



## History of NPS Visual Identity

Design guidelines are used to create the visual identities of major corporations and many public agencies. Guidelines direct the appearance of a broad range of communications and help to establish a distinctive public persona. Although the National Park Service has not historically had formal guidelines, the NPS identity has evolved from a mix of influences.

### Attire

From the earliest days until today, uniforms have been a primary expression of NPS identity. The first uniforms in national parks were worn by soldiers sent in 1866 to protect Yellowstone from vandals. To help the army enforce prohibitions against hunting, civilian "scouts" were hired, thus laying the foundation of the National Park Service. The scouts were not uniformed, but displayed their authority (after 1894) in the form of a badge. Not until the separation of the national parks and national reserves in 1905—and the introduction of uniforms into the latter by the Forest Service—did the park rangers give serious thought to their own identity.



*Ranger Keith Miller and his park patrol car at Mount Rainier National Park, Washington in the 1950s. (NPS Historic Photo Collection)*

As the rangers' desire for a national identity mounted, department officials waffled, first sanctioning one uniform style and then another. In fact, for a while there were two official uniforms: one forest green, the other olive drab. Finally, with the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 and the arrival of its first director, Stephen Mather, serious efforts were launched to develop standards of dress. The culmination of these efforts was the Uniform Regulations of 1920.

With the new regulations, all articles of the uniform—from hat to shoes—were covered. Since their adoption in 1920, NPS uniform standards have been periodically updated in response to changes in fashion, materials, and organizational needs. The uniform today, however, is basically the same as that envisioned in 1920. It now has shoes, trousers, and skirts instead of boots and breeches, but there are far more similarities than differences. The uniform, with its distinctive flat hat, remains a very recognizable public symbol of the agency.

### Architecture

Although not intended as a primary expression of identity, architecture has long helped to define the NPS style. Two periods of intense construction account for the emergence of the architectural forms commonly associated with national and state parks. The first was the result of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the later years of the Depression. The style, typically called "rustic," is characterized by the stone and rough-hewn timbers most often used in the western parks, or the adobe typical of the Southwest. From administration buildings and park residences to bridges, fire grates, and water fountains, many fine examples of this style remain today.

The work is largely the legacy of architect Herbert Maier, who worked as a consultant to the NPS during the 1920s and 1930s and later as an employee.

Examples of Maier's work, along with those of Dorothy Waugh, Norman T. Newton, and Albert Good were published in 1938 in a book titled *Park and Recreation Structures*. In the introduction to the book, then NPS Director Arno Cammerer wrote: "In any area in which the preservation of beauty of Nature is a primary purpose, every proposed modification of the natural landscape deserves to be thoughtfully considered. A basic objective of those who are entrusted with development of such areas is to hold these modifications to a minimum and so to design them that, besides being attractive to look upon, they appear to belong to and be a part of their setting."



Yavapai Point Trailside Museum on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in 1929. The structure, which was dedicated in July 1928, was designed by architect Herbert C. Maier. The building is now called the Yavapai Observation Station, and is still in use today. (NPS Photo by George Grant)

The second period of intense construction activity in national parks began in 1955 and continued until 1966—hence the project's Mission 66 name. During this era, over \$1 billion was dedicated to the construction of administrative buildings, comfort stations, service buildings, employee housing units, and more than 100 new visitor centers. The style of the new visitor centers contrasted starkly with the rustic look that then dominated NPS architecture. These new buildings were modern in their form and material, referencing contemporary corporate styles rather than the simpler style of CCC construction. While most of the designs aspired to the purest expression of modern form, some made efforts to relate to the local vernacular. Still others, like the Gateway Arch in St. Louis or the Wright Brothers Visitor Center in North Carolina, derived their inspiration from the symbolic character of the park's theme.

Many of the new visitor centers were distinguished by their location. Rather than attempting to blend with the park landscape, most Mission 66 visitor centers were prominently positioned convenient to the park's primary features and conspicuous to park visitors. This new determination to interpret a park's resources and to serve the needs of both visitors and park personnel is perhaps the lasting legacy of the Mission 66 program.

## Graphic Design

The most notable example of NPS graphic design is its arrowhead logo. Along with the ranger uniform, the arrowhead is the principal means by which the NPS is identified by the public. Surprising to some, the arrowhead has been the official emblem of the National Park Service only since 1951.

The design of the NPS arrowhead is credited to Herbert Maier and his staff, who were working under orders from newly appointed director, Conrad Wirth. Their design was based on one submitted by NPS historian Aubrey Neasham. In about 1949, Neasham suggested in a letter to NPS Director Newton Drury that the Service needed an emblem that expressed its primary function, "like an Arrowhead, or a tree, or a buffalo." With his letter Neasham included a rough sketch of an elongated arrowhead with a pine tree appearing within it. When Conrad Wirth became director in 1951, he turned Neasham's design over to Herbert Maier, then assistant director of what is now the Pacific West Region.



The arrowhead was formally authorized on July 20, 1951, revised slightly in 1954, and (to forestall inappropriate commercial uses) published in the Federal Register in 1962. Although never explained by its designers, the logo's symbols—the arrowhead, sequoia tree, and mountainscape—are assumed to represent the nation's natural and historic legacy and the NPS role in preserving them. The inclusion of the bison is intended to connect the NPS with the Department of the Interior.

In 1966, at the conclusion of Mission 66, Director George B. Hartzog, Jr. introduced a new symbol to the NPS identity. The logo was a stylized device with three interlocking triangles surrounding three small dots, designed by the New York firm of Chemayeff and Geismar. The new symbol reflected the belief that, just as the rustic architecture of the 1920s and



1930s had been supplanted by the more modern styles of the Mission 66 period, so, too, should the Service's nostalgic graphic symbols be replaced by more contemporary ones. But few liked the new "triangles and cannonballs" symbol, and it was eventually removed from use.

1968-1969

Since its introduction in 1951, use of the arrowhead logo was not well defined or carefully enforced. As a consequence, numerous unauthorized versions came into use, and in some cases, the correct arrowhead was used inappropriately. In 2000, in response to recommendations from the NPS Message Project, the National Leadership Council (NLC) directed that "exact standards should be developed for the appearance and use of the Arrowhead." The decision was made in the belief that wider use of the arrowhead and greater consistency in its appearance would contribute to the public's fuller understanding and greater recognition of what the National Park Service does.

In 2001, design refinements were made to the arrowhead to better facilitate its use in a wide variety of media and a broad range of sizes. Simplified versions of the arrowhead were created for use at small sizes, in lower resolution media, and on highway signage. A more richly detailed version was also created in a style reminiscent of early engravings for use in larger sizes and in higher resolution media. Also, the field on which the bison stands was extended and the way the bison is rendered was strengthened to improve visibility at small sizes. All versions of the new arrowhead were made available in digital format.



2001

In the mid-1970s, following a major publishing effort related to the Bicentennial celebration, the NPS Division of Publications at Harpers Ferry Center reevaluated its entire program. With the help of noted designer Massimo Vignelli, new standards were developed for a full range of interpretive brochures, books, and posters. Known as the Unigrid Program, the work is considered one of the most significant examples of public sector graphic design in recent years. In 1984, the program received a Presidential Design Award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

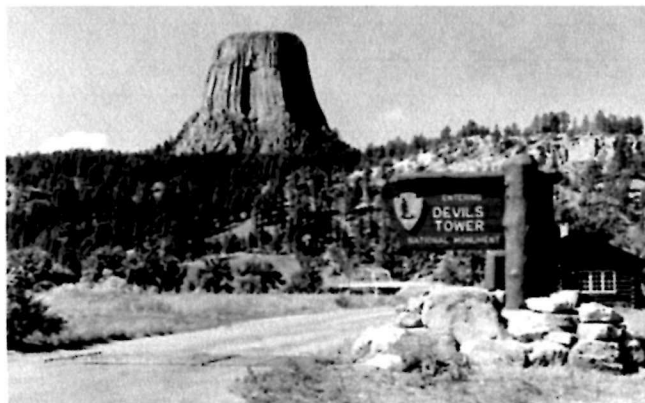
The Unigrid style is characterized by bold black bands, the use of two specific typefaces, grid based layouts with strong horizontal orientations, and a limited range of publication sizes. The strategy behind the program is to standardize design so that efforts can be focused on visual content and editorial quality, and especially, to provide the most economical means of managing a high volume program that produces nearly 30 million brochures every year. The approach also strengthens the overall NPS identity and takes advantage of the savings and efficiencies that come with systematic design and production. In 1990, the Unigrid standards were extended to the design of NPS outdoor exhibits.

## Signs

The way the National Park Service presents itself to those who visit parks says much about the agency, its mission, and our work. In fact, communicating effectively with the public is part of NPS work, essential to its mission, and is one of the agency's proudest traditions.

Signs are the most frequently used means of communicating with park visitors. Entrance signs offer greetings, welcoming visitors and reminding them that the place they are entering is part of a system of parks cared for by the National Park Service. Other signs guide visitors as they travel to or within parks, inspire them to understand and appreciate what they encounter, remind them of their role in caring for parks, direct them to various events and landmarks, and help them have a safe and pleasant stay.

As early as 1926, the National Park Service issued standards to ensure that its signs communicated consistently and effectively. The standards were periodically updated and eventually replaced, first in 1940, again in 1972, and once again in 1988. In the 1990s, efforts began to create sign standards that were more detailed and more comprehensive than any that had previously existed. The New York firm of Meeker & Associates was hired to develop sign standards for the National Park Service that



would address a complete range of sign types. Meeker had developed similar standards for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that are considered a hallmark of public-sector sign design.

*Entrance sign and ranger station at Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming, in 1956 (Photo by Wayne W. Bryant, NPS Historic Photo Collection)*

Meeker's work led to the adoption of the UniGuide Sign Standards in September 2003—a comprehensive set of standards for the design and fabrication of a broad range of signs in or related to national parks. Originally developed for Yosemite National Park, the system includes standards for three sign types: identification signs for park entry portals and major destinations; roadway guide signs to direct and regulate vehicular traffic; and small panel signs for information about rules and regulations, resource protection, pedestrian wayfinding, and interpretation.

Today, the NPS UniGuide Sign Standards help establish the National Park Service organizational identity, and help park managers meet their dual responsibilities of protecting parks and those who visit them.