

**FHBRO HERITAGE VALUE STATEMENT
CAMERON FALLS THEATRE
WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK, ALBERTA**

FHBRO Number: 16-067
DFRP Number: 141890
Resource Name: Cameron Falls Theatre
Address: Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta
FHBRO Status: "Recognized" federal heritage building
Construction: 1974
Designer: Architect Ronaldo Pattullo, in collaboration with landscape architect Cam Gibson
Original Function: Interpretive Theatre
Current Function: Interpretive Theatre
Modifications: No exterior modifications. Installation of equipment to attenuate the echo inside the building.
Custodian: Parks Canada

Description of Historic Place

Situated north of the townsite campground in a grassy area, the Cameron Falls Theatre is a one-storey concrete building, partially buried in the natural drop in the terrain. Its main entrance and exit are both tunnels, each framed by patterned reinforced concrete walls and topped by a concrete awning slab. The exterior is characterized mainly by its horizontality, marked by the presence of long blind low-profile concrete walls and a sleek look, with clean lines and no ornamentation. The interior consists of one large room serving as the auditorium.

Heritage Value

The Cameron Falls Theatre is a "Recognized" federal heritage building because of its historical associations, and its architectural and environmental values.

Historical value

The construction of the Cameron Falls Theatre is associated with the post-war development of Canadian parks and their infrastructure. More specifically, the Cameron Falls Theatre represents the increased importance accorded to interpretation programs as part of visitor experience in the 1950s and 1960s. During these decades, systematic efforts were made in National Parks to enhance public awareness of ecological and natural history. Built to replace an outdoor amphitheatre, the Cameron Falls Theatre is a very good example of an interpretive centre of the period, featuring custom design as a state-of-the-art indoor theatre and serving programs for both Waterton Lakes National Park and the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Its popularity among visitors demonstrated its success in fulfilling its role. The Cameron Falls Theatre is part of the region's more recent history, as Waterton Lakes was a recreational destination even before the national park's establishment in the late 1800s. The park underwent several important phases of development, and the Cameron Falls Theatre is a significant marker of a period of growth in the latter decades of the 20th century with the expansion of campsites, infrastructure, and facilities.

Architectural value

Designed by architect Ronald Pattullo in collaboration with landscape architect Cam Gibson, the Cameron Falls Theatre speaks to the Modern era of construction, and its integration into the landscape reflects an increased awareness of the impact of human presence on the environment. This subservience to the setting is achieved through the building's low, polygonal form with horizontal emphasis and partial burial in the ground. The Cameron Falls Theatre is a good example of the Brutalist style of the 1970s,

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illustrated by its extensive use of concrete. This architectural style is also expressed through the solid building envelope of blind walls, and recessed main entrance tunnel framed by concrete walls and capped with a slab. The single open-plan interior room, featuring an enclosed projection booth, sloping floor, and a series of wooden benches, continues to effectively serve its intended use as a place of interpretation. The choice of materials and quality of craftsmanship make it a well-built and functional building.

Environmental value

Considered part of the Waterton townsite community, the Cameron Falls Theatre site is bounded on the east by Cameron Creek, which separates it from the residential area, and on the west by Evergreen Avenue. Cameron Creek and Evergreen Avenue converge to mark the site's northern edge, while the south side is delimited by cottages and the Townsite campground. The site has changed over the years but has maintained its natural character. The Cameron Falls Theatre, situated in a field, is surrounded by cottonwood and spruce trees. The scenic landscape around the Cameron Falls Theatre features Upper Waterton Lake to the south and the majestic Rocky Mountains as a backdrop. With its low profile, geometric roof line and neutral colours, the building echoes the mountains and blends into the natural setting, while its modern aesthetic distinguishes it from neighbouring buildings. The theatre's extensive use by park visitors, campers, and locals for more than 40 years makes it a familiar landmark in the region.

Character-Defining Elements

The character-defining elements of the Cameron Falls Theatre at Waterton Lakes National Park that should be respected include:

Its effective functional design supporting interpretation activities in the park, as shown by:

- the open-plan interior space with enclosed projection booth;
- the sloping floor with built-in natural wood benches allowing for a better viewing angle;
- the natural wood ceiling.

Aspects of the Brutalist architectural style, as reflected in:

- its solid, permanent appearance and enclosed environment defined by two blind walls;
- the prevalence of concrete, for example the patterned, reinforced concrete retaining walls and concrete slab awning at the tunnels.

Its integration into the landscape, including:

- its one-storey height, low profile, multi-faceted geometric sloped roof, and polygonal shape;
- its partial burial by earth berms carefully placed in the landscape.

For guidance on interventions, please refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. For further information contact the FHBRO.

March 2024