



# Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway

## Commission sur l'avenir de la voie navigable Trent-Severn

### DISCUSSION PAPER #2 CULTURAL RESOURCES

*These discussion papers do not represent the conclusions or positions of the Panel. They are intended to stimulate discussion of some of the broad issues facing the waterway.*

#### **Context**

The Trent-Severn Waterway has been at the core of central Ontario life for centuries. Ancient fish weirs at Mnjikaning and Lovesick Lake; petroglyphs at Stoney Lake, and burial sites on Rice Lake all provide evidence that Canada's First Peoples have traveled and lived along its length for as long as 8,000 years.

Samuel de Champlain, traveling along the waterway in 1615, provided some of the first written descriptions of the landscape. Military strategists contemplated the waterway as a protected inland route to the upper Great Lakes given fears of an American invasion in the period after the American war of independence.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the waterway became increasingly important in the settlement and economy of Upper Canada. The vast timber resources of the Ontario interior were transported through log chutes and timber slides from the upper reaches of the watershed to Trenton and other centres for shipment to Great Britain and later to markets in the United States. Settlers from Britain, particularly Ireland, journeyed by ship, steamer and coach to communities along the waterway, clearing the land, planting the crops and building the mills and factories that transformed the landscape.

Built in stages between 1833 and 1920, the waterway is a testament to the political will of the residents, engineering skill of the builders and resourcefulness of the entrepreneurs who exploited the economic opportunities it presented. While the canal did not become the commercial highway envisioned by its promoters, today it provides recreational and lifestyle opportunities for many to enjoy the rich natural and cultural heritage along this historic corridor.

*But do we really understand what is culturally and historically significant about the waterway and have we, as a community, committed to preserving the artifacts and telling the stories of that tradition?*

#### **Historical Designation of the Waterway**

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board was established in 1919 in the first steps toward a national program for the commemoration of heritage resources. In 1924, the

Chair of the Board, in a letter to National Parks Branch Director Harkin, acknowledged that construction of the canals were “important events in the industrial history of Canada” and the following year, the Board asked for reports on “the commemoration of these national undertakings.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1929, the Board declared several canals, including the Trent-Severn, to be of “national importance.” A plaque was to be erected at Bobcaygeon in 1933 to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of construction. Like the original construction, there were delays and the plaque was not installed until 1938.

*TRENT VALLEY CANAL - Commemorating the construction in 1833 of the first Bobcaygeon Lock by the Inland Water Commission appointed by Sir John Colborne; the beginning of the improvement of the natural waterway connecting Lake Ontario with Georgian Bay.*

Since then, the Board has considered the historic significance of the canals and the Trent-Severn Waterway several times. In 1967, it recommended that the entire Rideau Canal be designated as nationally significant in response to Department of Transport plans for modernization, which were widely opposed in a well-organized public campaign. As a result, modernization plans for the Rideau were shelved in response although modernization of the Trent-Severn that was not the subject of public opposition continued. Departmental analyses of the day concluded that only the Rideau was significant because much of its historic infrastructure was intact. The Trent-Severn and the Richelieu canals were thought to be of “historic interest” since many elements of both had been modernized.

The Board did, however, elaborate on its earlier comments on the waterway during a national program in the early 1970s to convert plaque texts to a bilingual format.

*In 1833 the Legislature of Upper Canada authorized improvements to the waterways of the Newcastle District, the first of which was a wooden lock here at Bobcaygeon. Three years later the first funds were appropriated for the opening of a waterway via the Trent River and the Kawartha Lakes to link Lake Ontario with Lake Simcoe (and later with Georgian Bay). This system was intended to open up the interior of the province and to promote agriculture, lumbering and commerce.*

In 1973, the Board determined that “the canals of Canada have already been sufficiently commemorated and that no further commemorations should be considered”. Elements of the system, however, did receive designation. In 1979 the Board recommended that the Peterborough Liftlock was of “national architectural significance” and, in 1987, that the Canal Lake Arch Bridge and the Simcoe-Balsam Lake section of the waterway be declared nationally significant.<sup>2</sup>

Several other sites along the waterway have also been designated nationally-significant by the Board – in some measure because their stories are associated with the waterway. These include the Peterborough Petroglyphs on Stoney Lake, Carrying Place near the

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<sup>1</sup> Carter-Edwards, Dennis, *Commemorating the Canal: The Trent Severn Waterway and the HSMBC*, unpublished paper, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

Murray Canal, Serpent Mounds on Rice Lake and the Mnjikaning Fish Weirs at Atherley Narrows between Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching.

### Current Commemorative Framework

Parks Canada’s framework for protecting and presenting historic resources under its stewardship is established by way of a Statement of Commemorative Integrity. The CI Statement for the waterway prepared as part of the management plan approved by Parks Canada in 2000 identifies three nationally significant historic values.

- The Peterborough Lift Lock
- The Lake Simcoe to Balsam Lake section
- The original survey maps, documents, correspondence, designs, engineering drawings, photographic plates, patterns, molds, machine templates and other historic objects related to the design and construction of the Lift Lock and Simcoe to Balsam Lake section.

The statement also identifies other heritage values of importance.

- Locks 1-18, Lock 19 and Lock 22
- The dams at Healey Falls and Swift Rapids
- Nine road and rail swing bridges
- Selected cultural landscapes
  - Peterborough Liftlock
  - Locks 22/23
  - Related to water power – Lindsay, Swift Rapids, Big Chute
  - Recreation – Young’s Point, Lovesick locks
  - Natural features – Percy, Meyers and Haigues Reach
  - Natural landscapes
  - Archaeological sites – Aboriginal sites and other sites

The CI Statement also identifies messages and stories that should be told.

| <b>National Significance</b>  | <b>Other Heritage Values</b>  |
|---|---|
| The place and vision of the waterway in the national canal system for both military and commercial use in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century with the completion of the final link between Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario. | The construction and operations of the Trent-Severn Waterway.   |
| The nationally and internationally significant engineering achievement of the Peterborough Lift Lock – its design, construction and operation.  | The evolving relationship of the TSW to the development of corridor communities including association with lumbering, milling, hydro generation, settlement, agriculture and recreational activities. |
| The historic character of the waterway as exemplified in the structural elements and cultural landscapes surviving along the Simcoe-Balsam section.   | The Aboriginal use of the waterway.   |
| The evolution, development and construction of the waterway with particular emphasis on changing construction and transportation  | The relationship between the waterway and the region’s rich natural heritage including  |

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| technologies from 1833 to the present. | wetlands, natural shorelines, natural uplands, and wildlife and their habitats. |
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## **The Challenges**

**Structures or Ideas – What is Really Significant?** The section on “Historical Designation of the Waterway” describes an evolution of official designations that focuses largely on structures. With the exception of the wording of the second plaque in 1938, national significance is attributed to the first lock, the engineering achievements of the Peterborough Lift Lock and the Canal Lake Arch Bridge. The Balsam Lake to Simcoe section of the waterway is also determined to be significant because many of the original features are intact. Analyses by Parks Canada historians in the 1960s concluded that, among the historic canals, only the Rideau was deemed to be of national significance because most of its historic infrastructure remained relatively intact, unlike the Trent that had been partially modernized and was viewed as being of historic importance.<sup>3</sup>

In the minds of many, the emphasis on the integrity of the historic structures as the principal determinant of national significance overwhelms and obscures other important historic values. The importance of the waterway also lies in the idea itself and the stories it tells about the political and economic evolution of Ontario. Also, communities and First Nations along the waterway see importance in their historic and present relationship to the water. Perhaps it is time to reflect again, with a broader terms of reference, on what is really significant.

**Building passion for the place and its stories** – Not long ago, a consultant working on a project for Parks Canada remarked, in reporting on project consultations, that he had been struck by the absence of passion about the waterway among the people he spoke with. A waterway marina operator independently offered a similar observation. “In my travels/conversations with many different groups,” he wrote, “the common denominator usually excludes the TSW.”

This lack of identification and commitment to the idea and reality of the waterway is surprising. As a piece of existing infrastructure, it intrudes in some manner on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every day but evidently in a subliminal fashion. It is a part of today’s landscape but also a collage of the critical stories of our past and even our present. It is a story of the political evolution of Upper Canada. It embraces the lives, traditions and spirituality of our First Peoples. It marks the pathways of settlement and the evolution of the economy of central Ontario. It is about technological evolution and innovation, the diversity of our culture and what we like to do for fun. What’s not to get excited about?

**Telling the Story** – Nobody really knows how many people actually visit the waterway. Conservative measures suggest that 1.5 million people visit lock stations each year.<sup>4</sup> Each year there are more than 132,000 lockages, usually with several people in each boat.<sup>5</sup> More than 300,000 thousand people live along its route.<sup>6</sup> Compared to most of

<sup>3</sup> Canada-Ontario Rideau-Trent-Severn Study Committee, *The Rideau-Trent-Severn: Yesterday Today Tomorrow*, Toronto: Queens Publisher, 1971, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Parks Canada, *Ontario Attendance Report 1998-2005*, Cornwall, 2006, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Within a 2-kilometre band of the water. TCI Management Consultants, *Trent-Severn Impact Corridor Demographic Analysis*, 2007, p. 3, draft unpublished report.

Parks Canada's parks and sites, the potential visitor audience is staggering. And that is the just the number who "visit."

Approximately eight million people live within two to three hours' drive of the waterway including the diverse population in the Greater Toronto area. Just how many schools there are that might be part of an outreach program is unknown.

Parks Canada's 2004 Evaluation of Commemorative Integrity concluded the following.

*Heritage presentation is absent or lacking at most points along the 400km corridor. The program cannot adequately deliver the range of site and corporate messages...to the large and diverse audiences of the TSW. The decline in heritage presentation capacity was a consequence of Program Review [a federal expenditure reduction program in the mid 1990s].*

The foregoing numbers and the potential of an exciting story well told suggest opportunity. Realization of that opportunity – the how, the who and the where – is a key challenge.

**Make Connections and Engaging Communities and First Nations** – During 2006, the Orillia Museum of Art and History hosted an exhibition of the photography of Charles Pachter entitled "Regard the Lake." Mr. Pachter has renovated an ice storage warehouse on the shores of Lake Simcoe and the exhibition tells, at least in some measure, the story of part of the waterway.

Kris Nahrgang, diver, archaeologist and Chief of a non-status First Nation speaks with great passion about the First Nations archaeological resources that can be found just offshore of where he lives on the waterway. He reminds Parks Canada regularly of the importance of those resources and the need for engagement.

Mr. Nahrgang knows that he is involved in protecting the resources and telling the stories of a protected area. Few others including many community institutions may have made the connection.

**Understanding and protecting the resources** – In its Executive Summary, the 2004 Commemorative Integrity Evaluation concluded that:

- *The many cultural resources subject to wear and tear from operational use in a marine environment must be maintained. Against financial constraints maintenance has not kept up to wear and tear. These resources represent 10% of Parks Canada's built heritage resources.*
- *There are some dams, locks and bridges that are cultural resources and part of the waterway operation that are in poor condition and need major repair (beyond maintenance) to retain their historic value and operational use.*
- *Unique equipment or parts of equipment are needed to keep the Waterway operations going while ensuring technology remains authentic to the site.*
- *Large staff turnover in coming years could mean loss of expertise and knowledge if not passed on to new staff.*
- *More than 20,000 plans and other documents that may be historic objects should inventoried, evaluated and digitized.*

- *A large number of potential archaeological sites...should be inventoried and evaluated.*

### **Ideas**

- Parks Canada is a nationally and internationally acknowledged leader in the cultural heritage field. Perhaps because of its origins and operation as a commercial waterway, that culture of commitment to heritage protection and presentation has not always been clearly evident as a core mission of the waterway. Cultural heritage leadership at all levels of Parks Canada, in terms of policies, funding, and operations, would help to overcome the deficiencies identified in the 2004 Commemorative Integrity Evaluation. On-the-ground examples might include:
  - Increased use of interpretation expertise in lock operations.
  - Appropriate strategies and tools to present the human dimension of the waterway's history – the engineers, contractors, politicians, and thousands of workers who played a pivotal role in its building
  - Interventions guided by sound heritage protection planning and appropriate professional expertise
- Formalize continuing First Nations involvement in the research and management of First Nations archaeological resources and Aboriginal history sites on waterway lands and waters.
- Use a community-based network to foster an understanding and appreciation of non-Parks cultural resources associated with the waterway, and seek to develop a “brand” that can position all waterway-related resources as part of a “waterway heritage family”.
- Form partnerships with others to ensure that the important documentary and artifact resources are managed and held in a publicly-accessible repository.
- Promote provincial and municipal recognition of the lands and uses in the vicinity of heritage resources along the waterway, particularly with respect to land use change on adjacent lands.
- Actively present cultural and natural heritage through a mix of well funded personal and non-personal, on-site interpretation and an outreach program targeted at the Region's schools including schools in the Greater Toronto area.