

CULTURAL RESOURCE TASK FORCE REPORT  
TO THE ADVISORY BOARD  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1981

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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A headline article in the July 31st, 1981 issue of The Wall Street Journal entitled "Smithsonian Decides To Sort All The Stuff In Its Messy Closets" describes the tremendous problem facing the Nation's largest Museum as it begins to bring order out of confusion to their invaluable hoard of things. With the help of several hundred temporarily hired technicians they have begun the first complete inventory of the holdings of the Smithsonian's treasures, viewed by many millions each year.

It is estimated that over 78 million objects will be counted, stored in a new 28 million dollar superwarehouse equipped with smoke detectors, air filters, humidity controls, etc. These controls will be monitored by computer and linked to fire and police stations. Extra protection is necessary because, unlike a business whose inventory is moved out and replaced periodically, the Smithsonian has no other supplier.

A similar banner article might well be written about the National Park Service's messy closets. Next to the Smithsonian, the National Park Service has the largest uncatalogued and uncared for collection of irreplaceable cultural objects in the Federal Government.

In 1979 a Committee of the National Park Service Advisory Board and Council was appointed to study the problem of Cultural Resource Management in the Park Service. A report was submitted and among the recommendations was a request that further studies be made. The resulting report was presented at the October Board Meeting in 1980 which included 20 major recommendations.

Since 1979, the Directors of the National Park Service, encouraged by the Secretaries of the Interior, have been slowly implementing some of these recommendations. Many, however, have been, for reasons of finance and lack of personnel, left for future implementation,

and some have been questioned by the Director and his Staff.

Secretary Watt, in his memorandum to the Director of the Park Service dated July 6, 1981, wrote:

"I commend to every employee of the National Park Service a re-reading of the first Section of the Act of August 25, 1916, which set forth the fundamental purpose of parks ..... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Secretary Watt requested that a Task Force be established to review the handling of Cultural Resources and the Parks Program. This report will review the specific recommendations given to the Director in the 1980 Report, comment on the areas of achievements and the areas that need action.

It should be pointed out that prehistory and history have, since the beginning, been part of the National Park Service's concern. Since 1935, when Congress passed the Historic Sites Act, and 1966, with the National Historic Preservation Act, a substantial and complex body of law has developed pertaining to our Nation's historic landmarks and the Service's role in handling the Nation's heritage.

The elimination of the Heritage Conservation & Recreation Service returned archaeological and historic preservation programs as well as the Landmarks Program to the National Park Service early in 1981. This now places an enormous burden on the National Park Service for it must be the developer of what amounts to a National Program in prehistoric and historic preservation and conservation. (A large issue, but an important one, is the role and the relationships the newly-talked-position of a Department of Interior Archaeologist will have.)

The problem is complicated by the fact that one of the G.A.O.

Recommendations (April 22, 1981) to the Interior & Insular Affairs Committee is that guidance is needed at the Departmental level. This raises important questions as to the National Park Service's role in archaeological preservation.

This Task Force recommends that the National Parks Service, the Federal Agency with the greatest experience in that area, play a leadership role in the development of a Federal Archaeological & Cultural Conservation Program as called for by the G.A.O. We further recommend that to accomplish this the Secretary of the Interior should seek an amendment to the Archaeologic & Historic Preservation Act clarifying Interior's rulemaking authority.

The identification and designation process of Historic Landmarks will also be once again administered by the Division of History. This, too, was a major and important step forward, and one that makes it even more important for the History Division of the National Park Service to be well organized and competently managed.

Of utmost importance has been the establishment in the Washington Office of an Assistant Director for Cultural Resources and his Staff, including a Chief Historian, Chief Archaeologist, Chief Historical Architect, & Chief Curator.

The Task Force reiterates its concern over the apparent inequality between the Natural & Social Sciences and urges that thought be given to the problem of how best to equalize the importance of the two Science divisions.

When Secretary Watt said in his Memorandum of July 6, 1981 that "special attention should be placed on bringing old line Parks up to standard" it should be recognized that Mesa Verde, Casa Grande, Chaco Canyon and many of our battlefields and Historic areas should be placed in the category of "Old Line Parks". Thirty-five natural

area Parks have historic buildings of intrinsic significance and there are hundreds of buildings of lesser importance.

This is the first time that the Service has had a complete staff in Washington concerned with establishing the Rules & Regulations for the Conservation of all Cultural Resources on a Service-wide basis. However, we note that the Service still does not have a unified system of approaching Cultural Resource Management as recommended in the 1980 Report. For example, the Southeast Region recently proposed an organizational arrangement that will take the rehabilitation and repair of historic structures out of the Division of Cultural Resources and put it into the Maintenance Division. The specialist in Historic Architecture will be working in a division with mechanics, plumbers and house painters. Important as maintenance workers may be, they cannot be expected to be aware of the special needs of historic house conservation and the maintenance of historic integrity.

This Task Force believes that the Regional Offices must have a Cultural Resource structure parallel to WASO. This could be done by a Park Service Task Force ordered to evaluate the WASO system as it would apply to the Regions. Once the decisions had been made, a unified system could be established. As this is accomplished, the Washington Office should issue a Special Directive clearly defining for Regional & Park Managers, the legislative basis for the conservation and preservation management of archaeological and historical resources on all Park System lands and establishing standards of accountability and responsibility that managers must meet.

The Task Force feels strongly the need to emphasize again that Cultural Resource Management is a total process from identification through study to treatment, whether it be an archaeological site, a building or a Museum object. It is necessary to have the work done by

trained professional personnel. To break away any part of this process from Cultural Resource Management has adverse effect on our resources.

For years, Museum objects have been located in the Regions in the Interpretation Division. As a result, objects get attention only as interpretive devices and are not considered resources as are the structures and archaeological sites. As a result of this, objects and collections are in deplorable disarray today on a Service wide basis. The majority are uncatalogued, not properly cared for and, in certain instances, subject to loss by deterioration or theft.

That the recommendations of the 1980 Report calling for more and better trained curators need to be implemented goes without saying. The Park Service Management might well study the way in which the Smithsonian Institution accomplished its new system of cataloguing and curating its vast collections. Certainly the need for curators is as great as ever. Surely the furnishings of Theodore Roosevelt's home are as important to curate - and the books in the Adams Library to care for - as is the counting of desks, typewriters and trucks in the Northeast Regional area.

Never-the-less, in the 20 year period between 1960 and 1980, with the addition of over 150 Cultural areas, there have been a decrease in the number of trained curators.

The 1980 Committee's recommendation for Area or bi-Regional Service Centers not only for the basing of specialists whose professional services are thereby close to the resources but also to meet the special requirements of object and structure protection imposed by environmental factors has met with opposition from management who felt, with some justification, that a Research & Service Center handling the problems of more than one Region would complicate management unnecessarily.

This Task Force therefore recommends that the National Park

Service be divided into Seven Regions instead of 10. The 10 Regional boundaries, as they are now established, were defined during the 1970's and are not environmentally relevant nor historically pertinent.

This Task Force suggests that in this time of restricted Federal funding, Seven Regions might be established that would be environmentally and culturally relevant. Each Region would have its own Service Center where cultural items from similar environments could be catalogued, conserved and cared for. This would also assure the Regional Directors better controls over their Service Centers. That the monetary savings would be significant goes without saying.

The Task Force endorses again the assignment of Research Historians in Washington and the Archaeologists, Historical Architects and Architectural Conservators to the Regionally located Service Centers closer to the resources on which they are working.

The Task Force reaffirms the previous Committee's position that acceptable procedures should be developed by the Chief Curator of Collection and the Regional Curators to achieve a system-wide uniformity in the processing of material culture. We reaffirm our belief that proper and professional care of material objects extends from the most precious to the least impressive specimens. The double standard of treatment espoused by the Harpers Ferry Conference is, we believe, in error and should not be used. It is impossible to know in advance if a lowly object may not be of great importance in illustrating a basic idea.

The Task Force believes that in the area of data control and retrieval, early attention be given to the adoption of a National Computerized Inventory and Collections such as developed by the Smithsonian Institution and that physical resources should be checked periodically to ascertain the condition of objects and to determine the causes

of deterioration if that is taking place. This is important for all classified sites.

The Task Force views with dismay the reduction, if not elimination, of the Publishing Programs of the Cultural Resource Division and recommends its resumption. We are also worried over the lack of control over the archiving of National Park Service protocols, field data, photographs, drawings, maps, etc. resulting from Park activities. The Library at Harpers Ferry does not have a complete file on the Historical Studies made by the Service - a most distressing lack for a Center devoted to historic conservation and Museum displays. Knowledge about the collections requires comprehensive knowledge of the studies made that resulted in acquiring an area, structure or the artifacts for the Service.

The Task Force views with alarm the latent antagonism of some Service personnel against research. This is reflected in the budget-making process at the highest level as well as at Park or Monument level. Superintendents can elect to close their areas to qualified investigators and use Park Service Interpreters who may or may not be trained scientists to undertake research. That this antagonism continues is most unfortunate and involves such great National Parks as Grand Canyon as well as smaller areas.

The Task Force believes that scientific research should be undertaken and that it should be undertaken by trained and competent scientists whose studies can then be of use in interpreting the area.

Some of the recommendations to be found in the 1980 Cultural Resource Planning Committee Report are being implemented, some are being considered, and some have been disregarded. The Task Force recommends that a high level Interior Department Committee review that Report and this one, as well as the G.A.O. study, and other in-House



recommendations, and to follow up on those ideas, thoughts and recommendations that are found to be practical and useful for the better operation and care of the areas that tell us of our Nation's Heritage.

The 1979 Report on Cultural Resources, the 1980 Report, and this Task Force Report have many ideas in common. That the Directors of the National Park Service have acted on some of the important ideas and recommendations is most encouraging. That some of the recommendations will be acted on in the future as funding becomes available is unavoidable, but still a hindrance to proper management of the resources. All of the ideas proposed in the 3 Reports stem, in part, from Park Service personnel, specialists on Cultural Resources, and from papers resulting from conferences and studies made by the Service. It is to be hoped that the Service will adopt the proposals as fast as they are able to, so that the less-than-ideal care and concern for Cultural Resources can be eliminated and the Service gain the leadership role it deserves to play.

Present Regions in the National Park Service and the number of  
Park Service Areas in each Region:

1. National Capital . . . . . (28)
2. North Atlantic . . . . . (34)
3. Mid Atlantic . . . . . (25)
4. Southeast. . . . . (51)
5. Midwest. . . . . (27)
6. Rocky Mountain . . . . . (40)
7. Southwest. . . . . (37)
8. Western. . . . . (43)
9. Pacific Northwest. . . . . (15)
10. Alaska . . . . . (16)

Proposed Regions in the National Park Service and the number of  
Park Service Areas in each Region:

1. National Capital . . . . . (28)
2. Northeast. . . . . (64)
3. Southeast. . . . . (67)
4. Rocky Mountain-Plains. . . . . (53)
5. Southwest. . . . . (48)
6. Pacific. . . . . (44)
7. Alaska . . . . . (16)