

Lessons from the Road



Case #3: Intrinsic Qualities Make a Byway



"Intrinsic qualities" make each byway a one-of-a-kind experience for visitors.

Intrinsic qualities are the character-defining resources within a scenic byway corridor that attract and engage visitors. This case study describes the process used to analyze the Colonial Parkway's intrinsic qualities and identifies some useful lessons for anyone undertaking an intrinsic quality analysis for the first time.

The National Scenic Byway Program groups intrinsic qualities in six categories: archaeological, cultural, historical, natural, recreational, and scenic. Effective corridor plans identify these resources and incorporate them into management strategies that can accommodate growth and can protect, even enhance, a byway's intrinsic qualities.

For local communities, the task of defining the intrinsic qualities of a proposed

National Scenic Byway may appear overwhelming. Fortunately, intrinsic quality studies by corridor planners, landscape architects, and volunteers can serve as models. A publication called *Byway Beginnings* by the Federal Highway Administration and National Park Service describes a model you can use.

A page on the Creole Nature Trail—one of the first National Scenic Byways—describes how students, volunteers, and professionals used effective approaches to intrinsic quality analysis.

About Lessons from the Road

This case study features lessons learned by scenic byway advocates across the country that are applicable to many scenic byway initiatives.

Scenic byways are public roads with special scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archaeological, and/or natural qualities that have been recognized as such through legislation or some other official declaration.

Nomination guidelines for National Scenic Byway designation require a series of planning and management elements. Some byway efforts lead to nomination, and possibly national designation; the rest choose other paths for implementation. These case studies show how various byway managers address planning and management issues in distinctive ways.

Each case study in this series concludes with a resource list of helpful publications and details on how to contact the National Scenic Byways Clearinghouse.

Good luck with your byway.

The Series

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Assessing Intrinsic Qualities: An Example

In three general steps, the Colonial Parkway analysis process:

- Researched the historic intent and original condition of the road;
- Documented the existing condition of the road's intrinsic qualities; and
- Analyzed the differences between the original and current condition of the road's intrinsic qualities to determine their historical integrity.

Colonial Parkway, a key component of Colonial National Historical Park, is a 23-mile scenic road that connects the historic sites of Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Jamestown. Located in Virginia's Tidewater

Region, Colonial Parkway was built to withstand the demands of 20th Century auto traffic and, at the same time, offer the experience of driving down a country road. The road's views—sweeping vistas of the York and James Rivers, and the cathedral ceiling of boughs overhead—combine to create a parkway that is a driving experience in itself.

The Parkway, built between 1930 and the 1950s, spans 30 feet with three 10-foot-wide lanes, and travels through a 500-foot-wide corridor of land owned and managed by the National Park Service. Let's look at their inventory and analysis because it relates to byways that traverse other types of treasured landscapes.

Colonial Parkway connects Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Jamestown, Virginia.



Step 1: Research Byway History

The first step in any analysis is to gather information. This effort began by researching and writing an extensive history of Parkway lands, beginning with the Paleo-Indians who inhabited the land prior to 6500 B.C., and ending with Parkway construction in 1930. Researchers then divided the Parkway into 14 sections and wrote a detailed history for each section, which provided a clear picture of the effect historic events had on the Parkway landscape.

Information-gathering continued with an exploration of the original intent of the Parkway's planners. This step was important because it provided a reference for comparison of the Parkway's original condition and

its current state.

In the final step, they documented the condition of the Parkway's character-defining features, such as topography, spatial organization, vegetation, traffic circulation, and structures. This research created a baseline of information for the resource evaluation.

Steps 2 & 3: Document Intrinsic Qualities & Analyze Changes

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the historical integrity of the Parkway. The first step compared each feature's condition with its condition when the Parkway was completed in 1958. Historians analyzed each feature separately, then determined its historic integrity.

The second step in the evaluation process summarized Colonial Parkway's overall historical significance. The previous step had analyzed the Parkway in small sections to break down the task into manageable pieces. This next step merged the pieces to offer a comprehensive picture of the Parkway, its value as a premier example of a 20th Century American parkway, and its contribution to American history.

What Is a Scenic Byway?

FHWA defines a scenic byway as "a public road having special scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archaeological, and/or natural qualities that have been recognized as such through legislation or some other official declaration."



Colonial National Historic Park

Byway Beginnings

In a Federal Highway Administration handbook called *Byway Beginnings*, you can learn about a common sense method well-suited for intrinsic quality assessment by volunteer committees.

Along with step-by-step directions for organizing volunteers to conduct field inventories, the book offers "Tips to Make Your Job Easier."

- ✓ Mapping should be at a level of detail that is easily attainable. Use points or shaded areas depending on the geographic extent of the feature.
- ✓ Avoid analysis paralysis. Don't get bogged down in minutiae; you can always come back for details as you need them.
- ✓ Generally speaking, only inventory those intrinsic qualities that are visible from the roadway. These usually contribute most to the corridor experience.

Depending on the length and character of

the byway, the volunteers can do their work in cars, by bicycle, or on foot. Equip each team with:

- ✓ Maps (preferably USGS topographic quads, or the equivalent);
- ✓ Notebooks or worksheets (examples shown in the book); and
- ✓ Cameras (shoot color slides and black-and-white prints for presentations and reports).

Creole Nature Trail: Another Approach to Intrinsic Quality Analysis

The Creole Nature Trail is a two-lane state highway in southwestern Louisiana. It forms a 180-mile loop between Lake Charles and the Gulf of Mexico, through Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes. Natural and recreational intrinsic qualities highlight the Byway, which became a National Scenic Byway in 1996.

The Creole Nature Trail passes through an area with miles of Gulf Coast beaches, marshlands, alligators, and four National Wildlife Refuges. The intrinsic quality analysis conducted as part of the Corridor Management Plan contained three parts: an inventory, an assessment, and management strategies.

Two University of Louisiana graduate students in Landscape Architecture assisted the Intrinsic Quality Subcommittee of the Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District to produce the analysis.

The Creole study team began with an extensive inventory, cataloging the Byway's intrinsic qualities into the six standard categories. They documented information in text form and mapped it on U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps. To manage the mountain of data, the study team divided the road into 18 study areas.

Next, the team ranked the intrinsic qualities as significant nationally, regionally, state-wide, or locally. For example, the team ranked the Byway's natural intrinsic qualities as nationally significant because of the four national wildlife refuges along the Byway and its proximity to the Central and Mississippi Flyways used by migrating birds.

Finally, the study team developed management strategies. They identified goals and action items for each of the 18 study areas that included protecting viewsheds and wildlife habitat, improving visitor access, and developing visitor interpretation programs.



The Creole Nature Trail passes through an area rich in natural resources, including four National Wildlife Refuges.

What are Intrinsic Qualities?

Intrinsic qualities are qualities that are representative, unique, irreplaceable, or distinctly characteristic for an area.

Lessons Learned

Whether dealing with a designated or undesignated roadway, byway planners can draw key lessons from Colonial Parkway and the Creole Nature Trail and *Byway Beginnings*.

✓ Tell a Story

As Americans learn more about their natural and built landscapes, traditions, and history, there will be even more stories to tell. Historical research on the Colonial Parkway revealed the importance of events during the Colonial era, and also of earlier periods. Along the Creole Nature Trail, it became apparent that the story must also include Cajun culture and traditions as they relate to the bayous and wildlife.

Sorting through history to determine what should be folded into a cohesive story is a challenge, but always a critical step. A community's ability to describe and interpret its scenic byway and offer a satisfying visitor experience will depend, in large part, upon the clarity and power of the byway story. (See Case Study #4: Telling the Story of a Scenic Byway.)

✓ Focus Your Study Lens Carefully

When considering which qualities to assess, don't overlook important qualities that may not be obvious at first. On the Parkway, it was important to consider the historic qualities of the road itself even though surrounding historic sites (Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown) so easily overshadow the road. The well-preserved beauty of the Parkway design, structures, and scenic vistas inspired the idea of assessing the road itself.

✓ Others Can Help

Even when assessing complex corridors rich with intrinsic qualities, follow simple and consistent steps. While Colonial Parkway benefited from experts in everything from history to engineering, their method was both simple and instructive.

On the Creole Nature Trail, volunteers and graduate students assessed the region's

intrinsic qualities (not just the road's) in three steps: inventory, assessment, and management strategies.

✓ Split the Work into Sections

Another way to manage the detail and complexity inherent in any corridor is to divide the route into segments. The study team analyzed the historical integrity of each segment by splitting the Parkway into 14 sections according to intrinsic qualities. Segmenting the byway enables a team to divide the work and methodically meet the challenge of documenting and evaluating the intrinsic qualities of a corridor.

✓ Choose the Right Assessment Tool

Before committing to consultants, volunteers, or an inventory method, consider the scale and complexity of your corridor. Ideally, you will have accurate and conclusive information and advocates who are raring to go.

Additional Resources



Several good reference books are available to advise on protecting a potential byway's intrinsic qualities.

Additional Resources

Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes, Charles Birnbaum, National Park Service Preservation Briefs, Sept. 1994.

Byway Beginnings: Understanding, Inventorying, and Evaluating a Byway's Intrinsic Qualities, Evelyn Swimmer, Rick Taintor, John Whiteman, National Park Service & USDOT-FHWA, 1998.

Creole Nature Trail Intrinsic Quality Management Strategies (part of Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan), Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District, June 1995.

Contact the National Scenic Byways Clearinghouse for these and other resources (see below).

About this Series

The National Scenic Byways Program of the Federal Highway Administration and the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service collaborated to research, write, and produce **Lessons from the Road**. The series was written in 1998.

For information on resources mentioned in this series, contact the National Scenic Byways Clearinghouse: 1-800-4-BYWAYS (1-800-429-9297), press 2, or visit our website at www.byways.org.

The Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program works beyond national

park boundaries to bring conservation assistance to communities, serving as a catalyst for tangible results.

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