
THEMES AND SUB-THEMES



Themes are the important central ideas that are communicated to visitors through exhibits, programs, publications, signage and visitor centre design. Each theme is a complete idea that after viewing an exhibit or reading a brochure the reader can summarize easily and succinctly. Sub-themes are developed from themes and contain a little more detail and a little more information. One exhibit would illustrate a single theme but could include several sub-themes.

THEME STATEMENT: British Columbia's Northern Rockies – Serengeti of the North

THEME 1:

The Muskwa-Kechika and the Northern Rockies is one of the most significant wilderness areas in North America.

SUB-THEME 1:

The Muskwa-Kechika of north-eastern BC has national and international significance.

SUB-THEME 2:

The Muskwa-Kechika covers more than 6.3 million hectares of wildland with lands

under the strictest protection to special management areas where sustainable economic development can continue.

SUB-THEME 3:

The Muskwa-Kechika and Northern Rockies area is renowned for its significant populations of a wide variety of wildlife including Stone's sheep, woodland caribou, grizzly bear and wolf.

SUB-THEME 4:

Endangered, rare and unique species are found in the Muskwa-Kechika and Northern Rockies area.

SUB-THEME 5:

The Muskwa-Kechika was planned through the cooperation of government, industry, residents and environmentalists to balance resource management with conservation.

THEME 2:

The Muskwa-Kechika and Northern Rockies are a land of unparalleled natural diversity.

SUB-THEME 1:

The mountains and valleys of the Northern Rockies exhibit a variety of geological and geomorphological processes, many of which can be seen while driving the Alaska Highway.

SUB-THEME 2:

Rivers and lakes drain large, pristine watersheds, eventually flowing into the Mackenzie River.

SUB-THEME 3:

Special features, including hot springs, hoodoos, folded sedimentary layers, igneous dikes, rapids, waterfalls and glacial features are easily seen.

SUB-THEME 4:

Many different ecosystems can be found in the Muskwa-Kechika and Northern Rockies including wetlands, montane and sub-alpine forests, boreal forest and alpine areas.

SUB-THEME 5:

Wildlife is abundant and healthy, stable and sustainable populations of carnivores and ungulates exist.

SUB-THEME 6:

Rare, endangered and endemic varieties of wildlife are found here in healthy populations.

SUB-THEME 7:

Many opportunities exist to see wildlife due to their numbers, hence suggesting the name Serengeti of the North.

THEME 3:

People have lived and prospered in the Muskwa-Kechika area for thousands of years.

SUB-THEME 1:

Archaeological evidence shows that the area was used by small mobile groups of Aboriginal people for thousands of years.

SUB-THEME 2:

Aboriginal communities existed here when the first Europeans arrived and continue to exist today.

SUB-THEME 3:

The history of the area has always been the history of the frontier: fur trading, Alaska Highway construction, early industrial development, economic development through exploration and extraction of natural resources.

SUB-THEME 4:

Fort Nelson is a thriving community at the gateway to the Muskwa-Kechika.

THEME 4:

The Muskwa-Kechika offers an incomparable number of recreational opportunities for all ages, all abilities and all interests.

SUB-THEME 1:

Frontcountry use of the Muskwa-Kechika includes camping, sight-seeing, fishing, picnicking, boating, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and birdwatching.

SUB-THEME 2:

Backcountry use of the Muskwa-Kechika includes hunting, boating, horseback tripping, whitewater rafting, canoe tripping, backpacking, fly-in fishing, flightseeing, snowmobiling and ATVing.

SUB-THEME 3:

Amenities and facilities in the Muskwa-Kechika range from rustic to five star, fast food to gourmet, self-planned to completely guided.

THEME 5:

The Muskwa-Kechika area is part of the global environment and global economy.

SUB-THEME 1:

Resources such as wood (OSB, plywood, dimensional lumber), oil and gas are exported across the continent and beyond.

SUB-THEME 2:

Wildlife resources are accessed by locals and by international visitors for wildlife watching, hunting, photography and in other ways.

SUB-THEME 3:

The health of forests and waterways in the Muskwa-Kechika influence the health of air, water and people far beyond its borders.

SUB-THEME 4:

As a model of integrated resource management, the Muskwa-Kechika area is of global interest. As a global resource, this wilderness area is also of interest to the environmental and scientific communities.

SUB-THEME 5:

Industries in northern British Columbia are adjusting their philosophies, processes, practices and equipment to operate with greater sensitivity to the environment.

STORYLINE AND APPROACH



he storyline and approach encapsulate the themes and sub-themes and present them in a narrative form. The storyline is the basis for all exhibit, program and publication development and is required by the designer, the interpreter and the writer to complete their tasks. It can also be used as a brief document to be given out at public participation meetings, to donors, to staff and to anyone who needs to know what the interpretive centre is all about without wading through pages and pages of reports.

MUSKWA-KECHIKA – British Columbia’s Serengeti of the North

6.3 million hectares – imagine a block of wilderness the size of Nova Scotia, larger than Switzerland. A vast wilderness of mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes, forests, wetlands, muskeg and alpine meadows where wildlife thrives in large, stable populations. A frontier dedicated to protection of wilderness and all its values while permitting sustainable economic development. A place where you can hike for days and not see another person. This is the Northern Rockies!

Covering the north-eastern corner of British Columbia, this largely pristine area is inhabited by over 3500 black and grizzly bears, as well as wolves, coyotes, wolverines, cougars, lynx, marten, woodland caribou, elk, deer, Stone’s sheep, moose and many smaller mammals. Bird life ranges from gyrfalcon, bald eagle and ptarmigan to songbirds, teal and buffleheads. Snow geese, trumpeter swans and endangered bird species like the Connecticut warbler and upland sandpiper find the habitat and solitude here that they need for breeding.

Biologically, the Muskwa-Kechika is rich and diverse, one of the most significant wilderness areas in North America. It shelters some endangered or threatened species; plants and animals known nowhere else in the world can be found here. Old growth and mature forests have remained untouched, major wetlands are undisturbed and most of the forests have yet to see an axe. Even the geological features are impressive: some of the oldest rock in the Rockies, hot springs, waterfalls and big rivers and lakes.

The landscapes are enormous yet many smaller treasures are found by those who take a closer look. Alpine flowers remarkably adapted to the cold grow on wind-scoured mountain tops that blaze with colour for a few short weeks each

summer. Fossils pepper the limestone rock of these ancient mountains born under the sea. A species of dragonfly only found at the Liard Hot Springs darts after mosquitoes - one species also endemic to the hot springs. A broken scraper or projectile point suggests a long association of people with this wilderness.

The Muskwa-Kechika is known around the world and visited by people from many different countries. They come to see what their own country or region lacks: wilderness. They come for the magic of endless sky, clean air, clear water and little evidence of human activity beyond the main road. They come to explore, to learn, to experience a place vital to their being but far from their daily lives.

As visitors travel through the Muskwa-Kechika, most are limited to the view from their vehicle window. They stop at viewpoints and historic markers, they search for wildlife by the side of the road and imagine the life beyond their view. They chat with local people to find out what it is really like to be part of this incredible wilderness. Some will experience the wilderness vicariously through visits to interpretive centres, at roadside stops, through interpretive programs in the provincial parks and during their stay at campgrounds, lodges and hotels along the Alaska Highway. Others will strike off into the Muskwa-Kechika on their own, by engaging a guide, or signing on with a tour by plane, horse or boat. The recreational opportunities are limitless!

While discovering the wilderness, visitors and locals also discover the past. The Muskwa-Kechika has always been a frontier, far from urban centres. The strong and the resourceful have been drawn here in search of riches, resources, solitude and lifestyle. Native people bargained with the first explorers and fur traders, later taking an active role in the forestry and oil and gas industries. The construction of the Alaska Highway opened this wilderness – just a crack – to let more people through. Some settled and created towns like Fort Nelson, others passed through, returning home to spread tales of the wonders of the Northern Rockies across the south.

Those who stayed developed natural resources into commodities sought by the rest of the world. Wood products and natural gas are shipped to markets across Canada and the United States and beyond.

Yet, for this connection with the rest of the world to remain, the Muskwa-Kechika must remain healthy and vibrant. Through parks, ecological reserves and special management areas, the Muskwa-Kechika is managed through co-operation by the government and a multi-disciplinary advisory board.

The protection of the Northern Rockies through the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area is truly “British Columbia’s gift to the world”. (Glen Clark, October 8, 1997)

Setting the scene for the Interpretive Centre

ANTICIPATION



ur task begins before the visitor arrives in Fort Nelson. Fort Nelson already markets itself as a resource-full community, planting in the minds of potential visitors its many resource-based businesses and amenities. While projecting the image of a modern community, it also aligns itself with the image of a bear, an image for southerners and international travelers of wilderness. This dichotomy – modernity and wilderness – intrigues and attracts. Modern accommodation, restaurants and facilities attract visitors seeking a comfortable vacation while the chance to see a bear – that is what makes this holiday different from any other!

Presenting Fort Nelson as the home of the Northern Rockies Interpretive Centre must begin long before the traveler arrives in Fort Nelson. Promotion in travel literature and along the Alaska Highway through billboards or highway signage will build anticipation among travelers. By the time they arrive in Fort Nelson, they will be searching for the Northern Rockies Interpretive Centre. The greatest concentration of signage should occur from the south; however, the route from the north should not be neglected.

To be most effective, this pre-arrival advertising must have a strong visual

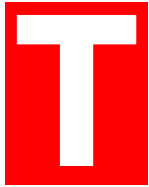
identity that would be carried through on all signage, print material, letterhead, web site, etc. We propose a visual that would incorporate the 'big' things in the Northern Rockies: mountains, rivers and bears.



The signage should carry on through Fort Nelson to lead the visitor to the interpretive centre. The visual identity developed through the highway signage must be incorporated into the entrance signage to pull visitors off the highway.

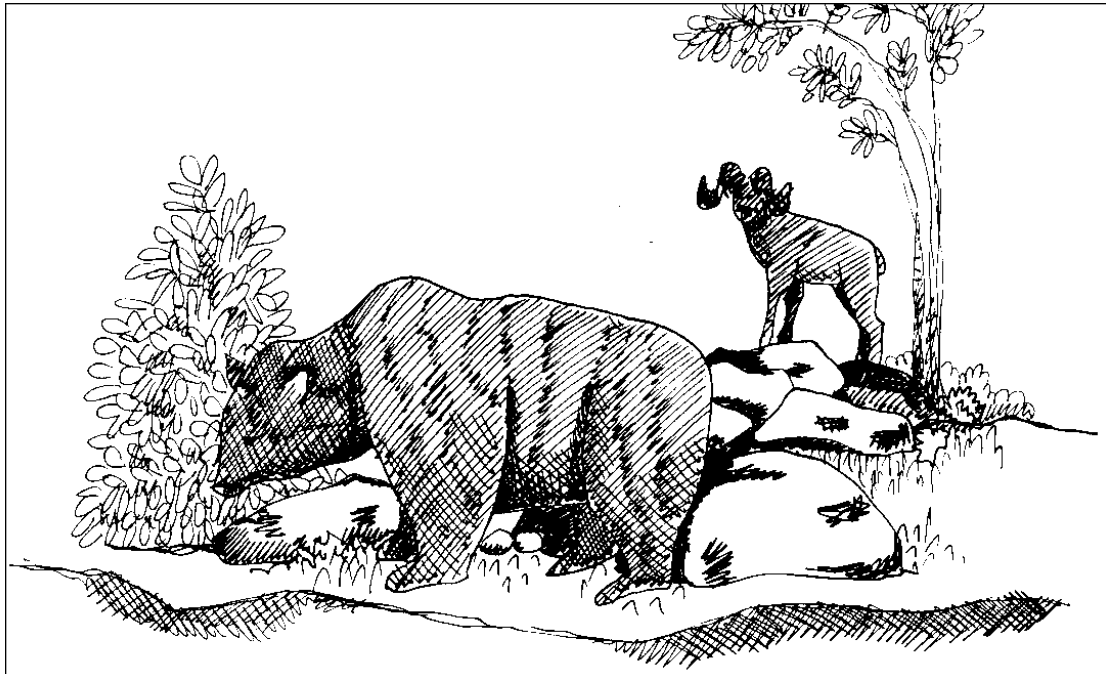
Setting the scene for the Interpretive Centre

WELCOME



The proposed designs of the interpretive building incorporate the 'big' elements of the Northern Rockies: a stylized mountain, tall elements that could be huge trees and stone. We suggest less use of large glass expanses – these do not evoke the image of northern wilderness for visitors. Smaller expanses of window, which would still allow generous amounts of natural light to enter, would be better

ing and lighting should complement the structure and incorporate natural elements: trees and shrubs from the region, log and stone benches, lights hidden in rock. The landscaping should incorporate elements of the land: hills and valleys, rock outcrops and different colours of rock as found in the region. Oversize sculptures of wildlife – those likely to be seen by visitors as they drive north – could be placed randomly between the parking lot and the



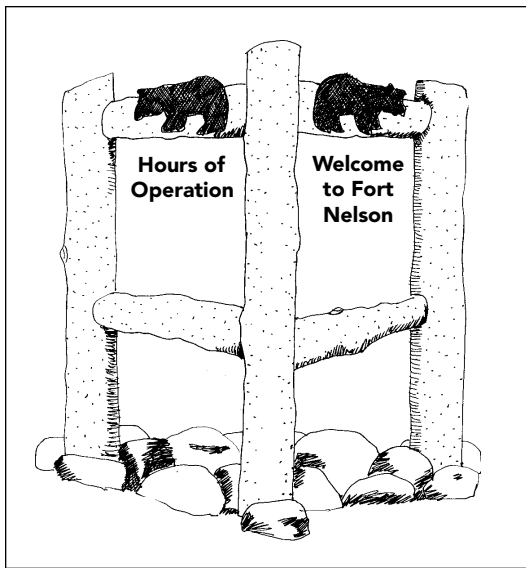
and will not remind visitors of their offices in downtown Calgary, Vancouver or Seattle.

The building should be front and centre – a parking lot could be tucked to the west side or behind the building. The landscap-

ing and lighting should complement the entrance to the interpretive centre. These sculptures could range from large bronzes like the stone sheep in front of the museum to two-dimensional sculptures of expanded metal mesh, or more abstract or free-form sculptures. As well as adding inviting and

interesting features to the front of the interpretive centre, these sculptures will become a must-see/must-photograph stop for visitors – similar to the murals in Chemainus – and the subjects for an outdoor art class for local students. The sculptures could be developed by local artists and added to the site over time.

Some visitors will always arrive after hours. A kiosk or other structure with topical tourist information such as accommodation, maps, events and the hours of operation of the interpretive centre should be provided. This kiosk would be designed to complement the interpretive centre design and should be located near the entrance to the centre. This strategic location, as opposed to being located near the parking lot, will



ensure that visitors during open hours will not end their visit at the parking lot. Ideally, washrooms should be accessible from the exterior after hours.

The final element required for the entrance is a staging area. A large open patio near the entrance would allow a bus tour or school group to gather outside and be welcomed by a staff person before continuing into the building. By developing this gathering area outside, you can avoid dedicating and maintaining a large amount of indoor, and basically empty, space for the occasional group.

By conducting this orientation outside of the building, the staff person can point out different features of the area including the location of the museum, the business district and the route of the Alaska Highway on the horizon. With school groups, the outdoor orientation gives the students time to chat, get into groups, pick up worksheets and generally use up some excess energy after sitting on a bus for potentially many hours. On bad weather days, this orientation could take place on the bus.

The orientation to the interpretive centre should include the location of the washrooms, the layout of the centre, an explanation of the theme of the centre and an introduction to what the visitors will see inside, and when any film or other production might next take place in the theatre. There may be other messages for school groups such as gathering areas, length of visit, whether they can help themselves to brochures or other materials, etc.

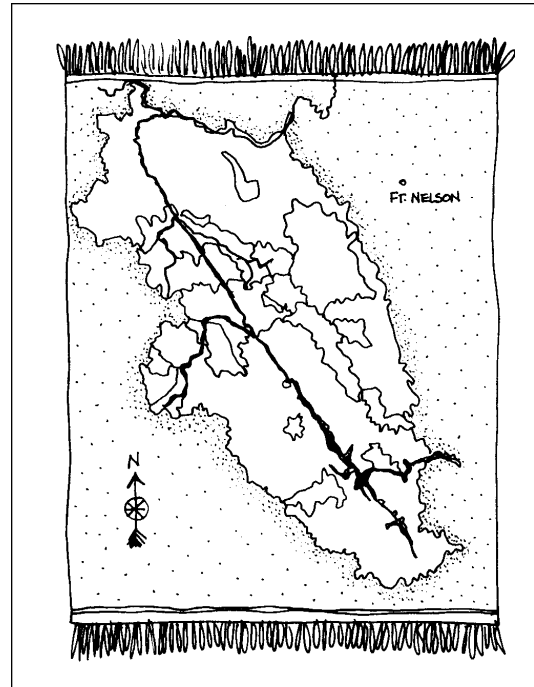
Setting the scene for the Interpretive Centre

ENTER

Large glass doors so that the visitor can see through into the building should open easily. Cast bronze sheep horns or bear heads act as doorknobs, continuing the theme of wildlife presented through exterior signage and the sculpture garden. The glass is etched in a landscape or scenic from the area.

Once past the entrance doors and in the vestibule large, beautiful photographs of the area dazzle the visitor. Overhead, tubes of light programmed into a specific sequence, shimmer and slide across the high ceiling. In pinks, greens and whites, they suggest the movement of the northern lights, a northern icon summer visitors would like to see but likely will not. To one side, a collage of aurora photos surrounds two buttons, which, when pressed, either tell a legend of the aurora told in a Native voice, or the scientific explanation told by a European voice. These lights can also be turned off completely if desired when the centre is open for a meeting or other function when these lights may not be needed.

Ahead, toward the welcome desk, is a map of the Northern Rockies region laser cut into the linoleum. This floor graphic stretches from wall to wall and shows as many details as possible of both the frontcountry and the backcountry. Visitors are able to physically walk the route they have covered

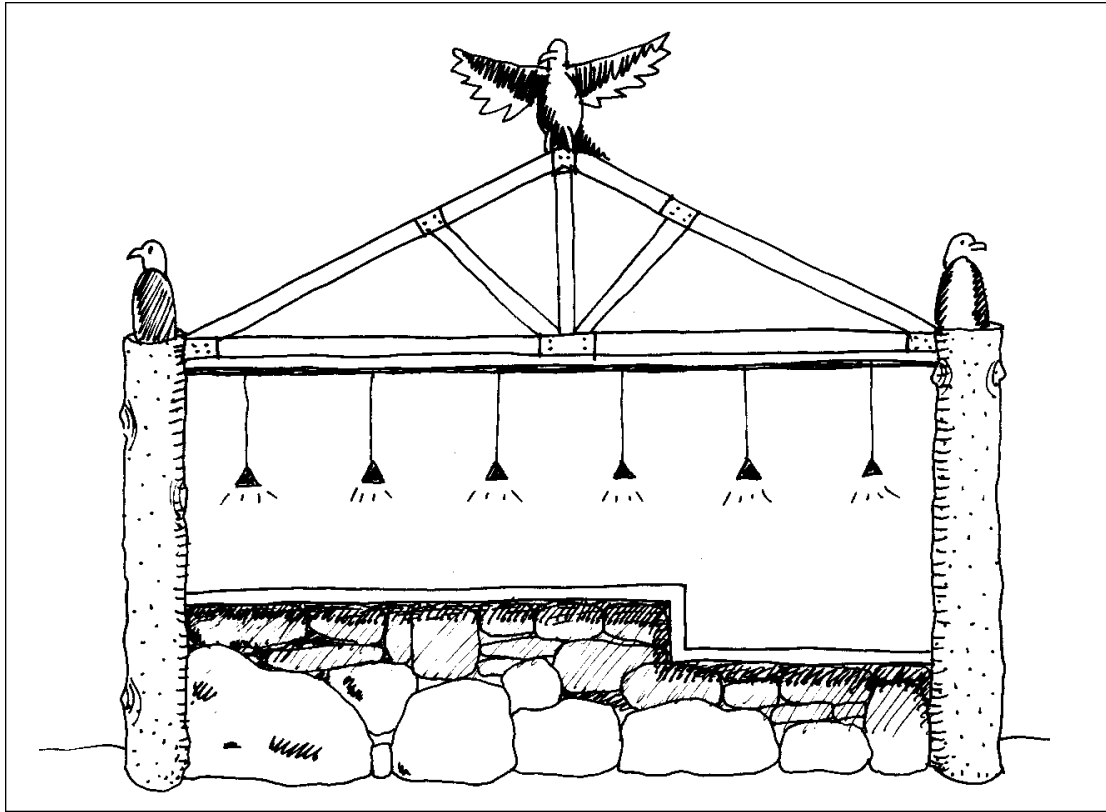


and follow the highway further. Businesses along the highway can, for a predetermined cost, be added to the floor graphic using removable floor vinyl. This would create a revenue stream for the centre while allowing the map to be easily updated, new features added, highway construction indicated; even sightings of wildlife could be posted. In the manner of a three-dimensional model, this floor graphic becomes a gathering place for families and others, leading to an exchange of information among travelers.

Beyond the floor map is the welcome desk. Always staffed by a smiling, knowledgeable attendant, the desk incorporates a map into its surface with photos of the many

sights to be seen along the highway. The front of the desk incorporates a grizzly bear relief to continue the wildlife theme. Behind the desk, a large graphic of a scenic – perhaps the view from Steamboat

Internet terminal. An Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) should also be considered. The interpretive focus of the centre continues in the washrooms. Travelers remember clean washrooms and their



Mountain or a panorama of Muncho Lake – draws the visitor's eye.

Within the vestibule are a few comfortable chairs in a sophisticated rustic design. Using wood, leather and canvas, this style of furnishing is found throughout the centre. The chairs encourage visitors to spend some time looking through their brochures and discussing the next leg of their journey. To one side of the welcome desk is the entrance to the washrooms, access to a public telephone and an

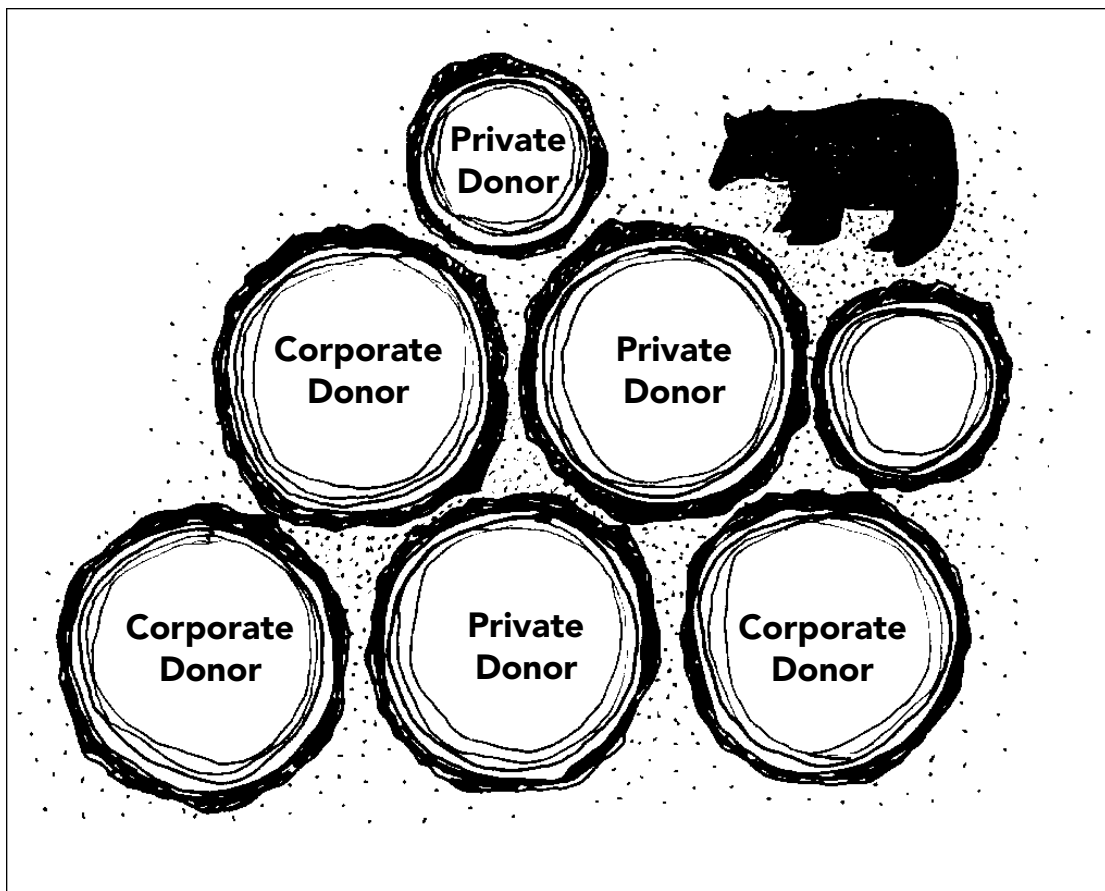
locations are passed on to other travelers. Along with cleanliness, the washrooms continue to interpret the area.

Topographical maps paper the walls, large graphics designed to look like postcards show scenics and activities in some places, the messages 'written' home about great experiences shown in others. Whiteboards are added so that visitors can write their own travel suggestions, wildlife sightings and recommendations.

Setting the scene for the Interpretive Centre **THANK-YOU**

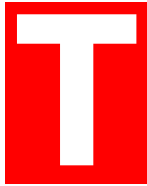
To the other side of the welcome desk is the donor wall. Slices of local logs in three or four different sizes are 'stacked' on the wall to represent a wood pile end-on. The donor levels you develop would determine the number of sizes of log slices. The name and/or logo of each donor is burned or carved into the wood, or bronze lettering applied to the surface. Interspersed among the donors are casts of animal silhouettes,

wildflowers, leaves or tracks. The donor wall then becomes a simple interactive element supplemented by a bingo-type game or treasure hunt to be enjoyed by school groups and by children while waiting for their parents working on their travel plans at the welcome desk.



Northern Rockies Interpretive Centre

EXHIBIT CONCEPT



he exhibit concept for the Northern Rockies Interpretive Centre takes visitors from their realm of understanding and expectation and moves them gradually to the themes and ideas that you wish to communicate. In part this is based on accepted learning theory – visitors must be met at a place within their own knowledge and experience before they can effectively absorb new information and concepts. Secondly, visitors traveling to the north from the south carry with them expectations, or preconceptions, of what the north will be like. With greater availability of travel information through auto clubs, the Internet and publications like *The Milepost*, these expectations are likely more realistic than even ten years ago; however, the once-in-a-lifetime trip to the north is still a romantic ideal rife with images and anticipated experiences.

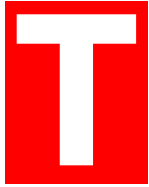
Some of these images include huge vistas, big mountains, thundering rivers, lakes full of fish and wildlife viewing opportunities beyond compare. Some visitors will still expect an adventure just from driving the road; others see the north as a playground for adventurers on the edge of the civilized world. For some, the great distances between gas stations and settlement will be adventure enough; for others a foray along a wild river or a horse trip to a back-country lake will be the climax of their visit. These images are created or influenced by television shows and brochures. Common

threads through these media are visuals of big landscapes, bears, endless forests and adventure.

In spite of the excellent transportation and communication networks and the ability of northern communities to be as, or more, modern in every aspect as their southern counterparts, travelers to the north still harbor an image of northern ruggedness. This is frustrating to northerners who do not want to be seen as grizzled old prospectors living in cabins in the northern woods. As visitors travel through northern communities and see modern housing, familiar stores and gas stations, recreational amenities and state-of-the-art buildings, they soon realize that the differences are not as great as they imagined. Yet, we can take advantage of some of these preconceptions, using icons such as log, leather, fur and rock in the design of the exhibits and the building to bring visitors from their southern reality to our northern one. Using materials considered typical of the north, we can present them in a sophisticated and modern manner to show that communities here are on the cusp of the 21st century, not the 19th.

With this basis in mind, our concept utilizes the preconceptions of the visitor to draw them into the interpretive centre and into the exhibits. As they explore the centre, they move past their own perceptions to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the north.

GENERAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS



he interpretive centre will be visited by a wide variety of people, from young children to seniors, northerners and southerners, visitors with one or more university degrees and visitors who never finished the ninth grade. A number of considerations must be taken into account in the final design of the exhibits and the centre.

Visitors have spent hours in a car, RV or airplane to arrive at Fort Nelson. The building should be designed with high ceilings and open spaces to contrast with their cramped vehicle and to complement the big spaces outside.

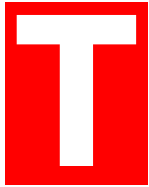
1. The interpretive centre should carry maps, books, audiotapes, videos and other products about the area that are not available, or easily available, elsewhere in town.
2. Different levels of information should be available in the interpretive centre. Some of this will be presented through tiered text in the exhibits and a range of age-appropriate activities. Some, like wildlife studies, impact assessments of industrial use, management plans, etc, should be available at reading tables or at the main desk for those who would like more in-depth information.
3. Some of this information could be available at an Internet site with links which could be accessed while visitors are planning their trip or once they arrive at the centre.
4. Some visitors are stretching their comfort limits by heading north into the great unknown. The interpretive centre can offer an 'urban' experience through its use of modern technology and exhibit techniques and thus provide a sense of comfort or reassurance to the visitor.
5. Older visitors especially appreciate large type in contrasting colours to backdrops with good lighting.
6. Texts and other media must use an active, not passive, voice to engage the visitor and maintain their interest. An active voice also supports the perception that the visitor is going on an adventure, and carries energy.
7. The physical abilities and restrictions of visitors must be kept in mind. These include appropriate text colour for the visually impaired, smooth floor surfaces or obvious transitions for the visually and mobility impaired, planning for total accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers, and adjustable volumes on

headsets or other listening devices for the hearing impaired.

8. Quiet areas are needed for visitors to sit down and rest during their visit. These could be as simple as a couple of chairs or a couch or two and a table.

The Exhibit Area

NORTHERN EXPERIENCE



he exhibit area can be divided into five distinct areas. The first is the Northern Experience. This area covers 20–25% of the exhibit area.

The second, Northern Rockies Exploration, is larger – 35–40% of the exhibit area and focuses on individual stories, events, species and places. The last three areas are interconnected but have interesting and important storylines of their own. These include Recreation, People and Resources and account for 40% of the exhibit space.

This section of the exhibit presents the Muskwa-Kechika region. It shows, through various media and text, the extent of the region and its environmental importance. It shows the diversity of wildlife species and why the area is known as the Serengeti of the North. It sets the scene for the later presentation of the diversity of human uses of the region.

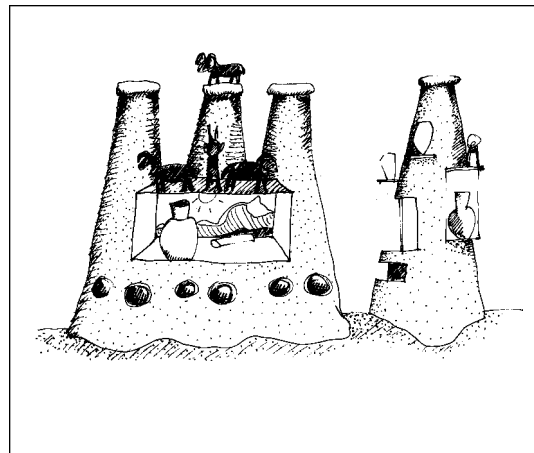
Visitors move relatively quickly through this first section. Its objectives are to introduce visitors to the area and leave them with a sense of the immensity and beauty of the Northern Rockies.

Visitors to the north have an expectation of BIG – big mountains, big rivers, big lakes, big wildlife. This first exhibit area will

explore the big things found in the Northern Rockies.

Big exhibit elements are the backdrop and the structure here. Floor to ceiling mountains show the changes from valley floor forest to mountaintop alpine. Lights play over the exhibit, introducing dawn, daylight and dusk. The sounds of waterfalls, rapids, birds, elk rutting, wolves howling and wind wash over the visitors as they pass through this exhibit area. Snatches of wildlife footage are projected for a few seconds at a time onto the mountains to develop a sense of mystery and excitement.

Small animal sculptures are placed in their appropriate environments. Glimpses of views or animals can be had from certain angles. Simple interactives are placed in this area: buttons to push to hear a sound,

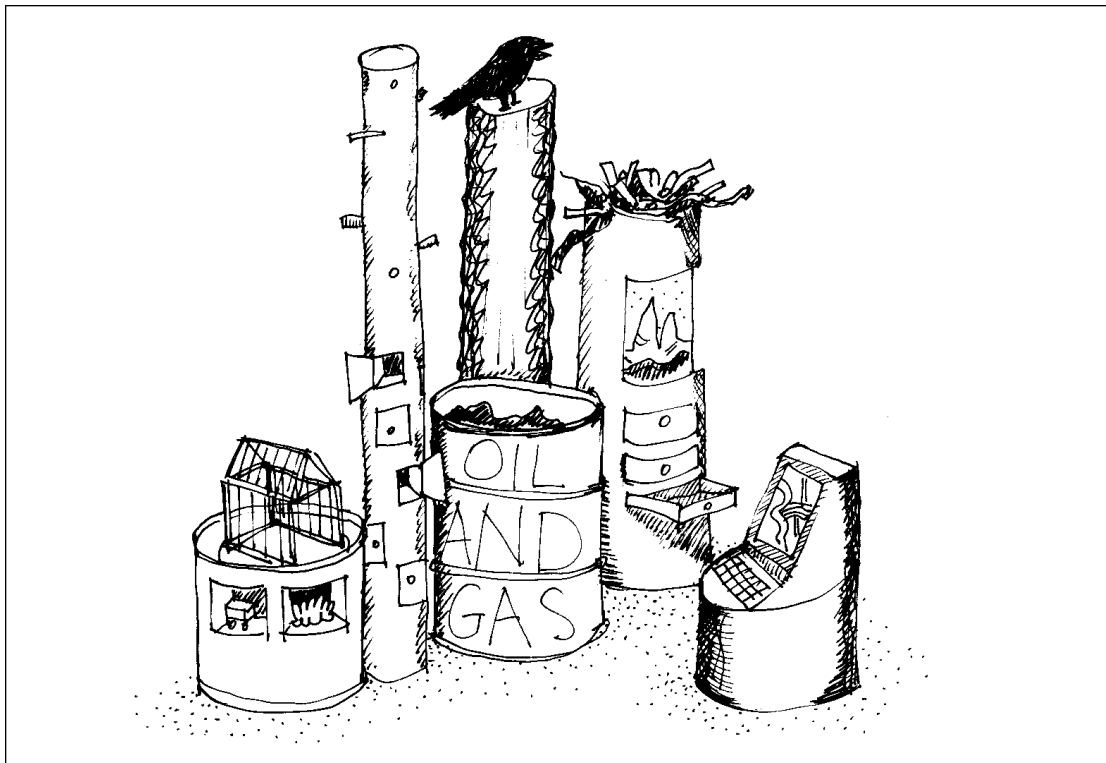


a flap or door to open to find a smaller animal, plant or artifact. These interactives are simple so that a group of people can move through the main part of this area fairly quickly while still starting to interact with the exhibit.

Tall columns, real tree trunks or stylized trunks, lead to movement and discovery. These elements are strategically placed outside of the main traffic flow to add eddies where one or two people can gather to take part in a short activity or play with an interactive element. A large tree trunk lets you squeeze inside where you might find ants, beetles and other creatures that live inside an old, dying tree. A video part way up shows the nesting activities of a woodpecker. Another tree contains a webcam focused on a huge landscape. A

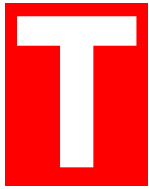
second webcam focuses on the Liard River Canyon or a video shows the path of the river from its headwaters.

Some of these tree trunks contain computer terminals where visitors can bring up a Landsat image of the Muskwa-Kechika. They can look at coloured maps showing the distribution of forest types, wildlife populations, rock types and minerals, roads and amenities. A simple program allows them to layer this information, placing the visitor into the role of a land manager, at a very simple level. Later in the exhibit area, this role can expand and a computer game allows the visitor to make decisions and plan impacts on the area based on a number of actions. The centre could develop a simulation-type game that could also be sold in the gift shop.



The Exhibit Area

NORTHERN ROCKIES EXPLORATION



his second section of the exhibit area looks more closely at the specific stories of the Northern Rockies and the Muskwa-Kechika. Visitors will learn about the geology of the area, the different environments, the wildlife, the archaeology and the palaeontology. This area introduces visitors to the treasures of the region.

As you leave Northern Experience, you enter a larger space where a family or a group can spread out and examine different exhibit components at random. The main exhibit structure will be logs and pipes – some floor to ceiling, others as pedestals – subliminally creating the transition from wilderness alone, to wilderness with the presence of people. Some of the pipes will house audio-visual productions and computers, others might hold a diorama or an artifact.

The floor is a gigantic topographical map; the Alaska Highway is the main pathway through the exhibit. The exhibit elements are scattered on either side of the highway placed, when possible, at the location of a treasure, or where space permits when there is no specific location for the presentation of a topic. The exhibit elements are presented below as if the visitor were traveling the highway from south to north.

Fort Nelson is presented as the frontier, the gateway to the Muskwa-Kechika. A link is made here with the Fort Nelson Museum. A brief history of the Alaska Highway is presented using original film footage and some abandoned artifacts dating to construction. Visitors could also choose to watch footage from later times as the highway changes from military to tourist use.

At Steamboat Mountain, the exhibit looks at the different environments found in the Northern Rockies. A series of exhibit elements show valley ecosystems lower down, gradually climbing from the valley rivers, lakes and wetlands to boreal forest to alpine with an overview of each. Graphics, discovery drawers, and objects to feel and smell present the environmental story. Panels can show typical tree, plant and wildlife species in each area then discuss any environmental issues as a whole. The Muskwa-Kechika is presented as an important and almost pristine wilderness where special management areas permit resource use. Some examples of use and mitigation can be shown here as well as later in the exhibit.

The next exhibit node is at Summit Lake. Here the visitor will find out about the Stone sheep for which this area is famous. Young and old can touch a mounted head, a piece of fur and a foot. A webcam at a

mineral lick shows the animals feeding. Pre-filmed footage is also available for the times when no animals are present. The difference between Stone, bighorn and Dall sheep is shown through graphics. A simple game or puzzle presents a year in a Stone sheep's life – a map outlines a herd's territory.

The Summit Lake node also introduces some geology. The story of glaciation begins here with a presentation of glacial features to be found along the highway. The erosion pillars are highlighted with an explanation of how they came to be. A reconstruction of this type of hoodoo is the base for part of the exhibit.

A single wooden pillar covers the story of controlled burns near the Racing River. An audio station that eavesdrops on the foresters planning the controlled burn then implementing their plans adds excitement and suspense to the series of photos from a burn. As the story culminates in the burn, a heater and fan turn on and blow hot air toward the listener. The story ends with the bugling of an elk and a picture of elk feeding in a rich grassy area surrounded by burnt snags.

The main geology story is told near Folded Mountain. The mountain building story is presented through an animated video that brings this difficult concept into the realm of everyone's understanding. Examples of folded rock, sedimentary layers, and igneous dikes are shown on film. Rock samples allow closer examination. Some of

the oldest rock in the Canadian Rockies is found here.

Part of the geology story is told through the paleontological finds at Wapiti Lake near Pink Mountain. Although the location of the finds is not near Folded Mountain, parts of the story are pertinent. There may be opportunities to tie in electronically with the Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology at this spot. Samples of the fossils, or reproductions, are presented here, with bronze casts mounted so that visitors can make rubbings to take with them.

As you enter Muncho Lake Provincial Park, the story shifts to wildlife. A series of short videos give information on elk, bears and caribou. Antlers of elk and caribou can be picked up and compared for size and shape. Skins of all three animals can be handled and stroked. The casts of a black bear track and a grizzly track will amaze visitors with their size and claws. Visitors will learn about camping and traveling through bear country.

At Muncho Lake, the story progresses into mountains and water. The glaciation story continues with an exploration of the lake itself and the surrounding features.

Many rivers have been crossed by this point so a presentation on the fish of the lakes and rivers is overdue. Several exhibit pillars, each one dedicated to either lake or river species, shows the fish found throughout the Northern Rockies. Fish mounts or casts will be used, and if possible, a tank of

small live fish. The fish story is presented in terms of habitat needs and life cycles – fishing information will be presented in a later part of the exhibit area.

At Liard River, the story of water continues. A webcam or a short film of the Liard River Canyon can be watched here, if not used earlier in the exhibit area. River erosion and the power of rivers is shown from the entire Muskwa-Kechika area. A model of the suspension bridge, the only one left on the Alaska Highway, shows how such a bridge is built. Hopefully footage of the construction in 1943 can be found.

As well, a separate exhibit will showcase the Liard Hot Springs. This exhibit pillar will include an interactive model of the hot springs showing how rainwater flows deep into the earth then percolates upward to the surface where it pools. Interesting features of the hot springs – rare plants that grow in the warm waters or shores, orchid species, the lake chub and other water creatures specially adapted to the heat and the mineral concentration – can be discovered through openings, through magnifying glasses, through a fish finder or binoculars. Legends about the origins of the hot springs can be re-told here through a cone of sound or headphones.

Several other exhibit nodes not tied to sites on the highway are placed off to the sides. These include a node on archaeology and Native prehistory. Through the display of archaeological remains, the story of the first peoples in the Northern Rockies is told. A

model of a prehistoric camp brings some of these remains to life.

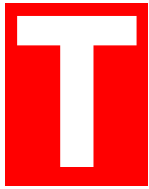
An exhibit node is dedicated to the presentation of the many natural areas, ecological reserves and other protected areas within the Muskwa-Kechika area but which are inaccessible other than by boat, airplane or a long walk or horseback ride. Stunning photography and a voice-over from park planners, environmentalists, Native people and others will speak to the need to conserve these areas and identify their special features.

A node is dedicated to the economic riches found underground. Samples of oil and minerals can be handled while simple maps show where these resources can be found.

A few quiet areas are interspersed among the exhibit nodes to allow visitors to rest. Each area will also provide further reading material, photo albums and references on the topics identified in the exhibit nodes.

The Exhibit Area

PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN ROCKIES



he final part of the exhibit area is divided into three inter-related themes: Recreation, People and Resources. The first thing visitors see as they enter this area is a large three-dimensional model of the Muskwa-Kechika area. This model brings together the landforms, rivers, lakes, roads, forests and other features touched upon earlier. Protected and special management areas are identified. Hiking trails are marked as are campgrounds, settlements, air strips and other places of interest. Sufficient room allows families and other groups to gather around the model to retrace their journey together or to investigate the route yet to be covered.

This section is rich in visuals and in information. Panels on hiking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, fishing and other recreational opportunities include detailed information on permits or licenses needed. Tips for success, stories on favorite trails or fishing areas told by area residents will be found here in text and on video. The items needed to use the backcountry are displayed to help keep visitors safe once they step off the highway or away from their campsite.

Visitors can step into a small airplane and embark on a virtual tour of the region with a final stop at a backcountry lake. Sounds and sensations will really take them there.

Visitors to any place in the world are always

interested in how the locals live, why they came here and why they stay. Several 'talking heads', placed among visuals of the places where they live, chat briefly about their lives. These include the local personalities identified in the pre-design phase, people like Grace Bumstead, the Muncho Lake boat captain, a Native elder, and a youth from one of the settlements. The variety of people included range from young to old and those who arrived a generation or more ago to a relatively new arrival.

Interspersed with the talking heads are exhibits and activity areas that mirror some of the things they say. A front cutaway of a logging truck that visitors can climb into will feature a video of a trip down a logging road with the visitor as the driver. For those waiting their turn, a video of a logging operation can be watched. A loader used at the OSB plant will permit visitors to manipulate the loading arm and try their skill at virtually loading logs or flats of OSB. A videoed tour of the plant gives visitors a glimpse of what takes place from log to board. A log cabin will have the traps, furs, stretchers and other equipment needed to survive as a trapper and hunter. A plan of a gas or oil processing plant shows the journey of petroleum as the visitor pumps it from the ground. Finally, the end of the exhibit area leads the visitor to two choices: exiting to the welcome desk and back to their vehicle, or stepping into the theatre.

THE SHOW



we feel that a professionally developed show is integral to the Northern Rockies

Interpretive Centre. Visitors along the Alaska Highway will see high quality audio-visual presentations at Watson Lake, at the Beringia Centre and the S.S. Klondike National Historic Site in Whitehorse, and at the Kluane National Park Visitor Centre. The show at Fort Nelson will be the most recent production of these and will stand out among the rest. These visitors will also be coming from the south where IMAX theatres are found in every large city and where blockbuster exhibits provide an incredible experience for the eye. They will be looking for, and expecting, the same quality and type of experience on their journey north.

As well as catering to visitor expectations, this is the only way that most visitors will be able to see the Muskwa-Kechika beyond views of the highway, at least on their first visit. Few visitors will have the opportunity to take a flight to a remote lake or journey a wild river from its source. They may not be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to see the amazing diversity of wildlife found here. By watching the film, and being introduced to the wide variety of vistas and opportunities, we will instill a

desire to return to the area at a future date and possibly during a different season. A percentage of visitors will have the flexibility in their schedule to change their plans as a result of viewing the production and touring the centre, and will spend more time in the area than originally planned on this visit.

We propose that a primary film, one that could run on a set schedule during busy times and as requested in the low and shoulder seasons, be commissioned as part of the interpretive centre project. Secondary productions could be developed by local industries to showcase their activities in the area. These would be shown upon request or on a secondary cycle.

The main production for the theatre should last at least 20 minutes and no more than 30 minutes. It should blow the visitor's socks off! This production carries on with the BIG theme – the vistas, the rivers, the lakes, the animals. It shows the Northern Rockies from the air and from ground level, in every season, from common viewpoints and from the remotest corners. It has movement and sounds through the seasons. It makes visitors gasp with amazement at the beauty and variety of the country and yearn to see more of it.

It has people. Visitors, like those in the audience, are shown taking part in activities from hunting to snowmobiling, whitewater rafting to backcountry fly fishing. We want visitors to feel that they could step into the actors' shoes and be there. Images of people shown in the exhibit would also appear in the production.

Throughout the production, we want people to know where these places can be found. Either a name of a location could flash by on the screen, or a map, separately illuminated, could light up as the film passes through an area.

We can leave the production as a one screen affair that is simple to operate and allows for multiple uses of the theatre, or we can take the production a step further and produce a multi-media event.

Imagine a film as described earlier. When the film reaches a certain point, say an overflight of a backcountry cabin, a three-dimensional scene somewhere in the theatre lights up. The audience not only sees the cabin pass below the airplane's wing, but also sees the interior of the cabin, hears two hikers or fishers swap a story, then fade to black. During a wildlife segment a full size caribou or grizzly bear suddenly appears, then disappears. As the camera pans a waterfall, bass speakers cause the seats to shake. A lightning storm or the northern lights stretch from the screen to the ceiling above the viewers. When the house lights are up, all these props are hidden from view behind black

scrim. This technique is used very effectively in places as different as Science North in Sudbury and the Batoche National Historic Site in Saskatchewan. Both types of productions can have incredible impact on an audience when done well.

While the theatre is dedicated to the showing of the Muskwa-Kechika production, it could also be used occasionally for lectures, classes and interpretive programs directly related to the stories being told in the centre. For instance, a certain night a month could be set aside for researchers working in the Muskwa-Kechika to present their findings. During high visitation months, centre staff or provincial parks staff could present a scheduled program on hiking or wildlife. Many provincial parks are turning to interpretive theatre where two to three interpreters develop a program with song, dance and drama to present topics from early exploration to insects. The centre could provide an alternative venue to the park itself – a bonus for visitors staying in town and a new audience for the park staff.

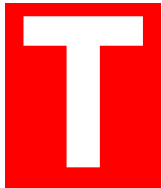
Other uses for the theatre may arise in the off-season when partnerships with the college or local schools are developed.

The theatre, to be effective, should seat at least 80 people. This size will accommodate a motorcoach tour plus any independent visitors. Seating should be tiered to allow everyone a great view and could be as simple as tiered levels with cushions or the more formal type of theatre seating.

Tiered levels would allow this room to be used more easily as a workshop space or classroom for younger students who may need a flat space upon which to work. Rental of the theatre would provide a revenue stream for the centre.

Visitors exit the theatre to the welcome desk where they can ask more specific questions about the places they saw in the production or in the exhibits. The attendant has a second opportunity here to influence the visitor's travel plans on this or a subsequent visit.

Interpretive Exhibit COST ESTIMATES



he cost estimates developed below are intended to project a realistic expectation of the amount of money required to produce exhibits at three levels of complexity.

The cost of developing, fabricating and installing interpretive exhibits is estimated, within the industry, on a square foot basis. While an exhibit does not cover the entire square footage on which an estimate is based, it includes the space needed for the circulation of visitors, gathering space and behind-the-scenes mechanicals in relation to that exhibit.

The cost estimates, at each level, include:

- Exhibit research
- Writing of text
- Digital output
- Design of the exhibit and its components
- Final art production and associated costs
- Project management fees (at 12% of total)
- Exhibit production
- All multi-media equipment
- Shipping to Fort Nelson
- And installation.

In developing the total budget for this project, 10% of the total exhibit budget should be added as a contingency, in case of last

minute modifications and unforeseen additional expenses. A further 15% should be added to the overall budget if the exhibits are to be phased.

We have based our exhibit estimates on three square-foot prices: \$200, \$400 and \$600. GST is extra. These estimates were derived from consultation with other designers and a review of their recent projects as well as our own experience. Not surprisingly, we found that exhibit costs ranged widely but higher costs reflected a number of factors: the amount of high tech interactives incorporated into the design (computer programs/games, video presentations, sound cones and exhibit components with original engineering or programming drove the price up), distance from fabricators, and length of time allowed for the design and fabrication stage (the tighter the time allowed, the more was charged by fabricators for 'rush' work).

These three levels have been applied to the 2000 square-foot exhibit hall identified in idealink's Pre-design Concept.

**APPROACH 1:
THE BOOK ON THE WALL**

We have all seen this approach used, often poorly, sometimes with great impact. This approach is often used when finances and imagination are tight. For their \$200 a square foot, some designers try to fit in as many words as possible in a very small space, hence the moniker Book-on-the-Wall.

This approach can be used effectively; however a larger proportion of the budget is used up in design time to make the delivery of information interesting and engaging. Although often this approach is equivalent to lining walls with text and graphics, as you can see in the sketch below, there can still be some three dimensional and creative use of the space.

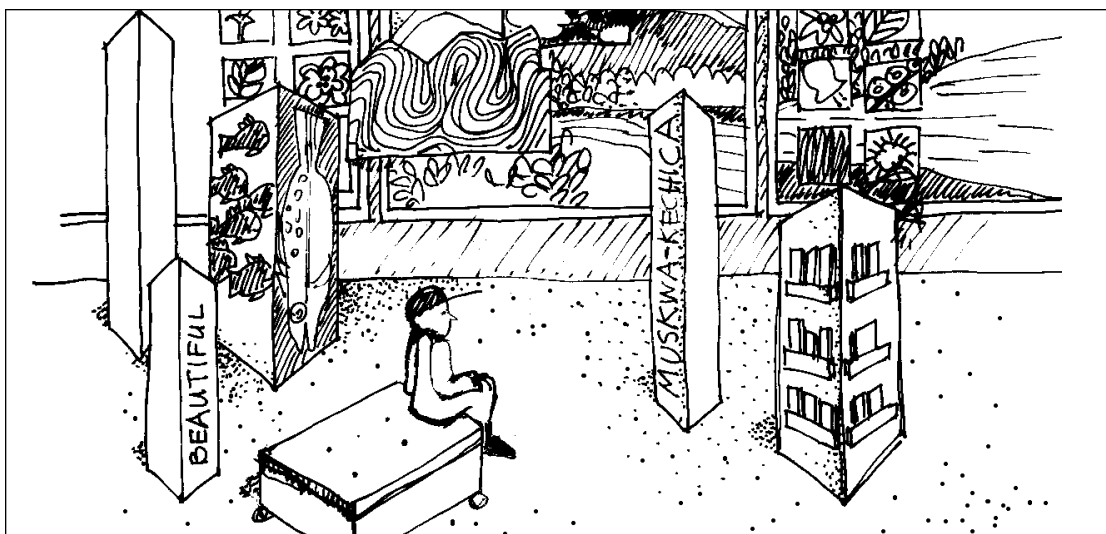
In this approach, information is presented in short texts, captions, quotes and bold headings complemented by visually stunning photo murals, smaller photo panels,

banners and illustrations. At this price level, there is some dependency on good graphics, primarily transparencies, to be already available or acquired through purchase rather than the contracting of a photographer to take specific shots. There is also an opportunity, at this level more than at higher levels, to involve local art or media classes to develop graphics, sound bites and even footage of events and places.

Panels are produced as digital output mounted on a stable substrate with a tough laminate finish covering the entire surface. The panels are mounted on the walls with float mounts. The installation is straight forward and uncomplicated and usually does not require an experienced crew to install.

This approach, of the three presented, is the easiest and least costly to update and change as required. There are no moving parts to break down and maintenance is simple and inexpensive.

Estimated cost for Exhibit Hall: \$400,000.



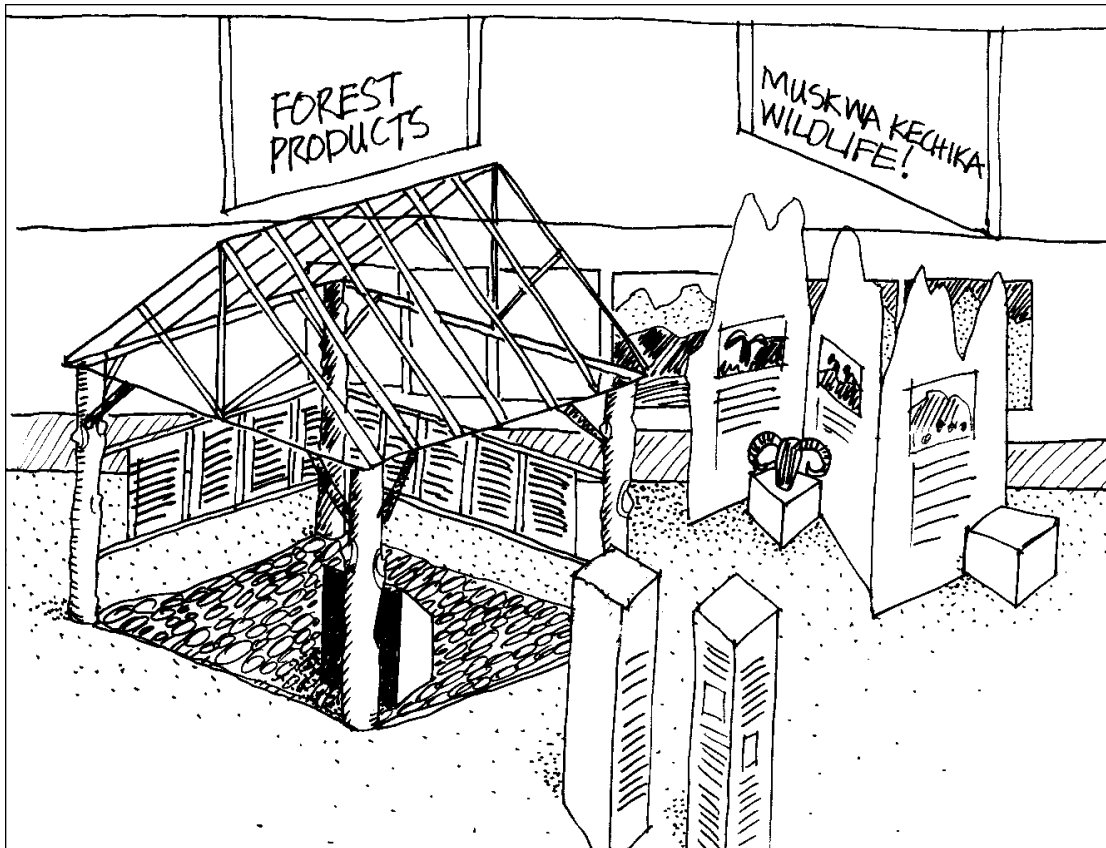
**APPROACH 2:
MID-RANGE**

This budget moves the exhibits off the walls and into the room. It allows for more complexity in presentation, more free-standing exhibit components, areas for interaction between exhibits and visitors and among visitors, and some active aural and visual media. The exhibit furniture, materials and finish are more dynamic. Flat panels remain to provide textual and visual information but they can now contain custom photos, more elaborate illustrations, simple manipulatives and some interactive exhibits. Computer-driven exhibits are feasible if based on existing programs. Audioscapes and live distance camera

feeds can enhance the texts and objects on display.

While this level of exhibitry is more and more prevalent in visitor and interpretive centres in the south, it also comes with a higher cost for maintenance. While exhibits must be designed with the easy availability of replacement parts in mind, the replacement schedule on some of the moving components may be shorter than expected. Computer hardware and software will need to be upgraded often, on at least a two-year cycle. General maintenance costs are to be expected. Exhibit changes are costlier.

Estimated cost for Exhibit Hall: \$800,000.



**APPROACH 3:
AMAZE AND ENTHRALL**

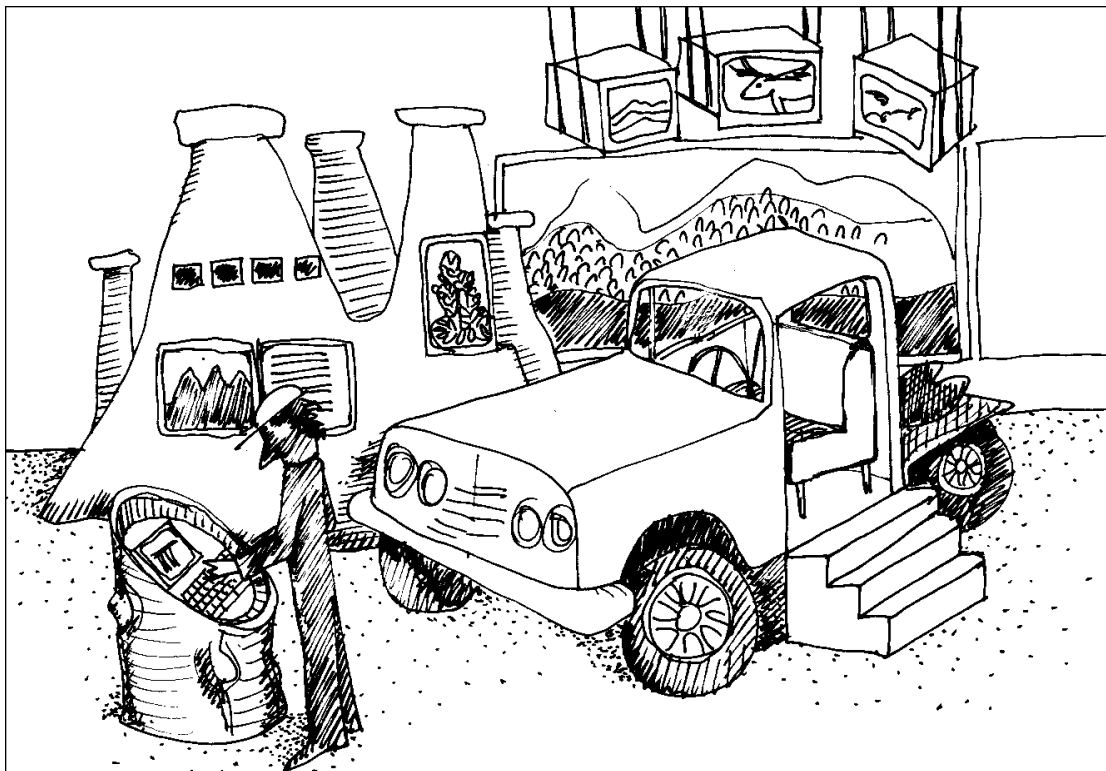
The third approach relies on a budget of \$600 per square foot and delivers an experience the visitor won't soon forget. There are no stops at this level and original computer programming, multi-media components, original music, recorded stories, live camera feeds, moving images projected on the walls and throughout the exhibits are all possible.

The exhibit furniture is high end with the materials more industrial and modern looking. Large free-standing landscape dioramas, features and sculptures will fill the exhibit hall, sometimes reaching the ceiling. Dramatic lighting can be designed throughout. A logging truck cab or tree feller may

be filled with interactive components and could be virtually driven by visitors. Live feed cameras can take the visitor into the OSB plant, to a mineral lick or to a forest fire command station.

The down side of these high tech exhibits is the amount of time that the exhibits tend not to work. Since expertise and components may come from a distance, a full-time facility manager with knowledge of technical systems should be considered. This person would maintain computers, programs, multi-media components and generally ensure that the exhibits are working for your visitors at all times.

Approach 3 estimate for Exhibit Hall:
\$1,200,000.



**NON-EXHIBIT SPACE:
ENTRANCE AND PUBLIC AREAS**

We have recommended that interpretation should not be limited to the exhibit gallery but be integrated into the entrance, the lobby, the reception area and the wash-rooms. For the most part, the exhibits developed for these sites would be two-dimensional so as not to impede visitor movement or counseling at the reception desk. The approach taken would be as described in Approach 1. Based on an area of 1710 square feet, the cost to develop basic interpretive exhibits would be \$342,000.

THEATRE

Idealink architecture ltd., in their pre-concept document, suggested a figure of \$425,000 for a fully equipped, 100 seat theatre. This estimate does not include the actual construction of the theatre or the projection booth, which would be part of the building cost. In their discussion of the show's production, they have suggested some alternatives, but have not included any costing.

Should a show be commissioned for the theatre, depending upon the complexity and length, we estimate a cost of \$150,000. This level of funding would provide for a 25- to 30-minute show that would include scenics shot from the air, water level views, interviews with local people, filming within local plants and the use

of archival film, if it exists. The film would be memorable and at least equal to other productions along the Alaska Highway.

The film industry is quite volatile and costing can increase dramatically, both for production and equipment, with little notice. These numbers should be reviewed again before fund-raising begins. As well, the architects will need to know the type of equipment being used for projection and for the screen when designing the theatre space.

Estimate for Theatre including show, equipment and seating: \$575,000.

Summary of Estimated Costs

	EXHIBIT HALL	PUBLIC AREAS	THEATRE	TOTAL
Approach 1	400,000	342,000	575,000	\$1,317,000
Approach 2	800,000	342,000	575,000	\$1,717,000
Approach 3	1,200,000	342,000	575,000	\$2,117,000

