



UW College of Agriculture and Natural Resources  
**Global Perspectives Grant Program**  
Project Report

Award Period (e.g. Spring 2012): Spring 2017

Principle Investigator(s) Cole Ehmke Department: AgEcon

Email: cehmke@uwyo.edu

Project Title from Application: Considering Rural Tourism: Issues and Best Practices

Amount spent: \$3,000 + \$1,000 provided by International Programs

Non-technical summary (max 1500 characters plus spaces):

Tourism is a growing component of Wyoming's economy and is an accessible venture for many in the state, both in agriculture and beyond. This award was used to travel to the United Kingdom with a group of UW faculty for the purpose of investigating our own individual topics while exploring cross-disciplinary connections amongst the group at the home of Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford House. The time at Abbotsford had a series of productive meetings with Abbotsford staff and specialists from various institutions in the UK, and trips beyond Abbotsford provided an opportunity to see tourism-focused rural development efforts in action. As a result, the beginnings of an Extension program in tourism targeted to potential entrepreneurs and economic developers have been built.

## Global Perspectives Grant Report

**Cole Ehmke, Extension Specialist (Snr), UW AgEcon Department  
Travel to Scotland, July 2017**

For this project, funds were requested to support travel to the United Kingdom to gain an understanding of issues for my nascent Extension programming on tourism. The work was conducted as part of UW's Abbotsford House group, an assembly of interested staff across UW whose various interests intersect with either Sir Walter Scott or his property Abbotsford (built in the early 1800s on the income of the many popular historical fiction novels he wrote).

For myself, as an Extension Specialist based in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics whose work centers on rural entrepreneurship, I have become curious about what Wyoming entrepreneurs might consider in starting a small-scale tourism-based venture. Wyoming has something like 10 million visitors a year, primarily attracted to our iconic gems such as Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park and Devil's Tower. And over the last 10 years there has been a 48 percent increase in visitation in the state. My awareness was: perhaps more of our citizens could take advantage of the increasingly prominent tourist trade to create ventures of their own. My overall aim with this project was to better understand what entrepreneurs and community organizations might do to create ventures that are attractive to visitors – to help these groups connect to history, people, structures, and a location – in short to provide a more rich experience for visitors traversing our state and perhaps become more of a destination in their own right.

I went to Scotland and Abbotsford House looking for best practice insights on tangible management such as signage, presentation, decoration, marketing, staff interactions, and on-property activities or spin-off/add-on efforts. During the course of a week's stay in the accommodation wing of Abbotsford, I was involved in numerous discussions: with the Abbotsford general manager about the development of the property, with the grounds manager about her activities to create and maintain the building and grounds in the spirit of Scott, with the educational director about the nonprofit's aims to engage at a local and personal level with numerous audiences (outreach to children to build basic awareness, outreach with others that positions the property in the public's perception), and numerous others. Their perspectives helped me realize the breadth and depth of issues associated with engaging with the public as an entity in the tourist trade. Such issues as walking path creation; roadside and wayfinding signage; historic item preservation and presentation; telling a "story" in a meaningful, inviting way; positioning a property within a market place . . . all are issues to be planned for.



**Outside of Abbotsford House.**

Beyond Abbotsford, I visited numerous rural venues and came away with further insights into models of engagement that both small and large-scale rural landowners are exploring. For instance many places have created opportunities that include a wide range of recreation activities

from making food products to setting up farm shops for marketing local produce and products (going far beyond the makeshift sheds we may be familiar with, including local food plus artisanal products from their own in-store baker and butcher), to bed and breakfasts, to shooting, to historically-themed activities. Some of these might be feasible in Wyoming, especially those that emphasize The West, given the high degree of interest tourists have about it. Perhaps such ventures could deepen a visitor's connection to the area by augmenting them with components



Outside of a farm shop.

such as displays of the sort of ephemera that accumulates on old ranches (Indian, pioneer and ranching artifacts) in which a visitor's stopover is enriched by finding out more about the West, for instance. I also gained innumerable insights at the micro level for creating a good, welcoming experience for visitors.

Scotland faces many of the same rural development issues as Wyoming – an increasingly urban population, employment issues in the rural areas, the desire to attract more

visitors and have them stay longer as part of the tourist trade. The area of Scotland that Abbotsford is in (Scottish Borders) does not have a strong economic base, especially after the decline in the wool and manufacturing industries. So in many ways the Scottish situation is similar to Wyoming, with our connection being more to the idea of the Old West and outdoor



Inside of a farm shop.

recreation than of charming villages and Great Houses, and with inventiveness and effort we could create something that would be attractive to visitors. Given Wyoming's notoriety for Western lifestyles, we are in a nexus of several current interests: heritage tourism, geotourism, agritourism and perhaps even ecotourism.

The Abbotsford trip also helped me to connect to colleagues at UW outside of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources whose expertise will be of use in forming tourism

programming. For instance, a connection made on the trip will inform about the awareness needed to write

labels to interpret artifacts. And another connection has brought forward an awareness of the concepts museums use to curate exhibits and engage viewers about the stories represented in the items.

### Future Plans

Primarily, this project built a foundation of knowledge in tourism issues that will inform future Extension programming. It has convinced me to further explore the topic and test receptivity of COANR's Extension audience to developing the topic. Already three Extension publications are in development (two with fellow Abbotsford group members, from the English Department and the American Heritage Center) on topics that will help readers prepare for tourism centered on the West. Neither would have happened without the Global Perspectives funding, and the third

wouldn't have been possible without the support for the conceptual idea from the first two. A presentation will be developed for use, likely with ag tourism-type audiences, but certainly transferable to others. Further, an Extension colleague in northern Wyoming and I are looking for ways to partner on the tourism topic.



**Scottish countryside.**

A separate goal for this project was to explore topics and venues for a COANR-based international trip for students. I'm pleased to report that one is tentatively planned for 2019, as part of a long-term rota within the Abbotsford Group. This trip would target UW undergrad students primarily, but may be open to others, to expand their understanding of world agriculture and rural issues.

Hosted in the AgEcon department by Mariah Ehmke as the lead, it would use Abbotsford as a base for part of the travel period.

### **Potential Impacts**

This project aimed to explore how small tourism ventures, such as might be created by agriculturalists and community supporters, could provide what many might consider a geographically dispersed form of economic development. Looking forward, tourism is a potential outlet that can augment (increasingly variable) ag incomes. I am hopeful that the outputs inspired by the project will encourage the exploration of ventures with tourism-oriented activities and connections to local heritage. Thus, from the College of Agriculture's, UW's and the state's perspectives, such ventures could deliver suitable development to marginal and/or peripheral social, cultural and physical environments and so enhance local economies, supporting a more healthy state economy.

