A south-west perspective on the United States National Park Service Cultural Landscapes Program

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In the United States, Jill Cowley is responsible for the co-ordination of the cultural landscapes program for the National Park Service within the south-west cluster area, which includes most of New Mexico, Southern Arizona, Texas, and Oklahoma. From July to December 1996 she served as visiting lecturer at Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW, where her responsibilities included preparation of an instructional module on cultural landscapes.

Introduction to the south-west

Northern New Mexico is an area of cultural richness, density, and diversity. American Indian people, including the Pueblo and Navajo people, have lived with the land in this region from the beginning of time. Pueblo culture is characterised by concentrated settlements (pueblos) surrounded by farming areas, and Navajo culture is characterised by more dispersed settlements within traditional grazing areas. For American indigenous people, like Australian indigenous people, the land is animated by ancestral Creator Beings. In the words of Mamie Salt,

Every inch of ground, all vegetation and the fauna on it are considered sacred.

There are no places that are holier than others. There are so many stories that go with the land that it would take more than 20 years to tell them.

Hispanic people have lived in the region for many generations, from the early days of the Spanish entradas (expeditions of conquest), and the Spanish mission period in the 1600s. Traditional roots of Spanish culture are evident today in the region’s rural and urban areas. By the mid-1800s, Anglo-Europeans were well established in the area, with the coming of the railroad, large-scale ranching and growing tourism activity. In his book, The West as Living Space, Wallace Stegner expresses the challenge of settling in this arid region:

In the West it is impossible to be unconscious of or indifferent to space ... out in the boondocks it engulfs us. And it does contribute to individualism, if only because in that much emptiness people have the dignity of rareness and must do much of what they do without help, and because self-reliance becomes a social imperative, part of a code.

The numerous national park areas which have been established in New Mexico and the greater south-west preserve landscapes relating to all cultural groups.

Program aims and activities

The overall aim of the National Parks Service (NPS) Cultural Landscapes Program is the protection, preservation and interpretation of cultural landscapes within the national park system, within a framework of research, planning and stewardship. In addition, the Preservation Assistance branch of the NPS Cultural Resources Program provides assistance to those managing cultural landscapes outside the NPS system.

Within the larger context, where all land surfaces can be considered cultural landscapes due to the extent of human association with and use of the land, the NPS Parks Cultural Landscapes Program focuses its preservation efforts on landscapes within NPS areas which are determined to be significant, and are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Cultural landscapes can range from small urban gardens to larger rural areas to landscapes where human manipulation is not visibly obvious. Within a conceptual and policy framework that has evolved within an Anglo-European cultural viewpoint, substantial efforts are being made for all cultural groups and perspectives to be equally represented.
Four overlapping types of cultural landscapes are identified: historic designed (similar to 'clearly defined'); historic vernacular (similar to 'organically-evolved, continuing'); ethnographic landscapes, landscapes with significance to contemporary communities with traditional ties to the land; and historic sites, significant for association with specific historic events, activities or persons. Ethnographic landscapes and historic sites can be similar to 'associated' landscapes.

Following are some of the specific aims and activities of the south-west cultural landscapes program, which are in large part based on the service-wide program.6

**Aim:** Develop a common understanding of, and language for, cultural landscape resources, and systematically identify all significant cultural landscapes within the region.

**Activity:** The south-west office participates in the ongoing, service-wide, computerised cultural landscapes inventory program. The goal of this program is to be able to describe and compare cultural landscapes, not to overly standardise our experience or understanding of landscapes.

**Aim:** Provide guidance for the development of recommendations for the management of park cultural landscapes, based on thoroughly researched statements of significance and integrity and the analysis of character-defining features.

**Activity:** The south-west office participates in the service-wide effort to complete cultural landscape reports (CLR) for significant cultural landscapes. A technical manual to guide completion of CLRs is currently being prepared by the Washington office.

**Aim:** Equal inclusion of indigenous, traditional, and under-represented groups.

**Activity:** While the NPS Ethnography Program has responsibility for ethnographic research on places special to contemporary groups, including Tribes and Pueblos, close co-ordination between ethnographic and cultural landscape research encourages a holistic understanding of landscape uses and associations being applied to park planning and management of cultural landscapes. Cultural landscape research routinely involves interviews with current or previous residents or neighbours; ideally, in addition, the CLR team includes an ethnographer to ensure that the story of the landscape from the associated community's perspective is included. Ensuring the accurate representation of women's contribution to the making and maintenance of cultural landscapes is another important effort within this aim.

Additionally, the program provides assistance to park planning, to facilitate the use of cultural landscape research in the planning process, and to park management, to assist parks with research and to work with parks' staff on solutions to design and management issues.
Examples of the range of cultural landscape projects

The overlapping cultural landscape layers at Pecos National Historical Park in north-central New Mexico were identified and evaluated in a study completed as part of the overall planning effort for the recently-expanded park. The park encompasses ethnographic, vernacular, and designed landscapes associated with Pueblo, Spanish, and Anglo occupation. An analysis and evaluation of the significance, integrity, and character-defining elements of component landscapes within the park was completed. The study provided park management with recommendations for resources management and the development of visitor opportunities throughout the park. The next step is to undertake more detailed studies of component landscapes, such as the Spanish Colonial Riverscape.

Long-distance historic trails and heritage areas are two kinds of larger resource areas which lend themselves to a cultural landscape approach. The Special Resource Study for Route 66, the famous highway which once ran continuously from Chicago to Los Angeles, discusses character-defining features of this linear landscape element. To the east in Louisiana is the Cane River Creole Heritage Area, a complex rural vernacular landscape which includes traditional villages and large plantation complexes. Conservation efforts will be spearheaded by local communities and organisations, with assistance from the NPS during the formative period.

To the west, within the Colorado Plateau area, is Canyon de Chelly National Monument, a landscape of supreme importance to the Navajo people with strong associative and historic significance. The NPS area was superimposed on Navajo land when the monument was established in 1931. The Navajo Nation manages natural resources, and the NPS is responsible for managing cultural resources, visitor use programs, and park operations. Studies of the Navajo landscape at Canyon de Chelly, which involve interviews with canyon residents, have increased the understanding of what places are special for Navajos who live within and outside monument boundaries, and the nature of the Navajo historic landscape within the monument.

Cultural landscape research and analysis has been applied to a number of design projects in parks. For instance, when the Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital building and grounds in Johnson City, Texas, was rehabilitated for use as the park visitor centre, the historic planting layout of native oak clusters was retained.

The National Park Service is involved in the protection of places significant due to their association with nationally-renowned artists. For example, the NPS was asked by Congress to study ways to commemorate Georgia O’Keeffe’s contribution to art. Within northern New Mexico, a landscape significant to Indian, Hispanic and Anglo-European communities, the relationship between O’Keeffe and the places she painted is one of many character-defining elements.