

The Gentle Sea

Sea Kayaking on Georgian Bay in French

Report and Development Proposal

By: Yves Ouellet, Consultant

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

Our approach

Overview

Clarification

Two sectors in the East

Southeast Georgian Bay (Nottawasaga Bay to Bayfield Inlet)

Meeting: Parry Sound

White Squall Paddling Centre & Outdoor Gear Store

Meeting: Parry Sound

Black Feather

Kayaking sites

Midland – Christian Island

Penetanguishene – Beausoleil Island

Awenda Provincial Park

Twelve Mile Bay

Massasauga Provincial Park and Sans Souci Island

Parry Sound

Killbear Provincial Park

Snug Harbour

Franklin Island

Mink Islands

Pointe au Baril

Sturgeon Bay Provincial Park

French River (river section)

French River (the mouth of the river)

Killarney

Meeting with Killarney Mountain Lodge and Outfitters

Manitoulin and the North Channel

Meeting with Horizons Adventures Rick Wise, Little Current, Manitoulin

Bruce Peninsula

Meeting with Thorncrest Outfitters

Recommendations

1. A sea kayaking trail around Georgian Bay

Definition

Components

Making it happen

Funding

2. A sea kayaking trail from park to park

3. Developing French products and routes with local outfitters

4. Assistance with Francization

5. Fostering partnerships between outfitters and the parks

Collaborators

Acknowledgements

Introduction

With the huge increase in the popularity of sea kayaking as a tourism product over the past 20 years, the province of Quebec seems to have reached market saturation, whereas Ontario is just beginning to develop this new market. Canoeing is still overwhelmingly the leader in non-motorized water sports. And, while sea kayaking is gradually gaining in popularity, much remains to be done.

In Quebec, experience has shown that Quebecois kayakers have explored most of their province and are increasingly open to exploring destinations outside Quebec. New Brunswick and the American east coast, from Acadia National Park in Maine to Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, are attracting more and more kayakers from Quebec. The exponential growth in sea kayaking in the Magdalen Islands and the Mingan Archipelago is also evidence of their willingness to venture forth. Quebec kayakers are increasingly open to new destinations and open to unique, different, and exciting opportunities. Are they ready for Ontario? Yes, especially if we invite them in French!

Developing sea kayaking in Ontario seems like an enormous undertaking and it is difficult to imagine taking it on, given the immense territory, the many waterways, and the unlimited potential... Developing sea kayaking in Ontario in French seems even more difficult for a variety of obvious challenges.

In order to tackle this project in a realistic way and to make it feasible in the short and medium term, we have decided to focus on one region: Georgian Bay. It not only has the potential for an extraordinary level of development, it is also relatively well-known to Quebecois kayakers.

Our approach

Our approach in the field consisted of meeting with all of the potential partners in order to develop sea kayaking routes in French on Georgian Bay. We mainly focused on adventure tourism companies that already have expertise in the field, but that do not necessarily have the resources to serve Francophones.

Provincial parks are also preferred partners because they are very well distributed geographically around Georgian Bay and offer camping, boat launching facilities, and long-term parking. They are critical stakeholders; as they develop, we expect that they will take increasing control over camping on any islands within their boundaries that are found along the routes. We should also anticipate business partnerships to develop between outfitters and the parks over services such as activities, equipment rentals, and shuttle services. These types of partnerships are already well established in Quebec's national parks. Algonquin Park in Ontario is a model of a public-private partnership.

Marinas are also major players since they control many of the strategic points of access to Georgian Bay for people kayaking on their own. Marinas from southern Georgian Bay to

the French River area and over to Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula must be involved in the development of sea kayaking and several have already expressed interest.

Hotel operators around Georgian Bay may also play a role, especially along the French River between Lake Nipissing and the mouth of the river.

Lastly, some municipalities may become interesting stakeholders as they become involved in developing tourism, especially smaller towns looking for ways to diversify their economic base.

Wherever we went, we presented the possibility of offering new tourism products in French, such as sea kayaking, as an effective way of going after a new, untapped clientele. Our first argument was primarily an economic one; to the east of Ontario, there is a very significant market of seven million consumers who have yet to be targeted.

There are two choices based on this finding. We presented these two choices to everyone with whom we met. The first is to seize this opportunity and to begin targeting the Quebec market with the conviction that, if they feel that they are welcome and are provided with a minimum level of service in French, they will turn to Ontario in the same way that they flocked to New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, New England, and the American east coast.

The other option is to let this opportunity pass us by for any number of reasons, all of which we respect. We knocked on doors. Our discussions with those who did not want to come on board were very pleasant and we were treated with kindness and respect.

Our discussions with those who did want to come on board were very exciting; this group was very enthusiastic, imaginative, cooperative and ready to put this whole project into motion.

To use a marketing expression, we feel that there is good momentum. There is an opportunity to tap into the Quebec and Francophone market and, by extension, the Acadian and European markets. The current drop in the American market, which is expected to last, has created a need to develop a new market that will help to break down misconceptions on both sides. One could even say that “it’s now or never”!

Meetings around Georgian Bay between July 2 and July 18, 2006

Summary and Evaluation of Kayaking Sites

Overview

Clarification

We should point out, right from the start, that the shores of Georgian Bay offer hundreds of points of interest. There are countless possibilities for sea kayaking routes and numerous points from which to set out to explore the islands. In fact, there are so many alternatives and choices that it is impossible to provide a complete inventory. Passing an island on one side rather than the other side completely changes the trip! And, as we know, Georgian Bay is the bay of 30,000 islands! We can identify regions that are particularly conducive to sea kayaking and others that are less so. We can also identify the special features of these regions.

One feature that applies to almost the entire Georgian Bay region (except for the Indian reserves) is the presence of many islands, even in the most densely used areas, which are public lands or Crown lands. These islands are accessible to all boaters: motor boaters, canoeists, kayakers, etc. Camping is free and reservations are not required (first come, first serve). During high season, several of these islands are full and it can be difficult to find a spot. This can extend a trip by several kilometres. During the week or in the off-season, finding a site isn't a problem. In order to identify potential campsites, kayakers and boaters should purchase a chart and, ideally, consult a marina or locals before heading out. Solo excursions of one day or several days are possible everywhere. Water entry points are easy to find around marinas and even easier to find in the provincial parks. Daily parking fees usually apply.

Two sectors in the East

The east shore of Georgian Bay can be divided into two large sectors for sea kayaking: the southeast, from Nottawasaga Bay to Bayfield Inlet, and the northeast, from Byng Inlet to Killarney, i.e. the mouth of the French River.

Southeastern Georgian Bay (Nottawasaga Bay to Bayfield Inlet)

This geographic area is a very high density tourist area. It has been a vacation destination for many people for many years. Since the 19th century, wealthy families from Toronto and environs and from the United States have built hundreds of cottages on the islands. This has created a point of interest since it is captivating to admire all of the picturesque cottages from the water. This has also resulted in very high level of water traffic and a general preference for powerboats.

This area developed around and for powerboats. There is a place for sea kayaking and we are beginning to see more openness to it. However, sea kayaking must comply with certain standards, such as the presence of powerboats and respect for the basic water safety rules. Respect for private property is another serious standard. However, there are many campsites on islands that are Crown land and that are accessible to everyone without reservations and free of charge.

Meeting: Parry Sound

White Squall Paddling Centre & Outdoor Gear Store

We received a warm welcome at White Squall and the owner was extremely attentive to our presentation and suggestions. We met in the morning and, since we left fairly quickly after one of his groups of young kayakers, he invited us to return the next day to continue the discussion.

White Squall is a pioneer in the field of sea kayaking. It has been in business for over 21 years and started to offer sea kayaking on Georgian Bay long before anyone had heard about it in Quebec. It now has sales of \$1.2 million, a large fleet, and a large staff. However, none of the guides are fluent in French.

At our second meeting, the director, Tim Dyer, provided us with more information about the business and spoke at length about his decision not to join our project to develop kayaking routes in French.

After consulting some of his associates, he came to the following conclusions:

- White Squall has reached its maturity in terms of market development and it would be difficult for him to take on new clients.
- After 20 years in business, they are more interested in selling [the business] than in opening up new market segments in sea kayaking.
- They are more interested in diversifying towards other activities that provide them with new challenges.
- They don't have any staff who could serve a Francophone clientele.
- They find that clients from outside the area often have expectations around service that are too high. They expect the royal treatment; White Squall's philosophy is that everyone should pitch in.

So, while he was pleasant and friendly, Tim Dyer turned down our offer.

Meeting: Parry Sound

Black Feather

We were warmly welcomed by Fred at Black Feather, who was very interested in our suggestion of developing a sea kayaking route in French for the Quebecois clientele.

This company, located in the Ottawa region but well established in Parry Sound, has an impressive staff of 45 guides, some of whom would not have any problems leading Francophone groups.

Fred was very open to the idea of a guided five-day trip for Francophones that could be offered about four times a season. He even invited us to choose the trip that would be

most conducive to the project. We suggested a trip from the mouth of the French River north to Killarney. Black Feather already offers a seven-day excursion along this route, but it would be a bit too long because most Quebecois clientele would prefer a five-day four-night trip, from Monday to Friday, which would give them the weekends to travel. One possibility would be an overnight at an inn on the Sunday night and the Friday night. We would have to check into this.

Fred raised concerns about communicating with clients in French over reservations and information. This was his only hesitation about the project. However, he gave us the impression that, despite the low staff turnover, he might be able to hire someone bilingual to do this.

Kayaking sites

Midland – Christian Island

Situated at the northeastern tip of Nottawasaga Bay, Christian Island is a potentially interesting destination due to its rich history and superb beaches. Christian Island is an Ojibway reserve that is accessible only by ferry.

According to the residents we met there, it should be fairly easy to find campsites and groups would be welcome on the condition that the band council was involved in every stage of development of this project.

Penetanguishene – Beausoleil Island

Despite its high population density, especially in the high summer season, the Georgian Bay Islands National Park and Beausoleil Island area should be taken into consideration. Beausoleil Island already has a campground that is accessible by water.

Awenda Provincial Park

Situated midway between Christian Island and Beausoleil Island, Awenda Provincial Park is probably the best starting point for a two or three day kayaking trip from one island to another or for an excursion into the Georgian Bay Islands National Park area.

Twelve Mile Bay

Accessible from Muskoka Road 12 off of Highway 69, Twelve Mile Bay is the southernmost of a series of long bays that go inland for several kilometres. These long bays offer several days of kayaking in generally very sheltered waters as well as opportunities for camping. These bays all empty directly into Georgian Bay or into groups of hundreds of islands of all different sizes and shapes.

Massasauga Provincial Park and Sans Souci Island

Stretching along the shore of Georgian Bay between Parry Sound and Moon River, Massasauga Provincial Park includes hundreds of islands. This marine park and its 135 campsites are only accessible by kayak, canoe or powerboat. Consequently, it has interesting potential for sea kayaking.

Parry Sound

An extremely popular region in southeastern Georgian Bay, Parry Sound offers many tourist attractions, outdoor activities, and services.

For kayakers, the harbour would be an interesting starting point for exploring the north and south shores of the sound. There are numerous cottages and a few public islands. These waters are fairly exposed to the bay; however, they are still very interesting.

Killbear Provincial Park

This immense provincial park represents the best option for kayakers in the Parry Sound area. Situated on a long peninsula at the entrance to Parry Sound, it has the advantage of being less busy because there are fewer islands. Entering the water at Killbear Point, kayakers can easily tour the entire peninsula without any difficulty. They can paddle the length of Parry Island to the south. Within Parry Bay, kayakers can paddle toward Mowat, Horse and Huckleberry Islands or explore the deep Blind River, Collins Inlet, and Loon Bay, which run parallel to each other. Collins Inlet empties into Deep Bay, which is fairly easy to navigate. Kayakers can also travel along the shore of Georgian Bay from Killbear Park towards Franklin Island without too much difficulty. Killbear Provincial Park could also be a starting point for a longer park-to-park trip up to Killarney or beyond.

Snug Harbour

With exceptional launch sites, Snug Harbour and Snug Haven are ideal for sea kayaking. Several islands at the mouth of the bay are suitable for camping. Local outfitter White Squall uses these islands. The small craft channel is in steady use, but it is perfectly safe for kayaks along the shore. This is a very good location for day trips or for two or three day trips with camping on the islands.

Franklin Island

With a circumference of 15 kilometres, this large island is a favourite destination for kayakers on Georgian Bay. Accessible from Snug Harbour or Dillon Cove, kayakers can circumnavigate the island in one day or camp for one or two nights and explore the area more fully.

Mink Islands

Situated five kilometres from Franklin Island, the Mink Islands offer an exciting challenge for more experienced kayakers. Many of the islands are privately owned, but Green Island, at the centre of the Minks, is a perfect place for kayakers to stop. More experienced kayakers will want to press on to the McCoy Islands to the north.

Pointe au Baril

Pointe au Baril, probably the second largest bay on the east shore of Georgian Bay, is a great discovery for kayakers. While it has mostly been taken over by cottagers, kayakers can explore the area, especially since many cottage owners own kayaks themselves.

Entering the water from one of the ramps at a local marina is relatively easy and there is also a very easy boat launch in the main parking lot in the marina.

The perimeter of the bay is less than 15 km in length and offers three points of interest. The first is the Pointe au Baril lighthouse, where we met the last lighthouse keepers who raised their six children there. They have created a small, very charming museum and greet visitors who all arrive by boat with a sugar tart or a lemon tart.

The second point of interest is a monument to Samuel de Champlain, erected in 1948, which marks his passage through the area in 1615. Further out is Ojibway Lodge, a century-old inn that has recently been restored at great expense.

Kayakers who want to linger can camp on several Crown islands. Locals assured us that campers will almost certainly be tolerated on private land provided that they respect the environment. It is always best to ask for permission.

Circumnavigating Shawanaga Island and Hertzberg Island would certainly provide a few days' worth of paddling.

Sturgeon Bay Provincial Park

Without question, the best base for kayaking in the Pointe au Baril area is Sturgeon Bay Provincial Park, located near the marina access road. This small park, the smallest in Ontario, is located on an inlet to the north of Pointe au Baril Bay. This area is much calmer and offers easy access to the main portion of the bay. Sturgeon Bay Provincial Park may also serve as an entry point for both short or long trips or as one leg of a trip along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay.

French River (river section)

The Monette, Ouellete, and Alban sections of the French River are somewhat on their own in terms of sea kayaking. The concept of offering kayaking in conjunction with deluxe accommodation is an interesting possibility with a service provider such as Pine Cove Lodge or Scheanitur Fetchy or a few others who are open to this new activity. The possibility of multi-day independent excursions with camping on the islands is also very

appealing. The only challenge is the French River itself; it is labyrinthine and kayakers must be familiar with the charts before setting out. Basically, if paddlers are able to navigate the French River, there isn't any reason why paddlers [sic] can't do the same.

The new Mashkinonje Provincial Park in this region offers some surprising possibilities, even though it is mostly dedicated to hiking trails. Part of the park will be reserved for sea kayaking or canoeing and will be off-limits to motorboats, which will be a plus.

In the context of developing a sea kayaking strategy for Georgian Bay, this area cannot be considered a coastal water trail, since it is mainly directed toward Lake Nipissing. However, it could be another option for tourists who wish to combine superior accommodations and sea kayak day tripping. New camping opportunities in the French River area could also be offered in conjunction with sea kayaking along the shore of Georgian Bay.

French River (mouth of the river)

Even though it is theoretically possible to navigate the French River stopping at inns located between Lake Nipissing and the mouth of the river, the most interesting portion of the French River is clearly the area located west of Highway 69, a few kilometres from the new French River Provincial Park visitor centre.

The only point of access to the water in this region is the Hartley Bay Marina, whose owners are extremely open to kayakers. They have noted that 40% of their clientele are now kayakers. Sensing a good business opportunity, they are ready to offer services to this clientele and are able to welcome Quebecois kayakers in French because one of the associates is Francophone.

According to them, the mouth of the French River offers several sea kayaking routes, some of which may involve a few short portages.

It is possible to travel from Hartley Bay to Killarney in five to seven days using the western channel of the French River. Some outfitters cover this route and Killarney Mountain Lodge offers to take kayakers and their equipment back to their starting point. From the western channel, loops back to the main channel and towards Hartley Bay area are also possible.

Another option is to explore the islands on the outer edge of the delta by travelling towards Fox Island. More adventuresome kayakers will want to travel to the islands at the mouth of the river, which include the Bustards.

There are numerous campsites throughout this area.

One of the historical attractions is the ghost town of Copananing, founded in 1872 in the delta. All of the timber from the surrounding area was floated downriver to Copananing, little of which remains. Naturally, the main attraction is the indelible mark left by the

Voyageurs who traversed this region for two hundred years. We know that, during these trips, they had to choose between the western channel and the main channel south of Nishoda Island. Some of their campsites remain, despite the passage of time.

Samuel de Champlain also traveled by this route. Kayakers can imagine him stopping in the very same places where they disembark!

Killarney

Meeting with Killarney Mountain Lodge and Outfitters

The town of Killarney represents another strategic venue for developing sea kayaking on Georgian Bay. In addition to Killarney Provincial Park, which welcomes many kayakers, there is also a private company (Killarney Mountain Lodge and Outfitters), which is increasingly oriented towards sea kayaking. In recent years, it has made consistent efforts to offer services in French.

Sea kayaking in the Killarney area will mostly consist of day trips to the hundreds of islands in the immediate area. Killarney Mountain Lodge offers only one really long trip in its catalogue and it doesn't seem to be very popular. However, we feel that if Killarney offered a Francophone five-day/four-night camping package that linked up Killarney with Hartley Point on the French River, this product would take off in Quebec. This product would be similar to the long trips that sell very well in the three big regions for sea kayaking in Quebec: the Saguenay, the Mingan Archipelago (North Shore), and the Gaspé. Also, this type of trip allows two days of travel, which is perfect for tourists from eastern Quebec. They could also be offered the option of a night at the inn before and after the kayaking trip.

If the outfitter wanted to offer a three-day trip with two nights of camping in the Killarney area, which could be offered in French to groups of four to eight kayakers, this product would no doubt be popular.

The provincial park could also get involved providing kayakers with a place to stay on the trip there and back, in addition to being the last stop on a park-to-park trip along the entire eastern shore of Georgian Bay.

We found that Killarney Mountain Lodge and Outfitters was very open; one of the managers said that he was ready to develop custom products tailored to the Quebec market. To do this, he was open to working with other companies with Francophone staff. We think that the idea of local outfitters working together will be one of the keys to developing successful Francophone tourism products on Georgian Bay and across Ontario.

Manitoulin and the North Channel

The entire Manitoulin Island area presents a challenge in terms of being included in a round-the-bay expedition. This is for geographical reasons; the island is deeply indented by many long bays. Conversely, the sheer size of the island with its bays and many lakes, lends itself perfectly to sea kayaking along the North Channel, the Lake Huron side, and the Georgian Bay side.

Clearly, the North Channel located in the triangle between Killarney, the Spanish River, and Little Current, offers tremendous potential for trips over several days with overnights on the islands. It remains to be seen whether this area could be integrated into a round-the-bay route.

Like the river portion of the French River, Manitoulin Island should be marketed on the basis of trips of one, two or three days on lakes or bays. This should be done in partnerships between outfitters, lodges, and campground operators.

Meeting with Horizons Adventures Rick Wise, Little Current, Manitoulin Island

Rick Wise piqued our interest in the La Cloche Mountain/North Channel area. The landscape, the history of the Voyageurs in this region, the unique geology of this region, the famous La Cloche Mountains that sound like bells, and easy access to the area's numerous islands make this a remarkable destination in itself.

However, Rick and his small company are not able to offer services in French. He should continue to be considered a resource in terms of acting as a collaborator, trip organizer in cooperation with other outfitters, logistics specialist, and, possibly, an on-site resource for developing the water trail.

Bruce Peninsula

The entire Bruce Peninsula, from Tobermory east to Owen Sound on Georgian Bay and west to Southampton on Lake Huron, offers excellent access to the water. However, depending on the weather, the Georgian Bay side and the Lake Huron side offer radically different sea conditions and each meets the needs of a distinct clientele.

The Lake Huron side of the Bruce Peninsula consists of a series of long beaches, a relatively flat approach to the water, and groups of islands that are readily accessible. Both beginners and experienced kayakers will enjoy this area.

The Georgian Bay side consists of one long escarpment. There are few access points to the water and, consequently, few exit points. However, it offers an extraordinary natural setting, with impressive cliffs and capes.

Meeting with Suntrail Outfitters

Based in Hepworth, in the heart of a region offering many kayaking opportunities, Suntrail Outfitters is outdoor equipment store that caters largely to canoeing and kayaking. The company also offers guided day trips for beginners.

We went out with one group to the Fishing Islands at Oliphant. This was a pleasant trip through a group of islands on the Lake Huron side, which are sheltered from the winds of Lake Huron. They have a lot to offer in terms of the flora and fauna, which make them ideal for nature excursions.

On the surface, it appears that Suntrail Outfitters does not cater to the needs of the clientele that we want to target because it does not offer any long trips or have any Francophone guides. However, Ann Fahrún assured us that her son, who completed a university degree in outdoor recreation and leadership, wants to develop this niche next season. This young man, who seems to be very entrepreneurial, apparently speaks French quite well and could easily lead groups in French. She was interested in our project and assured us that her son would be prepared to develop sea kayaking tours in French on the east shore of the Bruce Peninsula.

Meeting with Thorncrest Outfitters

With stores in Tobermory, Southampton, and Hanover, Thorncrest Outfitters has developed extensive expertise in outdoor recreation and sea kayaking as well as detailed knowledge of the Bruce Peninsula.

The company has taken an original approach, offering self-guided sea kayaking tours along the shore of Georgian Bay. These tours include equipment rentals and launches, logistical services, transportation, and shuttle services as well as stays in B&Bs in some cases. Thorncrest also provides all of the documents that kayakers need to guide themselves and experience their environment. These tours are intended for experienced, self-sufficient kayakers.

According to the experts at Thorncrest Outfitters, the east shore of the Bruce Peninsula is only suitable for experienced kayakers due to the rigours of the climate and the topography of the Niagara escarpment, which offers few opportunities for shelter in the event of an emergency. On the other hand, there are several basic campsites for hikers on the Bruce Trail. These campsites could be used by both groups.

Recommendations

Recommendations

1. A sea kayaking water trail around Georgian Bay

Definition

“A water trail is a network of launch sites, sheltered areas, rest areas, places offering accommodation and meals, basic campsites, and privately-run campsites. A water trail is easy to navigate, unmarked, and designed for small craft with a shallow draft, such as sea kayaks.”

The first initiative is the development of a water trail for sea kayaking around Georgian Bay.

Advantages

The first advantage of this trail is that it concentrates kayakers in a single area that offers numerous benefits:

- Kayakers are not spread out across the entire province.
- There will be fewer rescue operations and they will be simpler.
- Kayaker safety is maximized and the risk that kayakers will become lost is minimized.
- Interaction with powerboats is minimized.
- Conflicts with property owners are avoided.
- Kayakers are provided with all of the information they need.
- Help with trip planning will be available.
- Kayakers travelling without a guide will be provided with a complete travel kit.
- We will have the best promotional tool.
- All of the stakeholders who are interested in this type of tourist product will be brought together and offered an exceptional promotional platform.

Components

A water trail is a specific trail that is charted, showing kayakers a route to follow and all of the features along this route:

- Physical locations, islands, towns, cities, rivers
- Distances
- Provincial and national parks and the services they offer (camping, launching, parking, accommodation, meals, drinking water)
- Crown lands and islands as well as campsites that can be used
- Information on the regulations in effect on Crown lands and in parks
- Identification of private property, wildlife sanctuaries, and Indian reserves that are off-limits
- Launch sites and marinas
- GPS points along the route

- Information about areas with heavy powerboat traffic and areas that present special challenges due to the currents, wind exposure, depth, reefs, etc.
- Levels of difficulty: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Most of the southern, southeastern, and northern sectors of Georgian Bay are appropriate for all kayakers. The mouth of the French River is appropriate for intermediate to advanced kayakers. The Bruce Peninsula should probably be limited to expert kayakers travelling on their own or intermediate kayakers travelling with a guide.

Making it happen

Designing a water trail requires a team of specialists who plot the course on marine charts and then systematically explore the area for points of interest. They then conduct extensive research to complete and check any historical, practical or scientific information.

This work usually results in the production of one or more maps that show the water trail and all of the related information.

Funding

Based on similar work done in Quebec, some of the funding for this project could come from advertising sales to various private or public service providers who are along the trail who will benefit from it: parks, hotels, outfitters, private campgrounds, marinas, vendors of outdoor equipment, municipalities, tourism agencies, and sea kayak manufacturers.

The mission of *Direction Ontario* is to promote and develop Francophone tourism in Ontario. In keeping with this mission, the Georgian Bay water trail is an initiative that will be launched in French to penetrate the Quebec and Francophone markets. Clearly, however, this type of tool will be useful for all markets and documentation should be produced in English as quickly as possible. *Direction Ontario* could work with provincial agencies to fund and promote the trail.

2. A sea kayaking trail from park to park

On our tour of the entire Georgian Bay area, it became clear to us that all of the national and provincial parks along the shores of the bay must become key stakeholders in the development of a water trail and in the development of a new Francophone tourist market. Following our meetings and discussions with park managers and employees, we realize that what was obvious to us was also obvious to them; they were openly enthusiastic about this project. American tourists and fishing enthusiasts are on the decline, making this new and extremely interesting clientele (consisting of adults who are wealthy, environmentally aware, non-polluting, and non-predatory) hard to ignore. Many of the parks are under development and could see our project as an opportunity to expand their services and, consequently, their income through park entrance fees, increased park

use, and, thanks to the water trail, the possibility of developing exclusive campsites to which kayakers could be directed.

For this reason, we are proposing the development of a park-to-park trail within the larger water trail, which could be marketed through a central reservation system.

3. Developing French products and routes with local outfitters

Outfitters on Georgian Bay will be the primary designers of the Quebec market for sea kayaking in Ontario. We are also certain that this new market has promise and will be lucrative. To reach this objective, we believe that the outfitters who have expressed an interest in the project should develop at least one package tour in French that specifically targets the Francophone clientele.

We want to emphasize that this tour must actually be conducted in French, not in both languages, because experience has shown that, for this type of activity “bilingual” actually means “English”. Francophones who speak English or who want to improve their English language skills will purchase a tour in English such as those already offered by the outfitters. We believe that many Quebecois who have difficulty communicating in or understanding English or those who simply want to travel in French will opt for a French package.

Our suggestion to outfitters is to add at least one guided five day/four night tour to their catalogue or suggest a guided activity that would interest Quebecois clients. Since a self-guided tour is already offered in the Bruce Peninsula area, this product might interest experienced French-speaking kayakers provided any documentation and interpretation and some of the basic services are offered in French. In Quebec, in addition to introductory half-day and one-day tours, three- to five-day trips are very popular on the Saguenay, in the Mingan Archipelago (North Shore), and in the Gaspé. There is also a lot of growth in the Magdalen Islands and on the North Shore. Outfitters in the Saguenay area currently sell 25,000 days of kayaking per year on a route that is about 100 km long. This route is sold out during the peak season due to the limited availability of campsites.

These package tours should be led by professional guides who are fluent in French and who are familiar enough with the area to provide a historical and environmental interpretation of it. Knowledge of the history of the Voyageurs, Champlain, and Huronia would be an asset.

In exchange, *Direction Ontario* should commit to promoting the products that are developed by these service providers by:

- Implementing a five-year marketing program divided into an initial three-year period, followed by a two-year period.
- Setting up a press campaign, preparing and distributing press releases to the media and specialized websites, creating promotional documents, and organizing tours for journalists.

- Planning a three-year advertising campaign in Quebec's main outdoor magazines: *Géo Plein Air* and *Espace*.
- Getting all of the service providers and participants to promote their products during this campaign.
- Developing themes that will interest Quebecois kayakers such as:
 - *Tours, information, and documentation in French*
 - *Georgian Bay, an inland sea that is 15 times larger than Lac Saint-Jean*
 - *The most exciting freshwater experience in North America*
 - *30,000 islands for kayaking and camping*
 - *The routes used by the Voyageurs and Champlain*
 - *Areas that are still wild and island vacation spots different from anything in Quebec*
 - *Warm and calm waters in tropical colours*
 - *A water trail that passes through the most beautiful areas while sheltering kayakers from high winds*
 - *Inns on the French River and B&Bs along the Bruce Peninsula*
 - *A shuttle service*
- Devoting at least two pages to the water trail and the tours in the *Guide touristique l'Ontario en français* [French-language guide to tourism in Ontario].
- Guaranteeing exclusivity to initial program participants for the first three years.
- After three years, consulting participants to make any necessary adjustments and add other products or participants.
- Continuing the promotion during the fourth and fifth years and then allowing the market to develop on its own.
- Attending kayaking events in Quebec in order to raise awareness of the water trail, the package tours, and Georgian Bay.
- Doing a draw in the Quebec media for an attractive package tour.
- Designing a website for the Georgian Bay water trail and all of the related services.

4. Assistance with Francization

One of the main problems identified by outfitters and parks is the challenge of communicating with Francophone clients. To address this shortcoming, which is paralyzing some of them, we suggest the following:

- Set up an information and reservations centre in French for provincial or national park campsites and private companies interested in sea kayaking along the water trail to address their lack of Francophone resources.
- Support outfitters who want to have their flyers, documentation, and websites translated.
- Produce a French map of the water trail that identifies all of the participants that can be sent to anyone who requests it.

- Support outfitters who want to hire bilingual Francophone guides by making enquiries on their behalf at schools or universities with outdoor adventure programs.

5. Fostering partnerships between outfitters and the parks

To conclude, it is clear that only a few outfitters and parks are currently able to go after the Quebec market without outside help. It is therefore the role and the mission of *Destination Nord* to make things easier for them in this regard. On several occasions however, we noted that even though certain outfitters and park managers did not feel equipped to take this project on, there were resources that, if pooled, would make this project much simpler to launch. Naturally, competing companies don't usually share resources. However, some have Francophone guides and do not service the entire region. Others serve strategic areas, but do not have Francophone guides. Some offer all the logistics and equipment, but do not have the staff to offer guided tours. Others simply do not have the capability to handle rapid growth, but have expertise and valuable knowledge of the territory. Public agencies would greatly benefit from a new market, but are completely unable to generate interest in the product or to bring clients to the area. In a perfect world, all of these players would come together and pool their services and expertise in order to develop a new market and, together, reap the benefits. It would be very similar to what the business world refers to as an "issue table". This sharing of expertise and energy is certainly what will be needed to launch this exciting project.

Collaborators

Black Feather
250 McNaught's Rd.
RR 3
Parry Sound ON P2A 2W9
Phone: 705 746-1372

Killarney Mountain Lodge & Outfitters
Killarney ON P0M 2A0
Phone: 1 800 461-1117

Horizons Adventures, Little Current, Manitoulin Island
28 Sleepy Hollow Rd.
Whitefish ON P0M 3E0
Phone: 705 866-2345
Phone: 877 404-4142

Suntrail Outfitters
PO Box 29
Hwy 6
Hepworth ON N0H 1P0

Thorncrest Outfitters
193 High St.
Southampton ON N0H 2L0

It would be a good idea to identify another service provider or outfitter in the Sudbury area to round out the team of collaborators.

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank the extraordinary team at *Destination Nord (Direction Ontario)*, especially Nicole Guertin, and everyone with whom I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting during this exciting tour. Each and every one of you inspired me and made this experience a very enriching one. I was touched by your passion and I wish each of you success. We will certainly meet again...