A New 'Parkitecture': Re-Imagining the Interpretive Centre as an Interactive Route in Algonquin Provincial Park

by

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the anthropocentric history of wilderness parks in Canada. It investigates the role of architecture in actively interpreting the cultural layers inherent of these landscapes while simultaneously promoting recreational tourism.

The study focuses on Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, made famous by the Group of Seven painters at the beginning of the twentieth century. My critique is aimed at the systematic erasure of human inhabitation in the park. This thesis is also a critique on park interpretive facilities that attempt to educate users on this erased history of the area through entirely passive exhibitions. This thesis proposes a new typology of interpretive centre-- in the form of a route-- that is focused on integrating the user into the natural context and engaging them in activities that implicitly educate them on the human history of the park. The proposal is meant to show a forward thinking park architecture that is not only appropriate to the culture of Algonquin Park, but one that advocates for the importance of cultural sustainability in Canadas parks today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

North American Interpretations of Wilderness

The Canadian Wilderness Park is the physical manifestation of a uniquely North American idea – the preservation of large tracts of land for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.[1] Parks have become important places for not only natural preservation, but for human development. However, human history has been repeatedly erased in these places to accomodate the growing concern of ecological integrity and natural preservation.[2] Therefore, simultaneous preservation of park environments in a natural state and encouragement of public use of the parks will require the maintenance of a delicate balance in the future.

With systematic human erasure having occurred in numerous Canadian Wilderness Parks, Interpretive and Visitor Centres started popping up in the middle of the twentieth century in order to educate visitors on the anthropocentric history of these places. Designers have been particularly challenged with the problem of how to interpret and present a landscape, natural and/or historical, to the public. Typically, visitors have attempted to come to an understanding of the history of a wilderness park through interaction with two-dimensional graphic media and exhibits in singular building typology interpretive centres. In instances of graphic and electronic media, the visitor is completely removed from the actual landscape they came to visit. Subsequently, learning results from a 'passive' process rather than from an experiential or 'active' one.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the integration of architecture and

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1. The Canadian Encyclopedia, *National Parks of Canada*, accessed October 27, 2015, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/national-parks-of-canada/

2. J. Kerri Cronin. *Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photogrpahy, Ecology, and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 40-47.

program as the means through which a landscape and its human history is most effectively experientially interpreted by every visitor.

Algonquin Park is the ideal case study to test a new typology of interpretive centre. The park's human history was instrumental in defining Canada's attitude towards nature at the beginning of the twentieth century, and thus it bears a myriad of human relationships and cultural history that can be explored.

While the ideas put forth by this thesis might be used nationally, site specificity, historical park content, and current park uses are essential to shaping the interpretive experience within any wilderness park.

Thesis Question

How can architecture re-imagine the role of the interpretive centre in a wilderness park context to promote active engagement of the landscape while simultaneously revealing the history of the human occupation of these places?

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Parks for the People

The national park occupies a particular place in the imagination of Canadians. For many, it exists as the image of sublime nature, entirely separated from human. However, William Cronon, a noted environmental historian, claims that defining wilderness as non-human territory allows people to excuse themselves of responsibility vis-à-vis present environmental destruction. Separating humanity from nature ignores our entire human history. If we adhere to the conceptualization that we are supposedly separate from wilderness and nature then we eliminate the hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honorable human place in nature might actually come to look like.[3]

The National Parks we know today were created and fought for by people using the same arguments. Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect, had a decidedly anthropocentric view on the purpose of wilderness parks and made a larger argument for why national parks needed to be public parks and not just large tracts of land that had passive preservation strategies. Olmsted believed that it was the government's duty to protect individual citizens' pursuit of happiness. Olmsted had a longstanding belief that nature had a profound effect on people's psychology — that it gave people pleasure and increased their capacity for happiness. However, he also believed access to nature and recreation was, at the time, a monopoly of a very few very rich people. The great mass of society, including those to whom it would be of the greatest benefit, were excluded from it.[4] Since this time, there has been a fundamental tension in the Park Service's mission to both protect the land

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3. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996), 69-90.

4. The Boston Globe, *Defining Parks for the Social Good*, accessed October 27, 2015, https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2015/08/08/defining-parks-for-social-good/bK6JJVoWSURMk7DK1TUrCJ/story.html

and wildlife within park boundaries but also to make it accessible to humans.

Especially since the latter half of the twentieth century, when environmental awareness grew among the concern of the public, people increasingly began to see parks as 'wildernesses' that needed to be scientifically managed and protected from the impact of tourists. Thus, park management came up with the solution of demonstrating the human history and connecting people with the park through large indoor visitor and interpretation centres accessible by car.

Today, it is undoubtedly true that fragile park ecosystems are facing increasing threats from development, pollution, and climate change. However, it can be argued that the social role of parks is still incredibly vital and in even more danger of being permanently erased.

The ideas of Olmsted and Cronon provide a strong argument for a contemplative, experiential and non-consumptive human experience in traditional wilderness parks.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

A History of Parks Canada

Near the end of the nineteenth century, Canadian officials agreed upon the construction of a transcontinental railway to connect the Pacific Coast to the eastern provinces. As the railway went underway in 1875 and surveyors began studying the land, the evidence of minerals quickly introduced the construction of mines and resource exploitation in Canada's previously 'untouched' wilderness. Exploration led to the discovery of hot springs near Banff, Alberta and in November 1885, the Canadian Government made the springs public property, removing them from the possibility of private ownership and exploitation. This event brought about the beginning of Canada's movement towards preserving land and setting it aside for public usage as National and Provincial Parks.[5]
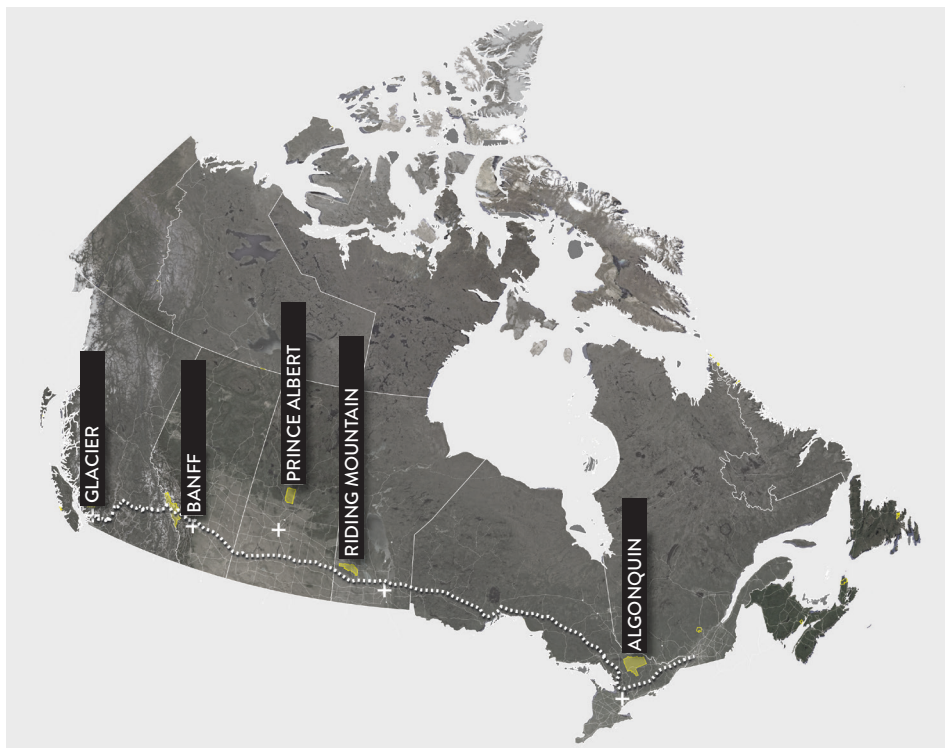

Figure 1. Algonquin National Park was among one of the first in Canada, which were initially established along the Canadian Pacific Railway; from Google Maps.

5. The Canadian Encyclopedia, *National Parks of Canada*, accessed October 27, 2015, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/national-parks-of-canada/

The parks remained a 'remote' wilderness for some time. The main goal of setting aside land was initially for passive preservation in a time of rapid urbanization, passive meaning keeping the area in an ideal environment.[6] However, as communications improved and accommodation began to be provided, the recreational function of parks gained interest and, in the early 1900s, they started to became fashionable destinations for wealthy tourists wishing to canoe, hunt, fish and camp in a wilderness setting.[7] Canada's National Parks started to allow a small percentage of the public an avenue into nature, while also attempting to integrate ideas of passively preserving Canada's scenic landscapes in an era of development.

Figure 2. A day's hunt of bears in Banff National Park, 1910; photograph by Harmon Byron on the History Research Shenanigans Blog

By the 1920s the growth in wages, the invention of the annual vacation, and broadening automobile ownership permitted the middle class to appropriate the national parks.[8]

6. Adam Shoalts, "The History Behind Canada's National Parks," *Canadian Geographic* (2011), accessed October 4, 2015, http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/blog/posting.asp?ID=417

7. The Canadian Encyclopedia, *Parks Canada*, accessed October 4, 2015, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/parks-canada/

8. Ibid.

The parks themselves changed from landscapes practicing passive preservation to destructive landscapes that accommodated growing numbers of campers and tourists. Middle-class visitors, who arrived in parks by car, wanted good roads and campgrounds. Some of the 'wild rawness' of parks disappeared as highways were fashioned to provide democratic access, interpretive facilities to educate city folk were erected, and accommodations to feed and house the millions of visitors were built.[9]

Figure 3. Taking a break from driving up to Algonquin Park, late 1920s; photograph from Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources on Lake of Bays Lane Blog

While it has become commonplace today to point out that recreational development in parks has triumphed over ecological management, visitors provided a base of popular support, an economic rationale, and contributed to a national identity for the nascent national park system. The visitor and automobile were democratizing forces that opened the parks as never before. However, the paradox that Canadians are loving the parks to death reflects both the popularity of outdoor recreation and the reluctance of Parks Canada to ignore popular demands. The dilemma became especially acute following a period of expansion in the 1950s and 1960s. Postwar affluence and population growth intensified demographic pressures on parks, and Parks Canada responded with a massive redevelopment program.[10] By the 1970s

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9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

and 1980s, many environmentalist critics had become convinced that parks-built-for-visitors threatened to uproot and replace parks-built-by-nature.

Figure 4. Algonquin Park East Entrance Gates, built in the Mid 20th Century

Figure 5. Algonquin Park Visitor Center, located along Highway 60

The infrastructure [particularly the visitor centre and/or interpretive centre] developed for the parks in this time has not been updated and is now outdated and do not reflect how people see themselves in nature today.

The Evolution of the Interpretive Centre

Thousands of structures have been built on park soil. The designed relationship between land, park building, and visitor has changed throughout the existence of Parks Canada. The architects of the early park buildings paved the way for the rustic design of park structures. The objective of these designs was to generate the feeling that the visitor was as far from the urban environment as possible.[11]

Figure 6. Jasper National Park Visitor and Information Centre, early 1900s; photograph from Jasper Yellowhead Museum on Parks Canada

At the turn of the 19th century, the railroad became the fastest way to travel to wilderness parks. Railroad companies constructed grandoise hotels in order to spark financial growth and entice people to come visit the parks.[12]

Figure 7. The Highland Inn Railroad Hotel, 1914; photograph from C.N.Rys. Ontario Stations

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11.   Canada's Historic Places, *The Rustic Style in Canada's National Parks*, accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/20_rustic_architecture.aspx

12.   Ibid.

With social and technological changes occurring around the 1920s, the railroad experience to parks became obsolete as visitors began to travel to parks by automobile. The visitor centre became the main point of contact for visitors, providing orientation, education, toilets, and administrative services in one location. These often simpler, cleaner designs were faster and less expensive to implement, and their public image fit with the idea of a "new era" in park services. Since this time, very little changes have been made with respect to park architecture and visitor facilities and education.

Currently, two dimensional representations within a visitor center have typically been the devices with which Parks Canada educates visitors about the human and natural aspects of these celebreated landscapes.
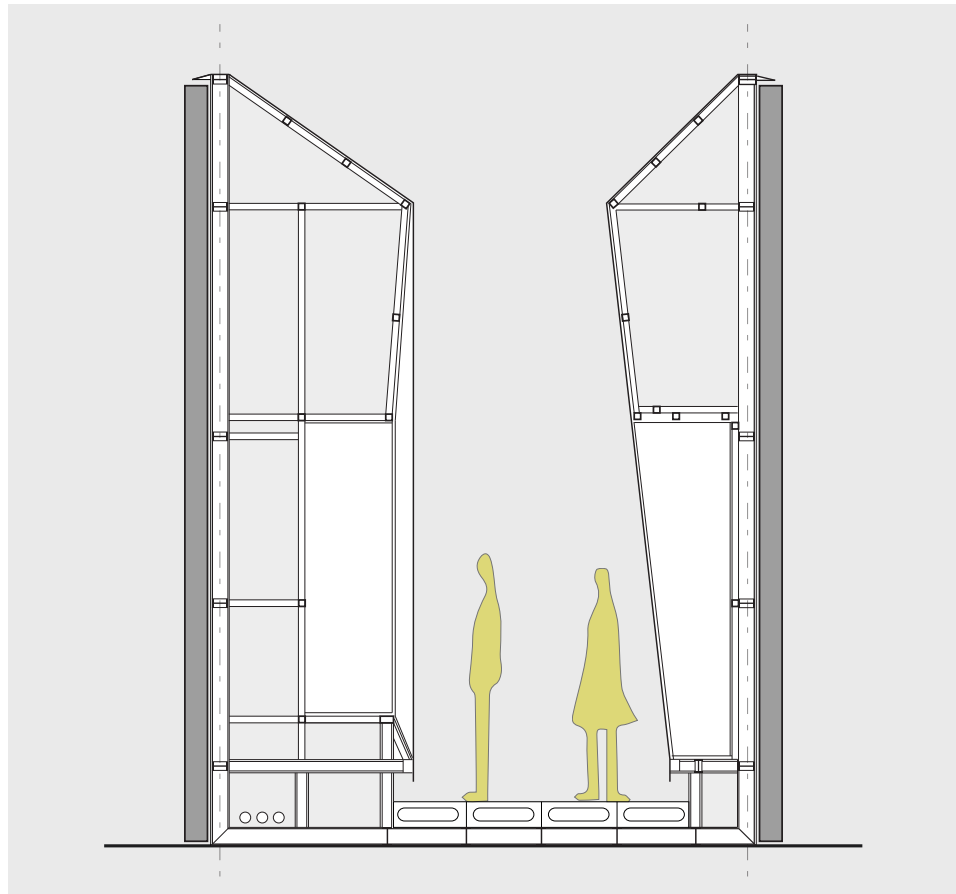
Figure 8. A typical two-dimensional graphic display of information in an interpretive centre

Algonquin
Art Centre

Williams Lake
Visitor Centre

PEI
Visitor Centre

Gros Morne
Visitor Centre

Algonquin
Visitor Centre

Kootenay
Visitor Centre

Banff Visitor Centre

Killbear
Visitor Centre

Waterton Lakes
Visitor Centre

Cape Breton
Visitor Centre

Signal Hill
Visitor Centre

Bow Valley
Visitor Centre

Point Pelee
Visitor Centre

Sleeping Giant
Visitor Centre

Squamish
Adventure Centre

Riding Mountain
Visitor Centre

Dinosaur
Visitor Centre

Mont Tremblant
Visitor Centre

Glacier
Discovery Centre

La Maurice
Visitor Centre

Terra Nova
Visitor Centre

Figure 9. Visitor and Interpretive Centre Typology in parks; photographs from Parks Canada

Approach: Antithesis of the Interpretive Centre

Over the course of Parks Canada's history, design in parks has undergone significant transformations. The growing influx of tourists in the early twentieth century and changing attitudes towards the design of the visitor experience in the mid twenteith century have been the primary causes for change.

Initially, the notion that architecture should support the visitors' experience of nature influenced early park designers. However, the relationship between building and land changed in the mid twentieth century post WWII. The object in the landscape experienced by visitors today became more pronounced with the inception of the visitor centre in the 1950s and 60s.

The visitor and/or interpretive centre has been a mainstay of national parks for half a century now, but as digital information expands, the size and scope of such facilities should be re-thought. Many people today plan their visits online and learn about the history of the park through online exhibits.[13] Thus, this thesis questions whether visitor and/or interpretive centres in their current incarnation are the best way to educate visitors about their national parks.

The period following the visitor centre was marked by a lack of building until very recently. Within the last decade, the large scale, general planning designs have begun to break away from the mid-century model. While the master planning of parks may be positive, with the use of electric trains, busing, etc., the architecture of the visitor and/or interpretive centre may be regressing. This has the potential to cause a complete loss on the information of human development in parks.

The intention of the design portion of this thesis is to explore and re-think the

13. Laura Petersen, "Traditional Visitor Centres may fade as National Park Service embraces Digital Age," *Greenwire* (2011), accessed September 15, 2015, http://www.nytimes. com/gwire/2011/06/02/02greenwire-traditional-visitor-centers-may-fade-as-nation-46973.html?pagewanted=all

design of the visitor/interpretive centre through the three-dimensional use of architecture as the interpretive link between human history, landscape and visitor's understanding of it.

Through the placement of architecture along a route, this thesis aims to generate visitor comprehension of place through the experience of singular programmatic, ritualistic elements. Existing conditions, park content, and history determine the extent to which the architecture and program of an interpretive intervention can be re-imagined. However, the following general design moves may be applicable across many parks:

Dispersal of Program

"Spreading" the program of an interpretive intervention across a site accomplishes several design goals at once. First, the visitor must enter into physical interacion with their natural environment when moving from building to building. Second, the visitor chooses his or her own path to learning about a place. Dispersing the program also decreases the overall massing of an interpretive building.

Active Engagement with the Landscape

Often, Interpretive Centres completely remove the visitor from experiencing the landscape they came to see. By dispersing the program and promoting outdoor activites, the visitor will engage with the natural envrionment of the park and this will promote a more well rounded interpretive experience.

Integration into Existing Park Recreational Patterns

This thesis promotes that the interpretive route is accessed by active transportation methods that are unique to the recerational trends of a given park.

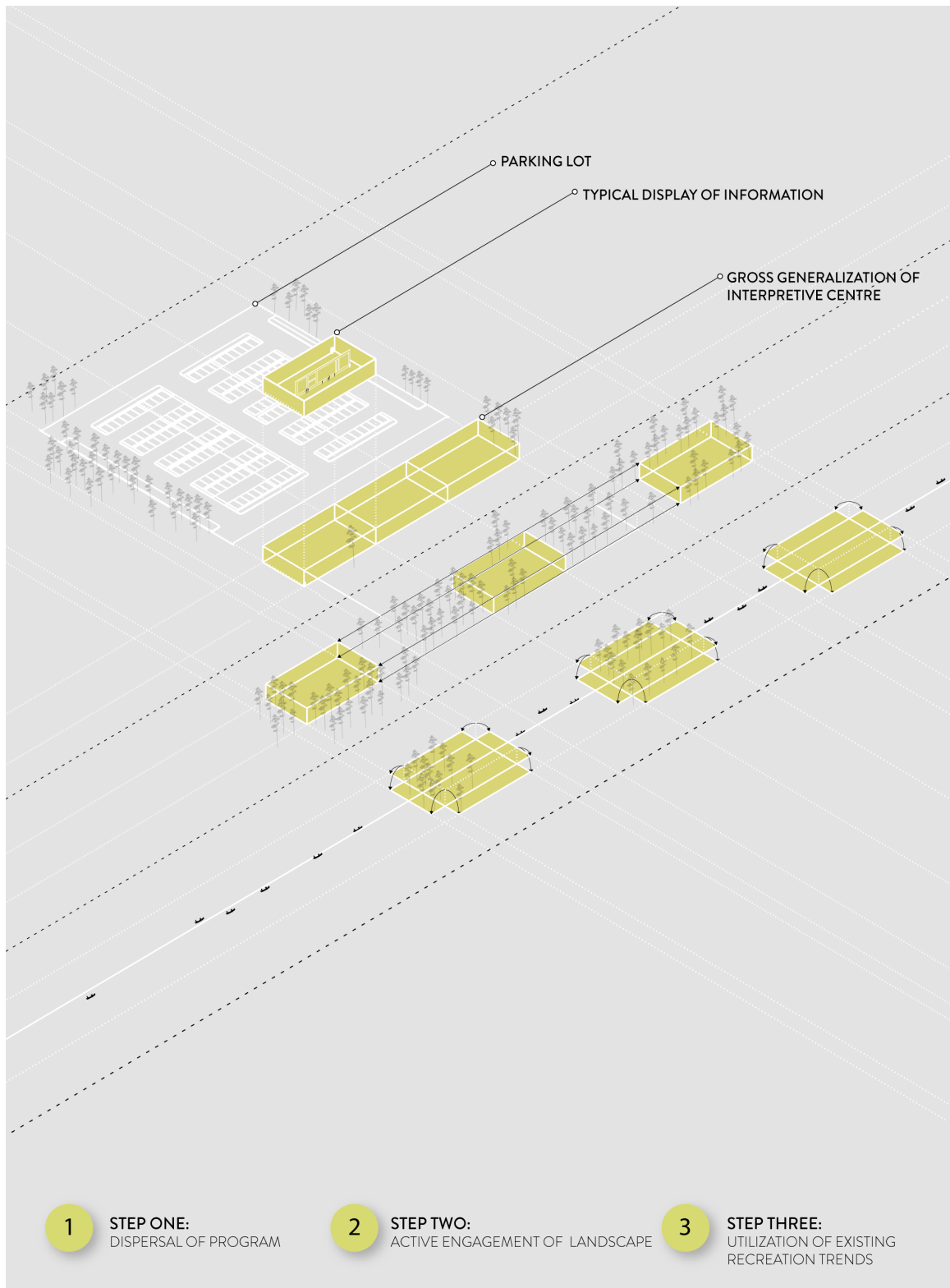Figure 10. The Interpretive Centre is often a singular typology building with a large parking lot. Inside, two dimensional diaplays of information are set up for visitors. This thesis proposes that a dispersal of program, active engagement with landscape, and utilization of existing recreation trends for active transportation has the potential to foster more active learning of human history in wilderness parks

CHAPTER 4: SITE AND INTERPRETATION OF LANDSCAPE

Methodology

The term palimpsest, which refers to any surface where writing has been erased to make room for a new text, is applied metaphorically in this thesis to interpret the landscape of Algonquin Provincial Park.[14] It is used as a metaphor to describe the over-written layers of information discerned from the landscape.

This metaphor allows the analysis of the layers of history embedded within a site to reveal not only what came before, but what has been erased and consequently how to move forward to create an appropriate sense of place. This begs the question of how the design portion of this thesis can complement, challenge, reveal, or make the history and material character of a site more evident. My intent is to develop strategies that create greater meaning for the visitors of Algonquin Park.
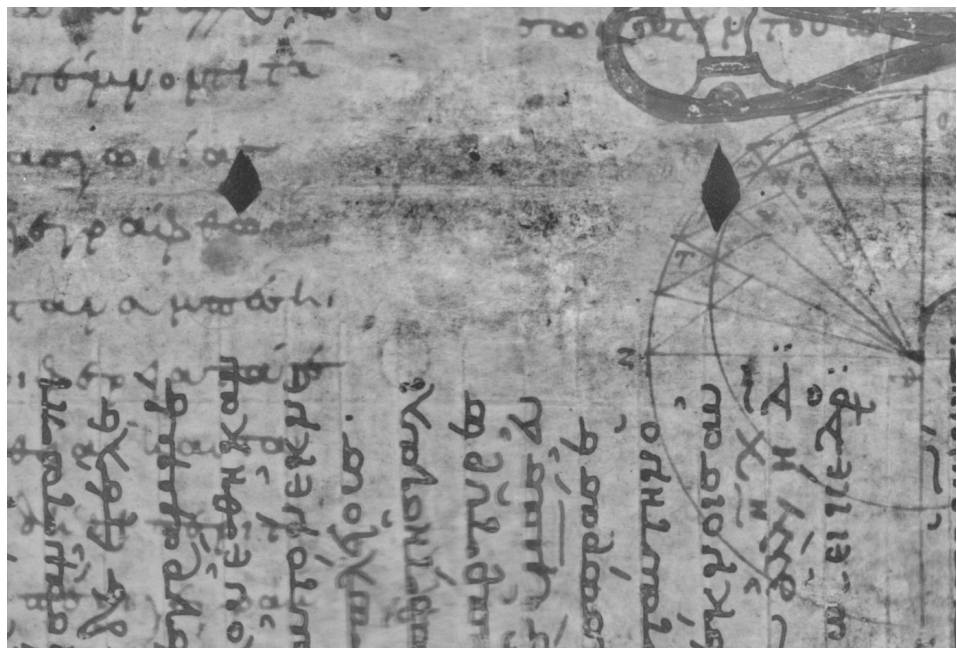
Figure 11. The battered Archimedes palimpsest; photograph from PBS

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14. Oxford Dictionary, *Palimpsest*, accessed November 3, 2015, http://www. oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/palimpsest

Algonquin Park seen as a Palimpsest

Widely regarded as the 'crown jewel' of the Ontario Park's system, Algonquin Provincial Park is one of Canada's oldest national parks and its first provincial park, having been established in 1893.[15]

Many people imagine that Algonquin Park is an untouched wilderness. However, humans have been associated with the Park area for thousands of years. Through its First Nations history, industrial uses and artistic inspiration, Algonquin is home to a unique cultural heritage that bears testament to a myriad of relationships between humans and nature. The human landscape of the park may be considered a palimpsest, as each human layer has continuously been erased, but has contributed towards the 'genius loci' of the landscape as we understand it today.
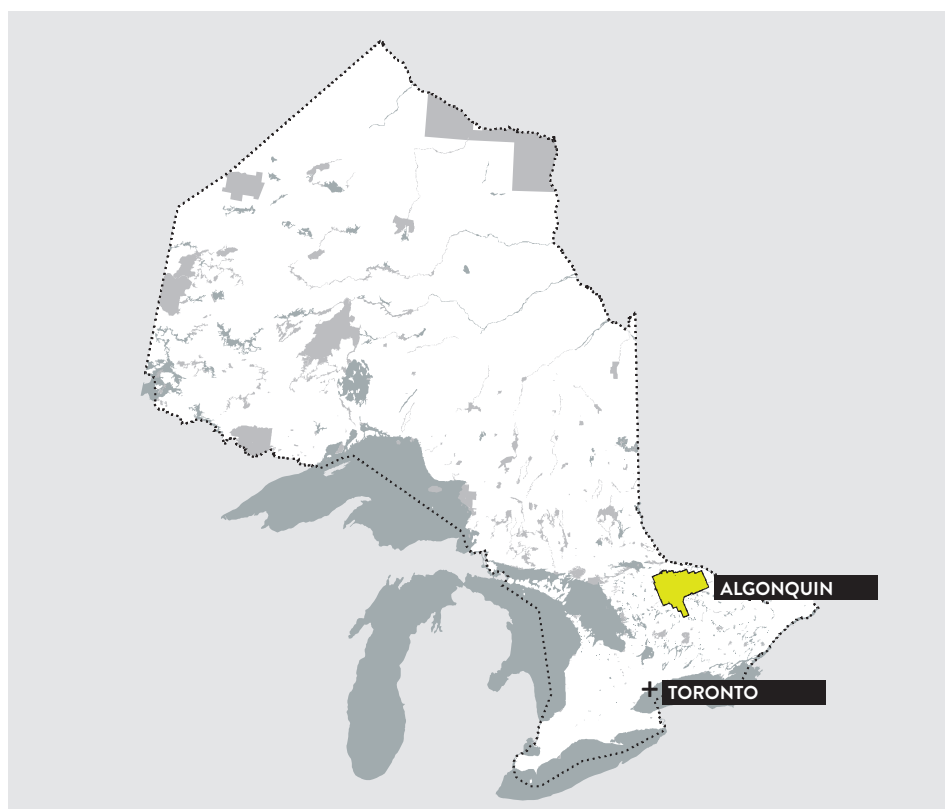

Figure 12. Algonquin Park, Ontario's "Crown Jewel", is located approximately 2 hours north of Toronto; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

15. Algonquin Provincial Park, *Cultural History*, accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/visit/history/cultural-history.php

FIRST NATIONS

Archaeological information indicates that the Algonquin Park area was inhabited by Native peoples for 8,000 years prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 1500's.

CIRCA 1500

LOGGING

Approximately 60 years before the Algonquin area became a park, pioneer loggers pushing up from the Ottawa Valley reached Algonquin in search of the great White Pine and Maple trees whose prime wood was increasingly in demand by an expanding British economy.

CIRCA 1800

GROUP OF SEVEN

Construction of the railway through the park in 1896 provided the first easy access to the area. The grand hotel era, with the construction of Hotel Algonquin and Highland Inn in Algonquin Park started around 1908. They remained mostly vacant until Tom Thomson and later the Group of Seven began to paint the iconic landscapes of Algonquin Park.

CIRCA 1900

Figure 13. The palimpsest of Algonquin Park consists of three layers of human history, starting from before the 1500s; photographs from Friends of Algonquin Park Archives

Layers of Human Inhabitation

Algonquin First Nation

Archaeological information indicates that the Algonquin Park area was inhabited by Native peoples for 8,000 years prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 1500s. They were organized into small, semi-nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers and used birch-bark canoes to travel great distances for hunting and trade. Groups would gather during the summer for fishing and socializing but separated into small hunting camps of extended families in the winter.[16] The Algonquin never surrendered their hunting and fishing area but it became occupied by the British. Eventually, the Canadian government established ten reserves, permitting the Algonquin to keep only a tiny portion of what once had been their original land.[17] This is the first instance of the complete erasing of a cultural history in what is known today as Algonquin Park.

The design portion of this thesis will use the formal strategies and life cycle ideas from the Algonquin First Nations for dwelling, eating, and bathing.
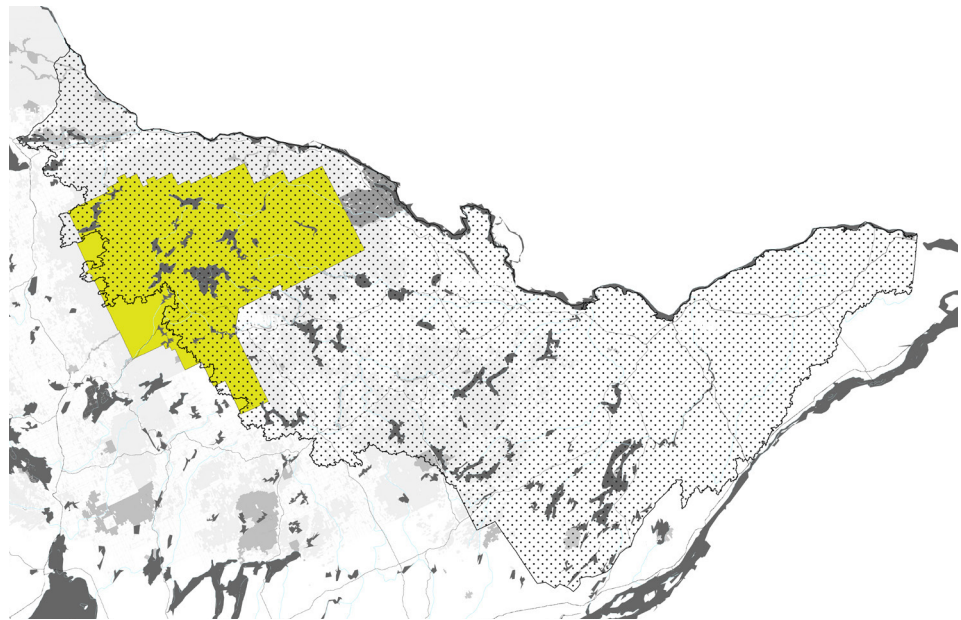

Figure 14. The Algonquin First Nation territory covered most of the current day boundary of Algonquin Provincial Park; data from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

16. Ottelyn Addison. *Early Days in Algonquin Park* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), 4.

17. Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, *History*, accessed January 10, 2016, http://www.algonquinsofpikwakanagan.com/culture_history.php

Logging Industry

Approximately 60 years before the Algonquin area became a park, pioneer loggers pushing up from the Ottawa Valley reached the Algonquin area in search of the great White Pine and Maple trees whose prime wood was increasingly in demand by an expanding British economy. Living in remote, primitive camps, they felled and squared the giant pine, and when spring came, drove them down swollen rivers to the Ottawa River and the outside world. Peak of the square timber trade was reached in 1864 and the last square timber was cut in 1912.[18]

Figure 15. Driving logs down the rivers of Algonquin Park towards Ottawa in the mid 19th century; photograph from Friends of Algonquin Park archives on TEDx Algonquin Park

Figure 16. A representation of the early camboose shantys of the logging era in the Algonquin Park area

Although there were numerous mill towns in the park, Mowat was the largest on the northwestern shore of Canoe Lake in western Algonquin Park. Unexpectedly, the lumber industry entered a recession and by 1914

18.   Algonquin Provincial Park, *Cultural History.*

the community rapidly declined. Soon after the trains stopped running and Mowat became a ghost town of its former self.[19] This is the second instance of a complete erasing of a cultural history in Algonquin Provincial Park.
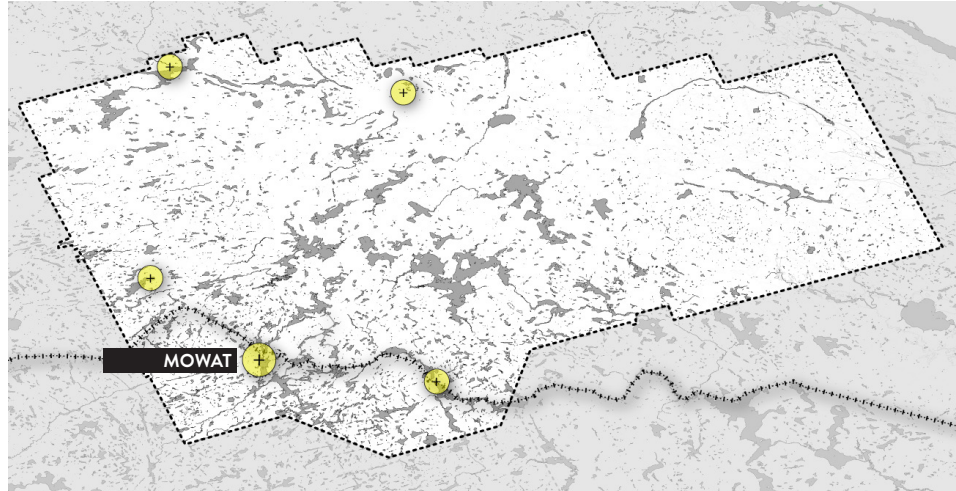

Figure 17. The five mill towns in Algonquin Park. Mowat was the largest and most famous mill town; data from the Algonquin Park Visitor Centre

Figure 18. The Mill town of Mowat; photograph from Friends of Algonquin Park Archives on Canadian Mysteries

Due to the presence of the logging of maple and white pine, the history of building construction in the park has been with wood. The design portion of this thesis will utilize and explore construction and envelope with both maple and white pine wood as an expression of this building history.

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19. Addison, *Early Days in Algonquin Park*, 23.

The Railway, Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven

Construction of the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway (O. A. & P. S.) through the park in 1896 provided the first easy access to the area. The grand hotel era, with the construction of Hotel Algonquin and Highland Inn in Algonquin Park started around 1908, shortly after the construction of the railway. These hotels, and many that followed, were built along the rail line.[20] They remained mostly vacant until Tom Thomson and later the Group of Seven began to paint the iconic landscapes of Algonquin Park.

Figure 19. Algonquin Station at Cache Lake in 1910; photograph by William James Topley from Canada Rail

Figure 20. The Highland Inn Railway Hotel on Cache Lake, built in 1908; photograph from C.N.Rys. Ontario Stations

20. Ibid., 31-39.

In 1912 two men arrived in Algonquin Park by train with fishing rods, camping gear, and paint boxes in hand. One man was Harry B. Jackson, a Toronto artist and graphic designer, and the other was a young and ambitious outdoorsman – Tom Thomson. They traveled on the railway from Toronto, where they both worked at a commercial design firm. Among Thomson's coworkers were J.E.H. Macdonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston and Franklin Carmichael, all of whom would later become members of the Group of Seven.[21] The Toronto artists later followed Thomson into the Park to sketch and paint its granite outcrops, windblown pines, and its various lakes and rivers.
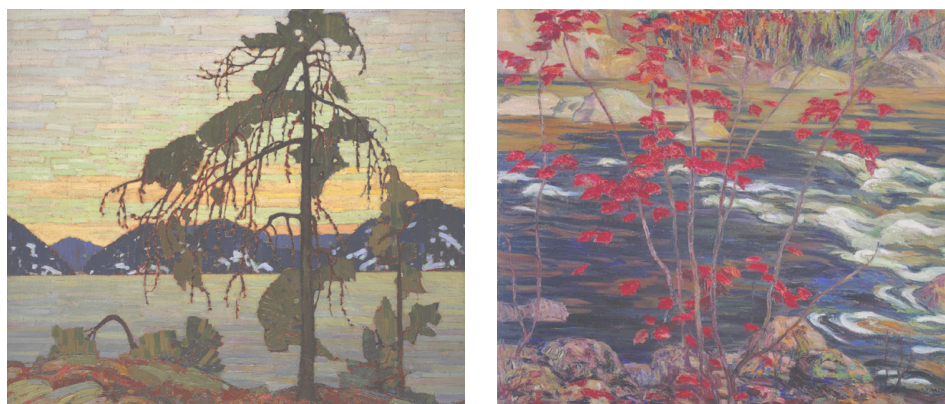

Figure 21. The Algonquin Park landscape inspired famous paintings, such as Thomson's "Jack Pine" [left] and Jackson's "Red Maple" [right]; photographs from the McMichael Canadian Art Permanent Collection.

Algonquin Park became a cradle for a new art movement, and its artists became known as the "Algonquin School of Painters." Their works promoted the idea of an art form native to the Canadian landscape—an idea of particular appeal for Canada at the time, as it was still in the early stages of developing a distinct, cultural identity. [22] Slowly the images of the Algonquin School of Art moved into the homes of the wealthy members of Ontario society, creating a social force that transferred the remote and marginal concept of a wilderness park into a powerful cultural moiré. The paintings depicted nature that may have been wild but was non-threatening and well suited to recreation. With

21. Ibid., 121-128.

22. John O'Brian and Peter White, *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 8-37.

the paintings of Thomson and the Group of Seven making their way into the homes of the Toronto elite, tourism to Algonquin Park started to grow. The scenery came to be viewed with reference to a set of expectations as visitors knew what to look for, thanks to Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven.[23]

Consequently, Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park may just be the most culturally significant park in all of Canada. The paintings of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven changed conventional views about Canadian Wilderness and human interaction with wilderness with Algonquin Park used as its medium. This changed nature as a hunting ground to nature as a place for viewing.

Therefore, the design portion of this thesis will frame the significant views found in the paintings.

Figure 22. The Algonquin Park landscape inspired some of Canada's most famous paintings; photographs from the McMichael Canadian Art Permanent Collection.

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23. Ibid., 8-37.

A 'back to nature' policy was approved in the 1950s which aimed at restoring the 'natural state' of the park. In the following years, prominent park structures were purchased, dismantled and burned. Aditionally, over 100 ranger cabins in the park were declared obsolete.[24]

Figure 23. A ranger cabin in Algonquin Park that was declared obsolete and was therefore burned down to remove it from the park; photograph from Early Days in Algonquin Park

While security concerns were cited as cause for their systematic destruction, the decision to destroy was no doubt influenced by prevailing ecological attitudes at the time. The Parks Act introduced two considerations into the management: that management decisions would reflect the fundamental principles of ecological integrity, and that park uses would be evaluated as either 'appropriate' or 'non-conforming' in accordance with this value. The 'wilderness' of Algonquin, then, became limited to its position as a park designated for natural conservation and management. This would be the third instance of the complete erasing of a cultural history in Algonquin Provincial Park.

Algonquin Park's Current Cultural Infrastructure

Around the same time that the park was undergoing major management changes, a transportation shift was occurring. The switch from railroad to car

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24. Addison, *Early Days in Algonquin Park* , 53.

changed the way visitors accessed and experienced the Park. With the advent of the automobile, a road was constructed through the park and visitors could now travel around at their own convenience. With expanded access came the necessity for visitor service amenities to be spread throughout the park. Before, the railroad companies choreographed the visitor experience controlling travel, arrival, and lodging. The car introduced a new challenge on managing the park experience as it gave the visitor greater freedom. Access via car also influenced Park's architecture in the form of entrance gates, visitor centers, and rest stops. Today, the interpretive and educational experience of a park has become a commercial transitory experience, spread across 55 km in Algonquin Park.[25]

Figure 24. The East Entrance Gates to Algonquin Provincial Park

25. Algonquin Provincial Park, *Highway 60 Corridor*, accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/visit/camping/highway-60-corridor.php

EAST ENTRANCE GATE
LOGGING MUSEUM

BEAVER POND TRAIL

ACCESS POINT
VISITOR CENTRE
SPRUCE BOG TRAIL
BIG PINES TRAIL
BOOTH'S ROCK TRAIL
LOOKOUT TRAIL
CENTENNIAL TRAIL

TWO RIVERS TRAIL
BAT LAKE TRAIL

HEMLOCK BLUFF TRAIL
TRACK & TOWER TRAIL

ACCESS POINT

ART CENTRE

MIZZY LAKE TRAIL
ACCESS POINT
HARDWOOD LOOKOUT

WHISKEY RAPIDS TRAIL

WEST ENTRANCE GATE

55
43
41
40
39
31
30
26
25
23,5
20
15
14
13
7

NATURE TRAILS
ACCESS POINTS
INTERPRETIVE CENTRES
ENTRANCE GATES
DEVELOPMENT ZONE
WILDERNESS ZONE
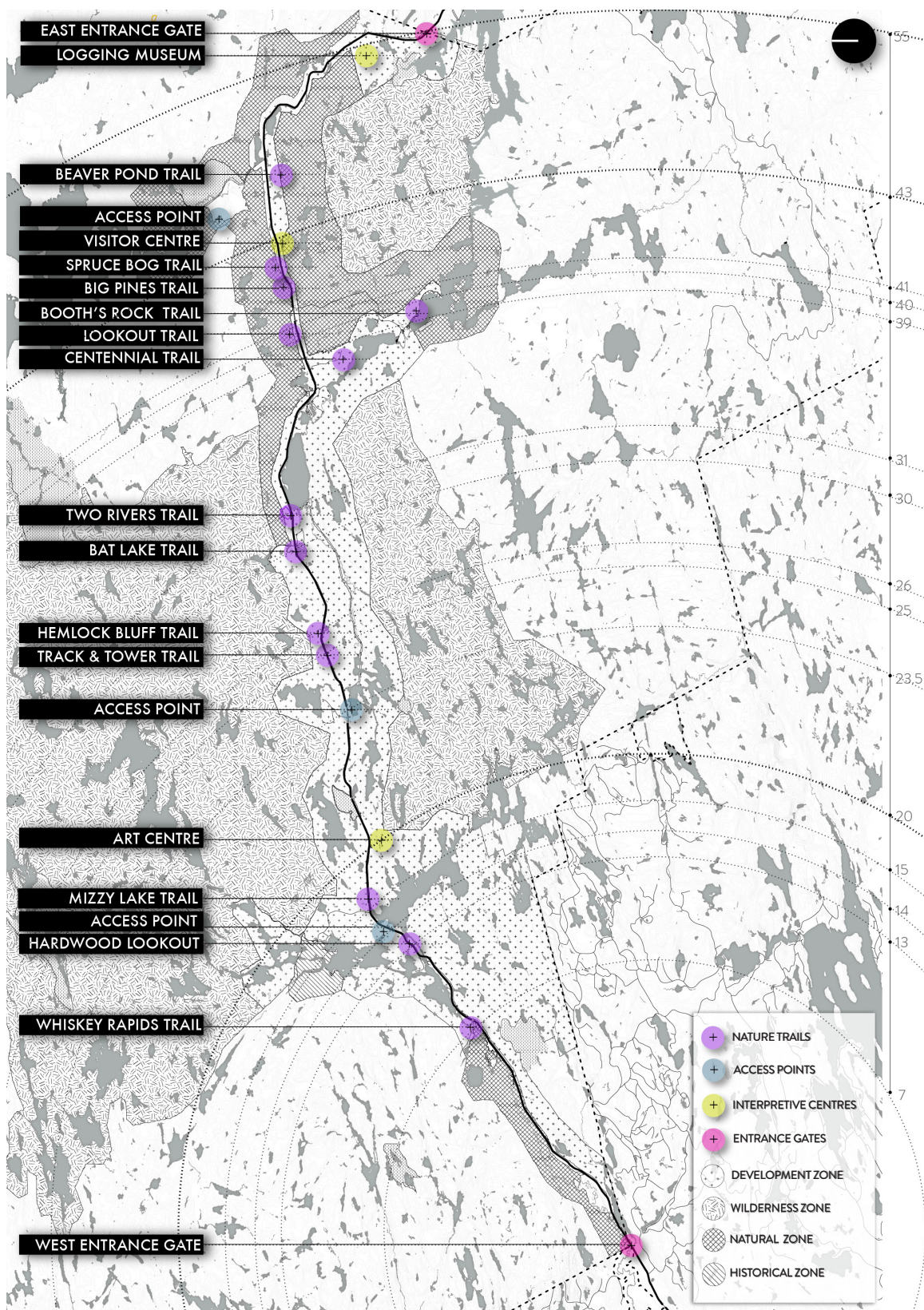NATURAL ZONE
HISTORICAL ZONE

Figure 25. Today, Interpretive Centres spread across 55km of highway, making all of the educational infrastructure of Algonquin Park a commercial transitory experience; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

Algonquin Park Today

Today, Algonquin Provincial Park is most commonly used by those seeking remote wilderness experiences like recreational and backcountry canoeing and camping, photography and painting. Accessible from large urban centres and convenient to most tourism travel routes across Ontario, Algonquin Park attracts nearly one million visitors yearly who participate in day use activities, camping, or back-country travel.[26]

AVERAGE LENGTH
OF STAY: 3.9 days

AVERAGE SIZE
OF GROUP: 3.8 people

SEASONAL OCCUPANCY:
70% summer

Figure 26. Algonquin Park is one of the most popular parks in Ontario for camping and canoeing; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool and Ontario Parks Statistics 2010

26. Algonquin Provincial Park, *Backcountry Interior Camping*, accessed March 4, 2016, http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/visit/camping/backcountry-interior-camping.php

Utilizing Existing Recreation Trends in Algonquin Park

By paddle and portage - more than 2,000 kilometres of canoe routes and over 1,900 campsites await those who seek the rugged beauty of Algonquin Provincial Park.[27] The most common way of using Algonquin's backcountry is to go on an extended canoe trip which covers a long distance. In recent years, however, many visitors make short weekend forays into the Park Interior.
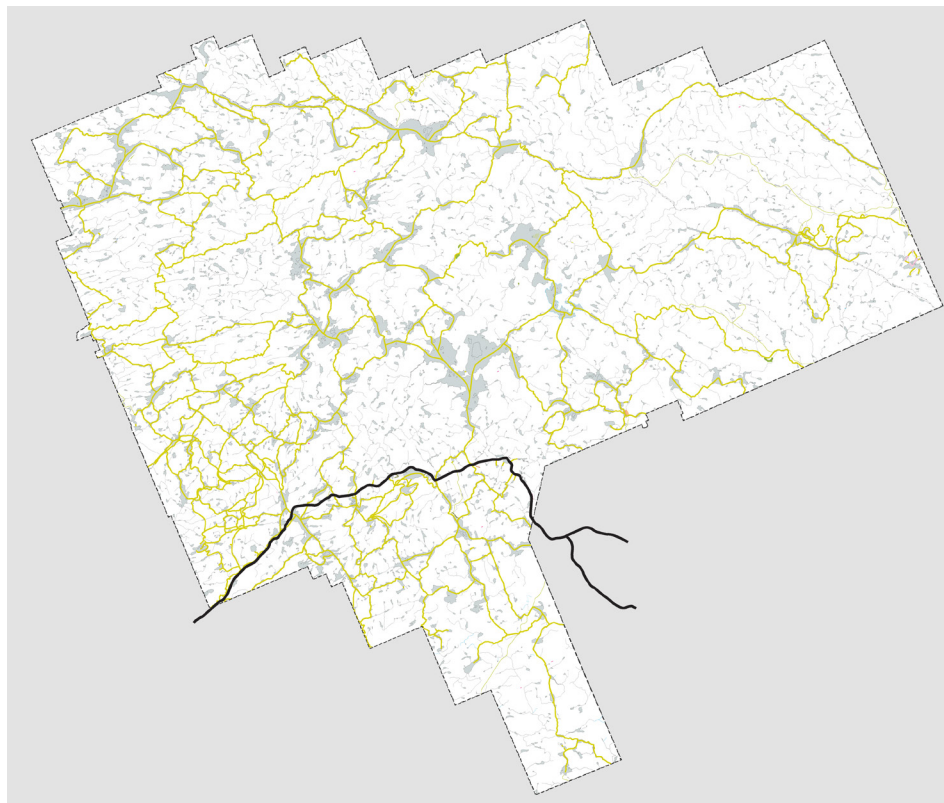

Figure 27. There are over 2000 kilometres of canoe routes in Algonquin Park; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers
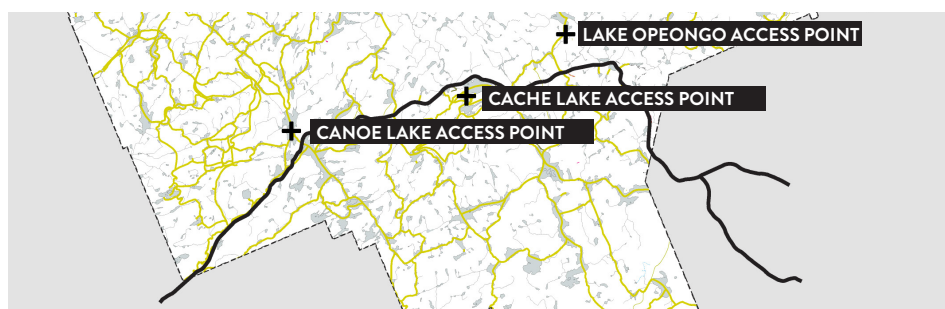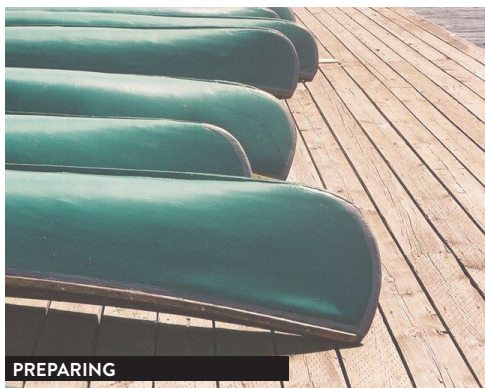

Figure 28. The canoe routes are accessible from three main access points along the highway; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers
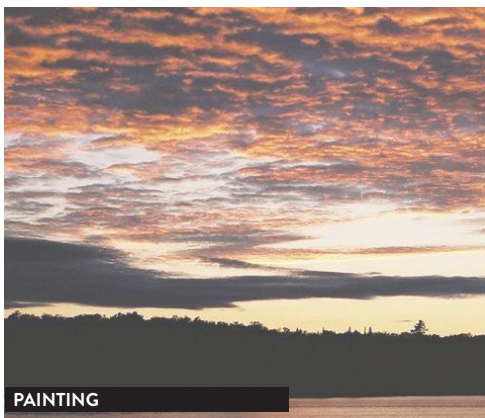
27. Ibid.

Figure 29. The rituals associated with backcountry camping and canoeing in Algonquin Park; photographs by Kate Barrett and Mikaela Kautzky

Additionally, during the winter, the most common activities include snowshoeing, skating, and cross country skiing. These activities are often completed along the same routes as the canoeing.

The route will be located at one of three access points off the highway. These are currently the most used areas of the park, so inserting an interpretive route into one of these areas will increase usability of interpretive infrastructure and promote learning of the human history of the park.

Defining a Study Area

In order to narrow in on a site for the design of a new typology of interpretive centre, a palimpsest of human transportation infrastructure was mapped. The transportation infrastructure determines the areas of intersection and concentration of human inhabitation in the park. As seen in Figure 33, the intersections identified from the palimpsest identify Canoe Lake as a strong site due to it's human inhabitation throughout history.
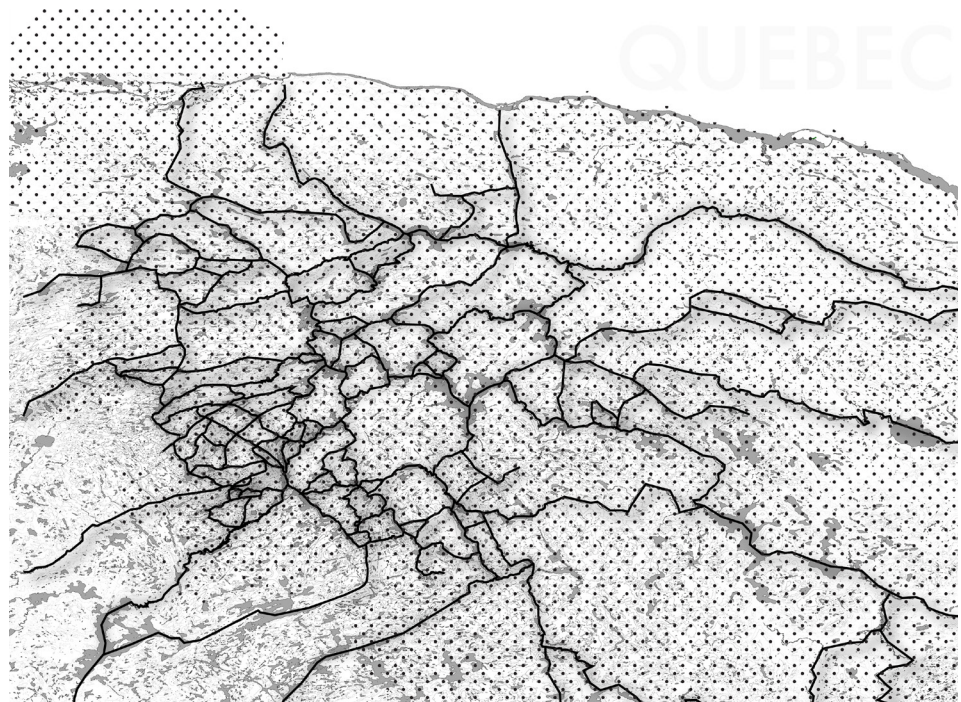
Figure 30. The canoe route network developed and used by the Algonquin First Nations; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers

Figure 31. The Ottawa, Arnprior, and Parry Sound Railway built in the late 19th century; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers

Figure 32. Built in the mid 20th century, Highway 60 is how visitors access the Park today; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers

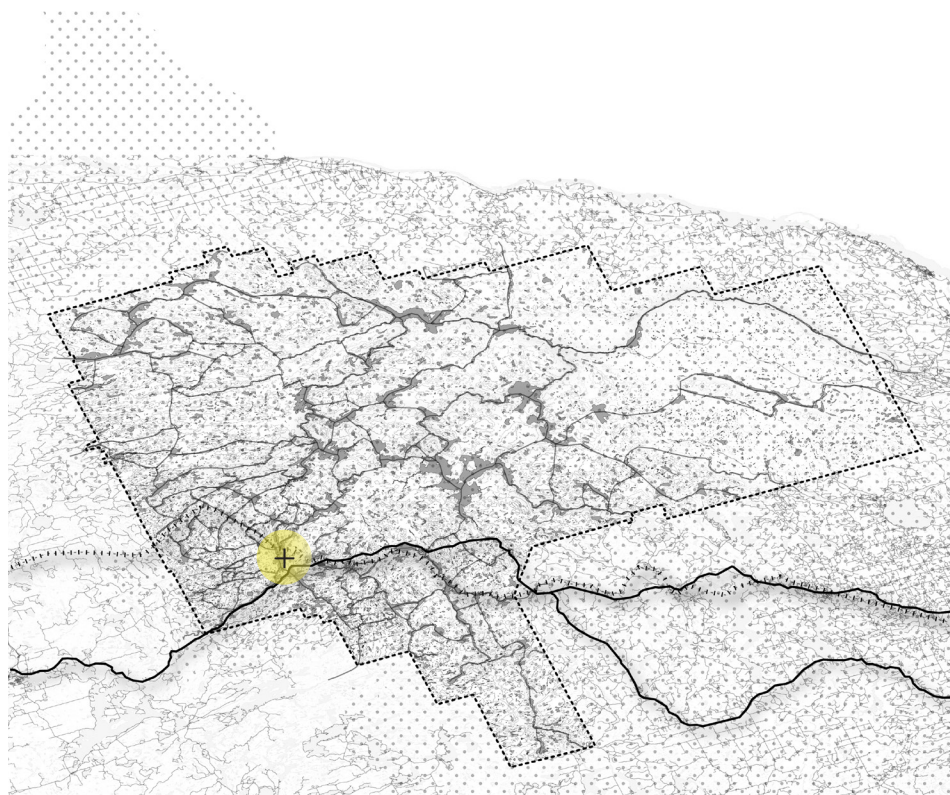Figure 33. Overlaying the transportation infrastructure of the park showed Canoe Lake was the area of intersection; data from Jeff's Map by Algonquin Provincial Park for Canoeists, Kayakers, and Backpackers

Canoe Lake as the 'Intersection Point'

Canoe Lake is a busy access point for canoeists entering the park. The access point consists of a parking area, ministry office and an outfitting supply station.[28] Canoe Lake is an area rich in history. Initially, it was used for travelling by the first nations and is where most of the 2000 km of canoe routes stem from. Four years after the establishment of the park, there were over 500 people living in a sawmill town on the shore of Canoe Lake. This small town would go on to have a major influence serving as the location for the park's first headquarters, home of the Gilmour and Company lumber mill, an important railway stop for tourists, and the summer home of Tom Thomson. Today, time and forest regrowth has reclaimed most signs of the history of this lake and the community of Mowat.

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28. Algonquin Provincial Park, *Canoe Lake Access Point*, accessed March 8, 2016, http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/visit/camping/canoe-lake-access-point.php

Figure 34. Canoe Lake Access Point and the Portage Store, one of the busiest departure points for backcountry camping in Algonquin Park; photographs from Wolf Den Bunkhouse

FORMER CANOE LAKE STATION

FORMER HOTEL ALGONQUIN

FORMER LUMBER MILL SITE

TOM THOMSONS CAMPSITE

TOM THOMSON CEMETERY

ALL CANOE ROUTES PART HERE

FORMER VILLAGE OF MOWAT

FORMER PARK HEADQUARTERS

FIRST NATION CANOE ROUTES

SITE OF TOM THOMSON'S DEATH

ACCESS POINT & PORTAGE STORE

DESIGNATED 'HISTORIC' ZONING

HISTORICAL SITE OF INTEREST

CANOE ROUTES

HIGHWAY 60 CORRIDOR

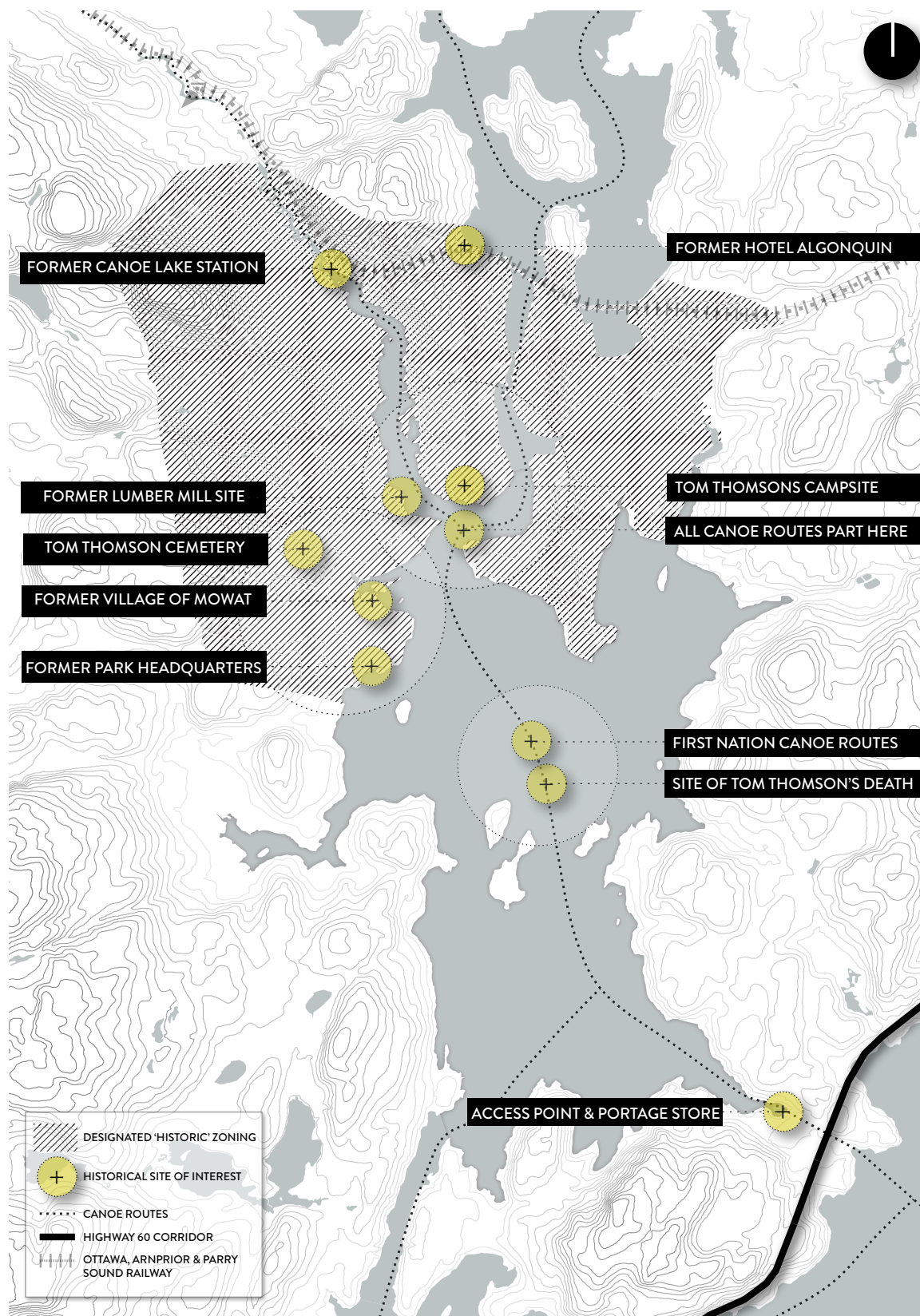OTTAWA, ARNPRIOR & PARRY
SOUND RAILWAY

Figure 35. The palimpsest of Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park reveals three clusters of historical significance in the park along the existing canoe routes; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool and The Portage Store

A Three Site Approach

Three clusters of historical significance on Canoe Lake relating to the three layers of erased human history in the park were uncovered through a mapping exercise using the methodology of palimpsest.

The route is organized and spaced so that it caters to all users of the park. For day users, the route can be completed [from departure point and back] in a ten to twelve hour day. For overnight users, the route can be completed in a 24 hour period for overnight users that wish to stay overnight at the second site. Lastly, for interior campers, the route can be completed at the beginning and/or at the end of their backcountry adventure.

Site one is located on the water in the midde of Canoe Lake -- approximately two hours into the route. The site is where Thomson died tragically along the first nations canoe route and the loggers log-driving route.

Site two is located in the forest at the site of the old logging town of Mowat and later Thomson's home base of Mowat Lodge -- approximately three to four hours into the route.

Site three [the final site] is located on the edge of Hayhurst Point, the furthest north point of Canoe Lake -- approximately five to six hours into the route.

These three sites will be used as the sites for the design portion of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

Overview

Rather than follow the didactic approach of a traditional interpretive centre which relies on imagery and text to convey meaning, this thesis proposes that an experiential and bodily interaction with the landscape can lead to a more subtle understanding of the site's multiple meanings. A three site route will lead visitors through the landscape where architectural interventions will call attention to new understandings of the park and its history, while pragmatically providing places of shelter and respite. The architecture becomes a tool by which to measure the landscape against the human body.

The route is intended to be completed by methods of active transportation, such as canoe in the summer and either by snowshoe, skating, or cross country skiing in winter.

As the route is intended to explore and uncover the human history of the park while also accomodating the activities of backcountry camping, the program will be focused around pragmatic daily rituals. It will specfically focus around resting, eating, sleeping, and finally bathing. They are organized on site and presented throughout the route in order of when the human body needs them.

Algonquin Park is characterized by it's interconnecting waterways and dense, green forests. Therefore, there will be three varying scales of engagement with the two most characteristic aspects of the landscape throughout the interactive route. The rest stop site will engage with the water, the sleeping and eating site will engage with the forest, and the bathing site will engage with both the water and the forest.

SITE 3: BATHING
five to six hours

SITE 2: EATING/SLEEPING
four to five hours

SITE 1: RESTING
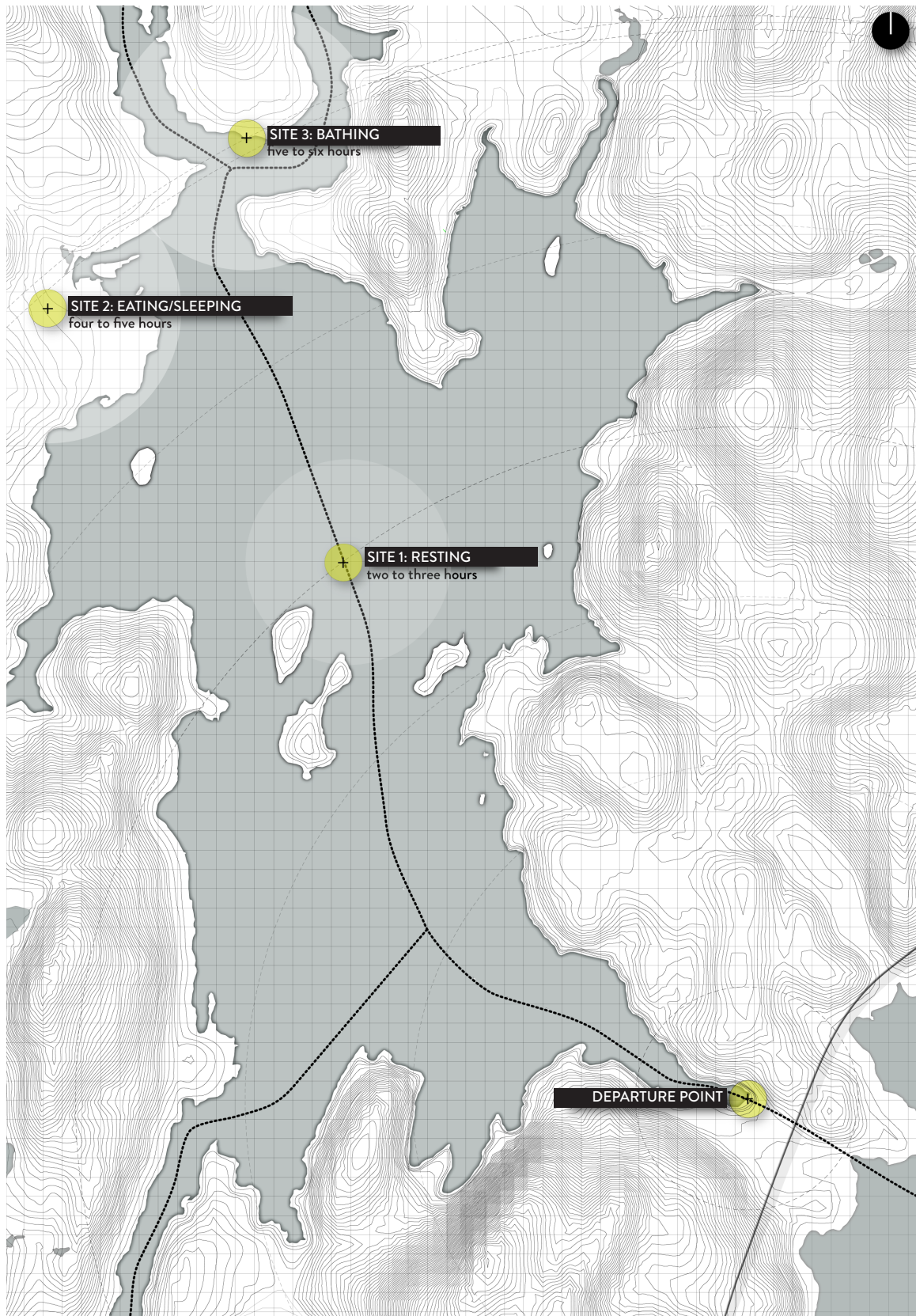two to three hours

DEPARTURE POINT

Figure 36. Site plan of the route, depicting the departure point and three sites of intervention along the lake; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

Architectural Strategies

Today, current perceptions of Algonquin Park are often singular in their reading, falling into narrow and oppositional views. This thesis critiques these singular readings of place in favor of exploring a way to present and uncover the site's multiple meanings through architecture.

Therefore, the strategy at each scale of intervention is to express all three layers of history while providing spaces appropriate for the human uses in the park today.

Formal Strategies

As aforementioned, the first nations were organized into small, semi-nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers. They lived in circular communities, with private dwelling around the exterior and communal activities towards the centre. The spaital organization of the design will draw on the formal strategies and the notion of life cycle for dwelling, eating, and bathing activities.

Envelope and Structure

Due to the presence of the logging of maple and white pine, the history of building construction in the park has been with wood. The harvesting of the timber used to be more ecological than today and these more ecological practices will be utilized and integrated in the construction and envelope with both maple and white pine wood as an expression of this building history.

Framing and Views

The works by Thomson and the Group of Seven promoted the idea of an art form native to the Canadian landscape. Many of these paintings were completed on Canoe Lake by Thomson and his colleagues. The design portion of this thesis will frame the significant views found in the paintings that people still come to see and are inspired by today.

Site Zero: Point of Departure

The point of departure is the Canoe Lake Access Point. Upon obtaining permits and the proper outfitting supplies for the voyage, visitors are ready to undertake a pilgrimage through the park's history. The proposed design intervention at this site is minimal, and is used only to mark the beginning [and end] of the interactive interpretive route.

The Beacon: A Wayfinding Device

Visible from most of Canoe Lake and located at the end of the small bay where the access point and permit office is, the design intervention at the departure point is a small structure that extends into the landscape of the lake and functions as an anchor from which to explore the site. It establishes a prominent front door to the interpretive route.

Much like buoys in the ocean, the structure will act as a wayfinding device throughout the route. The structure is a light pine timber frame structure with an elevated polycarbonate screen mass, providing light and a clear transition to the beginning of the path that leads into the route.

It was important that a design element could act as a lantern at night or in foggy weather so that visitors are able to orient themselves along the route. Canoers must pass near one of these structures to embark or return on their journey.

Figure 37. The departure point is located at the Canoe Lake Access Point off of Highway 60 and is marked by a 'beacon' structure that insinuates the start of the route; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool
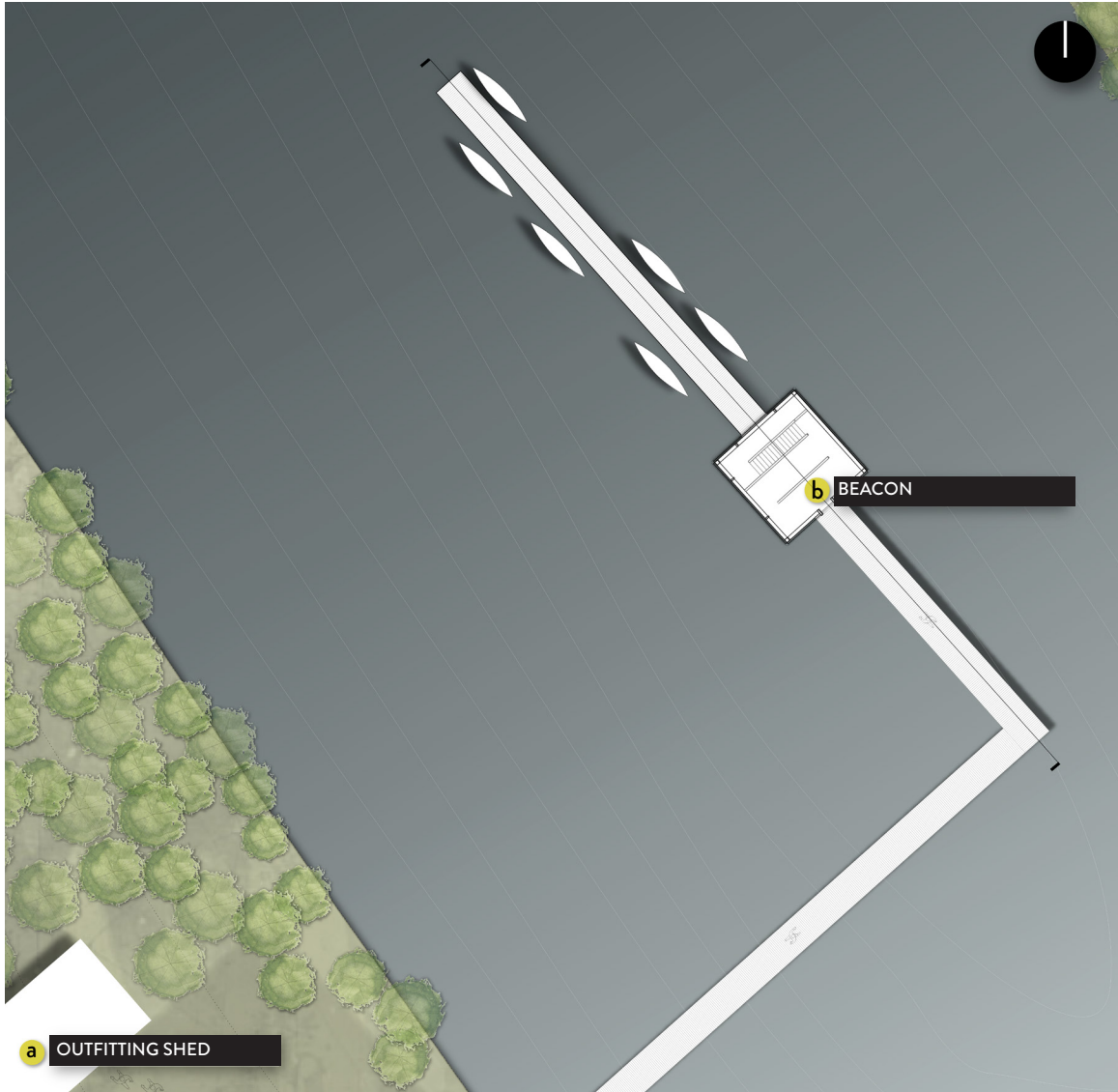
BEACON

OUTFITTING SHED

Figure 38. Plan showing the departure 'beacon'

Figure 39. Section showing the departure 'beacon'

Figure 40. Perpsective depicting the departure beacon, a recurring wayfinding device along the route

The intervention at this site ultimately serves as the embarkation point for visitors.

The beacon not only serves as a wayfinding device, but distributes information regarding the route and its historical significance. This structure will hold the only two-dimensional graphic media throughout the entirety of the design project.

From this point, visitors embark on the first leg of the interpretive route towards the rest point and observation tower, located approximately two hours into the journey.

Site One: The Water

Water represents a place of travel among all three layers. First, the canoe routes used by the first nations. Secondly, the lakes and rivers were used to navigate and push logs up to the ottawa river by the loggers in the nineteenth century. Lastly, Thomson and the Group of Seven travelled by water to find new, remote sites for painting.

Tom Thomson died in 1917 when setting out alone across Canoe Lake to begin a fishing and painting trip. Within hours of his departure, his empty canoe was spotted floating on the site of this design, and more than a week later, his body surfaced in the lake. Thomson's death still remains a mystery.

Thus, the first site of intervention is located two hours into the route on the water at the place of death of Tom Thomson.

SITE 1: RESTING
two to three hours

DEPARTURE POINT

Figure 41. The first site along the route is located two hours into the canoe route on the water and will be used as a rest point and an observation/ viewing area; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

The Observation Tower: A Rest Point

Pragmatically speaking, the design will serve as a resting point for canoers, snowshoers, cross country skiers, and skaters throughout the year. The structure provides spaces for resting in shade in summer and warming up in the winter. It is also a place for viewing and observing the landscape. Algonquin Park enjoys a rich natural landscape, but the topography is not greatly varied so there are not many places to enjoy a panoramic overview of the natural surroundings, especially since so much time on the route is spent on the water [which is at the lowest topographical point].

Formal Strategies

The design radiates around the observation tower, with the program increasing from private [travelling] to public [observing] towards the centre.

Construction and Envelope

The structure is a light pine timber frame structure with an elevated polycarbonate screen mass. Charred wood is used for cladding and natural pine wood is used for interior cladding and structure.

Framing and Views

Thomson was searching for landscapes to paint that would change the public's perception of the Canadian Wilderness. The tower intends to change the users perception of the wilderness around them as they ascend. On the second and third floor, specific cutouts of the polycarbonate screen frame views of landscapes Thomson was inpsired by on his journeys through Canoe Lake. On the top floor, the visitors are presented with a panoramic view over Canoe Lake and all of the sites that Thomson and his colleagues painted become visible.
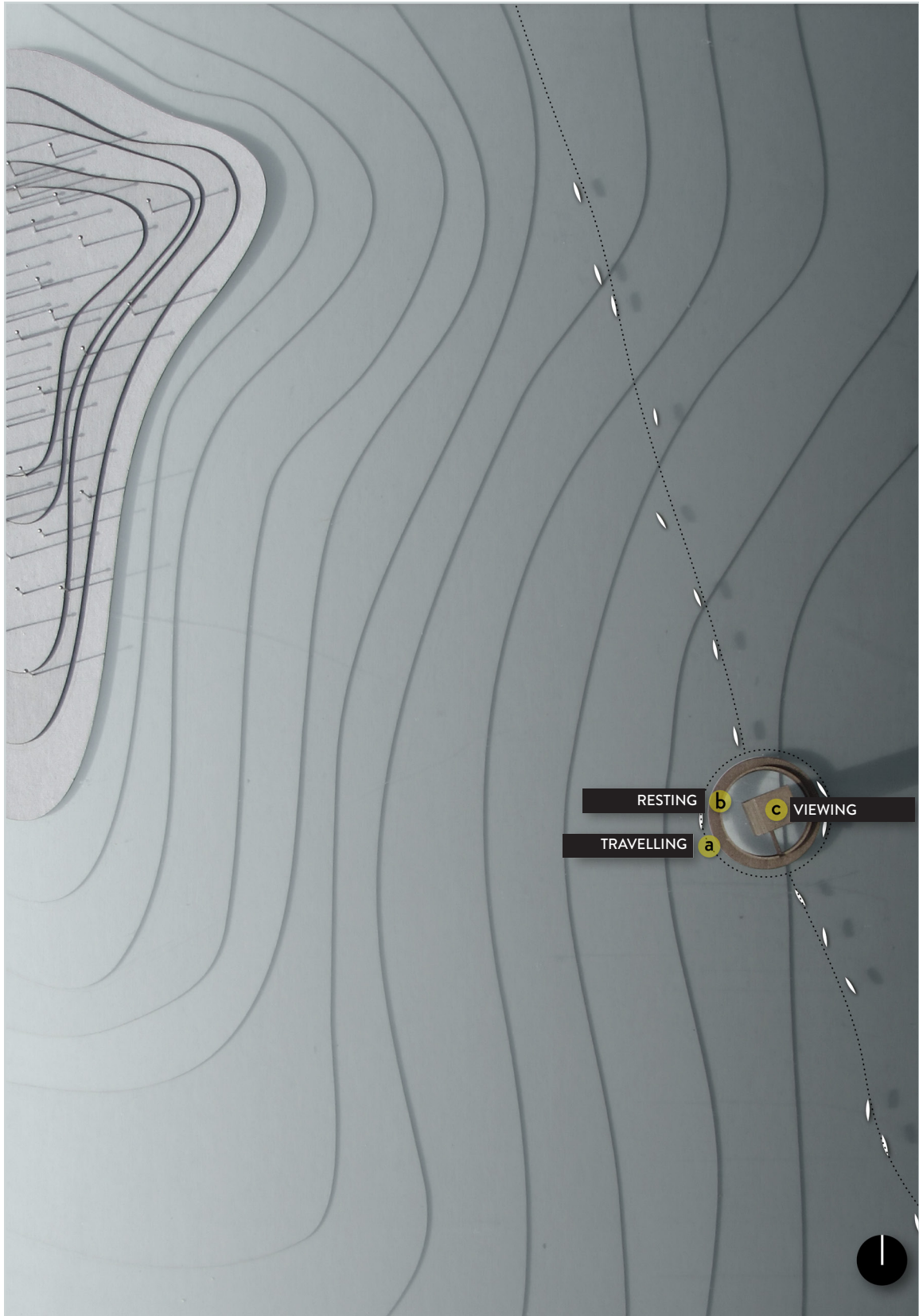
Figure 42. Physical model showing the site plan for the rest point and observation tower design

TRAVEL
REST
VIEW

FORMAL LAYOUT

POLYCARBONATE PANEL
CLADDING

LIGHT WOOD
FRAME STRUCTURE

BLACKENED WOOD

STRUCTURE & ENVELOPE

'MOWAT'
TOM THOMSON

'EVENING ON CANOE LAKE'
TOM THOMSON
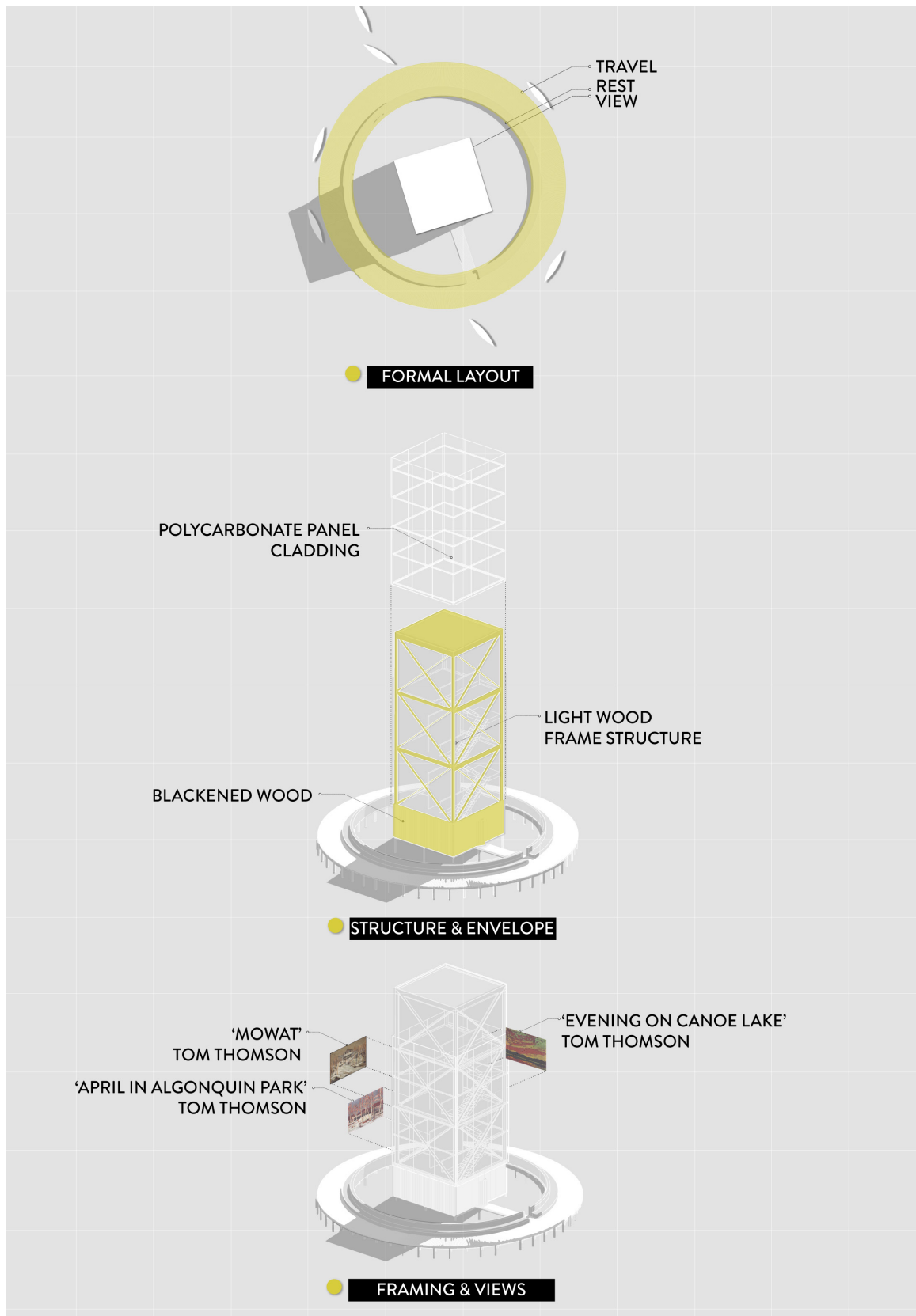
'APRIL IN ALGONQUIN PARK'
TOM THOMSON

FRAMING & VIEWS

Figure 43. Diagrams depicting the architectural strategies for the observation tower
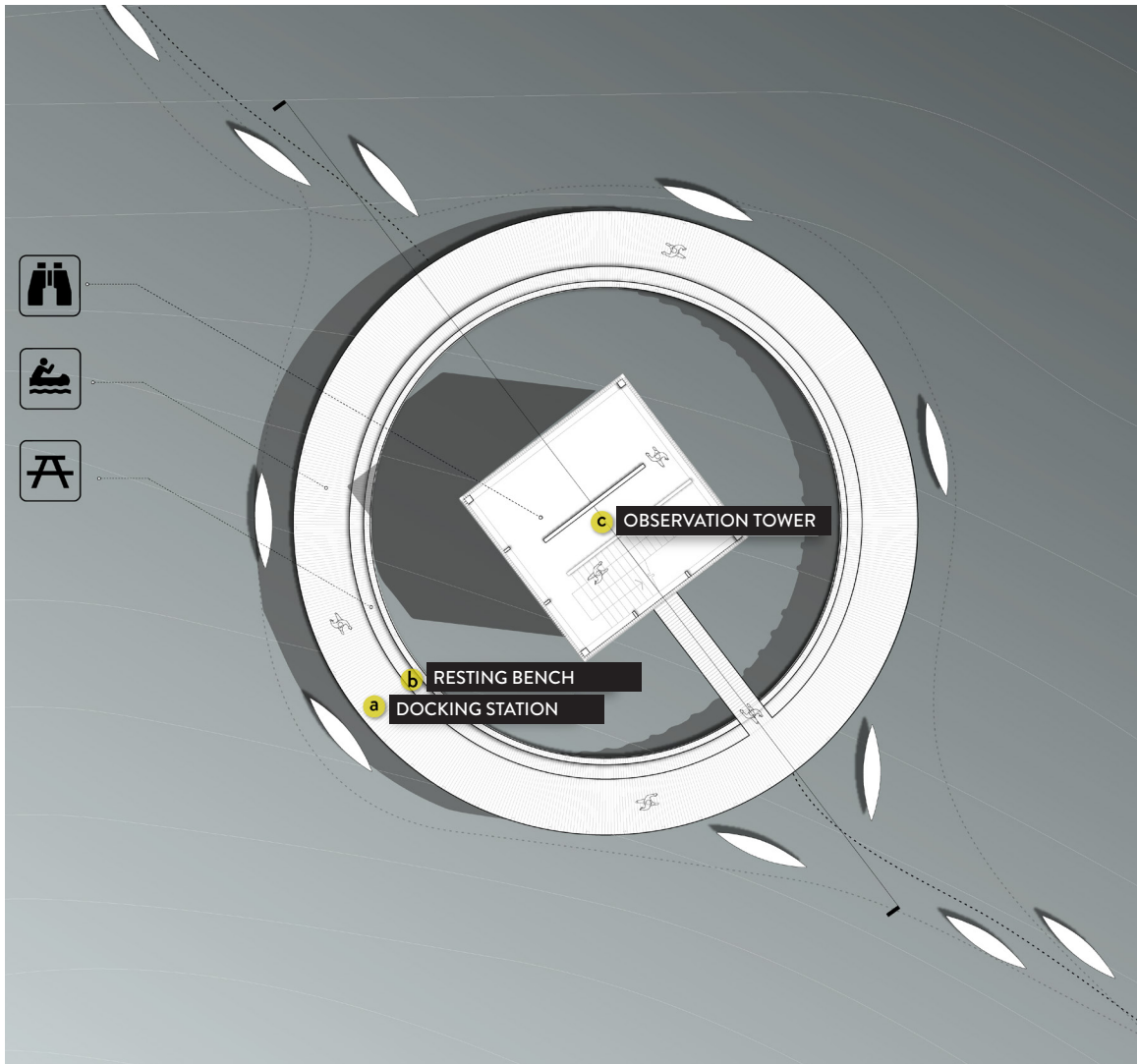
Figure 44. Plan of the resting point and observation tower

OBSERVATION TOWER

RESTING BENCH

DOCKING STATION

Figure 45. Section of the resting point and observation tower

Figure 46. Perspective of the resting point and observation tower

Architecture here is used as a device to focus the user towards the driving influences of this site; its under appreciated natural landscape and it's historical significance.

The viewing tower is designed to provide the opportunity to view a different perspective of the landscape as the users move up and down, but may otherwise never experience in all its scope.

From this point, visitors embark on the second leg of the interpretive route towards the communal cookhouse and overnight campground, located approximately four to five hours by canoe into the total journey.

Site Two: The Forest

Today, dwelling in the wilderness is often thought of as being experienced by ones self remotely. However, the history of the park shows dwelling and eating have been communal activities. The First Nations gathered during the summers, the loggers lived in large shantys, and Thomson and the Group of Seven sparked a recreational boom and tourists stayed in large lodges.

Mowat was a mill town that attracted residents in 1897 on the northwestern shore of Canoe Lake. Mowat was a lumberman's town that included all the usual stores and businesses of the early mill villages including a hospital for a town that grew to a population of more than 500, the largest town in the Park. Unexpectedly, the lumber industry entered a recession and the population dwindled to just over 200. By 1914 it was down to 150. Soon the trains stopped running and Mowat became a ghost of its former self.

After Mowat's decline, Tom Thomson painted and lived in the area. Thomson often stayed at Mowat Lodge, a tourist retreat which made use of a converted Gilmour company building.

The second site is at the old location of the logging town of Mowat, and later, Mowat Lodge.

SITE 2: EATING/SLEEPING
three to four hours

SITE 1: RESTING
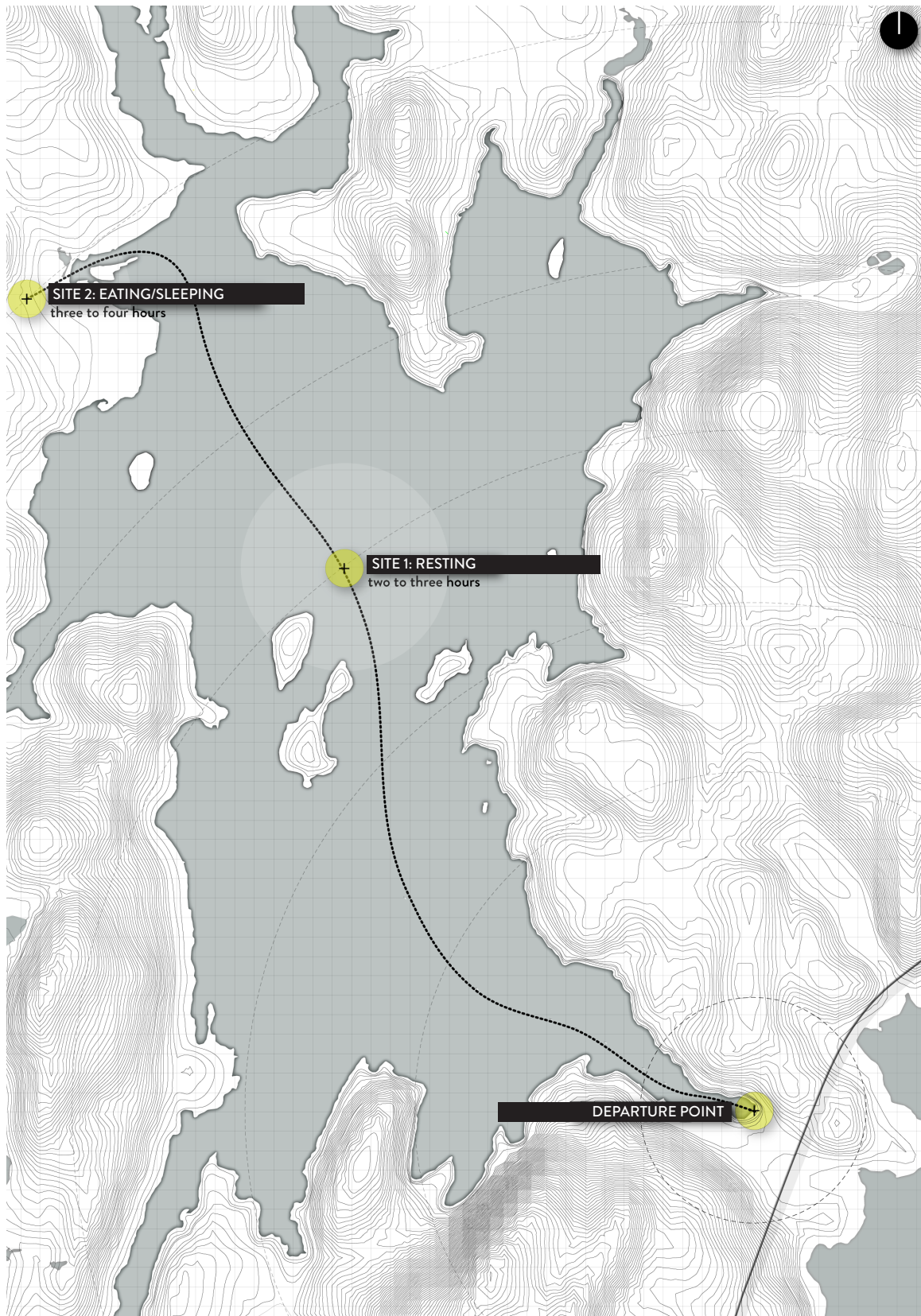two to three hours

DEPARTURE POINT

Figure 47. The second site along the route is located three to four hours into the canoe route in the forest and is designed as a place for eating and sleeping; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

The Campground and Public Cookhouse

From the lake, the 'beacon' structure is seen among the swampy wetland of the former town of Mowat, acting as a marker along the route. The campground is accessed off of a long boardwalk and is nestled between two hills among the tall trees, creating a place of refuge from the elements.

Formal Strategies

The design locates the private act of sleeping on the periphery and the communal act of eating and gathering around fire in the centre of the design. Four buildings surounding a circular courtyard are dedicated to the activities related to cooking, including food storage, fish smoking, food preparation, and waste collection and treatment. The building focuses around a central, sunken fire pit for the actual cooking and eating of the food. In between the sleeping area and the communal cookhouse, there are rainwater collecting walls that distribute water to all spaces.

Construction and Envelope

A grid of malleable poles around the buildings accomodates 2, 4, and 6 person formations for tents when fully occupied. When not fully occupied, the poles can be used to hang clothing and other camping supplies.

The structure of the buildings are a light pine timber with charred wood cladding. Pivoting polycarbonate screens open up the buildings to the central courtyard in warmer weather.

Framing and Views

The spaces in between the four courtyard buildings frame the views found in two paintings completed near Thomson's home base of Mowat Lodge.

Figure 48. Physical model showing the site plan for the campground design

SLEEP
PREPARE
EAT

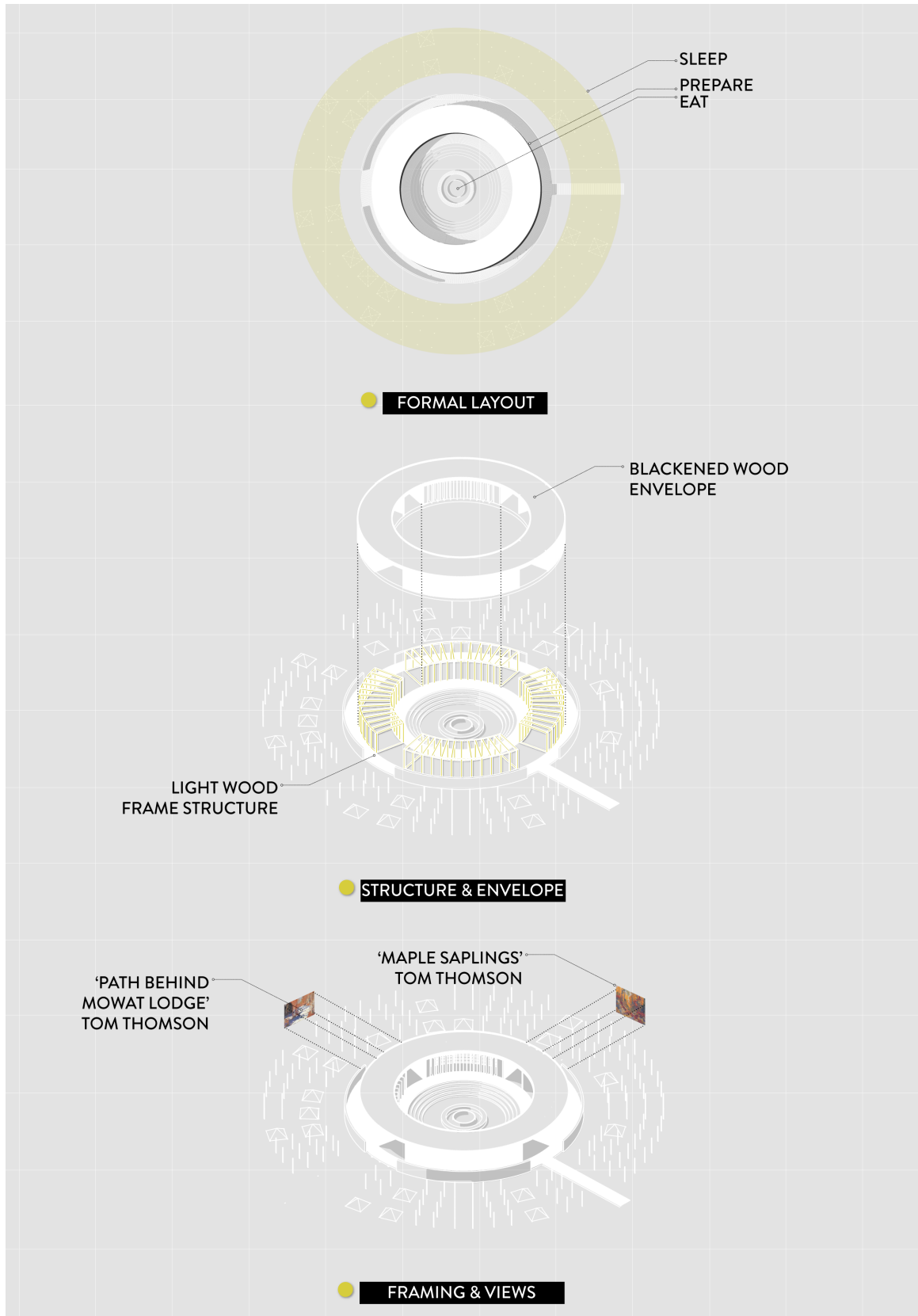FORMAL LAYOUT

BLACKENED WOOD
ENVELOPE

LIGHT WOOD
FRAME STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE & ENVELOPE

'MAPLE SAPLINGS'
TOM THOMSON

'PATH BEHIND
MOWAT LODGE'
TOM THOMSON

FRAMING & VIEWS

Figure 49. Diagrams depicting the architectural strategies for the campground

e FISH SMOKING
f WASTE
b WATER HARVESTING
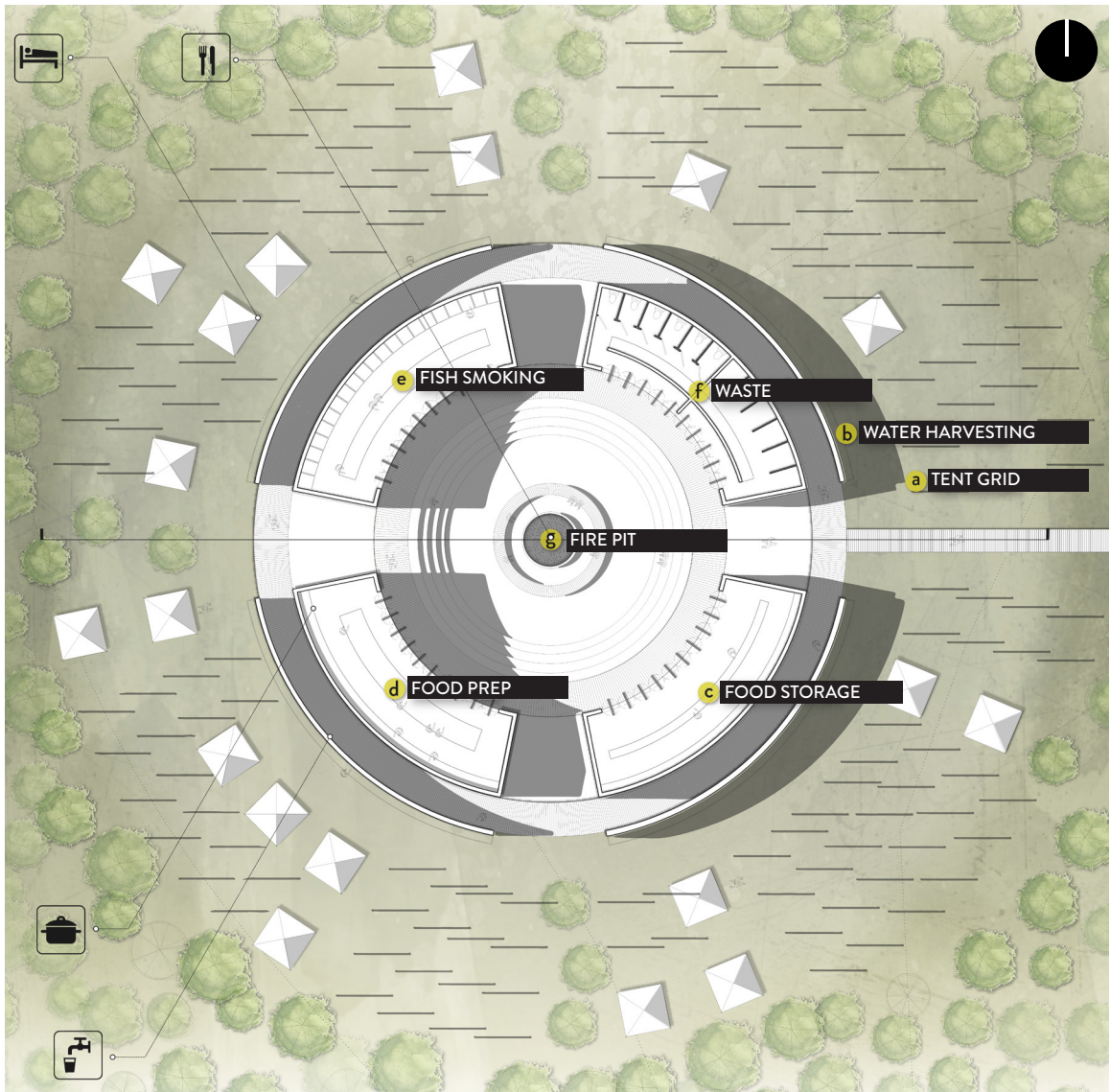a TENT GRID
g FIRE PIT
d FOOD PREP
c FOOD STORAGE

Figure 50. Plan of the campground

Figure 51. Section of the campground

Figure 52. Perspective of the central sunken fire pit and surrounding supporting activity

The design at this site ultimately serves as a gathering place for campers to eat, rest and be protected from the harsh winds and precipitation off the lake. The courtyard buildings are intended to absorb all daily acivity associated with camping - from setting up the campfire to gathering water to preparing meals.

Communal spaces for campers in the park rarely exist, and if they do, they are often found along the highway and accessible only by car. This campground intends to be a 'transition' zone from the crowded communal spaces to the remote independent campsites found in the park interior.

From this point in the route, visitors embark on the third and last leg of the towards the public bathhouse, located five to six hours into the total journey.

Site Three: The Water and the Forest

Bathing has historically been a spiritual act, a pragmatic one, and a recreational one in the park. The Algonquin First Nations used to cleanse their bodies and minds by engaging in sweat lodge ceremonies. Loggers bathed for physical cleanliness, and tourists in the grand hotel era bathed in the lakes and rivers of the park for recreation and enjoyment.

The chosen site holds significance for all three layers of history. It is a site of passage and threshold, from occupied to unoccupied landscape. It acted as a site of spiritual cleansing for the first nations when they moved camps. For the loggers, the site represented moving from their camp into remote forests to log. Lastly, it is the last point of Canoe Lake, where Tom Thomson would leave the comfort of his cabin outpost there and explore the remoteness of the park looking for new sites of inspiration.

The third and last intervention is five to six hours into the canoe journey and is at the location of the last point of Canoe Lake.

SITE 3: BATHING
five to six hours

SITE 2: EATING/SLEEPING
three to four hours

SITE 1: RESTING
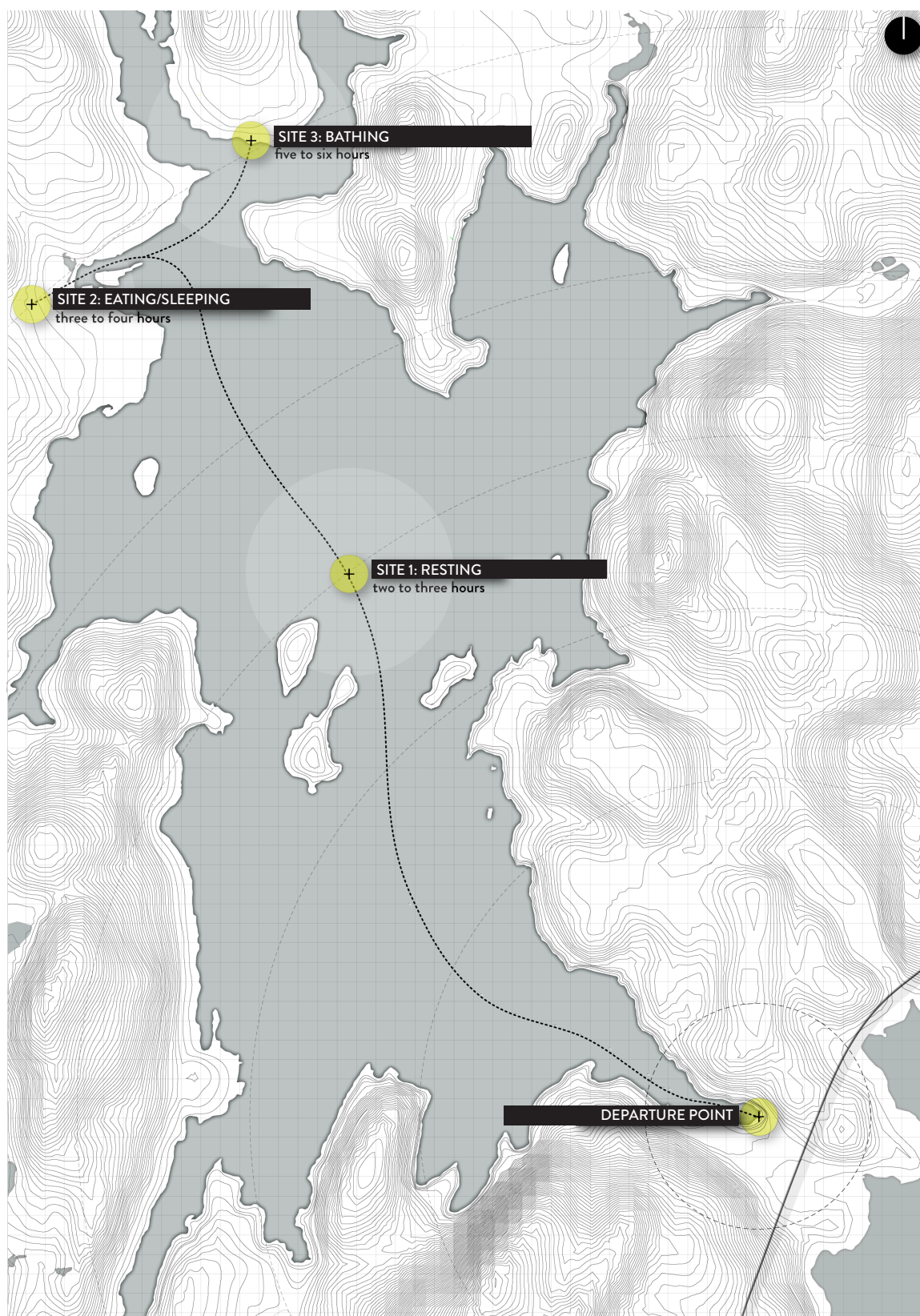two to three hours

DEPARTURE POINT

Figure 53. The third and last site along the route is located four to five hours into the canoe route and will be used as a point for bathing; data from Ontario Metadata Management Tool

The Public Bathouse

Today, this site is the last point of the canoe route before it branches off into 2000km of other routes and often the last point in the park that backcountry campers will see another person for days. It is also the first point of Canoe Lake one will see on their return from their remote journey. Therefore, the program for this site is bathing. From the lake, the 'lantern' structure is seen hovering on the water, acting as a marker for a site for along the route. The bathhouse is accessed off of a short boardwalk and negotiates between the forest and the water, sitting on the edge of the land.

Formal Strategies

The design consists of several private sweat lodges and a public bathhouse. The private act of sweating is located on the periphery and the communal act of bathing in the centre of the design. In between, there is a fire for gathering hot granite rocks to feed the sweat lodges.

Envelope and Structure

The sweat lodges form around the public bathhouse and are small light timber frame structures with an inner fabric shell. The public bath house is also a light timber frame structure that splits into two sections; one section leads directly into the lake water for bathing in the summer and warmer weather. The other section ramps up into a bath inside that overlooks the lake that has just been paddled. This bath is for colder weather or warmer bathing.

Framing and Views

The interior bathhouse, which ramps upwards and looks over all of Canoe Lake, frames the panoramic view of one of Thomson's most iconic paintings of Canoe Lake.
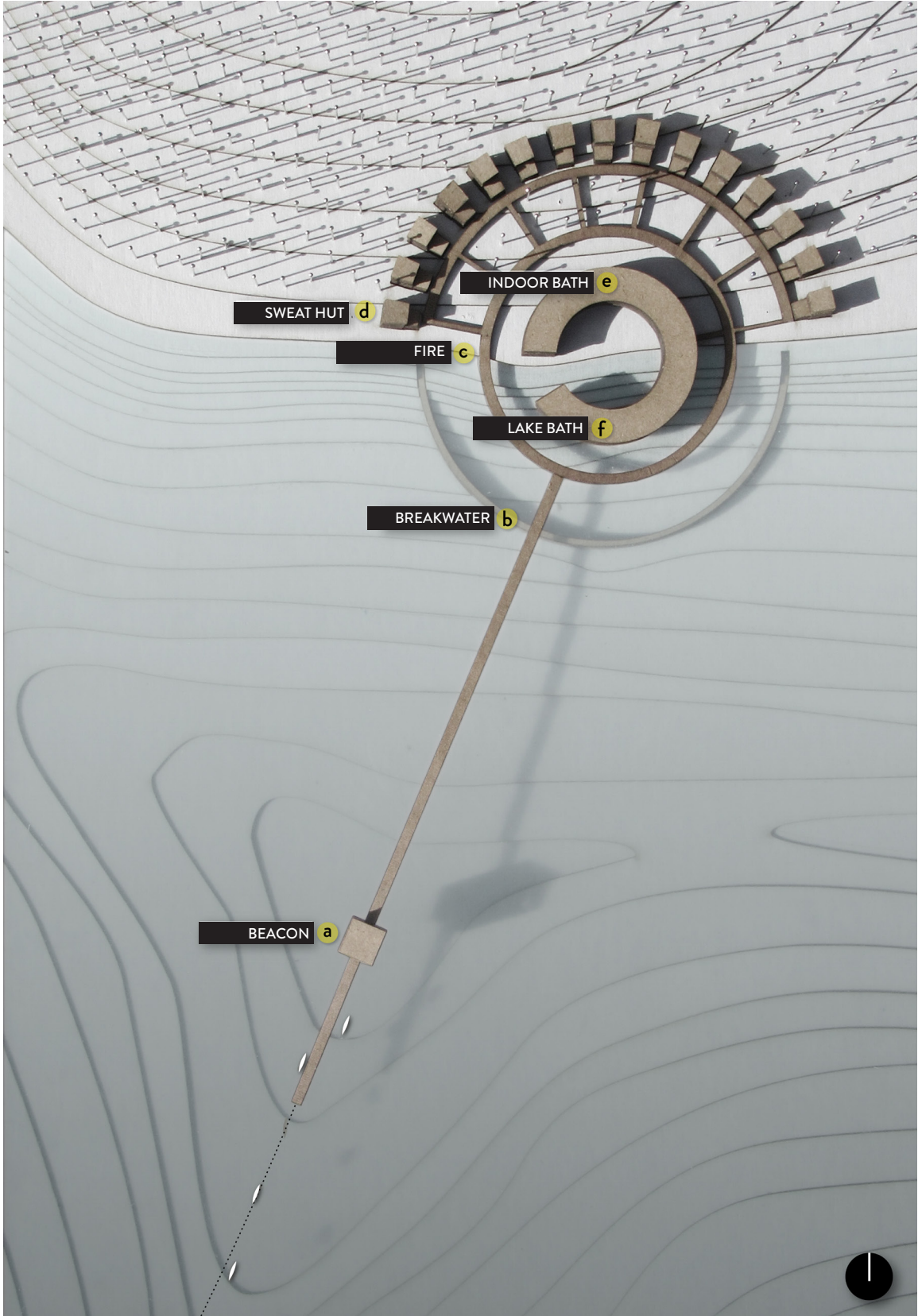
Figure 54. Physical model showing the site plan for the bathhouse

SWEAT
PREPARE
BATHE

● FORMAL LAYOUT

BLACKENED WOOD
ENVELOPE

LIGHT WOOD
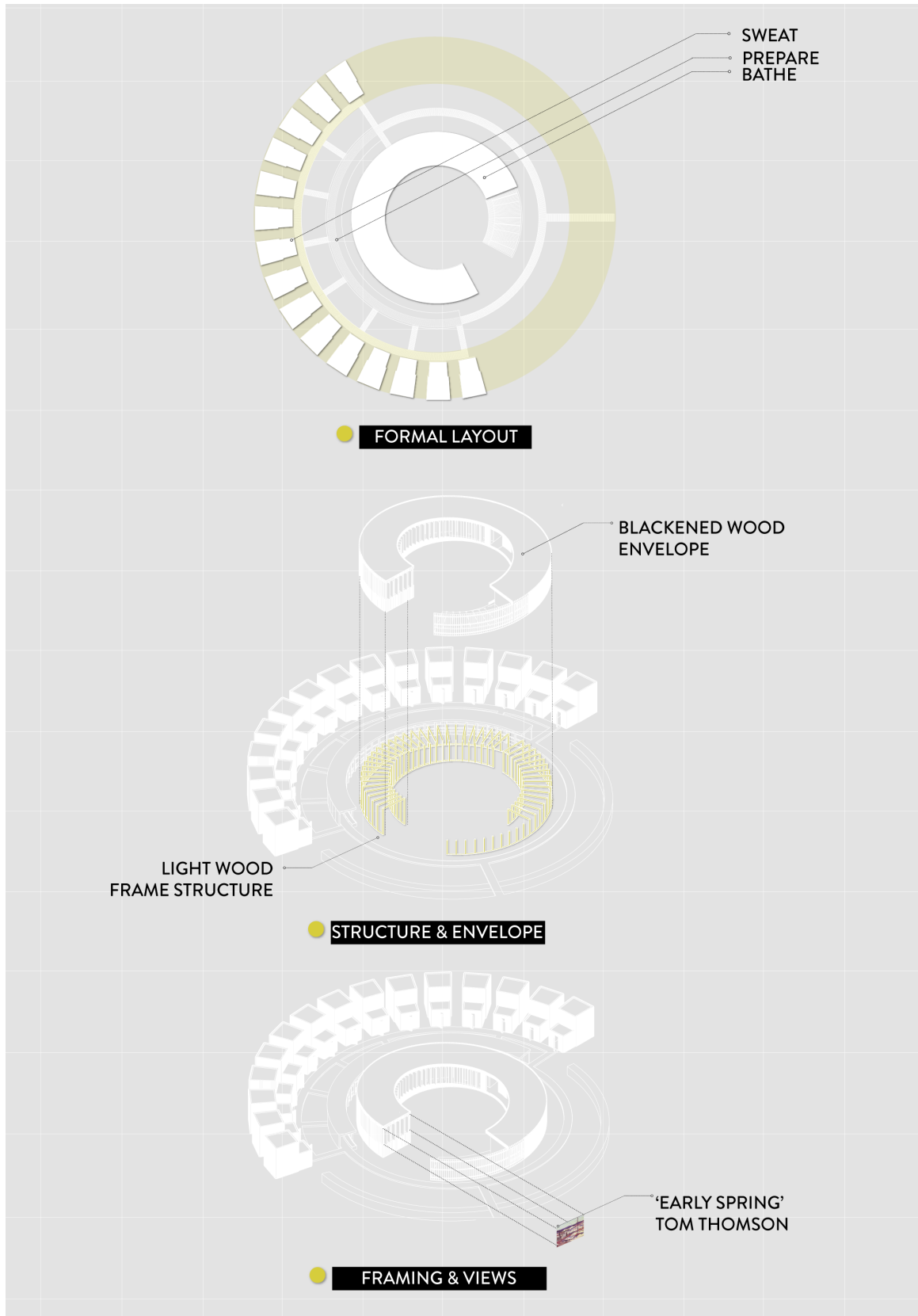FRAME STRUCTURE

● STRUCTURE & ENVELOPE

'EARLY SPRING'
TOM THOMSON

● FRAMING & VIEWS

Figure 55. Diagrams depicting the architectural strategies for the bathhouse

Figure 56. Plan of the bathhouse

The plan labels:

d: CHANGE ROOMS
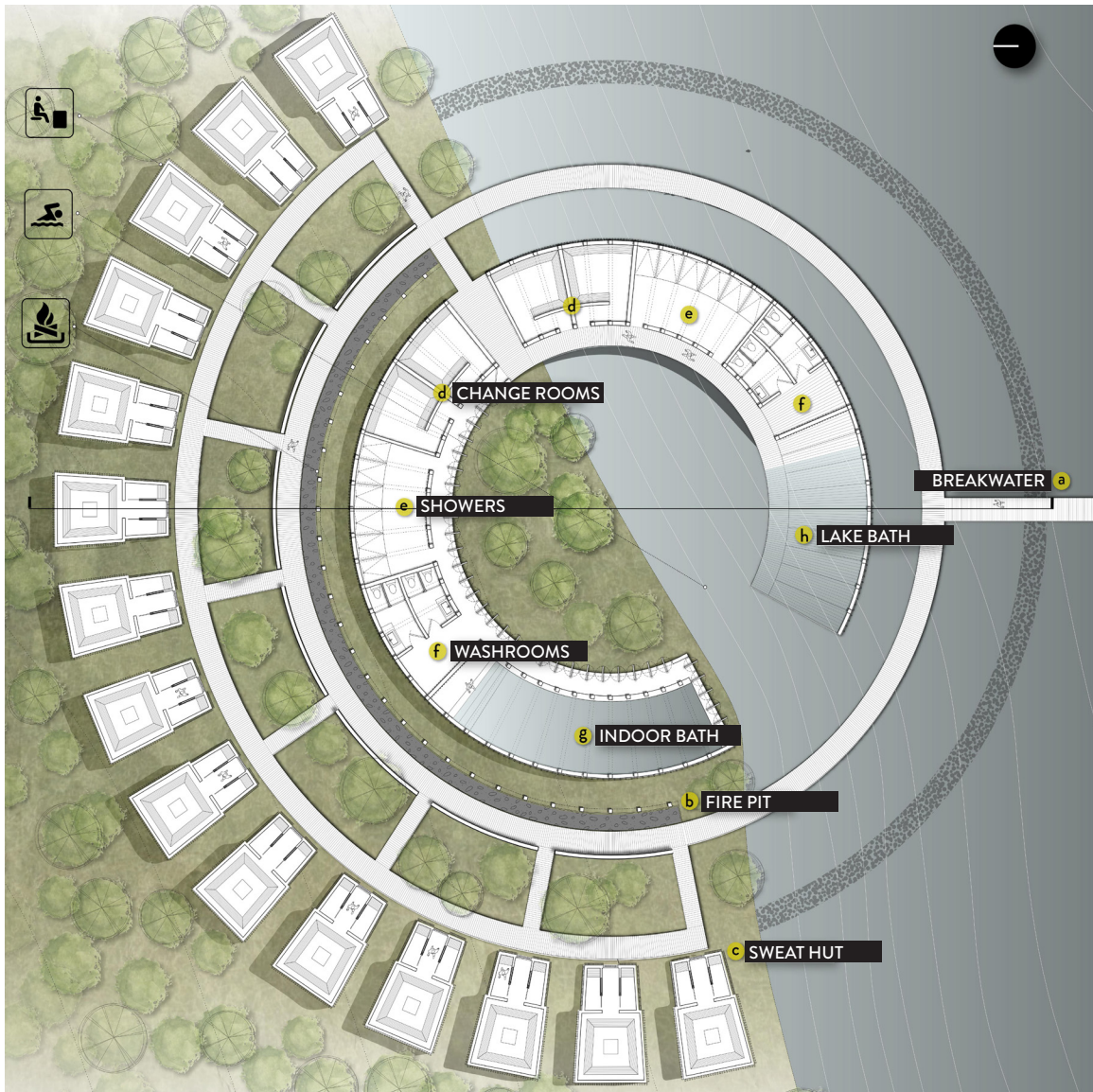e: SHOWERS
f: WASHROOMS
g: INDOOR BATH
b: FIRE PIT
c: SWEAT HUT
a: BREAKWATER
h: LAKE BATH

Figure 57. Section of the bathhouse

Figure 58. Perspective showing the two ends of the bathhouse

 The bathhouse acts as the final design intervention and is intended to cleanse the mind and the body for either returning to the access point or moving further into the park.

All three legs of the the route are now complete. The campers will then either return back to the access point or travel further into the remote forests of the park.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis began with re-evaluating the human place in Canada's wilderness parks. The intent of the thesis was to show a forward thinking park architecture that is not only appropriate to the culture of Algonquin Park, but one that advocates for the importance of cultural sustainability in Canada's parks today.

The design project demonstrates that Wilderness Park architecture and the antithesis of the Visitor or the Interpretive Centre has the potential to become the celebrated meeting place between the old and the new, the past and the future, landscape and human.

The architecture attempts to analyze the human experience within the park context, unveil the human memory of each site, and translate it into an appropriate architectural form for a wilderness park, reflective of the way that we see ourselves in nature today.

While the ideas put forth by this thesis might be used nationally, site specificity, historical park content, and current park uses are essential to shaping the interpretive experience within any wilderness park.

This thesis project is not to be applied as a language [as the language of this design thesis is extremely specific to the park context] to other wilderness parks. Rather, it may be used as a system of reading a naturally significant landscape with a human one, utilizing concepts such as palimpsest. The principles that could be applicable to any canadian park include the dispersal of program, active engagement of landscape, and access to sites by active transportation methods. The recreational activities and history unique to individual parks could be applied to this model to create an interpretive route that is original to each park.

PARKING LOT

TYPICAL DISPLAY OF INFORMATION

GROSS GENERALIZATION OF INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

1 STEP ONE:
DISPERSAL OF PROGRAM

2 STEP TWO:
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF LANDSCAPE

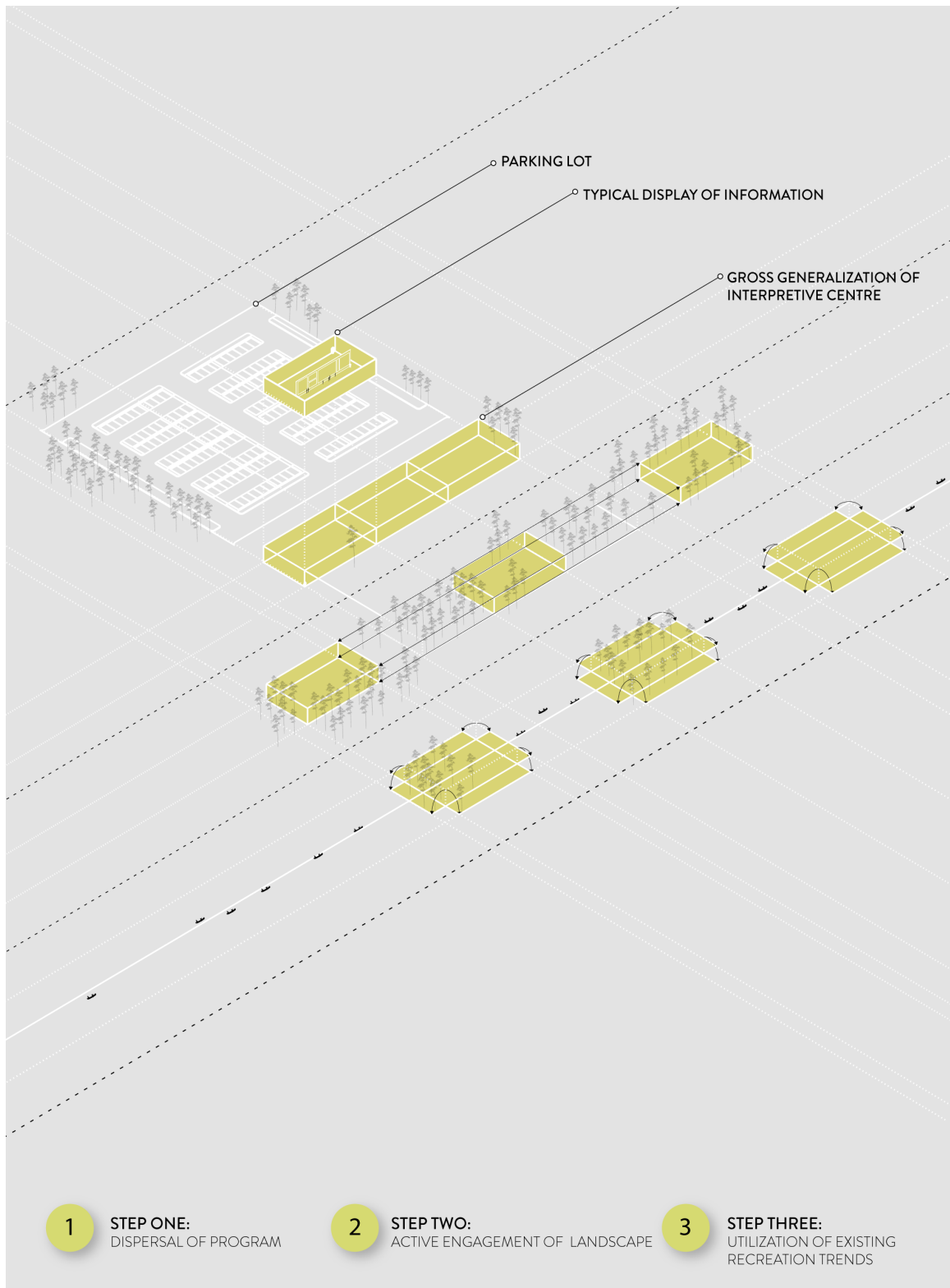3 STEP THREE:
UTILIZATION OF EXISTING RECREATION TRENDS

Figure 59. The principles that could be applicable to any canadian park include the dispersal of program, active engagement of landscape, and access to sites by active transportation methods.

GLACIER
NATIONAL PARK

hiking

PRINCE ALBERT
NATIONAL PARK

kayaking

THOUSAND ISLANDS
NATIONAL PARK

horseback riding

KEJIMKUJIK
NATIONAL PARK

canoeing

GWAII HAANAS
NATIONAL PARK

sailing

BANFF
NATIONAL PARK

snowshoeing

AUYUITTUQ
NATIONAL PARK

dogsledding
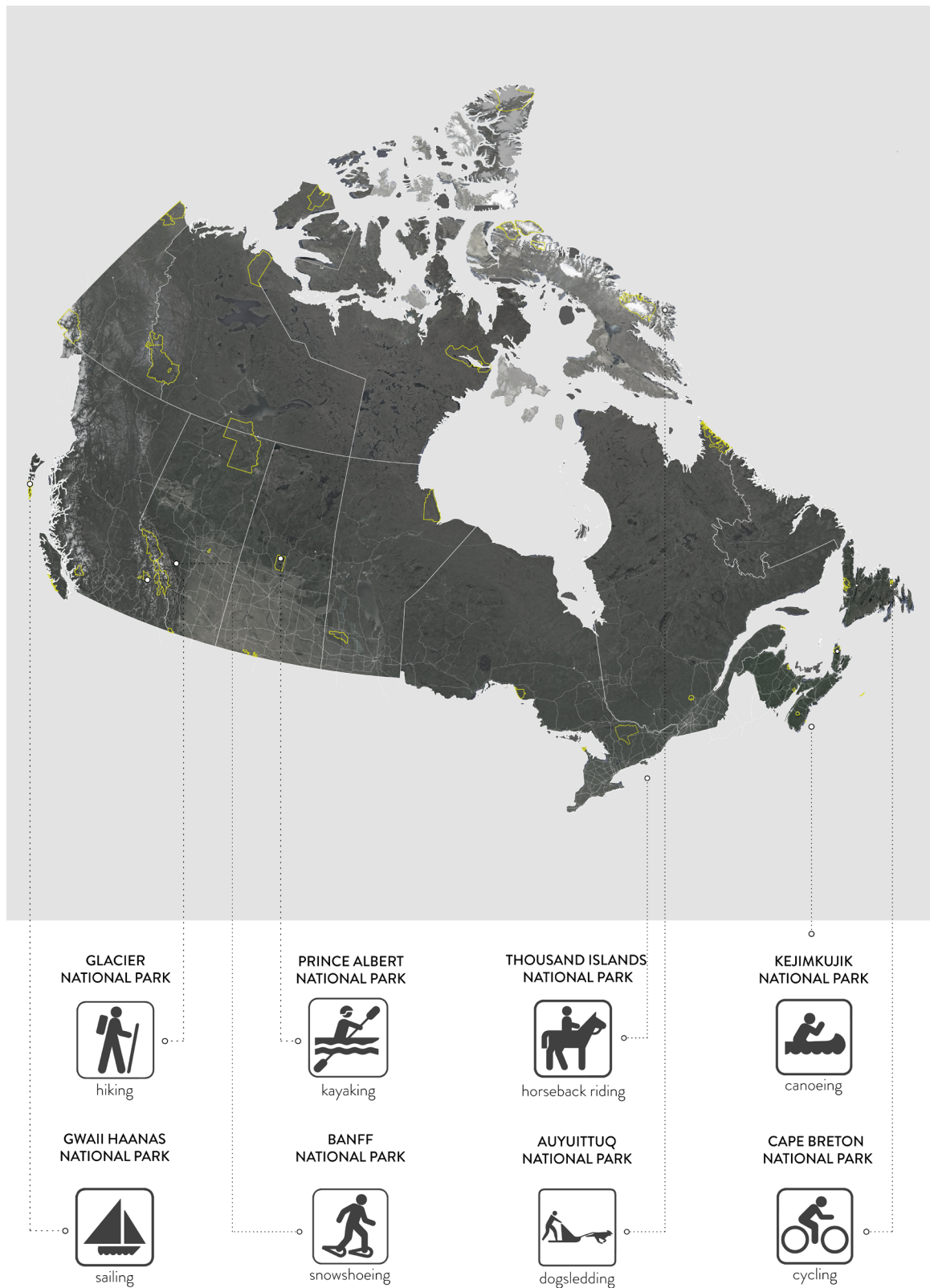
CAPE BRETON
NATIONAL PARK

cycling

Figure 60. The recreational activities and history unique to individual parks could be applied to this model to create an interpretive route that is original to each park; from Google Maps

There are a number of topics raised by the thesis which would benefit from further study. One potential direction for future study I find critical is regenerative design strategies for minimized building impact.

Regenerative design in architecture focuses on conservation and performance of buildings through a focused reduction on the environmental impacts of a building. Further, regenerative design has the potential to positively contribute to a landscape and its flora and fauna. Demonstrating the potential positive contributions architecture could have on a landscape would further push the concept of education within this park context and the interactive interpretive route.

Implementing regenerative design strategies into this thesis would push the research beyond solely educating the visitor on the human history to include the education of the natural preservation strategies of the park.

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