RECREATIONAL REDEVELOPMENT OF CANALS IN CANADA

A Paper by
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In a society where we seem to be running out of things, recycling is coming into vogue. The purpose of this paper is to describe an exciting Canadian approach to the recycling of old shipping canals into major recreational waterways. This action demonstrates a new interface between recreation, conservation and tourism—good news for everyone in resource design and management.

Currently under joint study and action programs by the provincial government of Ontario and the Parks Canada Branch of the federal government is a total of 425 miles of old waterways, composed of three segments. The first is the Trent-Severn-Waterway, stretching 240 miles from Trenton on Lake Ontario to Port Severn on Georgian Bay. The second is the Rideau Canal, running 125 miles from Kingston on Lake Ontario to the capital of Canada, Ottawa. The third is called the Bay of Quinte segment and runs through bays and Lake Ontario waters, connecting Kingston with Trenton, a distance of about 60 miles. This ties the Trent-Severn segment to the Rideau.

These abandoned commercial shipping canals, developed to avoid Indian and American conflict in the early 1800's, now offer a recreational potential of great diversity and interest. Both the boater and the sightseeing auto
tourist has ample opportunity to explore a new recreational world.

Characteristics of the Waterways

Of special interest are the 92 locks, linking 33 lakes and 6 major rivers. Many of the locks are still hand-operated, just as they were from the beginning. Visitor surveys have shown that the users prefer these to the modernized electrically controlled locks. (Wyatt: 1974).

At Peterborough is located the highest hydraulic lift lock in the world. Two chambers, 33 by 140 feet, actually lift and lower the boater in the water a height of 65 feet to the next level of the canal. A similar but lower lift lock is located at Kirkfield. Near Georgian Bay a marine railway rather than a lock is used to move boats up a grade to prevent sea lamprey from entering Lake Simcoe, a major resort lake on the Trent-Severn System.

A clue to the difficulty of planning these water corridors is the complexity of existing development. The waterway corridor has a population of over 800,000; includes 6 cities, 6 towns and 19 villages; and includes portions of 104 local municipalities, 2 regional governments and 9 counties. The federal government has control of the water and lock-site lands but other public lands remain with the Crown in the right of Ontario. In 1969 on the Trent-Severn alone, there were 25,000 cottages en route and an additional 12,000 cottages on adjacent reservoirs. In order to maintain navigability, the federal government regulates drawdown which varies from 2.0 to 13.25 feet depending on the size of the reservoir. (Jaakson: 1973). Although they do not consider it a major problem, some cottage owners have extensive mud flats in front at the very peak of their vacation season.

In recent years, even before any formal government recognition of recreational use of the waterways occurred, popularity increased greatly. Now about
8,000 vessels use the Rideau and over 18,000 ply the waters of the Trent-Severn annually. While greatest use is by cruisers, launches and houseboats, many canoes and sailboats use the tributary streams and lakes. It is estimated that the boat use of the system could increase 300 percent before reaching full capacity. (Rideau-Trent-Severn: 1971).

To date, all costs of improvement, operation and maintenance have been borne by the government. Operating and maintenance costs of both canals are about $5.2 million (Davies: 1975). Capital improvements on the Trent-Severn were $3.4 million and on the Rideau about $3 million in 1975. In 1973, the total cost was about $12.9 million. For the first time, lockage user fees were charged in 1975. It is estimated that these revenues will reduce government costs by about 7 percent. Evidence of federal commitment to the recreational use and development of these waterways is a $44 million budget over the next four years. (Maslin: 1975).

Joint Planning Study

As a result of growing interest in recreational use of these old commercial shipping lanes, the federal Minister of Transport and the Ontario Minister of Tourism and Information announced in 1967 that the governments of Canada and Ontario would jointly study and plan for the future development of these corridors. (Rideau-Trent-Severn: 1971). Much of the stimulus for considering regional scale planning of these water corridors came from a graduate thesis on the topic of recreation land classification, based on the Rideau Waterway. (Wyatt: 1967). General interest in protecting certain landscape and historic values gave impetus to a major planning program. An umbrella agency representing about 15 agencies in both segments of government
named members to the CORTS (Canada-Ontario Rideau-Trent-Severn) Committee.

While detailed study of the corridor was led by a three-man team of land planners, a great many others participated. Elected members of local constituencies, citizen groups and members of many related agencies took part. The purpose of the study project was to analyze the existing situation along the entire three-segment corridor and develop planning guidelines, but, apart from issues of jurisdiction, costs and implementation. The study, completed in 1971, resulted in two major public documents that have been given widespread circulation.

The study made recommendations in six major interest areas. On the topic of pollution, items concerning sewage treatment, nutrient waste disposal, industrial discharge, boat waste and cottage sanitation were discussed. Open space recommendations included zoning and protecting scenic areas. Because of the rich heritage throughout the waterways a number of important recommendations were made to preserve and restore old locks, buildings and to develop museums. Increased parks, picnic sites, scenic routes, canoe routes, docks and other public areas were recommended. Topics concerning commercial development such as tourist centers and cruise ship tours were discussed. Recommendations for cottage development, safety, water levels and publications were also included.

Observations

Personally, this summer I spent several days photographing and making observations along this interesting corridor. By boat and by land, one is impressed with the diversity of scenery -- from rocky to marshy, from hilly to flat, from agricultural to historic and from serene to exciting. Most lock
sites are accessible by both land and water and provide a step back into history as the manpower turnstiles work the heavy wooden doors of the locks. Old mill sites and venerable stone facades of century-old hotels, homes and shops are frequent sights along the waterways.

Of great interest to Americans is the special Canadian twist to historic events of the Revolution and the War of 1812. The entire Prince Edward county, including the Bay of Quinte waterway, is a concentration of sites commemorating those who remained loyal to the King in 1776, now perpetuated by a growing organization called the United Empire Loyalists.

In assessing the present development of the waterways, it seemed that the communities have not yet realigned themselves to the water. For example, there are few services specifically adapted to boater and tourist needs, such as accommodations, interpretive centers and food service.

Many of the cities in this waterway corridor would benefit from some of the findings of two studies we made at Texas A&M University. In one study (Gunn: 1972) we found that the San Antonio River Walk represented a new form of business-park mix that completely revolutionized a decaying downtown. A second study (Gunn: 1974) translated these findings into water resource development principles for all cities. This study was based on a nationwide investigation of how urban waters were (and were not) being planned and developed for recreation. Management

In spite of the thoroughness of preparation and widespread dissemination of the reports for planning the Rideau-Trent-Severn Bay of Quinte Waterways, implementation has not been as rapid as some might desire. On the other hand, considering the multiplicity of individual and corporate owners and decision-
makers involved, it is understandable that such a monumental task would take time. Furthermore, there were (intentionally) no specific implementation recommendations included in the planning studies. This was left to the administrative units involved. As a result, both the provincial and federal governments have kept a low profile for a few years for the populace and local units to fully digest the recommendations and their implications. Now, action is being renewed.

On February 20, 1975, another major step was taken. A CORTS signing ceremony launched an action program involving many interests. Using the recommendations of the original CORTS Committee, the new agreement created two key groups to coordinate intergovernmental activities on future management of this important corridor. One was the CORTS Advisory Committee composed of private citizens. The other is the CORTS Agreement Board, consisting of federal and provincial civil servants. (CORTS: 1975, 23).

The objectives include both further study and immediate action. Studies, designed to translate the recommendations of the reports in a major plan and action program, will be performed. Furthermore, three specific efforts will be initiated: identification of lands requiring special controls; identification of lands to be acquired and setting up mechanisms for water quality control. Rather than supporting projects with matching funding, Canada and Ontario will fund their programs separately but through coordinated effort.

A CORTS headquarters has been established at Peterborough and staff is being hired. Parks Canada, Ontario regional office, has begun base-line studies, inventorying characteristics of their lock sites along the Rideau. Interpretive programs and exhibits have been established at several lock sites. The
provincial government of Ontario is initiating its program of provincial waterways.

Conclusions

These examples in Canada demonstrate gradual but significant change in the relationship between tourism, recreation and conservation. For many years, there was little concerted action toward resource protection in Canada. Natural resources were abundant — therefore economic development was not only possible but was national policy. Tourism and recreation developed independently and for many years the relationship was that of coexistence.

Now, the public and private interest is shifting, especially along the CORTS corridor. Not everyone is sure of what is happening and not all leaders agree on strategy. However, there is greater and greater recognition that conservation of certain natural and cultural resources is important if both recreation and tourism are to take place. Furthermore, if the personal and societal values of recreation are to be obtained, both conservation and commercial development goals must be considered together. Perhaps this is a clue that the polarized position of antagonism and conflict between conservation, recreation and tourism is obsolete and is being replaced by collaboration and cooperation. Both the environment and people's rewards should benefit from this new symbiotic relationship.
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