

FHBRO Number 97-98

Banff National Park, Alberta

Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin***FINAL DRAFT***

Abbot Pass

The Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin was constructed in 1922, under the sponsorship of the Canadian Pacific Railway, to a design by Swiss mountain guides Edward Feuz, Jr. and Rudolph Aemmer. Built in a high mountain pass to accommodate parties of mountaineers, this one and a half storey cabin has undergone alterations shortly after Parks Canada took ownership in 1968, and again in 1986, 1993 and 1997. The building continues in its original use as an alpine cabin and is leased by the custodian, Parks Canada, to the Alpine Club of Canada. The cabin, located in Banff National Park, was designated a National Historic Site in 1992. See FHBRO Building Report 97-98.

Reasons for Designation

The Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin has been designated Classified for its historical associations, architectural significance and environmental qualities.

The cabin illustrates the period that became known as the golden age of mountaineering in Canada. Through its Swiss designers, it is associated with the long tradition of mountain shelters and Swiss mountain guides. The refuge cabin represents the theme of alpine recreation in Canada. The cabin is unique for being both the only shelter above the tree line, and for being the only surviving example of an alpine hut in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. It remains a well-known icon to the national and international alpine community.

The Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin is a very good and attractive example of rustic architecture. A very rare example of a stone cabin in the national parks, it was designed to be highly compatible with its unique setting through the use of natural materials in appropriate colours and textures. The builders accomplished a great feat in transporting the construction materials and erecting a high quality structure in such a remote and formidable location.

As an extension of the natural character of its environment, the Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin reinforces the character of the Rockies between Mounts Lefroy and Victoria.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin resides in its overall form, scale, rustic design, details, materials, interiors and site relationships.

The Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin is a one-and-one-half-storey stone cabin of rectangular plan with a medium-pitched wood gabled roof, a single entrance in the principal gabled end, and small windows on all four elevations. Its simple design was in direct response

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to basic shelter requirements, and was executed in a rustic style popular during this period in the national parks. A wood porch added to the original entrance platform now covers and extends beyond the original stone platform. While a relatively sympathetic feature, it does alter the intended simplicity of the overall design. Future work should seek to respect and enhance the simple lines and massing which are important to the heritage character of the building.

The simplicity of the design is distinguished by the use of materials with strong colours textures. The roughly coursed stone walls, built with split limestone quarried on the site, are highly textured and complement the character of the site. When re-roofing is required, consideration should be given to a design and material based on the texture and pattern of the original roof. Fascia boards at the gabled ends and exposed rafter tails projecting under the eaves are details that should be retained.

The windows originally had protective wood shutters. In future work programs, consideration should be given to reinstating window shutters sympathetic to the original design.

The original function of the Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin was shelter. Though the interior has been completely renovated since 1968, its function remains the same and the layout is generally unchanged. The interior plan delineation of kitchen/dining area and sleeping areas should be maintained.

An outhouse is situated behind and above the cabin and an unobtrusive helicopter landing pad of railway ties and rock is located downhill from it. In general, the integrity of the site has been retained. The setting is wild, inhospitable, with a natural beauty and spectacular views of the surrounding mountainous landscape. Any modification to the site or setting, or potential impact on views to and from the building, should be resisted.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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