

UTAH RECREATION & TOURISM MATTERS



December 2013

No. IORT/033

A Study of the Heritage Business Owners and Artisans of the Bear River Heritage Area

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Introduction

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has defined heritage tourism as “Traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources” (National Trust for Historic Preservation, n.d.). Heritage tourism is a growing subset of tourism in which the tourist seeks a connection with heritage or culture as these relate to the past. A relatively new approach, the idea of promoting heritage tourism through the creation of heritage areas has been rapidly gaining in popularity over the past several decades. Heritage areas seek to preserve and present the cultural history of the area and how the local landscape has shaped that history (Vincent & Whiteman, 2009). Heritage areas can be thought of as a regional, collaborative effort by area governments, businesses, and community groups to promote and preserve local heritage resources while promoting tourism and creating positive economic opportunities.

Important components of many heritage areas are the privately owned businesses or artisans whose products are related to heritage and the community. For instance, a drive through a heritage area may bring a consumer into contact with businesses or artisans that produce such things as handmade jewelry, crafts, soap, or saddles. They may encounter agricultural-based products and services such as honey, flowers, locally grown food, guest ranches, wagon rides, and so forth.

There are many artists and performers creating heritage art and music, as well as more traditional businesses such as small stores, historic restaurants, or bars. These heritage businesses and artisans are a reflection of local culture and heritage, and an important part of the community, the heritage area, and the local economic base.

The Bear River Heritage Area

There are many such heritage businesses in northern Utah and southeastern Idaho, within the boundaries of the Bear River Heritage Area (BRHA). This region is comprised of seven counties in northern Utah and southern Idaho, within the watershed of the Bear River



Providence Inn Bed and Breakfast in the historic Old Rock Church

(see Figure 1). The BRHA was created by an inter-local agreement finalized in 2006, and is recognized as a state heritage area by both Idaho and Utah. The BRHA as an organization seeks to foster and develop relationships with the community, government, and the private sector in promoting heritage, area economic development, heritage resources, and local heritage businesses. The BRHA has officially endorsed over 200 private businesses and artisans located within the heritage area. The BRHA promotes these businesses on its website and in promotional materials that include pamphlets, the BRHA guidebook, and tourist itineraries. These heritage businesses are the focus of this research.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the identity, motivations, and values of the heritage businesses with regards to their BRHA relationship, affiliation and endorsement. Investigated is the presence and types of perceived benefits and costs present in the BRHA and heritage business relationship. To help conceptualize the relationship between the heritage businesses and the BRHA, this research will examine if the heritage businesses and BRHA behavior conforms to the social exchange theory. Additionally, the heritage business' willingness to pay for their affiliation and endorsement is examined, as this has been discussed by the BRHA council as a possible method of raising funds for

heritage area operations and costs. There has been no comprehensive research conducted about the BRHA endorsed heritage businesses before this time. It is hoped this study will be of use to the BRHA Council in their baseline understanding of the endorsed businesses and artisans as well as in future decision making and planning.

Research and Sampling Methodology

Being exploratory, qualitative methods were well suited for this research. The researcher selected non-probabilistic sample (see Babbie, 2001) was created from the 250 businesses on the BRHA heritage business roster. The prospective business's emphasis on heritage, its place in the local landscape, its products, and its level of involvement with the BRHA were all considered during this phase. Care was taken to create a diverse sample of businesses to include heritage businesses classified in the following categories: Arts/Crafts, Retail, Restaurant/Food, Agriculture, Lodging, and Experiences. Additionally, five representatives from the BRHA Council were interviewed to shed light on the relationship between the endorsed businesses and the BRHA council.

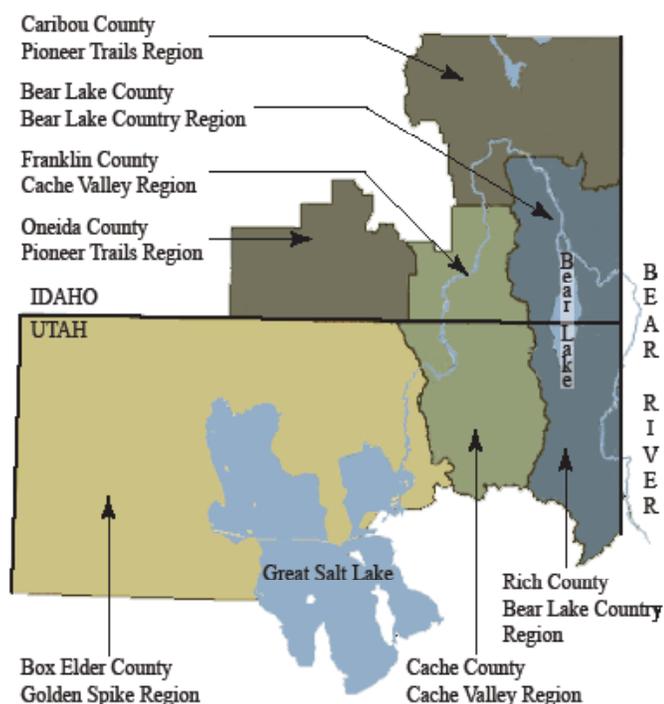


Figure 1. Bear River Heritage Area (Counties and Regions).

Preparing artisan cheese at Rock Hill Creamery

Table 1
Types of Businesses Represented in Study Sample

Business type by product	
Saddle maker	Deli
Antiques	Restaurant
Fly fishing supplies	Cheese maker
Soap maker	Bed and breakfast
Honey producer	Recreation outfitter
Custom woodcarving	Guest ranch
Garlic grower	Wildlife artist
Convenience store	Drug store
Pottery	Hotel
Cowboy poetry	Beef and lamb producer
Berry grower	Apple products
Livestock auction	Custom firearm manufacturer
Fabric/quilting	Cowboy boot manufacturer
Hot springs	Landscape painter
Historical farm	Farm
Horse harness maker	Playhouse theater

Some categories represent multiple businesses.

Demographics and General Results

The heritage businesses were generally small with 35.1% being one-person operations, and 67.5% having a workforce of five or less. The number of years established as a business ranged from 1-129 years of establishment with a mean of 25.1 years and a median of 14 years. These businesses were quite diverse in their products and services (Table 1). Some were more dependent on the local community for customers and some more on tourism. Since the heritage area is tourism focused, businesses were asked about their dependence on tourism. The majority of businesses (53.9%) reported depending very little to none on tourists for product sales, while 36% depended on

Table 2
Heritage Self-Perception Among Business Owners

Reason Mentioned	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Located in historic building	9	29.7
Maintaining/keeping tradition alive	7	23.1
Generational business (family)	5	16.5
Practices a heritage art or craft	4	13.2
Business established for many years	4	13.2
Status in the community	3	9.9
Rustic theme	2	6.6
Heritage theme	2	6.6
Quality products	2	6.6
Personal heritage (business owner)	2	6.6
Handmade products	2	6.6
Lifestyle	1	3.3
Improving the land	1	3.3
Community outreach	1	3.3

tourism significantly to completely. When asked why they considered themselves a heritage business owner or artisan, almost half (49.5%) of the businesses consider their products or art to be the reason for their self perception of heritage. A number of other reasons were given (Table 2).

Heritage Business Values and Motivators with Regards to BRHA Affiliation

When the BRHA was first organized, many heritage businesses were invited to join the organization. When asked why they accepted this invitation, advertising and business exposure (60.9%) were found to be by far the main reasons for business participation with the BRHA. The other dominant theme was over half of the respondents (52.2%) mentioning heritage in some way as a factor in their decision to become endorsed with the BRHA. Many business owners hoped their BRHA affiliation would profit their business. The majority (61.2%) of the businesses reported they had benefitted at some point or were currently benefitting in some way from their BRHA endorsement. A smaller, yet significant percentage (38.9%) reported they had not received benefits from their BRHA endorsement. When asked to quantify or define the benefits their business had received, many felt these benefits were mostly insignificant. By far the biggest perceived benefit of BRHA endorsement is advertising and bringing people to the business (67.5%). Other responses were given, many related to heritage, but were not mentioned by many respondents (Table 3). Many businesses hoped the BRHA affiliation would bring them customers, however only 38.5% felt that the BRHA advertising had brought people to their business, while 61.5% could not identify an instance in which someone had come to their business from the BRHA advertising. During the analysis, the businesses were characterized regarding the main type of value they perceived from their endorsement with the BRHA. It was found more than half of the businesses (56.4%) viewed the value of their BRHA affiliation mainly in financial terms, with 20.5% seeing both financial and heritage value from their affiliation, and only 17.9% valuing their affiliation mainly for the heritage aspect.

The BRHA/Heritage Business Relationship

Several BRHA Council representatives were asked how important the endorsed businesses are to the success of the BRHA. From their answers, it appears

Table 3

Types of Benefits Received from Business Affiliation with the BRHA

Type of benefit	Number of respondents	Percentage
Advertising/bringing people to the business	15	67.5
Help with keeping heritage and traditions alive	3	13.5
Creating a tourist draw	3	13.5
Partnership/agreement in values and goals	3	13.5
Able to be a part of heritage	2	9
Agritourism development	2	9
Small business and artisan support	1	4.5
BRHA printed materials (pamphlets and guidebook)	1	4.5
Business event promotion through BRHA	1	4.5
Assistance with grants	1	4.5
Knowing what's going on (being connected)	1	4.5
Networking opportunities with other businesses	1	4.5
Increasing business credibility	1	4.5
Assistance in outreach and education	1	4.5
Establishing/improving community relationships	1	4.5

n = 22. Multiple responses allowed. May not total to 100%.

the businesses are crucial to the success of the BRHA, as evidenced by responses such as “Can’t exist without them,” “They are a base or a foundation for the BRHA,” “There’s not much of a heritage area without them,” “They make the BRHA overall more attractive,” and they “Allow the BRHA to fulfill its purpose.”

Even though the businesses are important to the BRHA Council, it appears the relationship between the BRHA and the businesses has not been fully developed. Communication between the two was found to be infrequent, with a majority of the businesses (81.4%) reporting infrequent or no communication with the BRHA. This was confirmed by the BRHA Council members who stated they wished to improve the communication and the overall relationship, but constraints of time and funding had impeded this goal.

Heritage Business Willingness to Pay an Endorsement Fee

The BRHA is considering instituting a paid business membership-endorsement system to generate revenue and desired to know how this might be perceived among the businesses. The study found the vast majority of the businesses are not opposed to the idea of paying the BRHA for their endorsement and the benefits they receive, with 83.7% acknowledging the legitimacy of a paid membership-endorsement system. However, many respondents expressed certain conditions and expected returns that must be met in order to have their financial support. Over a third of the respondents (34.2%) indicated they would not

pay for their endorsement with the benefits as they stand now. When asked theoretically about what they would expect in return, assuming their business benefits from the BRHA endorsement, most businesses (32.4%) expected continued BRHA advertising for their business. About a quarter (24.3%) were fine with what they were receiving currently and would expect nothing more. Another 24.3% would need to see a return on investment for their endorsement fee. The amount of the fee was another area of inquiry. While a third (34.2%) indicated they would pay zero dollars for their endorsement, the majority (39.5%) indicated that they were fine with paying twenty dollars per year to the BRHA. Ten key informants (26.4%) gave totals over twenty dollars, ranging from \$25-\$100.

Study-Based Recommendations for the BRHA

As the study progressed, it became apparent that there





are several areas in which the BRHA might be able to improve or expand its efforts to better reach its goals and benefit itself and the heritage businesses. Based on the information obtained from the heritage businesses, some recommendations were made that might be of use to the BRHA Council moving forward.

Advertising

Because of the low reported effectiveness of BRHA advertising, as well as a large diversity in heritage business clientele and tourism dependence, the BRHA should re-examine and revise its advertising methods, as the current methods are directed primarily at tourists and tourism related businesses. First and foremost, the BRHA needs to develop advertising methods that take into account the differing types of endorsed businesses with different advertising needs, instead of utilizing a “one size fits all” approach. This would include advertising locally and regionally in addition to the current out-of-state advertisements, this being aimed at building awareness of the BRHA within its own boundaries and increasing the benefits to all the different types of heritage businesses, whether tourism oriented or not.

Communication

The relationship between the BRHA and the endorsed businesses was found to be weak, in part due to a lack of ongoing and meaningful communication. To improve this relationship, the BRHA needs to communicate the mission and goals of the BRHA more effectively to the endorsed businesses, as it was found that many endorsed businesses had little knowledge of the BRHA and its purposes. This would require the BRHA to maintain more effective and frequent communication with the endorsed businesses. One way to do this may be to distribute an email newsletter to the endorsed businesses and the local community, which would advertise and promote the benefits of endorsement as well as improving the working relationship and lines of communication between the businesses and the BRHA.

Membership

The BRHA is considering instituting a paid membership-endorsement system to generate revenue. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that the BRHA do so, finding that this is generally supported by the endorsed businesses community. Additionally, the BRHA should consider creating a membership program for any individual or group interested in supporting local heritage and the mission of the BRHA. In accordance with previously stated goals of increasing the BRHA’s brand viability, the BRHA should also distribute promotional/brand materials (e.g., bumper stickers, window stickers, signs, etc.) to member individuals, groups and private businesses and the community in order to increase awareness of the BRHA, both within the region for residents and for tourists visiting from outside the region.

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