



THE FORKS COMMEMORATIVE PLAZA • WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

THE FORKS COMMEMORATIVE PLAZA

designed by
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commissioned by
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January, 1993

Design for the Forks Commemorative Plaza

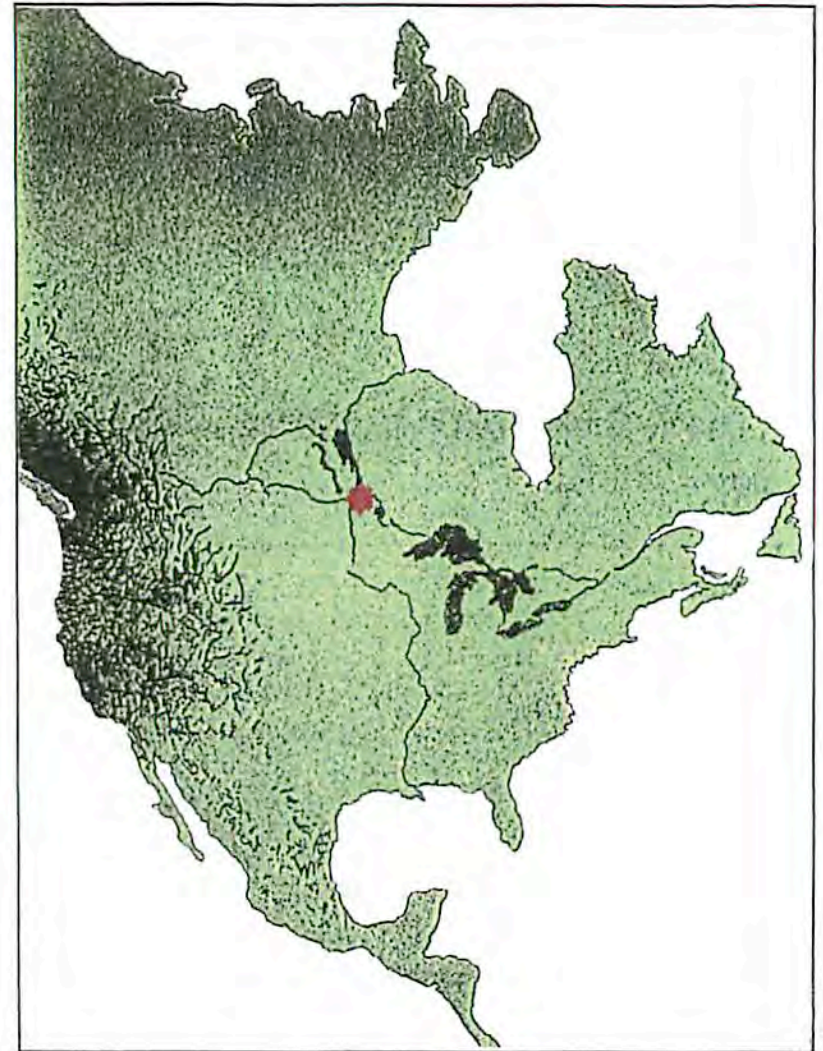
Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colours of the dawn and dusk.

N. Scott Momaday,
The Way to Rainy Mountain (1969)
Published in "Crossings"

The Forks, a legacy of glaciation and thousands of years of human occupation, is probably the most important historic site in Western Canada. Our decisions today regarding its use will say much about current community values and attitudes to future generations of users. The Forks at large and The Forks Plaza in particular should demonstrate high standards of excellence and in a profound way demonstrate the importance we give to all the history of human use of this site.

The Forks Plaza site represents the gravitational heart of "The Forks". Its proximity to the present junction of the two rivers; its proximity to the future south point aboriginal cultural centre; its proximity to the Market and Children's Museum - both important visitor destinations; and its location as the beginning of the Portage overland trail give it special significance within "The Forks".

Looking at the North American Continent, The Forks Plaza site is the junction of water based travel routes that bisect the North American continent in all compass directions; from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson Bay; from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. It is no wonder that the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers has been a meeting place for thousands of years.



The Forks Commemorative Plaza is situated at the heart of North America and the junction of key water routes.

The design challenge for The Forks Plaza is to create a physical entity that gives this site definition and status as a sacred place. What should the physical expression of this important site be? What special characteristics, what symbols and what activities will make the Forks Plaza be and remain, the “heart of The Forks”?

Design Concept

People have gathered regularly at The Forks for at least 9,000 years. Only 250 years ago, 100 years after the Taj Mahal in India was completed, La Verendrye introduced Europe to The Forks and 100 years ago the railroad arrived and technology began to accelerate our separation from the natural world around us. During most of our lives we are buffered from natural forces by technology. Sophisticated transportation, thermostatically controlled heat and air conditioning, food processed and plastic wrapped, floodways and storm drainage systems that deal with almost all rains; these are among a few examples of technical devices that separate us from dynamic nature.

The Forks Plaza project at the heart of The Forks represents an opportunity to:

- remind ourselves and future generations of the long human history at this site;
- put us back in touch with the dynamics and phenomena of the natural forces around us—earth, water, climate, seasonal change, and the solar system.



Preliminary sketch of the Forks Plaza 'naked eye observatory' and earth sculpture.

Proposed Development

Two distinct places would be created: a cobble surfaced plaza for vehicular function and festival activities, and a sacred place that reminds us of the natural forces which control and guide life rhythms.

The plaza will be paved with historic sandstone cobbles which are remnants from early railroad activities at The Forks. It will be a cul-de-sac termination to the historic “Portage Trail”, provide visitor drop-off by bus and car, service to the Children’s Museum & Johnston Terminal, and a large plaza that could be closed to vehicular traffic for special functions such as the annual Children’s Festival.

The sacred place would be located close to the actual junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It would be a space 60 metres in diameter formed by excavating a shallow bowl three metres deep which would remove the fill deposited over the last 100 years and allow us to stand on earth that was walked upon 3,000 years ago. The bowl would be grass lined and at its lowest point would be a stone medallion, geometrically scribed to sunrise and sunsets of the equinox and solstices.

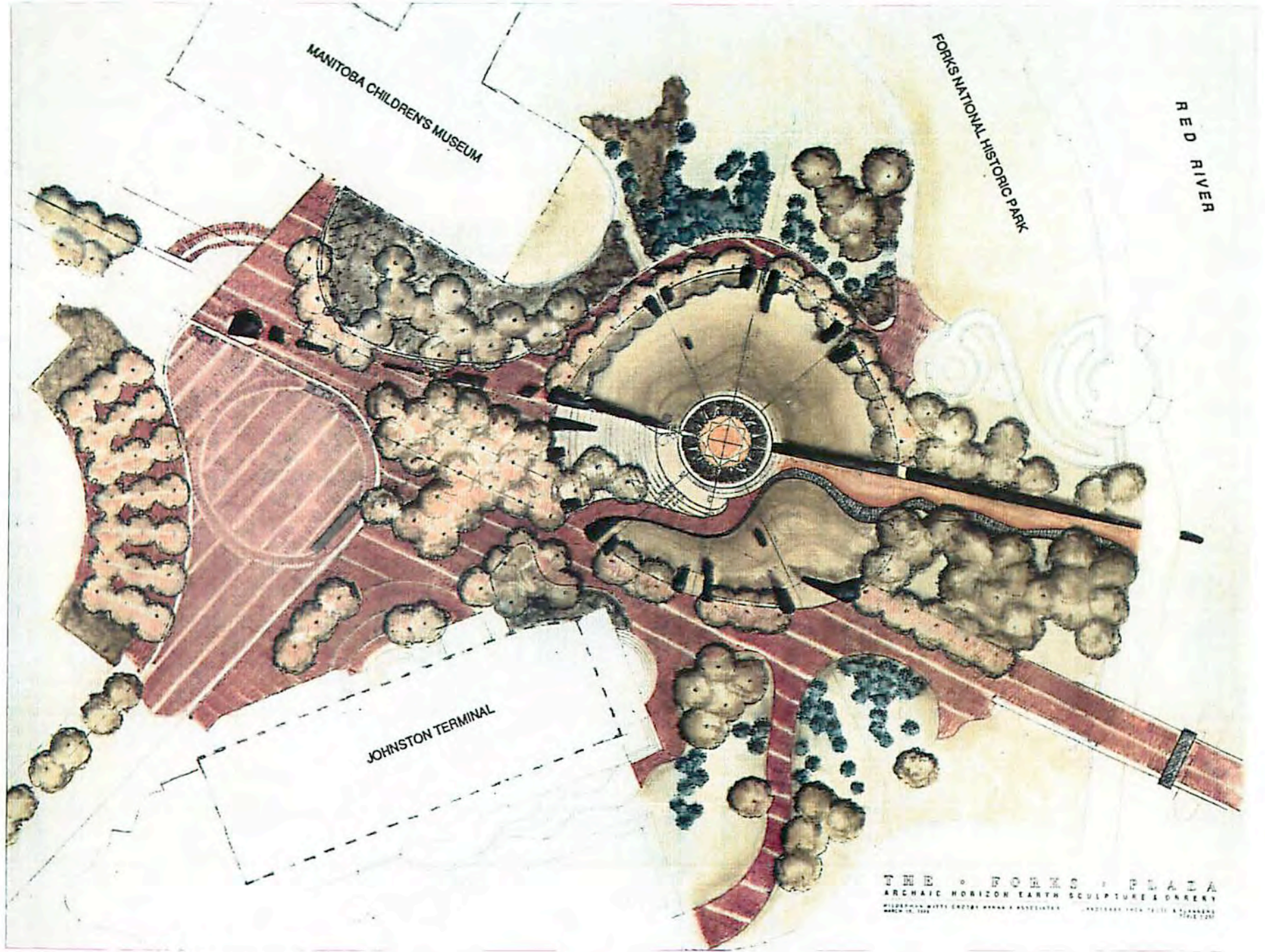
The 15 metre diameter medallion would be surrounded with an annual flower plantation symbolizing the richness and vulnerability of "Mother Earth". Emanating from the medallion would be four search lights which would create a tower of light marking this place from other locations in The Forks and beyond.



Detail of cobblestone paver installation.



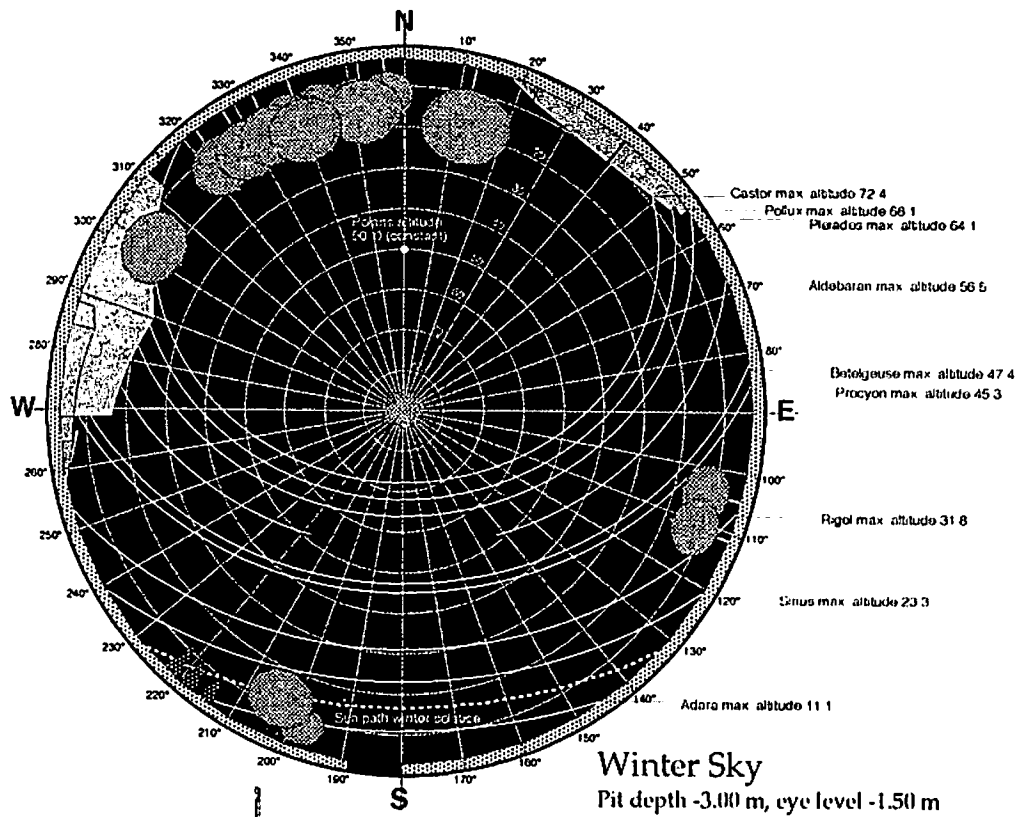
The cobblestone cul-de-sac (under construction) will terminate historic Portage Trail.



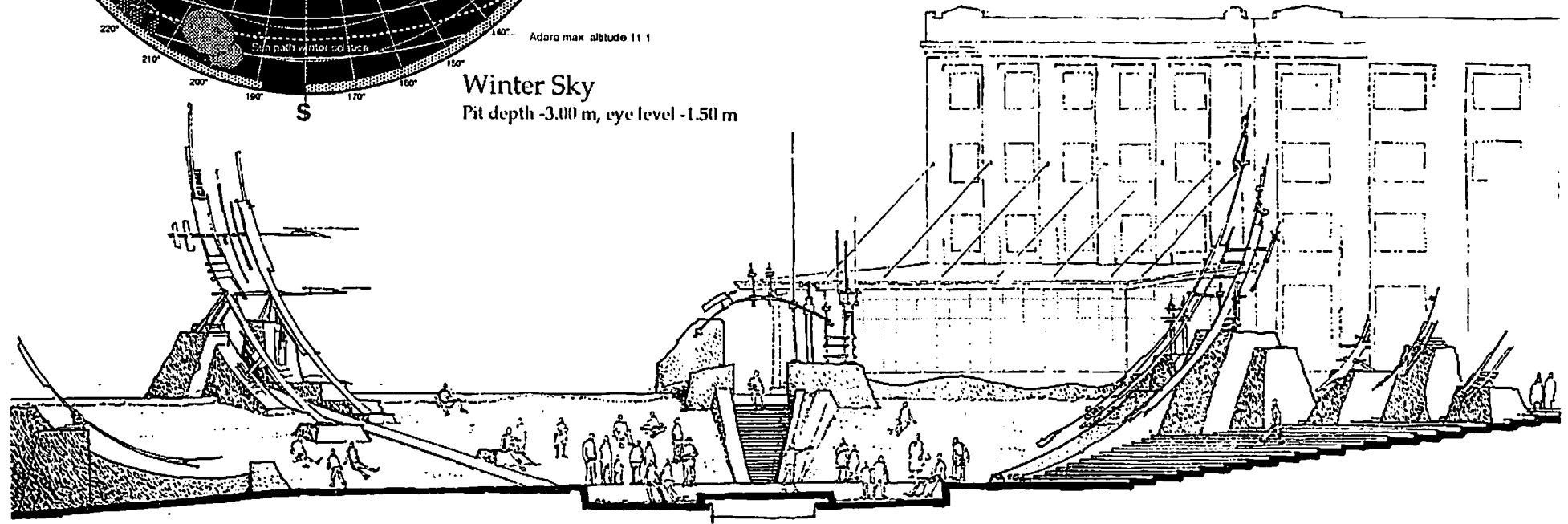
Conceptual site plan for the Forks Commemorative Plaza.

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The perimeter of the bowl would be demarcated with sandstone masonry formations aligned with true north and solstice and equinox sunrises and sunsets. The formations support soaring arches of stainless steel tubing which would serve as sighting devices for naked eye astronomy and crafted to make sound in the wind. These astronomical pointers would also house a high technology sound and light system to be used for the enhancement of performances staged on the central medallion.



Sketch of the ceremonial bowl, showing stone medallion stage and masonry formations with metal armatures used for sighting astronomical events. Inset: Chart showing where the brightest stars in the winter sky rise and set in relation to the perimeter of the ceremonial bowl, the Children's Museum and the Johnston Terminal.



**FORKS PLAZA
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SCALE 1:1000



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View of model looking north along the ramp connection to the riverside promenade.

It is proposed that a trench be constructed through the river embankment on the true north south axis. This sight line would focus on the tip of the "South Point," the exact junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and make the rivers visible from the cobbled plaza. Looking northward up the trench from the river edge promenade a five metre high object directly in front of the entrance to the Children's Museum would be visible. This slice through the river embankment would symbolically and visually tie the water junction of the Red and Assiniboine to the ceremonial bowl and the upland plaza. It would also provide a gently ramped pedestrian connection of the bottom of the bowl to the promenade and in the winter to the skating and ski trails on the river. The bowl in the winter would contain a bonfire and be used as a sheltered open air meeting place.

Conclusion

The ceremonial bowl of no single or obvious function, would be a reminder of our relationship with nature, a place to gather, a place where the poetic side of our natures can be comfortable and where the "little people" who some believe once lived in the riverbanks at The Forks can be talked about and perhaps seen again.