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With Heritage So Wild: Cultural Landscape Inventory in United States National Parks

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The concept of *cultural landscape* was developed over a half-century ago, and the general awareness of the importance of preserving significant cultural landscape sites has been growing steadily ever since. The U.S. National Park Service (NPS), despite an early history of inattention to cultural landscapes, has in recent decades been heavily engaged in the practice of cultural landscape preservation (Alanen and Melnick 2000). The NPS is the largest repository of identified cultural landscape sites in the United States and a leader in providing direction and shaping the overall practice of the field (Alanen and Melnick 2000; Goetcheus 2008). Despite these developments, much work remains to be done.

In general, the preservation of cultural landscapes is considerably more complex than other forms of historic preservation, as standard methods and models that rely on “arresting decay” do not sufficiently ensure that the significance of such sites is retained (Mason 2008). This is especially true for various types of vernacular and ethnographic landscapes that evolved through use and derive their significance from a complex history of cultural and natural interaction. These landscapes may vary considerably in scale, drawing significance from multiple attributes, and require “management practices that are dynamic, innovative, and sensitive to their special nature” (Boyle 2008, 150). Given all these challenges, cultural landscapes in general are often “misunderstood or marginalized,” and some argue that in practice they tend to be reduced to merely “physical entities—comparable to historic districts, for instance—instead of also being seen as a *method* of considering, analyzing, and evaluating places” (Longstreth 2008, 1).

An important component of the NPS’s efforts to shape a responsible practice for cultural landscape preservation was the creation of the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI), initiated in 1994 to collect information on sites that were already on the National Register (NR) or potentially eligible for it (Goetcheus 2002). For an entity as large as the NPS, a clear and consistent system for inventorying cultural landscapes is a prerequisite for effective management. Management decisions are then developed under a separate program, the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR), although some of the information needed for those decisions is recorded by CLI.

This paper focuses on the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) process within those properties specifically bearing the designation of “National Park.” These fifty-eight properties are only a subset of more than 390 sites managed by the NPS. The National Parks, commonly perceived as the “crown jewels” of the NPS system, are important to consider as a specific group of properties, because their management has historically focused on natural landscapes (including scenery and wildlife) and historic properties (including cultural landscapes) within them that have had a long history of neglect (Webb 1987). The concept of cultural landscapes challenges the “stark—and artificial—boundary between nature and culture” that past NPS management policies have created (Cronon 2003, 39), and nowhere have these boundaries been as stark as in the national parks.

The present study begins by reviewing the history of the NPS’s role in cultural landscape preservation, particularly in the national parks, to understand the evolution of cultural landscapes and to highlight their past neglect. The Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI)

program and its methodology are then explained. The content of the CLI database for two distinct points in its evolution, 2003 and 2009, is analyzed. The results are combined with examples from fieldwork in several national parks to elucidate areas of progress and continued challenges with CLI.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Although the Organic Act that established the NPS in 1916 mandated that it conserve both “natural and historic objects,” the agency’s earliest management approaches reflected a tendency to divide landscapes into natural (wilderness) and cultural (humanized). On sites that were deemed natural, such as most of the national parks, cultural imprints (or “unnatural scenery”) were obliterated so as not to detract from visitors’ experiences of pristine wilderness (Olwig 1995, 395). Such visions of uninhabited nature also inspired policies of removal of existing populations from park landscapes, including various Native American communities (Spence 1999). The humanized landscapes created by the banished groups suffered benign neglect or deliberate destruction. In Rocky Mountain National Park, for instance, several pre-park recreational sites (including dude ranches and lodges) were erased (Buchholtz 1983)(Fig. 1), and places of work (mining, ranching, agriculture, and irrigation) were allowed to disintegrate.

Exceptions to this pattern included various Native American cultural properties, particularly in the parks of the Southwest, where they were preserved using an archaeological framework. This approach, coupled with the neglect of less dramatic sites in active use by Native American groups at the time of park designation, helped the NPS to propagate the “wilderness myth” (Spence 1999). That is, it fostered the impression that all native cultures were “dead and buried” at the time the parks were created, rather than active and alive, as many were. A somewhat different, but also temporally isolating, approach occurred with some sites associated with European cultural groups, such as the Appalachian community of Cades Cove (Great Smokies National Park). Here, select (pre-modern) sites were preserved as a way to recognize a “unique and vanishing culture,” albeit in an idealized (and primitive) manner (Young 2006, 171).

The passage of the Historic Sites Act in 1935 created a national policy to preserve historic sites, including those under the NPS’s jurisdiction. Benign neglect and destruction of historic sites continued, however, despite pressure on the agency to comply with the law (Webb 1987). After the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, large areas in national parks were recognized as part of the “National Wilderness Preservation System,” with the goal of protecting nature and natural systems. Sometimes this meant “rewilding” parts of the designated wilderness areas, leading to neglect or eradication of humanized landscapes associated with them (Cronon



Fig. 1. Planned destruction of a dude ranch in Moraine Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, date unknown (Courtesy Rocky Mountain National Park).

2003, 39). The National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, which required federal agencies to assess their impact on historic properties through a Section 106 review, began to shape a consistent practice of historic preservation in the NPS. In 1980, the National Historic Preservation Act was amended to include Section 110, which expanded and made explicit the responsibilities of federal agencies in identifying and protecting historic properties (Public Law 102-575).

Cultural landscapes were recognized by the NPS in 1981 as a distinct type of cultural resource; the initial methodology focused mainly on rural historic landscapes (Melnick, Spohn and Saxe 1984). A significant development in cultural landscape practice by the NPS was the creation of the National Heritage Areas (NHA) program in 1983, which recognized distinct areas where historic landscape patterns shaped by human activities remain evident. The concept of the cultural landscape for the NPS was formalized in 1994, and in the subsequent years, the agency developed definitions and standards for different types of historic landscapes and treatment methodologies to ensure a consistent practice.¹ Despite all these advances, however, the Secretary of the Interior's Annual Control Report from 1990 identified a "material weakness" with cultural landscape sites on NPS properties, which were noted to be continually "damaged by neglect or deferred work due to insufficient funds or staffing" (National Park Service 2001, 1). To address these deficiencies, the NPS devised five corrective measures in fiscal years 1992 and 1994, of which the Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) was selected for funding (National Park Service 2001).

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE INVENTORY PROGRAM

The CLI is a comprehensive inventory of cultural landscapes in the national park system created to assist park managers in "planning, programming, and recording treatment and management" (National Park Service 2001, 9). The program aims to inventory all historically significant cultural landscapes already on the National Register or potentially eligible for it on all

properties in which the NPS has or plans to acquire legal interest. Drawing largely from the scattered cultural landscape inventories that had previously been conducted on various NPS properties, a three-year initiative commenced in 1994 to design and field-test a cultural landscape inventory methodology (National Park Service 2001). That methodology has now been in use for over a decade and its findings collected in a comprehensive database created in 1996 (Brown et al. 2001).²

The definition of cultural landscapes that the NPS adopted is broad-based to include geographic areas of cultural and natural resources that are associated with historic events, activities, or persons, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values (Birnbaum and Capella-Peters 1996). The agency categorizes resources into four (non-mutually exclusive) types: *historic sites* (significant for associations with important events, activities, and persons); *historic designed* (recognized for style of construction, associated with trends or events in the history of landscape architecture); *historic vernacular* (evolved through use by people whose activities shaped the land); and *ethnographic* (historic resources defined by different cultural groups) (Birnbaum 1994). In practice, the distinction between vernacular and ethnographic landscapes often seems to come down to whether they are associated with the dominant culture (vernacular) or other cultures (ethnographic).

The CLI adopts a four-part hierarchy for subdividing landscapes into manageable components: *landscapes*, *features*, *component landscapes*, and *component features*.³ The application of the hierarchy depends on the character and complexity of the landscape. Complex landscapes may use all four classifications to fully explain their scope and the connections between the parts and the whole; others may need only a few. Originally, the CLI structure included a four-tier inventory methodology to facilitate identification of sites and priorities. These included the baseline Level 0 (*park reconnaissance survey*), followed by Level I (*landscape reconnaissance survey*), II (*landscape analysis and evaluation*), and III (*feature inventory and assessment*).⁴ The completion of Level II required a concurrence by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), at which time the inventory was considered complete. In 2005,

the four-tier methodology was reorganized under a binary “complete” (Level II-certified) and “incomplete” (all else) system, and Level III was discontinued.⁵ With this methodological shift, only complete records are now included in the annual reporting of accomplishments (NPS 2009).⁶ Despite this reorganization, the current structure of the CLI database is much the same as the original (except for the fields associated with levels); it contains more than one hundred fields of data for every site whose inventory has been completed.⁷

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE INVENTORY DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the CLI data for national parks properties is based on data from 2003 and 2009, respectively.⁸ The goals of the analysis were threefold: to determine how the types of cultural landscape in the national parks that have been recognized through the Cultural Landscape Inventory process vary by regions; to explain the range of landscape attributes, types, and time periods; and to establish specifically the degree to which cultural landscapes that are vernacular or ethnographic fare in comparison to historic sites and historic designed. Broader issues around cultural landscapes preservation in the national parks that emerge from the CLI process are discussed in a separate section.

The analysis began by coding all of the landscapes in the database by landscape attribute and landscape type. Attribute was defined as a landscape’s predominant class of use associated with historic significance. The final list included: mining and industry; agriculture; transportation; military; NPS park-development; pre-NPS recreational; archaeological; living ethnographic (those that met the NPS’s definition of ethnographic landscape and were not primarily archaeological in nature); entire settlement (i.e., a whole village or town); and settlement-oriented (i.e., those containing one or a few components of a settlement other than the categories already listed (such as a house, school, or store).

Table 1 lists some of the details for identifying attributes. The research relied on hand-coding each site listed on CLI through a multistep process, which

was later repeated for all new sites in the 2009 dataset. Given the large number of sites (more than 1000), the first step was a relatively automated one focusing on the name of the cultural landscape. This was based on the assumption that names often readily reveal the single most significant attribute of the site (e.g., “Chititu Historic Mining Landscape” is presumably a mining landscape). Through repeated explorations of the CLI database, wordlists typically associated with specific landscape types and attributes were generated. For instance, the attribute “NPS park-development” (i.e., those landscapes whose human-made components consisted of developments by the NPS itself) was suggested by a wide range of terms listed in Table 1.

However, site names did not always clearly indicate landscape type or attribute, which was particularly evident for sites with dominant natural features (e.g., Willow Park, Christine Falls). In addition, certain terms suggested multiple possible attributes (e.g., the term “trail” may or may not suggest park development). Thus, for sites where the name did not clearly indicate a single landscape attribute, additional research was conducted to confirm or to determine attributes. This piece relied primarily on a wide range of NPS publications (both online and print resources), as well as additional archival materials and fieldwork.⁹ Forty entries (4%) could be assigned no attribute; these were primarily landscapes that listed the entire park as a site (e.g., Petrified Forest NP Landscape).¹⁰

The CLI data provided in 2003 did not explicitly state to which of the four landscape types (historic site, historic designed, historic vernacular, or ethnographic) the sites in the incomplete list belonged. So, after landscape attributes were determined, each site was assigned a landscape type. NPS’s four cultural landscape types were reorganized into three for this effort; historic site and historic designed landscapes were collapsed, since these two types share several common characteristics, and very few sites in the national parks derive their significance from association with an individual historic person or event, one of the main criteria for being a historic site. Table 2 shows the correspondence between landscape attribute and landscape type. The same forty entries that could not be assigned an attribute were not coded for type.

Table 1: Coding scheme for landscape attributes

Attribute	Initial automated terms	Hand coding
Agriculture	ranch, farm, agriculture, agricultural, cattle, barn, plantation, orchard, fishery, ditch	“mill” or “canal” to identify those related to agriculture
Mining and industry	mine, mining, furnace, coal, iron, factory, industry, industrial, dam, hydroelectric, lead, borax	“mill” to identify those related to industry
Transportation	road, drive, parkway, highway, “hwy,” railroad, bridge, lighthouse	“canal” or “trail” to identify those related to transportation
Military	military, fort, army	
Settlement-oriented sites	church, residence, store, homestead, cemetery, hospital, school, cabin, house, saloon	All sites containing “cabin” were reviewed to check for “patrol cabins” which were recorded as “park development.”
Park development	ranger, campground, CCC, picnic, developed area, entrance, NPS, maintenance, residential area, housing area, trail shelter, overlook shelter, patrol cabin, museum, headquarters, visitor center, amphitheater	“trail” to identify those developed by the park for visitors
Pre-NPS recreation	chalet, lodge, inn, hotel, resort, stables	All were individually examined to determine whether the property was developed by the NPS, in which case it was coded as “park development.”
Archaeological	archeology, archeological, ancient, pictograph	
Entire settlement	town, settlement, village	All sites named “village” to identify NPS-built tourist villages
Living ethnographic	ethnographic, homeland, <i>ahupua’a</i> (the Hawai’ian term for a communal land district), <i>tipi</i> , native	All sites with “native” were double-checked.

Table 2: Correspondence between landscape types and landscape attributes

Landscape type	Included landscape attributes
Historic site/designated	Transportation Settlement-oriented sites Military Park development Pre-park recreational
Historic vernacular	Agriculture Mining and industry Entire settlement
Ethnographic	Archaeological Living ethnographic

