

Hamlet of Natural Bridge

Resources are located between NYS DOT Start/End Mile Point Jefferson County 20.50 through 26.06

Located in Jefferson County in the Town of Wilna, Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain, purchased a large chunk of land in 1818 with the intention of creating a “New France” and is credited with naming the hamlet as a result of its natural bridge caverns. In 1829 Joseph Bonaparte had a frame mansion constructed over the natural caverns and according to local legend provided an escape route, via a tunnel if needed. Privately owned, the caverns continue to serve as an attraction to visitors.

The small hamlet of approximately 337 residents serves as a gateway to the Adirondacks today and provides a brief respite from their travels as visitor’s pause to chat with local artisans located along Route 3 while they browse and shop for folk art and crafts and/or stop by the local café to experience the cultural flavor of the community.

Tourism:

The importance of tourism to local communities in stimulating economic development opportunities along the western segment of the Olympic Byway is documented in the Strategic Plan for Tourism in Jefferson County, Jefferson County Economic Development Strategy, Black River Economic Adjustment Strategy, and A Tourism Plan for the City of Watertown, New York. Typically, advancing recommendations identified in the referred plan falls to the individual agency/organization/entity requesting the report rather than an orchestrated regional effort to guide long-term development. In recognition of the significant contribution made to the corridor by private business owners providing service and resources to facilitate the overall experience of visitors traversing the byway and the efficiency and effectiveness in a regional approach to promotion and marketing initiatives, the LAC/LSC is recommending a regional effort orchestrated through local chambers and advanced by the Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce, Seaway Trail, 1000 Islands Tourism Council, Olympic Byway and I Love NY Campaign.

Synonymous with its early development, are the Natural Bridge Caverns. Currently privately owned and operated, participants in community forums and LAC identified the need to seek opportunities through the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation to purchase, maintain, promote and market as a key resource to the byway and local economy as funding and opportunities allow. Located along Route 3 and within a 10-mile radius are overnight accommodations providing a range of services at privately owned and operated campgrounds & establishments. Also, within the hamlet is a privately owned and operated diner offering visitor’s home-cooked meals served in a down-home atmosphere and reflective of the local culture. Clearly identified through participation at community forums is the need for public restrooms to accommodate visitors.

In January 2003, and following a lengthy discussion by committee members representing the western segment of the Olympic Byway Local Advisory Committee, it was unanimously agreed that the strategic positioning of the Olympic Byway Tourist Information Center was crucial to attracting visitors into local communities with greater opportunities for success based upon the high volumes of visitors accessing services along outer Arsenal Street and traversing Interstate 81. In addition, committee members identified the need to disseminate Olympic Byway information at tourist information centers located in neighboring communities to broaden and expand opportunities for benefit.

Transportation:

As NYS DOT reconstructed Route 3 within the past few years, no new projects are scheduled. However, Route 3 traverses through the hamlet and serves as the “Main Street” and is the location for privately owned and operated businesses providing service and sales to visitors traversing the byway. The wide shoulders easily accommodate bicyclists, providing a safe distance from vehicular traffic.

Signage:

Identified by the LAC is the need for interpretive and directional signage located at strategic points of interest and intersections to facilitate pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular flows of traffic and enhance the overall experience of visitors.

Implementation:

As local community representatives, members of the LAC recommend the continuation of quarterly meetings facilitated by the Tug Hill Commission to maintain the flow of communication and information to support the advancement of recommendations and build upon the strengths of neighboring communities in a regional planning effort. The CMP also identifies likely partners associated with the resources to implement the recommendations and serves as a reference list as members of the committee track progress.

<i>Resources and Special Sites & Attractions</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Likely Partners or Stakeholders</i>
<i>Natural</i>		
Mountainous Beauty/Fall Foliage – surrounding backdrop along the byway – Breathtaking views of a natural phenomena with scenic vistas strategically placed offer visitors an opportunity to pause from their travels and gaze at the natural beauty of the mountains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing maintenance and enhancements of scenic vistas and picnic areas; • Identify site/s for the construction of public restroom facilities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS DOT & DPW Crews
Indian River – located along Route 3 and just off route 3 on Lime and Depot Streets. Visitors are attracted to the peace and quiet of the rural landscape while fishing for trout in one of the local fishing holes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterfront cleanup efforts along the bank as opportunities are available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town of Wilna DPW crews, Boys/Girls Club & local interest groups
<i>Natural Rock Formations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify existing sites; • Clearly mark access points with signage and interpret any historical significance; • Enhance, preserve, protect, promote & market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local interest groups and property owners; NYS DOT;
<i>Recreational</i>		
Hiking/Biking Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance trails through debris removal, grooming efforts, designated picnic areas; • Increase signage to direct visitors to designated public use trails; • Increase off-road parking areas to accommodate visitors traveling by vehicle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local interest clubs, NYS DOT, Town DPW Crews
Fishing/Hunting/Camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase and enhance signage along the corridor to clearly mark public use areas for outdoor activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS DEC, NYS DOT

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off-road parking to accommodate visitors. 	
<i>Cultural</i>		
<p>Folk Life- Local art and craft shops feature workshops and products to travelers, reflecting a way of life unique to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand business opportunities through promotion and marketing along the corridor; • Possibly organize an Artisans Guild to cooperatively promote and market the resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ANCA, Greater Area Chamber of Commerce, Thousand Island Tourism Council, in conjunction with business owners.