



## **First Nations Interpretation Internship Program**

The First Nations Interpretation Internship at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park celebrates authentic cultural heritage, while maintaining a view to the future. It demonstrates an innovative way of bridging past, present and future, using traditions and technology. This success story illustrates the value of strategic leaders who empower and trust staff to collaborate, innovate, and form partnerships.

### **Project Background**

The vision of the Parks division in the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation is to inspire people to discover, value, protect and enjoy the natural world, for current and future generations. Tourism, Parks and Recreation also leads the Aboriginal Tourism Initiative, which encourages the development of cultural tourism experiences in the province. Further, Alberta's new Tourism Framework highlights the tremendous opportunity to honour Alberta's First Nations heritage through new visitor experiences and programs, and the internship program at Writing-on-Stone is a great example of how we are achieving this.

Situated in south central Alberta 6 km north of the Montana border, Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park is a sacred places for the Blackfoot people, who call it Áísínai'pi, or "it is pictured." The significance of Writing-on-Stone is formally recognized through its designations as a Provincial Park and National Historic Site, and the park is considered worthy of World Heritage Site status. Today, park management honour the tradition of First Nations leadership through regular meetings with a trusted advisory group of Blackfoot elders.

In 2011, staff in the Parks division were introduced to a new Innovation Fund designed to support projects that foster innovation, create efficiencies, and generate revenue, support partnerships, or sponsorship. The vision behind the fund was "ideas drive our future," and all Parks division staff were invited to put their ideas forward.

Staff at Writing-on-Stone submitted an application for a First Nations Internship, with the intent to deliver new public programs, raise the cultural awareness of staff and visitors, and provide outreach programs at other park locations. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations was brought in, and worked collaboratively to enhance Aboriginal participation and employment opportunities in Alberta's provincial parks. Recognizing the strong link to cultural tourism, which is a key component of Alberta's new Tourism Framework, Canadian Badlands Limited was invited to become a partner in this initiative. This cross-industry partnership helped to increase the chance that the program becomes a model for other regions of Alberta and Canada. The application was granted innovation funding, and through the work of park staff, their vision was realized when the program launched in the summer of 2013.

## **Leadership Development**

The First Nations Internship program was meant to provide leadership development for First Nations staff. The two interns hired as interpreters were empowered to share their cultural and personal stories with visitors, which played an instrumental role in making our results meaningful.

The interns, and the successful management of the program, were overseen by Blackfoot Interpretive Supervisor Juanita Tallman, whose ability to address Blackfoot cultural protocols and sensitivities were invaluable. You can [read more about Juanita here](#).

## **Program Delivery**

Our two interns were very excited to bring a unique combination of traditional and western knowledge into the workplace. Their programs incorporated authentic replicas of Blackfoot artifacts which bring the past to life, mixed with various new mediums such as educating visitors through multimedia.

Trained and prepared to model the values of their culture, the organization, and themselves through a Cultural Awareness session with Parks staff and a 3-day training retreat, the First Nations Interpretation Interns shared their culture and stories with more than 4,000 visitors over the course of the summer at Writing-on-Stone, Beauvais Lake, Cypress Hills, and Dinosaur Provincial Parks.

We know that Indigenous participation adds authenticity, truth, and credibility to heritage sites. Through this internship program, this concept was effectively applied to form a win-win-win between parks, tourism, and First Nations organizations and communities. The benefits of this initiative are far reaching and long lasting.

The First Nations Interpretations Internship program has the capacity and the potential to change not just Alberta's parks, but Canada for the better. Our model brings people together and connects people to each other and to the land. Already the program has been recognized on a national level by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, and we are working to expand the program across the province and the rest of Canada.

## **Related Links**

[Alberta Parks online](#)

[Writing-on-Stone online](#)

[First Nations Interpretation Internship](#)