

LOST... AND FOUND: THE LAIRET RIVER AND THE BIRTH OF CANADA

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FOR OVER 40 years, the Lairet River was not a part of the National Historic Site of Cartier-Brébeuf Park, located along the St. Charles River, in the Quebec City borough of Limoilou. Recent rehabilitation works have reestablished the original landscape of the mouth of the Lairet River, a site which hosted the first Europeans who came to America. On his second voyage in 1535-1536, Jacques Cartier and his fellow travelers had wintered at this site near the Iroquois village of Stadacona. This is also where Jesuit missionaries built their first residence in Québec.

Built in the early 1970s, the park featured a replica of the Grande Hermine set up in a large artificial body of water. After thirty years, visitors had seriously worn out the site, the replica of the boat had been torn down, and the site had little to say about the history of the place. Moreover, the Lairet River, the site's main cultural resource, was flowing in a pipe since the late 1960s. In other words, visitors leaving Cartier-Brébeuf Park were, at the very least, bewildered as to the link between site and history.

Works carried out in 2008 were an opportunity to update the interpretation concept. As Prime Minister John Diefenbaker said in 1957, this site is a *"meeting point between past and present ... where every Canadian could say with sincerity: Here, indeed, is the cradle of my country."* Landscape architects at Public Works and Government Services Canada opted for a complete rehabilitation of the original landscape at the river's mouth. Today, Cartier-Brébeuf Park clearly speaks of facts of history, thus providing visitors with a new experience and residents of the Limoilou borough with a quality relaxation area.

THE TRIGGER

The project was triggered by the collapse of a segment of the pipe channeling the Lairet River. Significant work was needed to ensure user safety, and it was a good opportunity to rekindle interest in this historic site, as rehabilitation works were being initiated on the riverside walks along the St. Charles River.

The landscape architects of the client agency, together with Parks Canada, seized this opportunity

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« Voici, en vérité, le berceau
de mon pays... »



1978
5-10



2000



2010

« Here, indeed, is the
cradle of my country... »

... JOHN DIEFENBAKER, 1957

not only to review the many technical and functional issues of the site, but also to conduct a thorough review of how to communicate the site's cultural and environmental value, and ensure its sustainability. This exercise has helped guide the rehabilitation with a vision emphasizing the role of the site itself in an evocation of the history of the place.

Technical studies were conducted on public safety issues and on the Lairet River's water quality, hydrological capacity, velocity during floods, and potential sedimentation of contaminants at its mouth. Simultaneously, rigorous historical research was conducted in order to validate the original morphology of the Lairet River, as well as the location of the point of berthing of Cartier's ships.

A MEANDERING RIVER

The vision of the project initiator presented three challenges to the landscape architects of the IBI/DAA Group selected to design and implement the project. They had to develop a true meandering river ecosystem to replace the existing artificial lake and storm drainage pipe. They also had to organize on-site walking paths so as to encourage users of the riverside walk to explore the historical interpretation

site. Finally, they had to meet the \$4 million budget initially granted for the replacement of the collapsed pipe.

The design team has restored the sinuous lay-out and original topography of the meandering river, along with the original landscape and riparian habitats. The bank is steep on the outside of the curve, where the erosive current sculpts the shoreline. The inside bends are gently sloping. Coarse sand, river pebbles, and boulders reinforce the geomorphologic features of the site. The banks are naturalized with native land and water species to create a true ecosystem. Trails, bike paths, and piazzettas are inserted into the topography to highlight the existing interpretation centre, but mostly to showcase the meandering river as the main attraction of the park.

EVOCATION OF THE GRANDE HERMINE

IBI/DAA's landscape architects have created a sculptural evocation of the Grande Hermine, the iconic element of the site. This contemporary work – deconstructed, light, and aerial – is located on the beach side, inside a bend of the meander. It is integrated with an interpretive piazzetta recalling past uses of the site, including Jacques Cartier's win-

tering. Several plants used on the banks of the river, such as beech, cedar, elderberry, dogwood and sweet gale, all described by Cartier in his 'Tales', contribute to the historical interpretation.

The work reproduces the proportions of the Grande Hermine. Like a beached carcass, it reminds us that Cartier had left one of his ships behind, unable to man it following the ravages of scurvy that had decimated much of its crew. A text from Cartier's 'Tales' is integrated to a long granite bench in the shape of the bow of the ship. The scale of the sculpture helps visitors grasp how laughable was the attempt to cross the Atlantic in a boat so frail.

INTEGRATED PATHS AND TRAILS

The Cartier-Brébeuf National Historic Site is part of the recreational corridor of the St. Charles River. A pedestrian promenade runs along the shoreline and offers multiple points of contact with water while a bike path meanders through the park.

1 REPRODUCING THE PROPORTIONS OF THE GRAND HERMINE **2** COARSE SAND, RIVER PEBBLES + BOULDERS REINFORCE THE SITE'S GEOMORPHOLOGIC FEATURES **3** SITE RENDERING **4** EVOLUTION OF THE SITE: RESTORING THE SINUOUS LINE OF THE RIVER
PHOTOS IBI/DAA





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→ A bridge allows pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Lareit River. The street furniture, materials, and the medallions to Jacques Cartier's likeness affixed to the railings of the bridge all blend in with the sculptural work.

VARIED BENEFITS

Since its opening in Fall 2009, the rehabilitated Cartier-Brébeuf Park has been a success in several respects. The project has contributed to the visitors' and nearby citizens' reappropriation of the banks of the St. Charles River. This is reflected in greater traffic and high user satisfaction. Satisfaction also runs high with the wildlife that have re-inhabited the environment, as evidenced by the census conducted by Parks Canada in 2010, in which 12 species of fish have been identified, including the brook trout and walleye.

The comprehensive re-reading of the cultural landscape and site use provides an exemplary interpretation of a historic site of national importance. Visitors also appreciate the striking views with the Grande Hermine silhouetted over Québec's skyline. Indeed, the site has been confirmed as the gathering place for all events relating to Jacques Cartier, such as the 475th anniversary of his wintering celebrated in 2010.

The project team received the 2009 National Operations Greening Award from the Government of Canada for its achievements in sustainable development related to the improvements the project made to social, environmental, and economic issues. And finally, the CSLA Award to the Cartier-Brébeuf Park showed the project's managers that investment choices guided by enlightened concepts could bring new life to long-developed historic sites and enhance the visitor experience.



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1,2,3, SENTIERS, PISTES CYCLABLES, PLACETTES ET L'HORIZON DE QUÉBEC |

1,2,3, TRAILS, BIKE PATHS, PLAZETTAS + THE QUEBEC CITY SKYLINE

PHOTOS IBI/DAA