

# A History of Writing-on-Stone NWMP Detachment

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The North West Mounted Police outpost at Writing-on-Stone, Alberta, was not typical of the traditional idea of life in Canada's world-famous police force. The glamour and excitement from the many histories of the Force generally prove to be little more than figments of an over-fertile imagination when compared with the boredom, isolation and tedious hard work which were the norm for this small border detachment. Altruistic objectives, such as the desire to bring law, order and justice to the wilds of the Canadian West, may have moved the men who served at Writing-on-Stone to join the Force, but tracking down the occasional horse thief or serving as watchman for a herd of mange-infested cattle hardly fulfilled these objectives.

Interest in the work and undying loyalty was not the order of the day for this remote outpost. The slogan "They always get their man", is an ironic one applied to life at outposts such as Writing-on-Stone. Judging

from the police records, the Mounties had as much trouble keeping their own men in tow as tracking down wanted criminals.

This is not to downgrade the remarkable success of the NWMP in policing the expanses of the Canadian prairies. The task was formidable, and with the number of men available, the results were nothing less than astonishing. Crimes which in the United States were a common occurrence such as stagecoach robbery, train robbery and the like, were relatively unknown north of the border.

The police had a first-rate record in tracking down murderers, horse thieves, and those who attempted to circumvent the prohibition laws, the latter despite the gross unpopularity of the prohibition legislature. Yet for the men stationed at Writing-on-Stone, the pursuit of dangerous criminals and other such activities, which we associate with life in the NWMP, were the exception rather than the rule.

The daily routine at the outpost, the weekly patrols, the quarantine duty, and customs service only infrequently interrupted by sallies to recapture an escaped convict, may be best described as mundane. The work of constables and non-commissioned officers at Writing-on-Stone was important, but under no circumstances could it be considered either exciting or unduly challenging. The