

Tour of Panoramic Shelters A Promising Initiative

by Pierre HÉBERT

The tour of panoramic shelters stretching over more than 180 kilometres of road within the Haut-Saint-François MRC may not be unique in Quebec. But the tour's defining features, combining landscapes and culture, present a touristic opportunity that is already popular with many visitors from the area, as well as those from away.

Julie Pomerleau, cultural development agent at the Haut-Saint-François CLD, who ensures the project runs smoothly, shows modesty in her remarks. But the results gleaned from comments on social media, more than 5,000 visits to the website, and the testimonies of local individuals show that the tour has been a destination for many. People from Sherbrooke who admitted to never having set foot in the HSF, visitors from Granby, Bromont, Lanaudière and Montreal found the road that led to the tour of the panoramic shelters. The context may have helped, admitted Pomerleau, speaking in French. "People were looking for activities to do in nature, independently and safely. The tour of the shelters responded to this particular need." Above all, the originality of this project has set the Haut-Saint-François apart from other regions. Launched in early summer, especially on social media, the response has been more than satisfactory. "We are very, very happy," Pomerleau commented.

Well Planned

The result, while promising, is the fruit of several years of reflection and preparation. It was in 2014 that the idea germinated in the minds of participants. "We wanted to create a tour that would highlight our culture and landscapes. That was already decided, but the 'how' was not," said the CLD cultural development agent. It was in talking



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The shelter on the Franceville Road in the Marécage-des-Scots Regional Park, opposite the entrance to the Mont-Mégantic National Park campground, presents the full splendor of the area.

with representatives of the Pittoresco firm that the project took shape. After visiting the region, they noticed a significant number of panoramic shelters. "Stéphane Philibot said 'It would be fun to use them and make them a frame for our landscape.' That is where the idea started, sourced from a characteristic of our territory," explained Pomerleau.

In agreement with municipalities, the stakeholders chose strategic locations for the landscapes. The Pittoresco firm designed and built the shelters. The stylized structures serve as a framework for the landscape and aim to create a small time bubble so that visitors take the time to look, stop and feel emotions. In some shelters, where design permitted, works by professional artists from the Haut-Saint-François were integrated with texts presenting their work. Other writings relate the passage of Amerindians in the area, or highlight the indelible mark of such characters as the writer Éva Sénécal in La Patrie,

or Father Gédéon in Weedon. The stories of pioneers who were significant in the history of Cookshire-Eaton and elsewhere bear witness to the imprint that made the Haut-Saint-François what it is today.

The panoramic shelters tour includes seven stylized structures spread across the municipalities of Cookshire-Eaton, La Patrie, Hampden, Weedon, East Angus, Saint-Isidore-de-Clifton, and Lingwick. If all goes well, officials would like to add two more next year, including one in Bury. Subsequently, they would like to add additional elements, said Pomerleau.

Pleasantly surprised by the public's response, the project leaders do not intend to stop there. In its first year, the promotion strategy focused on the local market. If the context allows next year, they are considering tackling the entire Quebec market. The tour, Pomerleau emphasized, is suitable for all clientele. A panel showing the map and the

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