

Canadian Heritage River Systems – the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Project

Len Hopkins, Ontario Chair of Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee

ABSTRACT

The mandate or mission of the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Project is to move forward the process for inclusion of the Ottawa River as part of the Canadian Heritage River System. This is an information gathering process, requiring community input and support. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is Canada's national river conservation program. It promotes, protects and enhances Canada's river heritage, and ensures that Canada's leading rivers are managed in a sustainable manner. The CHRS has **no** legislative authority. Partnerships and community involvement are what drives it. Government's retain their traditional jurisdictional powers and management responsibilities. The Canadian Heritage Rivers website www.chrs.ca has a wonderful "Your Questions" section answering many of the questions about the benefit of designation and addressing many of the concerns that are traditionally raised. Becoming a Canadian Heritage River requires two formal steps – nomination and designation. In reality there are four stages of the process:

- Gathering the background information pertaining to the cultural, natural and recreational/economic values found along the waterway.
- Preparation of the nomination document, development of a nomination presentation and submission to the CHRS – Board of Directors.
- After the nomination is accepted, a management plan/heritage strategy for the sustainability of the values of the waterway is prepared.
- Finally Designation. The formal proclamation of a river being added to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System based on an approved management plan.
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RÉSUMÉ

Le mandat ou la mission du Projet de désignation de la rivière des Outaouais est de faire avancer le dossier de l'inscription de cette rivière au Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien. Il s'agit d'un processus de collecte de renseignements qui nécessite l'apport et l'appui de la communauté. Le Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien (RRPC) est le programme national de conservation des rivières du Canada. Il assure la mise en valeur, la protection et l'amélioration du patrimoine fluvial du pays, et garantit la gestion durable des principaux cours d'eau canadiens. À noter que le Réseau n'a aucun pouvoir législatif. Les moteurs du programme sont les partenariats et l'engagement communautaire. Dans ce processus, les gouvernements conservent leurs compétences traditionnelles et leurs responsabilités de gestion. Le site Web du Réseau www.chrs.ca contient d'ailleurs une rubrique des plus intéressantes intitulée Vos questions, où il est possible de trouver réponse à la plupart des questions habituellement soulevées au sujet des avantages de la désignation à titre de rivière du patrimoine. Pour qu'une rivière puisse devenir une rivière du patrimoine canadien, il lui faut franchir deux étapes officielles : la mise en candidature et la désignation. En réalité, le processus comporte plutôt quatre étapes, comme suit :

- *Cueillette de données documentaires sur les valeurs culturelles, naturelles, récréatives et économiques du cours d'eau.*
- *Préparation du document de mise en candidature et d'un exposé, suivi de la présentation du dossier à la Commission des rivières du patrimoine canadien.*
- *Une fois la candidature retenue, préparation d'un plan de gestion/d'une stratégie de gestion patrimoniale pour assurer la pérennité des valeurs du cours d'eau.*
- *Enfin, la désignation proprement dite. Annonce officielle du statut de rivière du patrimoine conféré au cours d'eau, désormais inscrit au Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien en fonction d'un plan de gestion de la rivière dûment approuvé.*

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Pour de plus amples renseignements concernant ce projet particulier, on peut contacter Jim Fraser, par courriel à jim.a.fraser@ontario.ca.

It has been over two years since I had the pleasure of meeting with several Parks Canada officials in Ottawa and asked them to help us work towards having the Ottawa River named a Canadian Heritage River under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. They were, and still are, very supportive and helpful in every way.

When we get up each morning and look around us we see the things and landscape with which we have become so familiar. The Ottawa River is one of those “gems” that has a special place in the thousands of years of our history. We are able to make the latter statement because of the thousands of years that the Aboriginals traveled this land before the first European arrived.

The Ottawa River has been a big success story over the centuries because it was always the “springboard” highway for Aboriginal trade, social life, and adventure. Later, it was the “springboard” for early explorers, fur traders and timber barons. Now it is used for recreation and is a major source of energy. Early explorers all went up the Ottawa and traveled through the interior of what is today Canada – right to the Pacific Coast and indeed down the Mackenzie River to the north and the Mississippi River to the south.

It should, then, be no surprise that Alexander Mackenzie who started out from the Ottawa River became the first European to travel across Canada and reach the Pacific Coast in 1793. The Ottawa was his “springboard”. He had with him some native guides and French Canadian voyageurs. His route was from the Old Port of Quebec to Bella Coola, B.C. and included travel up the Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers. At the Pacific, he planted his sign which read: “Alexander Mackenzie from Canada by land 1793”.

Nearly 100 years later, in 1885, John A. MacDonald stood on the Pacific Coast and planted his sign: “John A. MacDonald from Canada by Rail, 1885”. Even John A.’s C.P.R followed the shorelines of the Ottawa River and Mattawa Rivers.

What is a Heritage River?

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is Canada’s national river conservation program and it is administered by Parks Canada. It promotes, protects and enhances Canada’s river heritage, and ensures that Canada’s leading rivers are managed in a sustainable manner. Responsible river stewardship is the ethic that it engenders. Co-operation and public support are the strengths it builds upon. Local citizens and communities champion the program.

Actions taken are grass roots driven, and hence, so is the educational program that encourages people to respect their river, to have concern for the life in the water, and promote responsible and voluntary care for the river. Rivers are the lifeblood veins of our nation. Healthy rivers promote a healthy country.

When we say that governments retain their traditional jurisdictional powers and management responsibilities throughout this process, it means that departments such as Transport (Federal), Environment (both Federal and Provincial), Fisheries and Oceans (Federal), the Canadian Coast Guard (Federal) and Natural Resources (Provincial) will still operate as they do now because the C.H.R.S. carries with it no regulatory or legislative power. Communities, Aboriginal Peoples, landowners and other stakeholders have their rights and concerns respected.

Canadian Heritage Rivers receive national and international recognition and advertising. In the eyes of the tourist they become a “must see” sight or a “must have” adventure. The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, comprised of members appointed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, administers the C.H.R.S. A Charter, affirming the board’s role in overseeing the development and operation of the program, governs the Board. The Province of Ontario’s representative on the Board is the Managing Director of Ontario Parks, Adair Ireland-Smith. There are currently eleven Ontario rivers included as part of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

The Heritage Rivers website, www.chrs.ca, has a wonderful “Your Questions” section answering many of the questions about the benefit of designation and addressing many of the concerns that are traditionally raised.

Becoming a Canadian Heritage River requires two formal steps – nomination and designation. In reality, there are four stages to the process:

- Gathering the background information pertaining to the cultural, natural and recreational/economic values found along the waterway.
- Preparation of the nomination document, development of a nomination presentation and submission to the C.H.R.S. Board of Directors.
- After the nomination is accepted, a management plan/heritage strategy for the sustainability of the values of the waterway is prepared.
- Finally, designation, the formal proclamation of a river being added to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System based on an approved management plan.

In addition, a review of the river’s management plan is conducted every ten years. For example, *The Grand River, Ontario – A Decade in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System* was just completed in 2004.

The Ottawa River is 1271 kilometers long and its watershed with a host of tributaries and streams covers a geographical area of 146,000 square kilometers.

We divided the river into sections and asked a person in each section to act as an executive member of our committee. It was his or her job to put together a local committee to produce the background history and related heritage information about that section of the river. Then we needed some professionals to do some specialized studies, such as archaeology, geology, aboriginal history, trade patterns, settlements along the river, hydrology, and nuclear energy and research, and on and on it goes as a bigger story unfolds before our eyes. Because of the dedicated work of about 150 volunteers, the

history of the Ottawa River has begun to unfold, its features and qualities are being highlighted, and we realize that we are revealing the history of a great nation.

We were very fortunate to have gained the volunteer services of Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon, Curator, Ontario Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Canadian Museum of Civilization, to do a big section of the Ottawa River's archaeological sites from Mattawa on downstream. He points out the richness and the numerous sites that exist, but research to date has just touched the surface.

Another outstanding contributor to the archaeological history of the Ottawa River was Dr. John W. Pollock, Woodland Heritage Services Limited, City of Temiskaming Shores, Ontario, who covered the area from Mattawa to the north and east. "The earliest evidence of peoples living in the Upper Ottawa Valley was about 6000 years ago with the Shield Archaic Peoples, who may have come in search of caribou."¹

Harpoon heads from the Allumette Island site near Pembroke, Ontario, also date to 6000 years ago, and native copper knives or lance heads found "from the 5500 year old Morrison Island – 6 site near Pembroke, Ontario,"² are examples of items mentioned by Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon. The harpoon heads were "manufactured approximately 6000 years ago from native copper originating in the area west of Lake Superior."³

Dr. Allan Donaldson, who for many years has been a geology professor at Carleton University, has contributed the geological history of the Ottawa River for us and we are very grateful to him for all his work. His is an excellent contribution which opens up the planet on which we live, and virtually provides us with billions of years of geological history, about which every Canadian should be aware. His focus on the Ottawa River is invaluable to our work on Ottawa River Heritage Designation.

We are grateful to Joann McCann (Friends of Oiseau Rock) who has contributed a very good section on "The Missionaries of the Ottawa River and its Environs."

The Algonquin Bands of the Ottawa River Valley have always felt that their history was poorly written and inaccurate. There was also a feeling that materials relating to many issues were written first by people other than themselves and then these documents were given to them to rubber stamp without their having a chance to have some input into the matter. From the beginning we asked the Algonquin Bands to write their own history which is mostly verbal, passed on from generation to generation.

We met with the Chief and several members of the River Desert Reserve belonging to the Kitigan Zibi Algonquins who live near Maniwaki, Quebec. We met very early with the only Algonquin Band in what is now Ontario; this was with Chief Kirby Whiteduck and representatives of the Pikwakanagan near Golden Lake. Another important meeting took place with the Chiefs of Timiskaming, Quebec. It is a wonderful group of leaders with

¹ Pollock, Dr. John W.

² Pilon, Dr. Jean-Luc

³ Pilon, Dr. Jean-Luc

whom to work. We had the pleasure of getting to know Elder William Commanda, of the Circle of all Nations and he showed a great interest in our work.

The Chiefs agreed on having Jim Morrison, formerly of New Liskeard, now of Manitoba, to do their history. They are now reviewing the final product. It is an excellent section of our background study and a very “key” one because it is their own product.

People who say that Canada does not have a very long history are admitting that they are unaware of the background of what is today Canada. Aboriginals traveled this part of Canada going back to 6000 years B.C. When you go back to 6000 B.C. and beyond, how many countries in the world still have the same names that they had then? Today, as we look at what is now Canada, we have a very interesting history and that is why our “background document” for heritage designation of the Ottawa River is so important.

When we went to high school we studied some ancient civilizations but virtually nothing about the ancient history of what is now Canada. To put the ancient history of Canada in perspective, the Algonquins were making hunting equipment with copper and other materials along the Ottawa River for thousands of years before Caesar invaded Britain in 55B.C.

The Ontario Department of Natural Resources tells us that the Ottawa River is the third largest river in the world in terms of the volume of water that passes through it. The average flow of the Ottawa River is greater than all the rivers of England and Wales combined.

What are the reasons for these amazing statistics? There are a huge number of large tributaries and streams that flow into the Ottawa River from its vast watershed. There are sections of the Ottawa River that are 2 or 3 kilometers wide and other areas where it is eight kilometers wide and more. Along the river from its source in Lake Capimitchigama deep in the wilderness of Abitibi-Témiscamingue in north-western Quebec, there are many huge reservoirs such as Allumette Lake, Lake Timiskaming, Lac des Quinze, Lac Simard, Decelles Reservoir, Lac Granet, Grand Lake Victoria, Dozois Reservoir, Cabonga Reservoir, and many others.

Today, a series of hydro dams has created more huge reservoirs. The depth of the Ottawa River is another factor that adds to the volume of water in the Ottawa River. For example, Oiseau Rock in the north of Pontiac County, Quebec, rises more than 300 feet straight up out of the river and it boasts 3 lakes on top of it – one of which is a favorite swimming place. If you take your boat and go 100 feet out into the river from Oiseau Rock, you are sitting on 250 feet of water. Upstream from Témiscaming, Quebec, there are places where the water reaches depths of 692 feet. One can readily see from whence comes the great volume of water.

Canada has 20% of the world’s supply of fresh water and we are already being targeted by others who want that resource. We must mean business to preserve it! Our

appreciation goes out to Linda Halliday, Ontario Power Generation, Public Affairs Officer, who has helped us out with hydrographic information on the Ottawa River.

To sum it up, the Ottawa River was the 401 highway of early Canada, minus all the pollution. It played a role in the discovery of the interior of our country and in its development. It was a big economic factor in the fur trade and the timber era. Lumber and European goods moved up and down the river feeding the growth of local towns. Sawmills, grist mills, and farming communities came to life within its watershed. A way of life and new cultures were founded. Even Napoleon learned that the timber barons of the Ottawa could provide good masts for the British warships.

Citizens can do a lot to keep a river clean. They have an effect on other people around them. Responsible attitudes are catching and can be developed: e.g. anti-drunk driving, anti-smoking, and anti-pollution.

We show our respect for our ancestors who passed much on to us. Where is our Canadian national history and loyalty? We need to add much to the birth of a nation. With progress and unification we need emotions and not just facts. We need to dress the facts in Canadian pride and a spirit of real nationhood.

To our Algonquin friends, we salute you! Thank you for helping us and yourselves in this wonderful undertaking. Heritage designation of a great river brings people together and teaches them their history and ongoing responsibilities.

It matters not what lies before us,
It matters not what lies behind us,
It is what lies “within” us
That really matters.