

Interpretive Plan

For the

Saranac River Trail

Plattsburgh, New York

This Interpretive Plan for the Saranac River Trail builds on a history of community involvement in reclaiming the River front that gave birth to the city, powered its industrial growth, and now promises to add recreation benefits for residents, students and visitors. The Feasibility Study conducted by Alta Planning and Design in 2006 outlined a number of next steps, one of which is this Interpretive Plan. The Saranac River Trail Advisory Committee has continued to work on Trail development in cooperation with the City Engineer, Plattsburgh University campus engineers, and the Town of Plattsburgh. This entire project has been characterized by an extraordinary level of collaboration and a vision for a healthy, livable city.

The Saranac River Trail will re-establish connections across the landscape long obscured by discrete changes in land use over time. Peace Point Park, on the shore of Lake Champlain, will be connected with the downtown business district. The bustling Farmer's Market will recover a connection to the mill district that flanked the river behind it. An early residential neighborhood development will get a waterfront play area.

The three-mile section of the Trail covered by this Interpretive Plan will link the Lake to the City, through the University Campus to the Plattsburgh High School playing fields. Public meetings are currently underway to plan an extension of the Trail upstream to the Imperial Dam and westward through the Town of Plattsburgh. This is a multi-jurisdictional, community-driven project that will make an excellent contribution to the quality of life in the region.

The Saranac River Trail restores the continuity of the river to residents and visitors to the City. Wayside Exhibits will interpret three distinct regions: industrial uses of the river in the vicinity of the four main bridges, the cultural history in between, and the natural history and behavior of the river itself as the trail leaves the city streets for the shoreline edge of the University campus.

The Process

The Saranac River Trail Advisory Committee determined to follow the recommendation of the Study to seek funding for portions of the project. They proposed development of an interpretive plan that would recommend the educational opportunities available to tell about the natural history, culture, and and historic events that took place along the river. With support from a xxxx grant, the committee enlisted The Virginia Company to develop the interpretive plan.

The Advisory Committee met in mid-winter, 2011, to lay out a scope of work. A week later, the entire committee walked the trail to discuss interpretive opportunities. The winter conditions made it possible to see clearly through the river bottomlands and out across tree-covered bluffs. A draft Interpretive Plan compiling all the information and perspectives generated by the committee was circulated for review and comment.

The Advisory Committee met to respond to a series of policy questions raised during the field trip. Their decisions established a framework for the interpretive presentation.

- All signs will read in [Canadian] French as well as [American] English, in conformity with Plattsburgh Chamber of Commerce recommendation.
- When appropriate, interpretation will include recreation, cultural and historic information concerning a particular location.
- Orientation kiosks will be mounted at both ends of the trail: at Peace Point Park and George Angell Drive.
- A wayside exhibit will be placed at the Farmer's Market, with the possibility of adding a Waypoint Community kiosk for Plattsburgh nearby
- Wayside Exhibit signs will follow the Lake Champlain Basin Program's Heritage Trail design template
- The Orientation kiosks will follow the Lakes to Locks design template
- The interpretive plan will incorporate media generated by all partners in the project including (but not limited to): City of Plattsburgh, Clinton County Historical Association, Battle of Plattsburgh Association, Lakes to Locks Passage.

City and University engineers then reviewed the resulting list of possibilities and discussed sign locations. They agreed that the University would post its own trail rules signs, separate from the interpretive exhibits.

Finally, Committee members met to "stake out" the sign locations. The group consisted of the City Engineer, Saranac River Trail Committee chairman, the interpretive consultant and both the past-, and recently-appointed, City Historians. City employees later translated the stake locations to the City's GPS map to produce the trail map.

The Interpretive Program

Interpretation will be delivered through signs mounted along the trail. Complementary video “Passage Minute” presentations will be developed for the Stewarts Shop adjacent to the Catherine St. Bridge. All interpretive components will also be available on the internet: the Saranac River Trail signs will be posted with other Wayside Exhibits & Heritage Trails in the Culture and Recreation section of the Lake Champlain Basin Program’s website. Passage Minutes can be viewed at the Lakes to Lock Passage website.

SIGN SPECIFICATIONS

Two **Orientation kiosks** will be located at either end of the trail: one in Peace Point Park, facing the smallcraft launch site, and the other at the parking area on George Angell Drive. They will consist of 3’x4’ panels, mounted vertically on steel posts. The design scheme will follow Lakes to Locks Passage (the All American Road) template so that, in future, a Waypoint Community kiosk for Plattsburgh could be added to the structure.

The kiosks will provide an overview of the trail along with references to nearby sites of interest, a trail map, and several images depicting historic use of the river and contemporary recreation activities. The trail description will encourage users to link with other trails around the city.

Fifteen **Wayside Exhibits** will be installed in appropriate locations along the trail. These 2’x3’ *Low Profile* signs, mounted on a slant, are designed to explain the story of the particular place that the reader can see from where they stand, looking over the interpretive sign. Community organizations will share responsibility for these wayside exhibits, raising funds for the stories that fall within their interpretive mission.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Wayside Exhibits are designed to supply information about what the reader can see in front of them. Each sign along the trail will explain something about the natural features and historical activities that happened right there. But this is trail is part of a larger system of trails throughout the City and Town of Plattsburgh.

Just as the Saranac River Trail links to a wider system of trails throughout the city and the county, the interpretive signs will incorporate stories that reach beyond the visual field available at any particular location. Trail users can learn what’s on the other side of the river (WE#5), or make a connection to a related historical event (WE#1) and the interesting people who have shaped the history of the place (WE#8). This strategy is aimed at drawing trail users into other areas of the City, and understanding where they are when they get there.

Wayside Exhibit List

Wayside Exhibit Content & Locations

Moving west from Peace Point Park, on the lake shore to George Angell Drive.

Aikens Volunteers (WE-1)

Bridge Street Bridge

Story: Defense of bridge during Battle of Plattsburgh

Working space and Open space (WE-2)

MacDonough Park

Story: Mills run with water from power canals (both sides of river); Park as open space and history; Loyal Smith giving funds for City Hall. Monument story; Weed Pleasure Garden on river bank beyond park.

Mill Pond and Mill District (WE-3)

Farmer's Market

Story: Bridge Street dam and surrounding mills; Mill pond with log booms attached to pilons; power canals running to downstream mills. (see: 1877 panorama)

Transportation & nearby mills (WE-4)

Saranac St. Bridge/ Playground

Bridge, nearby mills, Trolley Barn

Story: Bridge built in two levels: Pedestrians and vehicles below (boxed into deck truss) narrow gauge RR (above) out to C.F.Norton's Iron Forge at S. Catherine Street and Norton's Foundry & Machine Shops; Remains of several bridge abutments still visible, along with arches of exit flume from Wilson Sewing Machine factory; Mason & Sons lumber yard. Ballfield was a shirt factory. Trolley barn & Plattsburgh Light, heat and Power Co coal gasification plant on other side of River. (see: 1899 Bird's Eye)

Fort Brown (WE 5)

At riverside playground

Story: Fort Brown history, location: across river on bluff, with ("Fort Ford" to get across the river. Mention of base expanding south from there, and out to lake shore.

Weed Town neighborhood (WE-6)

Pine Street opposite Standish

Story: Smith Weed's "development" of this neighborhood as worker housing for riverside mill hands; who the streets were named for; how long the neighborhood was separated from the city before in-fill (demo of mills?), police station, ball fields, etc. (see: 1877 panoramic view; 1899 bird's eye)

Mills at Catherine Street Bridge (WE 7)

Pine Street north of #6

Story: Mills clustered near bridge, both upstream and below: Norton Forge, Railroad shops, Lyon Mt. Iron processing. See: (Bird's eye view.)

Cemetery Personae (WE#8)

across from Cemetery on Seltzer Rd

Story: History of Riverside Cemetery; biographies of important folks buried here, combined with connections to other places in the city: Francis B. Hall's medal of honor is displayed at Kent de Lord House, Addie Shields many years in the County Historian's office, Mayor (in the Mausoleum) gave the money for MacDonough monument and City Hall. Seltzer Street as route to original river crossing "Winchell Bridge" or "Upper Bridge" . (see early Plattsburgh map showing "road to Salmon River")

Bedrock Riverbed (WE#9)

at break in fence, facing river

Story: Evidence of bedrock on river flow, as the "lie" of water-carved limestone creates diagonal wave pattern; explain layers of limestone in riverbed from here to Catherine Street Bridge: Crown Point, Day Point, whitewater paddling of rapids; Note: Rail mount?

Riverine behavior (WE#10)

On shore by playing fields

Story: Spring break-up behavior, rapids, ice jams, river transportation of trees, debris,. Note: two benches will flank this sign.

River dynamics (WE# 11)

Behind Clinton Dining Hall looking upriver

Story: How the river makes islands in slow places, carves banks with acceleration, making a serpentine course; bluff as a product of river carving; importance of vegetation in retaining soil.

Sweet spots for fishing (WE#12)

Waterhouse Park

Story: Tribute to Angie Mariana's instruction in fly-fishing; what you can catch during what seasons; how to find the best fishing spots based on fish habitat & river dynamics.

[Wayside Exhibits # 13-15 will be part of two later developments. A bottomland branch of the trail will be developed as the Dennis April Nature Trail, honoring the long-time nature columnist for the Plattsburgh Press Republican. The final wayside exhibit will be part of the westward extension of the trail out as far as Imperial Dam.]

Wildflowers in the Woods (WE#13)

In bottom lands near Cardinal flowers

Story: Explanation of richness of bottomlands and what grows there; noting wildflowers, wild edibles (fiddleheads, illustrations of Cardinal Flowers), debris from flooding & winterfall, and ice storm damage. Stands of white pine (wolf trees –what do they tell you?).

Dennis April Nature Trail (WE#14)

Foot of Foot bridge

Story: Biography of Dennis April; quotes from his newspaper columns as an introduction to what you could discover along the trail.

Imperial Dam (WE#15)

On trail extension

Story: History of dam and the papermill it supplied power for; ecological description of what dams do to rivers and the consequences for fish populations.

Orientation Kiosk (one at each end of the trail)

Welcome to the Saranac River Trail. Travelling the trail can help everyone make sense out of where they are in the city. Plattsburgh can be a very confusing city to a driver, because of the curving route the river takes through the landscape. Get familiar with this trail and you'll understand the city's history as well as its geography.

Trail Map:

Shows trail route and indicates links to other trails, and potential expansion westward.

caption:

Saranac River Trail links with other recreation trails in the City and beyond. At the mouth of the river, just downstream from the pedestrian bridge, a smallboat launch indicates where the Northern Canoe Trail reaches the western shore of Lake Champlain. On east end of the Saranac Bridge, the trail links with two paths, The Gordon Bicycle Path that wends southward through the Old Base, Karen Fleury Bike Path that runs north along the Lake shore to the City Beach, the State Park, and the ferry at Cumberland Head. At the west end of the trail, a footbridge offers access to the southern bank of the Saranac, and to Waterhouse Park where picnic and playground facilities adjoin excellent fishing locations.

Recreation photos: what to do along the trail: MacDonough park, Farmer's market, Cemetery overlook, woods trail to footbridge Fishing, kayaking, canoing.