

The current building was once the Western Heritage Centre, and is now the Cochrane RancheHouse, home to Town of Cochrane Administrative Offices, a 209-seat theatre and banquet/meeting facilities for two to 200 guests. The "Trust" mural is located in the foyer and can be viewed weekdays.

The Bert Sheppard Stockmen's Memorial Foundation Library and Archives is also located in the facility. The Library and Archives collects and preserves the history of western ranching and livestock industry. They also have a large collection of historical artefacts and displays, including photos, saddles, bronzes and art, and a player piano.

### 8. Coulee Slopes

The bottom of the coulee is a good place to look at the adjacent slopes and their vegetation. The north-facing slope is shaded for much of the year and is cooler and moister than the opposite slope. It is covered with large stands of spruce and aspen with a handful of Douglas Fir trees. By contrast, the south-facing slope gets direct sunlight all day. It is very hot — almost desert-like — with scrub brush and prairie grasses.

### 9. Grandfather Tree

This white spruce tree is estimated to be over 300 years old and would already have been fully grown at the time of the Cochrane Ranche. Its large root system grows down to reach water as well as up to support the weight of the tree. Notice the lack of undergrowth nearby: it's too shady and the soil is too acidic for local plants to grow.

Please do not climb on and around the roots. This contributes to soil erosion which may eventually kill the tree.

### 10. Big Hill Creek

The meandering Big Hill Creek provides shelter, food and protection for wildlife. The surrounding area of the creek — the riparian zone — links water with vegetation.

The riparian zone is very fragile and often mismanaged by those who border it. Fish and wildlife rely on riparian zones for part or all of their life spans, yet these areas represent just two percent of the land mass of Canada. The Cochrane Ranche is involved in an ongoing program to return the creek to its natural, healthy state.

### 11. Wolf Willow

Though commonly called wolf willow, this plant species is not a willow at all — it belongs to the Elaeagnaceae (Oleaster) family and is related to thorny and Canada buffaloberry (Shepherdia).

Wolf willow has a partnership nitrogen fixing bacteria in root nodules which enrich the soil. It does not form a closed canopy and competes little with surrounding vegetation.

Wolf willow's silvery sheen is common throughout the prairies on coulees, cutbanks and hillsides. When winter comes and the leaves fall off, the silver berries stand out against the white snow and bright blue prairie skies. Wolf willow berries were used by the Blackfoot Nation: the berries were boiled to remove the flesh and the pointed nutlets strung onto necklaces or used to decorate the fringes on clothing. Each seed is dark brown with yellow stripes. The bark was used to make strong fibre baskets useful for collecting berries.

### 12. Gilbert Residence

The small red house on the hill is known as the Gilbert Residence, after the last family that ranched this property. In 1949, O.N. Gilbert purchased 2,000 acres of land and grazed about 250 cow-calf pairs. The original blacksmith shop was located just below the house. In 1979, the government of Alberta bought 150 acres, including the residence, to establish the Cochrane Ranche Provincial Historic Site.

This building is currently used by Town of Cochrane Recreation, Culture and the Arts for community programs.

### 13. Cochrane Historical Museum

The Cochrane Historical Museum opened in May 2015 and is dedicated to telling the history of the Town of Cochrane.

The building was built in 1909 and is faced with brick from the Collins' Brickyard, which was located on the site of the Cochrane Ranche. Along with the brickyard, many other early arrivals to the area set up businesses to supply the nearby ranches and farms.

### Discover the Ranche

Tours, camps and other interpretive programs are offered from mid-May to early September. Cabin demonstrations take place June to September.

View the schedule at [cochrane.ca/Discover](http://cochrane.ca/Discover) or call 403-851-2534 for more information.



### Cochrane Ranche

In 1881, Senator Matthew Cochrane was granted the first of the huge western grazing leases by the federal government. The site for his Ranche headquarters lay below the Big Hill on a creek above the Bow River, about 35 km west of Fort Calgary.

The region usually provided excellent year-round grazing, as warm chinook winds regularly melted the snows and exposed the highly nutritious prairie grasses, ideal for animal forage. The spring-fed creek and nearby Bow River provided ample fresh water for stock watering.

Despite these advantages, hard luck dogged the Ranche. Terrible winter conditions and questionable management decisions resulted in huge stock losses over the winters of 1881 and 1882. The eastern shareholders decided to move the cattle to a second lease south of Fort Macleod.

New ranchers brought sheep and horses, but also failed to make a profit. Later, a dairy operation experienced considerably more success. Ultimately, the hard lessons learned on the Cochrane Ranche served to guide others in establishing a successful beef industry in Alberta.

### Town of Cochrane

The Town of Cochrane began as the budding settlement along the railway line, known as Mitford, not far to the west of the town's present location. The residents literally picked up and moved their buildings and belongings when the train station was relocated.

The town was named after Ranche owner Senator Matthew Cochrane. In 1903, Cochrane was officially incorporated and has grown to a population of 23,084 today.

### Cochrane Ranche Brand

The large "C" was the distinctive symbol used on the Cochrane Ranche to brand the livestock. Each ranch chose a unique letter or symbol to distinguish its livestock from those of the neighbouring ranches; 2015 marks 134 years since this brand was first used.



# Discover the RANCHE

Where **culture, nature and history** play.

## TRAIL GUIDE

[www.cochrane.ca/Discover](http://www.cochrane.ca/Discover)

[www.cochrane.ca/Discover](http://www.cochrane.ca/Discover)

cochrane  
HOW THE WEST IS NOW



cochrane  
HOW THE WEST IS NOW



# Cochrane Ranche Walking Trail

Welcome to the Cochrane Ranche Historic Site. We hope you enjoy your visit.

This Trail Guide directs you on a self-guided walking tour. The tour requires light hiking ability and will take approximately one hour to complete. Look for the numbered posts that correspond to the stops along the trail.



- 1 Westerson Cabin
- 2 The Corral
- 3 Interpretive Murals, Residence & Bunkhouse
- 4 Men of Vision Statue
- 5 Grasslands
- 6 Sandstone
- 7 Shelly Quarry
- 8 Coulee Slopes
- 9 Grandfather Tree
- 10 Big Hill Creek
- 11 Wolf Willow
- 12 Gilbert Residence
- 13 Cochrane Historical Museum

## 1. Westerson Cabin

This cabin was built in the mid-1920s and was moved here from its original location close to downtown Cochrane.



This bronze statue commemorates all the pioneer ranchers and cowboys of the West, the early “men of vision,” who, along with school teachers, missionaries and pioneer women, came to Alberta with a dream and launched the cattle ranching industry still vital to the province today.

## Commemorative Cairn

This monument was unveiled in 2013 by Cochrane Historical & Archival Preservation Society (CHAPS) to commemorate the local businesses that operated here after the Cochrane Ranche. The Collins Brickyard, Shelley Stone Quarry, Cochrane Creamery, Beynon-Davies Dairy Farm and Gilbert Ranches were all important in building and sustaining this community.



The statue was created by self-taught sculptor Malcolm (Mac) Mackenzie (1932- 2002), who lived in the area for most of his life and worked on many local ranches and trail ride operations. At one and a half scale and weighing 3600 lbs, the statue was cast in England, shipped in three pieces and assembled here in 1979.

## 2. The Corral

This reconstructed 1880s corral is the type of enclosure that would have been used on the Cochrane Ranche. The center square and gates were used to squeeze in the animals for branding and vet inspections. The windmill-like section at the side is called a windlass; cowboys used the windlass to lift carcasses for butchering. Its design and mechanical advantage enabled one cowboy to lift heavy weights.



## 5. Grasslands

Stop for a moment and glance around. It may not seem important at first, but these grasslands are the reason the foothills were settled by ranchers.

Native grasses such as rough fescue — the predominant bunch grass you see — are crucial because they retain nutrient value in winter and are excellent winter forage for livestock.

Unfortunately, much of our native grasslands are being crowded out by more vigorous invader species from Europe, cash crops and rural community development. Please help us protect this rare and precious remnant.

The post in the center of the rear corral is called a snubbing post. When cowboys first trained and saddled their horses, they tied them to this post.

## 3. Interpretive Murals, Residence and Bunkhouse

The images restored by Stan Phelps of the Alberta College of Art illustrate the history of the Cochrane Ranche.

The footprints of the Cochrane Ranche manager’s residence and the cowboys’ bunkhouse are laid out here, in their original locations.

In later years, the headquarters’ site was used for many other purposes, such as the Collins Brickyard established in 1902. Clay was dug from pits and the bricks were dried in kilns built along the south fence you see today. The distinctive yellow bricks can be seen in the St. Andrews United Church on First Street and a few other buildings in Cochrane.

## 6. Sandstone

The bedrock here is sandstone and shale formed 50 to 60 million years ago. Streams flowing north from the Waterton Lakes area along the eastern slope deposited sand and mud that hardened into sandstone and shale.

The small cliffs you see are made of sandstone, a rock less resistant to erosion than shale.

Please stay away from the edge of the sandstone outcroppings.



In 1919, the Beynon-Davies dairy farm began operations here. It was a very successful farm that survived the Depression of the 1930s, partly because of its high level of self-sufficiency. The fieldstone foundation dairy barn sat below the Men of Vision Statue, east of the encampment.

## 7. Shelly Quarry

The large wooden structure here is located on the site of the Shelly Quarry, established in 1910. The quarry supplied construction-grade sandstone to many government building sites in Calgary between 1908 and 1912. Through World War I, the quarry only operated sporadically, eventually closing after the war.



## 4. Men of Vision Statue

The Men of Vision statue shows an older, unnamed cowboy looking out over the bluff at his ideal spot for a ranch.