



UNESCO
World Heritage Site



Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump



INFORMATION GUIDE

WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Why is Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump a World Heritage Site?

HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP IS KNOWN AROUND THE WORLD for its remarkable testimony of prehistoric life. The site bears witness to a custom practiced by native people of the North American plains at HSIBJ for nearly 6,000 years. Thanks to their excellent understanding of topography and of bison behavior, they were able to kill bison by driving them over a precipice. Carcasses were carved up and processed in the butchering camp below.

In 1981, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated the jump as a World Heritage Site, placing it among other world attractions such as the Egyptian pyramids and the Galapagos Islands.

FOR MORE INFO

Head-Smashed-In

Buffalo Jump

Box 1977

Fort Macleod, Alberta

Canada T0L 0Z0

TEL (403) 553 2731

FAX (403) 533 3141

EMAIL

info@head-smashed-in.com

www.head-smashed-in.com

World Heritage Sites – an overview

- In 2006 there were only 12 other World Heritage Sites in Canada.
- The history of designating World Heritage Sites goes back to 1972. Recognizing that the world's cultural heritage knows no national boundaries, member states of UNESCO unanimously formed a Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, known as the World Heritage Convention.
- The World Heritage Convention provides a worldwide system of cooperation to protect the world's heritage within a permanent administrative framework.
- The Convention maintains a World Heritage list identifying treasures such as masterpieces of humanity's creative genius, unique witnesses of lost civilizations, natural habitats where threatened species of plants and animals still survive, and beliefs that have left a strong mark on humanity.

For information on UNESCO see www.unesco.org



BUFFALO JUMPING

- Long before they had the horse, the gun or even the bow, Plains Native Tribes hunted the buffalo, driving herds to their death over the cliffs at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.
- Buffalo jumping is such a sophisticated hunting technique that modern science is only beginning to understand its workings.
- The hunt began with a spiritual ceremony in which medicine women and men would go through detailed rituals to ensure a safe and successful hunt.
- During the ceremonies, the 'buffalo runners' were sent to locate and herd the animals. These were young men who possessed skill to move the bison herds.
- The buffalo runners, disguised under animal hides, would pass near the herds and try to lure them toward the cliffs, using their intricate knowledge of buffalo behavior.
- Ingenious V-shaped drive lanes were used to channel herds to the most dangerous point on the cliffs. These lanes were edged with rows of stone cairns which are still visible today. The lanes snake their way across the countryside, following ridges, crossing coulees and rising across the tops of high hills.
- Near the cliff area of the drive lanes, people hid behind brush stuck into the cairns and prevented the beasts from straying by shouting and waving buffalo hides. Hunters rushed from behind, panicking the animals into a thundering headlong plunge over the cliff.
- After falling, many buffalo were only stunned or wounded. Hunters waited below the cliff to kill the surviving beasts. The Native People believed that escaping animals would warn other herds of the deadly trap.
- The kill brought a surplus of meat to families and clans participating in the hunt. The people dried the meat, made pemmican, extracted fat from the bones, made tools, and tanned hides. Almost every part of the animal was used.



did you KNOW?

- Some meat was made into pemmican by first sun-drying it, then pulverizing the dried meat with a stone maul and mixing this with buffalo fat. To add flavor to pemmican, fruit such as chokecherries or saskatoon berries was added. The mixture was then placed in a 'parfleche', a rawhide container, and pounded to remove all air from the food. This mixture, when carefully prepared, remain edible for many years.

THE EXHIBITS



Napi's World

■ LEVEL 1

ORIENTS THE VISITOR to the delicate ecology of the prehistoric plains; describes the geography, climate, and vegetation; and introduces the native account of the origin of people and how they learned to hunt the buffalo.

Napi's People

■ LEVEL 2

PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW of the lifestyle of the Plains people and includes reconstructions of a tipi and 'dog days' travois, and a number of artifacts which visitors are encouraged to handle. This 'hands on' approach to interpretation has been a key element in the development of displays and programs throughout the Centre.

The Buffalo Hunt

■ LEVEL 3

DESCRIBES THE USE OF JUMP SITES like the one at Head-Smashed-In, focusing on a topographical model of the gathering basin and drive lanes used to direct the stampeding herd toward the cliff. The spiritual and ceremonial significance of the hunt is also explored.

■ THEATRE

'IN SEARCH OF THE BUFFALO', a ten minute film depicting the Iniskim Ceremony. Local Blackfoot actors re-create a buffalo drive and the activities surrounding a jump.

Cultures in Contact

■ LEVEL 4

DEPICTS THE CONSEQUENCES of the introduction of European trade goods in the early 18th century. The arrival of the horse and gun marked the passing of the traditional buffalo hunt and dramatically altered the native buffalo culture. European contact brought epidemics of foreign origin that nearly wiped out the native population.

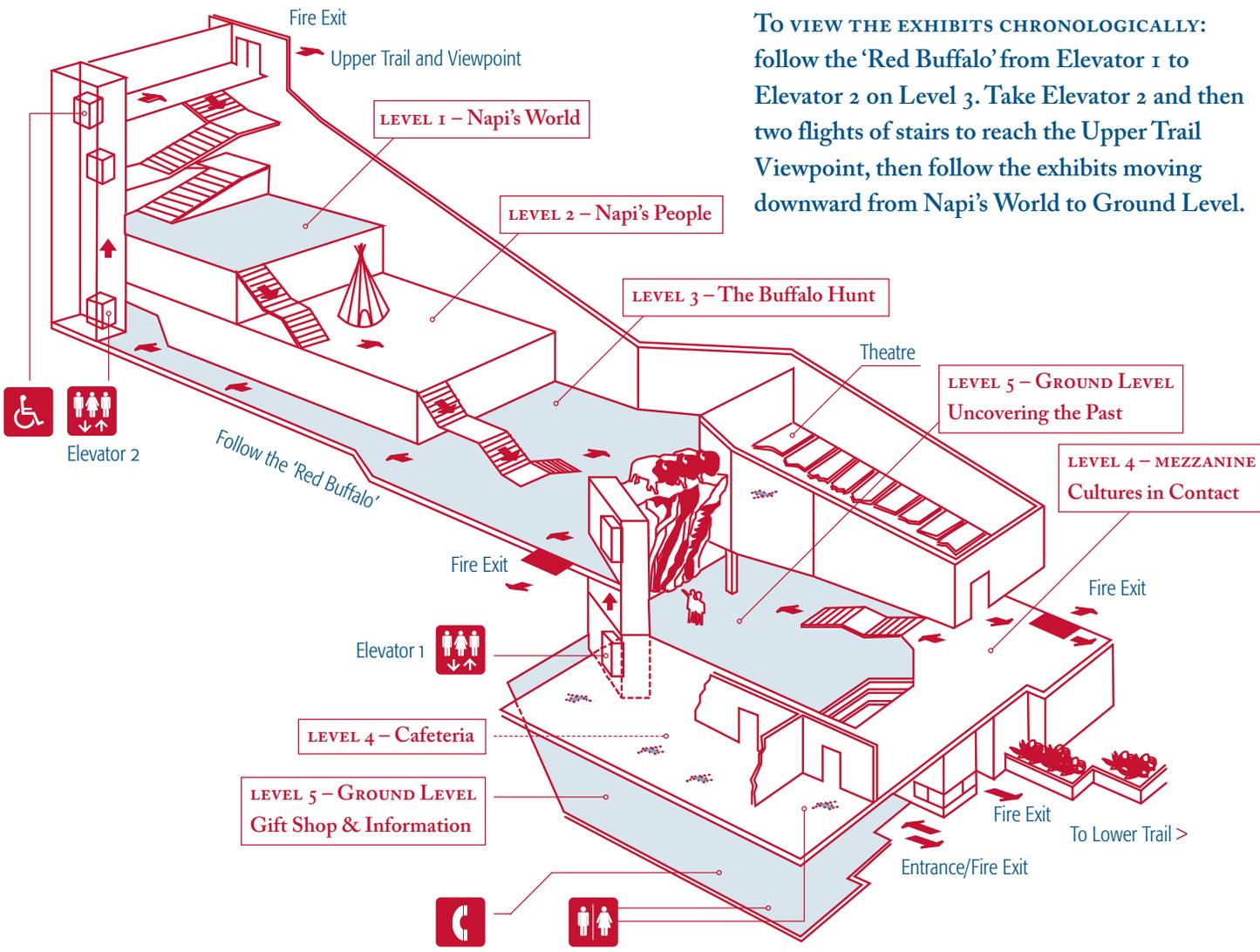
Uncovering the Past

■ LEVEL 5

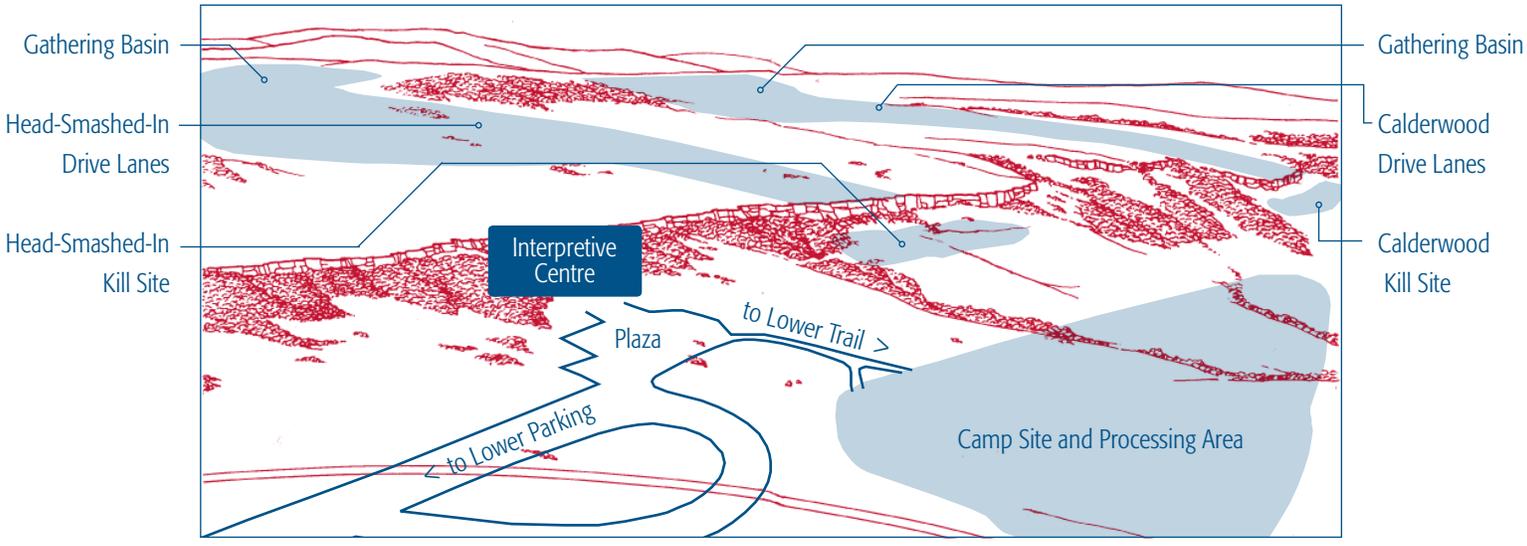
INCLUDES A FILM PRESENTATION of the archaeological program at Head-Smashed-In.

did you
KNOW ?

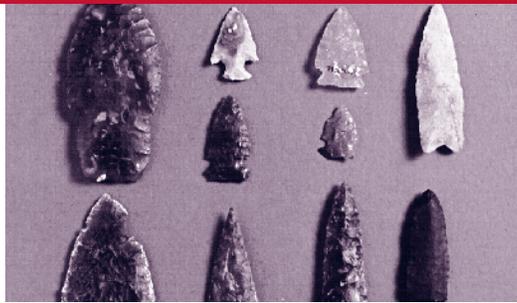
- It is estimated that 60 million buffalo roamed the Great Plains when the Europeans arrived in North America.
- The Head-Smashed-In area average 35 Chinooks per year, the highest frequency in Canada's chinook belt. A Chinook is the warm, dry, westerly wind that flows over the Rocky Mountains and brings relief from cold, snowy winter weather.



TO VIEW THE EXHIBITS CHRONOLOGICALLY:
 follow the 'Red Buffalo' from Elevator 1 to Elevator 2 on Level 3. Take Elevator 2 and then two flights of stairs to reach the Upper Trail Viewpoint, then follow the exhibits moving downward from Napi's World to Ground Level.



THE ARCHAEOLOGY



- This World Heritage Site is rich in prehistory. Bone and tool beds, nearly eleven metres thick, lie beneath the jump's sandstone cliffs.
- The oldest evidence of humans at Head-Smashed-In is represented by two Scottsbluff spear points, which are believed to be 9,000 years old. These points indicate the site was visited in early prehistoric times, although there is no evidence that bison were driven over the cliff by the makers of the early artifacts.
- According to radiocarbon dating of ancient bones, the site was used as a buffalo jump 5,700 years ago – more than 500 years before the first pyramid was built in Egypt and before Stonehenge was erected in England.
- Head-Smashed-In is just one part of a communal kill site complex which includes a network of sophisticated drive lanes used to gather herds and lure them to the cliffs.
- The first archaeologist to investigate the site was Junius Bird of the American Museum of Natural History in 1938. Since then, the site has seen four major archaeological projects, between the late 1940s and early nineties.
- At the bottom layer of the kill site, archaeologists have found projectiles used during the Middle Prehistoric Period. These tools are from the 'Mummy Cave Complex' – crude projectile points, smaller than spearheads, but too large to tip arrows. The points were attached to a dart that was thrown with an 'atlatl' or throwing stick.
- During the period from about 4,000 to 3,000 years ago, the jump appears to have been abandoned. There are no tools or bone deposits directly above those attributed to the Mummy Cave Complex. Archaeologists are uncertain why the jump was not used at this time.
- Most of the bone deposits and artifacts recovered at Head-Smashed-In come from Late Prehistoric times; that is, during the last 1,800 years.
- The uppermost layers at Head-Smashed-In contain metal arrowheads, indicating the jump was used in early historic times. As guns and horses became common the labour-intensive buffalo jumps were soon abandoned.
- Archaeologists have also studied sites above the cliffs. There are petroglyph, or rock carving areas, and vision quest sites where braves would go to commune with the spirits. These sites are not open to the public.

did you
KNOW?

- Buffalo horns were scraped and formed into spoons.
- Buffalo tongues were often given to medicine men or women, who were responsible for ensuring the success of the hunt.
- Peter Fidler, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, was probably the first European explorer to visit the Porcupine Hills area. He traveled there in 1792/93 with a band of Peigan Indians.

THE ARCHITECTURE



The unique \$9.8 million visitor centre (1987 dollars) is a seven-tiered building buried in a large slump block, south of the jump sites.

Architect Robert LeBlond (of LeBlond Partnership) designed the Centre. Careful to not disturb the fragile archaeological deposits, contractors removed a section of the cliff, built a massive concrete box, and then pulled the earth and grass back over the top of the building.

Robert LeBlond was presented the Governor General's Award for Architecture in 1990 for his design.

Interior

SKYLIGHTS OVER THE ECOLOGICAL AND BUFFALO JUMP DISPLAYS provide natural light.

The building's interior has a series of terraces on which the displays are arranged.

Elevators and stairs take visitors to the top of the building where they can overlook the panoramic plains. Stairs allow visitors to descend through the exhibits and theatre to the main floor and gift shop.

Exterior

TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THE BUILDING WAS CREATED BY EROSION, its exterior closely resembles the surrounding rock outcrops in color and texture. This theme of subdued sandstone hues is reinforced inside the building.

Outside the Centre, visitors can walk to an interpretive node, overlooking the jump site, or take a walk in the shadow of the cliffs on the lower trail.

did you
KNOW ?

- During the summer months, the buffalo's hair is at its shortest. Lodge covers and numerous other articles were made from the soft, dressed buffalo skins.
- One or two individual animals, usually females, led the buffalo herds.
- Natural topographic barriers such as coulees, depressions, or hills were sometimes used to funnel buffalo to the jump. Such is the case at Head-Smashed-In.

THE CENTRE

Location

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is located 18 km north and west of Fort Macleod on secondary Highway #785 (Spring Point Road), at the eastern edge of the Porcupine Hills, approximately 100 km east of the Rocky Mountains.

Hours of Operation

Open year-round, seven days a week.

10 am – 5 pm

Closed: Christmas Eve, Christmas Day,
New Year's Day, and Easter Sunday

History

- 1968 – designated a National Historic Site
- 1979 – designated a Provincial Historic Resource
- 1981 – designated a World Heritage Site
- 1982 – May, Provincial Government approval for Interpretive Centre
- 1984 – September 28, ground breaking ceremony
- 1985 – June, start construction
- 1986 – October, finish construction
- 1986 – December, building occupancy
- 1987 – July 23, official opening with HRH Prince Andrew and Princess Sarah Ferguson, the Duke and Duchess of York.

FACILITIES

- Theatre (80 seats)
- Cafeteria (60 seats)
- Gift Shop
- Over 2 km of outdoor interpretive trails
- Wheelchair accessible services
- Tours of the Centre with Blackfoot Guides
- Education programs
- Tipi camping (seasonal)

PARKING

- Cars: 120 stalls
- Trailers / RV's: 30 stalls
- Buses: 6 stalls

DIMENSIONS

- Site: 1,270 acres
- Building: 2,400 m²
- Public areas: 1,850 m²
- Display areas: 568 m²

COST TO BUILD

9.82 million in 1986



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