

Landscapes, Preservation, and the National Park Ideal

An understanding of today's controversies at Point Reyes National Seashore begins with a broader look at the transformation that takes place when a landscape is preserved as a park—specifically, what exactly the public expects from parks and why. National parks are among the most popular destinations in the United States, and many of us carry fond memories of our camping trips with family, or backpacking with friends, usually augmented by loads of photographs. Yet most of us don't really think much about what parks *are*, or how they got to be that way—their role is anticipated but unspoken: there will be scenic views, interesting wildlife, trails, historic markers or interpretive signs, and rangers in funny green hats. But where do these expectations come from? How do we choose which places “should” be parks, and how does that designation and management affect what we find there? In many ways these expectations have been built or “written” into the landscape itself through the process of park preservation and management.

And yet these expectations for parks often do not easily accommodate working landscapes, places that have been shaped by the work and lives of many individuals over generations, maintaining a distinct character yet responding to the changing needs of their residents.¹ Early parks, established in the nineteenth century, did not celebrate the working landscape, but rather overwrote it; Native inhabitants were usually forcibly removed, and new settlers prevented from claiming homesteads, so that the park's magnificent natural scenery could be preserved

unchanging into the future. In the twentieth century, however, Congress established more and more parks in inhabited places. Understanding what happens when parks are carved out of lived-in landscapes, such as Point Reyes, first requires us to understand the complexity that any given landscape represents, to explore the preservationist impulse, and to see how preservation began to shape the earliest parks into an ideal, an image of what a park *ought* to be, that continues to influence park management today.

LANDSCAPES AS INTERACTION OF PEOPLE AND PLACE

To start, just what *is* a landscape? If asked to imagine a landscape, many of us would envision a view, perhaps of rolling hills or a mountain in the distance, or even a city skyline. Defining that landscape is more difficult, as it is more than the physical ground itself. Even the most natural-looking of landscapes almost invariably include some degree of human influence—trails, campsites, or any other human-made structure or modification to the land—as well as elements of personal and/or cultural meaning. Two visitors standing side by side at a Civil War battlefield site may “see” landscapes with different meanings, if one visitor’s ancestors fought for the Union while the other comes from a formerly Confederate family, or if one visitor is white and the other black. Similarly, a small town looks very different to a tourist stopping to buy gas than to a person who grew up there. Our experience of a landscape is a combination of what physically lies before us and what is in our heads; how we think and feel about what we see matters, and these issues in turn influence how we interpret, use, and change what we see.

Through constant reinterpretations and changes over time, landscapes gradually come to reflect the ideas and values of the people who live within their areas. Thus a landscape can be thought of as the “unwitting autobiography” of those people, filled with cultural meanings that can be read, if you know what to look for.² In a recent survey of the field, Paul Groth describes landscape as “the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning.”³ This idea of landscape draws attention to human actions that result in the constant, day-to-day manipulation, negotiation, and contestation of landscape meanings. As a tangible combination of the natural environment and its social, political, and historical context, landscape is “not so much artifact as *in process* of

construction and reconstruction.”⁴ Even an area designated as a national park and protected in perpetuity continues to shift, not only with such physical variables as changing management regimes or tourist densities, but also with variables of meaning, such as whether the nation is at war or peace, whether neighboring communities feel enriched or limited by the park’s presence, and so on. As an element of study, landscape “provides a door to understanding how individuals and societies perceive their environs and how they behave toward them.”⁵

The term *landscape* can refer to the physical earth itself, with the combination of natural and human elements upon it, or a view of the same—or it can mean a representation of a landscape, such as a photograph, painting, or description in a novel. The physical landscape itself may also be symbolic of cultural ideas, either local or more generally held. A landscape is not just a passive stage on which people act out their lives, but a representational and symbolic space in which the dominant social order is materially inscribed and, by implication, legitimized. By way of example, French sociologist Henri Lefebvre asks whether religious ideology would be nearly as compelling “if it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle?”⁶ Lefebvre also asserts that the spatial practices of everyday life contain traces of older traditions otherwise obscured, constrained, and reshaped by powerful societal influences, such as corporations or government agencies. These traces represent the possibility of recovery from the ways in which modernity and capitalism alienate us from our own lives.⁷ This desire to recover the past suggests one reason why “everyday” landscapes have recently become the focus of many preservation efforts; it also suggests why those efforts—particularly via landscape planning and design, including parks management—can have troubling consequences.

Thinking of a space as a “landscape” changes assumptions about who, and what, belongs in it. The process of creating a particular landscape framework through which to view the world puts the framer in the authoritative position of defining who or what is “in” or “out” of the picture; it also sets up the framework as something that seems “to exist apart from, and prior to, the particular individuals or actions it enframes. Such a framework would appear, in other words, as order itself.”⁸ Defining the world as a series of landscapes allows those with power to define certain aspects of the world as important, while ignoring others, thus shaping and controlling which social relations may be expressed or reproduced. In terms of national parks, NPS management selects certain aspects of park landscapes as the primary focus of each

place, while overlooking or downplaying others, thus shaping and controlling which meanings may be expressed or reproduced.

Official landscapes not only reflect power relations, but also function to “naturalize” those relations, to make them appear to be unquestionable, taken-for-granted parts of reality, rather than social relations that could be altered or improved upon. The word *landscape*, like *nature*, *culture*, and *nation*, historically contains unspoken or unrecognized meanings that bolster the legitimacy of those who exercise power in society. These meanings can also, of course, be manipulated to create new power relationships. All four words, according to geographer Kenneth Olwig, “tend to be used as if their meanings were unambiguous and God-given, thus ‘naturalizing’ the particular conception which remains hidden behind a given usage.”⁹ By freezing the constant shifting of social struggles into material form, landscapes “solidify social relations, making them seem natural and enduring.”¹⁰

Marxist and Hegelian theories separate the concept of nature into two categories: “first nature,” that which is original and prehuman, and “second nature,” which consists of human alterations that overlay and remake first nature. When second nature is confused with, or defined as, first nature, the human activities and intentions that produced it become veiled, blending into the primordialism of first nature.¹¹ Yet the identification and management of universalized “natural” objects is always political; that which is natural is “‘fixed’ in specific ways from particular perspectives and with particular implications for how we might behave toward ‘it’ and each other.”¹² Because they are defined as natural, those political associations and exertions in the landscape are disguised and made to appear as elemental as the rocks and trees found there.

Several landscape scholars have shown how powerful social actors obscure their actions by associating second-nature manipulations of landscapes with pristine first nature. Olwig, for example, shows how sixteenth-century courts in northern Europe redefined traditional conceptions of custom and law by creating popular presentations of landscape scenery, both in artistic works, such as paintings and theater, and in the physical landscape, with formal gardens and estates. These efforts, which emphasized geometry and spatial aesthetics according to the idealized past of imperial Rome, created “‘natural’ surroundings while simultaneously erasing the memory of custom’s common landscape uses which stood in the way of gentry ‘improvement.’”¹³ Similarly, NPS management reshapes local landscapes into “parksapes”—overwriting the older appearance and meaning of local memory, so that understand-

ing of the place as a “park” overtakes all previous understandings, often even for the locals themselves—and yet only rarely acknowledges or interprets its own presence in the landscape, as if NPS management is somehow “outside” the land’s history.¹⁴

Discussing the eighteenth-century development of private parks (precursors to U.S. national parks in many ways) in Britain, literary scholar Raymond Williams finds the intent was to “make Nature move to an arranged design . . . [as an] expression of control and command.” The existence of the estates depended on the working agricultural land around them for income to support the landowners, yet all traces of work and labor were removed from the estate grounds themselves, even though considerable work was required to create and maintain these aesthetically controlled spaces. These two separate landscapes—pastoral lands and private park—remained connected economically, yet “in the one case the land was being organized for production, where tenants and labourers will work, while in the other case it was being organized for consumption—the view, the ordered proprietary repose, the prospect.”¹⁵ The owners and designers of these park landscapes aimed to make them appear unworked and “natural,” thus obscuring their origins as the productions of actual landscape design and manipulation. Public parks like Point Reyes that aim to *protect* working, lived-in landscapes, therefore, contain an inherent tension, between NPS staff supporting agricultural operations on the one hand and aiming to produce more natural-appearing, “unworked” scenes for tourists and recreation users on the other. The NPS unconsciously disguises its own land management efforts by emphasizing natural resources and downplaying traces of local history.

THE EFFECTS OF PRESERVATION

If landscapes are created by continually changing social forces, what does it mean to preserve one? What is *preservation*? To begin to explore this process, imagine a pickle—a classic dill pickle. Now think of a fresh cucumber—are they the same? Of course not: we all know that the pickle started out life as a cucumber, but that the thing that once was a cucumber, through the presence of vinegar and salt and the passage of time, has changed in some fundamental ways in the process of becoming a pickle. In the same way fresh fruit is transformed by preservation into jam, or fresh pork is transformed by preservation into bacon or salami or ham, landscapes are transformed by preservation into parks

and protected areas. The second state has a relationship with the first, but they are not the same.

Heritage is literally that which we inherit: the stories, meanings, and tangible evidence of the historical past that survive in the present. Heritage can include buildings, furniture, pieces of art, myths, cultural traditions, even language itself. The natural world is also often referred to as the heritage of mankind; advocates for the protection of biodiversity, wilderness, and other aspects of the environment have all appealed to the need to preserve our common heritage. In recent years the ranks of what is defined as heritage have changed markedly, “from the elite and grand to the vernacular and everyday; from the remote to the recent; and from the material to the intangible.”¹⁶ Because heritage can include almost anything, it is vulnerable to constant redefinition. Despite this, distinctions are usually made between natural and cultural heritage, and preservation efforts for each are almost always considered as distinctly separate concerns, although they actually share much in common.¹⁷

Specifically *which* resources deserve deliberate preservation, however, is an open question. For after all, if heritage is simply that which is passed down from history, why the need to preserve it? Preservation implies protecting something from harm, damage, or danger. For most of humankind’s existence, people generally either rebuilt and reused old structures, continually adjusting or reinventing them as circumstances warranted, or ignored them, allowing them to fall into ruins, sometimes disappearing entirely.¹⁸ Starting in the sixteenth century, however, a series of elites began to embrace classical antiquities as desirable links to the great Greek and Roman cultures, which they considered superior to their more recent history.¹⁹ By the eighteenth century, this attitude had developed into a widespread upper-class aesthetic visible in architectural styles, art, and literature. Because this developing interest in heritage put such a primary emphasis on material items, deliberate preservation became crucial as time and social change caused artifacts to fade or crumble, buildings to be replaced, and old ways of life to disappear.²⁰ Heritage could then be visited and viewed by tourists, in museums or at official historic sites, where the visitors’ sense of connection with the past would be learned and/or reinforced. For those in power, for whom change was a threat, preservation formed an important way to reassert and protect relics symbolic of their social prestige and control.

This desire to prevent change makes a kind of intuitive sense: known objects and stable spatial configurations allow us to maneuver through

our daily lives more easily. Simply put, people often tend to want their surroundings to stay as they are now; we have a fundamental discomfort with change, preferring our world to be predictable and constant. Hence many forms of change, particularly those that are unexpected, make many people ill at ease.²¹ As a result we tend to try to fix things in both time and space.²² Historical durability is often interpreted as a sign of worthiness, according to a sense that if “it lasted this long, it must be good.” While the future is murky and unknown, the past is usually thought of as tangible and clear, unalterable, providing a sense of stability, familiarity, and security. Thus it also appears to be one unbroken, uncomplicated chain of events, rather than a continually reworked narrative.

Preserving material objects is not the *only* way to conserve a heritage. In Ise, Japan, for example, the Shinto Grand Shrine is disassembled every twenty years and an exact replica, rebuilt of similar materials, is assembled in the same place. In this form of preservation, perpetuating the building techniques and the ritual act of re-creation matters more than the physical continuity of the structure.²³ Similarly, the ancient White Horse of Uffington in England was “re-created” for centuries by locals, who scraped the chalk figure every seven years to keep it from being obscured by growing vegetation. Cultures that rely on oral traditions retain their sense of cultural heritage without any tangible objects at all, but rather by retelling stories from the past. These and other traditional or “folk” ways of retaining heritage bring the past and present together, fused in a repeating, cyclical sense of custom through use and interaction in everyday life.

Despite these alternative approaches to preservation, the most prevalent modern conception of preserved heritage remains focused primarily on physical artifacts, set aside and ostensibly protected from change. Yet this kind of evidence only reveals the limitations of this vision of history, according to which anything that didn’t take material form can be left out. The high visibility and accessibility of relics, especially old buildings, tends to cause people to overemphasize—and overestimate—the stability and homogeneity of the past.²⁴ For example, places where many artifacts survive from one particular epoch, as if they had been pickled, can give the impression that time has stood still, that the places are perfectly unchanged since the era the artifacts reflect, regardless of what the actual historical experience may have been.²⁵ Nor can material relics tell their own stories. They require interpretation and explanation, adding another layer of present-day attitudes and values to the understanding of the past.

Preservation's act of reshaping the past according to the views of the present effectively distances the past from the present, causing it to seem like a distinct, separate realm, rather than something intimately connected with today. Recognizing the past's difference promotes its preservation, and the act of preserving it makes that difference still more apparent.²⁶ Particularly in the United States, heritage is often not permitted to coexist with the present; instead it is fenced off, "always in quotation marks and fancy dress," and visited on special occasions, rather than seen as an integrated part of everyday life.²⁷ Setting aspects of the past off as national parks contributes to this separation, implying that history is something to be visited and viewed, rather than lived with, day to day. Similarly, as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes, preserving particular ways of life associated with the past "turn[s] them into figures in glass cases, labeled and categorized as in a museum"—an approach more bluntly described as "geographic taxidermy."²⁸

All forms of preservation advance a strong tendency to idealize the resource in question, whether the historical past, a present-day cultural system, or a natural resource or ecosystem—or a combination of all three in a landscape—to make it representative of some imagined era of perfection, thus all the more worthy of preservation. The ways in which currently held values can be projected back onto history underlie this desire to see the past not as it actually was but as it *should have been*, according to how we see it today.²⁹ These resources may be idealized for aesthetic reasons, or because they contribute to some group's sense of identity or heritage. They may also be preserved as examples of natural or cultural diversity, or in hopes of gaining knowledge or profit, particularly from tourism. These different motivations can result in different strategies or techniques of preservation, but in a core sense they all seek to prevent change, or at least to control the direction and degree of change in a resource—and in doing so, they distort our ability to see and understand the past as it was, in all of its messy complexity.

What, then, constitutes "authentic" heritage? In regards to the value of a piece of art, authenticity refers to the originality expressed in the art; forged masterpieces do not fetch the same market value as the real thing. But how does this idea extend to whole cultures, to nature, or to the past? Edward Bruner describes the "problem of authenticity" as being built into Western societies as "the notion of a privileged original, *a pure tradition*, which exists in some prior time, from which everything now is a contemporary degradation."³⁰ This conception was particularly prevalent in historical practices of anthropology, as researchers

searched for “primitive” peoples and cultures, considered unchanged for eons and therefore more “pure.”³¹ Drawing the focus too tightly on purity, authenticity, or pristineness tends to disempower or eliminate any non-pure elements—such as people in nature, or recent changes to historical scenes or artifacts. Thus preservation has a catch-22: we ideally expect it to reveal the whole, pure, singular past, but we necessarily only have the fragments left over in the present—and the better adapted those fragments are to present-day life, the less authentic and thus less credible they seem.

An example of this problem is found California’s Bodie State Park, an old mining town preserved in a state of “arrested decay” since the 1950s.³² In her ethnographic research on the site, geographer Dydia DeLyser recorded visitors talking about how “authentic” Bodie seems, with its tumbling-down buildings, all weathered, faded, and lonesome. Visitors often contrasted Bodie with the gaudy displays in such nearby “restored” mining towns as Virginia City, Nevada, where the buildings were brightly painted and lit up, and entrepreneurs were always trying to sell them something. Yet ironically, when Bodie was still a functioning lived-in town, it *was* brightly painted and had loud saloons and restaurants; furthermore its existence was entirely about people trying to make money. So how can the preserved ghost town of Bodie be more “authentic” than Virginia City? It’s an authentic preservation of the idealization of a *ghost town*, which is a simplified and more pure version of the West’s past than an actual living town. Similarly, had the California State Parks Department just left Bodie alone, it would have fallen down completely long ago, the victim of time and harsh climate. Instead, the agency uses a deliberate policy of “arrested decay,” propping things up and repairing wear to keep the buildings in a perpetual state of “falling down but not all the way down.” Yet most of the visitors DeLyser interviewed were untroubled by this *actual* discrepancy in the site’s authenticity—that it is actively and deliberately managed to keep it in a particular state—as long as the *appearance* of authenticity was maintained.

While preservation may appear to freeze things in time, in actuality preserved resources increasingly reflect the values and ideals of their preservers, through the choices they make in terms of what to protect and how to manage and display them—in this sense, the authentic past is that which the authorities have chosen to preserve. Because preservation is an exertion of power, that power is reflected in and reinforced by the preserved resource, whether an ancient vase in a museum, a wild

animal caged in a zoo, or a landscape preserved as a park. The particular kinds of animals kept in a zoo, for example, reflect the interests of the institution itself; if the zoo wants to emphasize the diversity of life, many rare or unusual kinds of animals may be represented, while a zoo focused on entertaining the public may have more popular, familiar animals. No institution can display *all* kinds of animals, and many—common insects, for instance, or rats—are traditionally not included, indirectly conveying the message that these other species are less important, less interesting, or less a part of nature. In these ways, the institution's values are reflected in the act of preservation: the choice of creatures to display (or not), how they are displayed, and the information provided about them. In the case of Point Reyes, the National Park Service maintains this authority, through its ownership, management, and interpretation of the Seashore for the public viewer.

The ideals of preservation and the power that enforces them usually become “naturalized” at protected sites, so that the methods and standards of preservation come to be seen as normal, predictable, and inevitable. This process changes our perception of the preserved resource to *include* those values or ideals interjected through the process of preservation itself. To return to the example of a zoo: most people would be surprised to see a display of domesticated dogs in a zoo, because we have become so trained to believe that they “naturally” do not belong there. This has nothing to do with the dogs themselves, or the public's like or dislike of them, but instead reflects the values of zoos as repositories of only non-domesticated animal species. As we will see, similar expectations often lead visitors to question the role of agriculture at Point Reyes, simply because they have been trained to believe that ranches do not “naturally” belong in national parks.

NATURAL LANDSCAPES AS NATIONAL HERITAGE

A recent documentary series on the national parks quoted Wallace Stegner referring to them as “the best idea we ever had.”³³ But national parks are not a single idea; they emerged from ideas about preservation, nature, national pride, and tourism (recreation and history came later). When many people think of America's national parks today, they envision large expanses of pristine natural areas. The public imagines parks as sanctuaries for wilderness, or as a means to preserve and protect ecosystems. Nevertheless, the earliest national parks did not focus on the inherent value of nature for its own sake. Alfred Runte's classic work, *National*

Parks: The American Experience, argues that the primary motivation for setting aside the first parks stemmed from a national need for cultural icons, “natural wonders” that would assure Americans that they had a heritage equal to or better than that of Europe.³⁴ Places of spectacular natural scenery became infused with patriotic significance, representing America’s first major contribution to world heritage, and also became tourist attractions, where the public could bask in symbolic grandeur and connect more deeply with their nationalistic pride.

Parks are also not “our” idea. The national park system is often imagined as a group or collective effort, democratically conjoined through collective public ownership. More than any other type of government-owned land (such as a post office or an IRS building), parks are frequently referred to as places that “belong to the American people,” as if each citizen has direct ownership of Yosemite or Yellowstone. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, is quoted on an NPS website as having said, “There is nothing so American as our national parks. . . . The fundamental idea behind the parks . . . is that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us.”³⁵ In reality, however, citizens do not own these lands; as will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2, the public has the right to access and to comment on parks’ management, but we are not direct owners in a legal sense—we tend to confuse a sense of shared national heritage with actual ownership and control. And while the NPS is the federal agency with direct ownership responsibility, it is the U.S. Congress that creates parks via legislation. The impetus for the earliest parks came not from ordinary citizens or a groundswell of public opinion but rather from cultural and economic elites who exerted political power to push Congress to create these spaces. They did so both to represent specific ideals of national superiority and natural purity, and to propagate those values to the visiting public. In this way, parks became self-reinforcing expressions of a very controlled message in and about the landscape.

More specifically, the early parks came to embody the view, generally associated with the West, that nature and wilderness are completely separate from human habitation and use. Despite their importance as tourist destinations, these parks were more like museum or zoo exhibits, something to stand back from and observe.³⁶ Once the parks took on such powerful cultural symbolism, they had to be held static, as unchanging as the national values they now reflected. Their appearance also was enhanced and manipulated by landscape designers so as to accentuate their grandeur as an unchanging view of uninhabited, pristine nature.

These monumental parks preexisted the National Park Service, the federal agency created in 1916 to administer and maintain them. In its subsequent formation, the agency adopted these symbolic values of nature as its own foundational principles. Though never explicitly written into official park policies, these assumptions subtly undergird much of the NPS's organizational culture and management approach.

At the start of the nineteenth century, most Americans thought of wilderness, or “pure” nature, as something to be avoided, or better yet, tamed and subdued. Indeed, in 1831 the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville resolved to see some of the American wilderness while touring in the United States, but “when he informed the frontiersmen of his desire to travel for *pleasure* into the primitive forest, they thought him mad.”³⁷ Environmental historians have identified two major components to this traditional bias against wilderness: first, a very real threat to survival, and second, a dark and sinister symbolism, inherited from a long tradition of Western thought.³⁸ From its ancient biblical usage, “wilderness” implied the opposite of civilization, the place Adam and Eve were condemned to after being cast out of Paradise. The early Puritan colonists carried with them this idea of wilderness as a “wholly negative condition, something to be feared, loathed, and ultimately eradicated—something to be replaced by fair farms and shining cities on hills.”³⁹

The romantic movement of the 1820s and 1830s, which emerged out of eighteenth-century Europe and took hold among many American writers, artists, and scientists, added some complexity to this traditional view of wilderness. The romantics saw the handiwork of God in Enlightenment accounts of an apparently harmonious and orderly universe. Nature, therefore, should be considered sublime, as something that inspires exultation, awe, and eventually delight. In the romantic view, nature is specifically empty of human habitation and influence; it is the antithesis of civilization. Any human-induced artificiality reduced the direct connection to the divine and the sublime.⁴⁰ This, combined with Rousseau's idea of primitivism, became “the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living.”⁴¹ Within a few decades, writers like John Muir and landscape designers like Frederick Law Olmsted would actively espouse these romantic ideas in their work. While this perspective might seem to contradict the earlier negative notion of wilderness, in reality they are two sides of the same coin; in both, nature is necessarily empty of, and distinct from, people. The only difference is which side of the dualism is privileged.

American romanticism (in contrast to the older European tradition) took an especially nationalist turn, with natural scenery becoming emblematic of national greatness.⁴² To better understand this development, it is important to note that the new nation, having twice fought free from European political control in its first few decades, still borrowed heavily from Europe for much of its “culture”—art, architecture, and literature. While wanting to distinguish themselves from European societies, Americans depended on them as their link to the richness of the great heritage of Western civilization. National leaders and intellectuals believed that the United States was destined for a glorious future, but doubts persisted as to whether the society could really survive apart from its European parentage.⁴³ Having no truly ancient artifacts to point to as heritage, patriots began to rely on spectacular natural monuments as proof of distinctive national greatness.⁴⁴ The physical landscape became a way to quickly acquire a sense of national superiority, and nature tourism a primary vehicle for appreciating it.⁴⁵

Yet there was little that was genuinely unique about most of the then-settled American landscape. The East’s best hope for a symbol of greatness lay in Niagara Falls, on the border between New York and Canada.⁴⁶ Observers both home and abroad considered the falls to be America’s greatest natural spectacle; romantic and nationalistic views of nature merged to form an image of Niagara as sublime nature that would produce a corresponding moral sublimity in those who associated with it.⁴⁷ The Niagara landscape represented an idealized national identity, and popular artistic portrayals began to reshape expectations of what the actual physical place should look like.

But this natural splendor was compromised, and its symbolic power eroded, by increasing visitation to and development of Niagara, especially after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Newly constructed bridges, paths, and staircases rendered both sides of the falls accessible, and the nearby mill town of Manchester churned with industrial activity. By 1830, numerous small-time entrepreneurs competed to offer the best view of the falls (for steep prices), as well as food, trinkets, or tours, crowding out the famous view with their tawdry stands and signs. This disorganized and haphazard commercial development, according to historian William Irwin, “spoiled the more raw, adventurous, and reverent mode of experiencing the Falls”; reality no longer matched the idealized image of Niagara as a symbol of national strength and purity.⁴⁸ The commercialization did not go unnoticed by European visitors, who wasted no time in roundly condemning the private profiteers overwhelming Niagara.⁴⁹



FIGURE 3. View of Niagara Falls in winter, c. 1855. Whole plate daguerreotype by Platt D. Babbitt. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

This stream of published criticism on tourism at Niagara hit a raw nerve: Americans, already sensitive to their lack of contribution to “world culture,” stood accused of having no pride in themselves or their past. Lack of control over the private development of Niagara Falls had led to its apparent ruin; by allowing it to become overrun with ugly commercialization for private profit, Americans were seen as willingly selling their cultural legacy to the highest bidder. Word of spectacular landscapes opening up in the West soon offered a chance for national redemption.

CREATION OF CONTROLLED, UNCHANGING LANDSCAPES

By the mid-1840s, white American settlers were rapidly moving west of the Mississippi River, displacing Native American tribes as they went, and encountering truly unique landscapes along the way. Western expansion represented the country’s future; Manifest Destiny, the reigning territorial philosophy of the time, carried a message of progressive advancement and historic inevitability.⁵⁰ This expansion moved through

some of the boldest and most magnificent landscapes ever seen on earth; surely this must be a sign of national superiority! Journalists traveled west and published widely read descriptions of the marvelous landscapes they passed through. With most of the U.S. population still living along the Atlantic coast, the West became a stage, easterners watching as the spectacle of the West unfolded in popular journals and newspapers. Representations of the West, in paintings and literature as well as the popular press, idealized the landscape within a particular nationalistic framework that emphasized majestic and eternal natural scenery awaiting “discovery” by heroic white pioneers. The massive paintings of Albert Bierstadt, for example, exaggerated the steepness and depth of western mountains and depicted glorious landscapes empty of Indians; other paintings of the era depict railroads cross-crossing the landscape and wagon trains full of settlers pointing the way west.⁵¹ Journalist William Gilpin, in an 1846 report read in the Senate, extolled westward expansion: “*Divine task! Immortal mission!* Let us tread fast and joyfully the open trail before us! Let every American heart open wide for patriotism to glow undimmed, and confide with religious faith in the sublime and prodigious destiny of his well-loved country.”⁵²

Ecstatic descriptions of the West began shaping landscapes as symbols of national pride and destiny in the imaginations of the American public—particularly because, as Niagara had been, they were romanticized as pristine wilderness, a people-less natural landscape that could be understood as sublime and grand. These images did not merely illustrate particular conceptions about the western experience; they endorsed them.⁵³ Mark Spence notes that “the conflation of racial, political, and geographic ‘destinies’ with the cant of conquest effectively erased the human history of western North America and replaced it with an atemporal *natural* history that somehow prefigured the American conquest of these lands.”⁵⁴

The “discovery” by whites of Yosemite Valley and the nearby Sierra sequoias, in 1851 and 1852, respectively, provided two early examples of natural wonders through which the United States could claim cultural recognition. Nationalistic writers began drawing comparisons between western and European mountains, going as far as to belittle the Swiss Alps in favor of Yosemite. Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican*, exclaimed, “It is easy to imagine, in looking upon [the sides of the Yosemite Valley], that you are in the ruins of an old Gothic cathedral, to which those of Cologne and Milan are but baby-houses.”⁵⁵ Surveyor Clarence King described the giant sequoias in 1864, writing

that no “fragment of human work, broken pillar or sand-worn image half lifted over pathetic desert—none of these link the past as to-day with anything like the power of these monuments of living antiquity.”⁵⁶ Neither of these descriptions mentioned the long-resident Indians, who maintained a community in Yosemite Valley despite several attempts by the military to push them out.⁵⁷ They were already being edited out of the landscape, so as not to taint the national symbolism.

This natural, supposedly empty splendor soon enough had to fend off would-be settlers and concessionaires. By the end of the 1850s, private entrepreneurs were already hard at work at Yosemite, trying to make a profit by capitalizing on the grandeur of the natural discoveries.⁵⁸ Individuals attempted to claim the portions of the valley with the best access to the spectacular views, in anticipation of the sightseers sure to follow in their footsteps. Similarly, while the giant sequoias were not useful for lumber—when felled, they tended to shatter upon impact with the ground—several of the largest specimens were nevertheless stripped of their bark, cut into sections, and shipped off for sale as curiosities in the East and overseas, thus destroying the spectacular trees so that they could be sold piecemeal.⁵⁹ Both Yosemite Valley and the nearby sequoia groves represented a new claim to U.S. greatness via natural splendor, but uncontrolled land use and exploitation threatened to spoil both.

Another round of nationalistic criticism sprang up in response, lamenting the apparent repeat of Niagara Falls’ fate in the Sierra. In 1853 *Gleason’s Pictorial*, a popular British magazine, published a letter from an irate Californian regarding the destruction of the “Discovery Tree” for public display. Had the giant been a native of Europe, he suggested, “such a natural production would have been cherished and protected, if necessary, by law; but in this money-making, go-ahead community, thirty or forty thousand dollars are paid for it and the purchaser chops it down and ships it off for a shilling show.”⁶⁰ But Yosemite and the sequoias turned out not to be like Niagara after all: to protect the national interest in these places, the federal government became involved in efforts to preserve them.

Yet it did not become involved of its own accord. While it appears that private ownership of the attractions themselves, or control of access to the views, was not to be tolerated, corporate interests like railroad companies realized they could reap great profits from providing transportation to and facilities at these new tourist destinations, if the government could prevent or control small-scale settlement and clutter.

Particularly by the 1850s and 1860s, about the same time that Yosemite was first entering the public eye, the industry of providing for tourists had become increasingly sophisticated, and shrewd businessmen were on the lookout for new opportunities. By enlisting the federal government to set western scenic wonders aside for preservation, corporate tourism providers could ensure that they would have these opportunities to themselves.

By early 1864 nationalists and western promoters began urging legislation to protect Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa grove of giant sequoias to prevent private occupation and to preserve them for “public use, resort and recreation”; the idea originated not in a groundswell of public outcry, but in a letter written by Israel Ward Raymond, representative of the Central American Steamship Transit Company—at that time, ships were the primary way of getting to the West Coast, as the transcontinental railroad had not yet been constructed—and sent to John Conness, the junior U.S. senator from California.⁶¹ Niagara Falls served as a role model of sorts, both illustrating the possibilities of drawing tourists and highlighting the dangers of overcommercialization by small entrepreneurs. The official rhetoric written into the legislation, however, relied on the cultural symbolism of the iconic valley, rather than any economic rationales (pro or con).⁶² The argument found support in Congress, and on June 30, 1864, President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Act into law.⁶³

The grant itself was small—only the valley itself, the encircling peaks that formed its scenic backdrop, plus the Mariposa grove, located a bit to the south, were protected—and shortly thereafter was turned over to the State of California for administration.⁶⁴ Significantly, the grant contained a clause insisting that the protection be “inalienable”; as Runte writes, “from a cultural perspective, preservation without permanence would be no real test of the nation’s sincerity.”⁶⁵ This language of permanence shows an early emphasis on stasis in the establishment of U.S. national parks, a desire to protect the symbolic qualities of the grant in perpetuity by preventing change. The first western park preserved by the federal government was clearly imbued with particular ideological meanings, which the NPS would later inherit: it was to be a natural landscape frozen permanently into a static image of national greatness.

Ten years later, an almost identical process of nationalistic description and appropriation took place with the “discovery” and exploration of the area that would become Yellowstone National Park. The area had not received much attention from early explorers, mostly because of its

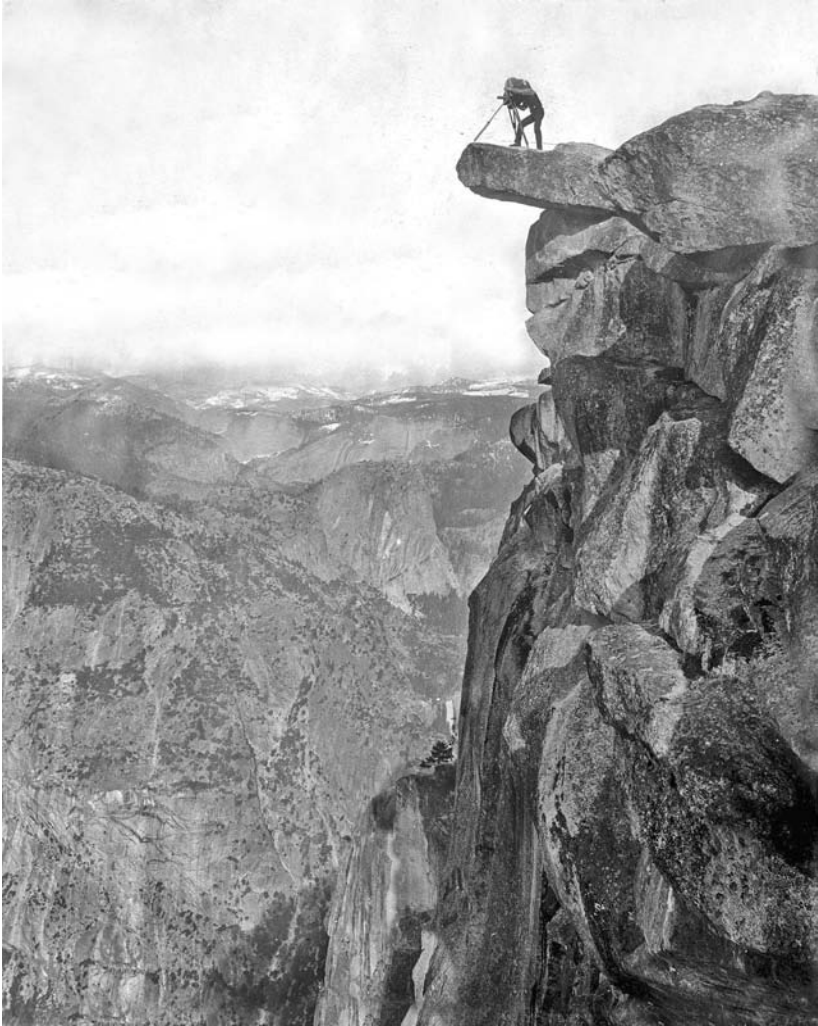


FIGURE 4. William Henry Jackson photographing from Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, c. 1884. Courtesy of History Colorado.

inaccessibility. The discovery of gold in Montana in the 1860s, however, brought people to the area, and soon tales of wondrous scenery began circulating in eastern society. The proliferation of geysers and other geothermal features at Yellowstone was unique; once again, many comparisons were drawn to European ruins. Charles W. Cook, on an 1869 expedition to the area, noted a limestone formation that “bore a strong

resemblance to an old castle,” whose “rampart and bulwark were slowly yielding to the ravages of time.”⁶⁶ And once again, most accounts of the landscape omitted the presence of the local Indians so that it could be symbolically recast as “empty wilderness,” despite archeological evidence and active Native management suggesting otherwise.⁶⁷

As had happened at Yosemite, almost immediately after the “discovery” of the Upper Geyser Basin individual entrepreneurs began fencing off the most scenic areas for future tourist spots. In response, representatives from the railroad industry started a campaign for government protection of the area. The initial suggestion of creating a national park at Yellowstone came on stationary from Jay Cooke and Company, a principal financier for the Northern Pacific Railroad, who presumably hoped to spark tourism.⁶⁸ A report written by the House Committee on Public Lands stressed the promotion of the area as a scenic oasis, and criticized private individuals’ attempts to lay claim to the distinctive geologic features and “to fence in these rare wonders so as to charge visitors a fee, *as is now done at Niagara Falls*, for the sight of that which ought to be as free as the air or water.”⁶⁹ Once again, Niagara served as an effective reminder of the nation’s failure to protect its cultural heritage; the report stressed that the leaders must match their rhetoric with a commitment to action. The bill passed Congress and was signed on March 1, 1872.⁷⁰

As was the case with Yosemite, Yellowstone’s initial protection was largely of symbolic importance. The park’s large size reflected more on the lack of accurate surveys of the scenic geologic features rather than on a desire to protect the wilderness; the boundaries were drawn large enough to ensure that all of the features would all be included. Furthermore, the park was retained by the federal government, rather than given to the state government to administer, because Wyoming was still only a territory—the “first national park” only remained national because there was no local government body to give it to. It would be several years until Yellowstone would receive any significant tourist visitation; even the Northern Pacific Railroad, the original advocate for creation of the park, didn’t connect to the park until 1883.⁷¹ Yet once the tourists began coming, the railroad monopolized transportation to and from the park, as well as all hotel accommodations, with no competition from small-scale independent entrepreneurs. Despite rhetoric that the parks were necessary to preserve nature from the clutter of development, in many ways they were actually created to provide business opportunities for corporate interests.

Significantly, both of the two first national parks, later to become “crown jewels” of the National Park Service, were initially created to prevent change in natural scenery that could be identified as uniquely American and to provide tourists with new destinations where they could gain a sense of national heritage. The establishment of all the earliest national parks and monuments—including Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, Mount Rainier, Glacier, and the Grand Canyon—followed a similar process, in which legislation created static landscapes to match society’s idealizations of natural and national heritage. The parks were infused with symbolic ideology, their natural scenery representing unchanging visions of national greatness, demonstrating the lasting vitality and virtue of America’s republican government; all were advocated for and served by private railroad corporations rather than demanded by “the public.”⁷² As landscape theory suggests, these powerful business interests utilized government protection of these landscapes to push out small-time competitors and control the views so as to attract tourists, and the parks themselves became relatively static viewscapes reflecting nationalistic ideals. This ideological meaning, and connection to corporate concessionaires rather than local settlers, have stayed with the national park system, even as it has expanded to include an ever-widening array of types of landscapes, and they influence management even in places like Point Reyes, as we will see.

PARK IDEALS AS EXPRESSED THROUGH PRESERVATION

Preserved landscapes are not neutral; they require management to produce the appearance and maintenance of stasis. What ends up being preserved is not the actual landscape as it was at the time of preservation, but those aspects of it that coincide with the values that the agency assigned with its management seeks to accentuate. The cultural uses and meanings that produced the landscape in the first place are increasingly overlain or replaced by the social dynamic of preservation itself, which comes to be built into the landscape, both in physical shape and cultural meaning. Yet these landscapes tend to be seen only as places of aesthetic wonder, with little or no consideration for how they got that way.⁷³

In the case of the national parks, the agency tasked with preserving the landscape is the National Park Service. As discussed above, the first generation of natural parks stressed natural beauty and unpeopled landscapes in the service of national greatness. By the time that the NPS

was created in 1916, that mandate had incorporated recreation and tourism, with services provided by corporate partners rather than locals. The NPS's institutional values, inherited from the first parks, created before its establishment, are based on long-held societal assumptions about what national parks "ought" to look like, which in turn are based on nineteenth-century conceptions of nationalism, romanticism, and Manifest Destiny. While it did not create these ideals, the NPS inherited them along with the parks it was assigned to protect, and it made them its own. The agency gradually developed standardized rules for the parks' management, with an emphasis on unchanging permanence as a goal of preservation. National parks have also idealized nature as completely exclusive of human habitation or use, aside from tourists viewing the scenery. These ideals weave in and out of the agency's history, at times becoming more predominant, at other times less, but never completely fading. Despite not being written down as formal policy, they form a powerful ideological foundation for how the NPS conducts much of its business. Through land acquisition, design, management, and interpretation they become written into park landscapes.

Of all of the ideals of the national parks, the most consequential one has almost certainly been the idea that parks are devoid of people. Time and time again, the notion of "empty" landscapes has pushed out residents—most obviously Native Americans, but also Euro-American landowners in the case of more recent parks. Because of the reciprocal relationship between landscapes and the people who live in them, the removal of people from natural landscapes has observable effects on the land. In Yosemite Valley, for instance, the valley's ecosystem has shifted from primarily open meadows and oak woodlands to closed coniferous forest in the years since Native Americans and their land management practices, which included frequent burning, were reduced to living museum exhibits.⁷⁴ Few visitors know of this transition, and the thick forests, with a few designated scenic overlooks kept clear to emphasize the iconic views, are now considered "natural" and timeless.

Yet within two decades of its establishment, the NPS was also assigned the task of managing landscapes that no one could ever mistake for "unpeopled." Starting in 1919, Congress began to authorize the establishment of parks in places that had previously been in private ownership. In the 1930s the NPS also took on management of the nation's historic heritage as well as natural scenery. More recently (as chapter 2 will explore in detail), the agency has been tasked with protecting vernacular landscapes, lived-in ordinary places that represent

the everyday, rather than the extraordinary and iconic, as our society's ideas of what counts as "heritage that is worth saving" have continued to shift and change.

Yet the very concept of preserving vernacular landscapes is difficult to reconcile with the ideology of national parks in America. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, cultural geographer and publisher of the influential magazine *Landscape*, simultaneously raised the appreciation of common everyday landscapes and decried their formal preservation. He regarded protected landscapes of all kinds as political products, created by official legislative acts to be stable or unchanging, rather than remaining in the true vernacular as mobile, unpredictable and fluid. He was critical of both the environmental and historic preservation movements, asserting that their efforts result in seeing the landscape "less as a phenomenon, a space or collection of spaces, than as the setting of certain human activities."⁷⁵

The NPS is not alone in facing this quandary; it is a frequent outcome of preservation efforts around the world. For example, the National Trust in the UK, established in 1895, aims to preserve both natural and cultural heritage, including historic homes and gardens as well as industrial monuments, social history sites, and entire lived-in landscapes such as England's Lake District. Despite the Trust's explicit focus on protecting "for ever, and for everyone," British anthropologist Barbara Bender notes that ordinary, everyday people tend to be excluded by the official protection and repackaging of landscapes.⁷⁶ She writes that "its main focus has been the landmarks of those with power and wealth, inscribed in an aesthetic, which, as it has done for centuries, bypasses the labor that created the wealth."⁷⁷

Both in Britain and the United States, the fact that preservation protects some landscapes and not others raises the question, "Preservation and presentation for whom?"⁷⁸ Which places will be singled out for protection, and in what ways does protection modify their original appearance and meaning? Will they be places of production or consumption? Through its actions—park selection criteria and techniques of maintenance, management, and interpretation—the NPS cannot help but place its imprint on the landscape, reshaping the protected area into a national park, something with its own distinct meanings and implications. Yet the NPS managers generally do not recognize this process of creating a set of official landscapes; they naturalize the process in its own right. The shift toward a designed, orderly "national park-scape" is not interpreted or questioned by NPS managers, but accepted as "normal," desirable, and

inevitable. Thus preserved landscapes, as they move from the realm of the vernacular to the official, often reveal less about the history of the place being protected than about the preserver's perception of the past.

In his work on the establishment of English estates, Raymond Williams has asserted that "a working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the NPS has increasingly become involved in protecting working landscapes, including, of course, Point Reyes. At these sorts of parks, the history of the land as having been worked and inhabited is ostensibly what NPS is trying to preserve. For example, Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts preserves the brick buildings and water-powered mills of the early textiles industry—yet the factories are no longer working, and the complex is more akin to a ghost town, with buildings standing empty except for exhibits and visitors. Park units such as Point Reyes, including Ebey's Landing in Washington and Cuyahoga Valley in Ohio, are different in that at least some commitment has been voiced to actually maintaining the landscape as a working landscape.⁸⁰ And yet, this is difficult, because of the uneasy relationship between these kinds of lived-in places and the background ideology the NPS has inherited concerning parks.

Landscape can be both work and an erasure of work. Landscapes are created through people's labor in their daily lives, and yet the traces of their labor become increasingly invisible as management operates to make them disappear into the "natural," taken-for-granted appearance of the park. Preservation of working landscapes, in particular, builds on the social production of the residents' lives, yet creates a new landscape that tends to diminish or eliminate their contributions to it. The accompanying interpretation, with its frequent emphasis on natural heritage, reinterprets the landscape's significance according to the agency's historical ideologies. Thus it is important for this book to make this reshaping process in the national parks more visible; as geographer Peter Jackson asserts, "recognizing the ideological dimension [of landscape] robs it of much of its power."⁸¹ By doing so, this research can help to clarify landscape management goals and direction, and to reveal and prevent unintended consequences of park management actions.

A ROLE FOR WORKING LANDSCAPES IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY PARKS?

The NPS now manages over four hundred park units, including national parks, monuments, seashores, historic sites, battlefields, recreation

areas, rivers, and trails. Over its hundred-year history, the agency's mandate has both changed dramatically and maintained certain key assumptions. The NPS no longer focuses only on scenic vistas; gradually it has embraced the importance of ecological health and science-based management of its parks, as well as a broader understanding of U.S. culture and history. Native peoples and their uses of the landscape are more accurately depicted in interpretive materials today than at any time in the past. Yet because the NPS adopted the early ideology of parks—preservation of scenic heritage and provision for recreational tourism—as the core of its mission, assumptions about appropriate private residents and land uses in parks remain; in many ways they are built into the policies and management strategies of the institution itself.

These assumptions are not aspects of formal policy, nor are they solely held by the NPS—they are cultural ideals of what a park “should” be that are commonly held throughout U.S. society. And while these ideals have gradually changed over time, the values that were most prevalent at the time the NPS was established have molded the agency's structure and culture, its sense of mission and purpose regarding the lands that it manages. NPS historian Richard Sellars, in his study of the slow but gradual incorporation of ecology into the agency's management objectives, concludes that, “Given the strength and persistence of ancestral attitudes within the Service, its core values are likely to outlast any one director, even one who is stubbornly determined to change them.”⁸² And the parks themselves continue to reinforce and recreate these ideals—they reflect the values of preservation, which in turn emphasize unchanging scenic nature.

Understanding the effects of preservation ideology on parks is significant for two important reasons. First, preservation, while often well intentioned, can become a tool of control in a landscape, redefining the place according to the idealized image of what the preservers want it to be. By exploring the role of institutional ideology in steering landscape change, this book adds to the theoretical understanding of how landscapes are used, inadvertently or not, as tools of power. Previous researchers have shown that institutions often intentionally manipulate the landscape and its meaning as a way to marginalize others' interpretations of it.⁸³ As an extension of this approach, this history investigates the degree to which NPS management both intentionally and unknowingly has reshaped park landscapes to reflect the institution's beliefs and

priorities. Similarly, in some instances environmental advocates or certain (often wealthy) locals have steered NPS policy and management to impose their landscape preferences on others, often privileging the area's value as a scenic vista or recreation destination over its role as a working, living landscape. The ideology of park preservation is not limited to the NPS itself.

Writers from Raymond Williams to Richard White have noted the tendency in environmentalism to separate traditional resource-based work like agriculture or forestry from aesthetic or recreation spaces, equating work with environmental destruction; working a landscape causes unpredictability and change, and can be harder to control, standardize, or “tidy up” as bucolic scenery.⁸⁴ In a similar way, because the presence of residents challenges the agency's sense of control, the NPS has struggled with parks that contain them. This at least partially explains why the NPS has insisted on full-title ownership of parklands whenever possible—early on, NPS leaders believed that private ownership was incompatible with effective preservation management. Full-fee public ownership also makes the landscape more “legible” to an administrative agency, as a bounded, simplified, manageable space rather than a more complex and contested landscape.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, legislative guidance for a number of parks created in the past fifty years has suggested other ownership models; Point Reyes is interesting, in part, because it illustrates how difficult it has been to integrate those alternative models into the NPS's preferred administrative policies.

Second, a more complete view of the effects of preservation on working landscapes will contribute to further developing and refining resource protection policy in the National Park Service. Policy makers and park managers need better awareness of the historical trends and on-the-ground outcomes of NPS management so that effective protection of working landscapes can be sustained over time. This is of particular importance and urgency in park units where the human activity that created a distinct cultural landscape is still active, as the changes resulting from NPS policies may impair the residents' own sense of landscape meaning and significance, or even their ability to persist as a functioning community. At the very least, park personnel should be aware of this dilemma, so as to have greater clarity regarding the intent and goals of management, and greater recognition of the ways in which management may affect the landscape. There is nothing inherently wrong with causing change within parks, but the NPS should be cognizant of these processes

and their implications for the resources, residents, visitors, and park managers themselves.

Examining this issue now is particularly timely, as the NPS is currently struggling with the question of how best to manage its ever-growing roster of populated landscapes. Increasing numbers of new parks include existing human settlements as part of the protected landscape, and many of these places have encountered controversy resulting from implementation of management policies. In some cases NPS management has overlooked the needs of the residents, resulting in what legal scholar Joseph Sax has called “communities programmed to die.”⁸⁶ At the same time, interest in and concern with the preservation of cultural landscapes has increased within the NPS.⁸⁷ In a collection of articles on managing cultural landscapes, Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick identify the NPS as the primary force in the nascent cultural landscape preservation movement in the years since the agency first recognized them as a specific resource type in 1981.⁸⁸ Hence it is crucial to understand what likely outcomes can be expected from the NPS’s involvement. Yet while some excellent research has been done on how NPS management has shaped biological resources over time, few works look at historical change in cultural resources or working landscapes within national parks.⁸⁹ This volume aims to contribute both to the theoretical understanding of working landscapes and to the current challenges facing the NPS in its efforts to improve protection of these unique and rich places, by following the agency’s development through the lens of one particular landscape, Point Reyes.

The evolution of the working landscape at Point Reyes under park management also informs a series of growing questions about how best to respond both to the reality of ever-more-rapidly shifting ecological conditions due to climate change, which is affecting species distributions and the make-up of ecological communities, and to shifting ideas about our relationship with nature as represented by park management. The U.S. conception of the primary purpose of national parks has already changed, substantially, over the parks’ 150-year history: from static symbols of national greatness, to commemorative spaces of war and history, to tourist playgrounds for the automotive traveler, to wilderness sanctuaries of biodiversity, and most recently to places that (slowly) reflect a newer understanding of the role of humans in nature. In this newer view, work in nature is not always seen as “unnatural,” and it is understood that human management and use have long been integral parts of most ecosystems, while management based on the

removal of humans (except as visitors) is actually a far more modern creation.⁹⁰ In recognizing that we are now in an era where human activity has far-reaching influence on almost every aspect of the natural world, many scientists are now arguing that looking backwards at some imagined “pristine nature,” and trying to recreate it, is a fool’s errand.⁹¹



FIGURE 5. Pierce Ranch School, Point Reyes National Seashore, 2013. Photograph by author.