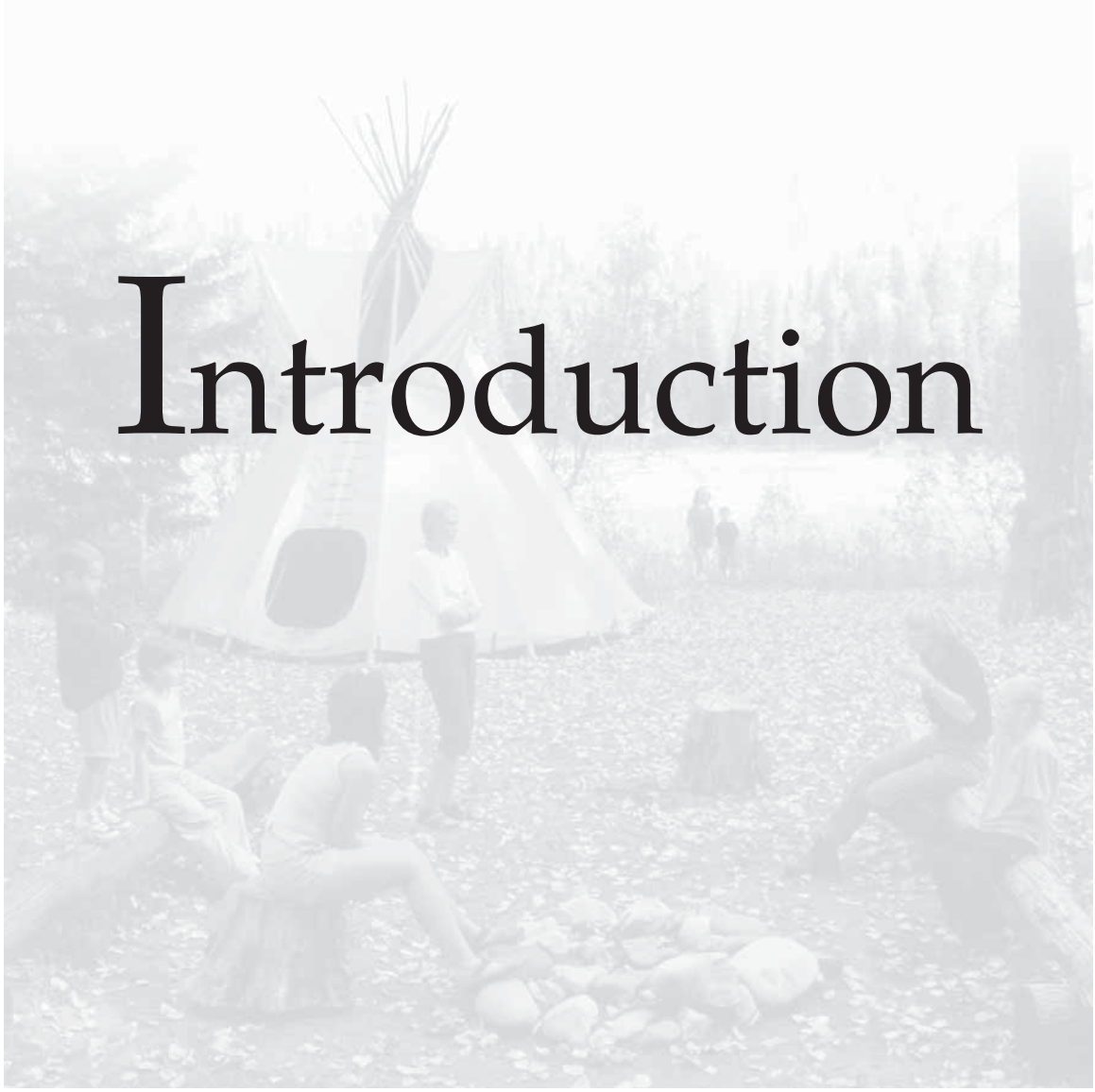
Rocky Mountain House NHSC is administered and operated by Parks Canada as a significant summer tourism destination in west-central Alberta. The Friends of the site continue to support and actively promote the site. There is a spirit of cooperation with First Nation and Métis people, the local community, regional attractions, local governments, neighbouring landowners, and the gas plant operators to ensure the site's commemorative integrity. Rocky Mountain House NHSC is faithful to its past while moving forward to meet tomorrow's challenges.

Key Themes

Management planning for Rocky Mountain House NHSC draws on the site's key themes, which are reflected in this Vision.

- Parks Canada manages Rocky Mountain House NHSC in a manner that ensures the site's commemorative integrity.
- The Rocky Mountain House NHSC Commemorative Integrity Statement (1998) guides decision-making.
- The principles and practices of cultural resource management are strongly upheld.
- Education and awareness about the values of the national historic site, ethics of stewardship, cultural and natural heritage and services are provided both within and beyond the boundaries of the site.
- The site welcomes all Canadians and international guests who wish to visit in the summer months.
- The Friends of the site continue to be an important partner.
- An inclusive approach is taken with First Nation and Métis people recognizing their long and close association with the site.
- The site contributes to regional tourism and the environmental sustainability of the region. The Town of Rocky Mountain House, provincial authorities and regional attractions actively cooperate in marketing and promoting the site.
- Parks Canada liaises with adjacent landowners, industrial users and municipal authorities to ensure, as much as possible, the site's viewscapes and cultural resources are preserved and respected in their decisions.

James Hector's 1858 sketch of Rocky Mountain House. *Credit: Hocken Library, University of Otago 13.126*



Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Rocky Mountain House is of national historic significance because of its role in the historic fur trade: its association with David Thompson and "exploration towards the westward;" and its relationship with the Blackfoot peoples (Niitsitapi), particularly the Peigan (Piikani).

Statement of Commemorative Intent, Rocky Mountain House

On the banks of the North Saskatchewan River near the town of the same name, Rocky Mountain House NHSC invites visitors to relive one of the legendary eras in Canadian history. The Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company operated fur trade posts on this site for much of the 19th century. David Thompson - celebrated explorer, trader, and surveyor used it as a base of explorations to cross the Rocky Mountains. Aboriginal peoples, notably the Niitsitapi and the Piikani brought their furs to this very spot to trade with European explorers.

The historic site encompasses trading posts built and occupied between 1799 and 1875 on the west bank of the North Saskatchewan River, and the Seafort Burial Site.

1.1 Management Planning

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* (1998) requires each national historic site administered by Parks Canada to have a management plan. These plans, prepared in consultation with Canadians, reflect the Agency's policies and legislation. They are approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, tabled in Parliament, and reviewed every five years.

The goal of management planning is to ensure the commemorative integrity of national historic sites including the application of cultural resource management principles and practices. Management plans also identify appropriate opportunities for people to enjoy memorable experiences and to appreciate and learn about Canada's history.

Fur Trade Post to National Historic Site

1799	North West Company builds Rocky Mountain House
1799	Hudson's Bay Company builds Acton House
1835	Hudson's Bay Company builds second Rocky Mountain House
1868	Hudson's Bay Company completes the final Rocky Mountain House
1875	Fur trade companies leave the area
1922	Brierley family begins farming the land
1926	Rocky Mountain House declared a national historic site
1931	First parcel of land donated to federal government
1968	Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recommends the creation of a national historic park
1970s	Additional purchases expand the site to 228 hectares
1979	Rocky Mountain House NHSC officially opens to the public

The first management plan for Rocky Mountain House NHSC was approved in 1994. In the spring of 2006, Parks Canada began the process of updating the plan.

The plan sets out a vision, along with strategic goals, objectives and actions to achieve that vision. When approved by parliament, it will guide Parks Canada and its partners in the protection and presentation of Rocky Mountain House for all Canadians.

1.2 National Historic Sites of Canada

National historic sites commemorate the diversity of human experience and the legacy of thousands of years of human history. They mark the tangible cultural remains of the lives and stories of the people who forged Canada. This family of national historic sites is very large, encompassing more than 900 sites and representing every province and territory. Parks Canada administers just over 150 of these sites.

1.3 Legislative and Policy Framework

Management planning for individual historic sites takes place within a larger multi-faceted framework of legislation and policy. In essence, the Parks Canada Agency mandate has three key elements or pillars; protection, education and facilitating memorable visitor experiences. This section describes the main laws and policies applicable to national historic sites administered by Parks Canada.

Historic Sites and Monuments Act

The *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* (2000) authorizes the Minister of the Environment to designate historic places of national significance. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, composed of representatives from all provinces and territories, advises the Minister on this type of commemoration. Between 1992 and 1996, there were extensive consultations with heritage constituencies across Canada on priority areas to enhance the system of national historic sites. These

consultations identified the history of Aboriginal peoples, ethnocultural communities and women as insufficiently represented. These three areas, which are reflected in the *National Historic Sites of Canada System Plan* (2000), are Parks Canada's strategic priorities.

National Historic Sites Policy

The *National Historic Sites Policy* (1994) sets out the Government of Canada's objectives for national historic sites:

- to foster knowledge and appreciation of Canada's past through a national program of historical commemoration;
- to ensure the commemorative integrity of national historic sites administered by Parks Canada by protecting and presenting them for the benefit of this and future generations, in a manner which respects the significant and irreplaceable legacy represented by these places and their associated resources; and
- to encourage and support the protection and presentation by others of places of national historic significance that are not administered by Parks Canada.

Commemorative Integrity

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* (1998) states that, "It is in the national interest . . . to ensure the commemorative integrity of national historic sites." *Commemorative Integrity* reflects the health and wholeness of a site. A national historic site possesses commemorative integrity when:

- the resources directly related to the reasons for designation as a national historic site are not impaired or under threat;
- the reasons for designation as a national historic site are effectively communicated to the public; and
- all decisions and actions respect the site's heritage values (including those not related to the reasons for designation).

Parks Canada prepares a *Commemorative Integrity Statement* (CIS) for each national historic site under its jurisdiction. This statement reflects the Agency's *Cultural Resource Management Policy* (see below) and describes the conditions that must exist to ensure commemorative integrity. While it serves as the basis for decision-making, a *Commemorative Integrity Statement* does not prescribe particular actions. Instead, it provides information about historic values and acts as a framework to assess the impact of proposed actions. The management plan is the primary vehicle for identifying future direction.

The *Commemorative Integrity Statement* for Rocky Mountain House NHSC was approved in 1998, and the commemorative integrity evaluation was completed in 1999. The condition of most resources, the effectiveness of communication, and selected management practices received fair to good ratings. Communication of the site's national significance received a poor rating.

Cultural Resource Management Policy

Cultural resource management is an integrated, holistic approach to managing cultural resources. It applies to all activities that affect national historic sites administered by Parks Canada. It calls for the principles of value, public benefit, understanding, respect and integrity to guide decision-making at all levels of planning and administration.

Parks Canada's Corporate Plan

Memorable visitor experiences, resource protection, and education are the central pillars of the integrated management approach described in *Parks Canada's Corporate Plan.*

The corporate plan sets key priorities for national historic sites.

- Recapitalize deteriorated assets in a manner that reflects the expectations and needs of visitors.
- Ensure *Commemorative Integrity Statements* form the foundation of sound management at national historic sites administered by Parks Canada.
- Ensure regular evaluations of the state of commemorative integrity; improve the condition of all elements that are rated as poor.
- Ensure that Aboriginal voices and stories become an even more integral part of Parks Canada's programs and management.
- Increase public support and maximize the number of visitors having lasting, memorable experiences at national heritage places.

The updated management plan addresses the three pillars of the Parks Canada program.

1.4 Visitor Experience

Offering visitors the opportunity to enjoy a memorable experience is a fundamental goal for Parks Canada. Understanding the needs and expectations of those visitors is central to this approach. The challenge for all national historic sites is to respond to shifting demographics and attitudes, while respecting the commemorative integrity of these special places.

To improve the visitor experience and heritage presentation at Rocky Mountain House, Parks Canada has begun a major redevelopment of its facilities and interpretive media. The site has faced a number of infrastructure issues in recent years (e.g., potable water, deterioration of the Visitor Centre, outdated exhibits). In 2004 Parks officials examined a number of options including closing the Visitor Centre, removing the admission fee, and enhancing exhibits. The local community expressed strong support for maintaining the present level of services including operation of the Visitor Centre.

On April 22, 2005, Parks Canada announced $2.9 in funding to be invested in visitor facilities and interpretive displays. The redevelopment will not only address the condition of the Visitor Centre but also improve the visitor experience by offering new interactive exhibits, improving outdoor interpretive media, expanding the Friends retail space, and providing new washrooms.

1.5 Public Consultation

Parks Canada, acting alone, cannot ensure the commemorative integrity of Rocky Mountain House NHSC. Public support and the cooperation of visitors, other levels of government, Aboriginal peoples, neighboring land managers, operator of the gas plant, cooperating associations, and heritage organizations are essential in safeguarding and celebrating this site. The multidisciplinary team responsible for this document consulted interested stakeholders and the public in setting priorities.

Planning Context

2.0 Planning Context

2.1 Regional Setting

Just 80 km west of Red Deer and seven kilometres from the community of Rocky Mountain House, this historic site is set in a region dominated by agriculture, lumbering, and oil and gas production. The area is experiencing phenomenal growth in the oil and gas sector. Communities are expanding, the number of acreages is increasing, and there is mounting demand for gravel and utility corridors.

Development surrounds the national historic site, with oil wells near the boundary, gravel pits to the west, a rail line and propane storage facility to the north, and rural acreages to the west and north. A number of buried pipelines cross the property to a large and visible gas plant. Natural forest on privately owned land across the Saskatchewan River from the Visitor Centre makes a significant contribution to the site's sense of place.

Fluctuating water levels from the Bighorn Dam, approximately 120 km upstream, cause periodic flooding and ice dams at the historic site.

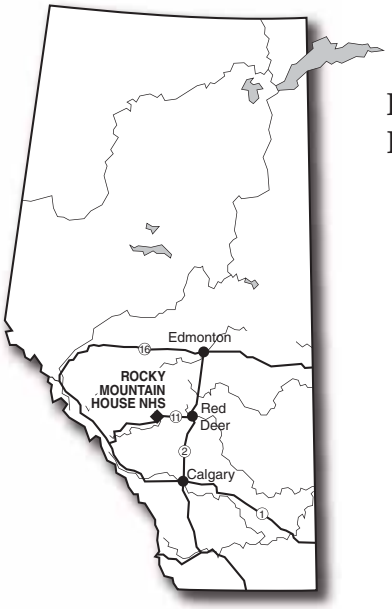


Figure 1. Regional location of Rocky Mountain House NHSC

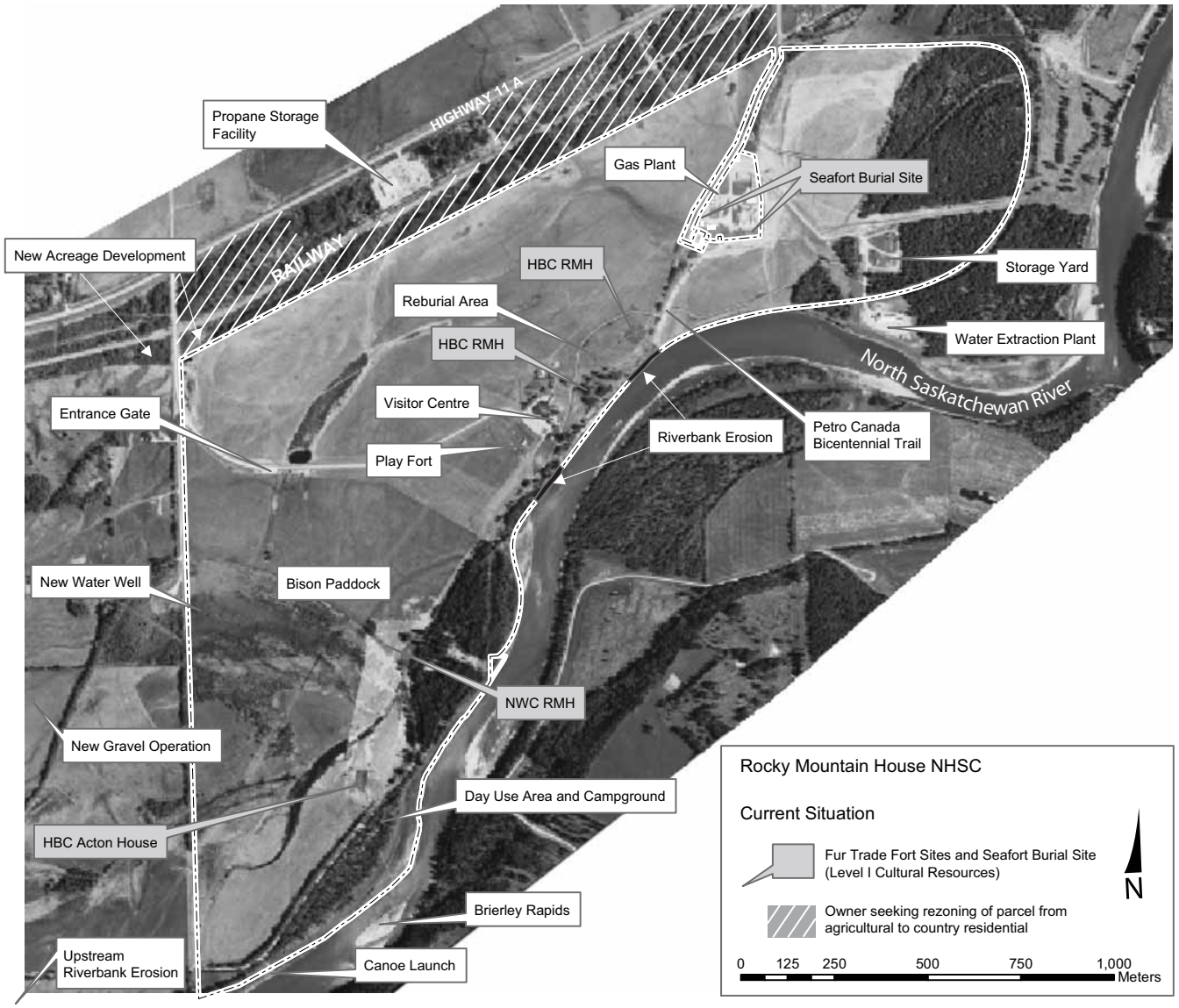


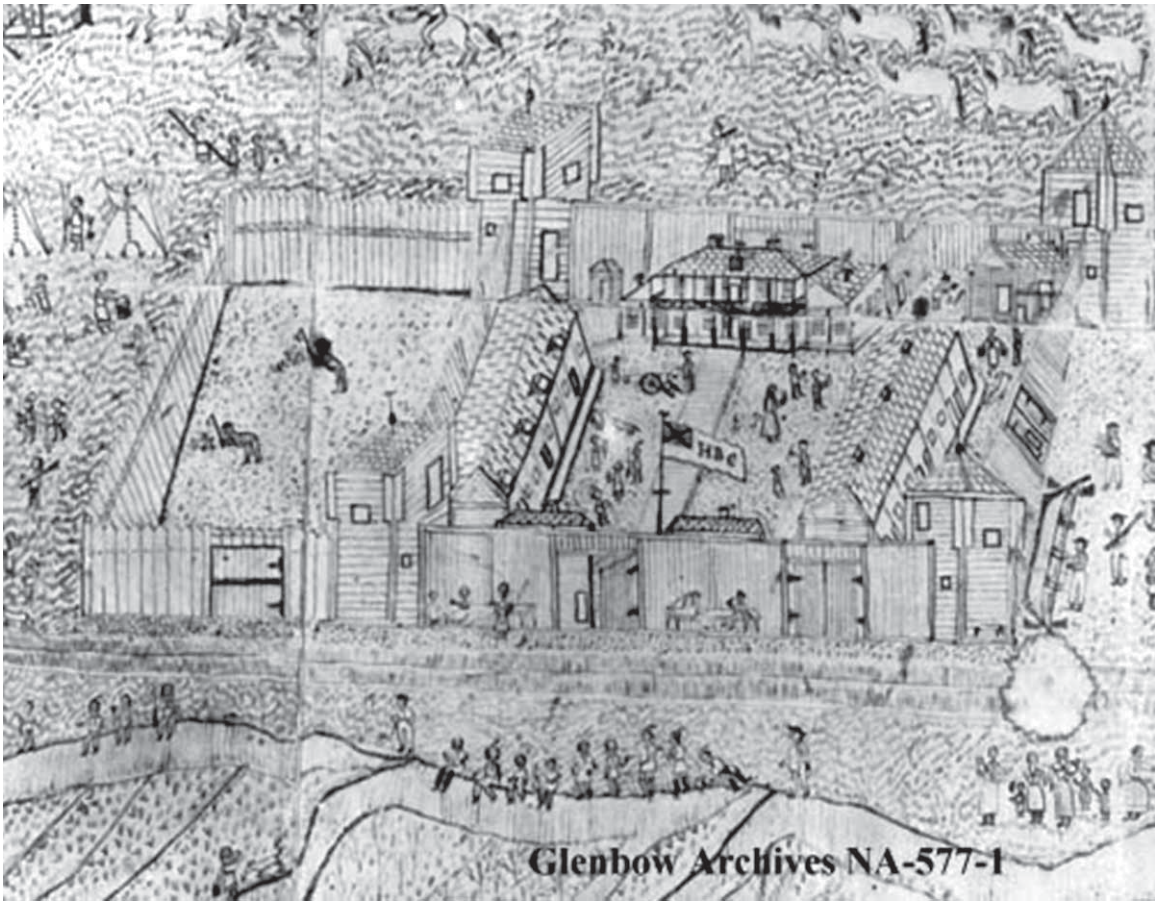
Figure 2. Current situation at Rocky Mountain House NHSC

2.2 History

By the late 18th Century the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies were competing for the increasingly lucrative commercial fur trade in Canada. In pursuit of new sources of fur, the two rival companies were driven further into Canada's western interior to establish new, profitable trading alliances. In 1799, near the confluence of the North Saskatchewan and Clearwater Rivers, the North West Company built Rocky Mountain House, hoping to attract Kutenai trade from across the mountains and establish a base of exploration for new fur trade territories. In that same year, the competing Hudson's Bay Company established Acton House nearby.

The companies quickly realized the anticipated trade with the Kutenai would never materialize. The Peigan (Piikani) did not want the companies to circumvent their profitable role as middlemen and prevented the Kutenai from trading directly for guns and ammunition. The Piikani, Blood and Blackfoot became the principal customers at Rocky, preferring not to visit other posts in the region where they faced the prospect of confronting their rivals, the Cree and Assiniboine.

The most famous of the Nor'westers who used Rocky Mountain House as a base was the surveyor and explorer David Thompson. During his 28 years in the fur trade, Thompson travelled some 88,000 km and filled in the map of western Canada. In 1807 he followed the North Saskatchewan westward from Rocky Mountain House and crossed the mountains via Howse Pass to establish new trading alliances. In 1810 the Piikani forced Thompson to abandon Howse Pass in favour of Athabasca Pass to the north. Thompson's explorations from Rocky Mountain House were integral to his later completion of the 'Great Map,' an extraordinary achievement that served as a benchmark for cartographic knowledge of western Canada for decades.



Jean L'Heureux, sketch of the Last Rocky Mountain House in 1873 (National Archives).

The continuing fight for supremacy left both the North West and Hudson's Bay companies struggling financially. With little choice, the two companies amalgamated in 1821. Under the Hudson's Bay Company banner, the North West Company fort on the North Saskatchewan was likely abandoned and Acton House took the name Rocky Mountain House. In 1835, after a failed attempt to establish an alternative post, the Hudson's Bay Company returned to Rocky, replaced the dilapidated 1799 post, and began a long period of regular habitation in winter. The company put considerable effort into making the post comfortable and durable. It was heavily fortified and constructed to protect its inhabitants from the severity of the elements, and to discourage possible attack.

Opening a new trading establishment did little to draw trade from the Blackfoot Confederacy, especially the Piikani who began to trade with the Americans. For the next several years, trade at Rocky Mountain House shifted to the Cree, Stoney and Métis People of the eastern slopes and upper North Saskatchewan River valley. Trading remained limited and the new post survived with diminishing success until 1861, when a group of Blackfoot, finding the fort abandoned, burned it to the ground. In anticipation of a new era of prosperity, the company returned in 1864, quickly established a temprary post and began construction of a new permanent post that was completed in 1868. Other than the occasional hint of prosperity, trading remained meager and the post was permanently abandoned in 1875.

After 1875 there was no permanent occupation of the site until well into the 20th century, when construction of a rail line to the Nordegg coal district encouraged agricultural settlement and lumber operations. In 1922 the Brierley family began farming the land around the old fur trade site, where, without realizing it, they built their homestead on significant archaeological resources associated with the 1789-1821 RMH.

Oil and gas occupy an important place in the history of this national historic site. In the late 1960s Seafort Petroleum Ltd built a pipeline and compressor plant on the Brierley property, near the current north boundary of the site. When Parks Canada purchased the property in the 1970s, encumbrances related to the gas plant and pipelines were in place. These agreements allow the oil company to operate in perpetuity or until they decide to surrender their interest.

Workers building the gas plant uncovered the Seafort Burial Site in 1969. Construction of the tank farm in 1979 had an additional impact on the burial site.

Research in the 1960s and 1970s gradually revealed the story of the fur trade at Rocky Mountain House. The Canadian government acquired the Brierley farm in 1970, and Parks Canada undertook new archaeological and historic research. The farm buildings were removed, a section of the bank was stabilized, and a visitor centre was built.

Heritage Protection

3.0 Heritage Protection

3.1 Background

In managing cultural resources, Parks Canada will adhere to principles of value, public benefit, understanding, respect, and integrity.

Cultural Resource Management Policy (1994)

Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy provides clear direction about the principles and practices that apply to protecting the heritage resources under its care.

The policy defines cultural resources . . .

A cultural resource is a human work, or a place that gives evidence of human activity or has spiritual or cultural meaning, and that has been determined to be of historic value. Cultural resources are distinguished from other resources by virtue of their assigned historic value. This value derives from an association with an aspect or aspects of human history.

. . . and sets out the four elements that must be in place in all decision-making.

i) the inventory of resources

ii) the evaluation of resources to determine which are to be considered as cultural resources and what it is that constitutes their historic value

iii) the consideration of historic value in actions affecting conservation and presentation

iv) monitoring and review to ensure that conservation and presentation objectives continue to be met effectively

3.2 Historic Values of Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site of Canada

The *Commemorative Integrity Statement* for Rocky Mountain House NHSC describes its historic values.

- The site's association with the fur trade, David Thompson, the exploration of the West, and the Blackfoot (particularly the Peigan).
- The relationship of the four forts and the Seafort Burial Site.
- Extensive in situ remains of the forts and the Seafort Burial Site.
- The natural setting, believed to look much as it did during the fur trade (e.g., river terraces, the spruce forest, Brierley Rapids).

Level I cultural resources

A Level I Cultural Resource *is of national historic significance. This is the highest level assigned to a cultural resource for which Parks Canada is responsible.*

Rocky Mountain House 1799-1821
This site was excavated between 1975 and 1978. Its contours resemble a stabilized cultural landscape showing the palisade, bastion and outlines of the buildings.

Acton House 1799-1835
This site was excavated in the 1960s and re-examined in the early 1980s. A steel framework and timbers mark the location of palisades, buildings and bastions.

Rocky Mountain House 1835-1861
This site has received minimal attention and is not readily visible. Excavation has concentrated on defining its outer limits.

Rocky Mountain House 1868-1875
This fort is buried northeast of the Visitor Centre. Two reconstructed chimneys and a number of cultural depressions are visible. The south palisade and bastions have been lost to erosion. The riverbank has been stabilized by rock fill. Excavation has concentrated on select buildings.

Seafort Burial Site
This site is on and adjacent to land leased by the gas plant. Burials uncovered during construction and subsequent expansion of the gas plant have been moved to a cemetery north of the 1868 -1875 post.

Artifacts
Excavations have uncovered some 50,000 artifacts, including trade goods, personal effects, and manufactured goods. Most are Level l cultural resources made of metal, stone, ceramic, glass, bone, and antler. Many artifacts are fragments, probably discarded as refuse.

Level II cultural resources

A Level II Cultural Resource *is not of national historic significance but may be considered a cultural resource because of its historic value.*

Aboriginal Site
One prehistoric Aboriginal site has been identified, evidence of human occupation before 1799. Little is known about other Aboriginal campsites likely associated with each of the four forts.

Pioneer Cemetery
A pioneer cemetery west of Rocky Mountain House (1799 -1821) is associated with settlement in the district after the fur trade.

1967 Centennial Voyageur Canoe
The Voyageur canoe is the original Alberta canoe launched at Rocky Mountain House during the canoe brigade re-enactment celebrating Canada's centennial in 1967.

After the Fur Trade
Sites associated with settlement in the early 20th century include sawmills and the Brierley farmstead.

Cultural Landscape

Rocky Mountain House is an excellent example of a cultural landscape, a term that refers to the combined works of nature and humans over time. A common thread is human use of the landscape and how people see the result as an expression of past attitudes and values. At Rocky Mountain House NHSC a number of elements contribute to its complex cultural landscape:

- the relationship of the forts and the Seafort Burial Site to the North Saskatchewan River and to each other;
- the importance of the view to the setting and the visitor experience. The view of the forested slope across the river is an important element in defining the character of the cultural landscape;
- the spruce forest along the river and associated plant communities; and
- the North Saskatchewan River, including the Brierley Rapids. The river is a strong symbol of the site's national historic significance and an important link to the fur trade period.

3.3 Current Situation

While Parks Canada has a substantial inventory of resources associated with the historic forts, much remains to be learned.

Research consists largely of the excavation of two fur trade sites and a complete inventory of the site's historic objects undertaken in 2001. While the extent of the Seafort Burial Site is unknown, remote sensing indicates the presence of undisturbed graves in and around the gas plant. An archaeological survey during construction of the Bicentennial Trail indicated that areas near Rocky Mountain House 1868-75 and Rocky Mountain House 1835-61 are rich with undisturbed archaeological features and artifacts.

In spite of a number of historic studies, gaps remain, especially surrounding homesteading and the sawmill operation. A full inventory and assessment of archaeological specimens has not been completed and little evidence exists about the activities of Aboriginal peoples throughout the fur trade era.

A major flood in 2005 destabilized sections of the bank above the 1835 – 1861 post and along the access road to the campground. As archaeological resources are vulnerable to erosion, rip-rap was installed in 1973 to protect the 1868 -1875 site. There is a real possibility that the river will breach the bank at the north end of the site, resulting in a major loss of land.

A landscape management plan (2004) addresses a number of issues, including the burgeoning ground squirrel population.

Human use on the North Saskatchewan River has increased in recent years. The Brierley Rapids are popular with kayakers and canoeists and is the main channel for motorboats travelling upstream. Jet boating, kayaking, rafting, canoeing, and swimming have all become more prevalent, raising concern about damage to the shoreline, habitat destruction, air and noise pollution, and unlawful access from private lands.

Uncontrolled vehicle access from the Petro-Canada Bicentennial Trail has been an issue for site security and vandalism.

3.4 Strategic Goal

To protect cultural resources, cultural landscape features, and associated natural resources in a manner that respects their historic value and ensures their integrity.

3.5 Objectives

Use the approved Commemorative Integrity Statement to guide the protection of the site's cultural resources.

Consider historic values in actions affecting all conservation and presentation activities.

Adopt an integrated management approach to the protection of the site's cultural and natural resources.

Protect the elements that define the character of the cultural landscape both on and near the site.

Improve regular communication with local landowners and planning authorities to encourage mutually acceptable land use decisions.

Fill information gaps through on-going research.

3.6 Key Actions

1. Continue to inventory and evaluate cultural resources and elements of the natural landscape; focus on problem areas where additional information is needed.
2. Develop and implement an integrated monitoring program for cultural and natural resources.
3. Complete a summary report on the scope and condition of archaeological specimen collections; undertake necessary collection management activities based on the recommendations of this report.
4. Update the scope of collections statement for historic objects.
5. Continue to work with the operators of the gas plant to reduce the impact of the plant on all aspects of the historic site.
6. Pursue a best practices agreement with the gas plant operator that identifies protocols and procedures for the protection of Seafort Burial Site and for the environmental assessment process; encourage measures within the agreement that maintain and improve the quality of the visitor experience.
7. Ensure that all operators of pipelines crossing the national historic site minimize any ground disturbance, ensure the integrity of their pipelines and apply acceptable standards for environmental assessment and protection.
8. Ensure remediation of groundwater contamination from the gas plant is completed in compliance with federal and provincial legislation.
9. Ensure any disturbance associated with plant and pipeline construction is subject to environmental and archaeological resource assessments.
10. Identify ways to reduce the threat of erosion along the riverbank.
    - Undertake a detailed engineering assessment to examine impacts and proposed solutions within the next five years; design and implement a course of action based on the assessment.
    - Continue regular monitoring of the riverbank.
    - Document and salvage archaeological resources in areas that cannot be protected from erosion.
11. Update and implement the landscape management plan.
    - Plant a buffer of trees along the edge of the bison paddock.
    - Plant trees to screen the gas plant.
    - Continue to control ground squirrels in proximity to archaeological sites.
    - Control invasive weed species (e.g., tall buttercup).
    - Implement the fire management measures; mow fireguards along the access road, the north edge of the compound, the west fence, and across the central meadow to the north boundary fence.
    - Minimize the impact of the aspen grove on the cultural resources of the 1868 – 75 fort.
    - Continue to protect wildlife habitat in the central and east meadows.
12. Improve barriers to prevent motor vehicle access along the Petro-Canada Bicentennial Trail.

13. Continue to coordinate emergency planning and response with the operators of the gas plant and others in the event of emergency situations with the gas plant, the propane loading dock, river flooding, fire and other potential hazards.

Memorable Experiences

4.0 Memorable Experiences

4.1 Background

Memorable historic site experiences foster a shared sense of responsibility for our heritage, both environmental and cultural. These experiences influence the values of Canadians and encourage them to take action beyond the boundaries of our protected areas. Visits to national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas promote a clear and strong sense of Canada, adding to the well-being and health of its citizens.

People come to Rocky Mountain House NHSC to learn about Canadian history, to rest and relax in a peaceful setting, and to enjoy outdoor activities such as camping. The site is open to the public from the May long weekend until September. Access is from a paved road off Highway 11A. While highway signs at Saskatchewan Crossing, in the Town of Rocky Mountain House, and on Highway 11 west of Red Deer mark the site, additional signs would make it easier for visitors to find their way.

Visitor facilities and services include the following:

- a Visitor Centre with a reception area, theatre, gift shop, exhibits, offices and universally accessible washrooms with flush toilets;
- two interpretive trails;
- remains of four fur trade posts;
- replicas of a York Boat and a Red River Cart;
- bison paddock;
- observation tower;
- picnic tables;
- a play fort;
- boat launch;
- Brierley Rapids campground;
- tipis (for group camping); and
- parking.

4.2 Current Situation

After considerable public discussion, the fall of 2005 saw the start of a major redevelopment of the site's facilities, including the Visitor Centre. This work is scheduled for completion in 2008.

The Visitor Centre serves as the point of welcome and orientation, introducing visitors to the site and to Parks Canada. Here people have the opportunity to see and experience the history of the fur trade. In the absence of historic buildings, facilities and programs play an important role in connecting with the story and creating a memorable experience. An effective orientation video would help give visitors a better sense of the site and what it offers.

Daily personal interpretive programs for groups and individuals of all ages range from conversation with staff in the Visitor Centre to demonstrations throughout the site.

Two interpretive trails lead to the locations of the original trading posts. Listening stations and interpretive media bring the story alive along the trails. The views of the river and the connection between the four posts add an extra dimension to the experience, helping visitors leave with a better feeling for what life was like at the site during the fur trade.

The redeveloped visitor centre will retain its existing footprint with a separate washroom building being added near the front of the building. A more inviting façade will complement the site's historic landscape and theme. The concession, operated by the Friends of the site, will be expanded, as will the exhibit area. A new theatre, improved listening stations, and better interpretive media along the two trails will be part of the redevelopment.

Some work on the project has already been completed:

- a new entrance gate features artistic ironwork and reflects the site's themes;
- a new well supplies a reliable flow of clean drinking water to the Visitor Centre;

- new siding and a new roof improve the condition of the maintenance shop;
- a new traffic loop and parking lot at the day use area and campground improve traffic flow and parking; and
- new fire pits and a new privy improve the function of the day use area and campground.

The Brierley Campground and day use area is an important part of the visitor offer. The Brierley Rapids are a premier destination for canoeing and kayaking. In 2005, Parks Canada signed a two-year agreement with the Métis to provide a host program and collect fees at the campground. Vandalism has decreased significantly thanks to the Métis presence and the cooperation of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

The Bison Paddock occupies approximately 81 ha in the southwest corner of the site. The bison herd was removed in 2005 to allow for an archaeological survey and construction of the new water pipeline.

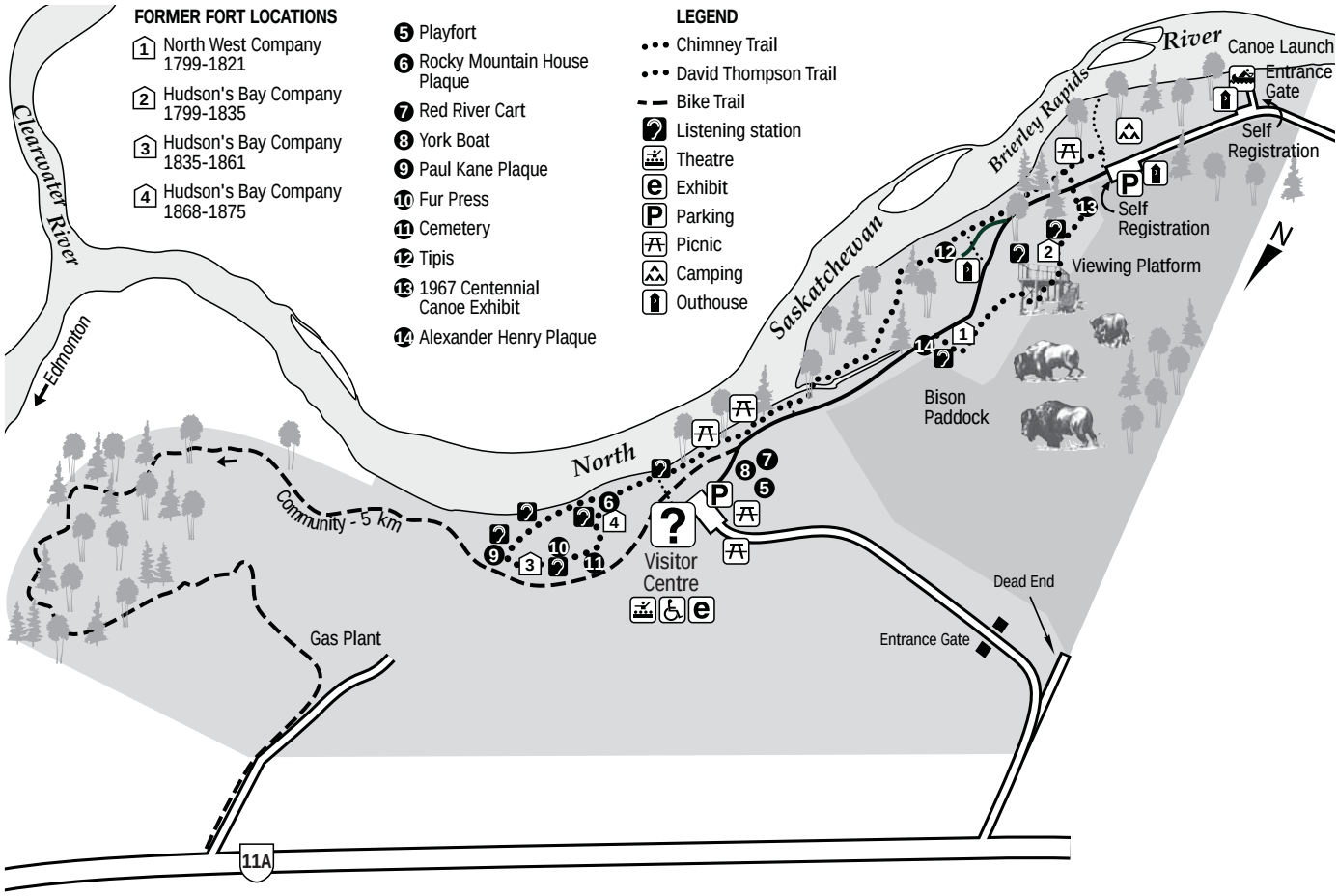


Figure 3. Site plan of Rocky Mountain House NHSC

Red River Cart. *Credit: Parks Canada Agency*

4.3 Strategic Goals

To provide a range of meaningful and memorable on-site visitor experiences that respect the commemorative integrity of the site.

To increase the number of visitors.

To reduce vandalism and illegal access.

4.4 Objectives

Protect and present key elements of the cultural landscape and the special sense of place that contribute to the image, appeal and quality of the visitor experience.

Emphasize the site's unique features – the authentic cultural landscape, the North Saskatchewan River, and the large natural space.

Engage the Friends of the site, the local community, Métis and First Nation groups in providing memorable visitor experiences.

Direct more visitors to the site.

Create excitement and a reason to return.

Attract new audiences – new Canadians, youth, non-supporters – while keeping existing audiences.

Build on previous successes – community relationships, interactive exhibits, strong school program, name recognition, and established special events.

4.5 Key Actions

1. Complete the current redevelopment project by the spring of 2008.
2. Work with partners to diversify the visitor experience and to make the site more accessible, relevant and attractive to a broader range of clients.
    - Improve directional signage on highways leading to the site.
    - Continue to provide personal interpretive programs in the summer.
    - Pilot compatible new products and heritage experiences such as overnight tipi stays, canoe trips on the river, and cart rides through partnership and agreements with third parties.
    - Enhance the heritage experience through demonstrations and new activities offered by Métis and First Nation people.
    - Diversify the program offer to create a reason to return.
    - Attract new clients and visitor groups (e.g., use of the site for corporate retreats).
    - Undertake regular visitor surveys to gather information on expectations and satisfaction.
    - Continue to consult educators and youth regarding improvements to the school program.
    - Provide clearer directions to the site on the Parks Canada website.
    - Work with Clearwater County to maintain the quality of the roads and signage to the site and to Brierley Campground.
    - Continue a campground host program at the Brierley Campground.
    - Maintain a herd of Plains bison in the existing bison paddock.
    - Continue to provide special events that complement the site's services.
    - Provide a summer food service through the Friends of the site (e.g., a barbeque and picnic tables near the Visitor Centre).
    - Encourage more campers and river users to visit the historic site.
    - Encourage the gas plant operator to reduce the noise from the compressors and reduce the visual impacts of the tanks in the gas plant by repainting them a blend-in-with-the-forest colour as part of improving the visitor experience along the Chimney and Bicentennial Trails.
    - Encourage more local people to use the Bicentennial Trail to visit the site.
    - Encourage users at the Riverside Campground to visit the site.

Public Appreciation & Understanding

5.0 Public Appreciation & Understanding

5.1 Background

Heritage presentation offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy and learn about Canada's parks and sites. Parks Canada's messages fall into four main categories.

1. Information about a site's national historic significance based on the Statement of Commemorative Integrity.
2. Information about historically important aspects of the site that are not nationally significant.
3. Information to orient visitors to services and programs.
4. Messages about the family of national historic sites, heritage stewardship, and national identity.

The *Commemorative Integrity Statement* for Rocky Mountain House lists the following messages to be communicated at the site and through outreach programs:

- the fur trade at Rocky Mountain House during the period 1799 -1875, the historic place and its associative and physical attributes, the integral and essential role of Aboriginal people in fur trade operations at the site, and the role of Rocky Mountain House itself in the fur trade of the northern plains;
- "exploration toward the westward" in the early nineteenth century, its relationship to Rocky Mountain House, and the role of David Thompson; and
- The particular role that Rocky Mountain House played in the Hudson's Bay Company's policy toward the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and their plains allies, with respect to American competition, the need for provisions, and intertribal rivalries.

5.2 Current Situation

A primary challenge in communicating key messages is the lack of physical remains of the fur trade forts and their contents. The site uses a variety of techniques to make the fur trade era come alive for visitors -- heritage programs, exhibits, self-guiding interpretive trails, as well as audio, video and on-line media.

The local Métis participate in the delivery of programs on their history and culture, with particular reference to the fur trade. From May through September, the site offers a successful education program for organized groups.

Visitor Centre Exhibits

At the Visitor Centre people get an overview of the site before heading to the actual location of the fur trade posts. The redevelopment project includes plans for an interactive exhibit, complete with multi-media and tactile displays. New interactive exhibits will give visitors a sense of how and why the fur trade operated, who traded, what their lives were like, and of the influence of the fur trade on the people of the time and on the development of Canada. Films, available at the Visitor Centre and at other national historic sites, will tell the story of the fur trade and David Thompson.

Self-guided interpretive trails

The landscape along the North Saskatchewan River is inspiring. New media and listening stations along the interpretive trails will promote a better understanding of the site's key messages. The trails will allow visitors to explore four of the five original fur trade sites and to observe deer, bison, beaver, and other wildlife.

Chimney Trail

Upgrades are planned to the five listening stations along this 800 m self-guiding trail, which passes the location of the two most recent forts and traces the history of Rocky Mountain House.

David Thompson Trail

Upgrades to this 3.2 km trail will provide information on natural and cultural aspects of the North Saskatchewan River, the early history of Rocky Mountain House and Acton House, the fur trade rivalry, First Nation traders, and David Thompson and his travels through the Howse and Athabasca passes.

The Bicentennial Trail

The Bicentennial Trail, built in 1999, connects the historic site and the Town of Rocky Mountain House.

Play Fort

A play fort, built as a bicentennial project, is being enhanced with a three season shelter that will become home to the popular David Thompson Puppet Show, presented by the Friends of the site as well as a venue for interpretive programs and a sheltered picnic site.

Target Audiences

The site's key audiences are visitors and outreach groups. Each group has distinct needs and interests.

On-Site Audiences

Recreation – these visitors are looking for something to do in the company of friends and family. They need a place that offers enjoyable, interactive programs of interest to children and adults and expect good value for their entrance fee.

Learning – these visitors want to learn about the fur trade, Canada's history and culture, David Thompson, and Aboriginal history and culture. The site currently offers a variety of personal programs for this group.

River users – these people make use of the campground and river trail, often without realizing the national significance of the site. Improving communication with this growing group could take the form of information on the heritage values of the North Saskatchewan River, the Brierley Rapids, and the long history of river transportation in Rocky Mountain House. The site will continue to provide access to Brierley Rapids, a popular whitewater destination.

Local and repeat visitors – special events, offered in cooperation with local organizations, could attract this group to the site. Changing displays or activities will also appeal to local visitors.

Organized Groups include commercial tours and schools. Commercial tours on a tight schedule want a quick, informative, and entertaining visit. Personal programs are the most effective way to communicate with tour groups, whose members have a broad range of knowledge and experience. Schools want an educational and entertaining experience that match their required curriculum. This group enjoys personal on-site programs. Outreach programs or a website may also be effective.

Outreach audiences

Some outreach audiences may want to obtain information before visiting Rocky Mountain House NHSC. Others have no intention of visiting but want to learn about the site and its history. Key outreach audiences include Internet users, local and regional residents, and campers at parks in the region. Parks Canada will make a special effort to reach young people, urban residents, and ethnic groups.

Internet – this audience expects an up-to-date website featuring a range of information about the site and its importance. This information should meet the needs of potential visitors, visitors with questions not answered at the site, people looking for in-depth information, and those unable to visit. The website is not exclusively a promotion or marketing tool.

Local and regional residents – Rocky Mountain House NHSC plays an important role in the life of the local community. Communication about the site's contribution to tourism, the economy, employment, and sense of place could improve.

Campers in the region may not have an opportunity to visit the site. Where resources permit, an outreach program can bring messages about Rocky Mountain House NHSC to them using signs or personal programs. At Crimson Lake Provincial Park, interpreters tell the story of Rocky Mountain House during evening programs in July and August.

School Groups – the site provides schools with edukits as part of its current outreach program.

5.3 Strategic Goal

To help Canadians appreciate and understand the significance of Rocky Mountain House, to inspire them to learn more, and to encourage them to support efforts to protect the site.

5.4 Objectives

Present the site in a way that allows visitors and outreach audiences to appreciate and understand its national historic significance.

Present Métis and First Nation themes in a way that accurately reflects their voices and stories.

Maintain 85% visitor satisfaction, with 50% being very satisfied with on-site heritage presentation programs.

Maintain 75% visitor understanding of the significance of the national historic site.

Provide opportunities for Canadians to learn about the site outside its boundaries.

Highlight the themes that link Rocky Mountain House NHSC with other heritage places commemorating Aboriginal culture, David Thompson, and the fur trade.

5.5 Key Actions

1. Focus the on-site heritage presentation program on the Visitor Centre, the self guiding trails, and at the Play Fort.
2. Work with the Friends, Métis and First Nations to enhance and expand heritage presentation opportunities.
3. Maintain the current presentation approach for the four fort sites.
    - Rocky Mountain House (1799 -- 1821) as an archaeological landscape showing the palisade, bastion and outlines of the buildings.
    - Acton House with the steel framework and the building locations marked on the ground with timber.
    - Rocky Mountain House (1835 – 1861) with the footprint by mowing the grass to show the fort's location.
    - Rocky Mountain House (1868 – 1875) to show the two reconstructed chimneys and the cultural depressions.
4. Improve the quality of and access to pre-trip planning information.
5. Pursue cooperative approaches with the Province of Alberta to promote cultural sites in the area (e.g., joint passes).
6. Create new heritage experience packages that will attract tour operators and their clients.

7. Distribute information about the family of national historic sites.
8. Work with local and regional tourism associations to ensure they have up-to-date information on the site.
9. Work with the Town of Rocky Mountain House to install a permanent exhibit in their Information Centre.
10. Collaborate on a new interpretive exhibit at Heritage Park in Calgary that links their reconstruction of Acton House with the location of the actual fort.
11. Improve the Parks Canada website.
    - Improve information regarding directional signage to the site.
    - Provide information on special events.
    - Create interactive games for the Parks Canada website.
    - Provide information on research results.

Marketing, Partnering & Community Relations

6.0 Marketing, Partnering & Community Relations

6.1 Background

Heritage tourism is a growth market both regionally and nationally. Parks Canada recognizes the unrealized potential of Rocky Mountain House NHSC for heritage tourism and the economic benefits this would have for the area.

Park Canada works with the public and a variety of partners to enhance the protection, presentation and promotion of the site. Communication with the local community, including neighbours, businesses, organizations, Clearwater County, and the Town of Rocky Mountain House, is imperative in building understanding and support for the site and its mandate as a protected heritage area.

Children at the York Boat with the Play Fort in the background. *Credit: Parks Canada Agency*

6.2 Current Situation

Rocky Mountain House NHSC, a main attraction in the area, enjoys strong community support. Since 1984, the Friends of the site have supported site operations and helped with a variety of heritage programs. Under the terms of a two-year agreement between the Friends and Parks Canada signed in 2005, the Friends collected entry fees, provided orientation information as well as operating the gift shop, and offering the David Thompson puppet show. The Friends continue to be the site's most important partner.

With money from the Aboriginal Innovation Fund, the Métis community planned and delivered programs on the fur trade and Métis culture in 2005. These programs were very well received and were continued in 2006.

Parks Canada needs to engage in more regular contact with adjacent landowners and leaseholders to promote discussion about common concerns and about the purpose and objectives of Rocky Mountain House. Regular communication will permit Parks Canada, leaseholders, and local operators to work together for their mutual benefit.

While the site has made some progress in linking to other regional attractions, much work remains to be done.

Visitors and Marketing

In 1998, approximately 10,000 people paid for admission to the site, a number that fell to fewer than 8,000 in 2004. This decrease mirrors the trend in other national historic sites in Alberta and Eastern British Columbia during an era when terrorism, SARS, and the strong Canadian dollar affected tourism across Canada.

With new investments in the Visitor Centre, interpretive media, and the campground, Parks Canada hopes to see a substantial increase in the number of visitors. A strategic marketing plan for national historic sites in Alberta and Eastern British Columbia emphasizes cooperative marketing in partnership with local, regional and provincial tourism authorities. Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site currently cooperates with Crimson Lake Provincial Park and Fort Edmonton to present interpretive programs.

Surveys in 1998 and 2005 indicate most visitors are satisfied.

Regional Land Use

Changes in the regional landscape are of growing concern to the long-term operation of Rocky Mountain House NHSC. Rezoning and land use in the surrounding area have the potential to impact both the historical ambience and the natural environment.

The nearby town of Rocky Mountain House is growing rapidly and Clearwater County is under mounting pressure to respond to new oil and gas developments, to rezone agricultural land for rural acreages, to meet demand for gravel for construction, and to provide opportunities for recreation (e.g., a dock for jet boaters). Air photos reveal a network of new gravel pits, pipelines and access roads around the historic site.

In approving a new gravel operation in 1995, Clearwater County required the operator to leave a buffer between the historic site and the area approved for gravel extraction. A second gravel operation on privately owned land adjacent to the site's west boundary has been approved. The owner of a narrow strip of private lands between the tracks and the north boundary has recently proposed a zoning change from agriculture to country residential. Clearwater County requires a plan before they will consider a zoning change to allow for further subdivision of this property.

As with many protected heritage areas, Rocky Mountain House NHSC is becoming an island in a landscape increasingly defined by development and human use. The site can expect more resource and acreage development in the area.

Parks Canada continues to work with neighbouring landowners, Clearwater County, and the private sector to develop complementary management strategies. Regular communication will help promote a better understanding of each other's needs and encourage mutually satisfactory land use decisions.

6.3 Strategic Goal

To work in partnership with others to protect, present and promote Rocky Mountain House NHSC.

6.4 Objectives

Continue to work in partnership with the Friends of the site.

Increase marketing efforts, with a primary focus on Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer.

Strengthen relationships with the community, neighbours, provincial tourism partners, and the media.

Increase the number of visitors by 35 % over the next five years.

Continue to work with neighbouring land managers and Clearwater County to maintain the historic ambience of the site.

Build community support.

6.5 Key Actions

1. Hold "locals" days at the site.
2. Promote the site in partnership with local and regional attractions that offer complementary programs and facilities (e.g., the Visitor Centre in the Town of Rocky Mountain House, Crimson Lake Provincial Park, Nordegg and Howse Pass National Historic Sites, Fort Edmonton, and Calgary's Heritage Park).
3. Explore opportunities to participate in marketing initiatives for central Alberta (e.g., David Thompson Country).
4. Promote cross marketing strategies with Travel Alberta.
5. Develop themed initiatives to tie in with the David Thompson Bicentennial Commemoration from 2007 to 2011.
6. Offer new products and promotions that encourage children to visit the site with their school and their family.
7. Offer programs and activities to attract more bus tours.
8. With partners consider and deliver event packages (e.g., site visit/camping package).
9. Create a special pass for the regional market to encourage both new and repeat visitors.
10. Provide updated information to call centres about the site and its programs and services.
11. Continue to work closely with Clearwater County regarding land use proposals surrounding the site. Encourage the county to maintain the existing agricultural zoning.
12. Encourage owners of the strip of land between the north boundary and the CPR tracks to maintain tree cover to screen the railway line and the propane loading facility.
13. Continue to encourage owners of the land across the North Saskatchewan River from the main part of the historic site to maintain the tree buffer on their property.
14. Work with Border Paving to minimize the potential impact (e.g., dust and smell) of the gravel pit and asphalt plant.
15. Host a yearly open house with partners to share information, track implementation of the management plan, and promote special events.
16. Continue to communicate with Trans-Alta Utilities regarding water releases from the Bighorn Dam; monitor riverbank erosion and ice damming.
17. Work with stakeholders to reduce the impacts of river use on private lands and the national historic site (e.g., reduced speed zones); participate in cooperative river management initiatives.
18. Encourage research that strengthens the protection and presentation of the site including research on the site's artifact collections.

Stewardship & Environmental Assessment

7.0 Stewardship & Environmental Assessment

7.1 Stewardship

Practicing stewardship means considering environmental concerns in all aspects of managing lands, facilities, and natural and cultural heritage. As an environmental steward, Parks Canada is committed to protecting the natural resources that help distinguish the site as a significant cultural landscape. The *Environmental Management Strategy* for the Banff Field Unit, currently in preparation, will include Rocky Mountain House NHSC.

The renovated Visitor Centre will adopt energy efficient measures, including zone heating, which will allow Parks Canada to lower heating costs in the off season.

7.2 Administration & Operations

Rocky Mountain House, part of the Banff Field Unit, has year-round staff (2.5 person years) that includes an operations supervisor, maintenance supervisor, and an administrative support person. Offices are located in the Visitor Centre and maintenance compound. Staff are hired during the operating season to deliver heritage presentation programs.

Parks Canada is committed to the long-term operation of Rocky Mountain House NHSC.

7.3 Environmental Assessment Summary

Parks Canada has prepared a strategic environmental assessment as required by the *Cabinet Directive for the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals*. The assessment considers any environmental effects, including cumulative effects, that may arise from implementation of the management plan for Rocky Mountain House NHSC.

From a strategic perspective, resource and management issues are well understood. An approved *Commemorative Integrity Statement* sets out the site's heritage values. The proposed plan provides explicit direction to improve the protection of heritage resources, visitor experiences, and public appreciation and understanding.

Key Findings

- The proposed management plan will have a primarily positive impact on the environment. Specific actions will enhance protection of cultural and natural resources. Improvements to the visitor experience, and greater public appreciation and understanding will also indirectly contribute to the protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Parks Canada recognizes increasing use and potential conflicts on the North Saskatchewan River. Parks Canada is willing to participate in cooperative river corridor management initiatives.
- While the management plan does not guarantee protection of the site's heritage values from activities outside the protected area, the emphasis on partnerships and community relations highlights the key areas for action.

With the application of suggested mitigating measures, implementation of the management plan for the Rocky Mountain House NHSC is not expected to result in important adverse environmental effects. The plan's proposed initiatives are expected to make a positive contribution to the commemorative integrity of the site through improved protection, awareness, education, and visitor experience.

Implementation

8.0 Implementation

This management plan sets out a long-term vision for Rocky Mountain House NHSC. The plan addresses commemorative integrity, meaningful visitor experiences, and opportunities for public education. It reflects Parks Canada's cultural resource management principles and practices.

Parks Canada is responsible for implementing the management plan and reporting annually on progress in achieving its goals. Parks Canada will host an annual open house at the site to report on the implementation of the plan.

Management plans are subject to periodic review and may be amended to reflect changing circumstances. A formal review of the management plan will take place in five years. At that time, Parks Canada will determine if the direction set out by the current plan remains valid. Public consultation is an important part of this process. Any resulting plan amendments, beyond minor administrative adjustments, will be tabled in Parliament.

"State of the National Historic Sites" reports, produced every five years, summarize the current condition of a national park, national historic site, or national marine conservation area. They assess performance in meeting established goals and objectives and are the basis for the five-year management plan review.

The *Commemorative Integrity Evaluation* (CIE) will continue to be the key process in reporting on the state of national historic sites and addressing elements rated as "poor." A CIE will be undertaken at Rocky Mountain House once the redevelopment is complete.

Park Canada has a framework for measuring performance in the area of visitor experience. Each management plan reconfirms the Agency's commitment to providing opportunities for Canadians to have meaningful national historic site experiences. This commitment will help Parks Canada fulfill its mandate by including the "visitor experience" as a core responsibility, together with protection and education. The framework includes Key Performance Areas, Success Indicators and Measurement Systems. The Key Performance Areas are as follows:

- Understanding Visitors;
- Providing Opportunities;
- Delivering High Quality Services; and
- Connecting Visitors Personally with the Place.

Strategies, objectives and actions in this management plan will be implemented though the Mountain Park and Field Unit Business Plans. Implementation depends on the allocation of resources within the field units. Parks Canada will look for opportunities to cooperate with partners in identifying, evaluating and pursuing appropriate projects.