



Great Lakes Circle Routes

Networking Workshop

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*Hosted by the:
Tourism Solution Council
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario Canada*

The Tourism Solution Council works in partnership with:



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Opening Remarks – Peter Burtch / Facilitator

Purpose: A forum for open discussion on the re-establishment/ enhancement of Great Lakes Circle Routes; to establish a network of interested parties; to rough out a critical path to move forward.

Background: A brief history and current “non” status of the concept were reviewed. Mr. Burtch set the parameters by establishing the broad geographic area from Duluth to Manitoulin/Sudbury; highlighting the exceptional natural international opportunities; and the advantages to all, to market the entire region if a number of established routes could be brought together under one umbrella organization. Today’s session would be focused on discussing opportunities created by co-operative planning and marketing and the steps required to make it happen.

Example of a success story – The Yukon Model was presented by Josephine Stewart in a previous TSC conference in March 2001:

In the early 90’s tourism traffic drove through the Yukon to Alaska having a very limited economic impact. At the time the Yukon was made up of a poorly organized, unsophisticated tourism industry that had to get its act together. To coordinate the grassroots movement they first needed to establish the Tourism Industry Assoc. of the Yukon. TIAY undertook partnership development, tourism planning and development, programs, marketing and training certification. TIAY established community based tourism development plans for product, packaging and infrastructure development that all contributed to the whole. TIAY then worked to educate the RV market about the Yukon. As a result, the Yukon tourism industry grew tremendously between 1990 and 1999 with visitation increasing by 150%, creating 2,000 related jobs (an industry increase valued at \$124,000,000 per year) all this with a population in the Yukon at the time was only 23,000 people!

Mrs. Stewart felt very strongly that we in this region have the potential to do the same as the Yukon, or even better by looking at your advantages and using them to the fullest extent focusing on your target audience.

That’s why we are here today, to look at the establishment of a long-term positive direction that will lead the tourist industry in the upper Great Lakes region into a better future. There is a lot of work ahead, but the rewards can be very positive.

Guest Speakers

Great Lakes Heritage Coast Project - Iain Mettam, Director

Purpose: Mr. Mettam addressed the GLHC long-term strategy currently under development – hoping for a spring 2003 release – the strategy will identify what the future GLHC will become and will identify how this should occur.

The presentation outlined the need to share our successes and develop a regional approach with a consistent message. Like any other business case, this one can be strengthened when it is part of a larger package – the reestablishment of the circle route concept will help in that regard. This concept is being pursued in a project between the GLHC in conjunction with the Cities of SSM, Thunder Bay and Township of Georgian Bay by planning to create monuments developed to make visitors aware that they are in a special area. These monuments will be designed and created to emphasize the natural geology and character of the location.

Product Development: Under management of the MNR, the GLHC project has the ability to create a tourism opportunity working with communities and partners and to improve and increase attractions to people. In the past two years, the GLHC as funded by Ontario's Living Legacy, has provided \$4,000,000 in Capital to upgrade recreational facilities with Ontario Parks and develop partnerships with a number of NGO's in support of the future GLHC. An example being the Pigeon River "gateway" project saw the construction of a 400-m boardwalk with a barrier-free entrance to Lake Superior, a new hiking trail, new stairs to high falls and a new footbridge. A year and a half ago you couldn't even see Lake Superior and now you can touch it. Artwork at the site was done by Thunder Bay artist Shawn Randle.

The Arch at the site was created just for this location as a unique piece. It symbolizes a boat prow on Lake Superior with waves receding to a distant horizon. The symbol will be used to tie the GLHC together and will become a central part of all GLHC signage. Signage, however, will also reflect the local features and could depict landscapes or cultural activities. (i.e. Sault Ste. Marie the rugged topography of Algoma, Pigeon River it's logging, Port Severn it's a lighthouse). Though different, all signage will have a common look that will be easily recognizable as one of a series of pieces.

Great Lakes Heritage Coast Working Group - Lucy Ann Trudeau, Misswezahging Development Corporation

Purpose: The GLHC Working Group was developed as a grassroots connection between various communities along the coast in an effort to be proactive in relationship to the soon to be announced GLHC strategy. Ms Trudeau spoke more specifically about the Misswezahging Development Corporation (MDC) and how it related to the project.

A Success Story of Partnerships: The Misswezahging and Blind River joined together to build a Heritage Centre. It was the first time a First Nation Building of this size and local significance and the first Misswezahging project to be built on municipal land. The result is a great success and so was the journey.

First the representatives from each group prepared a detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This required lengthy preparation as they wanted to ensure everyone's interests were protected. This MOU is an excellent example of communities working together for the common good.

The MDC was originally a spin-off of the Huron North Study in an effort to develop a high level of package-ready services and products based on First Nations. First Nations wanted to assist with developing marketing packages and ensure they are architecturally and ecologically so with the landscape. As a result of the process, two new aboriginal businesses have been established over the last year including one entrepreneur who constructed cabins for rent and another that created a canoeing experience.

GLHC Working Group - Natalie Heasman, East Algoma Community Futures Development Corporation

Success Story: In 1999 three communities (Algoma Mills, Spanish, North Channel) combined and put in place an infrastructure for a tourism marketing plan called the North Huron Study. As a result of their efforts a 14-km interpretive park is being created including the history of the communities, logging, mining and fur trading. In addition, a fish and wildlife viewing station is being constructed from Algoma Mills to Serpent River. Spanish created a bluff trail of the Huron Channel with interpretive information and a remote camera for bird-watching buffs. Funds have been acquired from the Patten-Post compensation package.

Lake Superior Circle Tour Route - Tim Lukinuk, North of Superior Tourism Association (NOSTA)

Purpose: To provide an explanation of the Lake Superior Circle Route project and the benefits of working together to create a world-class destination.

Benefits of Cooperation: Mr. Lukinuk began with the first slide showing an overhead view of Lake Superior where red lines indicated the water shed and yellow spots were city lights. He pointed out the greater concentration of lights and therefore attractions on the U.S. side and the reduced lights that provide dark skies on the Canadian side. Also noting that the American scenic bi-way ties in with Circle Tour that extends into Canada.

While there are challenges there are also opportunities. The task is to develop the product while keeping in mind what the consumer wants: a message, a recognizable brand, catering to the target audience, websites, links and other mediums that can effectively and

conveniently carry the message. Treat this project as an economic development initiative. We should link capital and marketing projects in various communities around the lake. If we do well it will be a real and measurable economic impact in many communities around the lake. For example link Thunder Bay's waterfront plans with Terrace Bay's gateway proposal and the Duluth, MN waterfront - get everyone under one big umbrella and one big project to move ahead. As we collect research on the inventories of our products we can also adjust the marketing plan.

Challenges and Opportunities

a) Defining who we are (Lake Superior Circle Route)

- geographic
- by highway linkage
- by watershed
- other

b) Bringing us together

- integrated and efficient marketing
- diverse products and regions
 - rock climbing, bird watching...
 - Circle Tour Magazine tries to do this
 - big cities working together with small communities (hub and spoke approach)

c) Sorting out competing initiatives - find those that are complementary with the Circle Tour concept

d) Selling the Circle Route - concept to the market by focusing the combined power of the Canada and US stakeholders

The Task

- ❖ Define who we are
 - our product (inventory)
 - our message (brand)
 - our audience (markets)
 - our messengers (i.e. Circle Route Mag.)
- ❖ Finance delivery of product and message
- ❖ Conduct research to establish baseline data
- ❖ Review and refine message and messengers using research results
- ❖ Identify major partners
 - gov't agencies, NGO's, cities, major attractions, aboriginal component etc.
 - clusters (hinterland approach)
- ❖ Integrate existing initiatives
- ❖ Establishing a marketing template (i.e. Common logos)

Benefits of working together

- ❖ Economies of scale

- ❖ Multiplier effect of having all tourism websites in the region supporting (talking about) the Circle Route
- ❖ Multiplier effect of showcasing Circle Route along with stakeholders' regional attraction at the various trade shows each may be attending
- ❖ Border-crossing issues (Circle Route concept may reduce anxiety of traveler and compel them to make the effort to get across)
- ❖ Linking diverse groups (small towns to bigger cities)
- ❖ Branding makes it easier for tourists outside the region (Europe, southern US) to associate with the product (i.e. Great Lakes vs. Thunder Bay or Duluth)
- ❖ Packaging (7-day; 5-day; 3-day driving tours whatever fits)

Suggested Strategies

1. Bi-national Advisory Committee
 - made up of reps from 5 zones (3 US states plus Superior East and West in Ontario)
 - network with provincial reps., big cities, states and regional reps.
 - each contributes their own product and marketing info. and the group integrates it
 - websites integrated
 - work from a economic development perspective
2. Measure Impact
 - research
 - what works and what doesn't
 - what products do people want?
 - adjust marketing plans accordingly

FERMATA & EUP Alliance - Ted Eubanks, Texas

Question: Why should I care as a consumer? All I need to care about is the end product. It's the traveler that is the judge at the end of all this. This is the whole point!

Supply and Demand: Ted presented from a "demand-side" of the perspective instead of the "supply-side". How are you going to get people to come and enjoy resources? First you have to keep them, so the product-side plan must be embodied by conservation.

What's the market? A potential one is Wildlife Viewing. Did you know that \$35 billion is spent on wildlife viewing in the United States? 30% of the market travels to other states to view wildlife (feed birds, take pictures, etc.). This group alone exports \$10.5 billion in tourism which they will spend if you make it easy for them. Wisconsin alone spends \$4.3 billion on wildlife viewing. Also note that on average a wildlife tourist is 52 yrs. old and spends \$131/person/day amounting to 4.3 days/trip and average eight distance locations that birdwatchers travel through an area. They come in quietly, use your restaurants, shopping malls and leave your natural areas relatively undisturbed. Here's a segment of the market we can offer a solid product to. You just have to keep your market in mind and put your dollars in the most effective medium.

Similarly, Train Watchers are an environmentally friendly group. They know the best places to go, number of locomotives, where the train travels and what they carry. Once you target the right communication tool you simply match the Resource \longleftrightarrow Market by tying it together.

Uniqueness: What makes Lake Superior **NOT** Lake Erie?

Don't look at how you are similar, rather in what way you are different. Once that is established build on it but keep in mind that if they don't live on it, they don't know anything about the lakes. Educate your clients! That's how you build a market.

Make it Manageable: We are almost too resource rich. You must carve trails networks into consumable chunks. A Circle Tour is an excellent tool to reach this objective. As a tourist you must draw me into the area - tell me where to go. 85% of Americans live in the City (urbanized). The great outdoors in all of its vastness is scary and large. This space is too large to be comprehended by the average urbanite. Provide me with an itinerary that gives me a point of interest that is no more than about 30 minutes from the last. Provide an outline of a day trip, 3-day trip, 7-day trip just make it easy to follow and no work to think through. Make it simple!

Right now the Great Lakes/Lake Superior is "brand poor". It does not have the recognition it deserves or the product development it requires. Alaska is one of the top 10 travel destinations in the U.S. This should be the same for the Great Lakes.

Real Time: One tool is to be able to see what is happening in the great lakes currently. Don't tell me what happened two years ago. What's happening in "real time"? Get me involved now. Connect together in the virtual trail - keep me the traveler energized as I go! We're selling ourselves short. Both sides of the border base plans and finances on existing revenues. Expand your horizons. ***We have a world-class resource - sell it to the World.*** They will travel for that grand vision. First you need to do an inventory of what you have to offer - history, culture, nature. Keep in mind that History is static. It's fixed in a place and fixed in a time. Go from static to dynamic!

Example: Lewis & Clark are history. They have been dead for over 200 years but the animals and nature are still here. Rather than focusing on the history of Lewis and Clark you could put a tourist in their footsteps. It's the land and nature that is appealing to the average tourist. It is the immediate. Once that attracts them to a community or area the history and culture can be tied to the nature and make it come alive. Supply and demand - add seasonality. Supply changed today compared to yesterday. Tour is an art of equilibrium between supply and demand. It must always change to keep up with the change in the market.

Session #1 Questions and Comments

What would be a tourism-related experience - and what could it become....

- Resources - data collected in a common manner
 - data warehouse for the region
 - monitor data by stakeholders' -web collection?
 - superimpose a regional model over the data that is collected
- Challenges - No washroom facilities along the highway in winter season.
- Look at Circle Tour in spatial terms - the "other dimension" which is time. Put a calendar together with what is happening at different times through the different communities (i.e. winter carnival tour)
- Get people right down to the water - feel it/touch it. Large-scale industry and pollution can pose a challenge but can see other lakes.
- Drive through - inventory and assessment of uniqueness and market what's there.
- Special events going on in communities are man-made and commercial and one way to market an area. However, let's promote natural happenings (i.e. road migrations).
- Work on "odd seasons" (off season) for tourism opportunities (i.e. brown winter, leaves falling, northern lights, dark sky sights, wave watching)
- Rest areas and drive thru's - people go to the familiar. Use them as a location to market tours, make them a partner (i.e. Tim Horton's, McDonalds).
- Bus Tours of Parks - State and Provincial - work with park employees to have them trained when to expect buses coming and have someone interpretive to meet them.
- Recognize contact with the U.S.
- What's going to attract people? What's our market and what can we do to capture it? We have to have results. Demand-side needs more attention to it. We as a community need to look at that. What pulls them off the road from the Circle Tour?
- Also to consider what are the limits of acceptable change. Look for the right place.
- Do products match community needs?
- *Not mentioned but perhaps we may want to suggest that we make better use of the existing tourism infrastructure NOTICE sites and encourage the GLHC to support keeping these facilities open all year around instead of the 24th of May to Thanksgiving. This could tie into the above point....open the door for franchised food services to help keep these strategic locations open.*

Who needs to be involved with this initiative?

- All of us.
- Who is not here at this workshop? Ontario Ministry of Transportation, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development & Mines, MNR Districts, Ontario Parks, Parks Canada (NMCA), EDC Federal level, Agriculture, US Forest Services, people who have the money, International Joint Commission.
- It must be stakeholder driven community level - operator level – everyone must be involved.

Target Audience- Methodology

- Birdwatching guides are the hottest items going out of the Canada Store
- Specific groups should be able to reach this target audience as they belong to Associations.
- Circle Tour has to mean something. What is the deliverable? What do I get out of it?
- Who cares? People don't have the time to research a vacation extensively. (T. Eubanks) I don't want to go find it. You have to show me where it is and what I'm going to see. Make it easy to find it (info.)
- What is the average rest time? Stops should be available once every 30 minutes.
- Do we have someone ready for them? You have travelers for 15 seconds.
- Create an immersive experience "...and the story beings" if not a destination resource

FYI - Eco Tour Guide (Sault to Midland) Launch set for April 2003 in Sault Ste. Marie - Canadian Geographic – Lake Superior section now being written

What areas need to be improved on in order to be market ready?

A very important fact that needs to be brought forth is the need to become market ready before marketing.....we do have a few things in place but we need a considerable improvement in basic service (such as sanitation) before we increase the numbers of visitors through marketing. What we don't want is to market the Circle Route prematurely – hopefully within the next 3 years the GLHC will be a major contributor to infrastructure improvements along the highway corridor.

- Supplier development must support growth
 - Community Welcome
 - Educate your local people on Lake Superior and on “their own backyard” – make them proud of their surroundings
 - Do a "fam tour" for locals
- Infrastructure improvement - interpretive signage (resource protection, flora, fauna, geology, culture, event promotion, directional maps etc.)
 - Web page-keep current, hrs. of operation, washrooms, etc.
 - Viewpoints, day-use beach sites, hiking trails, new sanitation facilities, interpretive sites,
 - Needs considerable planning – GLHC will be key in Ontario
 - On Circle Route Signs create a small sub-sign with "Site #047" and match in the book. Marks the way/route
- ZOI - Zone of Influence - Inventory everything in that zoi.
 - Show me what it is
 - Territory
 - I want the market to tell me what they want
 - I don't want you to tell me what you want
- Have a strategy together - what is your group doing and we can all cross-sell
- Accentuating the differences in the tour, celebrate the diversity of the experience
- Highly specialized market - birding, museum, dinner - tie in experience

- Inventory - long range
- Embrace big picture - market the big items then get them to stay for smaller venues

Session #2 Questions and Comments

Steps needed to enhance the Great Lakes Circle Routes

- Common inventories could be possible if all organizations/businesses used the same spreadsheets (excel/access?) Possibly a web-based reporting system. Keep it simple, data base with simple inventory:
 - ❖ UP Economic Developers Group - Every ED is a member of this group
 - ❖ UPEDA created a template and emailed it to all of their 15 counties.
 - ❖ UPEDA requested they fill in the appropriate information and return
 - ❖ They then took out any duplications, gained 10,000 contact names.
- Consistent collection of data
- Government bodies to agree on this concept of international focus
- Get college/university students to do this (GIS) (sequel service tech) through internships or summer programs.
- Persuade locations to "get out of silos" (T.Eubanks) and become a larger picture. A requirement for funding is a common thread.
- ID communities, who should be involved, agencies who support this
- Access destination first, hang goods and service on it after
- UPTRA (Upper Peninsula Tourism Recreation Association) find out who competitor is, get everyone to share things, get them to see the benefit of sharing
- Look at established MOU.
- Tie into Great Lakes Heritage Coast – must make the long-term protection of the resource the top priority for this initiative – we must demonstrate sustainability otherwise we risk losing the wild natural product we have by exploitation. One of the products could be the “how” we have taken steps to protect and rehabilitate our natural values. If we follow this simple step we will be part of the future GLHC direction
- Tie into Bi-national
- Framework - info. gathering; planning (product infrastructure); implementation; marketing (need to have a good fit)

***FYI -Tourism Conference in Brimley MI on or about May 14th.
Outcome of this TSC conference can be brought forward to UPTRA conference in
May. Resolution-agreement***

Top Actions required to move this initiative forward!

- ID a lead co-ordinator, have someone to make this happen, next agenda, follow-up with contacts. Next step? Build into Brimley conference, collection of best practice database.

- ❖ TSC will follow up with the proceedings from this meeting to all participant and interested parties including any government agencies/departments as requested by the participants.
- ❖ TSC will contact an adhoc task force and set a date with names suggested including Tim Lukinuk-Great Lakes Circle Tour, Derik Brandt-Thunder Bay Tourism and EDC; Shaun Fogg-Algoma Kinniwabi; Iain Mettam-GLHC. Any others interested in participating in this group or initial meeting please contact the BEC office at bec@soonet.ca and your coordinates will be passed to the volunteer chairs. The TSC has the ability to provide a teleconference opportunity for adhoc members.
- ❖ TSC with support from the adhoc group will develop a presentation to provide the foundations of the next steps from the “Networking Workshop”.
- Consider application to IJC for funding – must stress the opportunity to use education as an important tool that will lead to the long-term protection of the wilderness resource that most visitors will come to see.
- Collect the contact information at the workshop for further information to develop a template for web-base - OTMC has a database -Come back with common data base - demographics
- Ted Eubanks to provide contact information for funding partners to continue with this research and connecting everyone.
- FYI - 600-700 visitors/day are looking for information off the Lake Superior Travel Guide website at www.lakesuperior.com (info. not just "hits").

Point form minutes is available from the morning session with Bob Michael, consultant with the GLHC. This earlier session was designed to brain storming what northern communities need to become a tourism destination. A summary of the discussions is attached for your review.

FYI - May 21st Workshop in Sault Ste. Marie Michigan featuring the Disney Customer Service training workshop.

The Tourism Solution Council of Sault Ste. Marie would like to extend a special thanks to all of those attended. It is through continued partnerships and goals that we can make great things happen!