

VEOC Discussion Highlights

for

Merrickville / Long Island Reach

Perhaps more than any other single location within the Rideau Canal Heritage Corridor, Merrickville locks and surrounding heritage buildings expresses the complex evolution of the Rideau River's human history.

Merrickville lock station is located within one of the oldest settlements along the Rideau Corridor. Its founder William Merrick was attracted by the power of the water passing through this narrowing of the river's natural corridor. As Colonel By would do subsequently, Merrick sought to harness the river's natural power for grist, saw, and carding mills. Only a few years later canal builders arrived and again harnessed the river's waters in aiding vessels to avoid the natural descent of the river through a series of three locks, two basins and an artificial channel.

While some of the River's flow was diverted for Canal purposes, sufficient flow remained for the mills, unlike in many other cases throughout the Corridor.

The combination of the milling and transportation economies spurred the well-being of Merrickville to become one of the Corridor's leading industrial centers.

The end of the community's industrial growth is closely related to the decline of the commercial phase of the canal. The rise of the nearby town of Smiths Falls as a major railway hub displaced Merrick's Mills as an industrial leader in the region.

The Merrickville Blockhouse, the first and largest of four blockhouses constructed on the Rideau Canal, stands as a reminder of the Canal's original purpose in providing a secure military supply route for Upper Canada.

Merrickville's historic waterfront presents in one small area a diversity of heritage experience opportunities: the living heritage of the Canal's operation, complemented by the nearby industrial ruins, set against the backdrop of Canada's best preserved 19th century village and its renowned Blockhouse.

Below Merrickville, the Rideau is a narrow meandering river bordered by woodlands, farmlands with well-preserved farmhouses and sensory rich wetlands. The scenic Nicholson Locks were the engineer's solution to avoiding the Burritts Rapids. A vantage point near the manually operated King Post Bridge clearly conveys from a single vantage point the natural and modified flow of the River.

A second important vantage point occurs at Clowes Lock, where a clear view of a very scenic long stone arch spillway dam is visible.

Below this dam, in a stretch locally known as "The Big Bend", the River is a widening meandering flow lined with extensive wetlands and farmlands. Three important accessible natural heritage areas: Rideau River Provincial Park, W.A. Taylor and Baxter conservation areas are popular accesses to the water's edge.

Within this stretch are the historic settlements of Becketts Landing and the creek leading to Kemptville, a steamer stop on the Rideau Canal.

The 40 km stretch locally known as “The Long Reach” joins the historic communities of Kars and Manotick. There are numerous marinas and water access points along this popular water sports along the ‘slackwater’ area.

Watson’s Mill is a unique 1860’s grist and flour mill located in Manotick, on the shores of the Rideau River. A working industrial heritage site, its stories reveal local politics, the building of a country, and a tragic love story. It is a working historic grist and flour mill and a social, cultural and educational focal point for the community and guests.

Below the island of Manotick, the waters are slowed by an impressive large stone dam adjacent to Nicholson Island and extending to Long Island.

Exploration Themes

Participants felt that that this Reach possessed a diversity of natural and cultural heritage resources and experience opportunities, particularly in its upper portions and in Manotick, and, as well, is an outstanding water recreation area for both boaters and land based explorers.

They placed particular emphasis upon the direction that the environmental health of this Reach must be a prominent concern in its sustainable tourism future.

In general participants identified a number of exploration themes which they felt would be of interest to Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorers and leisure travelers and recreationalists:

- National significance of Canal & Corridor – political, economic, industrial, military, settlement, first nations
- Insights into the creation and operation of Canal
- Natural heritage of Rideau Watershed – before and after Canal development – 175 year old aquatic environment
- Immersing in “Community” heritage & Lifestyles
- Meeting the “people” of the Rideau
- Human heritage in Rideau’s natural realities - agriculture, transportation, lifestyles, culinary, music
- Exploring Reach’s different natural personalities
- Experiencing the serenity & beauty of the Reach

Canal Heritage

- Insight into design and development challenges - ingenuity of canal builders
- Human modification of watersheds - “slackwater” and what it took to make it
- Water level management challenges
- Evolving lock operations and challenges
- Strategic Defence of a Nation - Merrickville

Community Heritage

- Merrickville industrial heritage - evolving social & economic heritage - museum and living heritage
- Merrickville, Manotick, Historic Kemptville Community heritage - settlement - military - economic
- Founders of the Rideau Corridor - settlers, canal builders, industrialists
- Rideau agricultural heritage and evolving economies - Kemptville
- Rideau Canal - a unique, yet representative piece of Canadiana – nostalgic heritage of tourism

Connecting with People of the Rideau

- Rideau Corridor artisans - Merrickville and Manotick arts, food, music
- Built Heritage and Natural Environment Conservationists
- Gardeners and landscape architects
- Agricultural innovators – orchards, forest

Natural Resource Heritage Exploration

- Natural and modified Rideau River and lake systems ...
- Corridor's evolving terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems ...
- Corridor forests, plants, land and water ecosystems
- Corridor wildlife – aquatic and terrestrial
- Kayaking marshes, wetlands, backwaters and secluded shorelines
- Bird watching and sanctuaries

Human Heritage in Natural Environments

- Water is life blood of Rideau life, communities, economies,
- Hydro power in the context of Rideau economy and life for mills, transportation, communities
- Experiencing the solitude of remote lakes and streams
- Wandering the trails and waterways through a diversity of natural environments
- Biodiversity of plants and explore species at risk
- Urban escape to Rideau Corridor's natural serenity

Desired Images for this Reach and Corridor

Current Images

Discussion participants felt that at this time, heritage experiences were most popularly known to be achievable in the village of Merrickville and to a lesser extent in Manotick and other small villages and communities such as historic Kemptville, Burritts Rapids and Kars.

Unfortunately, they felt that this specific Reach of the Rideau Canal has little or no general image both cultural and natural in the minds of potential Canadians and international guests.

In the minds of regional and Corridor residents the images relate to recreational boating, water sports and fishing, and to residential development along the River's edge.

They expressed some concern, that from an environmental perspective, the aquatic habitats of the Reach were "stressed" and warrant recovery efforts.

They felt that an image associated with the City of Ottawa portion of the Canal – one of "Boats and Skaters" is the most prevalent image associated with the Rideau Canal, as a whole.

They desire to adjust both of these image situations.

Desired Image In Four Years:

Reach:

- Popular with many types of travellers – land & water based
- Accessible safe day tripping – land and water
- An important piece of Canadiana - element of our history
- Some surprising “bests” in Canada and world i.e. Muskies
- Sustainable nature & culture experience opportunities – model for others
- Great hosts, vibrant places , producing great memories
- Canal & communities are viable and compelling tourism places
- Canal is adequately resourced by all of its benefactors

Corridor:

- Heart of the Canadian culture between two capitals.
- Serene & Vibrant - kayaking in the marshes
- Embodies history of Canada -settlement, military, industry, transportation
- Perfect amalgamation of culture & history - sustainable balance
- Place of history, beauty and hospitality.
- Readily accessible, safe adventures in history and nature
- Pilgrimage for all Canadians to understand the story of Canada
- A vibrant place for world to understand the history of Canada.

Compelling Opportunities Within Reach

- Historic Communities: Merrickville, Kemptville, Burritts Rapids
- Distinctive Architecture and engineering achievements
- Models forests - Fergusons - agricultural places
- Wetland habitats and wildlife - aquatic environments
- Locks and lock station areas - Nicholson, Burritts, Long Island
- Industrial heritage and ruins - Merrickville, Watson Mill
- Bird sanctuary and conservation areas
- Recreational waters and lands
- Places of beauty & serenity - artisans & creative heritage
- Canoeing and kayaking Rideau River, Canal and its tributaries

Desired Outcomes of Contributing to the VEOC Discussions

Discussion participants expressed the following desired outcomes and/or opportunities for change:

Shared sense of direction

It was suggested that while individual communities and attractions had direction, there was not an overall direction for this Reach or the Corridor as a whole. The participants felt there was considerable need for a “shared direction and set of achievable goals”. This was deemed applicable to the Reach and as well to the Corridor, as a whole.

Participants recognized the need to build a strategic course of action to ensure that tourism within this Reach and the Corridor as a whole was “sustainable” – environmentally and economically.

They felt a shared direction was required in order to capitalize upon our strengths in responding to the values and interests of priority guests and residents, businesses and communities within the Reach.

Collaborate and complement

Discussions expressed frustrations that decision-making by major players was too often independent and not adequately cognizant of the implications on others. It was felt that greater understanding of each other’s challenges and opportunities was required as a basis for cooperation.

In particular, it was a desire that lock operations and guest services provided by Parks Canada are appreciative of the needs and expectations of both boaters and the boating services sector.

Both having a shared direction and pursuing it in collaboration with others, through actions which complement those of others are essential in the Reach and throughout the Corridor, it was expected that the Reach could become a more compelling element of the Corridors natural and cultural heritage experience opportunities.

Vibrant tourism economy

It was a concern of some that the tourism economy of this Reach and perhaps the Corridor as a whole had declined and was continuing in this direction.

It was a desire that this trend be reversed through enhancing the leisure travel and experiential tourism opportunities for both water and land use guests from nearby cities and from farther afield. Relying upon past strengths was not seen as viable in the long run. Building upon heritage resources and natural environment opportunities with diversified programs and services was the desired direction.

Tourism must be sustainable

While economic vibrancy of communities is a goal and recognized as a critical element in being a sustainable tourism destination, it was further recognized that complementary attention must be paid by hosts and guests to environmentally sound and culturally acceptable appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage and contemporary living realities. This balance is the foundation of sustainability. Hosts and guests must be continually aware of this goal and its requirements and be better stewards.

Enhance awareness of our opportunities

Participants felt that there was a need for shared awareness of our natural, historic and community resources as opportunities for guests, hosts and residents to enjoy and appreciate this special place. It was suggested that the understanding of current and potential experience opportunities and their requirements for conservation and appreciation by guests was not adequate. Sharing knowledge was seen to be essential.

As an extension of growing host knowledge, it was recognized that ways and means must be put in place to grow guest awareness and interests in our natural and cultural heritage and leisure recreation opportunities. Informing, influencing and involving residents and guests in realizing the potential of this Reach will require new and enhanced ways of communication and engagement.

Understanding and responding to guest values, interests and travel traits was a key to building awareness and engagement.

Balance focus on boaters and land based explorers

Participants expressed concern that the economics of the Reach's tourism and heritage operations were too dependent upon and focused upon boaters. Discussions suggested that there seemed considerable potential to grow the number of land based explorers and leisure travelers by diversifying the experience opportunities and spreading them throughout the Reach.

Clarify Reach's image - strategically attract guests

The recognition that the image of the Reach is either non-existent or community and activity specific; caused contributors to desire a clarified image, and even more importantly an image which would strategically grow enjoyment and appreciation of the Reach, with positive implications for the economy and environment.

Enhanced program / service capacities

It was a shared impression of participants that there was an array of opportunities to subtly enhance support for guests to explore the waterways, wetlands, communities and historic resources in ways which were not capital investment intensive, but rather relied on providing better access and personal support for guests. It was envisioned this would make a greater call on local expertise to share their knowledge and insights, and the encouragement of land owners and facility operators to share access to the most compelling places and experience opportunities along the Reach. Access to expertise and special places was a cornerstone of concern.

Paradigm Shifters

With these outcomes and objectives in mind, participants shared some fundamental changes in how guests could be hosted and the tourism industry enhanced with related benefits to local communities and residents.

Rideau Canal watersheds restored to high quality aquatic environments

Participants felt an important issue was to address the image and reality that Rideau is not a healthy aquatic ecosystem. They felt that if appropriate actions are taken in regards to water resource management that the Rideau Canal could become known as the best fresh water resource in the world of canal waterways. They envisioned drawing upon resources and expertise of Ottawa area universities and Museum of Nature to guide and be involved in the recovery of the aquatic habitats and bring these habitats to the first-hand experience by guests through a series of aquatic experience opportunities above and below the water and in the surrounding near water environments.

Network of performance / gathering places

Especially where the nature and culture of Rideau meet, for example in authentic communities like Burritts Rapids and lock area, there would be a series of iconic amphitheaters reflecting the original concept of the Burritts Rapids “band shell”. Perhaps located in community or lock station green spaces, the network would be focal points for community events, heritage festivals and for telling the stories of the Rideau.

Introductory camping and outdoor activity programs and services

Many new Canadians and urban dwellers do not feel adept or equipped to explore the natural beauty of the Reach and the Corridor as a whole. It was envisioned that an array of introductory camping opportunities, programs, services and support facilities could be made available for people who have not camped before. In a similar vein, outfitted natural area explorations of both aquatic and terrestrial areas would be compelling introductions to the Rideau Canal Heritage Corridor. This Reach could serve as the introductory door step to the Corridor as a whole.

Network of public green spaces

Guest services and communications relating to land trust, conservation areas, parks and lock station lands could be positioned as one umbrella offering of guest experience opportunities. Their programming and services could be integrated yielding efficiencies and heightened effectiveness without loss of individual identities; but communicating added identity of a family of similar things for guests. The collaborative approach could be a strategic investment basis for enhancing and innovating experience opportunities throughout the Rideau Corridor.

Heritage district tourism industry leadership body

Building upon the desired outcome of a shared sense of direction and collaborative commitment to the growth of tourism throughout the Corridor and within this Reach, it was suggested that a single body comprising members of the private, public and non-profits sectors of the tourism industry be established to lead and manage the enhancement and innovation of tourism products and services and their marketing and promotion.

Rideau Corridor marketing strategy

The desire was expressed that the Corridor and this specific Reach be marketed under a single strategy, coordinated by a single tourism marketing organization drawing upon marketing resources from throughout the Corridor and benefiting operators and communities alike.

Rideau Corridor website

It was suggested that a single website be established to herald the Reach's and the Corridor's array of natural and cultural heritage attractions and related service providers. This full capacity site and service would be able to inform, influence and support guests in their connections with all leisure travel and heritage experience opportunities within the Reach and Corridor.

It would be a collective and coordinated way to get the word out and to strategically heighten and manage the image and brand of the Corridor.

NGO Canal operations advisory or governance board

Reflecting their desire for greater collaboration amongst tourism suppliers, participants suggested that Canal operations might be guided by a board comprised of representatives of communities, private and public sector attraction operators, traveler services and destination marketing organizations. Parks Canada would still operate the canal, but with guidance from the Board.

Locks become Reach's primary gathering place

It was suggested that lock station lands might become key gathering places for both water and land based leisure travelers and explorers. These places would be central distributors of information and guidance, provision of support services and equipment for aquatic and terrestrial activities and performance venues.

These additional service offerings were seen as potential direct and indirect revenue sources, which might be used to aid in the cost of operating the locks and perhaps in reducing or stabilizing the lockage fees.

Enhancement & Innovations For Reach Specific Experience Opportunities

Improving Experience Opportunities

Having identified the potential exploration themes and subjects of interest for the explorers and having assessed the desired exploration opportunities and their current quality and availability, the VEOC discussion participants

- First turned their attention to enhancing existing opportunities, programs, services and infrastructure provided by host communities and tourism attractions and services;
- Then focused their attention on identifying innovative experience opportunities and related support programs and services.

Each of the nine explorer types was considered separately, although it was recognized and noted that many of the suggested improvements would be valued by a number of the explorer types. Tweaking an idea or improvement had the potential to make it of value to more than the explorer types it was identified to facilitate.

It is anticipated that the following “enhancements and innovations” will be approached in a collaborative manner involving complementary action and investment by all sectors of the tourism industry.

An Integrated Set of Enhancements and Innovations

A review of the enhancements and innovations identified for this Reach reveals the following framework of ideas for improving guest experience opportunities and the service offered by their hosts. These enhancements and innovations are gathered under a framework of improvements respecting:

- Guest Information, Welcome and Sense of Arrival
- Cultural Heritage Connection Opportunities
- Natural Heritage Connection Opportunities
- Augmented Appreciation / Passive Observation Opportunities
- Recreation / Relaxation Opportunities
- Accommodation Services and Related Experience Opportunities
- Transportation Services

Guest information, welcome and sense of arrival

Discussion participants recognized the importance of communicating a clear sense of welcome and arrival; a welcome which would communicate the diverse array of natural and cultural heritage experiences opportunities afforded throughout the Reach.

Consistent welcome centres

Participants felt that throughout the Reach, and the Corridor, the guest information and orientation facilities in communities and attractions were far too variable in quality and content; and in many cases non-existent. They recommended that a network approach to such services would raise the level of

quality and impact of the service in encouraging guests to more thoroughly experience the diversity of the Reach.

To provide guests with information on a 24/7 basis throughout the year, it was suggested that a network of information terminals or smart boards be positioned at the most popular gathering points and in all tourism oriented communities and attractions.

Well-informed Information Staff

Contributors identified that consistent training of guest information and service staff was essential to convey coherent and consistent information in friendly and effective ways.

They suggested staff be provided with opportunities to acquire first-hand knowledge of the experience opportunities and knowledge of the tourism services afforded throughout the Reach. To this end, season-opening and special weekend arrangements might be made to familiarize staff with the guest opportunities throughout the Reach.

It was also suggested that training be offered to enhance hosting capacities and to enhance their awareness and understanding of how to support various types of guests. A Rideau specific 'super host' training program was mentioned.

Hosts & Ambassadors

It was recommended that there be a host certification program designed to enhance the quality of our traditional front line and special information services; and to go beyond traditional services to create a 'concierge-like' quality amongst our hosting network of people.

It was discussed that a common or integrated look to information providers working from guest information centres throughout the Corridor and Reach and roaming in communities and popular gathering places would contribute to the effectiveness of the service.

An ambassador program from Ottawa to Kingston would integrate a network of quality, trained hosts creating a consistent sense of welcome and arrival, Corridor- long.

Website and Web Communications

The Reach's attractions and service providers need to be a part of a Reach-wide and Corridor-long website to communicate their service offer and unique experience opportunities. This web-site will support networking amongst hosts to better welcome and support guests travelling throughout the Corridor.

It was recognized that guests' abilities to receive and request information prior to and during their travels are evolving quickly through the use of web based services and personal communication devices. It was accordingly noted that investment in enhancing the reach of our messages and information services must be responsive to our guests' requirements, as well as enhancing traditional information outlets and services.

- Establish a web-based network of information with front-line terminals throughout the Reach to support the dissemination of accurate and up to date travel and experience opportunity information
- Equip front-line staff with the information and capacities to create travel experience packages and to cross-sell, refer guests to other experience opportunities and service providers

Rideau “App” – An extension of the Website would be an “app” which guests could use throughout their travels to connect with the Corridor website or to connect with a specific Reach attraction, service provider or experience opportunity. These are desired by Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorers, No Hassle Travelers and Free Sprits.

Signage – The participants suggested that the existence of a collage of signing at the Corridor, county, municipality and attraction / service level creates confusion. They recommended a common-look and messaging be used throughout the Reach and the Corridor. They felt a Corridor-long shared branding and marketing strategy would assist in this regard.

Please note – Following the title of an enhancement or innovation, there is a forecasted indication of which explorer types may be attracted to this type of opportunity or service. The types in bold are likely most attracted, and others are identified as having some interest.

Enhancement and Innovations of Reach’s Cultural Heritage Experience Opportunities

Discussion participants identified the following innovations and enhancements to support guests in connecting with the authentic character of this Reach’s people, places, communities, history and heritage.

Community walking tours (GE, NHT, PHT, CE, AE, R,)

As an example, perhaps beginning at Merrickville’s Canal waterfront, or another heritage location, it was suggested that guided walking tours of would be popular ways for Gentle Explorers and No Hassle Travelers to experience the cultural heritage highlights of Merrickville with the benefit of add insights from local expertise. A scaled down version of this same concept might be applicable in other historic villages.

A self-guided version of these tours could be provided with either printed guidance or GPS based guidance devices. These independent tours leave the guest more time to linger and contemplate what they have discovered.

The self-guided tours could be further segmented with a network of QR Coded heritage information posts at key vantage points throughout the village.

Artisan experiences (CE, AE, B, NHT, GE, R, FS,)

Merrickville is renowned for its gathering of artisans. Initially the storefronts were outlets for the works of the artists and opportunities to meet the artists. However, increasingly they have incorporated means by which guests can view artisans at work; and perhaps in some cases participate in learning programs and skill development programs.

Studio touring and special events inviting guests behind the scenes are growing in number and popularity.

Artist in residence – artistic retreats to special places (R, B, CE, AE,)

It was suggested that some Cultural Explorers, Rejuvenators and art Buffs would relish opportunities to learn from an artist and travel to special places within the Reach or Corridor to capture the natural or cultural heritage of the setting. An array of artistic mediums provides a foundation for a complementary array of artistic retreats and learning experiences.

Culinary experiences of heritage (CE, AE, PHT, FS, NHT, GE, R,)

The farmer's market experiences of some communities, such as Merrickville and Manotick are taste experience models to build upon. These venues bring guests in contact with the producers, and restaurants can then extend this initial contact by presenting and explaining heritage dining experiences.

This same connection of 'field to plate' was suggested in supporting heritage picnics in community parks, at lock stations and heritage museums.

Culinary guide books and access to expertise in food production, processing and fine cuisine add to the real of experience opportunities.

Selected restaurants of Merrickville, Kemptville and Manotick could afford special insights into the food heritage of the Canal and this particular Reach. This might have added value to guest , if it could be accomplished in view of the Canal or river waters, or even aboard a floating restaurant or boat.

It was also noted that Kilmarnock orchard hosts an ale festival and brings in chefs from Ottawa and he cooks onsite. It was suggested that this type of experience opportunity could be developed in concert with other similar venues to expand and diversify the culinary and tasting experiences .

Animation of locks (GE, NHT, CE, AE,)

Particularly at the Merrickville locks and perhaps the Nicholson locks, it was suggested that a greater sense of theater might add to the experiences achieved by both land based and boating guests at lock stations. In this regard, it was suggested that lock staff might be costumed in the period dress.

It was also suggested that scheduled performances be added to the normal operations. These might be provided by local performers. These performances would be revenue generating opportunities.

Where appropriate, the performers might lead guided explorations of the locks and related structures. These walks might be linked to other guided walks throughout the neighbouring communities and cultural landscapes, including stops at heritage museums and industrial ruins.

Locks become launch points for explorers (ALL)

Again particularly at Merrickville locks, yet also applicable at other locks in association with historic communities and compelling natural areas, such as Nicholson locks, it was suggested that lock stations and lands, which are now popular viewing points of Canal boats and activities, could increasingly serve as launch points for explorations of surrounding landscapes and communities.

The concept envisions information being available to inform and motivate guests to travel beyond the lock to connect with other natural and cultural heritage places and resources – in effect becoming an epi-centre of explorations. In a complementary vein, this location could also serve as a distribution and drop

point for bicycles, canoes and kayaks used to explore nearby waterways, wetlands and cultural landscapes.

Locking through (CE, AE, PHT, NHT, FS, GE, B, R)

Many guests visiting the waterfronts of Merrickville simply must stand and observe boaters passing through the locks and lock staff operating the locks. It was suggested that Parks Canada in collaboration with others could facilitate more meaningful experiences for some guests by providing water crafts with which these land based travelers could lock through.

The opportunity to lock through one or a set of locks, particularly in a setting like the Nicholson locks was thought to be an iconic opportunity for land based travelers. This would be an adventure for both leisure travelers and learners seeking to understand the challenges of lock designers and their ingenuities.

Hands-on lock experiences (CE, AE, PHT, NHT, FS, GE, B, R,)

The opportunity to serve as a lock station worker for a day or longer at a lock station such as Merrickville was thought to be a compelling opportunity for Cultural Explorers, Buffs and Personal History Travelers.

Archaeological digs (CE, AE, B, PHT, NHT,)

In a similar vein, it was suggested that a network of active “archaeological digs” respecting the diverse heritage of the Rideau Corridor could become places where guests would be able to observe and learn about the heritage and the dig; and perhaps in some cases where they could get involved in the dig.

Celebration of boat builders and heritage boats (CE, AE, B, PHT, NHT,)

The design of boats and the rationale behind these designs intrigues both boaters and boat observers. Learning from notable boat designers of the Canal as a whole and the Merrickville area designers and other marinas along the length of this Reach would be a valued opportunity for both Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers – to say nothing of boat buffs.

Celebrating founding peoples (CE, AE, PHT, NHT, GE, B)

Cultural Explorers and Personal History Travelers are drawn to opportunities to connect with and/or experience the heritage lifestyles of the array of peoples who launched the communities and cultural heritage of this Reach and the Corridor in general. Celebrations of millers and their achievements, navigators and boat builders, canal builders and operators, founding community families or landowners might be unique events – the themes of which could vary from year to year, with the celebration location remaining constant.

Rideau stories and storytellers (GE, NHT, PHT, CE, AE, R)

It was suggested in these discussions, that people who have been long-time residents of the Reach and Corridor, or those who can relay in detail their family heritage might be willing to contribute to a “human library” or “speakers bureau”. These knowledgeable and quality speakers could be hired by individual guests or by gatherings of special interests to convey their heritage or that of the Reach and Corridor. They could use special heritage places such as Canal lock stations, heritage museums and other special places as stages and backdrops for their stories.

Network of Rideau chairs & vantage points (All)

This Reach has a network of special places from which to observe and connect with its nature and living history. Some are at the river or canals edge, some are on the main streets of towns or municipal parks, some are at the more remote and sometimes more serene lock and surrounding lands.

Some of these vantage points are accessible by vehicle, foot or water and are valued locations or discoveries of all types of explorers and leisure travelers.

Drawing upon 'local knowledge' of valued sites, it was suggested that a network of chairs and contemplation points be developed at these special places throughout the Reach and Corridor. In some cases, augmenting some with QR coded information posts might motivated wider exploration of the Reach and longer stays.

Enhancement and Innovations of Natural Heritage Experience Opportunities

The proximity of this Reach to Ottawa provides special opportunities to seek to engage local residents in discovering and appreciating the aquatic and terrestrial environments of this safe and readily accessible component of the Rideau Corridor. In the same vein, it is a readily available opportunity for guests of Ottawa to see beyond the urban realities of the Canal, and perhaps more fully comprehend the array of natural challenges addressed by canal builders and operators.

Participants suggested the following enhancements and innovations to assist guests in connecting with the natural heritage of this Reach and as an introduction to the Corridor as a whole:

Inventory of special places and experience opportunities (All)

There are a wide array of aquatic areas affording insights into the river environments, wetlands and marshes. Some conservation areas and parks support guests in exploring and understanding the ecosystem, but many other places are rich opportunities for self-guided discoveries.

The suggestion was made that these special places to be explored on water and land should be inventoried and developed into a network of natural heritage explorations.

Water Based Travelers

As suggested in other Reach discussions, it was recommended that steps be taken to better host and guide explorers, particularly those seeking an introduction to outdoor experiences of this nature. To this end the following enhancements and innovations were suggested

Water based exploration routes (AE, CE, FS, B, NHT, PHT, R,)

Building upon the inventory of special places, it was suggested that themed maps and guidance could be developed for explorers of this Reach's waterways, and linked with similar guidance suggested for neighbouring reaches. These guides would be of value to both boaters and land based travelers renting equipment to explore this and other reaches.

Floating QR code buoys network (AE, CE, B, NHT, PHT, R,)

Throughout this Reach's meandering river environments and Corridor as a whole, a network of information buoys could be established at special experience locations to aid guests in understanding the significance of the places and resources – and particularly in respect of resources less visible to the untrained eye.

Expanded network of water access points for boats (AE, CE, NHT, PHT,)

It was suggested that an expanded network of water access facilities for boaters, canoeists and kayakers could be created, with associated parking and launch facilities at locks or communities. Perhaps, each of the launch points could be associated with a set of aquatic environment exploration themes and guidance.

Land Based Travelers

As in other Reach's, for land based explorers, bikers and walkers, the following enhancements were suggested:

Network of floating and waterside trails (ALL)

This concept is intended to aid guests in exploring the Reach's waterways and wetlands. It envisions making it feasible for guests to travel throughout the Reach along its Canal waterways and through its marshes and wetlands with an innovative set of interconnected trails beside, over and on the water. This system would allow non-boaters to perhaps achieve the experiences achieved by kayakers and canoeists. It would take guests into areas not presently available to them. It would be available in all seasons.

This Reach's trail network could be linked with similar trail concepts suggested in other Reaches. The exploration experiences could be augmented with guidance systems, and the network could be a resource for guide explorations facilitated by Reach expertise.

Floating platform network (R, GE, NHT, CE, AE,)

It was suggested that a network of platforms be established along the lake shores and in more remote locations to be used in a number of ways: as night observation points for star gazing, as wildlife and wetland observation points, as swimming platforms for day users.

A network of "shorefast" platforms (R, GE, NHT, CE, AE,)

It was also suggested that land based travelers, particularly gentle Explorers, Rejuvenators and Authentic Experiencers would value special vantage points from which to observe the lakes and aquatic environments. These two might be equipped with QR coded information posts.

Land based tour of Corridor (GE, PHT, CE,)

Complementing the type of experiences afforded by boat based touring such as the Kawartha Voyageur, it was suggested that a multi-day tour taking people to the best natural and historic and cultural experiences could be developed and facilitated by a Corridor-long operators.

Augmented Appreciation / Passive Observation Opportunities

Burritts Rapids performance amphitheater – one of a network (GE, CE, NHT, AE, PHT)

One participant outlined a concept for creating an iconic heritage gathering place and performance facility in the area of Burritts Rapids. The concept built upon the original concept of the Burritts Rapids band shell

A location linking the heritage and historic resources of the village and the locks was the basis of the concept. The amphitheater was envisioned as an opportunity for theatrical, musical and story- telling presentations. It was also seen as a serene and picturesque gathering place, when not in use as a performance venue.

It was felt that the concept might be applicable to other small communities and intimate natural and cultural heritage places. The place and its infrastructure need to be respectful of their surroundings and responsive to the hosting community's values, history and current lifestyles. The design will reflect the scale, nature and needs of each individual place.

Merrickville Theater (GE, NHT, CE, FS)

The suggested concept saw performers doing more presentations respecting segments of the history of Merrickville and its surroundings. Some presentations would celebrate moments in time, while other would present themes of evolution experienced over time by this Community.

A series of presentations were mentioned in regards to the political and economic history of the Community; and its rise and fall as an industrial centre of the Corridor.

Street performances (GE, NHT, CE, AE, PHT, FS)

An off shoot of the theater idea was the staging of theater-like presentations, perhaps shorter vignettes in the streets and publically accessible buildings of the Community. A series of these events during an evening or weekend was seen as a means of guiding guests throughout the town and exposing them to much more of the built and less visible heritage than is currently perceived by guests.

Sound and light performances (All)

In regards to bringing the industrial ruins to life and perhaps making the waterfront and lock lands even more engaging during the evening hours, it was suggested that ' sound and light' performance techniques might be used in telling the stories of Merrick's mills and the building and operations of the Canal and locks.

Festival of the Rideau (GE, NHT, CE, AE, FS, PHT, R)

It was suggested that perhaps Merrickville or Manotick, or another gathering place within this Reach could be one of a series of six venues which would host a migrating series of festival-like performances and events celebrating the Rideau's part in the "Story of Canada". These events would be timed throughout the primary guest season and make use of performers and stages along the Corridor. The series would be a choreographed set of performances.

Spectacle event of “A great Canadian pilgrimage, done by voyageur canoe” (AE, CE, FS NHT, GE,)

Building on a concept being considered for the 2017 celebration of Canada’s 150th anniversary, the idea envisions a flotilla of voyageur canoes moving from one end of canal to the other and camping along the way. The arrival of the pilgrimage in various communities at selected canal-side attractions would ignite local celebrations, which would be attractions in themselves. Together, the canoes and the local performances would share aspects of the local and Corridor-long heritage.

Rideau “Ramble Guides” (AE, CE, B)

It was suggested that “qualified” residents and operators could afford different expertise and guidance services. They could serve, for hire, as occasional guides and expertise; facilitating guest connections with aquatic environments, the natural and cultural landscapes, community and canal history, heritage and lifestyles. Their services could be promoted on a website and through host referrals. This network could be linked to similar networks for fishing guides and other outfitting services.

Web cam network (All)

It has been suggested that a network of web cams could be developed throughout the Corridor to provide remote experience opportunities for guests, who might view the results in guest information centres, on close circuit transmissions to resorts and other accommodation bases or popular gathering places.

The web cam network would be designed to facilitate exposure to remote locations, not accessible to most guests – backwaters and inaccessible shorelines of this Reach. To bring guest indirectly into sensitive habitats not available for direct experiences – wetlands and/or to aid guests in experiencing indirectly underwater environments and submerged heritage resources.

Enhancement and Innovations of Recreation / Relaxation Opportunities

Water is at the core of the Canal’s history and the heritage lifestyles of its peoples and communities and it is the anchor attractions for the largest percentage of Corridor guests. With this in mind, participants suggested a number of enhancements and innovations designed to “get guests onto the water”.

Reach specific water tours (GE, NHT, R, AE, CE,)

It is anticipated that within this Reach, like most reaches of the Corridor, a compelling water tour could be designed to take land based travellers to water only accessible experience opportunities.

Guided Outings (GE, NHT, AE, CE,)

The growth in use of small non-powered boats will have the potential to bring a growing market of experience seekers to this most spectacular Reach. No Hassle Travellers and to a lesser extent Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers will look to guided tours of rivers, lakes and ventures into wetland environments. The guidance is more for understanding the habitats being traversed rather than for security, yet some will rely upon the leader for orientation and direction.

“Geo-caching” (NHT, FS, AE, CE,)

Trail and free roaming based geo-cache programs could be developed with support guidance and facilities. These activities could be linked to resource and Corridor exploration and discovery programs

Secure mooring points (NHT, B, AE, and CE)

It was suggested that a network of mooring points in more secluded portions of the Reach become a part of a Corridor-long network of remote and isolated moorings.

Enhancement and Innovation of Accommodation & Experience Opportunities

Overnighting on the water or remote islands (AE, CE, NHT, PHT, FS)

It would be a valued opportunity within this Reach for land based travelers and self-powered water-based travellers to have opportunities to overnight on the water in moored boats or perhaps in floating yurts or to have designated areas on remote shorelines or islands to overnight in huts or camp in primitive sites.

Networks of inns (CE, NHT, GE, AE, R)

For those exploring the Corridor and Reach, as a part of multi-day trips, being presented with the services of booking multiple nights of accommodations through a network of quality heritage inns and bed and breakfast would be of assistance. If these bookings were linked to a Corridor – long shuttle service of goods, boats, bicycles and people, multi-day adventures would be even easier to plan.

Network of ‘waterside’ basic accommodations (AE, CE, NHT, PHT, R,)

Accessible by water and foot on public lands and private lands, this network of huts, restored heritage buildings and yurts would be available for reservation by boaters and waterside trail users. The network of facilities might be offered by an array of hosts forming a necklace of evening opportunities for river travellers.

In a linked suggestion, the participant envisioned such accommodations built on stilts in marshes and wetland areas, allowing distinctive evening and overnight experiences in unusual setting and environments.

This Reach specific concept might be linked to a similar concept proposed for other Reaches, which builds upon the Spanish Barador concept of restoring vacant buildings for use as basic accommodation by travelers. Like the El Camino trail, there might be cabins every so far with minimal supplies. So that if you want to hike, cross-country ski across the Rideau these are cabins you can stay in with some supplies.

Enhancement and Innovations of Transportation Services

Rideau experiential touring support network (All)

It was suggested that an integrated network of water to land based shuttles to connect visitors to different stops and experiences would support more in depth and convenient exploration of the Reach (and the Corridor) by all types of guests. The network would be operated by well-informed drivers who would cross-promote communities, attractions and services, by serving as ambassadors and story tellers.

Cinque Terra – like multi-modal network of transportation routes (AE, CE, FS, NHT,))

Throughout Reach and Corridor - pedestrian, bicycle, water, road and perhaps in the Reach 'train' supportive shuttle service for people and goods and luggage - centralized booking service for accommodations and travel support services - looping services to return explorers to their start of the linear exploration - perhaps arrive by plane in Ottawa travel by multi-modes throughout corridor to Kingston and return via VIA Rail to Ottawa

Short Term and Medium Term “Doables”

During the Reach discussions, participants were asked to identify actions which they felt might be undertaken to realize the enhancements and innovations they had put forward. The following highlights those “doables” related to Reach-specific doables”

Top Priority EQ Types

Current Guests

The participants were asked to speculate in EQ type terms, who were their current guests and who in the foreseeable future were their desired guests. This was intended to provide a part of the foundation for moving forward. Overall they speculated that Gentle Explorers and No Hassle Travelers make up the bulk of guests in this Reach travelling by both land and water. Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers are the next most prevalent groups.

It was speculated, for example, that those most often visiting the following areas or types of attractions may be:

- Merrickville and the Locks - No Hassle Travelers, Gentle Explorers and Cultural Explorers.
- Manotick and Kemptville – Buffs, Cultural Explorers and No Hassle Travelers
- Long Island locks and park lands – No Hassle Travelers, Gentle Explorers and Rejuvenators
- Marinas – Rejuvenators, Gentle Explorers and Authentic Experiencers
- Voyageur canoeing – Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorers, Free Spirits

It might be speculated that a majority of current guests are regionally high repeat guests, who may, owing to their familiarity with the Reach and perhaps being nearby residents act as they are Gentle Explorers and Rejuvenators.

In sum, the current guests may be best hosted by responding to the values and traits of Gentle Explorers, No Hassle Travelers, Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers.

Future Guests

The participants believe that this Reach has a rich array of cultural heritage experience which is capable of attracting guests from afar and new guests from within Eastern Ontario. They also believe that the waters and landscape are capable of affording safe and accessible escapes for local urban dwellers.

With this in mind, the participants indicated an interest in growing the number of guests from both near and far, who are Authentic Experiencers (nature experience biased), Cultural Explorers (culture experience biased), and for those escaping to outdoor activities and serenity, No Hassle Travelers, Gentle Explorers and Free Spirits.

Bringing the communities to life through animation, festivals and events will meet the needs of Gentle Explorers and No Hassle Travelers. Enhancing the vibrancy of communities and in particular their waterfronts, will respond to the interests of all priority explorer types, with Gentle Explorers and Rejuvenators being very appreciative of enhancements.

The focus of enhancements and innovations relating to exploring and discovering the Canal's and waterway's cultural and natural heritage resources are prominently a response to Authentic Experienter, Cultural Explorer, No Hassle Traveler and Free Spirit values and interests.

“Doables”

Participants were asked to identify enhancements and innovations, which they thought could be accomplished within one year and within the next three years.

Enhancements by 2014:

- Make the visitor centre a welcome centre, much more than an information distribution service by enhancing the “hosting / concierge” capabilities of staff and developing menus of experience opportunities for priority types of guests.
- Merrickville lock staff and management to become much better acquainted with other Merrickville tourism managers and staff, and in so doing share knowledge of the destinations array of experience opportunities.
- Manotick area Marina operators will resurrect navigation lessons, and encourage boaters to experience the Reach's special places, both on water and by land.
- Promote the canoe / kayak dock which has been put in place by the Forest Centre, and develop a similar dock in historic Kemptville.
- Connect the managers and staff of the Kemptville BIA and Ferguson Forest Centre with those of Burritts Rapids Locks.
- Develop bundles of EQ types based attractions and experience opportunities on the North Grenville web site.
- Garden design artisans will start offering garden design workshops, as hands on learning opportunities for guests.
- Approach Manotick Council to incorporate greater care for boaters as a part of their tourism and waterfront development planning.
- Enhance signage for canoeists and kayakers re portage trails and opportunities, especially at Long Island locks. Alert paddle clubs and marina operators of these opportunities.
- Encourage Long Island Lock land-visitors and boaters to explore the lock buildings and meet lock staff to learn more about the history and current operations of this set of locks and the community which once border it.

- Merrickville Locks' picnic tables will be available beyond the length of the boating season, and put in place a canoe / kayak docking service at the locks
- Add music and guidance to enhance the Industrial Ruins site experiences
- Diversify the Voyageur canoeing experience to attract water based wetland experiencers, birders, photography buffs (AE and CE).
- Heighten the experiential tourism positioning of the Rideau Rambles botanical gardens, and perhaps provide docking facilities at Mahogany Harbour and trails access for kayakers and canoeists
- Seed funding is promised for a new festival

Significant change by 2017

- New retail boutique shops, upscale, accommodations in Merrickville.
- Move towards an enlightened leadership / governance model for the Rideau Canal Heritage Corridor tourism district, in an effort to ensure the Canal and the surrounding attractions and communities are more economically vibrant and sustainable tourism models.
- Establish bike lanes along the River Road from Kemptville to Burritts Rapids and to Merrickville
- Have in place a Corridor-long full service website with North Grenville playing a lead role in advancing the IT.
- A significant event hosted by Burritts Rapids "green team" launching the new band shell.
- Television coverage of 25 voyageur canoes camped at Long Island.
- Voyageur canoe festival with 150 ambassadors; and on June 29th a crew of new Canadians.
- Additional Voyageur canoes will have been built in conjunction with first Nations
- An improved Manotick waterfront for boaters will be in place