

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE NATIONAL PARK IDEA: CHALLENGES FOR MANAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

What This Theme Issue Is About

In January 1999, I organized a symposium during the fourth World Archaeology Congress (WAC-4) meetings in Cape Town, South Africa. The title of the symposium was "Archaeology and the National Park Idea: Challenges for Management and Interpretation." During this international session, we examined the unique challenges and problems of managing and interpreting archaeological resources in national parks and similar protected areas. Eight presentations from four countries examined the relevance and effectiveness of differing strategies for management and public presentation as well as the primary motivations for management and public interpretation strategies (e.g., compliance with laws and regulations, preservation, tourism, politics, etc.). According to feedback received during and after the session, the symposium was useful for the South African members of the audience in recognizing the effectiveness of a variety of management approaches and in not "reinventing the wheel." This special issue of THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM includes several papers that were delivered at the symposium (Jameson, Mulvaney, Powell, Fowler and Harte, and Blockley) plus four contributed papers (Church, Gojak, Mytum, and Magne).

While the focus is on national parks, the authors also discuss and give examples of other protection designations where archaeology plays a key role in understanding the importance of places and episodes in the human experience. What is significant or worthy of protection and public concern can be defined in a

myriad of ways according to social, political, cultural, geographical, and empirical criteria. Some are formal designations, such as in defining and laying out the boundaries of a national monument; others are less absolute, such as in the identification of the "Dreaming Places" among the indigenous peoples of Australia

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(Mulvaney). We hope that these discussions provide relevant and useful comparative information in terms of what has worked (and what has not) in the physical protection of sites and in programs to promote public interpretation and appreciation—the *raison d'être* for conservation efforts around the world.

**Setting of the WAC-4
Symposium**

That WAC-4 met in Cape Town is particularly significant. The congress was formed in 1986 as a consequence of the international rift in the discipline that followed a worldwide boycott of South Africa during the latter years of apartheid. In South Africa today, as in many parts of the world, attention to “new ethnicities” at the turn of the millennium is resulting in a renewed discovery of archaeology as a source of information on a wide variety of national and cultural heritage issues (SAAS 1998).

In archaeological circles, South Africa is best known for the fossil man discoveries of the Leakeys and others in the Transvaal region. Much hoopla was made of the discovery in 1997 of a trail of fossilized footprints left more than 100,000 years ago by an anatomically modern human on the shore of a South African lagoon. South African archaeology has indeed made major contributions to the understanding of Early Man and African prehistory. Unfortunately, in

South Africa, as in many other places of the world, archaeological knowledge has sometimes been used for political purposes. Because of the years of limited academic freedom under apartheid, any link to the “old establishment” archaeology as a discipline is seen by many in the country as a tool of racism and exclusiveness. This has resulted in a limited popular base for archaeology (SAAS 1998).

Although special conservation areas have been set aside in South Africa since the 1890s, serious problems have always existed in carrying out effective management. These problems are exacerbated today with the turnover of politics and government. However, impressive efforts are now being made in South Africa to challenge and overcome persisting stereotypes of the country’s past; archaeologists and archaeology educators are working hard to more effectively engage the public. These efforts are presenting archaeology as something more than just a sterile and academic pursuit. More and more in contemporary South Africa, archaeology is seen as a tool for discovering the unwritten heritage of the country from the earliest hominids to the material traces of the recent past (SAAS 1998). Our “hats are off” to our South African colleagues who bravely embrace the difficult issues of park management in the new and rapidly evolving politi-

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cal and socioeconomic climate of their country.

The Nature of National Protected Area Systems Worldwide

In many countries at the national level, a variety of designations is used for resource conservation. Inevitably, the same designation may mean different things in different countries, and different designations in different countries may be used to describe the same category of protected area. Because of this, an internationally recognized system of categories, defined by management objectives rather than depending on titles, is in use (IUCN 1994). This category system was devised by IUCN–The World Conservation Union—a union of governments, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations working at the field and policy levels for worldwide conservation—through its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). The WCPA works “to promote the establishment and effective management of a worldwide, representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas as an integral contribution to the IUCN mission.” In performing this mission, WCPA strives to establish itself as “the world’s recognised source of guidance, support and expertise on protected areas” (WCPA 1996). The category system is intended to operate in the same way in all countries in

order to facilitate the collection and handling of comparable data and to improve international communications. IUCN uses the categories to update its authoritative *United Nations List of National Parks and Protected Areas*, which is revised about every three years. There are about 9,900 protected areas worldwide (WCMC 1999).

Definition of a Protected Area

IUCN’s definition of a protected area is: “An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.” IUCN defines nine purposes for protected area management:

- Scientific research;
- Wilderness protection;
- Preservation of species and genetic diversity;
- Maintenance of environmental services;
- Protection of specific natural and cultural features;
- Tourism and recreation;
- Education;
- Sustainable use of resources from natural ecosystems; and
- Maintenance of cultural and traditional attributes.

IUCN defines a “national park” as a protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation,

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including maintenance of ecological integrity, exclusion of resource exploitation, and preservation of spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational values (IUCN 1994).

Problems in International Comparisons of Protected area Designations

One of the problems in making international comparisons is the widely varying types of protected area designations. For example, in the USA, several categories exist for units of the National Park System that contain archaeological sites: national park, national monument, national historic site, etc. Meaningful international or cross-cultural comparisons are difficult without detailed understanding of the cultural and sociopolitical atmosphere surrounding a particular resource or issue. The location of a resource within the boundaries of a protected area does not remove it from both artificial and natural forces that might degrade it. We can hope that "important" sites, however they are defined culturally or politically, are experiencing less degradation and enhanced public appreciation by their inclusion in national parks and other protected area designations.

Archaeology and Conservation

Archaeology, as a sub-field of anthropology, is the study and reconstruction of past human lifeways as reflected in material culture and artifacts. In many instances,

archaeological sites represent the sole source of new information on a particular cultural group or time period. Professional archeologists use scientific methods to identify and analyze the residue of human behavior. Data collected by archeologists are used to supplement, modify, and correct humanity's written record. Historical archeologists blend existing historical accounts with archaeologically derived information to produce new interpretations of history.

Archaeologists study material remains within the cultural system that produced them. A common misperception of archaeological sites is that they are "invisible" and therefore should be treated as separate entities from the above-ground or "built" environment. While we often must, in fact, look under the present-day ground surface in order to study and evaluate archeological remains, archaeological materials can be both below and above the ground surface as part of the cultural landscape.

Archaeological sites are non-renewable: once they are disturbed or destroyed they cannot be brought back. Even the scientific methods of archaeology, such as systematic excavation, are destructive in the sense that they remove archaeological materials from their original physical context. In recent years, a conservation ethic has developed where archaeologists usually sample

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only a portion of a site, leaving the remainder for future archaeologists armed with more advanced methods and procedures that can yield more accurate interpretations.

Archaeology Conservation and Interpretation in the U.S. National Park Service

The U.S. National Park System contains a great variety of archaeological sites from early prehistoric times (+10,000 BC) to nineteenth-century battlefields and twentieth-century settlements. Of the approximately 380 units of the System, nearly all contain archaeological resources. U.S. National Park Service (NPS) programs provide national leadership and coordination for the protection, preservation, and interpretation of America's archaeological resources inside the National Park System and beyond. Programs seek to broaden public understanding, protect and preserve sites and artifacts in place, and strengthen community relations while recognizing cultural diversity (NPS 1999). Knowledge gained from archaeological research in the parks is used to evaluate and protect threatened sites and to broaden knowledge as background to enhanced public interpretation programs and exhibits.

While the archaeological sites protected by NPS may number in the hundreds of thousands, some are internationally known for their prehistoric importance. For example, Mesa Verde National Park, estab-

lished in 1906, contains elaborate stone villages or "cliff dwellings" in the sheltered alcoves of a steep canyon in Colorado. The culture represented at Mesa Verde reflects more than 700 years of history (approximately AD 600 through 1300). Ocmulgee National Monument in Georgia is an example of a park unit that owes its existence to work done by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. One of the primary attractions at Ocmulgee is the reconstructed earthlodge dating to about AD 1100.

Ninety Six National Historic Site and Fort Vancouver National Historic Site are examples of parks that rely heavily on archaeology to supply details in the interpretation of significant events and periods of U.S. history. Ninety Six contains the remains of an eighteenth-century frontier outpost, including a reconstructed stockade fort (Figure 1). From 1825 to 1849, Fort Vancouver in Washington state was the western headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trading operations and the center of political, cultural, commercial, and manufacturing activities in the Pacific Northwest. A major program of reconstructions has followed comprehensive archaeological work.

Since the 1930s, NPS architectural historians, archaeologists, and interpreters have debated the validity and appropriateness of reconstructions, whether on-site or off-site. Although they can be very useful tools

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Figure 1. Reconstructed Stockade Fort at Ninety Six National Historic Site, South Carolina.

in public interpretation, reconstructions have long been a source of controversy in NPS and have nearly always been allowed only when substantial archaeological and architectural details are known (Jameson and Hunt 1999).

The practice of archaeology, as well as archaeologically derived information and objects, can inspire a wide variety of artist's conceptions ranging from straightforward computer-generated reconstructions and traditional artists' conceptions to other art forms such as poetry and opera (Finn 1999; Ehrenhard and Bullard 1999). Although some level of conjecture will always be present

in these art forms, they are often no less conjectural than technical interpretations and have the benefit of providing visual and conceptual imagery that can communicate contexts and settings in a compelling way. We can look at archaeology's connections to art and music as a different way of valuing and defining the resource and making it more meaningful to the public. The National Park Service has used artistic renderings of archaeological findings, such as original oil paintings and other forms of interpretive art, as public interpretation tools. Such art works are used in conjunction with interpretive wayside exhibits, public

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Figure 2. Interpretive rendering of the burial of a Confederate prisoner-of-war; details of the scene are based on archaeological evidence. Fort Pulaski National Monument, Georgia.

awareness posters, book covers, and other presentations as eye-catching, educational devices (Figure 2).

A unique program to cross-train archaeologists and interpreters in

NPS is the newly developed archeology-interpretation shared competency curriculum. Archaeologists, interpreters, and educators are trained together in the “basic tools”

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for developing effective presentations and programs that meet federal standards and agency missions. Stressed in the curriculum is the need for cooperative communications between disciplines, the importance of teamwork, and the need for accurate and sensitive interpretation to multicultural audiences. The goals of this program are to strengthen the relationship between archaeology and public interpretation and ultimately to improve how archaeology is presented to the public (Jameson 1999).

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