



BYWAY LENGTH: 250 MILES

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS AND ATTRACTING VISITORS



IN NEW YORK AND VERMONT, EIGHT COUNTIES AND FIFTY-FOUR TOWNS WITH A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO LAKE CHAMPLAIN WORKED TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL IDENTITY TO PROMOTE THE AREA AS A SINGLE DESTINATION.

PROJECT: Lake Champlain Byways Interpretive Projects

BYWAY: Lake Champlain Byways

STATES: New York and Vermont

STARTED: 1997

COMPLETED: 2000

TOTAL COST: \$660,000

STATE SHARE: \$66,000

LOCAL SHARE: \$55,000

SCENIC BYWAY PLANNING GRANT: \$528,000

PRIMARY CONTACT: Janet Kennedy,
Byways Coordinator
Adirondack North Country Association
814 Bridge Road
Crowns Point, NY 12928
Phone: 518-597-9660
Fax: 518-597-9661
anca@cptelco.net

THE CHAMPLAIN TRAIL SCENIC BYWAY runs along one of the most popular attractions in Upstate New York and Northern Vermont: Lake Champlain. The Lake's unique charm is captured in its impressive military history, compact villages, working landscapes and great opportunities for recreation and sightseeing. Surrounding the one hundred twenty-one mile lake, the Champlain Trail features miles of sandy beaches, quaint historic villages and stunning views of the Adirondack Mountains in New York and Green Mountains of Vermont.



PROJECT FEATURES:

Comprehensive, grassroots approach to establishing a regional identity and developing a bi-state partnership for a two hundred and fifty mile byway corridor management plan, including:

- A product-oriented approach to developing the plan created several interpretive products that were immediately useable,
- Community-by-community outreach for forming a unified vision – used a video for local officials and organizations introducing what a byway is all about,
- A broad-based, locally developed corridor management plan – lays out a unifying vision for the Lake Champlain Basin and the byway as a single destination,
- *The Lake Champlain Wayside Exhibit Manual* – designed to help local groups develop interpretive signs that follow a format and presentation shared throughout the region, and
- A multi-modal approach – unifies and connects the region. Initiatives include Lake Champlain Bikeways, Lake Champlain Walkways, the Showcase of Agriculture and the Lake Champlain Birding Trail.

What Happened

In 1997, eight counties in New York and Vermont began a joint planning project, Lake Champlain Byways, to study the feasibility of developing a two hundred and fifty-mile bi-state route surrounding America's sixth largest freshwater lake. The work of the corridor management plan (CMP) focused on coordinating existing activities to establish a regional identity and develop a partnership approach to unify the Lake as a region.

Integral to the success of the project was the involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure local support and commitment to implement the plan. The project was overseen by the Byways Steering Committee that met to coordinate activities between agencies, serve an advisory role to the counties for policy and program development and provide technical assistance as required. In each of the counties surrounding the Lake, Local Advisory Committees (LACs) were established to develop the vision, goals and objectives for the plan.

At the beginning of the project, several local communities expressed their concern that the byway plan would add to the regulatory control of private lands. Rather than rely on land use policies and regulations, an education and incentive-based approach was used to steward and promote the region's historic, natural, cultural, recreational and working landscape resources.

To create a viable plan, small, locally initiated projects were used as a catalyst for regional coordination. Each of the LACs was responsible for the development of their county's byway product, program, and policy development. This allowed for a great deal of control while expanding regional interaction and opportunities for coordination.

PARTNERS

- New York State Scenic Byways Program
- Vermont State Scenic Byway Program
- Lake Champlain Basin Program
- Lake Placid/Essex County Visitor Bureau
- Lake Champlain Birding Trail
- Vermont Morgan Horse Association
- National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program

IMPORTANT PEOPLE

- Ronald Ofner
- Maja Smith
- Mary Jeanne Packer
- Anne Brown
- Jennifer Waite
- Karl Beard
- David Fasser
- Matthew Langham
- Janet Kennedy

The key strategy that resulted from the planning process was the promotion of a network of multi-modal transportation routes for residents and visitors to experience the region. Routes for biking, walking and boating from village to village would merge transportation and recreation. These slower modes of travel coupled with interpretation would provide a meaningful experience for residents and visitors by increasing access to local businesses and showcasing local culture and heritage. Promoting alternative means of travel would also have the added benefit of reducing congestion on the major roadways.

In an effort to integrate the region's resources into a unified story, the resources identified at the local level were woven together to create an integrated theme for the region. These themes provide a framework for an interpretive plan, which is reflected in the byway's interpretive brochures and signs. Collectively known as "The Four Lives of Lake Champlain," the themes help communities place their unique stories in a broader

context designed to promote the Lake as a single destination. Lake Champlain Bikeways, Lake Champlain Walkways, the Lake Champlain Birding Trail, the Showcase of Agriculture and the Lake Champlain Wayside Exhibits Manual are all projects that resulted from the planning process. Each was designed to provide residents and visitors information on and access to the byway's diverse natural, cultural, recreational, and agricultural resources.

The success of the Lake Champlain Byways Project stems from the extensive participation of numerous individuals and local communities. It is an outstanding example of a grassroots planning process that has established a locally managed partnership to implement the actions.

— Janet Kennedy, Adirondack North Country Association

The Lake Champlain Bikeways interpretive theme loops provide visitors an opportunity to learn about the history of the area while traversing the landscape that shaped the lives of the people that live in the region. The principal three hundred and fifty-mile route encircles Lake Champlain traveling through Vermont, New York and Quebec. Fifty-seven theme loops in Vermont and New York have been identified for interpretation. Of these loops, twenty-four have been interpreted and included in the Lake Champlain Bikeways brochures. As a partner in the planning process, Lake Champlain Bikeways worked closely with local communities and the LACs to confirm the location of the principal route. Once established, they worked to identify, evaluate and interpret the theme loops that link the natural, cultural, agricultural, and historic resources of the region, and help tell its story. Lake Champlain Bikeways maintains a web

site (www.lakeplacid.com/bikeways) and a clearinghouse to provide information to visitors through a partnership with the Lake Placid-Essex County Visitor's Bureau.

Lake Champlain Walkways is a new initiative built on the success of the Bikeways project. In its first year of activity, it sponsored "Walking Weekend" featuring guided walks and hikes of varying lengths to highlight unique places in the Champlain Valley and generate awareness and support for the project. Lake Champlain Walkways has already proven to be a great success, and a brochure *Thirty-Six Walks in the Lake Champlain Region* is currently in production. The brochure identifies local hikes and walks, complete with maps and information on interpretive opportunities. The brochure will be used by local innkeepers to showcase the resources of the region.

Historians, tourism representatives, planners and other stakeholders interested in creating outdoor wayside exhibits have long recognized the need for unified standards and guidelines for the Champlain Valley. Addressing this need, the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) in cooperation with Lake Champlain Byways and the Chittenden County Region Planning Commission have developed a design manual for use by organizations and municipalities in the Champlain Valley. The Lake Champlain Wayside Exhibit Manual addresses specific guidelines to successfully plan, design, fabricate, install, and maintain wayside exhibits. With graphic designers on staff, the LCBP will design exhibits free of charge using text and images provided by interested organizations. The manual is available online at www.byways.org.

The working lands of farming and forestry create the dramatic vistas that are found throughout the Lake Champlain region. Landowners who steward these lands worked with the byway project to develop ways to keep farming viable, and therefore the views maintained. One of the incentive and education-based approaches for this project is the Showcase of Agriculture. This event is part of an ag-tourism initiative designed to have visitors learn more about agriculture in the region and promote the purchase of locally produced products. It's a day full of fun with raffles, music and hands on events to educate and delight residents and visitors alike.

The Lake Champlain Birding Trail is an initiative that provides visitor interpretation and access to key birding sites, while protecting sensitive natural habitats. The Birding Trail is a highway-based route that unifies and connects approximately sixty birding sites along the Lake's shoreline and uplands in Vermont and New York into a cohesive and marketable unit.

Many of the sites along the trail are areas that already provide public access in a manner designed to reduce resource damage. At several of the locations, site assessments have been conducted to evaluate potential impacts to species and habitats and recommendations have been made for resource protection. Interpretive signs and a brochure have been developed to enhance the visitor experience and help protect the species that inhabit the sites. Information about the Lake Champlain Birding Trail is available to visitors through their web site at www.lakechamplainbirding.org.

One of the most valuable tools to come out of the project was a short video documenting the planning process and future strategies for implementation. A local PBS station produced the video after being involved in a Local Advisory Committee and becoming excited about the project. Initially intended to bring new people up-to-speed with the project, the video has proven invaluable in soliciting support and funding. Most importantly though, it has been made available to byway planning projects throughout the country to demonstrate the approach used in this grassroots byway project.

Partners

The Lake Champlain Byways interpretive theme loops and signage system for the Bikeways, Walkways, Showcase of Agriculture and Birding Trail initiatives are the direct result of the creativity and involvement that occurred at the local level. The grassroots structure of the planning process and product-oriented approach of the project provided a framework for creative solutions. The challenges posed by a two-state, two-nation region with no prior history of regional identity development and marketing were considerable. The success of this project is a result of the commitment of the countless individuals and organizations involved. Already the project has expanded funding sources and the partnerships continue to grow.

Two significant partnerships demonstrate the success of the multi-modal/interpretive approach to the byway:

In addition to playing an important role in the Lake Champlain Byways planning process and developing the bike route around the Lake, Lake Champlain Bikeways has also taken the lead in



promoting the Champlain region as an international bicycling destination. This has proven to be an excellent opportunity to solicit the involvement of Canada in the Lake Champlain Byways project. An informal agreement between Velo Quebec and Lake Champlain Bikeways provides a structure for future grass roots planning and cooperative ventures. To promote use of the Bikeways, Lake Champlain Bikeways, Velo Quebec and Amtrak have entered into a cooperative marketing effort. To make it easy for visitors from New York City and Montreal to bring their own bikes to the region, Amtrak has outfitted its Adirondak line with bike racks. To promote the program, bi-lingual rack cards have been developed that describe the initiative and provide route information. These cards are available at stations and in the seat backs on that line.

The Lake Placid/Essex County Visitor's Bureau is currently working with the New York State Crown Point State Historic Site, Essex County Planning Department and the Adirondak North County Association to design and construct a historic replica sailing ferry to cross Lake Champlain at Crown Point, New York. The beautiful, but narrow, Crown Point Bridge spans this crossing, but it is very difficult for pedestrians and bicycles to use. In 1998, through New York Governor Pataki's Lake Champlain/Lake George Waterfront Revitalization Initiative, funds were provided to design and construct a replica historic sailing ferry. The ferry is scheduled to begin operation in the Fall of 2002, and will not only provide users of the Bikeways and Walkways an alternative to the bridge, but provide new access to the "Lake Champlain Experience."

Primary Lesson Learned

BUILD SUPPORT FROM THE BEGINNING. A commitment to grassroots involvement is crucial when developing and implementing byway initiatives to reduce perceived fears about byway designation and:

- Generate interest and spark imagination and creativity,
- Provide a framework for inviting contributions from many stakeholders,
- Promote ownership and identified roles for the management of the region's resources, and
- Facilitate open communication to help unify the region.

