



Cave and Basin National Historic Site of Canada

November 26, 2018

The Significance of the Cave and Basin National Historic Site

The Cave and Basin hot springs are located in Banff National Park on Treaty 7 lands and within the traditional territories of many Indigenous nations including the Métis. Indigenous groups have identified the Cave and Basin as a sacred and spiritual place where their people have gathered for cultural ceremonies that are still practiced today. However, in the late 1800's Indigenous access to the Cave and Basin was fundamentally changed.

In 1885, through an Order in Council, the Government of Canada set aside 26 square kilometers of land in and around the Cave and Basin to protect the thermal springs on Sulphur Mountain for the benefit of Canadians. Two years later, this was expanded to 674 square kilometers and became the core of the first national park in Canada. The hot springs were key to the site's history of recreational use by settlers and travellers.

In 1981, the site was commemorated as a national historic site. The commemorative intent is expressed in the following statement: "Cave and Basin was designated a national historic site of Canada because it is the birthplace of Canada's national parks." Elements commemorated and protected by the historic place designation included the Cave, the Basin, the four thermal springs flowing into the Cave and Basin, the outflow to the marsh, and the archeological vestiges of the 1883 'hotel' erected next to the vent-hole.

Since reopening after major renovations in May 2013, the Cave and Basin has enjoyed the fastest growth in visitation of all national historic sites administered by Parks Canada. In 2013/2014 visitation was 91,282. By 2016 this number had increased to 179,415. During 2017 (the Canada 150 year), visitation reached 267,951. The Cave and Basin National Historic Site is now among the most visited historic sites in Canada.



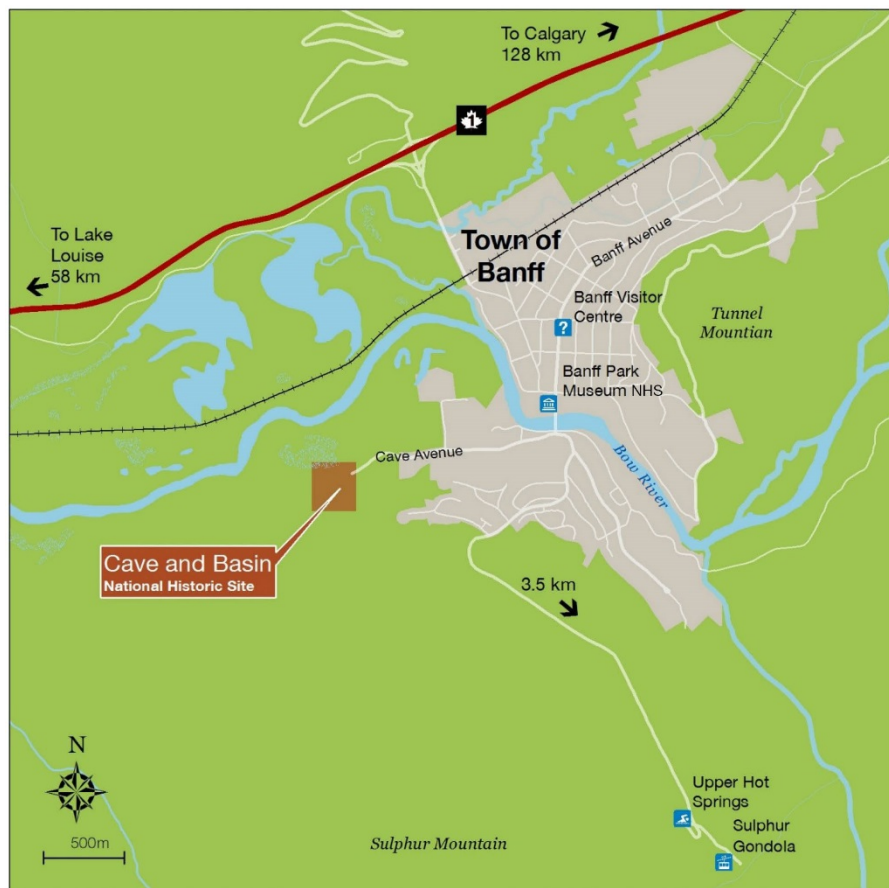
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Location

Cave and Basin National Historic Site is located just outside the town of Banff, at the foot of Sulphur Mountain. The boundaries of the site are defined by the parking lot to the east, the upper thermal springs to the south, a line immediately west of the Caretakers Cottage and the Cave and Basin Marsh to the north.

History

Indigenous use of places in close proximity to the Cave and Basin, such as Vermilion Lakes, dates back over 13,000 years. Human interaction with thermal water has played a central role in Cave and Basin history from the very beginning. The waters were, and continue to be, important to Indigenous Peoples as a place of gathering and ceremony.



In 1883, railway workers found the cave and descended into it. Their attempts to claim the hot springs brought them to the government's attention. At the same time, interest was expressed by railway officials in creating national parks along the railway line. In 1885, the Hot Springs Reserve at the Cave and Basin was established by the Federal Government.

In 1886, an entry tunnel was blasted into the cave. This enabled walk-in access and changed the practice of entering the cave through the overhead vent hole. The cave and basin pools were stabilized, and two bathhouses and a caretaker's cottage were built as the first national park buildings.

In 1914, a new bathing pavilion and a large open air swimming pool were added. From 1915-1917, a First World War internment camp was located at the facility. By 1935, the Cave and Basin had become a major attraction for visitors to Banff. In response to this, the facilities were renovated and further expanded. Parks officials saw the facility as an important place where Canadians could relax and find physical and spiritual renewal by bathing in the curative mineral spring waters and enjoying recreational swimming and sunbathing.

In 1985, a major renewal of the Cave and Basin was completed and the site was reopened as part of the Parks Canada Centennial. Renovations included the construction of a new swimming pool and replica 1886-1903 wooden bathhouse and adapting the pavilion to receive interpretive exhibits. In 1992 the swimming pool was closed due to maintenance problems.



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From 2010-2013, significant renovations of the facilities are done as part of the *Birthplace of Canada's National Parks* project. This included major conservation work on the Bathing Pavilion, new programming space on the pool deck, construction of new facilities (Gallatley and Welcome buildings) and the installation of new exhibits. These upgrades have improved the protection of cultural resources, enhanced protection of the thermal water environment and greatly enriched the visitor experience.

Today

This busy year-round site is located in a heavily forested setting on the lower slope of Sulphur Mountain. The site both encompasses and is surrounded by flowing mineral springs—part of the same thermal water system that feeds the Upper Hot Springs pools. The Cave, Basin, and thermal springs have both cultural and natural value for the site.

The thermal springs are among the most unique natural features of Banff National Park providing habitat for rare plants, invertebrates and the endangered Banff Springs snail. Its highly specialized habitat is located throughout the site including above and below the buildings, inside the cave and in the basin. Other species at risk, such as the Western Toad and Vivid Dancer also regularly occur at the site.



The Middle Springs Wildlife corridor is located directly above the site. This 500 metre wide band of forest helps large carnivores move across the Bow Valley, and around the town of Banff. Wildlife also routinely pass through the designated area of the national historic site.

Amar Athwal

The Cave and Basin Marsh zone is located both within the designated area of the site and flowing out below it into Vermillion Lakes. This location is the most important habitat for snakes in the park. The Vermillion wetlands and the Cave and Basin marsh constitute the most productive bird habitat in the lower Bow Valley. The site's 0.5 km lower boardwalk provides visitors with the opportunity to experience this sensitive wetland area and develop a deeper sense of connection to both the environmental and cultural aspects of the site.

The interior of the buildings at the Bathing Pavilion Complex contain a wide selection of interpretive exhibits and digital media presenting content on local, Indigenous and Parks Canada history. The Bathing Pavilion Complex offers a variety of other amenities as well, including scenic view decks, a theatre for showing films and hosting events, a small rotating exhibit space, and an informal “library” sitting room for relaxing, reading, playing games or attending presentations. The pool deck functions as a large open air four season exhibition and activity space for programs, temporary exhibits and special events.



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During the 2010 renewal project, Parks Canada staff engaged with representatives from the Stoney Nakoda, Ktunaxa and Siksika nations to develop content for new exhibits. This content communicates the represented Indigenous perspectives on the Cave and Basin site itself, as well as Parks Canada more generally. Since 2013, the Cave and Basin has occasionally been used for traditional ceremonial practices, and is frequently visited by school tours and other groups from Indigenous communities.

The cultural and natural resources at Cave and Basin are in good condition, and the archaeological sites are in stable condition. While the landscape and built heritage features of the site are generally in good condition, the corrosive thermal water environment and the constant flow of thermal water on and around the building foundations threaten various long-term impacts and requires constant attention. The Cave, the Basin and the four natural springs that flow into the Cave and Basin are all landscape features of national historic significance. These features also comprise critical habitat for the endangered Banff Springs Snail. Management and



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control of the thermal water flow has been a central operational concern since the site’s early beginnings. Cultural resources, including the vent hole, the 1883-85 archeological hotel remains, and the 1914 Bathing Pavilion (a classified FHBRO Building) are all threatened by high moisture levels, corrosive minerals in the water, and an extreme freeze/thaw cycle. Major conservation work (e.g., repointing of rundle stone and masonry repair) has been performed on the Bathing Pavilion over the last 8 years.