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More than a Trail: Greenways and Heritage Tourism

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Three recent projects demonstrate how communities have built supportive coalitions and expanded the value of their physical resources by layering and connecting linear corridors - greenways, roads, creek valleys and trails-- with heritage tourism and recreational, historic and interpretive opportunities. In this era of limited public resources, each project demonstrates a distinct and differing approach to leveraging a place's assets with physical realities that, in combination, build a stronger community.

These projects are located in very different geographic regions in the eastern United States, from the rural, historic landscape of the Piedmont to the urban waterfront of southeastern Washington, D.C. to a narrow valley in eastern Kentucky's coal country. Value was added to each project through the linking together of heritage resources scattered throughout the area, the layering of storytelling, and the expansion and extension of the project's economic value to the greater surrounding community.

These projects demonstrate ways to broaden traditional linear corridors by leveraging the communities' heritage resources to expand the economic potential and cultural value of the physical investment in a trail or greenway.

Background

The National Trust for Historic Preservation [U.S.] defines cultural heritage tourism as *'traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources.'* (NTHP)

Heritage travelers tend to stay longer, spend more, shop more and travel more than the typical tourist and vacationer. Cultural heritage travelers when compared with more typical travelers:

- Stay longer – 5.2 nights compared to 3.4
- Spend more - \$623 per trip compared to \$457
- Shop more – 44% compared to 33%
- 25% take three or more trips a year (TIA, 2003)

¹⁷ Elisabeth Lardner served as Project Director and Prime Consultant for the Hindman/Knott County Community Development Initiative

¹⁸ Jim Klein served as Project Director and Prime Consultant for the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Corridor Study and as Project Director for his firm's work as a subconsultant on the Anacostia project.

The three projects demonstrate differing ways to incorporate heritage tourism within linear corridor and greenway projects. By engaging the visitor's interest, a longer stay ensues, additional monies are spent, and the visitor's greenway experience is enhanced. These projects illustrate ways that a community-based planning effort can effectively link traditional greenway and corridor planning with heritage-based tourism efforts.



Figure 1. The Three Sites: Journey Through Hallowed Ground Corridor (left), Anacostia Riverwalk Trail (center), Hindman Community Development Initiative (right)

Journey Through Hallowed Ground Corridor

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Corridor (JTHG) follows Routes 15/20/231 and 53 from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to Monticello in Virginia – a scenic and historically rich landscape that, according to the late historian C. Vann Woodward has ‘soaked up more of the blood, sweat, and tears of American history than any other part of the country.’ This three-state, multi-jurisdictional project expands traditional linear corridor-planning efforts by fostering community-based participation in the development of heritage travel routes. Coordination of interpretive themes link sites together to tell a more complete and compelling story than could be told at a single site or visitor center.

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground began with five overall goals to gain recognition for its heritage and to better define for visitors the offerings of its resources:

1. An awareness campaign of ‘*Where America Happened*’
2. Educational programs to increase civic engagement for students of all ages
3. An act of Congress to obtain National Heritage Area designation
4. Designation of the Route 15/20/231 corridor as National Scenic Byway
5. The creation of a socially responsible Land Purchase Trust

The first four goals are complete and have established the type of heritage tourism infrastructure that makes it easier for a visitor to understand the history of the place, enjoy the experience and easily navigate the corridor.

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Goals alone are not sufficient. The Journey, working with its partner sites, makes use of three themes to convey an understandable message amongst the vast array of possible stories associated with this corridor. A clear and understandable theme is the central and key component of any successful message. Travel itineraries take a visitor from site to site, each selected to tell one of the rich stories associated with that particular theme in a coordinated manner. For example, under the *Land of Leadership* theme, the itinerary links past homes of eight U.S. Presidents and their associated stories. A second theme features the stories related to the Civil War, *Land of Conflict, Reunification and Rebuilding*, and the third focuses on the innate features of the mid-Atlantic landscape: *Place of 'National' Beauty and Rural Character*.

The JTHG Partnership organization has been careful to ensure that selected sites for the itineraries are visitor ready. Criteria were established early and were used to categorize sites according to the following categories:

- Full service (i.e. guided tours by trained staff or volunteers)
- Limited (i.e. tours available at certain times; self-guided materials)
- Self-guided (no staff, tour with brochure or audio)

Using these categories, a travel itinerary is developed by the JTHG Partnership that is tailored to the interests of a wide range of visitor expectations. A heritage traveler using a trail or riding a bicycle may prefer a self-guided visitor experience while an organized school group may be better served with a more formal or 'hands-on' structured experience.

An example of a structured and coordinated experience along a linear corridor is the JTHG Partnership's '*Extreme Journey*' program. The program uses the themes and visitor ready sites to transform traditional textbook learning into a truly stimulating educational experience, presenting middle school students with historical situations and asking them to solve problems on their own while studying the impact through the lens of our contemporary world. '*Extreme Journey*' is a summer camp/summer learning opportunity geared towards young teens that combines a creative curriculum, the latest technology, expert accounts and on-site visits with the heritage corridor's breathtaking landscapes to create a high quality experience that would not be possible without the coordinated efforts of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership (JTHG, 2003).



Figure 2. Bicycling along the C&O Canal as part of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground "Extreme Journey" summer experience

Anacostia River Trail, Washington D.C.

This corridor integrates programs associated with Washington, D.C.'s Office of Cultural Tourism, Department of Transportation and the U. S. National Park Service to complete the final leg of the Anacostia River Trail. In addition to completing a missing link in a riverside trail, the project physically and metaphorically links adjacent neighborhoods to the long neglected Anacostia River in the forgotten corner of Washington, D.C., Northeast, far from the monumental splendor of official Washington, D.C. Community-based story telling will be captured and included on interpretive panels along the length of the trail as a way of linking together neighborhood heritage with a regionally scaled, multi-use trail.

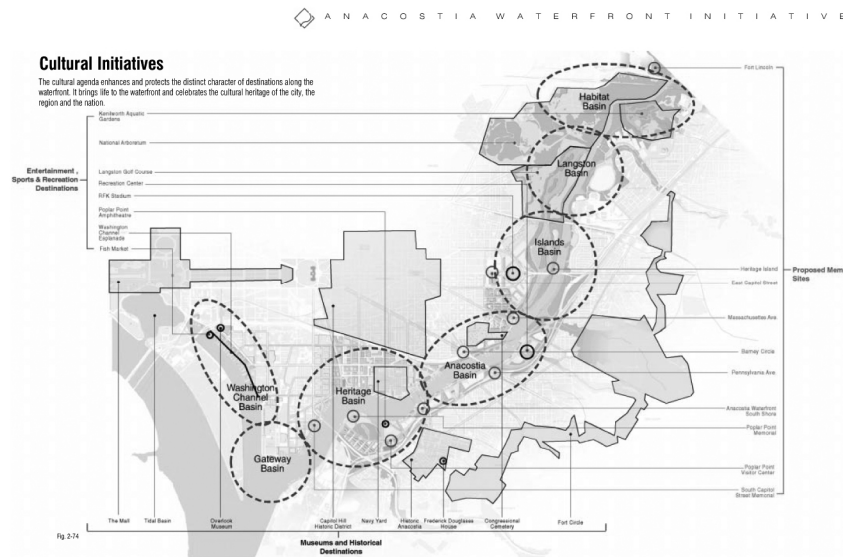


Figure 3. Cultural Initiatives along the Anacostia River developed as part of the Anacostia Riverwalk Initiative

The overall Anacostia River Trail system includes approximately 48 miles of existing and planned trails whose purpose is to increase public use of Anacostia National Park, its natural areas and recreational facilities, increasing connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods and providing multi-modal transportation linkages and alternatives. The trail also provides interconnectivity between the Bladensburg Trail in Maryland, the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, Anacostia Park on the east side of the river, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium (RFK) and the Washington Naval Yard on the west side, and several neighborhoods, intersecting bridges, and main roads.

The Kenilworth section of the trail links the Deanwood Neighborhood along Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue with the Anacostia River. Deanwood is a traditionally African American enclave in Far Northeast D.C. The District's cultural tourism program developed a walking tour called: *'A Self-Reliant People: Greater Deanwood Heritage Trail.'* Fifteen poster-sized street signs combine storytelling

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with historic photographs and maps to tell the story of Deanwood's rich history including its early history as a destination for horseracing or later, for entertainment at the Suburban Gardens Amusement Park. Marvin Gaye Park, a linear park along Watts Branch – an Anacostia tributary - commemorates the legendary R&B artist who once sang a cappella with friends at the same location.

Early meetings with the D.C. Cultural Tourism office led to the identification of interpretive opportunities along the section of the Anacostia River trail that connects to Deanwood. In fact, a portion of the trail will go along the former racetrack, making an ideal location to tell a big piece of the Deanwood Story. Other interpretive opportunities include telling the story of the Anacostia River environment and its recent history as a once forgotten and neglected landscape, home to a landfill, trash transfer station, and power plant, now being rediscovered and repaired.



Figure 4. Gateways and Waysides along the Anacostia River Trail will have consistent design elements throughout the 48 miles of the trail system

Building upon available opportunities is a challenge with limited public budgets. Public funds were available to build the infrastructure for the Anacostia River Trail, but no monies were available for communicating the message or the stories through interpretive work. The solution was to make use of available infrastructure funds to create spaces along the trail that take advantage of future interpretive opportunities. The trail construction will incorporate a wayside spot, shade through newly planted trees, a low seat wall, and sites where future signage may be installed. The waysides are sited in logical places, overlooking areas of interest and importance for future storytelling and interpretation. These sites are assets with or without the interpretive scaffolding.

Troublesome Creek Pedestrian Trail, Hindman, KY

Citizens of Knott County and Hindman, KY chose the phrase *'Using our Heritage to Build Tomorrow's Community'* to describe their long-term goals for this tiny Appalachian community. The Master Plan, which directed over 40 million dollars of capital investment in the narrow valley of Troublesome Creek and its branches, uses the surrounding hills and creek valley as the basic framework for the town's form. Pedestrian linkages to the downtown (where crafts are sold and students may stay) and the new Welcome Center/City Hall from the new Kentucky School of Crafts and branch of the local Community College provide the needed connections to these disparate but interdependent entities, with nodes for seating and future interpretation. Plan implementation demonstrates a scheme successfully integrated within the landscape, as well as an improved network of streets, sidewalks, and open space while reflecting vernacular building patterns and making the most of scarce opportunities. The site plan and program development includes a plaza at the entry of the Hazard Community College building, streetscape improvements for the town's Main Street, a new Arts and Crafts College, and a pedestrian trail linking the town to the new college facilities.

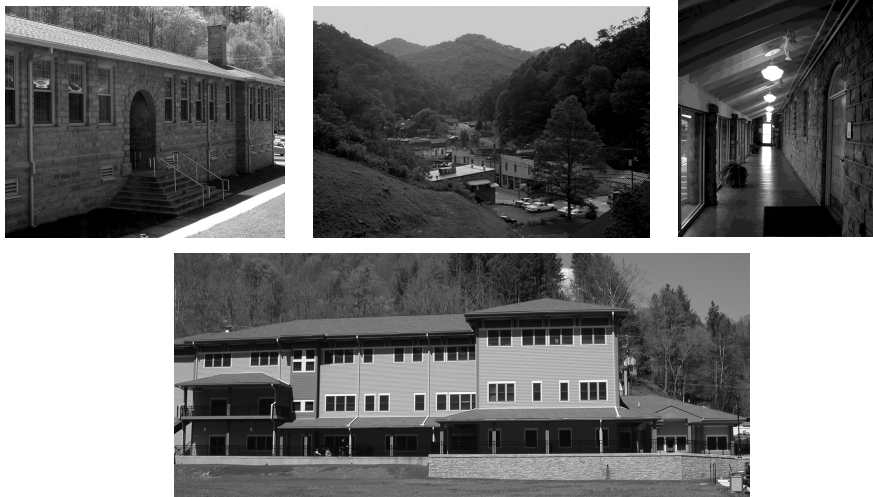


Figure 5. WPA-era high school and arcade upper far left and far right, view of downtown Hindman, center, trail alignment in new college building, bottom

This example is successful because the definition of a trail and greenway has been expanded. The trail in this community takes many forms. It starts with a standard concrete sidewalk along a state highway traveled by coal trucks and connects to a worn and old but serviceable narrow downtown sidewalk - including oddly placed steps. The connections are made with a new, accessible, sidewalk incorporated by design into a bridge crossing a branch of Troublesome Creek, a loop through a new amphitheater along the creek, to a wide and sheltered walk under the new Community College's veranda modeled on the historic, WPA-era old high school's courtyard. These linked fragments are woven together with the insertion of a new

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pedestrian path, wide and appropriately graded to meet current accessibility standards, and drained with a cast iron patterned grate that elegantly references the future blacksmithing component of the new Kentucky School of Craft. The new pedestrian trail segment widens to accommodate benches and a public gathering space, and is landscaped with plant materials that reference early settlers' plantings and the native landscape. These small threads, woven together, begin to achieve the community-based vision with the implementation of the community-based plan and create *'A literary, educational, and artistic meeting place in the beautiful natural setting of the forks of Troublesome Creek.'*

This project also exemplifies the notion of taking a grubby entry and not just creating a greenway trail or glorified sidewalk between a new school building and the downtown core, but instead seeing the vehicle of the trail as the central organizing spine of the overall Master Plan. Wooing the highway department (note the name of the agency – not sidewalk pedestrian department) to incorporate a sidewalk on both sides of the bridge, a sidewalk wide enough to accommodate a bench mid-span overlooking the creek through a vertical-slatted rail, and wrapping one end of the bridge structure in a stamped concrete veneer with a Welcome to Hindman embedded sign was challenging but imperative to the project's success.

Time, and a well-articulated and illustrated vision ensured the completion of the final trail link – the development of an amphitheater on the banks of Troublesome Creek's branches' confluence. Today, the trail follows the creek bed between downtown and the new college buildings, with stops along the way to host *'Picken and Grinnin'* bluegrass sessions at the outdoor amphitheater. The trail alignment incorporates gathering spots for respite and future interpretive panel placement and preserved, by careful trail siting, an original settler's chimney structure.

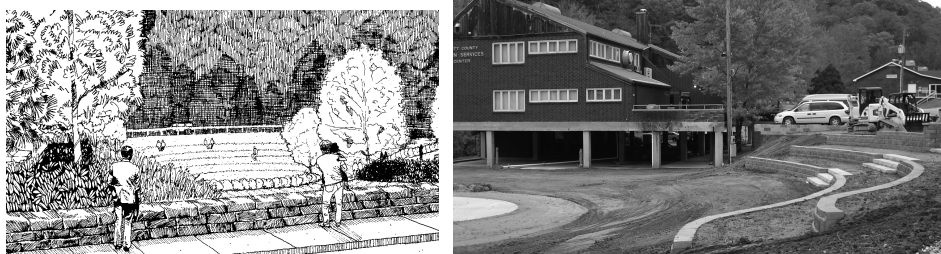


Figure 6. Early sketch on left of proposed bridge, trail and amphitheater on Troublesome Creek, amphitheater under construction, right

Heritage is also linked through the architectural reflection of historic building patterns and materials. The interior courtyard arcade and building stone of the Works Progress Administration high school building from the 1930's (now home to the Kentucky School of Crafts) was reflected in the construction of the new community college building. The greenway trail loops through the arcade on the south face of the new building above the creek and the one level area in the entire community.

Success in achieving this vision depended critically on the ability to articulate it, as the community in Hindman did so patiently while choosing priorities based on available resources both human and financial. Implementing most of the Master Plan has taken the past eleven years. The re-use of historic and meaningful places integrated with a coordinated series of public infrastructure improvements has given value and validation to the citizens in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky.

The use of design elements, interpretation and the telling of a coordinated story to establish a meaningful connection to place (the context of the greenway) increases audience appeal and attracts heritage travelers while encouraging longer stays. Heritage tourism is more than actors and monuments. Heritage tourism can mean telling the story in a more engaging manner. This is particularly appropriate for greenways and trails, linear corridors that by their physical nature are natural connecting entities.

These projects illustrate a key point, that we must start building more than a trail, and build a community. Community comes from the telling a coordinated story, wedding the pragmatic to the poetic.

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