

**Heritage Rivers and Communities Best Practices Mission
March 11-15, 2008
South Carolina**



COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH BEST PRACTICES

FINAL REPORT

**Heritage Rivers and Communities
March 11-15, 2008**

National Heritage Corridor, South Carolina



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Introduction

The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor was established by the U.S. Congress in 1996 as one of a select number of National Heritage Areas - regions in which entire communities live and work, and where residents, businesses, and local governments have come together to conserve special landscapes and their own heritage.

The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor extends 240 miles across South Carolina, stretching from the mountains of Oconee County, along the Savannah River, to the port city of Charleston. The 14 counties of the corridor offer a cross-section of the state's history, culture, and natural landscapes. The area describes the evolution of upcountry and lowcountry life, from grand plantations and simple farms to mill villages and urban centers, and how their history affected South Carolina as a state and America as a nation. The 240 miles and fourteen counties that comprise the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor are divided into **four distinct regions** that, together, provide a cross-section of the landscape, history, and culture of the corridor.

As one travels along the corridor, you experience the history, nature, and lifestyles of the rural South. Two routes, the Discovery Route and the Nature Route, run the entire length of the Heritage Corridor, connecting special places within the fourteen counties and creating one unfolding heritage tourism destination. Locations of great natural beauty, recreational opportunities, military history, birding, local arts and crafts, agricultural traditions, and the state's rich African American heritage are identified and interpreted along the way.

The experience provided through the Heritage Corridor is very comparable to opportunities that exist in Atlantic Canada in terms of scope, rural/urban blend and connectivity. The Mission provided numerous examples of the commitment and passion of people making things happen in their communities and the willingness to work together for the greater good.

Purpose

The purpose of the Heritage Rivers & Communities Best Practices Mission was to provide participants, representing communities and destinations, which have used their location alongside a river, with successful examples of how to develop water-based experiences, cultural products/artisans and wildlife viewing. The destination showcased linkages between several communities along the same waterway system which cross-sell one another as part of a larger tourism destination. The mission participants were exposed to ways to encourage visitors to move progressively from one destination to the next along the river route by means of effective navigation in both rural and urban settings.

- Initiatives include marketing and development ideas for riverside communities, partnership opportunities among stakeholder groups for product development purposes, appropriate product mix, funding structures, eco-friendliness, and packaging.
- The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor was developed to promote economic development in rural areas of South Carolina through heritage tourism.

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Primary Expectations

The following provides a summary of the participants' primary expectations for the Best Practices Mission (taken from their applications):

- To learn methods and new ideas for developing a high quality tourist destination based on experiential products, particularly with a culture, heritage and coastal focus.
- To have greater awareness of the product development process and the interaction between the Heritage Corridor and tourism operators.
- Expose us to best practices on familiar products and services where the 'experience' can provide the tools and information to help guide the overall development process.
- Showcase of an existing project incorporating Historic Districts linked to eco-tourism, marketing, services and other activities such as the arts and culinary.
- Inspire new and successful concepts to better assist in the development of the tourism product in our local area.
- Gain insights into how this area has taken this concept of a Heritage Corridor and developed it into an experience, that clusters product and services into a tangible, visitor friendly asset.
- Evaluate how the various partners, including State and local governments, communities and stakeholders, have worked together and built successful collaboration to create the Heritage Corridor.
- To network and learn from each other.

Mission Itinerary

The Mission was coordinated locally with Whitney Ellis, who is the Group Tour Manager and Certified Interpretive Guide with the National Heritage Corridor. For more information on the Corridor visit: www.sc-heritagecorridor.org or contact Ms. Ellis by email at: wellis@scprt.com

(Complete itinerary is attached as Appendix 1)

Mission Leader

Bob Book
Senior Tourism Specialist, Tourism Atlantic – ACOA

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Participants

This Mission included a total of 17 participants, comprised of 12 industry/community representatives and 5 from the Public Sector.

New Brunswick

- Derek Burchill – Miramachi Open River Museum
- Linda Bain – City of Cambellton, Tourism
- Arthur Slipp – St. John River Valley Tourism Association
- Simon Mitchell – St. John River Society
- Sonia Turner – Seaside Peddler, Bathurst
- Denise Boudreau – Tourism and Parks Dept.
- Louis Picard – Tourism and Parks Dept.

Newfoundland and Labrador

- Jeff Saunders – Engineering, Town of Grand Falls
- Kathy Elliot – Corner Brook Museum and Archives
- Trevor Pilgrim – Mayflower Outfitters Inc.
- Andy Hennebury – Industry Development Officer, Gov't of Nfld. & Lab.

Nova Scotia

- Allan Billard- Shubenacadie Canal Commission
- Charlene Marshall – Destination Richmond Tourism
- Ida Scott – Bridgewater Development Association
- Colin Fowlie – Project Manager, Creamery Square Assoc.
- Doug Phelan – Manager TT&I, ACOA

Prince Edward Island

- Bob Book (Mission Lead) – Tourism Atlantic, ACOA

Mission Activities and Presentations

Once the objectives are communicated and the itinerary set the overall value of the Mission and the Lessons Learned will vary from participant to participant. In terms of this particular Mission the evaluation reported an overall high level of satisfaction. Specifically, all participants reported that in terms of relevance of this Mission to: Operations, Marketing, Planning for business growth, Product Development, Interpretive Programming, Human Resources & Customer Service: it was very and somewhat relevant!

Two areas identified where this Mission was not as relevant as expected were in Packaging and Partnering with Travel Trade as noted in the evaluations.

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Specific to the presenter's and quality of information provided the participants reported a consistent 'good' and 'very good' evaluation and felt it was information that is and could be applied to their operations. One area that scored slightly lower was in regards to time where it was felt that some sessions could have utilized more time to learn more from the presenter's. However, with a full and tight itinerary this is a common occurrence.

In terms of overall expectations the Mission **met or exceeded expectations for all participants!!** This is a Mission theme and location that we will definitely consider repeating based on the feedback, evaluations and future Mission priorities.

Evaluation of Mission (Taken from participant surveys and debrief discussions)

1. Strengths

- Knowledgeable presenters with quality, relevant content.
- Appropriate theme, relevance of location and destination.
- Lessons learned that can 'definitely' be applied in Atlantic Canada.
- Individuals and communities were passionate about their efforts to make the Corridor concept work through partnership and collaboration and demonstrated this very well.
- Ongoing financial support by the senior levels of Governments for Heritage/Culture/Tourism infrastructure and marketing.
- Reinforced the importance of regional planning, product development (clustering), marketing and quality of visitor experience.
- Diversity of the Mission participants and their ongoing ability to interact, network and participate in all components of the Mission.

2. Weaknesses

- A front end presentation outlining the formation/history and management structure of the Heritage Corridor would have been helpful.
- Time allotment at some of the sites was challenging.
- Some other minor logistical issues.

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3. Lessons Learned / Recommendations

- The need to look at ‘Themed’ experiences and ‘clustering’ of product based on the success of the Heritage Corridor.
- The information gathered on this Mission will provide the basis for creating our own ‘themed’ Corridor.
- We must partner and work with all levels of government and the various stakeholders to be successful.
- We appear to be headed in the right direction. In order to be successful and sustainable individual Heritage/Cultural/Tourism initiatives must be planned, developed and marketed within the larger context of regional, provincial and inter provincial strategies.
- We need greater emphasis on the quality of product and service levels rather than the development of new product.
- A true reality check for our region (very relevant) in terms of partnerships, expectations and customer service.

This theme and location is definitely worth consideration again in the future based on the feedback and the Lessons Learned. Very relevant location and product, both demographically and the type of experience that has been created with the Heritage Corridor. They have also combined a product designed to blend the rural and urban mix through a willingness to work together. Strong interest from industry for this type of theme and we have created some strong partnerships and relationships in South Carolina. The success of this initiative was due to the research on location, presenters and relevance of the theme to Atlantic Canada that resulted in a strong, engaging itinerary.

Conclusion

I believe this Mission provided a great opportunity for industry and communities in the region to experience firsthand the successes and challenges faced in creating a themed product as a means to provide visitor’s both a quality rural and urban experience. This type of initiative still needs individuals with passion, strong interest in their community and the willingness to work with many partners. The role of Government(s) is also very much a key component for success.

For more detail and information on the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor please visit: www.sc-heritagecorridor.org

Please see:

Appendix A: Full Mission Itinerary and schedule of presentations
Appendix B: Photo Gallery Link

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Appendices

Appendix A: Full Mission Itinerary and schedule of presentations

**Heritage River and Communities Best Practices Mission
South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, SC
March 10th – 15th, 2008**

Monday, March 10th

Travel from Atlantic Canada to Charleston Airport in Charleston, SC

P.M.: Check in to Hotel:
Hampton Inn Airport

6:00 p.m.: Dinner on your own, as participants are arriving at different times

7:30 p.m.: Get acquainted meeting for the participants

Tuesday, March 11th

Whitney Ellis of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor will accompany the group today on the bus.

8:00 a.m.: Continental breakfast & check out

9:30 a.m.: Meet with bus at hotel, load luggage. A Heritage Corridor staff member will travel to Aiken, SC with the group (Whitney Ellis)

10:00 a.m. Depart for Aiken, SC

12:30 p.m.: Lunch & Presentation
Presentation: Heritage areas and the connection to the National Park Service Connection
Presenter: Michelle McCollum, Executive Director – HAD TO CANCEL
Heritage Corridor

2:30 p.m.: Tour of Historic Aiken (meet at Washington Centre)
Mobile presentation: Tourism in a rural historic district
Presenter: Barbara Gassman – The City of Aiken Tourism Manager

4:00 p.m.: Check into The Aiken Hotel

6:00 p.m.: Group dinner at Up Your Alley

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Wednesday, March 12th

Whitney Ellis of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor will accompany the group today on the bus.

- 7:30 a.m.: Breakfast at The Aiken Hotel
Complimentary hot breakfast
Check out
- 8:30 a.m.: Load luggage on the bus
- 8:45 a.m.: Travel to the Silver Bluff Audubon Center
- 9:30 a.m.: **Presentation: The Savannah River and how the river makes the Audubon Center a destination for eco-tourism**
Presenter: Paul Kohler, Director, Silver Bluff Audubon Center
Location: Silver Bluff Audubon Center
- 11:00 a.m.: Travel to Riverview Park
- 11:30 a.m.: **Presentation: Riverfront communities and marketing**
Presenter: Allison May, Economic Development Director
Location: Riverview Park
- 12:30 p.m.: Lunch at the North Augusta Living History Park
Catered Lunch – Contact: Lynn Thompson
Location: North Augusta, SC
Presentation: Marketing program of the Heritage Corridor
Presenter: Elizabeth Harm, Director of Marketing
Heritage Corridor
- 1:30 p.m.: Scenic drive to Aiken State Natural Area
- 2:30 p.m. **Presentation: Insight on the fishing, canoeing, and other water sports that are tourist friendly and how to attract the tourist out of the city**
Presenter: John Greider State Park Ranger
- 3:45 p.m.: Follow the Heritage Corridor to Springfield, SC
- 4:25 p.m.: Stop and visit a small southern town called Springfield – the town has received grants from the Heritage Corridor and Sylvia Heirs (guest speaker for the evening) is very active in this community
Springfield, SC
- 5:00 p.m.: Travel to Blackville

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6:00 p.m.: Dinner and tour at the Region 3 Discovery Centre. Enjoy a BBQ dinner from Goodlands BBQ in Springfield with Sylvia Heirs, a Region 3 Board Member

7:30pm.: Check into the Hampton Inn Orangeburg (Confirmed)

Thursday, March 13th

Whitney Ellis of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor will accompany the group on the bus until Walterboro, where Scott Enter will take over. Donna Laird will also be with the group for the whole day.

7:30 a.m.: Continental breakfast at the hotel & Check Out

8:45 a.m.: Luggage on the bus

9:00 a.m.: Travel to the historic town of Walterboro, SC

10:00 a.m.: Site visit – The Great Swamp Project
Guide: Mayor Charlie Sweat of Walterboro, Region 4 Board Member and State Board of Directors

11:00 p.m.: Site Visit: The South Carolina Artisans Center
Presenter: Carol Mullis, Director, South Carolina Artisans Center
Location: The South Carolina Artisans Center

12:30 p.m.: Lunch at the Blarney Stone

Presentation: Waterway communities and tourism in Walterboro

Presenter: Walterboro Representative
Donna Laird, Walterboro-Colleton Welcome Center

1:30 p.m.: Travel to the Edisto River

2:00 p.m.: Guided canoe trip along the Edisto River which will provide pristine views of rural natural wildlife along the unique Black Water River. (10 miles – please take along shoes and clothing that can get wet)
Carolina Heritage Outfitters

6:00pm: Get off the river, clean up and get ready for dinner

6:30pm: Dinner on the grounds of the Walterboro County Historical Society properties in downtown Walterboro. (A Lowcountry Boil is a hearty dinner after a long day on the river.)

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8:00 p.m.: Check into the Hampton Inn in Walterboro

Friday, March 14st

Scott Enter of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor will accompany the group on the bus today.

6:45 a.m.: Check out and put luggage on the bus

7:15 a.m.: Travel to the City of Charleston
Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina

8:30 a.m.: Light Breakfast with Suzanne Wallace, Director of the Charleston CVB
Presentation: The wide variety of tourism products that Charleston has to offer
Contact: Suzanne Wallace

9:30 a.m.: Historical tour of the city with Historic Charleston Walks

11:45 p.m.: Travel to Drayton Hall

12:15 p.m.: Boxed lunch on the grounds of Drayton Hall at the Pond
Presentation: Building partnerships for marketing and product development
Presenter: Ray Anderson, Region 4 Board of Directors
Location: Drayton Hall

1:15 p.m.: Tour Drayton Hall a National Trust for Historic preservation property
Presentation: The importance of river travel and the historic Drayton Hall
Presenter: Debbi Zimmerman, Group tour manager of Drayton Hall
Dr. George McDaniel, Director of Drayton Hall, Region 4 Board of Directors, National Trust for Historic Preservation site
Location: Drayton Hall

2:45 p.m.: Travel to downtown Charleston

3:15 p.m.: Check into Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina

4:00 p.m.: Free time

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7:30 p.m.: Group dinner at Bocci's Italian for dinner

9:00 p.m.: Return to the Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina

Saturday, March 15th

Morning: Travel from Charleston Airport to Atlantic Canada

Appendix B: Photo Gallery Link

Photo Gallery of highlights of the Mission can be found at the Competitiveness Through Best Practices Website at <http://www.tourismbestpractices.com/albums.php>.