

CASE STUDY

the ROAD BECKONS

BEST PRACTICES FOR BYWAYS

CREATING AWARENESS AND EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

GREAT RIVER ROAD CELEBRATION TOUR

Arkansas



The Great River Road travels 362 miles across the Arkansas Delta. It's an area that was shaped and changed first by the Mississippi River and then by the many settlers who came to tame the land.

To announce the road's designation as a national scenic byway, byway supporters pulled out all the stops to stage a 3-day celebration tour in 18 towns along the route. Special dedication events were held in each community involving local citizens, public officials, media representatives, and the traveling byway contingency. The tour provided the perfect means to thank committed supporters, reach out to new partners and create awareness for the byway. The release of a new visitor's guide and recent tourism statistics also were highlighted to illustrate how natural and cultural resources can, with proper stewardship, become economic catalysts for communities.

WINNING ELEMENTS:

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE

SUCCESS. Timing the event to coincide with the national announcement was important to maximize excitement and momentum. Newly designated byways were informed only a few days before the June designation event which necessitated quick thinking. Detailed planning of the event began June 14—the day after the national announcement. Just three weeks later, the tour was in full swing!



The Great River Road follows the Mississippi River through a ten state corridor (opposite right). When the Arkansas section was designated, 18 local communities participated in a traveling celebration tour (right).



CLEARLY IDENTIFYING OBJECTIVES.

The tour was designed to:

- Announce and celebrate National Scenic Byway status for the Great River Road—Arkansas and thank those who assisted.
- Present the latest tourism statistics for the counties along the Great River Road route.
- Introduce the release of the 2002–2003 Arkansas Delta Byways visitors guide, featuring the Great River Road—Arkansas as the region’s second National Scenic Byway.

TAKING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD.

Designation of the Great River Road—Arkansas as a national scenic byway marked the culmination of 2 years of work by nearly 200 volunteers to develop a corridor management plan. When the time came to celebrate, it only seemed natural to “take the show on the road” and hold local events to thank the many people involved. Going out to the

communities also provided ready access for residents and business owners along the corridor to learn more about the importance of protecting and promoting the byway’s resources and how they might get involved.

CAREFULLY SELECTING SITES AND COORDINATING LOGISTICS.

Because the route is 362 miles long and traverses 10 counties, one of the challenges of planning the tour was deciding where and how the celebrations would be held. In the end, the 18 cities selected included every community located directly on the route with a population of 1,000 or more, towns under 1,000 located directly on the route that were actively involved in the development of the corridor management plan, and towns not directly adjacent that were county seats and could be accessed via a loop or spur off the byway.

In each town, a key individual (usually an Arkansas Delta Byways member from the county

or a chamber executive) was asked to coordinate logistics, including identifying a site, securing a podium and microphone, and (only if desired by the community) providing any refreshments, staging and decorations, and/or preliminary entertainment before the caravan arrived.

Generally, ceremonies were held on a courthouse lawn, in a city park, or at a major community attraction.

Division of labor:

- **Community Representatives:**
Organized logistics in each town.
- **Arkansas Delta Byways:** Officers and staff for this 15-county regional tourism promotion association coordinated the event, produced printed materials (letters, news releases, scripts, briefing papers, etc.), designed and produced plaques, and furnished a van.

ADB also provided copies of the Arkansas Delta Byways brochure. The agency that produced the brochure donated a banner for use as a backdrop, coordinated the distribution of the brochures to visitor locations in each community, and provided on-site assistance to the news media.

- **Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism:**
Provided copies of the corridor management plan for presentation and placement in local

libraries. The department also furnished a van and a staff photographer.

- **Brinkley High School Students:**
Produced a poster for each county.
- **Arkansas State University:** Graduate students from the Delta Studies Center videotaped ceremonies in all 18 cities. The Delta Heritage Office designed and produced plaques awarded to each community.

PROVIDING A FORUM TO HIGHLIGHT AND EXPAND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.

In addition to celebrating national designation of the route, each event provided an excellent opportunity to share information about the participating partner organizations, the services they provide and how their expertise might be utilized to help enhance, preserve and promote local resources.

- **Mississippi River Parkway Commission (MRPC):** The state chairman served as emcee for the ceremonies, briefed the audiences on the work of the commission, and presented mayors with a plaque. (A customized version of the National Scenic Byways plaque was presented to each community complete with a photo of a local historic site or attraction.) In each county, the local MRPC commissioners introduced the chairman.
- **Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD):** The State Scenic Byway Coordinator addressed the economic impact of scenic byways and the assistance and support provided by AHTD. In some communities, the AHTD director was present and participated in the ceremony.



Byway communities received a commemorative plaque (left) at local ceremonies. Advance publicity attracted local media (right).

- **Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism:**

The Assistant Tourism Director presented tourism statistics and tourism trends for the region, along with a copy of the corridor management plan for placement in local libraries.

- **Arkansas Delta Byways:** Officers and staff for this 15-county regional tourism promotion association introduced the new Arkansas Delta Byways brochure.

- **Mayors and County Judges:**

Provided community responses at the ceremonies.

SPREADING THE NEWS!

- Prior to launch of the tour, news releases were sent to each town along the route to announce national designation of the roadway.
- Personalized letters of invitation were sent to key stakeholders.

- A news release was developed for provision to local media highlighting the event.

- All of the tour vehicles were marked with an American flag to create awareness for the tour.

- Copies of the articles generated about the event were collected and sent to state legislators to encourage sustained state investment.

- A PowerPoint presentation was created incorporating photos from the 3-day event for use with various groups.

- Raw footage from all 18 ceremonies was edited into a 12-minute video.

- The tour was highlighted during a presentation made by Arkansas Delta Byways at an Alabama/ Mississippi joint rural economic development conference.



FUNDING SHARE & SOURCES	DOLLARS	PERCENTAGE
STATE SHARE:		
Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism		
Corridor Management Books (18)	\$504.00	
Photographer (1)/Supplies/Processing	\$408.48	
Van (1) at \$.29/mile (475 miles)	\$137.75	
Hotel (3) \$45 at 2 nights	\$270.00	
Arkansas State University		
Delta Heritage		
Postage for announcement letter (500) at \$.34	\$170.00	85%
Plaques (18) at \$21.00	\$378.00	
Videographers (2)/Supplies/Mileage	\$929.50	
Van (1) at \$.29/mile (475 miles)	\$137.75	
Hotel (2) \$45 at 2 nights	\$180.00	
Supplies—flags, film, processing	\$60.00	
Brinkley Public Schools		
Posters for each county (10) at \$15 each	\$150.00	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE & SOURCES:		
In kind:		
Refreshments, 18 cities at \$25 each	\$450.00	12%
PRIVATE SHARE:		
Cash		
In-kind:		
Ad Agency for Arkansas Delta Byways brochure donated a GRR banner	\$120.00	3%
TOTAL COST	\$3,895.48	100%

PLANNING ON A SHOESTRING. With no budget or dedicated funding available, each of the participating partners assumed their own costs, as well as providing in-kind contributions. Each town decided what they wanted to do to host the event. Most chose to provide refreshments and one community went all out and planned a luncheon. To quantify the cost, each partner submitted estimated expenditures (both direct and in-kind).

LESSONS FROM THE ROAD: “IN THEIR OWN WORDS”

During this project we learned:

- The event was invaluable in keeping our volunteers involved and interested.
- It was an important way to involve and educate others in the community, including opening

their eyes to the economic impact of tourism and the significance of the byways program.

- By localizing our ceremonies, and incorporating local people into the program at each stop along the way, we were able to get maximum media coverage that we could never have gotten any other way.

If we were to do it again, we would:

- Attempt to build in more lead time to allow greater advance publicity about the event and draw even greater audiences.
- Get scripts and instructions to local participating mayors, county judges and on-site coordinators earlier.
- Give more thought to the time of year and the time of day in considering appropriateness of ceremony locations and staging selected by each town along the route.
- Outline essential photo opportunities before starting the tour. (Luncheon, refreshments, and caravan were not photographed on this tour.)



State and local dignitaries voiced their support for the byway.

ASSESSING YOUR EFFORTS

This project was successful because of a number of factors. Is your byway implementing similar best practices?



Celebrations were held on porches, in parks, and at key community sites.

ASSESSMENT
1 2 3 4

1: Never 2: Sometimes 3: Frequently 4: Always

1. We celebrate special events and key byway milestones.
2. We have defined ways to educate the public and build awareness of our byway.
3. We engage a wide range of stakeholders in our byway including elected officials, students, and tourism representatives.
4. We have developed materials for media requests (newspapers, TV, radio, etc.)
5. We are familiar with local, state, and regional tourism statistics and information.
6. We look for low cost, high yield opportunities to share our byway success stories.
7. We find ways to thank and recognize our volunteers.
8. Instead of waiting for people to come to us, we reach out at convenient times and locations.

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RESOURCES

Corridor Management Plan, newspaper articles generated during the tour, press releases, scripts, letters of invitation, briefing materials, Arkansas Delta Byways brochure, PowerPoint presentation, video showcasing the event.

ROAD WORK AHEAD

1. What upcoming events do we have planned along our byway?
2. What projects are we completing? What anniversaries could we celebrate? How could we create a special event around these milestones?
3. How can we use these events to promote what we have accomplished? Promote the byway for travelers and visitors? Recognize volunteers, partners, stakeholders, public officials, businesses and other organizations or individuals for their accomplishments, participation, and support?
4. Could we use volunteers to help organize the event or help with activities the day of the event? What do we want volunteers to do? Who is available to organize or work with the volunteers?
5. Do we have a willing or interested sponsor(s) for the event? Have we overlooked any organizations, businesses or other entities—big or small—along our byway?
6. How can we work with the media to get the word out about the event—in advance—to help attract participation?
7. What can we learn from this case study?
8. Are there aspects of this case study that we would like to incorporate into our byway plans and initiatives?
9. What are our success stories? In what ways are we working to *increase awareness of our byway and educate the public*?
10. What steps would we like to take to improve and enhance our public relations efforts?
11. What would we like to know more about related to this case study?



Food and music added to the celebration.



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Case studies are drawn from the 2001 and 2003 Best Practices for Byways competitions.