

2013 Heritage Tourism Grant Proposal

Path Through History North Country Region

Presented on behalf of the North Country Path Through History Working Group
by Grant Sponsor:
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North Country

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PART 1: PTH HERITAGE TOURISM VISION PLAN

VISION STATEMENT

The North Country's Path Through History Working Group developed the following vision statement:

Bounded by waterways and crowned by mountains, the North Country region of New York State boasts a rich story of human occupation and settlement. The sense of place is molded by those who came to tame the wilderness, build industry, open farm lands and capitalize on water corridors. One discovers a unique testimony to the exceptionally important military role played on all its borders. This rural region's heritage is deeply connected to its striking environment of landscapes and shorelines. From battles that spurred the revolutionary effort and secured a struggling democracy, to resource extraction that fueled the Industrial Revolution, America happened here.



REGIONAL PLAN ALLIGNMENT:

The PTH vision statement reflects many of the sentiments found in the North Country Regional Economic Development Council’s vision.

From the NCREDC Plan:

The region is geographically the largest in New York with a relatively low population density, making it the perfect location for investments that will result in transformational returns. With the combination of a much-sought after quality of life, a rich and abundant natural resource base and entrepreneurial and talented people, the North Country is ripe for the kind of thoughtful and targeted investment that will secure its local economies for generations and help re-establish the Empire State’s role as global leader.

In addition to the two micro-politan hubs of Plattsburgh and Watertown, which anchor the east and west sides of the region, the North Country has access to unique resources that will attract people and private investment to the region. The tourism industry, with its potential market of 120 million people within a day’s drive, the 200 miles of international border connecting New York’s North Country and Canada, the large military presence at Fort Drum, the growing clean energy industry and long-standing agricultural businesses, the growth of manufacturing along the I-87 and I-81 corridors and innovations at the region’s ten institutions of higher learning will, collectively, serve as the catalyst to drive economic development in the North Country. They will also, in turn, continue to transform North Country communities into great places to live and visit and attract the additional public and private investment that will diversify the economy and spur job creation.

Actualizing this Vision will create family sustaining jobs and build an innovative economy, capitalizing on our abundant natural capital – pristine waters, productive forests and agricultural lands, the splendor of the Adirondacks, and our dynamic international border.

The vision for heritage tourism in the North Country closely aligns with the region’s overall vision. Simply put, the region wishes to engage in thoughtful, targeted activity that will assist in transforming the North Country into a great place to live and visit.



REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Landscape

The North Country is largely rural, with vast stretches of sparsely populated landscapes. Although the region has many villages that offer services, Plattsburgh and Watertown, located in the northeast and southwest corners of the region, serve as the only micro-politan regional centers. Although Plattsburgh and Watertown function as regional centers, most heritage assets (including those with the highest traffic) are located in rural areas, villages, and hamlets.

The North Country shares the international boundary with Ontario and Quebec, and is in close proximity with the Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City metropolitan markets. This proximity, shared heritage, and appeal of the Adirondacks and 1000 Islands provides great opportunities for attracting Canadian travelers.



TOURISM

Tourism Branding

The North Country includes the majority of two I Love New York Tourism Regions; the Adirondacks and the 1000 Islands – Seaway Region. Both destination marketing regions have actively promoted heritage tourism. While neither is anxious to subjugate their brand equity, the destination marketing organizations have historically cooperated in leveraging common themes to their individual benefit. In addition, two nationally designated byways, Lakes to Locks Passage and the Great Lakes Seaway Trail have invested extensive resources in developing and promoting thematic travel experiences that unify numerous counties and NYS tourism regions.

Sustainable Tourism – The concept of sustainable tourism is important to communities in the North Country. Tourism development and activity that is in harmony with the region’s culture and environment is a key vision of the NCREDC plan. Heritage tourism fits well into the region’s vision of sustainable tourism. Existing corridor management plans for Byways and Blueways and local tourism master plans envision leveraging the region’s heritage assets.

Tourism Impact – Tourism tends to be a more important component of local economies in the North Country than in most areas of New York. It is important to note that this is often a matter of scale. Activities that can appear insignificant from a statewide perspective can be essential economic drivers at the local level of small hamlets and villages.

While the region has a handful of historic sites that have developed sophisticated visitor facilities and aggressively market themselves as tourism attractions, most sites in the region have modest resources often depending on volunteers. The great majority of existing sites have annual attendances of less than 20,000. A few have attendance counts of more than 75,000. Lacking high-volume destination attractions, the creation of cross-promotions among small venues and the development of thematic corridor experiences are very important to presenting a North Country tourism “product.”



ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES

Authenticity is often ranked as an important motivator for heritage tourists. The authenticity of the North Country story and visitor experience is a highly marketable asset. Not only are the region's heritage experiences "the real thing," heritage and tradition are palpable in everyday life. The region's villages offer charming, historic downtown districts. Pristine waterways and forests reflect on the region's natural heritage. Traditional outdoor and craft skills are on display across the region. The North Country heritage experience is not only set in a beautiful environment, that environment is an intrinsic component of the heritage story.

In reviewing the assets and opportunities, it is useful to be aware of those noted in the public planning session (see below):

STRENGTHS

Broad sweep and scale of the Region
Border Region, International Audience
Tremendous waterways
Numerous small museums
Adirondacks/Public Lands
Military History
Proximity to Canada

WEAKNESSES

Seasonal Facilities
Lack of "Deep Pockets"
Ability to locate tourism information
Transportation
Lack of draw/population centers
Lack of services in French
Lack of collaboration

The list often reflects the positive and negative of the same condition. The North Country has many institutions, a broad scale and vast open lands and waterways. But, transportation across that broad region can be difficult. And, lacking financial resources of larger populations, collaboration across wide geographies and between small groups is a challenge.

The region has a mature tourism industry. There is opportunity to build on the brand equity of the Adirondacks and 1000 Islands to reach audiences with a heritage tourism message. As was noted earlier, the region also borders Ontario and Quebec. Growth of Canadian visitation to the region has been significant in recent years. Numerous organizations have developed cross-border relationships to further the economic goals of the Region. The North Country Chamber of Commerce has provided leadership in the creation of the Quebec-New York trade corridor which includes a partnership with the Lakes to Locks Passage to foster tourism. The Thousand Islands Bridge Authority has been instrumental in creating the Capital Corridor for trade and tourism (route from Ottawa to Washington). Growth of Canadian visitation to the region has been significant in recent years, especially for cross-border shopping. The opportunity exists to engage these cross-border shoppers in more varied experiences.



HERITAGE THEMES

The North County has assets related to all of the statewide themes. But, four over-arching heritage themes that incorporate several of the statewide themes come to the fore for the North Country.

Military Heritage – The region played an important role the French & Indian War, American Revolution and War of 1812. Today, significant sites from those wars are anchor tourism attractions for several localities. As the home of Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division, the region’s military ties remain strong in the modern age.

Natural History – As is reflected the NCREDC vision, the region’s abundant natural resources impact its story strongly. Shortly after the American Revolution, easy access by water to the edge of the Adirondack “frontier” made this region the first heritage tourism destination. Urged on by tour books, landscape paintings and scenic cards, the North Country was dotted with Great Camps and Castles, modest summer camps and resorts – all offering the benefits of outdoor life. As the forests disappeared and the cities expanded, Americans began to realize that their country needed care. New York State created the Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1892, beginning a conservation movement that has protected millions of acres of wilderness and laid a path for land stewardship. The region also boasts one of the world’s great rivers in the St. Lawrence. New York and Ontario partners promote the natural heritage of this waterway through conservation areas, a UNESCO biosphere reserve, shoreline State, Provincial and National parks and heritage facilities that focus on the River.

Innovation and Commerce -- When people began to trap the wildlife, harvest the timber, cultivate crops, and extract the mineral resources of the North Country, they built the economic base through milling, manufacturing and trade that built communities. The remoteness of the region spurred the development of canals and railways to get products to market; these byways now bring travelers to the region. Most communities have local museums and historical societies that proudly display this heritage and when thematically linked together, provide numerous opportunities to deliver distinctive travel experiences.

Sports History – The sports heritage in the North Country is intrinsically linked to the landscape – the region has twice hosted the Winter Olympics, and serves as a world-class sports training and competition venue. Numerous communities are proud of the professional athletes that call them home. The North Country is a destination for hiking, boating, paddling, fishing and hunting and regularly hosts national level tournaments and outdoor enthusiast events.



SITES & EVENTS

Heritage sites - The Path Through History planning process identified 82 (see attached) specific heritage tourism sites in the region. These sites range from large tourism destinations such as Fort Ticonderoga, the Wild Center and Boldt Castle, to smaller sites maintained by local historical societies. Managers and volunteers at these sites have good working relationships with like entities, but little formal interaction exists for the purposes of marketing.

During the PTH planning process, museums frequently expressed the need for greater collaboration– and the PTH plan depends on it to reach its objectives. Only by having each historic site/organization/museum successfully tell its story do we weave the full tapestry of New York State’s history and attract visitors for long-term stays. The focus on the shared heritage of the region creates a thriving economy, develops strong local support, and leads to attracting both private and public dollars. Initiating projects that foster this cooperation will be a long-term goal

Special events – In addition to the sites identified in the inventory, the North Country hosts many events related to history. Examples include battle reenactments; antique boat shows; agricultural heritage fairs; and ethnic heritage festivals. These events are important tourism drivers for the region. Moreover, many events offer unique visitor experiences not available at sites. Due to limited resources, very few heritage special events are marketed by the event sponsors outside the region. However, DMO experience indicates that special events can be a significant influencer on decisions to visit.



IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY

Destination Marketing Organizations – The region’s DMO’s regularly collaborate on projects. The Adirondack Regional Tourism Council is a staffed DMO for the Adirondack Region operating in cooperation with county Tourism Promotion Offices. The 1000 Islands – Seaway Region also maintains active marketing programs. It is likely that the North Country effort will outreach to other counties that are part of the Adirondack and 1000 Islands – Seaway Tourism Regions, but not in the North Country (Oswego and Warren). Moreover, it is also likely that the DMOs will work to collaborate with existing partners on the key feeder routes into the region.

Byways & Blueways – The North Country has two nationally recognized “Scenic Byways” in the Lakes to Locks Passage and the Great Lakes Seaway Trail. The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) promotes three NYS-designated scenic byways including the Adirondack Trail, Central Adirondack Trail, and Olympic Byway. The Tug Hill Commission has worked to develop the Black River, Maple Traditions, and Olympic byways. Other NYS designated byways in the North Country include the Blue Ridge Road, Dude Ranch Trail, High Peaks Scenic Byway, North Country Scenic Byway, and the Roosevelt-Marcy Trail. State recognized Blueways include the Raquette River and Black River. Each of these corridors has identified touring themes related to history that constitute a tourism experience that transcends a visit to any particular site and often crosses political boundaries by unifying numerous communities. The byways provide an administrative structure to increase partnerships between historic sites and attractions that are otherwise isolated or disconnected, creating the critical mass for thematic collaborations and generating visitation to smaller communities. The NCREDC has also placed a priority on advancing projects in communities along the miles of river corridors and scenic byways that transect the Region.

Product Development – Various heritage tourism projects have been undertaken by organizations to enhance the traveler experience. As mentioned above, byways have initiated heritage tourism projects that include interpretive signage, themed guidebooks, community kiosks, and websites. Organizations such as the Adirondack North Country Association; Traditional Arts of Upstate New York; St. Lawrence International Partnership; Mountain Lakes Public Broadcasting; WPBS-TV and North Country Public Radio have initiated experiences that celebrate and promote North Country Heritage.



GOALS, STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Short Term Goals

Create go-to-market stories – Building on a great deal of work already done by organizations across the North Country, an important goal of the Path Through History initiative will be to organize some of the region’s “stories” or “themes” into ready-for-market experiences. This will include projects that integrate historic assets with other hospitality businesses. The goal will be to implement projects that can convey stories which attract visitors to the region and generate overnight visitation rather than simply presenting historic tid-bits to existing tourists. Heritage and tourism organizations within the region have already developed substantial interpretive resources that can be leveraged with new investments in technology and supporting media.

Leverage statewide activity - New York’s story is truly one that can attract visitors from anywhere on the planet. A short-term goal will be to better integrate the North Country into the State’s overall heritage tourism marketing effort – not only to benefit to region’s economy but also to assist in presenting a compelling case to visit Upstate as a whole.

Build Canadian audience – The North Country story is inextricably linked to Ontario and Quebec history, but little has been done to tell that story and take it to market. A good example of how this can be done is *The Waterways of War: War of 1812* guidebook that lists both American and Canadian sites related to that conflict. But more can be done -- in particular, the shared French heritage has great appeal; we need to develop ways to demonstrate that heritage and provide bi-lingual interpretation of the stories. Other themes such as New York’s British Loyalists relocation, the Underground Railroad, and Prohibition could encourage visitation to North Country museums and historic sites by Canadian and European travelers.



Long term goals to be addressed through the regional economic development structure

Encourage sustainable tourism – The North Country’s over-arching long term goal is to engage in tourism strategies that provide economic support for its way-of-life. This means using tourism as a driver to build infrastructure (recreation, hospitality, cultural facilities) that contributes to livable communities with the capacity to attract and retain investment.

Assure statewide alignment - A key strategy of the North Country plan will be to put in place the tools needed to fully capitalize on I Love New York’s Path Through History initiatives. This includes implementing projects that utilize websites, mobile apps, media relations, social media, tour development, travel trade outreach and point-of-sale opportunities

Leverage capacity with thematic connections – As noted earlier, many of the region’s assets simply don’t have internal resources to present themselves to the broad tourist market. Moreover, localities often lack the “critical mass” of offerings to attract significant visitation. A long-term goal will be to seed cooperative ventures that allow limited resources to be leveraged into projects that can be taken to the broader market.

Build sustainable historic and cultural sites – Over a century ago, New York State legislated that each community have a historian; therefore most communities have a local museum and/or historical society that maintains a collection. As discussed earlier, many of these sites struggle to survive, challenged by limited human and fiscal resources, and stale exhibits – and usually operate in isolation from each other. Most local museums are visited by travelers on rainy days or when there is nothing else to do –therefore they compete against each other for this very limited attention. We can change that dynamic by:

- Creating a thematic collaboration of destinations and experiences that makes visiting North Country museums the reason for the trip, and
- Providing technical assistance and trainings to ensure that these facilities have strong governance, dynamic exhibits, and broad public support to make them worthy of promotion and visitation.

As a model, the Essex County Historical Society has recently completed a pilot project that has demonstrated the benefits of museum collaborations that strengthen individual sites.

Integrate education with tourism - Most museums have educational programs targeting K-12 students. A long-term goal will be to build on museums’ education programs to create collaborative multi-disciplinary field and classroom activities, and re-energize a love for New York heritage experiences. Moreover, there are many opportunities for public broadcasting to help deliver the stories of the North Country in lively and engaging ways.



Target Audiences

Geographic - Geographic markets represent somewhat of a challenge in the North Country. Communities in the eastern part of the region depend upon traffic related to I-87, with strong visitation from the Hudson Valley, Capital Region, Massachusetts and Quebec. Communities in the western part of the region depend upon traffic related to I-81, with strong visitation from Central New York, the Finger Lakes, Pennsylvania and Ontario. So, it is unlikely that a geo-targeted paid advertising effort could be mounted. However, this highway proximity to markets also creates an excellent opportunity for effective media relations efforts and travel trade outreach.

Demographics – Experience has shown that older couples tend to be the prime audience for heritage attractions in the region. This demographic is also attractive due to their ability to travel in the shoulder seasons which is likely to be an important consideration in targeting. During the core summer season (Mid June – August), families are a useful target demographic. Groups are often a top target for historic sites; a strategic region-wide approach to the travel trade as part of the Path Through History initiative could yield benefits with modest investments.

Heritage tourists tend to hold college degrees, travel more frequently than an average audience and place a high value on authenticity. These factors will be considered in developing marketing resources and placing media.

Niche – The North Country has had great success with highly targeted niche audiences. These include enthusiasts (i.e. birders, hikers, anglers, etc.) and group affiliation's (AAA members, bank clubs, etc.). Projects that can effectively target niche audiences from a reasonable geography with an affinity for heritage tourism can be an effective use of limited funds.

Students – New York state museums can be critical partners in K-12 education. It is the only state in the country that incorporates museums and heritage organizations with public broadcasting through the state education department.



Measurement

Metrics – Where possible, basic metrics will be gathered relating to audience engagement (i.e. click-throughs, sales appointments etc.). DMOs will be asked to share their performance data related to tourism sales in their communities. Participating heritage organizations will also be asked to share performance data such as attendance counts. Performance data available through public agencies will also be monitored (traffic counts, border counts, taxable sales). In addition to quantitative data, confidence and opinion surveys will also be employed to test changes in attitude and personal observations.

Spending

Costs – Based on planning meetings, it is clear that the \$100,000 available as a regional grant will only provide a modest incremental step in realizing the vision and goals for heritage tourism marketing in the region. To that end, implementation projects that include additional cash and in-kind investments from North Country organizations will be given priority. Additionally, the region recognizes the value of an on-going commitment to heritage tourism marketing. To that end, implementation projects that can provide an incremental boost to existing efforts, serve as a catalyst for private investments, or a pilot project for an innovative approach to addressing the region's heritage tourism challenges will be given priority.

Implementation responsibility

While no single existing organization has a mission aligned with heritage tourism marketing across all seven of the North Country Counties, the PTH planning process has identified an interest in cooperation among the County Tourism Promotion Agencies; Byway and Blueway groups; the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; regional organizations such as the Tug Hill Commission and Adirondack North Country Association; and key heritage attractions. These organizations will be engaged as a heritage tourism working group to move the PTH effort forward in the North Country.



PART 2: PTH HERITAGE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

In the initial year of the PTH initiative, the North Country has identified four priority projects to implement. These projects are efforts that: 1) Build and enhance existing heritage tourism marketing in the region; 2) Can attract incremental support from partners and have a good value to investment ratio; 3) Can benefit heritage sites and tourism destinations region-wide and; 4) Can be implemented cost-effectively using existing administrative resources.

The four projects selected for the current round of funding total \$95,000. Another \$5,000 would be reserved for administrative expenses related to implementation.

Tactics: Priority Projects

Region-wide collateral

Develop, print and distribute regional PTH map

Working with Adirondack North Country Association and Ad Workshop, ANCA's popular North Country Map will be revised to feature historic site touring along byways. On an in-kind basis, the map will be distributed by the Adirondack Tourism Council and 1000 Islands International Tourism Council at staffed welcome centers servicing the USA/Canada border on I-87 and I-81. The piece will also be used in fulfillment packages, at travel shows and by other information centers in the region (200,000 copies). Previous editions of this publication have highlighted other resources, such as birding, and have proven to be very popular. This project builds on over \$200,000 invested in previous map projects and creates a close collaboration with byways and TPAs.

Travel Trade Outreach

Organize and promote PTH itineraries for the travel trade

Organize four distinctive North Country *Path Through History* itineraries for promotion to the travel trade. Each itinerary would have a "sell sheet" created outlining the experience and providing contacts for booking. An e-mail campaign promoting the itineraries would be conducted using existing travel trade channels. A direct mail to existing tour company leads from TPA sales departments would follow the e-mailings. Advertising in travel trade magazines would further expose the itineraries. Themes to be promoted would be:

- Military Heritage Tour
- Natural Heritage Tour
- Gilded Age Heritage Tour
- Waterways Heritage Tour

This project builds on exiting sales and marketing capacities at the region's TPAs, as well as incrementally promoting themes developed through the byway program.



Marketing Resources

Build photo library of PTH sites

Engage independent photographers to develop a library of images related to North Country historic sites and themes. This project would send photographers into the field to create images that could be distributed royalty-free for publicity purposes. Some photography would simply fill gaps in existing collections to cover less promoted locations. Specialty photography such as 360 degree shots and staged shots with models would be commissioned to feature higher profile sites. The deliverable library would be uploaded to an online digital asset management system and duplicated on hard drive for distribution to TPAs, local development offices, and the Division of Tourism. Regional tourism and heritage contacts will be utilized in developing the shoot list and locations will be asked to provide in-kind assistance such as models for set shots and hospitality for out-of-town contractors.

Create PTH web video library

Create a series of 2-4 minute web-ready videos profiling key historic sites/themes for the North Country. Post the series to a YouTube (or similar channel) and engage tourism and historic site partners to promote the series broadly, including featuring links on related websites. In reviewing online historic site videos, it is clear that promotion is essential to making this investment worthwhile. Many state historic attraction videos attract only a few hundred views, while others (such as CaliforniaTravelTips) attract many thousands of views based on strong collaborations on promotions. This project would also target creating “b-roll” footage for use other projects. It is anticipated that the region’s public broadcasters will provide production capabilities for this project and local heritage sites and tourism offices will assist with on-site expenses to keep costs contained.



INVENTORIED HISTORIC SITES:

Clinton County

Alice T. Miner Museum
Arts Center & The Strand Theater
Babbie Rural & Farm Learning Museum
Battle of Plattsburgh Association
Champlain Valley Transportation Museum
Clinton County Historical Association and Museum
Heart's Delight Farm Heritage Exhibit
Historic Plattsburgh Air Force Base
Kent-Delord House Museum
Lyon Mountain Mining and Railroad Museum
Macdonough Monument
Northern New York American-Canadian Genealogical Society
Plattsburgh--SUNY Art Museums
Rouses Point-Champlain Historical Society
Samuel de Champlain History Center
SUNY College at Plattsburgh Special Collections
The William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute
Valcour Island & Bluff Point Lighthouse

Essex County

1812 Homestead and Farm Museum
Adirondack History Center Museum
Adsit Log Cabin
Champlain Monument and Lighthouse
Crown Point State Historic Site
ECHO
Fort Ticonderoga
Hancock House Museum
John Brown Farm
Lake Placid Olympic Museum
Lake-Placid North Elba Historical Society
Minerva Historical Museum
Newcomb Historical Society
North Star Underground Railroad Museum
Penfield Homestead Museum
Schroon-North Hudson Historical Museum
The Iron Center Museum
Ticonderoga Heritage Museum
Westport Heritage House
Willsboro Heritage Museum
Willsboro Visitors Center
Wilmington Historical Society

Franklin County

Historic Saranac Lake
Saranac Laboratory Museum
The Bartok Cabin
Wild Center

Hamilton County

Adirondack Museum
Great Camp Sagamore (Sagamore Institute of the Adirondacks)
Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts
Indian Lake Museum
Inlet Museum
Lake Pleasant Museum
Morehouse Museum
Wells Historical Museum

Jefferson County

10th Mountain Division & Fort Drum Museum
Antique Boat Museum
Boldt Castle
Boldt Yacht House
Cape Vincent Historical Museum
Cornwall Brothers Store
Henderson Historical Society Museum
Historical Association of South Jefferson
Jefferson County Historical Society
New York State Zoo at Thompson Park
NNY Agricultural Historical Society
Pickering Beach Museum
Rock Island Lighthouse
Roswell P. Flower Memorial Library
Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site
Sackets Harbor Visitor Center
Seaway Trail Discovery Center
Thousand Islands Museum
Tibbetts Point Lighthouse Visitor Center

Lewis County

Adirondack Mennonite Heritage Farm
American Maple Museum
Constable Hall Association
The Railway Historical Society of NNY

St. Lawrence County

Fort La Presentation Company
Frederick Remington Art Museum
Lisbon Depot Museum
Massena Museum
Singer Castle
St. Lawrence County Historical Society
Walker House Museum - Madrid Historical Society

