



## Western Highways Transportation Corridor: Adaptation and Challenges for Preserving a Cultural Landscape Today

**Gwénaëlle Le Parlouër**, Cultural Resource Management Advisor, Parks Canada Agency, 30 Victoria Road, 3rd floor, Room 127, Destination Code PC-03-P, Gatineau, Quebec, J8X 0B3, Canada; [Gwenaelle.leparlouer@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Gwenaelle.leparlouer@pc.gc.ca)

The intent of this paper is to introduce what Parks Canada has initiated to identify and preserve cultural landscapes within five western national parks, which are currently facing major investment projects for the highways that traverse these national parks (Figure 1). It is important to know that before highways were built, these national parks had a long history of scenic road building which allowed visitors to experience the “spirit of the beauty” of the place.

In November 2014, the government announced the largest infrastructure investment in Parks Canada’s 104-year history. Starting April 2015, Parks Canada was allocated up to \$3.4 billion over five years to maintain and upgrade its assets, including cultural resources. This investment program addresses deferred work and should improve the condition of Parks Canada assets, including the highways through the national parks. For the highways, the main reason for the proposed changes is to improve traffic safety. For the western highways, the scope of work will involve widening the highway from 2 lanes to 4, and recontouring the slope where necessary to bring the road to the current Canadian roadway design and construction standards, where possible. For Glacier National Park more specifically, it will involve improving the avalanche mitigation systems.

**Brief introduction to the history<sup>1</sup> of the highways within western national parks in Canada**  
**Highway 16** (Yellowhead Highway, Jasper National Park), also known as ‘the Yellowhead,’ is a through highway that extends east-west across Jasper National Park. The highway follows an ancient travel and trade route crossing the Rocky Mountains via Yellowhead Pass.

**Highway 93N** (Icefields Parkway, Banff-Jasper National Parks), a scenic highway, runs north-south through Banff and Jasper national parks through spectacular mountain scenery including the Columbia Icefields. Linking Jasper and Banff with a tourist road was discussed as early as

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Figure 1. Parks Canada Mountain Guide, highways within the Mountain Parks, 2010/2011.

1914. The route of the highway crosses a number of important east-west travel and trade routes to and through the mountains that have very long histories of use by human cultures; these include Howse Pass and Athabasca Pass.

**Highway 93S** (Banff-Windemere Highway, Banff and Kootenay national parks), the Banff-Windemere Highway is a scenic road stretching from Castle Mountain in Banff National Park, to Radium, in Kootenay National Park. For most of its route, the road is in Kootenay Park. The history of the park and road are directly connected. The road opened in 1923. It was designed to stimulate tourist travel, as it was an important link to routes that American tourists could follow up from the western states to Canada's western parks. Its construction was seen by the National Parks Branch as a key element in its plan to intensively develop auto tourism.

**Highway 1**, the Trans Canada Highway, or the TCH (Banff, Yoho and Glacier national parks) is identified as one of the longest national highways in the world, with 7,821 km coast to coast. It is



a through highway that extends east-west across Banff, Yoho and Glacier national parks (NPs). From the Banff East Gate to Lake Louise the highway follows the Bow River. At Lake Louise it continues west through the Kicking Horse Pass National Historic Site (NHS). At Glacier NP/Rogers Pass NHS, it is a through road that uses Rogers Pass to cross the Selkirk Mountains. In the parks, the highway follows the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Canada's first national railway link which was completed in 1885.

In summary, the Federal Infrastructure Investment projects for major highways involve the following national parks: Glacier, Jasper, Banff, Yoho and Kootenay. Some projects are more intrusive than others because they directly impact the transportation corridor cultural landscapes within these national parks. The following are three examples of major highway infrastructure projects.

First, the widening of the existing Trans-Canada Highway in Kicking Horse Pass National Historic Site to a 4-lane highway. A significant consideration<sup>2</sup> with this stretch will be addressing is some of the less tangible cultural landscape values that have been identified in the Commemorative Integrity Statement for Kicking Horse Pass NHS. These heritage values are under threat as a result of the cumulative impact of the road work, rock scaling and borrow pitting. Unfortunately, this may be unavoidable. It is suggested that the heritage value that may be lost can be communicated through interpretive measures or through recording the current condition of the highway before it is widened.

Second, the Icefield Trail project<sup>3</sup> route will roughly parallel the existing Icefields Parkway, or Highway 93N. It passes through Banff and Jasper National Parks. Key features that will be impacted by the project include the old road grades and associated features. There are archaeological sites and cultural landscape features present. Depending on how the cultural resources are impacted by this project, there may be a net negative impact, a net positive gain, or a mix. If these cultural resources are affected in a way that preserves their physical integrity and/or restores and protects the character defining elements, then it could be seen as a major plus for the resource. Additionally, it will be a positive intervention if the public has the opportunity to appreciate the heritage value associated with these resources. Implementation of this opportunity is still to be discussed at the time this paper is being written.

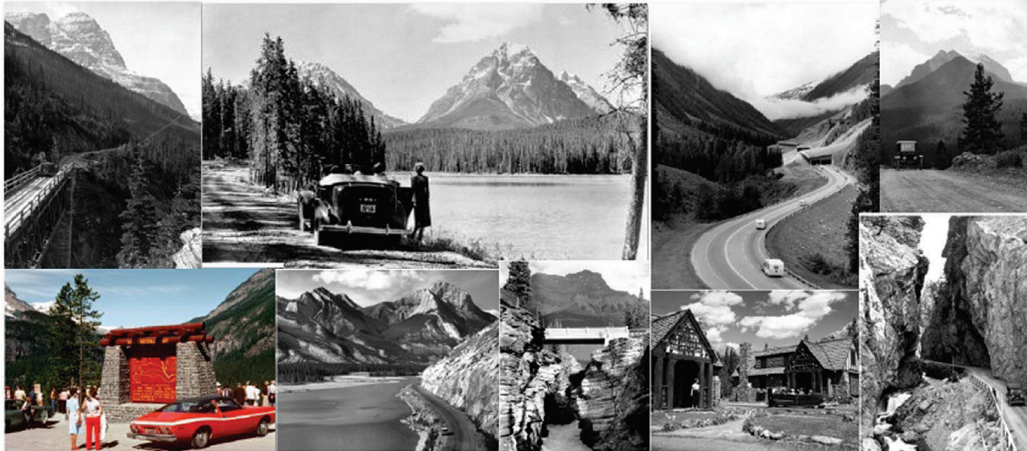
Third, is the widening of the existing Trans-Canada Highway in the Rogers Pass National Historic Site at the Summit and Illecillewaet Curve areas from 2 lanes to 4 lanes. This project is explained in more detail as a case study below.

The first phase of understanding the major highway corridors through the mountain parks was the development of a framework: the matrix of historical themes and values and their key features, a working document (Figure 2). The matrix was developed to respond to the need to analyze the potential impact of the mountain parks highway projects on cultural resources. As a cultural resource management advisor, it was important for me to collect information to adequately understand the heritage value of the transportation corridors' cultural landscapes. A formal analysis of its potential values and character-defining elements must be undertaken before a formal evaluation is completed.

This analysis had not yet been conducted, although a tentative analysis and evaluation of the potential cultural components of the highways within national parks was initiated by Christina Cameron, former Parks Canada Director General, National Historic Sites directorate, in 1991.<sup>4</sup>

## Matrix of Historical Themes and Values and their Key Features

For the Major Highway Corridors through the Mountain Parks  
Working Document



Matrix of Historical Themes and Values and their Key Features  
For the Major Highway Corridors through the Mountain Parks  
May 2016  
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**Figure 2.** The matrix of historical themes and values and their key features, a working document, cover page, May 2016, Parks Canada Agency.

This was associated with the possibility of transferring<sup>5</sup> the highways within all national parks to Transport Canada. Since the transfer was put on hold, the analysis was never completed and the evaluation never occurred. Ironically, 25 years later, the opportunity to evaluate the cultural components of the highways through the mountain parks is back under cultural resource management's consideration due to the major infrastructure investment program.

The first step taken was to create a multidisciplinary team which was familiar with both the project location and the conservation approach for cultural landscapes. This multidisciplinary team<sup>6</sup> included a historian, national office cultural resource management advisors, archaeologists, and field unit cultural resource management advisors working directly with the mountain parks. All were involved in the production of the matrix of historical themes and values and their key features. Although all members contributed to the understanding phase, and played a key role in the identification of heritage values and key features, historical research played a fundamental role in this process by providing the history of road construction,<sup>7</sup> a detailed chronology, and an overview presentation that drew on the historical literature on twentieth century highways and engineering, travel, aesthetics and Canadian park history.

A conservation approach that followed the principles of the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (S&G)* was developed to guide the group's discussion during the analysis, which followed the first step of a conservation approach, the understanding phase. To achieve this, an evaluation criteria document<sup>8</sup> was written as a framework for the workshop to outline the proposed steps for the "understanding" exercise of the major highway corridors landscape. Finally, in order to support the discussions, a template was proposed for a matrix which identified the main sectors and provided the sections to be completed by the

multidisciplinary team. The intent of the matrix was to develop a document that would be used by cultural resource management advisors and any person who has to deal with changes through the major highway corridors, to support decision making, evaluate impacts and identify mitigation strategies for cultural resources impacted by federal infrastructure expenditures along these transportation routes.

**A case study: the 4-lane project at Rogers Pass National Historic Site, in Glacier National Park**

As proposed, the 4-lane project was intrusive to the landscape because it was located in an area with significant heritage value related to the landscape, which is the Illecillewaet Curve. The cultural resource management team analyzed the impacts using the matrix to identify which features would be impacted by the project. This is part of the cultural resource impact analysis process, which is always done by a multidisciplinary team. For this specific project, the team included an archaeologist, a historian, the field unit cultural resource management advisor and myself, as a national office cultural resource management (CRM) advisor. Some archaeological sites were impacted, which included the former remains of a wood snowshed on an 1885 grade, former rail grades, sidings, structures, and refuse deposits associated with the original Trans Canada Highway construction as well as changes in the original design of the highway, which modified historic scenic views.

In order to record the changes that are happening in this significant area of the Trans Canada Highway transportation corridor cultural landscape, the CRM team suggested that the field unit management team carry out a viewscape heritage recording, as a mitigation measure for cultural resources (Figure 3). The field unit agreed to follow this recommendation. Consequently, a viewscape heritage recording is being undertaken in response to the 4-lane Illecillewaet project in Rogers Pass National Historic Site. This document records the landscape through Rogers Pass, but it is not limited to this specific area. The field unit made the decision to be proactive and do this exercise for the whole Trans Canada Highway transportation corridor cultural landscape within Glacier National Park. The rationale to extend the scope of work was to provide a reference document that will help the field unit in the future with other infrastructure projects for the highway within this transportation corridor cultural landscape.

The document<sup>9</sup> includes the following:

- an essay<sup>10</sup> to provide a history of Glacier National Park and Rogers Pass National Historic Site viewsapes on the Trans-Canada Highway;
- historic pictures, where existing, of key viewpoints (the intent is to show the evolution of the landscape and related viewsapes since the beginning of the late nineteenth century;
- a heritage value statement to make the link between the features and values that they embody, such as historical, scientific, aesthetic, scenic, cultural and spiritual values; and
- current views of the corridor that include key features such as views, buildings, engineering works, vegetation, etc. (a list of character defining elements was identified and provided in advance to the photographer in order to ensure that the most significant features were captured).

This document records what exists today as well as the evolution of the landscape since the late nineteenth century. It will help especially to manage the future proposed highway work in this area.





**Figure 3.** Leaving the summit at Rogers Pass National Historic Site on the eastbound, September 2015, photo by Gwénaëlle Le Parlouër.

### Endnotes

1. Meg Stanley, Parks Canada Agency “The matrix of historical themes and values and their key features” (unpublished manuscript, May 2016).
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4. National Historic Parks and Sites Directorate, “Canadian Parks Service, Scenic Highways: evaluation criteria, quantitative rating system designed for application in rating CPS highways by way of identifying ‘scenic highways’ and the scenic elements (both cultural and natural) in the highway corridor” (November 28, 1991). On file at Parks Canada Agency, National Office, Gatineau, Québec.
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