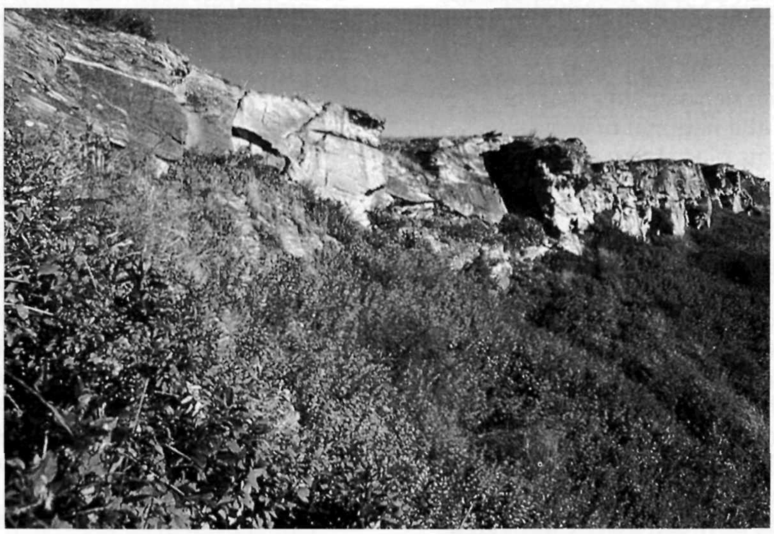
The Mouse That Roared

Rediscovering Partnerships for New National Historic Sites

G. Brian Woolsey

It was little more than 15 years ago that Parks Canada proclaimed that it managed the "Crown Jewels" and that Canadians could be justifiably proud of their collective heirlooms. Canada's acquisition and management of its national parks (natural areas) and national historic sites (historical places) were historically viewed as the logical and most effective approach to heritage conservation and presentation.

Parks Canada has found that this traditional route is expensive and inflexible. Our agency has launched a bold and multifaceted experiment in heritage partnerships, one that will certainly challenge our ancient shibboleth that ownership equals effectiveness. The particular focus of this paper will be partnerships in cultural resource management, but many of the same arguments could be made for other aspects of our mandate, including the establishment of new natural areas and the management of existing parks and sites. A consensus is emerging within our program that partnership is not only a cost-effective strategy for protecting the national heritage, it may well be a more effective approach, period.



Not all World Heritage Sites in Canada are managed by Parks Canada; Head-Smashed-In Bison Jump is managed by the Province of Alberta.

Current System of National Historic Sites

The national historic sites system currently includes some 129 operating sites which are visited by some 6.8 million people annually. Beginning in 1972, several heritage canals were also transferred to Parks Canada, and these corridors receive about 710,000 visitors a year.[1] The flagship of national historic sites is the magnificently reconstructed Fortress of Louisbourg, representing an 18th-century fortified town in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Parks Canada also operates Artillery Park and the 18th-century fortifications in Quebec City, the historic capital of the French Empire in North America until 1759.

The Halifax Defence Complex attests to the lengthy British military presence in Canada. The complex is composed of individual sites located in and around Halifax, Nova Scotia, covering the period from the founding of this superb harbour community in 1749 to WWII. Other elements of Parks Canada's historic sites system include the Rideau Canal, in eastern Ontario, which contains the best preserved canal technology in Canada; Lower Fort Garry, near Winnipeg, the only surviving stone fur-trade post in Western Canada; and Dawson City, in Yukon, once called the "San Francisco of the North" by virtue of the extensive, but short-lived, settlements there as a result of the Gold Rush of 1898.

Most of the provinces and territories also operate historic site programs, many of which protect and present sites of provincial significance, but occasionally sites of national and even international significance, such as the Head-Smashed-In Bison Jump in Alberta. The latter is a World Heritage Site, as is the early-11th-century Viking settlement of L'Anse aux Meadows, in Newfoundland, administered by Parks Canada.

Cultural Resource Management

Cultural resources in Parks Canada are managed according to the Cultural Resource Management Policy. The Historic Sites and Monuments Act of 1953 forms the legislative basis for Parks Canada's system of cultural resource management (CRM). This legislation formally establishes the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as advisors on historical matters. Specifically, the Board (or HSMBC) recommends to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada whether a particular historic place is of national historic significance. "Historic" significance in this context also embraces national architectural or archeological significance.

For sites evaluated as nationally significant, further Board advice is sought as to the level of recommended involvement: commemorative plaque, cost-sharing agreement, or property acquisition. As an index of the Board's effectiveness in screening sites, of the 6,000-odd applications for national commemoration since 1919, only approximately 1,000 have been declared nationally significant.

Of these, only slightly over 200 have been recommended for financial investment by Parks Canada: 90 for cost-sharing agreements and over 100 for acquisition. Over 5,000 potential sites were thus considered not of national significance by the Board; for these sites, there would be no further involvement by Parks Canada.[2]

Members of the Board include residents from each province and territory in Canada, with an additional member for Ontario and Quebec and an *ex-officio* member

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from the National Archives and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Members tend to be experts in the key cultural resource or heritage conservation disciplines. The Board's excellent academic reputation has proven invaluable in ensuring that its recommendations are credible with the heritage community in Canada.

The Board assists Parks Canada in determining the commemorative intent for each site administered by Parks Canada. In other words, the HSMBC presents its historical rationale for site designation and defines the key representative resources at each historic place. If the Minister responsible for Parks Canada accepts this advice, as is almost always the case, the site is designated a national historic site.[3]

The reconstructed buildings at L'Anse aux Meadows, an early-11th-century Viking site is both a World Heritage Site and part of the system of national historic sites managed by Parks Canada.

These representative resources are then accorded Level I or priority status in any subsequent research, planning, or development programs proposed for the designated site. This approach helps ensure that the major themes and resources at a national historic site, the very things that caused this place to be selected in the first place, are suitably recognized in all aspects of its programs.

Early Partnership Efforts, 1972-1984

Parks Canada's CRM Policy is proving useful in providing both a guiding philosophy and workable management parameters for national historic sites and heritage canals owned and operated by Parks Canada. What remains to be determined, however, is how this system of CRM operates within a partnership context. Although the new policy emphasizes that CRM applies to co-operative arrangements, how can this be done in a situation where policy decisions have to be negotiated, not promulgated?

In 1972, Parks Canada formally recognized the need for a co-operative approach to heritage with the launching of the Byways and Special Places Program. The Agreements for Recreation and Conservation Program (or ARC Program), as it came to be known in 1974, was announced as a major new initiative and a separate Parks Canada program, which would be managed and operated on an equal basis with the National Parks and National Historic Sites Programs.

Specifically, ARC was mandated to manage the nine heritage canals, such as the Rideau Canal, transferred to Parks Canada from the Department of Transport, and to carry out feasibility studies in co-operation with provincial and territorial agencies on various linear corridors and heritage areas. ARC studied potential initiatives from a number of vantage points: natural and cultural significance, and scenic and recreational potential.

This program clearly held out great promise, for it recognized the pivotal role played by provinces and territories in designing the support infrastructure (roads, tourism facilities and services, development of compatible attractions) essential to the successful management of heritage attractions. For a while at least, that promise was fulfilled. Agreements were signed with the Province of Ontario for the Trent-Severn and Rideau canals in central and eastern Ontario in 1975, for the Red River in Manitoba in 1978, and for the Mackenzie Trail in British Columbia in 1982.[4]

These agreements had a clear cultural resource focus, for the Rideau-Trent-Severn dealt with major historical transportation corridors in the heart of Ontario, the Manitoba Agreement with sites associated with the fur trade and Red River Society around Winnipeg, and the Mackenzie Grease Trail with an important 19th-century interior fur-trade route in British Columbia.

While these agreements are now at least 10 years old, they are still regarded as models in intergovernmental integration. The Red River Agreement, for example, links the Parks Canada sites in the Winnipeg area, such as Lower Fort Garry, St. Andrew's Rectory, and the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, with thematically related sites operated and managed by provincial and municipal agencies. The result is a co-ordinated presentation of historical and recreational attractions in and around Winnipeg that allow visitors a comprehensive glimpse into the rich history of the Red River Settlement without the usual duplication or competition in attractions and services that seem to characterize many heritage regions.

Unfortunately, agreements were signed only for the three areas cited above, despite numerous other initiatives that had significant appeal. In 1984 the ARC program was cancelled and its former components were redistributed between the National Parks and National Historic Sites Programs.

The demise of ARC has been attributed to various causes, not the least of which, in the author's opinion, was the stubborn persistence of an ownership culture in Parks Canada that had remained deeply rooted and relatively uncomfortable with the compromises and delays that frequently accompany co-operative approaches. Partnerships meant sharing the political limelight, which at that time Parks Canada appeared not anxious to do.[5]

A chronic problem, as well, in gaining provincial approval for ARC initiatives was the lack of an opera-

The Saint John Market's economic feasibility was ensured when glass enclosures were erected to provide additional sales space in the building. The HSMBC-designated portion of the structure was the interior, not the exterior.

tional budget. This meant that joint federal-provincial facilities could be planned and built by virtue of federal capital funding, but that operating and maintaining them was the responsibility of the provinces or other partners.[6] This precondition led to the collapse of many negotiations, as operational resources are usually the most difficult for cash-strapped governments to find. Finally, for the Atlantic Provinces, the 50/50 formula for federal cost-sharing proved quite unattractive, particularly when the federal portion for other programs was as much as 90% of the total cost.[7]

Background to the National Cost-Sharing Program

The ARC Program had just been buried when Parks Canada faced the direct challenge of a substantially reduced budget with the election of the Progressive Conservatives in 1984. Parks Canada suffered a significant reduction of some $36 million, or approximately 20% of its capital budget for the period 1985-88.[8] The new government put into place mechanisms to eliminate any new spending initiatives without new funding and explicit Cabinet and Parliamentary authorization.

Partnership: A Flexible Heritage Conservation Option

This, however, is not the whole story. In the author's opinion, our shift towards partnership as the preferred paradigm was not exclusively, nor even primarily, driven by financial considerations. When properly managed, co-operative mechanisms can be applied in a more timely fashion and to a wider variety of cultural resources than the legalistic, time-consuming, and sometimes unpopular site acquisition-development route. Through partnership, cultural resources can be managed more effectively.

The National Cost-Sharing Program, 1986

The National Cost-Sharing Program received policy approval in 1986 and was formally established and funded at $1 million a year in 1987. At the time, eligible recipients for financial assistance were provinces, territories, municipalities, and private non-profit groups. No provision is made for operational assistance under this program, as its exclusive focus is historical resource conservation. Selection of candidate sites is the role of the HSMBC, and the maximum Parks contribution is 50% of the total restoration/site-acquisition costs and $1 million per project. Period reconstructions are ineligible for financial assistance, and cost-sharing sites cannot be owned by Parks Canada.

The principles and practices of CRM apply to this program. Adherence to CRM is ensured by requiring that the partner prepare a comprehensive conservation report before undertaking any physical interventions on the site.

The report presents the rationale and underlying database supporting works of stabilization, restoration, renovation, and modern adaptation. The implications of any proposed interventions to a historic structure or landscape must be pre-tested by the necessary research studies, exactly along the lines stated in Parks Canada's CRM Policy. Thus, studies such as an overview structural and/or land-use history of an area, a physical assessment of the heritage buildings and/or landscape, may well be necessary. Archaeological testing may also be necessary.

To encourage our partners to undertake such research, the costs for these analyses are potentially eligible for cost-sharing. Parks Canada will, however, only reimburse its partner for the research costs if the conservation report is approved.

Further, although by definition conservation reports concentrate on the impact of interventions on historic resources, they must also deal with the contemporary features of a site, such as how it will be used, managed, and maintained. The draft report is reviewed by planners and CRM specialists in Parks Canada's regions and headquarters, and if judged unacceptable, cost-sharing funding is withheld until the report is appropriately amended.

A final defining characteristic of conservation agreements is the application of the so-called heritage character statements. Heritage character statements define the critical components of a site from the vantage point of the HSMBC. This guides Parks Canada planners and managers in negotiations with our partners, for it provides a clear sense of a site's nationally significant elements, and by implication, those heritage components which might have to be modified or adaptively reused. These "trade-

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The administration facility (far right) added to the St. Thomas, Ontario, City Hall was designed in 1988.

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offs" are frequently inescapable in order to arrive at a conservation report satisfactory to everyone.

Thus, while compromise is inevitable in partnership, the conservation program is structured to ensure that nationally significant heritage values—those which must receive the highest priority under CRM—are not sacrificed in the negotiations process.

Early Partnership Venture

The Saint John Market in New Brunswick has been restored, rehabilitated, and effectively recycled, and its heritage components have been respected, despite the fact that Parks Canada footed only one-sixth of the total project cost of $6 million. The market's surviving interior was defined and respected in the conservation report and subsequent renovations as the key heritage component of national significance.

The market's exterior walls were proposed for modification to permit additional vending units, which were to be housed in glass enclosures. Parks Canada was able to reduce the magnitude and visual impact of these additions, to ensure the visual congruity of the building from most viewing vistas.[9] Although some heritage purists might well have decried this external cladding altogether, the choice for the city was either increased revenue, afforded by the additional commercial space, or razing the building altogether and replacing it with a modern facility.

As one of Parks Canada's first partnership ventures, staff agonized over the Saint John Market development concept. Ultimately, it was decided that since the nationally significant elements were being respected, the external enclosures were an acceptable quid pro quo. Ironically, the market project was cited in 1988 for a design award by the Heritage Canada Foundation. The Foundation functions as a heritage watchdog in Canada.

The McLean Mill in Port Alberni, B.C., in the 1930s. (From the collection of the Alberni Valley Museum, Port Alberni, B.C.)

Not all projects have been that successful. As might be imagined, with over 20 conservation projects between 1987 and 1994, we have experienced some reverses as well. For the St. Thomas City Hall, for example, we found it very difficult to change the conservation philosophy of this project once the planning and design assumptions had been approved by the city. Our agency was presented with a modern adaptation to the city hall that, to our way of thinking, was incongruous with the rest of the structure. We were in no position to disentangle ourselves from an agreement, however, having made no comments at the time this design was being vetted. CRM was not at stake, but our reputation as a sensitive heritage agency certainly was at issue.[10]

As a direct result of swallowing that design solution, we will no longer participate in projects for which a conservation philosophy has been established without our input. Parks Canada is either involved from the beginning or not involved at all.

Expanded Program of Cost-Sharing Agreements, 1990

The minor blemishes we experienced with the 1986 program did not dissuade us from an aggressive pursuit of partnership opportunities. In 1990, under the umbrella of the Green Plan, we initiated an expanded cost-sharing program which would provide assistance for both conservation and presentation elements. The Green Plan was a Government of Canada thrust to improve the Canadian environment, including initiatives to complete the national parks system and to commemorate unrepresented historic themes.

An additional $7.1 million was allocated for this new variation of the National Cost-Sharing Program for the period 1991-1997. By virtue of a conscious policy change, the list of eligible recipients of cost-shared assistance was expanded to include the private sector. Except for the prohibition on site ownership and the restricted capacity to assist site operations (maximum period of 10 years), the conservation and presentation program has many of the characteristics of a traditional, operating national historic site.[11]

The McLean Mill is the first major initiative to be undertaken under this program. The mill is located near Port Alberni, on the west coast of British Columbia. Port Alberni has historically been associated with the lumbering and pulp and paper industry. The mill was built in the period 1920-1940, when the British Columbia forest products industry was in full swing. It was chosen by the HSMBC to commemorate the theme of lumbering in British Columbia because it is the last surviving mill located on Vancouver Island that contains machinery and equipment from the 1920-1940 period.[12]

The credible interior layout of the mill property is paralleled by the site's surrounding land use. McMillan Bloedel, a giant lumbering corporation in British Columbia, carries out logging operations in the adjacent highlands. McMillan Bloedel, historically an associate of the McLean family, originally owned the lands encompassing the mill and transferred them to Port Alberni in 1991. The city, in return for the lands, agreed to develop the abandoned structures as a historical site and then

Some of the equipment that has been painstakingly restored by Port Alberni volunteers for display at the mill.

invited Parks Canada and the province to co-operate in a multi-agency development scheme.

Barely two years after the HSMBC recommended co-operative action on McLean Mill, Parks Canada was sitting down with provincial and municipal officials to develop a program for interim resource conservation measures, site research, and management planning for this site. Urgently needed conservation work was undertaken in 1992 and 1993, thus preventing the mill structure itself from collapse. Partnership appears to permit timely responses to short-term problems.

The key outstanding issue for the McLean Mill will be whether or not this project meets the requirements of CRM. The litmus test will be the management plan, which will function for conservation and presentation agreements exactly as a conservation report did for conservation agreements. The CRM principles must be applied to this site as much as they would to sites under the direct administration of Parks Canada. Further, the management plan must be attached to, and form part of, the cost-sharing agreement for such sites.[13]

Currently, Parks Canada is in the final stages of co-operative planning for the McLean Mill, and no agreement has been signed yet. It would be premature, therefore, to claim a major victory for co-operative heritage planning just yet. Nevertheless, from our discussions to date, we have learned that if we can patiently explain the underlying rationale for CRM, we stand a very good chance of convincing our partners that such CRM principles as knowledge and respect are the best means of ensuring a site's credibility and therefore its enduring success as a tourism attraction.

Conclusion

Skeptics will not fail to note that, together, both variations of cost-sharing amount to .5% of Parks Canada's operational and capital budget. It is true that we have begun modestly! Nevertheless, so impressed is Parks Canada by the potential of partnerships and convinced that the community or band-based co-operative models are avenues of the future that we will not acquire another historic property unless that is the sole means available to protect a threatened national historic site.

Further, the latent potential of projects such as McLean Mill has alerted our senior management to the almost limitless possibilities inherent in this approach. As a result, partnership will be the preferred avenue for establishing all new national historic sites. As well, planners for national parks, which to date have all been owned by the federal government, are examining the potential of a parallel approach for new natural areas. Finally, a program-wide study is underway to investigate shared management for the entire system of national parks and national historic sites. It seems, therefore, that partnership is not only here to stay, but that it will be much more prominent in the future. In that sense, the National Cost-Sharing Program may be a mouse that roared!

This article has been excerpted from a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Public History in Sacramento, CA, March 18, 1994.

Photos courtesy Parks Canada.

Notes

1 Parks Canada, *Visitor Use Statistics for 1992-93*, Annual Report.

2 Personal communication, Larry Friend, Executive Director, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Hull, P.Q., January 1994.

3 Parks Canada Policies, Draft November 22, 1993, *National Historic Sites Policy*, Role of the Minister, Section 1,1,2, p. 66.

4 Personal communication, Ann Verbiwski, Review Officer, Leasehold Lands, Policy and Audit Division, Realty Services Branch, Parks Canada, Hull, P.Q., Sept. 1993.

5 This reticence became particularly evident, in the author's personal experience, in the latter stages of negotiations over the proposed Saskatchewan Rivers Heritage Complex, a co-operative project oriented around Batoche and provincial sites such as Fort Carlton in the 1981-82 period.

6 Personal communication, Mahlon Robinson, Chief, Management and Operational Planning, Operations Branch, National Historic Sites Directorate, Parks Canada, Hull, P.Q., January 1994.

7 Personal communication, Rob Thompson, Head, National Historic Sites Planning, Policy Planning and Research, Atlantic Region, Parks Canada, Halifax, N.S., January 1994.

8 Personal communication, Paul Hartley, Chief, Financial Planning and Resource Analysis, Finance Branch, Parks Canada, Hull, P.Q., January 1994.

9 *Saint John City Market National Historic Site*, Conservation Report, January 1988, (Parks Canada, Atlantic Region).

10 The design concept was submitted to City Council on April 24, 1988; Parks Canada was not in receipt of a positive HSMBC recommendation on the city hall until January 1986. (Internal Parks Canada correspondence—National Cost-Sharing Program.)

11 Draft Guidelines for Implementing An Expanded National Cost-Sharing Program (November 1993), Parks Canada Publication.

12 Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Minutes, June 1989, pp. 16-17.

13 Draft Guidelines.

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