

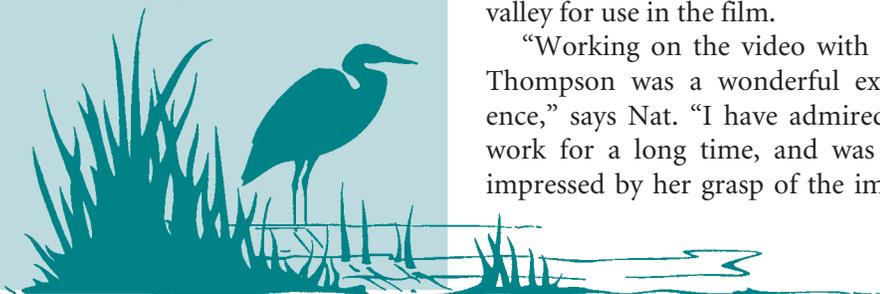
River Byway News

— SPRING 2004 —

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CONNECTICUT
RIVER
BYWAY



Introducing... The Byway Video

WITH great pride, the Byway Council introduces “*Welcome to the Heart of New England*,” a new 14-minute film created to invite visitors and residents to explore the Connecticut River Byway of New Hampshire and Vermont.

The Connecticut River Joint Commissions and Connecticut River Byway Council developed the film with the talented production direction of Caro Thompson, who also produced the hour-long Vermont Public Television documentary in 2003 entitled, “*New England’s Great River: Discovering the Connecticut*.”

“What’s special here are the vast connections that still exist between today’s way of life and the valley’s history,” Caro observes. “That history is all around us, but those who live here often take it for granted and visitors likely don’t recognize a fraction of what they’re seeing. This video weaves together broad, peaceful overviews of stunning scenery with details of historical events and the vitality of daily life in the 21st century.”

A committee of the Byway Council, led by CRJC Commissioner Nat Tripp of Barnet, provided content ideas and script development. Tripp’s own professional experience in video production and knowledge of the region contributed greatly to the project. Byway Council chairman Jay Barrett of Fairlee provided historic images of the valley for use in the film.

“Working on the video with Caro Thompson was a wonderful experience,” says Nat. “I have admired her work for a long time, and was very impressed by her grasp of the impor-

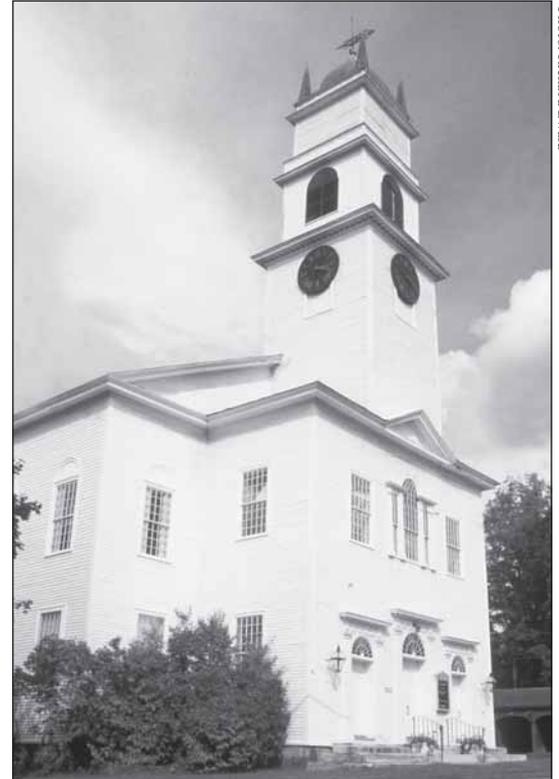


Photo: Richard Ewald

The handsome 1812 Congregational Church on the Common in Lyme, New Hampshire, appears in the new film.

tant issues in marketing the byway, as well as her production expertise. She is a great resource and I hope that we can use her skills and familiarity with the byway on future projects.”

Continued page 2



**Be thankful for
wildlife...
see page 3**

Video, continued

In April, Nat Tripp received the Kingdom Recognition Award for his work on the St. Johnsbury Waypoint visitor center.

Complementing the well-framed views of village greens, historic homes, farm scenes, and the Connecticut River itself is the film's original score, composed and performed by Peter Wilder of Ergo Communications.

A grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Scenic Byway Program, originally earmarked for the Wells River-Woodsville waypoint center but not needed for that project, provided \$17,750 to cover production costs. A number of regional planning agencies, chambers of commerce, and arts and tourism organizations in the



On this page, video stills by Caro Thompson. The new film focuses on the Connecticut River Valley's settlement history, agricultural heritage, and sense of community.

valley contributed a total of \$2700 to enable a complimentary distribution to these groups and to Byway Council steering committee and CRJC members, waypoint centers, and agency colleagues, as well as to the two states' Congressional delegations.

The Byway Council and Connecticut River Joint Commissions intend that sales of this film will benefit the waypoint interpretive centers, chambers of commerce, and museums along



the Byway. The retail price is \$9.95 for VHS or CD versions, and \$14.95 for DVD. Copies may also be obtained from CRJC. 

CALENDAR

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway Council Steering Committee meets on the third Thursday of every other month, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Hartford, Vermont, Municipal Building. All members of the Scenic Byway Council are encouraged to attend and participate.

2004

June 11

July 15

Sept. 16

Nov. 18

**CONNECTICUT
RIVER
BYWAY**

ERRATA

Credits for photos in Fall 2003 issue:

- cover page, photo of governors and Sharon Francis by Edith Tucker
- page 5, photo of wood duck courtesy of NRCS
- page 6, photo of Lancaster's Great North Woods Welcome Center courtesy of Lancaster Renaissance

Preservation Education Institute Workshops

WE are fortunate to have a high caliber venue for historic preservation craftsmanship in the Connecticut River valley. The Preservation Education Institute, a division of Historic Windsor, Inc., is well respected for the quality of training it provides to professionals working on historic structures.

The Preservation Education Institute has to date trained more than 2500 students, primarily building professionals or knowledgeable laypersons, through more than 130 workshops. Instruction focuses on historic restoration techniques and technology, as well as modern alternatives.

Topics for this spring and summer's workshops range from the Care and Repair of Historic Barns, Revealing Decorative Paint at the Ascutney Union Church, Evaluation and Repair of Timber Frame Structures, Architectural Photography, to Re-pointing Brick Masonry.

Communities and property owners seeking good advice and assistance in caring properly for their historic buildings can contact the Preservation Education Institute at 802-674-6752, or explore these offerings on the web at www.preservationworks.org. 

River Byway News

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Wealth through Wildlife

WITHIN sight of the Byway, one can observe peregrine falcons and bald eagles, fish for wild brook trout, capture moose on camera, or follow the tracks of bear and turkey. Wildlife-related recreation, including observing and photographing wildlife, fishing, and hunting, contributed \$619 million to New Hampshire's economy in 2001 and \$386 million to Vermont's, according to a study by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of Commerce, and US Census Bureau.

Trip-related expenses accounted for a third to two-fifths of these figures, and equipment purchases another third to a half. The rest was spent on licenses, contributions, land ownership and leasing, guide services, and other items.

In 2001, a remarkable 86 percent of Vermonters and New Hampshireites spent time watching, feeding, and/or photographing wildlife. Visitors from out of state spent \$174



Above, a moose crosses Route 2 in Concord, Vermont, obediently within sight of a "Moose Crossing" sign. New England's largest mammal ranges throughout the region, including on New Hampshire's conservation license plate. Below left, the peregrine falcon, which appears on Vermont's conservation license plate, has returned to nest in the Connecticut River Valley after nearly becoming extinct due to pesticide poisoning. The river serves as a dispersal route for these spectacular aerial acrobats. A pair nesting high on the Palisades over Fairlee Village is easily observed from the parking lot of the Fairlee Diner, which regularly hosts birders also looking for a hearty breakfast. Below right, tributary confluences offer excellent waterfowl watching, especially during spring and fall migration. Here, NH Rep. Ruth Bleyler and her husband, Lyme Selectman Peter Bleyler, have spotted a green heron in the mouth of Grant Brook in Lyme.

million watching wildlife and \$40 million fishing in New Hampshire, and \$59 million and \$51 million on these activities in Vermont.

A follow up study in 2003 found that of all the bird-watching and birding (there is a distinction, to those who do it!) going on in New Hampshire, 43

percent is by people who visit the state from somewhere else. While they're checking their bird books and hunting through their binoculars, they're often also contributing to tourism revenue, especially through the state's rooms and meal taxes. Birds mean business! 



Photo: Chris Martin, courtesy of the Audubon Society of NH



Riverfront Redevelopment in Windsor

ENERGY, innovative thought, and persistence are helping Windsor focus successfully on its “Rails to the River” region, a key 70 acre area of its downtown between the railroad tracks and the Connecticut River. Formerly home of the town’s industrial core, occupied largely by the Goodyear and Cone-Blanchard industrial sites, it is soon to be the heart of the community once again.

Prime real estate just a few blocks off Main Street, the area is now a jumble of largely empty buildings, brush, and “what I like to call a cultural exhibit of old machine tools,” says Jill Michaels, Windsor’s development director, “but which others call a junkyard.”

The town has hired consultants who have devised a concept for the central core’s future. Windsor plans to work with private developers to achieve this vision, which includes a hotel and

conference center, retail and residential space, and walking paths.

The town’s goals are to redevelop the historic community, making the most of its setting on the Connecticut River. To date, there has been environmental work on the former Goodyear site, and several companies plan to expand into Windsor, including Yankee Veneer, a nano-technology company incubator, and a green building supply company.

Michael Crane, of Crane Associates, has looked at river-related recreation as a source of economic development for Windsor, supported by a 2003 Partnership grant from the Connecticut River Joint Commissions. Assessing current use of the river between Wilder and Bellows Falls Dams, he analyzed the gaps between recreation supply and demand to find a niche for Windsor.

The Vermont outdoor recreation

market is characterized by higher household income, travel in larger group size, stays lasting twice as long, more returns, and twice as much spending as average. Windsor, he said, is not marketed to this group. Similar travel patterns are observed among Vermont’s cultural visitors, so these two groups can be treated as mesh markets.

Michael pointed out that four of the five top outdoor recreation pursuits could be enjoyed in Windsor, including wildlife watching, which attracts half of recreational visitors. Windsor’s key assets are clean river water with good

flows for boating, excellent camping opportunities, and the chance to see bald eagles. The town now captures four percent of the outdoor recreation market, and he believes it could capture eight percent, or \$73 million in recreation-related expenditures. However, there is currently no river access in Windsor, no infrastructure, no marketing, and no lodging.

Michael is concerned that Windsor is missing a large segment of the tourism industry, but is well positioned to attract it. He suggested that 20,000 visitors/year could be realized if the town’s assets are marketed correctly. Among his recommendations is construction of a boathouse on the waterfront which could rent canoes, kayaks, and sculls, and offer natural history tours, workshops, and other experiences.

WINDSOR WINS AGAIN

Windsor has recently won several grants to support projects that will well serve the preservation goal of the Connecticut River Byway. The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation awarded \$6500 to hire an architectural historian to work on National Register District descriptions and to help evaluate the town’s Design Review District expansion. Owners of local historic properties will have the benefit of educational materials created by Historic Windsor’s Bob Rodriguez to help them preserve and use their properties.

In March, the Vermont Downtown Development Board awarded Windsor \$75,000 from the Designated Downtown Transportation and Improvement Fund. Windsor has now put together more than \$1 million for sidewalk, street light, parking, and other upgrades in the downtown area over the next two years. Other sources of support include Transportation Enhancement Act funds, Scenic Byways funding, and in-kind support from the Town of Windsor. 



Photo courtesy of Jill Michaels and Town of Windsor.

Windsor’s Rails to the River area, looking south. The Cornish-Windsor Covered Bridge appears in upper center.

Waypoint Communities Update

PROGRESS continues toward an integrated network of ten up-and-running waypoint centers along the Byway. Only a few short years after the Byway Council adopted the concept of waypoint communities, visitor centers are now open and welcoming guests in seven of the ten towns that stepped forward. Here's a quick progress report starting in the headwaters region of the river.

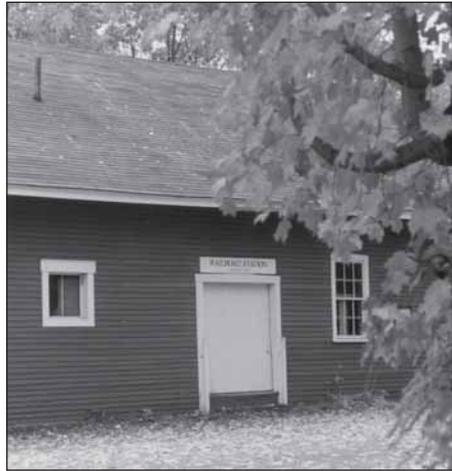
Colebrook won a grant from the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund to protect 79 acres of scenic riverfront meadow which give Byway center visitors such a glorious view of the river. The town is also planning a trail to link the Byway center to a new town recreation center.

Lancaster's Welcome Center hosted more than 5,000 visitors last season, from Switzerland, Australia, Poland, Israel, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, and many more closer to home. English visitors enjoyed discovering town names common to the Connecticut River region and to their home in the Hampshire region. Entries in the guest register included "thanks for keeping an old building alive" and "we need this in Laconia."

Approval of the **St. Johnsbury** depot renovation design is still pending, but the "interim" visitor's center continued to serve many through the winter, and saw over two hundred guests on some days during the peak season.

Restoration work continues at Alumni Hall in **Haverhill**, which will complement visitor services already available at **Wells River**, and will house larger exhibits. The hall's addition will be finished by early June. Since rest rooms will be operating, plans for limited summer programming are underway. Local organizers anticipate a new access to the Connecticut River for canoes and kayaks in **Woodsville**.

Construction will get underway in **Fairlee** this spring, where Vermont's oldest surviving rail depot, a simple,



The c. 1860 Fairlee Depot, future home of the town's Waypoint Center, is the oldest surviving railroad depot in Vermont.

clean-lined building set on the banks of the Connecticut River, will find new life as the Fairlee Waypoint Center. (See page 6 for more about Fairlee.)

White River Junction has embarked on an ambitious redevelopment project at historic Railroad Row, which has been years in the planning. The Hartford Chamber of Commerce will move into the Welcome Center at the railroad station and take over responsibility for hosting visitors and managing exhibit space.

Construction on the **Windsor** Waypoint Center is scheduled for this fall. Meanwhile, the Old Constitution House has provided room for a permanent display being developed for the Center by Bill Jenney, the museum's curator, Ann Lawless of the American Precision Museum, and Judy Hayward of Historic Windsor. The Windsor/Mount Scutney Chamber of Commerce purchased the Byway exhibit kiosk and will display

it in the lobby of Windsor House until it moves to the Waypoint Center.

Claremont's visitor center is featuring a new, permanent sign. Work continues to try to forge a future for the historic mills along the Sugar River that form this center's distinctive backdrop.

Things are really cooking in **Bellows Falls**, where the Waypoint Center opened in December with a lively celebration and the driving of a golden railroad spike by Lt. Gov. Brian Dubie. Bellows Falls and the Rockingham Arts and Museum Project will host the Preservation Trust Conference on the creative economy on May 21.

Brattleboro eagerly awaits news from Washington that Scenic Byway funding will be approved to allow work to begin on transforming an historic riverfront gas works building into its waypoint visitor center.

As we go to press, we also await word on federal Scenic Byway funding for the major Byway signage proposal (see Fall 2003 issue). The design, winner of many compliments from high-ranking transportation agency officials, will result in reduction of sign clutter as new byway directional signs are installed. ☒



At Bellows Falls' opening ceremony, architect Daniel Scully, Selectman John Cook, and Development Director Richard Ewald gather at the podium. Lt. Gov. Brian Dubie is at right.

The Bellows Falls Waypoint Center features engaging interior and exterior exhibits, from mounted local wildlife to a well-illustrated time line of the region's history, a video, and displays of early images. "Thank you for telling us about the Bellows Falls center," writes a traveler from Rochester, New York. "What a wonderful place that is, with such well-done exhibits, so easy to understand. We were inspired to go right out and look for the canal."

Photo: Sally Anderson

F AIRLEE

Profile of a Waypoint

We continue our tour of the Connecticut River Byway's Waypoint Communities.

THE Town of Fairlee was one of sixty-three towns chartered in 1761, on both sides of the Connecticut River, by New Hampshire's Royal Governor Benning Wentworth. The good Governor was chartering many towns in what is now Vermont, believing that the land lying between the Connecticut and the Hudson Rivers, north of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, belonged to New Hampshire. New York, however, claimed land to the western bank of the Connecticut River, and appealed to King George III accordingly.

The King had far bigger problems brewing in his colonies, and within sixteen years, the Allen Brothers, Ethan, Ira, et al, decided the matter by declaring the area in question to be the independent Republic of Vermont!

Settlers soon began arriving in Fairlee, traveling north up the river valley, primarily from Connecticut. Within the new six-mile-square township, a common size used to lay out settlement, they established crude roads, cleared land for agriculture, and erected schoolhouses and churches. A solid middle class agrarian society took root.

Unfortunately for present day historians, although there exist several well advanced theories as to the source of the name Fairlee, there is no one clear

record. From the start, early travelers and settlers alike often remarked upon the Town's many unique and beautiful natural features: the rich and broad flood plain meadows along the river, the striking cliffs known affectionately as the Palisades, and the two lovely lakes now called Morey and Fairlee.

These features were to play a prominent role in Fairlee's development. It did not take long for settlers to realize that the mountains and lakes were in fact causing two towns to develop: one along the Connecticut River and another within the township, west of the river. In 1797 the Vermont Legislature approved the town's request to split into two equal halves, the independent Towns of Fairlee and West Fairlee.

Samuel Morey, a resident of both Fairlee and neighboring Orford, New Hampshire, developed and tested his theories of steam boat navigation on the Connecticut River and Lake Morey (then known as Morey's Pond) many years before Robert Fulton's celebrated efforts at same on the Hudson River. It also appears that, in 1826, Morey was first



The recently restored 1937 Samuel Morey Bridge is the first such steel structure across the Connecticut River to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

had the luxury of leisure time and some discretionary income, Fairlee's two lakes began to be recognized for their superb beauty and recreational potential. The earlier establishment of the railroad through Fairlee in 1848 made for easy and economical travel for urban visitors, and soon Fairlee was home to lake-side inns, cottages, and summer youth camps. Summer visitors by the thousands became the norm at its two railroad stations, located in the villages of Fairlee and Ely, three miles south.

Fairlee was a major cross-roads community from the earliest days of river travel and the pre-railroad era of turnpikes and stage coaches. One of the earlier Connecticut River crossings was a wooden covered bridge, linking Fairlee with its sister community of Orford where the steel arched Samuel Morey Bridge sits today.

Through the years, Fairlee has continued to evolve. In the late 1960s Interstate 91 cut a major swath through the village, nibbling off the profile of the beloved Palisades. However, the "town beneath the cliff" carries on with a spirit of good natured optimism and contentment, secure in its place within one of the world's most beautiful river valleys. 

— JAY BARRETT

Jay Barrett is Chair of the Scenic Byway Council and a Fairlee selectman. He is responsible, with Carl Schmidt of Orford, for the designation of the Morey Bridge to the National Register.



Antique postcard courtesy of Jay Barrett.

Village of Fairlee, viewed from the Palisades at spring high water. The 1856 covered bridge was replaced with the current steel arch bridge after the 1936 flood.

to develop an internal combustion gas engine, placing Morey's invention a full sixty years ahead of Messieurs Daimler and Benz in Germany, often called the fathers of the modern internal combustion engine.

By the later nineteenth century, as more Americans

New Family Business Complements the Byway

IT opened the doors in 1917 as a saloon on the banks of the Connecticut River, and probably saw more than a few customers during the log drive days. With the passage of Prohibition, the saloon became a store. Eventually known simply as “DeBanville’s,” the store on Shoemaker’s Corner in Bloomfield Village was the center of this small community for 85 years. Then, when owner Anthony DeBanville retired after many years behind the counter, the store went up for sale, and the lights went out. The building eventually came down, and something was lost.

The right business in the right place is a recipe for success, however, and the store is back, promising to become part of the economic and community rejuvenation envisioned by Byway organizers. In January, the Belknap family reopened a brand new DeBanville’s General Store on the site of the 1917 saloon at the corner of Routes 102 and 105, just across the river from North Stratford. Bloomfield selectman Sherry Belknap, his wife Darlene, and daughter Karen have worked hard to bring the business—and Shoemaker’s Corner—back to life.

The new store is a handsome stick-style clapboard structure, painted in a Victorian-era polychrome scheme to complement the historic town hall just across Route 105. Located halfway between the Colebrook and Lancaster waypoint centers, DeBanville’s provides a welcome amenity with lots of comfortable local flavor for those who tour along the Connecticut River, whether by canoe, bicycle, snowmobile, or automobile.

Instead of the piercing glare and looming over-lit signage of cookie-cutter convenience store franchises that shout homogenized roadside America, the Belknaps have built something that looks right at home in their small Northeast Kingdom village.



The recently restored Bloomfield Town Hall provided the architectural inspiration for the gable design of its new neighbor.

The modest Texaco sign is no larger or taller than needed to convey its message, and the store’s pleasantly lit interior, designed by Sherry, invites exploration, provides privacy to diners, and features the warmth of wood beams and posts that come from trees the Belknaps cut on their own land.

DeBanville’s offers locally produced crafts and maple syrup in addition to groceries, snowmobile supplies, a deli, and a fill-up, and also provides that key necessity identified by the Byway Marketing Study, a public restroom. The store sells snowmobile passes, hunting and fishing licenses, and supplies for canoeists. Darlene Belknap has also moved her cottage business, Walking Boss Suspenders, under its roof. And, it’s really and truly open seven days a week, from 8 am to 9 pm.

Across the way is the handsome Bloomfield Town Hall, until recently a gaunt old white building that looked a little worn around the edges.

Sherry not only found grants to stabilize the structure, but located a restoration expert who determined its original color scheme, which was anything but white. The town hall’s colorful cranberry, mustard, and forest green, legacy of the Victorian era’s rebellion against the stark and simple tastes of colonial times, are now back, and highlight its distinctive architectural ornaments as they did during the log drive days.

“We wanted our store to complement the old Town Hall,” says Darlene, “and Sherry designed this building with that one in mind.” The gable design of the 1890s building is now echoed in its 2004 neighbor’s cranberry and blue.

Plans are also in the works to create a new public fishing and cartop boat access to the Connecticut River here, thanks to the generosity of the original DeBanville family. The entire project salutes Bloomfield’s history, architecture, and very special setting on the banks of the Connecticut River. Be sure to stop by and congratulate the Belknaps next time you’re exploring this beautiful part of the Byway, perhaps for their Grand Opening on Memorial Day. ☒



Owner Darlene Belknap at the entrance of the resurrected DeBanville’s General Store in Bloomfield, Vermont.

Caring for the Golden Goose

THE Scenic Byway Council's mission is to balance the promotion, preservation, enjoyment and stewardship of the Connecticut River Valley. Much, though not all, of the initial effort has focused on organizing, establishing a heritage tourism infrastructure, and producing promotional elements: maps, video, signage, exhibits, web site, and interpretive centers.

Now the Council is turning attention to the preservation side of its mission, to safeguard what it is that makes the Connecticut River valley one of New England's loveliest landscapes. What are those elusive "intrinsic values," and how do we go about the business of protecting the proverbial goose that laid those golden eggs?

On April 30, the Byway Council invited regional planning commissions, land trusts, and others to pursue this question. The Council reviewed the scenery protection findings made when the states established the Byway routes in 1998, and compared this with a 2003 scenic resource inventory in Lyme, Orford, Piermont and Haverhill. The group discussed the scope of scenic and historic resource protection needs along the Byway and how to identify short term and long term priorities.

The Council considered how the Byway might relate to views, and to projects such as the Connecticut River Birding Trail and bicycle trails. Funding is, as usual, a key ingredient for success, and the Council will look at the possibility of applying for federal scenic byway funds and other likely sources. Communication with towns, landowners, and others will be essential.

Look for more on this topic in our Fall issue. 

10th Annual Big Splash River and Arts Festival

JUNE 5, 2004

10:30 am-6:30 pm

**Wilder Picnic Area
Wilder, Vt**

**For more information:
info@ctriverfest.org**



A for-sale sign recently cropped up in a riverfront field along the Byway.



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