



JOINT INTERPRETIVE FACILITY AT CHECKPOINT HWY1 & 7

Tourism

Planning/strategy

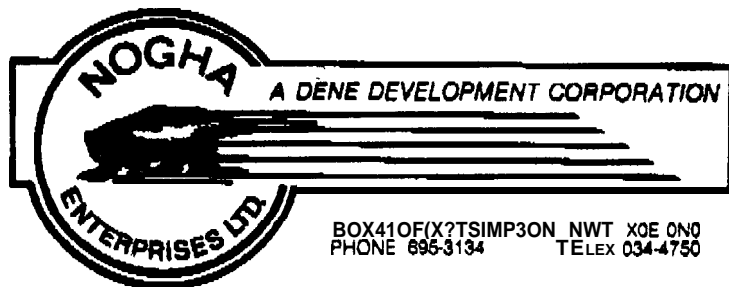
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June 04, 1990

Stoney Burton
Tourism Development Officer
Deh Cho Region
Govt. of N.W.T.
FORT SIMPSON, N.W.T.
XOE ONO

RE: JOINT INTERPRETIVE FACILITY AT CHECKPOINT HWY 1 & 7

Nogha Enterprises is pleased to offer their support for the above noted project. We do, however, wish to be very closely involved in the design and construction of the facilities and structure entailed.

We would like to meet as soon as possible to discuss our intentions for the specific location of the facility. **Nogha anticipates major improvements at Checkpoint to be initiated very soon. The details of the above noted requirements should be integrated with these plans to facilitate minimum business disruption.**

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Doris Erasmus
Interim General Manager.

CP/DE/de

ALDRICH
PEARS
ASSOCIATES

Aldrich/ Pears Associates Limited

1573 East Pender Street Vancouver BC V6L 1V9

(604) 253-1125 Telex 04-352848

NWT Highway 1

Communications Plan

September 1988

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Introduction

Introduction

In the summer of 1988 the NWT Department of Economic Development and Tourism initiated a study of the corridor along Highway 1. This extends from the Alberta border northward to Enterprise and from there westward to the Checkpoint at Jean Marie River. The purpose of the study was twofold:

- to ascertain those locations that might be upgraded to become more accessible to tourists, and
- to develop an outline of the interpretive messages that could be introduced and how they might be treated.

The study has produced two documents. The first, the Technical Report, provides a comprehensive analysis of the recommendations as well as a detailed inventory of the work required at each of the sites along the highway corridor.

This document, the Communications Plan, was written to give a vision of the role an interpretive plan can play along the highway corridor. It summarizes the conclusions and gives a visual and graphic introduction to the proposed interpretive plan.

The conclusions reached in this document are preliminary. Your comments are encouraged.

Opportunities
& Constraints

Opportunities

A road trip to the Northwest Territories offers a few extraordinary opportunities that cannot be found in other parts of Canada.

1. *The Romantic Image.* For decades, the North has been perceived as an exciting, adventurous place to be. Visitors who come to the North are **self-selected**; they have chosen a vacation that is different and special. This gives tourism specialists the opportunity to enhance the most dramatic aspects of the North, to define visitor experiences that are more exciting or unusual than those offered in the south.
2. *The Human Touch.* Southern highways offer a wide range of facilities for solving tourists' problems: hotels, motels, gas stations, and a variety of cultural and recreational facilities line the freeways. Consequently, vacationers in the south may never visit a tourism office. In the North, by contrast, visitors are dependent not only on tourism facilities, but on the warmth and helpfulness of the northerners they encounter there. The human element, contact with "real" northerners from a variety of walks of life, can become one of the principal features of a vacation along the Mackenzie highway.
3. *An Integrated Circuit.* Unlike the highway systems of the south, where visitors can choose any one of hundreds of routes, this highway system functions as a series of three loops. All three loops are linked to the first leg of Highway 1, from the Alberta border to Enterprise. This is a rare bonus for interpretive planners and designers, since the opportunity exists to "choreograph" a coherent group of visitor experiences for the entire highway.
4. *An Expandable Audience.* Visitor studies show that the visitors currently driving into the NWT fit into two principal categories: young singles/couples interested in outdoor travel and older general tourists. This means that several possible tourist groups are scarcely represented. This skewed visitor profile offers the possibility of targeting new audience groups and developing the interpretive plan in conjunction with the long term development strategy.

Constraints

Unfortunately, there are some limiting factors that have had a negative effect on the level of highway tourism in the Northwest Territories.

1. *The Green Curtain*. The Mackenzie Highway was developed as a transportation corridor, not as a tourism route. As a consequence, the road often passes at some distance from the most exciting features of the district. In other places, the verge of trees along the highway forms a green curtain, obscuring any sense of the land and the rivers.
2. *"Too Much Highway"*. Visitors to the NWT often complain that there is "too much highway". The lack of tourist facilities along the Mackenzie Highway forces visitors to leapfrog their way through the North, from community to community. Since the communities often lie a day's drive from one another, a road trip to the NWT becomes a marathon road race along long and dusty highways.
3. *"Too Many Bugs"*. The tourist comment books unfailingly reflect visitors' irritation with the mosquitoes and black flies that are a part of a summer's day in the North. If some of the new visitor facilities are developed to give travelers some respite from the resident bug population, particularly in the evenings, visitor satisfaction would probably increase markedly.
4. *Say Goodbye to "Woodsie Tootsie"*. In the past, **signage** in the North has taken two separate approaches, neither of them entirely satisfactory. Some **signage** systems emulate the dignified but somewhat dull highway **signage** systems of the south: small metal signs that delineate a single feature of interest. Other signs take the "woodsie" approach of wilderness parks: wooden signs painted **in** natural **colours**. These two kinds of signs may be adequate for the south, where they are but one of a number of interpretive features, but they are lost **in** the vastness and power of the northern landscape.

Recommendations

Recommendations

As a result of the study, the consultants have seven general recommendations for the development of an interpretive approach for the Highway 1 corridor. These policy guidelines are outlined below. The following section of the document describes how these guideline could be applied to five specific facilities along the study route.

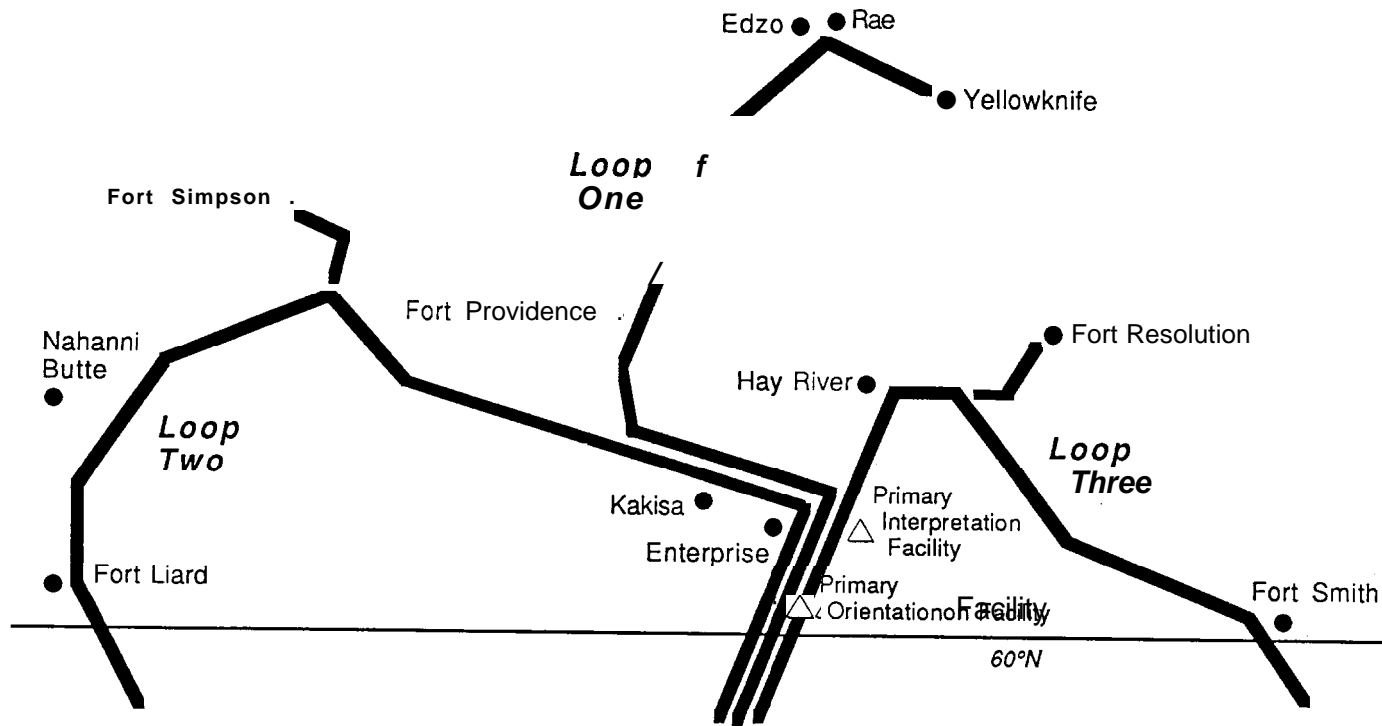
Recommendation 1: Highway One as a System

It is recommended that any plans to develop an interpretive **plan** for the area should take all three loops of the road network into account. The emphasis should be on developing a coherent set of themes and a single aesthetic approach for the entire area. In this way information available at any point along the system will carry complementary messages, couched in a coherent voice.

The zone from the Alberta border to Enterprise should be given particular attention, since it will serve to welcome most road visitors to the Northwest Territories. Soon after crossing into the NWT, visitors should be introduced to the major messages that they will be encountering all along the highway system.

In order to achieve this aim, the Department should consider developing two facilities along this stretch of highway: a primary orientation facility and a primary interpretation facility. The orientation facility would upgrade the present border station; it **would** serve to make visitors feel welcome and provide them with a wide variety of materials to help them plan their vacations.

The primary interpretive facility would be developed in the Alexandra/Louise Falls area to offer visitors outdoor interpretation linked to a visitor centre that introduces the thematic messages that will be referred to throughout the subarctic highway "system.



Highway #1 - The Mackenzie Highway System .

Recommendation 2 Tourist Regions and Core Zones

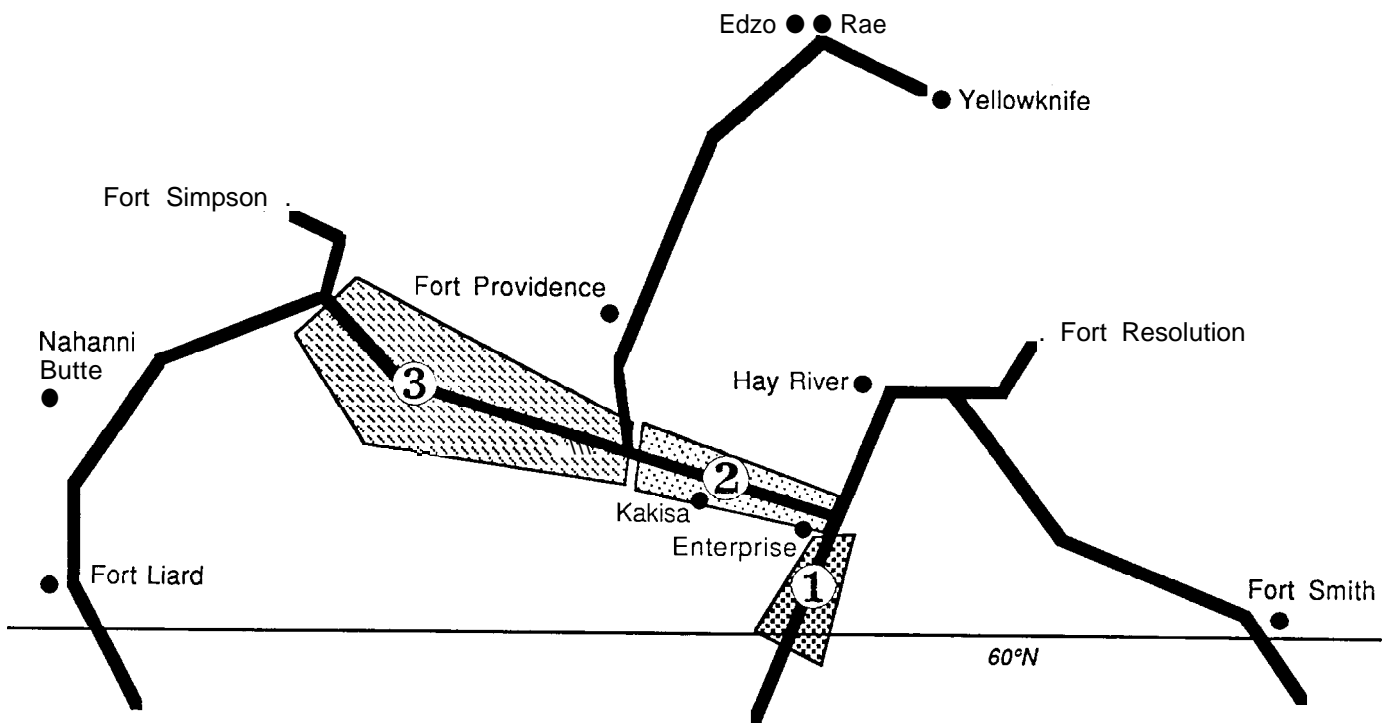
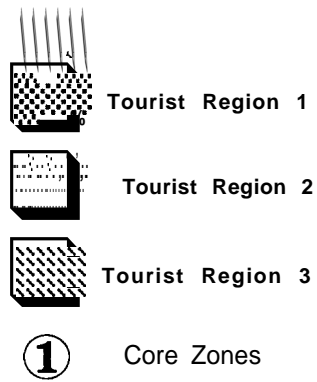
Highway 1 is currently interrupted only by stops in the communities, which are often several hundred miles apart. In order to break up the long drives between communities, it is recommended that the highway system be divided into tourist regions, each of which could be identified by signage with a distinctive name and logo. Along Highway 1, these areas could be:

- Tourist Region 1, extending from the Alberta border to Enterprise;
- Tourist Region 2, extending from Enterprise to the junction with Highway 3;
- Tourist Region 3, extending from the junction of Highway 3 to Checkpoint.

It is further recommended that a core zone containing recreation, interpretation and services be developed around the most dramatic natural feature in each of the tourist regions. Each of these core zones would be developed and staffed so that tourists could make a one day "stopover.

The first of these core zones could be created around the primary interpretive facility, in the area linking Alexandra Falls, Louise Falls, and Escarpment Creek. Another might be developed in the area surrounding Lady Evelyn Falls, the Hart Fire Tower, Kakisa River Bridge and McNallie Falls. The third core zone would be created around Whittaker Falls.

In this way, the core zones will act as destination points where tourists will be able to break up the lengthy journeys between communities.



Highway #1 - Tourist Regions

Recommendation 3: Orientation and Service Information

In addition to interpretive messages, visitors traveling along Highway One need two very specific kinds of assistance: orientation information to explain where they are and service information explaining the condition of roads, ice bridges and weather.

It is possible to institute two sets of facilities through which this information can be delivered to the public in a consistent manner.

Along the Highway 1 corridor there are three places where the highways branch: at Enterprise, near Kakisa and at Checkpoint. A restaurant is located at each of these points. These restaurants are ideal for giving travelers information about each of the adjacent highways. Moreover, because these restaurants are staffed year round, they can be used to give out information about highway and weather conditions.

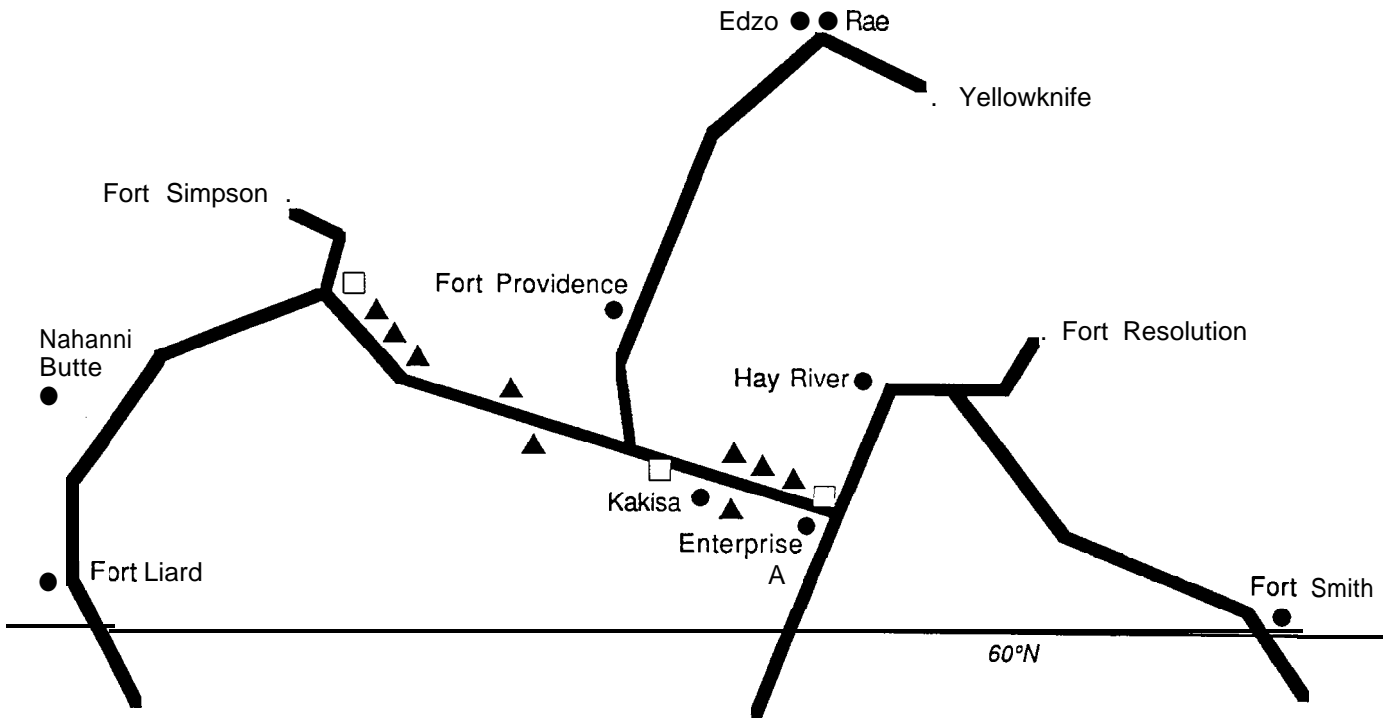
Since Enterprise is the first community that visitors will encounter as they come north, the facilities in this community might be singled out for special attention. Special orientation and service information possibilities **should** be investigated.

At the present time, there are eight Highway rest areas and several park facilities along the highway where travelers can stop for basic services. In most cases the rest areas include garbage cans, an outhouse, and an emergency shelter. It is recommended that more rest areas be added so that visitors will not have to travel more than 50 kilometers without services.

Although these facilities are developed primarily to meet a specific need for services, they can also play a role in making the tourist's visit to the North more enjoyable. It is recommended that a recreation/interpretation component be added at each of the rest areas, encouraging the visitors to take a brief, interpreted walk around the immediate area.

□ Secondary Orientation Facility (private)

A Tertiary Orientation/interpretation/Service Facility



Highway #1 - Orientation and Service Facilities

Recommendation 4: Exhibit Strategy

Exhibit strategies for remote areas are often hampered by serious constraints: the lack of electricity and a long winter season in which the exhibits must be removed or stand unattended. As a result, exhibits have sometimes been designed to a minimum standard, with materials that are more admired for their solidity than for their drama or beauty.

But exhibits about the bush do not have to be bush league. Stylistic devices at the leading edge of the design discipline can be as easily adapted in the North as in the South.

It is recommended that the exhibit style for Highway 1 create an image of the North as a modern and dynamic part of Canadian society. This can be a **three-pronged** strategy.

- a) **Exhibit Technology.** Exhibits should exploit up-to-date technical possibilities:
 - short, snappy video programmed should replace the longer documentary style;
 - computer games that use **humour** and illusion;
 - hands on exhibits that allow the visitor to become a participant as well as an observer.
- b) **Graphic Style.** The graphic style should aim for a "corporate" standard of effectiveness: clarity of line and strength of image. The graphic product need not carry a corporate message; like the materials developed by the Sierra Club, for example, they can adapt high production standards to an interpretive message.
- c) **Contemporary Materials.** Contemporary materials, textures and colours can be used so that exhibits stand out from their surroundings.

Recommendation 5: Communications Programme

Consistency is a critical factor in any communications programme. Visitors must find a familiarity in the tone that delivers the interpretive information.

It is our recommendation that the interpretive information offer the possibility of a "personal" tour of the subarctic highway system. All information would be communicated through three hosts: a scientist experienced in interpreting the geology, botany and wildlife features of the North; a native person who can interpret the Dene way of life; and an engineer who has played a role in the development of the infrastructure of the North. Some possible avenues for this information are listed below.

- a) Video Interpretation. Visitors arriving at the border of the Northwest Territories want to be introduced to the splendid country that lies ahead of them. At the border station, interactive videos would allow visitors to choose their route north. In a series of short video programmed, the three hosts can initiate new arrivals into many of the experiences that await them along the road ahead.
- b) Highway Interpretation. At each of the interpretive facilities along the highway the three experts could be incorporated into the exhibits as the **signage**. The interpretive information could be matched to the special features of the area: the scientist could link the waterfalls to the course of the Mackenzie and its tributaries; the Dene could explain the way local people use the fish camp at **Ekele** Lake; the engineer could explain the construction of ice bridges.
- c) Audio Encounters. We might consider developing a series of audio tapes that could be purchased at various points in the North. Recorded as radio programmed, hosted by our three specialists, these programmed would include music, sound effects and interviews with people who live along the highway. As tourists travel along the highway, the tapes would give them a glimpse of the spirit of the Mackenzie.
- d) Brochures. Three brochures could be developed to reveal the highway through the eyes of our hosts. Ideally, the brochures would teach southerners to see and understand the remarkable features of the North that so often escape the untrained eye. These three brochures could be packaged in a portfolio with a boardgame based on the surprises one can encounter along Highway One.

Recommendation 6: Highway Signage Programme

Many signage systems currently in use in the North employ a wood structure and muted colours. install signs that are "visually harmonious with the environment".

This signage approach was developed for southern provincial and national parks where an unobtrusive signage programme stood apart from the commercial signage along the highway. Such a subdued signage programme may not be the best alternative to employ in the Northwest Territories, however, it tends to blend into the landscape and can be obscured by the twilight of winter and the dust of the roads.

We would recommend a signage programme that has more punch, so that it stands out from the surrounding landscape and serves as a visual break from the monotony of the road. Such a programme would have the following features.

- a) Visual Strength. It would employ strong colours, rather than blues and greys, so that the signs can be seen from a distance, particularly in winter.
- b) It should be visually coherent. All of the signs, from small to large, for both interpretive and orientation functions, should be a part of the same modular system.
- c) The system might combine a natural element, like wood, with more industrial elements like enamel signs and steel tubing, to give a contrast in texture and colour and a less "woody" feel.

In effect these signs, and the recreation and interpretive opportunities that surround them, will become the most important visual break offered to tourists along Highway One.

Recommendation 7: People and Programmed

The barriers to northern tourism are considerable: long distances, unpaved roads, a dearth of services. Exhibitions and visitor **centres** cannot overcome these barriers alone. Visitors will not travel these distances to see an exhibit, no matter how powerful. They travel to have adventures, to meet "real" northerners.

In order to become a destination point for visitors to the North, the new tourism facilities must offer exciting programmed that will offer visitors the adventures they crave. These activities can be directed toward the segments of the tourist market that are not presently coming to the North in large numbers: caravans of R/V owners, parents with young children, adults with specialized, northern interests. Some of the programmed should appeal particularly to local visitors who making a one day excursion to the park.

It is our recommendation that the exhibits for the new visitor facilities develop in conjunction with staffing and programming possibilities, so that they offer tourists to the North a comprehensive vacation package. Such an approach could take the following form.

- a) **Programme Variety.** A new visitor centre in the Alexandra/Louise Falls area could offer short programmed for road tourists as well as longer programmed for people who come to the park specifically to spend several intensive days in the area. These programmed could tap a variety of audiences by offering special activities related to recreation, science and culture.
- b) **Demonstrations.** The exhibit base for the visitor **centre** could be supported by demonstrations of northern skills: hunting, trapping, needlework and so on. These workshops could be run by local residents on a contract basis.
- c) **Fireside Chats.** Facilities in the core zones could be provided with screened "**pavilions**" that could be used for evening interpretive talks by staff.
- d) **Interpretive Walks.** Short interpretive walks can be integrated into each of the parks along the highway system. These parks could include experiences that are a little less protected than those in similar parks in the South. For example, the walk at Whittaker Falls might include a swinging bridge that lets visitors walk above the chasm.

These interpretive possibilities, developed in conjunction with local people with particular skills, would give tourists their dreamed-of Northern adventure.

The Visitor Experience

The Visitor Experience

1. *The Border Station*

Visitors arrive at the border of the Northwest Territories weary from the 600 kilometer drive from High Level. The border station is a place where they can stretch their legs, celebrate their arrival and prepare for the adventures that await them along the highway.

The border itself should be a gateway - a strong and colourful element that cuts the tedium of the highway. It should involve a more dramatic mix of natural and man-made elements than it does now: wood, metal, and rock from the local riverbeds. The border should also be developed with more recreational opportunities for visitors; the path to the cairn should be extended around the pond in front of the Information Centre so that visitors have a chance to take a quick walk. It is also possible to create a greater variety of photo opportunities: a pile of boulders that give the illusion that visitors have scaled a high peak.

At present, the Information Centre is an enjoyable place to visit. In large measure, this is due to the friendliness of the staff, who communicate their enthusiasm for the North as they acquaint visitors with vacation possibilities. Their ability to deliver information about the North would be enhanced if visitors could seek out more specific information by themselves, in effect, planning their own vacation possibilities.

This could be done at video stations that allow visitors to choose one of the three hosts to take them on a tour along the highway they will follow. In a series of short video clips the hosts can take visitors beyond the "Green Curtain", to see many of the opportunities available to them wilderness tours, short hikes and unique stores.

2. *The Louise/Alexandra Falls Visitor Centre*

Many visitors want to rest soon after reaching the border of the NWT; having achieved their goal, they want to spend the night before pursuing their journey. A Visitor Centre at the Louise/Alexandra Falls area would give new arrivals the opportunity to relax and get their bearings in a world class wilderness site.

The Visitor Centre could be a welcoming place, well staffed and offering a variety of activities for people of different age groups. Evening programmed would allow overnight visitors to meet at a central facility, to get to know one another and trade stories in a place that gives them some protection from the insects. Longer interpretive programmed could convince tourists to prolong their stay in the area or to sign up for tours offered by local outfitters.

The exhibit style should be as lively as the demonstrations and activities. Visitors who have spent all day in a car will be drawn in by exhibits that stimulate their minds and encourage them to interact with one another. The exhibits can make use of games, puzzles and hands on activities to encourage visitors to look more closely at the geology, flora and fauna that they will encounter along the highway.

3. *Whittaker and Lady Evelyn Parks*

Whittaker and Lady Evelyn Parks offer tourists picnic spots and pleasant surroundings for overnight camping. Both sites are extraordinary, with hikes along the edge of the escarpment to the waterfalls. Both of these parks would be enhanced by developing new recreational and interpretive possibilities that deepen the visitor's appreciation of the natural beauty of the area.

At present, these parks lack a central location which could serve to focus the social activities and information. A screened-in pavilion, with braziers for **barbeques**, could serve as a place where campers could meet in the evening, or where tourists could gather for a fireside chat away from insects. It could double as a rendezvous point for interpretive walks to the falls.

The pavilion could be landscaped with local plants that augment the interpretive themes: herbs and plants of scientific and cultural value. Interspersed around the building would be **signage** that would direct visitors toward the interpretive themes and recreational possibilities.

4. *Restaurants*

The three restaurants that stand at critical places along the highway system are ideal locations for orientation and service information. Almost all of the travelers along the highway stop for a break during their travels. More importantly, those who are confused about the road ahead will stop at the restaurant to make inquiries.

A system of signage for these locations has to fit some stringent requirements. It must be outdoors, so that information is available to visitors who arrive when the restaurant is closed. The system also has to be changeable, so that vital weather and road condition information can be kept up to date. Finally, it has to be sympathetic with the existing restaurants which are owned by private citizens.

Such a signage system could be developed as a kiosk placed near the restaurant. Each of the four sides of the kiosk could contain information pertinent to one branch of the highway. Ideally, in summer the area around the kiosk could be landscaped with benches and local plants, so that visitors would feel they could sit down and take a short break from driving.

5. *Rest Areas*³

The rest areas along the highway offer visitors an opportunity to get out of the car and stretch their legs. Emergency shelters and outhouses supply basic services. But many visitors would appreciate the chance to spend more time at some of these spots, perhaps to take a short walk.

Our examination of the Highway One corridor suggests that many of the existing rest stops could be upgraded with recreational walks or activities. A path could be added to a rest stop at an old burn, for example, so that visitors would have the opportunity to observe the successive generations of new growth. A rest stop near a fishing hole offers the chance to interpret the seasonal fish runs of the North.

The subject matter at each of the stops will correspond to the interests of one of the three hosts. Industrial features such as borrow pits, transmission towers and ice bridges would be interpreted by the engineer; traditional hunting and trapping areas would be explained by the **Dene**; and significant geological, botanical and wildlife information would be communicated by the scientist. In this way, the voices of the North would be consistent throughout a journey along Highway One.