

## Changing Approaches to Management at the Tsankawi Mesa of Bandelier National Monument

**A**s demonstrated by a special section of *The George Wright Forum* titled “Taking Stock: Changing Ideas and Visions for Parks” (Volume 17, Number 2), both the park idea and approaches to managing parks have changed greatly over the past century. Parks have been “managed, exploited, enjoyed, glorified, or left alone, depending on the ideals espoused” during a specific period (Carr 2000, 16). This is particularly true of the national parks, which have been, seemingly contradictorily, developed for mass tourism and preserved in a relatively unaltered state depending upon the management approach taken by the National Park Service (NPS). The Tsankawi unit of Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico can stand as a particularly relevant example of the agency’s changing concept of park stewardship. Throughout much of its history as part of a protected national monument, this mesa was to have been developed to accommodate large numbers of visitors, similar to the principal area of Bandelier, Frijoles Canyon. Because NPS never followed through on these plans, Tsankawi was preserved as an intact cultural landscape containing the remains of an unexcavated pueblo, ceremonial kivas, cavates, pictographs, and a prehistoric footpath worn deeply into the rock of the mesa. Recently, it has become a focal point for a new approach to park management: NPS and other land management agencies now recognize such areas as indigenous ancestral sites that are important to contemporary Native American culture, and are engaged in efforts to consult with tribes on their preservation and interpretation. It is remarkable that an area that NPS wanted to intensively develop for much of the last century could now be a model for sensitive management. However, this new approach only came about recently and Tsankawi was preserved more because of a lack of funding for development than as a result of a conscious preservation effort.

### **Establishing a National Monument**

Efforts to protect Tsankawi and other archeological sites on New Mexico’s Pajarito Plateau began as early as 1899, when the archeologist Edgar Lee Hewett recommended that a substantial part of the region become a national park. Working with

Representative John E. Lacey, chairman of the House Public Lands Committee, Hewett helped draw up several proposals for a park of between 150,000 and 250,000 acres, called either Pajarito Plateau National Park or the National Park of the Cliff Cities. Hewett and Lacey were joined by those who saw a national park as a

boon to tourism and a means to enhance the image of the territory — and, beginning in 1912, state — of New Mexico. As was often the case with proposals for national parks, opposition came from proponents of development who did not want to see such a large area put off limits to grazing, timber cutting, and homesteading. They had allies in the federal government, particularly the then-young United States Forest Service (USFS), which managed much of the Pajarito Plateau as an area dedicated to the utilitarian use of natural resources. By 1916, USFS had to contend with the new NPS, which joined the movement for a national park. USFS countered the park movement with a proposal for a smaller national monument that would protect some of the archeological resources in the area but avoid putting a large tract of land off limits to development. On February 11, 1916, three discrete areas containing significant archeological sites were proclaimed as Bandelier National Monument by President Woodrow Wilson through executive powers granted by the Antiquities Act. The new monument totaled 22,400 acres and included the major sites at Frijoles Canyon and the separate Otowi and Tsankawi mesas. The new monument came under the management of USFS, displeasing NPS, which continued to advocate the creation of a national park (Rothman 1988).

### **NPS Development Plans**

During the period that Bandelier was under USFS management, NPS continued its efforts to have the monument included within a larger national

park placed under its jurisdiction. In anticipation of a future land transfer, on two separate occasions the agency sent to the region representatives who reported on the resources and made recommendations for their management. These early reports displayed NPS' seemingly contradictory goals of protecting resources while promoting development to accommodate visitors. Following his inspection tour in the summer of 1919, Herbert Gleason wrote that NPS would be a better protector of the archeological sites within the national monument than USFS, but would also make these sites more accessible to visitors. Of the detached Tsankawi and Otowi mesas, Gleason complained that the "Forest Service, apparently, takes no pains to protect these ruins from irresponsible relic-hunters or to maintain in proper shape the roads leading to them" (Gleason 1919, 6). NPS criticism of USFS' failure to provide for visitation to Bandelier was countered by the USFS argument that it was a better steward of the archeological sites because it would not build roads that made them more accessible to looting, nor would it construct a hotel in Frijoles Canyon, as NPS proposed (Rothman 1988, 29-30).

The report on a 1930 inspection carried out by senior NPS officials Jesse Nussbaum, superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park, M.R. Tillotson, superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, and Roger Toll, superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, was even more visitor development-oriented. The superintendents concluded that much of the land around Bandelier

was not of sufficient scenic value to warrant inclusion in a national park and argued that NPS take over only the national monument. Then, it could begin new developments for visitors, most importantly the construction of a road into Frijoles Canyon where the most significant archeological sites were located. They noted that while Frijoles Canyon received 3,000 to 4,000 visitors a year, the detached Otowi and Tsankawi sections of the monument received far fewer people, as there was little at each site to attract the public. However, this could be remedied by their development. Of Otowi, they wrote that there was “little to interest visitors at the site of the main pueblo. It could however be made of interest by re-excavation.” The inspection party found the Tsankawi mesa more interesting, both because of the spectacular view from the top and because the “ruins of Tsankawi have been only partly excavated and offer almost their original value for scientific excavation and development for visitors” (Nussbaum, Tillotson, and Toll 1930, 12, 16). Although the superintendents favored the excavation of Tsankawi, they wanted to preserve certain aspects of the site. The road to the mesa ended a half-mile away and the party did not believe it “desirable to build a road all of the way, since visitors should approach the ruins on foot, over the worn trails used by the prehistoric inhabitants.” As for the ruins, few people visited them because “they have been but partly excavated, and no effort has been made to bring out the features that would be of interest to visitors.” Like the 1919 report on

Bandelier, the inspection party offered seemingly contradictory recommendations, stating that it was “of great importance that as many as possible of these prehistoric ruins should be protected and preserved in their present condition, for future generations,” but also recommending new excavations “with a view of acquiring all possible information from the ruins, and of protecting the structures from further deterioration and making them available for public inspection and instruction.” The party recommended that Otowi and Tsankawi “be developed and made features of interest to visitors,” who would be able to “combine a trip to these ruins with a visit to” Frijoles Canyon, “thus making a combination trip, which would present more features of interest than would one area alone.” (Nussbaum, Tillotson, and Toll 1930, 29-30, 67) Clearly, NPS was interested in developing Bandelier National Monument for the sake of visitation.

With Nussbaum, Tillotson, and Toll recommending that NPS take over the management of Bandelier National Monument rather than seek to have a national park established in this region, the agency temporarily abandoned its park proposal. In 1931, USFS agreed to transfer the monument, along with additional land that would allow the Otowi and Tsankawi mesas to be combined into one area, which was then referred to as the Otowi Unit of Bandelier National Monument. The transfer was made on February 25, 1933, but the idea of creating a national park on the Pajarito Plateau remained alive within NPS, which made additional park proposals

later in the 1930s and again in the 1960s.

Despite the recommendations of the 1930 inspection party that Tsankawi be excavated, after NPS took over Bandelier National Monument development was limited to Frijoles Canyon. Here, using Civilian Conservation Corps labor, a road was constructed to ease access to the canyon, and a visitor center, administrative facility, and lodge were constructed on the valley floor near the major archeological ruins. Tsankawi was, however, considered to be among the more important archeological sites in the park and remained in consideration for future development. In the 1940s, when NPS was planning a land exchange with its new neighbor on the Pajarito Plateau, the Los Alamos National Laboratory, it wanted to hold on to Tsankawi even though other parts of the detached Otowi Unit could be exchanged for laboratory land on the rim of Frijoles Canyon. Writing about the possible exchange of land in the Otowi Unit of the monument, Erik Reed, the chief archeologist for the Southwest Region of NPS, reiterated earlier observations, stating that of all the ruins here, Tsankawi was the “most important from the archaeological and interpretive viewpoints” (Reed 1948).

The Tsankawi section of Bandelier was clearly recognized as significant by NPS, but through the 1940s and 1950s park management continued to focus on Frijoles Canyon even though with increased visitation to Bandelier, the outlying unit became a destination for growing numbers of people. It was this change in the habits of visitors to

Bandelier that led NPS to consider developing Tsankawi into a major destination in the national monument. In 1956, officials from the NPS regional office in Santa Fe noted that the “trail to Tsankawi is increasingly popular,” but a lack of funding prevented the park from providing visitors with anything more than a self-guiding interpretive trail (NPS 1956). At this time, NPS was planning Mission 66, a ten-year effort to make all of the areas in the National Park System capable of handling the huge numbers of people visiting them in the post-war era. In most cases, under Mission 66 the response of NPS to increasing visitation was to build more roads and visitor facilities in the parks. Bandelier was to have been no exception, as here the “problem” was a “dual one involving protection for the detached Otowi section and the lack of space for expansion of existing facilities in the main visitor area” in Frijoles canyon. To remedy this, NPS planned to construct a visitor center along the highway near Tsankawi, as well as for the pueblo to be “excavated and stabilized” and the prehistoric foot-path to the mesa top “reconstructed with appropriate exhibits installed along the trail.” The development of Tsankawi, which was called the “most important part of the Mission 66 program for Bandelier,” would serve three goals. First, it would “provide the necessary protection of this very important section of the monument.” Second, development would “provide the proper kind of interpretation” in order to “make it possible for the visitors to obtain the maximum benefits from the features” found here. Third,

making this area more attractive to visitors would “relieve the overcrowded condition of the Frijoles Canyon by a dispersal of monument visitors” (NPS, undated).

The Mission 66 plan for Tsankawi was not carried out, but support for new development at this part of the monument continued through the 1960s and 1970s. In 1962, the acting superintendent of Bandelier wrote to the director of the NPS Southwest Region about planned excavations and visitor-oriented developments that were a “high priority” for the monument (Widmer 1962). Proposals for the excavation of the pueblo were included in the 1973 and 1977 master plans for Bandelier. Unlike earlier plans, the excavation would not be carried out simply to expose the ruins for interpretive purposes but “allow visitors to observe an excavation in progress and to learn how archaeological materials are used to reconstruct the past.” Once excavated, it could be determined “how the ruins can be best used and interpreted” (NPS 1977).

The 1960s and 1970s were periods when NPS was relatively flush with cash as a result of congressional appropriations for park development under the Mission 66 program (in the 1960s), and to prepare for the American Bicentennial (in the 1970s). Why, then, did nothing happen at Tsankawi? No clear answer exists, but it may be the case that despite the development plans that existed for this part of Bandelier, and the numerous examples of managers stating that the area was a priority for the monument, this detached piece of land actually became less important to NPS after a

large piece of the Otowi Unit, the Otowi mesa itself, was transferred to Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1963 in exchange for additional land adjacent to Frijoles Canyon. Following the land transfer, the Frijoles Canyon section of the monument grew to 31,911 acres as compared to Tsankawi’s mere 826 acres. The fact that the Tsankawi mesa was retained in 1963, despite its being a detached unit of the park with the inherent management difficulties that this represented, reflects the importance of the resources there to NPS. However, as far as the allocation of funds for development, the new land adjacent to Frijoles Canyon became a priority. Here, a new campground and amphitheater were constructed, thereby allowing an overcrowded campground to be removed from Frijoles Canyon itself. In addition, much-needed employee housing was built.

### **A New Approach toward Tsankawi**

Because NPS failed to carry out its plans to excavate and develop Tsankawi, the mesa remained a relatively pristine area in which visitors could have a different experience than that found in the developed and overcrowded main section of Bandelier. At Tsankawi, visitors could hike along the prehistoric foot-path rather than over the asphalt and pipe-railed pathways installed near the ruins in Frijoles Canyon. Climbing to the top of the mesa, one passed numerous petroglyphs before finding the expansive 360-degree view of the Pajarito Plateau, Rio Grande Valley, and Sangre de Cristo Mountains. There

was the unexcavated pueblo, which allowed visitors the opportunity to gain an appreciation for archeology by seeing what an archeologist has to work with before beginning an excavation. On the far side of the mesa, where visitors began the return hike, cavates and petroglyphs line the mesa wall. All of this provided visitors to Tsankawi with a feeling of discovery, away from the controlled exhibits and crowds that have come to typify a visit to Frijoles Canyon. Granted, the interpretation at Tsankawi could have been improved, but the fact that people came to this area despite the lack of visitor facilities testified to the importance of this type of national park experience.

By the 1990s, NPS recognized that an undeveloped Tsankawi was a valuable resource for Bandelier. The 1992 interpretive plan made this quite clear, stating:

In contrast to the paved trails, full-service, multi-media facilities of Frijoles Canyon, Tsankawi will not be developed for mass visitation. Instead, it will remain a less developed discovery site where people can have the thrill of walking in paths used by prehistoric people. In this quiet, unexcavated site it is easy to have a personal encounter with the cultural resources, maybe even sense the presence of the former inhabitants. It is an aesthetic and emotional experience rather than an intellectual one, or has been one in the past (NPS 1992).

During the same period that NPS made the conscious decision not to develop Tsankawi, the site experienced an increase in visitation that led to a number of management problems, particularly the rapid erosion of the prehistoric foot-paths to the top of the mesa and the uncontrolled explo-

ration of cavates. In response, the agency explored options for the area but clearly rejected the development plans of previous decades because this would be “detrimental to the site’s scenic, natural, and cultural resources.” However, the fact that for decades NPS had planned to develop Tsankawi but instead left the area largely alone meant that there was “[n]o guiding management philosophy” for the mesa (NPS 1995). Here was an opportunity for NPS to develop and apply a new management approach.

Rather than see the mesa as containing a collection of archeological features of interest to visitors, in the 1990s Tsankawi was recognized both as an intact cultural landscape that was significant because of its unaltered state and an indigenous ancestral site that remained significant to contemporary Pueblos in the area. This new approach was, in part, the result of an ethnographic study of the traditional use of resources within Bandelier, which developed into active consultation on the management of these resources with Pueblos historically associated with indigenous sites within the monument (Merlan, Panteah, and Gonzales 2000). It was also the result of a new effort to study preservation issues at Tsankawi by Bandelier management, the NPS Santa Fe office, and the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, which had been carrying out technical conservation work for several years at Mesa Verde National Park and other NPS sites in the Southwest. Beginning in 1998, Tsankawi became the focus of an annual program that



brought together park managers, Penn professors and students, and members of the Cochiti and San Ildefonso Pueblos to determine the appropriate management of the mesa and undertake the technical conservation of its features. Over the course of several summer field programs, Penn students joined with Pueblo students to carry out conservation treatments, such as backfilling the historic footpaths that

were becoming heavily eroded from the increased visitation to the mesa (Matero 2000). Consultations between public land managers and historically associated indigenous peoples is presently taking place throughout much of North America, but the history of the Tsankawi Mesa stands as an example of how this is only a recent development in the evolution of public lands management.

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