

Truro & Colchester
TCPEP
Partnership for Economic Prosperity



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PLEASE NOTE: This report contains references to *Lacking, Meeting or Exceeding* – these are assessment references relative to the state of market readiness of the products, services and experiences association with the operation. The use of these terms is intended only to provide an indicator with regard to the state of operational market readiness. Commentary and recommendations in this report are intended to advance the product and market readiness of the property – however the owners/operators are fully responsible for all investments and financial liabilities stemming from future decisions that they choose to undertake).



Mentoring Report

Operation: Cliffs of Fundy Geopark

Location: Fundy Shore

Contact: Beth Peterkin

Consultant: ilmage

Date: October 2020

AREAS OF FOCUS:

1. Operator/Consultant Identified Issues

The need for continuous, long-term funding

The need to conduct a fresh strategic plan/business plan/financial projections and governance review

The need for the Geopark to resolve its receptive capability at both primary entry points to the destination area

2. Overall State of the Business

Date of business plan: Lacking – the Geopark is in transition: following the appointment of a new General Manager; being in the closing chapter of its first tranche of funding through ACOA; and having some unknown funding sources, there is no current business plan

Operating dates: Year-round

Key management (person/title): Beth Peterkin, General Manager

Staff levels (# FT/seasonal): Administrative Assistant Debbie Boehlen

Key markets: International

3. The 12 Essentials of Successful Tourism Products

Provided courtesy of ilmage

	<i>Lacking</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Exceeding</i>
Theme/Brand/USP:			The brand and supporting descriptors perfectly describe the products, the services and the experiences associated with the Geopark
Access:			Although mostly remote, the majority of experiences are accessible



New Media Strength:		The Geopark optimizes well and is supported by various social media, however there is a potential gap/threat with regard to at least two domains which should be acquired (see report Apprndix A)	
Essence of the Destination:			The Geopark is explosive in terms of its ability to showcases the essence of the destination area
Powerful Sense of Place:			The Geopark presents a powerful sense of place at every turn in the road
Authenticity:			The Geopark represents and will work to showcase countless authentic aspects of the land and sea scapes, the cultures, traditions etc. of the destination area
Emotional Trigger:			The Cliffs of Fundy are an inescapably emotive encounter on a truly global scale
Educational/Entertaining/ Enriching:		The Geopark has many future potential roles to play in further igniting the Cliffs of Fundy destination experiential menu	
Hands-on interactive:		The Geopark has many future potential roles to play in further igniting the Cliffs of Fundy's tactile, interactive and personally engaging range of experiences	
Value-Added Proposition:	The Geopark's leadership should develop value-added		



	propositions for every visitor experience as they are being developed		
The Mechanics:	The organization is currently encumbered by a lack of entrenched financial support, a lack of human resources, and a lack of physical spaces through which the Geopark narrative can be effectively delivered		
Sense of Excitement:		Given the provision of adequate resources, the Geopark is on the threshold of living up to UNESCO's expectation that the Cliffs of Fundy can be a world leader within its genre of interest	

4. Overall Physical Site Impressions

Overall curb appeal:	N/A – the Geopark has more than 40 natural sites, however there is only one, limited-operation receptive facility (Lower Economy) which does not aesthetically reflect the gravitas and international audience demands associated with UNESCO designations, Geoparks or otherwise
Interior:	N/A as noted above, the only Geopark-operated visitor-engagement site is extremely limited in space and lacks the production values one would associate with a UNESCO-branded destination organization and/or locations/sites
Comfort and amenities:	N/A – there are variables of comfort and amenities at each of the 40+ Geopark sites – there does not currently exist any median line of comforts, amenities, services, etc.

5. Customer Service

Receptive capability:	Lacking – the Geopark is in a weak position in terms of receptive capabilities (e.g. no true welcome capability at any of the entry points to the overarching Geopark destination area)
Staff uniforms/nametags:	N/A – the Geopark does not have a core complement of front-line visitor-interactive employees
Customers service training:	N/A – the Geopark does not have a core complement of front-line visitor-interactive employees
Customer service evaluation:	Meeting – Management should ensure that all posted comments concerning Geopark sites receive an immediate response



Staff rewards: N/A – apart from the Executive Director and one Administration Assistant, the Geopark does not have a core complement of employees

6. Packaging and Sales

Packaging: Lacking – the Geopark is merely in the Introduction phase of its product life cycle – as strategic planning takes form, as infrastructure assessments are completed and as partnerships are solidified, packaging should become an eventual priority

Partnerships: Exceeding – the Geopark is involved in myriad partnerships

Sales activity: N/A – the Geopark has considerable product/market readiness to undertake before becoming over-preoccupied with its sales and marketing strategy

Volume: N/A at this stage of the Geopark’s evolution

Revenues: N/A at this stage of the Geopark’s evolution

Profitability: N/A at this stage of the Geopark’s evolution

Other:

7. Marketing Materials

Directional signage: Lacking/Meeting – the Geopark has some, but only a limited signage presence within the destination area

To site: Each site’s needs must be addressed as part of the Geopark’s infrastructure assessment process

On-site: N/A – concentrate on website development, social media and partnerships with influencers

Brochures: N/A – concentrate on website development, social media and partnerships with influencers

Advertising:

8. Online Presence and Social Media

Web content: Exceeding

Website transactional capability (i.e. online sales etc.): Lacking – however this is only temporary as transactional functionality is forthcoming permitting the online sale of merchandise, memberships, etc.

Use of social media and other platforms: Exceeding

Current social media engagement and targets: Exceeding – there is a need to discuss the adoption of a potential Communities of Interest (COI’s) strategy

Quality of social content (i.e. photos and videos): Exceeding

Other:

9. Other Emerging Issues

A World-Class Destination – there is anecdotal evidence, from within the senior ranks of the Global Geoparks Network International Association of Geoparks (final meeting of the UNESCO evaluators and the Fundy Geopark stakeholders – July 29, 2019) that the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark has the



potential to be the #1 geopark in the world – also this from the 2019 UNESCO evaluation report (“There is no doubt that Cliffs of Fundy represent an area with high potential to become one of the strongest UGGp due to the fact that the area is globally very well known for the highest tides on Earth and related geomorphologic and sedimentary structures as well as for its internationally significant geological heritage related with the formation and break-up of the Pangea”) – these references dictate that every place, product, service and experience within the Geopark must strive for the highest level of quality – a breakthrough continuum of value-added places, spaces and experiences based on a value equation that reaches up-market (see report Appendix B) – the current Lower Economy welcome centre, even allowing for site enhancements, would seem to violate this philosophy – the Geopark should, globally speaking, reach much higher

Strategic Planning – because of the formative stages of the organization under the direction of a very new Executive Director, there is currently no clearly-documented strategic plan setting forth a clear vision, mission, strategic objectives and action plans to achieve strategic objectives – however there is clear evidence that the new General Manager has the capacity to craft such a plan – this and other essential planning measures will be critical to entering into a new 2-3-year tranche of funding with ACOA and to obtain other ongoing support mechanisms from the Province of Nova Scotia

Business Plan – concurrent with the authorship of a fresh new Geopark strategic plan, there is a need for a fresh set of financial projections and assumptions (with a 3-5-year outlook) – there is clear evidence that the new Executive Director has the capacity to undertake a comprehensive financial pro forma – it is recommended that such a plan should be based strictly upon conservative-thinking guidelines – this and other essential planning measures will be critical to entering into a new 2-3-year tranche of funding with ACOA and to obtain other ongoing support mechanisms from the Province of Nova Scotia

Governance – solely in ilmanage’s view, the status quo board structure of 15 members and multiple sub-committees is unweildy and unmanageable, placing undo pressure on any executive to deliver healthy outcomes – while it is understood that funding agents deserve and in some cases must have board representation, there simply has to be a more fluid, manageable model, based on commonly accepted governance practices, that will suit the demands of the Geopark as an organization – there is also the issue of the Geopark’s executive officer being referred to as the ‘General Manager’ versus use of the more common ‘Executive Director’ with regard to an organization of this nature – ilmanage recommends that an independently-contracted, third-party professional governance advisor be engaged to deliver a cohesive new governance plan (e.g. possibly funded 80/20 through CBDC’s Consulting Advisor Services – CAS program which typically has a ceiling of \$10,000 including HST – 80% funding through CBDC) – this and other essential planning measures will be critical to entering into a new 2-3-year tranche of funding with ACOA and to obtain other ongoing support mechanisms from the Province of Nova Scotia

Receptive Capability – the Geopark is lacking in strategically situated receptive capabilities which can reflect the global significance and gravitas of UNESCO and of the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark brand in and of itself – the desire would be to have receptive capability situated at the two primary entrance points to the destination area – ilmanage wants to underscore the need to create a dynamic new presence rather than inherit hand-me-down facilities which may not live up to the brand and the Geopark promise of showcasing world-class sites and experiences – this does not mean building white elephants – rather boutique-scale facilities which provide simple receptive capability would be the desired outcome versus large-scale facilities – by way of example, the existing ‘inherited’ welcome centre is almost certainly de-marketing the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark brand unless it is de-commissioned as a welcome site and is simply recognized and used in relation to its World War II history and/or used as a stopover picnic site

Infrastructure Assessment Process – it is understood that the Geopark’s infrastructure committee is undertaking an assessment of infrastructure at some or all of its included sites – this is an extremely valuable exercise, of course, yet one which at some point should also involve the trained eye of an experienced tourism-sensitized landscape architect/spatial planner who could assist the committee in



recognizing visitor needs and in prioritizing infrastructure advancements and enhancements on a phased basis over coming months and years (see report Appendix E)

Communities of Interests (COI's) – the ACOA tourism action plan is very much predicated on its partners recognizing the value of and channeling their resources into COI's – in the case of the Geopark, using social media channels in the acute pursuit of champions and influencers (enthusiasts) having a high level of interest in Geopark-type products, services and experiences – there is an opportunity to discuss a singular or conjoined COI initiative as one aspect of a next tranche of activity in partnership with ACOA

Geo-Food Partnerships – the Geo-Food concept is yet another fabulous avenue for attracting partners and relevance within the Canadian tourism sector

Never-on-a-Napkin – as a point of philosophy, any Geopark strategic plan should insist that spatial planning at any Geopark designated site should be subjected to the rigours of qualified spatial planning under the hand of qualified, proven contractors

ACOA-Led Best Practices Missions – the Gros Morne Institute of Sustainable Tourism (www.gmist.ca) now coordinates various themed best practices missions on behalf of Tourism Atlantic (ACOA) and the various provincial partners – the Geopark should participate in at least one of these missions (e.g. visiting and learning about the lessons learned at the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark in British Columbia) – there is also the prospect that the Geopark may wish to host its own Reverse Best Practices Mission wherein expertise is brought to the destination area to share best practices information (e.g. the leadership from Tumbler Ridge)

Edge of the Wedge Program – the Geopark's Executive Director should participate in the Edge of the Wedge, the premier experiential travel training program in Canada, operated by the Gros Morne Institute -- set in the natural splendor of Gros Morne National Park, the Edge of the Wedge is an immersive, hands on opportunity that will increase revenue potential, competitive market position, result in new tourism experiences and long lasting community partnerships – currently in hiatus due to Covid-19

Signature Merchandise – the Geopark should concentrate on identifying one or more truly signature retail products which reflect the Cliffs of Fundy theme – while it is important to offer stereotype or typical products such as hats and T-Shirts, it is MORE important to create signature merchandise that is uniquely and inherently 'Cliffs of Fundy'

Glooscap Campground – while ilmage has not conducted a site visit in order to assess the quality and potential of this property, a comment is in order: the Geopark should be very cautious when considering whether or not it should involve itself directly in operations of this type

10. Market Readiness Work Plan

The following table is intended to act as a visual guide for tracking improvement to your business, and can be used during the follow-up sessions. "Urgent Actions" may be tangible or intangible. For example: "make the business wheelchair friendly" or "improve customer satisfaction".

Urgent Actions to be completed by the consultant	Budget to be completed by the operator	Responsibility to be completed by the operator	Timeline to be completed by the consultant	Measure to be completed by the operator	Status to be completed by the operator
Undertake strategic plan, business plan including financial 2-3-year financial projections			4 th quarter 2020/1 st quarter 2021		<u>Update #1:</u> <u>Update #2:</u>



and a revised governance plan					
Conduct reverse best practices mission involving Tumbler Ridge and possibly one other successful Geopark entity			1 st or 2 nd quarter 2021		Update #1: Update #2:
Undertake initial sites infrastructure assessments			4 th quarter 2020		Update #1: Update #2:
Contracted technical infrastructure assessments and capital cost evaluations including Geopark destination area receptive points			2 nd quarter 2021		Update #1: Update #2:
Receive detailed Communities of Interests (COI's) briefing from Tourism Atlantic (ACO)			1 st quarter 2021		Update #1: Update #2:

11. Tourism Atlantic Operator Tools and Solutions Checklist

Would the operator benefit from considering any of these tools or solutions? *Check all that apply.*



Tools:

- A Business Diagnostic Tool – this process may be able to be executed internally by the Executive Director
- Site Assessment Tool – in addition to the Board of Directors Infrastructure committee’s work in evaluating Geopark sites, it is recommended that

Solutions:

- Tourism Best Practices Mission
 - Gros Morne Institute for Sustainable Tourism (GMIST)
-

Potential Resources for Assistance:	Contact Person	Contact Information
Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC) – investigate Consulting Advisory Services (CAS) program for review the Geopark’s governance structure Province	-	The Geopark is in need of a new 2-3-year tranche of funding in alignment with the current ACOA tourism action plan
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency		



Appendix A – Experiential Planning Models

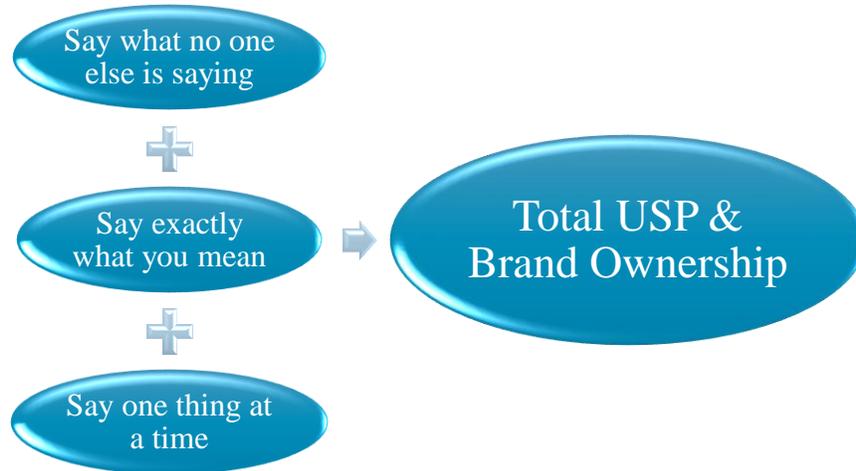
Adherence to the principles of the 12 Essentials of Leading Travel Experiences and Refined Experiential Construction models is extremely important in crafting new Geopark in-demand travel experiences.



REFINED EXPERIENTIAL CONSTRUCTION



Appendix B – ilmage’s Resolution of Unique Selling Proposition (USP) Model



Appendix C – Recommended Additional Domain Acquisitions

www.cliffsoffundygeopark.ca and .com
and
www.novascotiageopark.ca and .com
www.novascotiafundygeopark.ca and .com

Appendix D – The Recommended Cliffs of Fundy Geopark Value Equation

Touristically speaking there are audiences for products, services and experiences at all three levels of the market spectrum (Lower Value, Medium Value and Higher Value). It is recommended, however that within its future strategic plan, the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark strive, in alignment with the ACOA tourism action plan (*Growth and Prosperity: The ACOA Tourism Innovation Action Plan – Advancing Atlantic Canada Tourism’s Competitiveness and Productive Capacity*) to adopt an equation in which reflects higher value, as per the following:

Higher Quality + Higher Uniqueness + Higher Price = VALUE



Appendix E – Recommended Infrastructure Assessment Checklist

The Geopark’s infrastructure committee may wish to include some or all of the following items in the carrying out of their sites assessments:

- Existence and quality of directional signage to the site, including current or potential portrayal of the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark brand – potential use of a QR code linking to the Geopark website.
- Existence and quality of signage and wayfinding at the site, including current or potential portrayal of the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark brand – potential use of a QR code linking to the Geopark website.
- Overall sense of arrival.
- Depending on the scale of the site, the existence of an obvious 100% Point (*the place* on the site where visitors are most likely to gravitate toward).
- Adequate and organized parking, including for over-sized vehicles (e.g. RV’s and motorcoaches).
- Lighting.
- Existence of amenities (e.g. public washrooms, emergency telephone, emergency advisory signage).
- Existence and quality of interpretive aids, including current or potential portrayal of the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark brand – potential use of a QR code linking to the Geopark website.

