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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Pacific West Regional Office
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700
Oakland, California 94607
(510) 817-1300

IN REPLY REFER TO:
H14 (PWRO-RD)

July 30, 2001

Memorandum

To: Directorate, All Superintendents, All Regional Leads, Pacific West Region

From: Regional Director, Pacific West Region

Subject: Symbolism of NPS Arrowhead

Please see the attached. It is an important bit of NPS tradition.

Please make it available so that all NPS employees can see it, and make it available in all orientation kinds of training you give.

Thank you.

/s/ John
(original signature on file)

John J. Reynolds

Attachment

cc: w/attach.
Ed Carlin, Albright Training Center, P.O. Box 477, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

The Official National Park Service (Arrowhead) Emblem

HISTORY

The Arrowhead was authorized as the official National Park Service emblem by the Secretary of the interior on July 20, 1951.

It was designed by a team of Herbert Maier, Sanford Hill, Cecil Doty, and Walter Rivers from Region IV (now Pacific West). They had been assigned this task by Director Wirth in 1951. They were working from the ideas of Aubrey V. Neasham, a historian in Region IV who first suggested the Arrowhead, and submitted a rough sketch of it, to Director Drury in 1949. Neasham believed that "an arrowhead, or a tree or a buffalo" would be an emblem that depicted the primary functions of the Service rather than the Sequoia cone that was then in use. In fact, prior to Neasham's suggestion, a contest had been held to design an emblem for the Service. Although Dudley Bayliss was awarded the \$50 prize for his entry, his design was not used because, although "good and well presented," it did not symbolize "what the parks were all about." On the other hand, Director Drury thought that Neasham's design had symbolism and the merit of simplicity.

Oregon Caves National Monument published an information folder in 1952 that, likely, was the first use of the Arrowhead. This was followed by instructions for its use on signs issued in September that same year. Also in September 1952, the Arrowhead became a part of the Service's uniform.

On March 20, 1954, Director Conrad Wirth approved a slightly revised Arrowhead that did not change the design elements but maintained its symbolism and simplicity while adding a "crispness" or more finite detail. The correct and proper colors of the Arrowhead were also specified at this time.

The Arrowhead has been in use since then with only one serious attempt to do away with it. The 1966 Parkscape, U.S.A. program of legendary Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., introduced a logo of three interlocking triangles surrounding three dots that had been designed by Chermayeff and Geismar Associates of New York. In 1968, when Secretary of the Interior Udall adopted a new Departmental Seal, the Parkscape logo was to replace the Arrowhead. Before all of this could take place, however, the new Secretary of the Interior, Walter Hickel, returned to the historical Departmental Seal and, in May 1969, the Arrowhead became, again, the Official National Park Service Emblem.

Service mythology holds that Director Hartzog reportedly said that the worst mistake he made as Director was trying to change the Arrowhead! What could prompt such a strong reaction? Perhaps it is the simplicity and symbolism of the Arrowhead, or as Director Wirth thought, because it was an idea of, and designed by Service members, it says what the parks are all about, visually and emotionally. To the women and men of the Service, this is important.

SYMBOLISM

Although not found in an official document, by tradition it is accepted that the elements of the Arrowhead emblem symbolize the major facets of the National Park System. The Sequoia tree and bison represent vegetation and wildlife, the mountains and water are emblematic of scenic and recreational values, and the arrowhead shape represents historical and archeological values.

Legend has it that the Sequoia tree is modeled around either the General Sherman or General Grant tree.

An accompanying item of Service mythology (which, as Joseph Campbell documented, has great power) is the symbolism of the declining range and population of the bison represented by its outline form and the small piece of grassland upon which it stands.

The Arrowhead is a unified collection of symbols that represent the National Park System. It is not, nor is it intended to be, a "picture" or artistic rendition of some imagined scene. Rather, as Aubrey Neasham first suggested, it is an emblem that depicts the primary functions of the National Park Service. The arrowhead shape, representing cultural resources, is especially meaningful as it encompasses the other symbols, just as cultural resources are integral to virtually every unit of the System, regardless of their natural or recreational resources. The Arrowhead, just as the National Park system does, brings these together into a unified whole. It is like the mortar that binds the bricks of a building into a common mass having unity and strength.

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