

SCENIC RESOURCES

Grand Meadow Wayside

The Grand Meadow Wayside is located east of Grand Meadow along Deer Creek and is connected to Pine Lawn Park. The wayside is well signed and highly visible from the roadway. Besides providing restroom facilities and picnic areas, the wayside offers views of the rolling rural landscape and serenity of the winding creek. No interpretation of the wayside, park, or area is currently located there.

Recommendations: This is a critical location for interpretation, since it is near the western terminus of the Byway and in a location with few readily apparent resources. Several interpretive opportunities could be exploited at this wayside. This wayside is recommended as a key interpretive site, interpreting the nearby Grand Meadows Quarry, with interpretive panels discussing the significance of the quarry site and American Indian lifeways. Further notes at this wayside should indicate what could be seen in Grand Meadow, to lead travelers to that location.

Farmland and Small Town Landscape

What the Southeastern Minnesota Historic Bluff Country is most likely known for is its picturesque landscape and quaint communities. Views of this landscape and small town life can be found throughout the Byway corridor. However, to date, interpretation that addresses these main traits as a whole is not found along the highway.

Recommendations: These types of resources are conveyed in the overall theme of the Byway and will be interpreted by a variety of means and in various locations. The overall tone, logo, and graphics of all interpretation should reflect image and feeling of the small towns along the Byway.

Rock Columns and "Pulpit Rock"

A number of significant rock columns – in particular one named Pulpit Rock – can be found just off the Root River State Trail, north of Preston, at the Isinours Junction, where the Harmony-Preston and Root River State Trails connect. Little, if any, interpretation is being conducted at this site.

Recommendations: These geological formations are part of what makes this region unique. Interpretation should focus on the geological origins and development of these features. Directions to views of these features, accessible only by trail, should be found on the “Beyond the Byway” panel on the Fountain interpretive site.

Preston Wayside

The Preston Wayside is located just east of the City of Preston, on the south side of TH 16, overlooking the fairgrounds and town. The historic wayside was built in the 1930s, and although it is constructed with attractive stone overlook walls, no facilities or interpretation exist at the site.

Recommendations: This is an excellent opportunity to utilize and enhance an existing WPA-era byway amenity at the hub of the Scenic Byway and has been recommended as a key interpretive site and gateway. The site should be used as an orientation to the Byway and can direct people to attractions in all four directions. Interpretation at this site can include enticements to visit Preston and experience the small town, as well as a discussion of the Amish community and the Amish Byway. Because this property is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, funds may be available for its sympathetic restoration and rehabilitation.

Lanesboro Wayside (Inspiration Point)

Inspiration Point is another historic wayside built in the 1930s and is located 2 miles southeast of the junction of Highway 16 and County State Aid Highway 21. The wayside is situated at the top of a bluff and overlooks the surrounding rolling landscape and the City of Lanesboro in the distance. The wayside consists of stone overlook walls, a stone fireplace, and stone picnic tables and benches. A metal marker was placed in 1997 discussing “Minnesota’s Norwegian Americans.”

Recommendations: Like the Preston Wayside, this historic wayside can also benefit from increased use and investment and is recommended as a key interpretive site. The WPA-era features should be restored and rehabilitated. The site is already interpreted with a metal marker near the road. Additional interpretation can discuss the development of Lanesboro as an industrial town. Any interpretation should be certain not to detract from the scenic beauty or historical character of the wayside.

Root River Views

The Root River travels through most of the cities along the Byway east of, and including the City of Preston and in the cities of Fountain and Chatfield, north of the Byway. Ideal views can be observed in these cities, in Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park, and from the Root River State Trail. Nearly all public canoe accesses are signed off Highway 16. Some information about the Root River can be found at Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park, however, there is not a particular location that provides interpretation of the river itself.

Recommendations: The Root River is largely responsible for the formation of the special and scenic environment that visitors are experiencing. Interpretation of the river at is recommended at the Peterson Wayside, accessible from the Byway, the river and the trail. Interpretive panels can discuss the forces of the river, the environmental concerns, and recreational opportunities, like fishing.

Bluff Views

Dramatic views of the steep river bluff topography can be viewed throughout the corridor of Highway 16, particularly east of Spring Valley. Currently, there is no site that provides information or interpretation of the history of the land or formation of the bluffs.

Recommendations: Interpretation on the geological formation of the valley should be discreetly placed so as not to compete with or obscure the scenic views of, or from the valley bluffs. Modest facilities or picnic grounds will enhance the experience for visitors. Hiking trails with

scenic vistas would further allow visitors to experience the environment. Such scenic views need little further in interpretation.

Yucatan Valley

County Road 4 winds its way through the Yucatan Valley southwest of Houston. The valley is noted for its beautiful views of the rolling natural landscape, and is also known locally as an area of historic Native America activity. Signs directing visitors to the Yucatan Valley are not located on Highway 16, and no interpretation of the valley exists along County Road 4.

Recommendations: This drive through a scenic valley should be part of a driving tour and appropriately marked from the Byway. It can be used to access other resources, such as the Schech's Mill. Regulations regarding signage and other intrusions should be considered to protect the scenic beauty of this valley.

Magelssen Park

Magelssen Park is located on the top of a bluff overlooking the City of Rushford. Scenic views are somewhat limited by mature trees. No interpretation exists at the park, and way finding from Highway 16 is difficult due to lack of signage.

Recommendations: Interpreted walking trails would make this park a desirable recreational resource in Rushford.

Como Falls

Como Falls is located within a municipal park in Hokah, at the east end of Falls Street. It is a short but picturesque waterfall on Thompson Creek, just before the creek meets the Root River. The park includes a newly established sign with a history of Como Falls, Thompson Creek, and the immediate area where Edward Thompson – founder of Hokah – established a dam and saw mill. Unfortunately, the park is not well-signed from Highway 16, and travelers unfamiliar with the area have difficulty finding it.

Recommendations: The Como Falls, recommended as a key interpretive site, can be coordinated with Mt. Tom and should emphasize the human interaction with nature and interpret the American Indian presence in the Root River valley.

HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Exchange State Bank, Grand Meadow

This architecturally significant bank, designed by well-known Minnesota architects William Gray Purcell and George Grant Elmslie in 1910, features stylized decorative ornaments in terra cotta, glass, mosaic and wood. This was the first among many small distinguished banks designed by the architect duo. The building still operates as a bank.

Recommendations: Since this is still a place of business, interpretive plans must be done in cooperation with the current owner. However, this is among the few attractions at the western end of the corridor and illustrates the prosperity of agricultural towns as reflected in their

architecture. The property should be included on driving and architectural tours of the corridor. The stylized terra cotta panel can serve as a graphic marker or theme for the Grand Meadow area.

Spring Valley Methodist Episcopal Church (a.k.a. Laura Ingalls Wilder Site), Spring Valley

Built in 1878, this church includes a museum with a Wilder photo display, religious artifact collections, the Conley camera collection, a country store, local pioneer business artifacts and displays, an exhibit on Richard Sears (founder of Sears & Roebuck), and a wooden fire wagon. It is open daily June, July and August and on weekends in September and October.

Recommendations: This historic site can capitalize not only on its association with Laura Ingalls Wilder, but also with its connections to Spring Valley's other impressive architectural properties. The church can be key to a variety of community festivals and events that might also be appealing to Byway visitors. The church can host pioneer-related programs, events, and activities targeted to specific interested groups. The church could be included on a walking tour of Spring Valley.

Washburn-Zittleman House, Spring Valley

The 1865 house is open to public tours of its turn-of-the-century furnishings, quilts, and toys. The museum complex also includes an agricultural exhibit building and a workshop. It is run in cooperation with the Spring Valley Methodist Episcopal Church across the street.

Recommendations: This site already interprets small town and agricultural life in the nineteenth-century Spring Valley region through personal guided tours. The already well-established program should be expanded to provide visitors with other memorable experiences to take away with them. Children and parents would enjoy experiencing pioneer life by churning butter, riding farm equipment, reading by kerosene light, and cooking on a wood stove.

Spring Valley Carnegie Library, Spring Valley

The 1904 Carnegie Library in Spring Valley is a symbol of the community's prosperity and aspirations at the turn of the twentieth century. Although the library recently moved from this building, it remains in public hands and now serves as city offices.

Recommendations: As public property, this facility retains a certain level of accessibility. At a minimum, it should be included on a walking tour of Spring Valley that highlights other structures that illustrate the town's prosperity at the turn of the century.

Parson's Block and Hall, Spring Valley

The 1871 High Victorian Italianate commercial block illustrates Spring Valley's prosperity through its elaborate architecture in its downtown.

Recommendations: Preservation of this block, and other historic structures around it, should be considered a high priority. The continued use of the first floors for unique retail shopping will allow visitors to experience the historic building as originally intended and to bring business downtown. The building should be included on a walking tour of Spring Valley.

Wykoff Commercial Historic District, Wykoff

This historic district in downtown Wykoff includes 18 individual properties, mostly commercial. The town was platted by the railroads when they were established in the area. Some of the existing downtown businesses offer establishments of interest to tourists.

Recommendations: Wykoff, with its picturesque Gold Street of brick-faced commercial buildings, illustrates the type of town that arose following the arrival of the railroad and is recommended as a key interpretive site. The town's history can be contrasted with Forestville, which declined once it was bypassed by the railroad. Visitors should be encouraged to compare and contrast the experience and look at each of the towns. Businesses that would be of interest to tourists should be encouraged to capitalize on the charming downtown area. The Historic Wykoff Jail Haus bed and breakfast is a good example of the type of business that successfully utilizes, and interprets, a historic property. Ed's Museum, a private museum on Gold Street with a collection of Jack Sprat grocery items and memorabilia, has the potential to offer visitors the small-town, historic experience. The museum could perhaps be combined with a "real" general store where gifts and other items could be purchased.

Forestville Townsite, Forestville State Park

This property is a state historic site, managed by the Minnesota Historical Society. Costumed guides portray member of the Meighen family and other residents in their daily activities. The site is open Tuesday through Sunday in the summer and on weekends in September and October. It is located within Forestville State Park between Preston and Spring Valley, near Mystery Cave.

Recommendations: Many opportunities exist for interpreting this resource to a variety of audiences with the confluence of the historic, recreational, and scenic and natural resources. Management by the Minnesota Historical Society ensures that interpretation of the Forestville Townsite will be active and engaging. Nearby communities, such as Preston and Spring Valley, should coordinate with the Forestville management and marketing activities so special programs can be extended beyond the historic site. If individuals or groups are drawn to Forestville for specific programs or events, local towns should further accommodate them with complimentary activities, events, and accommodations.

Downtown Chatfield

Downtown Chatfield offers a scenic main street experience north of the Byway with handsome brick-faced commercial buildings and schools facing U.S. 52, a major north-south route.

Recommendations: Chatfield is recommended as a major gateway to the Byway, although it is about 12 miles north of TH 16. The TH 52 route, however, is the quickest and most direct way to get to the Historic Bluff Country Scenic Byway from the Twin Cities. Interpretation should focus not only on the resources of Chatfield, but also provide an introduction to the entire Scenic Byway. The city park along Chatfield's main street provides a highly visible venue, with parking for interpretive information on the Historic Bluff Country and Chatfield for travelers heading south toward the Byway. The development and implementation of a historic preservation plan with design guidelines for its Main Street will do much to enhance the look and feel of Chatfield.

Milwaukee Elevator Company Grain Elevator, Preston

This Preston grain elevator, a monumental structure typical of many small towns in grain-producing country, is located along the rail tracks, near the river, and near the Root River Trail. It currently serves as a trailhead for the Root River Trail with public restrooms.

Recommendations: This property is a prominent visitor stop in Preston and should be noted on the key interpretive site and gateway at the Preston Overlook. Interpretation at this site should focus on the role of central communities, and grain elevators, in rural regions. An opportunity to see or experience the function of grain elevators and how they work would help to reinforce the understanding.

Allis Barn (Reliance Stock Farm), near Preston

The historic Allis Barn, constructed in 1884 and 1885, is used as a centerpiece of the Old Barn Resort, which offers a hostel, camping, restaurant, and recreational facilities. The resort, near Preston, is open April 1 through October 31. Although this is a privately owned resort, the public restaurant and bar (located in the barn) make this a good opportunity for visitors to view the inside of the massive building and appreciate its architecture and history.

Recommendations: Opportunities exist for the proprietors to host tours focused on agriculture and local history. Groups visiting the area can lodge or dine at this historic property and learn more about agricultural history in an inspiring setting.

Lanesboro Historic District, Lanesboro

The Lanesboro Historic District is a grouping of commercial and industrial buildings and structures dating from 1868 to 1929 in the heart of Lanesboro. Most of the downtown section, primarily along Parkway, continue to serve as commercial properties, many of them catering to the thriving tourist trade, including shops, restaurants, a museum, a theater, and an art gallery. Some stores provide for tourist activities, such as bicycles rentals.

Lanesboro has recently installed a series of sculptural medallions throughout Lanesboro showcasing different aspects of the community and environment. This program is called “Discover Sculpture – Explore Lanesboro” and will be enhanced with a brochure that will allow visitors to walk from one medallion to another, encouraging them to explore Lanesboro.

Recommendations: Lanesboro is not only the geographical center of the Byway, but also a hub of cultural, historical and tourist activity, and therefore a tremendous tourist draw. A Byway Information Center should be located in Lanesboro to market the Byway to the visitors who come to the area only to see Lanesboro. This center can provide information, such as literature and signage that will introduce tourists to other opportunities in the region and draw them east and west along the Byway.

Lanesboro Stone Dam, Lanesboro

This historic dam can be seen from public property and is considered to be a scenic, as well as historic site. It offers a pleasant location to sit or eat by the waterside and listen to the rushing water fall over the dam. Handicap fishing access is provided.

Recommendations: Use this scenic setting as a place for visitors to relax by the waterside by providing picnic tables and other amenities. An interpretive marker would be helpful to explain the history of the dam and its significance in the industrial development of Lanesboro.

Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul Bridge, Lanesboro

This railroad bridge is situated just off of Parkway, Lanesboro's main street, and is now incorporated into part of the Root River bicycle trail. Interpretive panels about the Milwaukee Road railroad are located on the bridge.

Recommendations: This bridge is currently being well-utilized as an appropriate interpretive tool describing the railroad's presence in Lanesboro. It is located near the Lanesboro Historic Preservation Museum and is easily accessible to cyclists and pedestrians.

1877 Peterson Station Museum, Peterson

This museum, located in the 1877 Peterson train depot, was established in 1974 after the community moved the train station to the present site. Local memorabilia, artifacts, and photographs of local interest are on display. The museum is open Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Recommendations: This building and museum is one of several properties valuable in interpreting the railroad's contribution to the region, in addition to the history of Peterson. Further interpretation of its holdings, along with expanded hours, is recommended to introduce visitors to historic Peterson.

Southern Minnesota Depot, Rushford

The Southern Minnesota Depot in Rushford, built in 1868, serves as a Root River Trailhead, providing parking and public restrooms. A display of historic materials is also located within this building.

Recommendations: The old depot, among the oldest in Minnesota, is ideal to serve as an interpretive site for railroads, with good access to the Byway and to the Root River Trail. Possible interpretive experiences include hands-on displays of working in a depot, information on the railroad's influence on Rushford's development and growth, and a starting point for walking tours of historic Rushford.

Schech's Mill, Caledonia Township

The Schech's Mill, located on private property within Beaver Creek Valley State Park in Caledonia Township, is a particularly scenic image of the once-important milling industry. The mill is known as the state's last direct-drive, water-powered mill run with its original equipment. The property, which can still function, is generally open to the public on weekends, May to October, or by appointment. The mill is located off of a winding gravel road, about a 10-mile drive from the Byway.

Recommendations: Schech's Mill faces several interpretive challenges. This mill is well known regionally and is a cherished historical resource. Although the private owner is committed to preserving the property, he is reluctant to open it to regular tours. The DNR has expressed

interest in obtaining it, and potentially operating it as a historic site, but the current owners intend to keep it in private hands. The family has sought a \$400,000 grant from public sources for restoration work to the mill, dam, sluice, and bridge, but was not eligible because the property was privately held.

Several steps must be taken before Schech's Mill can be interpreted and accommodate more tourists. The property must establish increased and reliable hours for public tours. Sufficient signage must be erected to direct visitors to the isolated location. The mill must be integrated into, and promoted by, interpretive literature in order to draw people the extra distance to visit the site.

Communication with the owners should be established to seek ways to benefit the public and accommodate their financial and restoration needs. Opportunities to collaborate with the Beaver Valley State Park's programs and funding potential should be considered and pursued.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Sinkholes, Fountain

Hundreds of sinkholes can be found all around southeastern Minnesota. A few of these have been selected for greater tourist attention near the City of Fountain. Two sinkholes in particular are outlined and marked- one is near the City sign and one is near the trailhead of the Root River State Trail. Unfortunately, both of these noted sinkholes are without any formal interpretation.

Recommendations: Sinkholes provide an intriguing and delightful curiosity in this part of the state. Visitors would be pleased to know more about the unique formations and Fountain is recommended as a key interpretive site to address this subject. Interpretive discussions of the two identified sinkholes should discuss their geological origins. Further information about the geological formations can be provided at the Fillmore County History Center and Genealogy Library in Fountain. Regional interpretation and marketing should be done in cooperation with Mystery Cave and Niagara Cave.

Niagara Cave , near Harmony

Located 2 miles south of Harmony, Niagara Cave is one of the largest caves in the Midwest and a prime example of the unique geology of the region. The cave is privately owned and interpretation is handled through tours given on a seasonal basis.

Recommendations: This resource is being successfully interpreted. Future interpretation and marketing should be done in conjunction with other regional sites and resources, especially those with appeal to rock hounds and spelunkers, such as the sinkholes near Fountain and Harmony.

Mystery Cave, Forestville State Park

Mystery Cave is part of Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park and maintained by the Minnesota DNR. Like Niagara Cave, it offers an opportunity to see karst geology that characterizes the area from a different perspective. Interpretation is given through guided tours and literature distributed by the park. The cave is open seasonally.

Recommendations: Like Niagara Cave, interpretation and marketing should be coordinated with other geological sites and resources in the area.

Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest

The R.J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest consists of scattered pieces of designated land throughout southeastern Minnesota. Within the Historic Bluff Country, it is contained mostly within Fillmore and Houston counties. The majority of the forest is privately owned. However, tracks of public land are divided into Forest Units and include the Isinours, Vinegar Ridge, Brightsdale, Reno, Gribben Valley, Oak Ridge, Money Creek, and Diamond Creek.

Recommendations: Posted nature trails and guided tours through publicly owned portions of the forest could illuminate visitors to the natural flora and fauna of the area. Trail signs can be adjusted seasonally to note the changing life cycles of the plant and animals. Emphasizing nature's activities during the winter will help to draw snow-shoers and cross-country skiers during the off season.

Root River

The Root River winds its way through Southeastern Minnesota, with its main channel passing through the cities of Hokah, Houston, Rushford, Peterson, and Whalen. West of Whalen, the main channel splits into the Middle Branch and South Branch of the Root River. The Middle Branch curves north and west to the community of Fillmore where it then splits into smaller creeks and streams. The North Branch stems north from the Middle Branch near County Road 5 and travels north through Chatfield and into Olmstead County. The South Branch extends from the main channel southwest through Lanesboro, Preston and Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park where it begins splitting into tinier streams. Finally, the South Fork leaves the main channel near Houston and winds its way southwest through the Yucatan Valley. Some interpretation is provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) at some of the canoe accesses and the state park.

Recommendations: Not only is the Root River a natural resource, but also a well-used recreational and scenic resource. Paddlers enjoy many spans of the river, which can be considered a second "byway." Interpretive media can be provided to river users to watch for the many resources that are passed along the way, such as the towering bluffs, mills, and railroad beds and bridges.

Mound Prairie State Natural Area

The Mound Prairie State Natural Area is located adjacent to Highway 16, approximately two miles west of Hokah. The purpose of the natural area is to restore the original prairie land that once existed in the region. Mound Prairie State Natural Area is managed by the DNR, however, little interpretation currently exists for this site.

Recommendations: Mound Prairie provides an excellent opportunity to inform visitors about native prairie vegetation and animal life and what the restoration process means. With the resources, travelers will be able to envision the way the countryside looked in its natural state. This can be contrasted with their visual experiences of the cultivated areas.

Mount Tom

Mount Tom, in the City of Hokah, is generally located just south of the Root River and east of Highway 16. The markedly pointed bluff stands out as a landmark to local residents, but is not utilized as a recreational resource. Therefore, little interpretation currently exists for the distinct peak. Mount Tom also borders along the Como Park, a city park where Thompson flows over Como Falls and eventually dumps into the Root River.

Recommendations: The interpretation of Mount Tom, along with Como Falls, should emphasize human reaction to, and interaction with, the land, and special land formations. A location with a view of the bluff can include the interpretation of American Indian, as well as Euro-American, responses to prominent land formations, and in particular to Mt. Tom.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Amish Country/Amish Tours, Harmony and Lanesboro

Several private tour operators in Harmony and Lanesboro provide guided tours of the Amish farms and countryside. These enterprises interpret the Amish ways and coordinate with specific families who invite visitors onto their farm. Visitors have the opportunity to purchase handmade furniture, crafts and baked goods. Visitors who do not take the tours may also experience Amish families selling goods on waysides, may be invited to a farm, and will frequently see horse-drawn buggies traveling in shoulder lanes.

Recommendations: This is an experience that many visitors take great pleasure in, especially since they can have a cultural exchange with Amish families and bring home handmade, unique souvenirs of their experience. The Amish experience is a strong attraction to this region, but it should be sensitively interpreted and not exploited, thereby risking a loss of authenticity.

Fillmore County History Center and Genealogy Library, Fountain

The museum features displays of Fillmore County, agricultural displays, and a genealogy library. The story of Bernard Pietenpol, “the father of the homebuilt aircraft movement in the United States,” is interpreted at this site with display of one of his airplanes and a hangar. It is open seven days a week during the summer, and Monday through Friday during the winter.

Recommendations: The history center can serve as a source and location for history-related events and meetings, as well as a point for visitors to receive information on the variety of resources along the Byway. Further interpretation of the nearby sinkholes and karst terrain would also be appropriate at this site. Changing the winter schedule to Tuesday through Saturday would give better access to weekend visitors during the winter season.

Lanesboro Historic Preservation Museum, Lanesboro

The Historic Preservation Museum, Lanesboro's history museum, is located in downtown Lanesboro, just off the Root River and the Root River Trail. It offers interpretive displays of Lanesboro's history and artifacts and is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Recommendations: The museum's proximity to the Byway, the river, and the trail, combined with Lanesboro's central location on the Byway, make this an excellent location from which to distribute interpretive information about the Byway, to direct visitors to other nearby resources, and to familiarize people with the wide range of resources beyond Lanesboro.

Houston County Historical Society Museum Complex, Caledonia

This complex includes a collection of early settlement structures, such as a log home, schoolhouse, church, agriculture building, and other displays interpreting early life in Houston County on the grounds of the Houston County Fair in Caledonia. The museum is open year-round Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. from June through September.

Recommendations: This site can serve as a hub of interpretation activity for the southeastern portion of the corridor. It can host a variety of historical experiences, especially those focused on children who would particularly enjoy the hands-on experience available at the museum. Consideration should be given to weekend hours during the winter, with events scheduled on winter weekends, to draw more visitors year-round.

Festivals and Cultural Experiences

The Historic Bluff Country is home to many local festivals, celebrations and other cultural events that visitors find highly enjoyable. These seasonal events can and should be considered cultural events themselves. Examples include Western Days, an Old Fashioned Fourth of July, Fall Foliage Festival, Holiday Fest, Art in the Park, Buffalo Bill Days, and Oktoberfest to name a few.

Recommendations: Festivals and events are excellent resources to attract return business, as visitors are more likely to experience such an event a second time, since no experience is ever the same. No further interpretation is necessary, but notification of these events should be promoted to potential first time and return visitors through newsletters, web sites, e-mail notification and other means. A visit for a special event is likely to lead to other visitation and further experiences in the area.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Forestville/ Mystery Cave State Park

The main part of Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park is located approximately four miles south of Highway 16 off County State Aid Highway 5. The park contains the historic town of Forestville where interpretation is relayed to visitors through character role-play and literature.

Mystery Cave is a few miles southwest of the main park. Interpretation there is provided through group tours through the cave given by park guides.

Recommendations: The interpretive and marketing plans for Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park can benefit from the combination of the natural, recreational and historical sites located within its boundaries. Thematic events can be coordinated to take advantage of existing interpreted experiences at the Mystery Cave and the historic site, along with on-site camping facilities. This location, in fact, is the epitome of the small town in a spectacular natural setting, a theme used throughout the Byway. Events could include such themes and settling on the plains, pioneers days, and address environmental issues on making our mark lightly upon the earth.

Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail

The Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail is an 18-mile multiple-use trail that connects the communities of Harmony and Preston and connects to the Root River State Trail just north of Preston. The trail follows or crosses Watson Creek, the South Branch of the Root River, and Camp Creek, and cuts cross country through wooded areas and farmland. Some interpretation can be found at the trailheads in Preston and Harmony, but it is not very comprehensive.

Recommendations: Like the Root River State Trail, the Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail is a recreational resource that also serves as an alternative byway. Interpretation in the areas near the trail should be made accessible to those using the trail to enhance this experience.

Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, near Lanesboro

The Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center offers a variety of programs for groups of all ages and is open to the public. The center is located north of Lanesboro off County Road 21. Interpretation is provided by facilitators and volunteers of the center.

Recommendations: This interpretive center should be considered a focus of the natural resource sites, along with the Houston Nature Center. It should be included on a driving tour of other nature-oriented sites along the Byway. Furthermore, this organization can help to coordinate the interpretation of natural resources along the entire Byway by developing specialized brochures, guided walking and driving tours, and contribute to interpretive signage.

Root River Canoe Accesses

Along the Byway, signs to the canoe accesses are found in the following towns: Houston, Rushford, Peterson, Lanesboro, Preston, and Chatfield. Another is also located on Highway 16 just west of Whalen. At most access points, signage provided for by the Minnesota DNR offers a map of the river, stipulations, and general information.

Recommendations: Paddling the Root River by canoe is but one way to experience the resources along the river. Interpretive sites should be accessible by river users where resources are visible from the river.

Root River State Trail

The Root River State Trail is a multiple-use trail that extends for 42 miles through the cities of Fountain, Lanesboro, Whalen, Peterson, Rushford, and Houston. Some interpretation can be

found at trailheads and at the Root River State Trail visitor center in Lanesboro. Some interpretation at trailheads is available and accessible to users and non-users of the trail.

Recommendations: The Root River State Trail should not only be considered a recreational resource, but also an alternative travel route, or a walking/cycling byway. Future interpretation should continue to be made accessible to users and non-users of the trail.

Houston Nature Center, Houston

The new Houston Nature Center is located at the Root River State Trail trailhead in Houston. Programs provide interpretation of the region, natural surroundings, and wildlife.

Recommendations: With the Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, the Houston Nature Center can serve as a primary point of interpretation of natural resources along the Byway. Furthermore, it can help to coordinate the interpretation of natural resources along the entire Byway by developing specialized brochures, guided walking and driving tours, and contribute to interpretive signage.

Beaver Creek State Park, Caledonia Township

Beaver Creek State Park is located off Highway 76, just west of Caledonia. Interpretation is handled by the Minnesota DNR and park programs.

Recommendations: This state park lends itself to natural and environmental interpretation. Existing interpretation includes organized walks through the state park and spring wildflower tours. These types of seasonal events emphasize the experience and encourage travelers to come for repeat visits. To appeal to a wider audience, interpretation and marketing should be done in coordination with the Schech's Mill.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Grand Meadow Quarry Site, near Grand Meadow

The 10,000 year-old chert quarry, known as the Grand Meadow Quarry site and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, demonstrates the dependence of Native Americans on the land and its geology. The site is now owned by The Archaeological Conservancy, a national organization dedicated to acquiring and preserving the best of the nation's remaining archaeological sites. While the site is not open to the public and its location is kept confidential due to concerns over looting, the Conservancy does occasionally provide student tours.

Recommendation: This resource is critical to the interpretation for the west end of the corridor, where resources are few. Coordination with The Archaeological Conservancy will be necessary to interpret the site at the nearby wayside as one of the key interpretive sites. An interpretive panel can describe the site without revealing the specific archaeological site. The Archaeological Conservancy is a possible source of funding, and interpretation is consistent with its mission for public education. The site should be included on an overall map of Native American sites in the region, and might also be included on specialized archaeological tours.

Yucatan Fort Site, Black Hammer Township

The Yucatan Fort is a small grouping of earthworks that is believed to be associated with the Oneota people, who occupied the area from 1400 A.D. to 1650 A.D. This National Register of Historic Places-listed site provides insight into the importance of agriculture to Native American groups in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. It also illustrates how the availability of a more stable food source that agriculture provided allowed for the creation of larger villages and settlements.

Recommendations: This significant archaeological site should be included on the general Native American interpretive map and also on specialized archaeological tours. Possible interpretive signs in this area could include comments regarding the geological formations of the region and the Native American use of the land.