

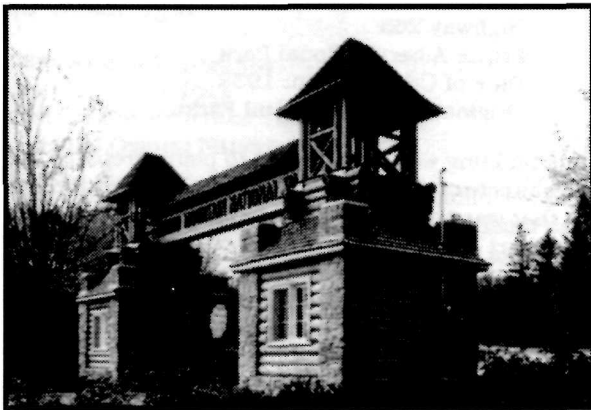


# EAST GATE REGISTRATION COMPLEX NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

## RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

### **Introduction**

The East Gate National Historic Site is a nationally significant example of the Rustic Design tradition of the 1930's in Canada's National Parks. It is the last of three log entrance gates in Riding Mountain. Skilled local craftsmen hired through the Federal Government's Depression Relief Program constructed this gate of indigenous materials. Comprised of a registration building and two staff cabins, the East Gate Complex has symbolic value because its association with early autotourism and outdoor recreation. It is an enduring landmark for visitors to Riding Mountain National Park of Canada.



**The East Gate Entrance Building (1991).**

### **Historical Summary**

Riding Mountain obtained National Park status in 1930 and was officially opened in 1933. Typical of Canadian National Parks at this time, all development at RMNP was oriented towards recreation and tourism; parks were not simply set aside but had to be "developed" in order to be made "useful." The construction of the East Gate

Complex is associated with the development of Riding Mountain as a National Park and as a product of the Depression relief work.

The complex was built in 1933 and 1934. It is located at the eastern entrance of the park on Highway 19 (formerly known as the Norgate Road) at the base of the Manitoba Escarpment. Access through RMNP along this route is extremely steep and prior to the advent of automobile would have been impassable. The Norgate Road, which was built by the depression Relief workers, supplanted the McCreary and Ochre River Trails. These trails had traditionally provided access from the eastern edge to the interior of what is now the park. This road was constructed to lead to Clear Lake, providing direct access to the main area being developed for recreation and leisure. This development reflected the changing use patterns of the park area at that time.

### **Autotourism**

Registration buildings or park entrance buildings appeared in the national parks as by-products of increased automobile tourism.



**The East Gate Entrance Building (1930's).**

**Aussi disponible en Français.**

The building's primary purpose was to accommodate park attendants who registered incoming vehicles, advised visitors of park regulations, and dispensed information (e.g., road and weather conditions). The National Parks Branch saw their value in both functional and symbolic terms, and designed them as visual landmarks that heralded motorists' arrival at the park's boundaries. Because many of the buildings were situated at considerable distance from town sites, basic living accommodation for the attendants was often provided either in the registration building or a separate cabin.



**Driving up the steep Norgate Road.**

### ***Depression Relief***

The quick pace and wide spectrum of development at RMNP throughout its first decade could not have been accomplished outside the depression of the 1930's. Failing economic conditions had put a huge labour force out of work and resulted in widespread financial hardship among Canadians. The mounting severity of the situation prompted the Federal Government to enact relief measures designed to make work for the vast population of unemployed.

This federal aid was earmarked for relief work in Canada's National Parks. In 1930, the *Unemployment Relief Act* was passed. It supplied funds for the establishment of work camps in national parks such as Banff, Jasper, Waterton Lakes, Prince Albert and Riding Mountain Parks. Riding Mountain sustained the largest relief camp

operation employing over 1,200 men on various projects between 1934-35.

Depression relief aid also took the form of direct funding supplied through the 1934 *Public Works Construction Act*. A large portion of these funds was in turn allocated for construction for specific types of buildings in the parks, namely administration and community buildings, garages, warden cabins and staff head quarters. Many of the local craftsmen hired to design and construct these buildings were Swedish immigrants who had settled in the vicinity of the park. With the aid of relief workers through the Depression relief program, park administrators were able to exploit the craftsmen's expertise in log and stone construction. In RMNP 86 buildings of various descriptions, including those at the east gate entrance, were built between 1930 and 1936 through this program.

### ***Rustic Design Tradition***

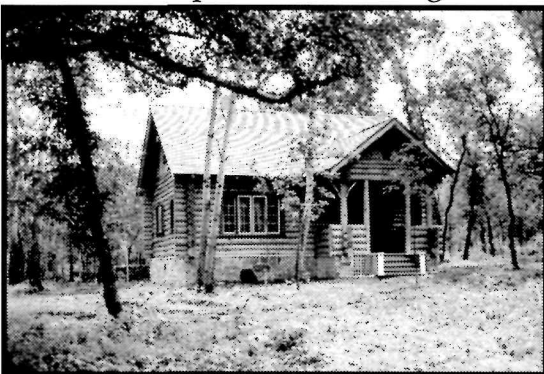
Major public buildings such as registration complexes, museums and administration buildings were purposefully designed to function both as landmarks and as a visual cornerstone for the architectural themes being developed within the respective parks. Between 1902 and 1930, a distinctive rustic architectural style emerged that was uniquely evocative of the natural environments within a national park. The Rustic Design tradition reached its zenith in Canada's National Parks during the Depression of the 1930's. Between 1922 and 1936 Federal architects applied English Arts and Craft stylistic elements (e.g., Tudor style) to scores of designs for both public and private buildings in the national parks. The use of local materials, whether as structural components or as decorative features were used to develop distinctive sub-themes within various parks. The use of logs and stone was typical at RMNP. The rustic design tradition is closely associated with Canada's national parks since the system was established at Banff in 1887. It remained as an important design policy for the next 50 years.

## ***East Gate Registration Complex***

This three-building complex consists of a portal-style entrance building and two nearby staff residences. The grouping well illustrated the rustic theme prescribed for Riding Mountain National Park during the Depression relief period. For entrance buildings in this park, staff architects devised a portal design which consisted of twin kiosks linked by an overhead bridgework. This design was used for facilities at all three road entry points to the Park, and was unique to Riding Mountain. The buildings were constructed in 1931 (south entrance), 1933 (east entrance) and 1936 (north entrance). The east gate is the only one that has survived.

The Whirlpool Warden's Station is a simple structure built primarily of log. It is one of the three houses originally built for the Park. It is a rare example of a log residence designed to the guidelines adopted by the Architectural Division of the National Parks Branch. The house is positioned near the highway entry point and is highly visible to motorists, giving both a sense of authority and protection.

The gatekeeper's residence was built in 1933-34. It is a similar structure to the warden's station. It was originally constructed as a summer residence, but was later modified to facilitate year round use. The building occupies a clearing in the forest in a prominent location along the entrance road. Together with the warden's station and the east gate entrance building, the gatekeeper's residence contributes to a unique historic setting.



**The Gatekeeper's Residence (1933).**

## ***Historical Designation***

In November 1992, The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recommended that the East Gate Complex be designated as a site of national historic significance. In July 1995, the complex was officially established as a historic site, commemorating its historical and architectural significance as one of the most noteworthy expression of the rustic aesthetic in Canada's National Parks.



**Road Construction (1930's).**

