

# Living Landscape

By Jane Roy Brown  
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For more than 10,000 years, a corridor formed by two great river valleys—the Kennebec in Maine and the Chaudière in Québec—has connected people on both sides of the border. Native Americans paddled through it. France and England squabbled over it. Benedict Arnold marched up it.

Canadian immigrants followed it to jobs in Maine’s mills and forests.

Today a highway, labeled Route 201 in Maine and Route 173 in Quebec, traces this 233-mile route from Popham Beach to Quebec City. Road trip, anyone?

I didn’t unearth the route’s history on my own. A commission made up of government agencies and nonprofit organizations on both sides of the border did that in 1997, dubbing it the Kennebec-Chaudière (shoh-dee-AIR) International Heritage Corridor. The commission hopes that by promoting the route’s diverse sights and activities, visitors will follow it off the beaten (coastal) path. The organizers say the route is to be experienced more like a buffet than a sit-down dinner, and they have carved it into five zones:



Photographs by Bill Regan

Tidewater Kennebec Maine, steeped in maritime and Revolutionary War history; Central Kennebec River, studded with old mill towns; Forest Highlands, a height of land threaded with whitewater; the rural Beauce region in the Chaudière Valley; and metro Québec City.

There are scenic villages and wonderful inns and restaurants somewhere in the vicinity. But organizers say the corridor is a working landscape: farms, mills, factories, and industrial forest. Observing how this landscape changes, and imagining how great the changes have been over the centuries, is like reading a story written in topography. In the words of Jay Adams, director of Old Fort Western in Augusta and a past president of the corridor commission, “The

corridor is very much about ‘Wait, we still live here.’ If that means that pieces of it aren’t green and scenic any longer because people are making a living on it, that’s part of the story.”

Maine’s mill towns, the state’s forested interior, and the Quebecois borderlands held instant adventure appeal for this Franco-American and native Mainer. So my husband and I chose the three middle zones, starting in Augusta, driving through to the Beauce, staying overnight in the small city of Sainte-Marie, and cruising back to Augusta the next day....

