

Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba
Interpretive Centre
Government Reserve, Wasagaming Drive, Wasagaming

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Interpretive Centre at Riding Mountain Park was constructed in 1933 by the Department of the Interior, to designs prepared by the Architectural Division of the National Parks Branch under the direction of chief architect W.D. Cromarty. Originally called the Museum and Community Building, it was built to house specimens of indigenous flora and fauna. Provision was also made for the use of one of the larger rooms as a community hall and another as a lecture hall for the holding of religious services and other meetings. The building survives relatively unchanged in form and function. The custodial department is Environment Canada. See FHBRO Building Reports 84-32 and 85-43/85-54.

Reasons for Designation

The Interpretive Centre at Riding Mountain has been designated a Classified federal heritage building because of the historical and architectural significance of its design and siting.

The building is one of the most significant designs produced by the Architectural Division of the National Parks Branch during its period of active involvement in park development. It represents the fullest expression of the rustic style as developed by the division under W.D. Cromarty's direction, and it was purposefully intended as a conspicuous landmark for Riding Mountain National Park, as well as the national parks system in general. A comparable "showpiece" for Prince Albert National Park was never fully executed as planned. The Museum and Community Building, set in a formal landscaped setting, was designed to serve as a visual focus for the Wasagaming townsite. The architectural detailing and craftsmanship lavished on the building reflected its intended status and extended even to the design and construction of interior furnishings and display cases. This thoroughness was facilitated by the skilled labour force at the branch's disposal at Riding Mountain during the Depression Relief Period. The variety of facilities provided for, including the museum, community room, lecture hall, and writing rooms, was also unusual. The centre was an integral part of the educational role of the park, an important and often overlooked purpose of the national parks system.

Most interior detailing remains intact, and the exterior is visually unchanged except for minor modifications to roof shingles and rear entries. The surrounding landscaping, including remnants of an English formal garden introduced in 1934, remain in place. The building continues to fulfill a central role, through its siting, scale and function, in the life of the park.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Interpretive Centre is defined by the whole of its exterior, interior and grounds. The continuity between the three was an essential element of the original design, and continues to give the building its significance.

The building is a one-and-a-half storey log and stone structure, placed on concrete foundations faced with stone. The use of bearing log construction, rather than log veneer over frame, was made possible by the availability locally of Scandinavian-born laborers who were skilled in this form of building. Decorative touches, many of them Tudor in inspiration, are provided by the exposed log rafters bracketing the eaves, the false half-timbering of the gables, the leaded casement windows, and the stone and brick chimneys. The interior is marked by a peeled log truss system and a unique pole siding finish on the sloping roof surfaces of the lecture hall. The pole siding featured in the building was manufactured at a mill located within the park, using a patented cutting process invented by the mill operator.

The surrounding landscape enhances the picturesque quality of the building's design, and has matured over the years. It still retains remnants of the 1934 formal garden.

It is recommended that the form, material and detailing of the building and its grounds be preserved through ongoing programs of maintenance and repair. Every attempt should be made to conserve the historic fabric of both the exterior and interior, including the finishes, and experienced conservators brought in as appropriate to deal with more serious problems of deterioration. Preparation of a conservation maintenance plan, specific to this building, is recommended. Functional upgrading should be accomplished in ways which do not affect the integrity of the building or its site. The significance of the design means that any intervention should be minimal and reversible. Continued functional use of the building as an educational centre within the park is an appropriate way to ensure its survival.