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# Using Cultural Landscape Reports

View from Maryland Heights looking up the Shenandoah River toward Virginius Island, c. 1895.

The boundaries of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park include 2,287 gross acres located at the junction of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers. The park encompasses land in West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia. To properly administer and preserve the park land consistent with National Park Service (NPS) standards, a number of documents exist that outline acceptable management procedures. Documents that are frequently consulted for landscape management are the park's 1980 Development Concept Plan, the *Secretary of the*



Chapter 7 of the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline* (NPS-28) outlines the recommended NPS management procedures for cultural landscapes. According to NPS-28, “a cultural landscape is a geographic area, including both natural and cultural resources, associated with a historic event, activity, or person.” NPS-28 recognizes four cultural landscape classes: historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, historic sites, and ethnographic landscapes.

In the process of applying this terminology to Harpers Ferry NHP, 10 distinct cultural landscapes have been identified and they are categorized as historic vernacular or historic site landscapes. These landscapes are Bolivar Heights, Cavalier Heights, Camp Hill, Virginius Island, Lower Town, Halls Island, the Armory Grounds, Short Hill, Maryland Heights, and Loudoun Heights. As of this time, CLR's have been prepared for both the Lower Town and Virginius Island.

In addition to NPS-28, other NPS guidelines come into play in the process of managing cultural landscapes within Harpers Ferry NHP. Where Harpers Ferry's historic landscapes merge with mountains, forests, and rivers, the Natural Resources Management Guidelines embodied in NPS-77 are also consulted in the process of managing the natural resources on the landscape. As is true in all national parks, landscape management in Harpers Ferry NHP is a true interdisciplinary effort involving both cultural and natural resource issues. Harpers Ferry NHP is also like other national parks in that Section 106 consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is mandated in cases where current park projects have the potential to impact cultural landscapes. However, aside from the more general Servicewide efforts to adhere to the tenets of NPS-28, NPS-77 and the Section 106 process, the staff of Harpers Ferry NHP seeks cultural landscape management direction from the park's two Cultural Landscape Reports.

Interdisciplinary teams with backgrounds in landscape architecture and history were assembled



Virginius Island from Jefferson Rock, 1865.

Photos courtesy Harpers Ferry NHP.

*Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Landscapes*, archeological reports, Historic Structures Reports, and Historic Furnishings Reports, just to name a few. However, two Cultural Landscape Reports (CLR) stand out as essential tools in the effective management of cultural landscapes within Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Before continuing with further discussion about the CLR's and how they are used by the park, it is first necessary to understand how and why these CLR's were created.

to produce the park's Cultural Landscape Reports. The core team that developed the CLR for the Lower Town district of Harpers Ferry NHP was led by Historical Landscape Architect Cathy Gilbert (NPS, Pacific Northwest Region), Project Landscape Architect Maureen Joseph, (NPS, Denver Service Center, Falls Church Office), and Project Historian, Perry Wheelock (University of Maryland). This became the park's first completed CLR. The length of this project from inception to publication took approximately one year to complete at a cost of \$100,000.00 dollars.

A second CLR for the park's Virginius Island area was developed and led by Landscape Architect, Maureen Joseph, Project Landscape Architect Deborah Warshaw (University of Maryland), Project Historian Perry Wheelock, and Landscape intern, Andrew Kriemelmyer (West Virginia University). The second CLR project entailed one year as well at a cost of \$75,000.00 dollars.

These Cultural Landscape Reports evolved because Superintendent Campbell recognized the significance of the complex cultural landscapes within the park and sought the development of CLRs to provide a body of data that would assist with the management of these valuable resources. With cultural landscape studies deemed a priority, decisions concerning which landscapes to study first needed to be resolved. This was done using factors such as the condition and type of cultural and natural resources within a given landscape, safety considerations, visitor impact potential, major interpretive themes interwoven in the landscape, and cost. At the time, the availability of staffing and funding allowed for the speedy development of the CLRs.

The Cultural Landscape Reports written for Harpers Ferry NHP are technical reports which include maps, plans, drawings, sketches, and photographs. The CLR is broken down into the following basic categories: introduction, existing conditions, landscape history, analysis, evaluation, design development, appendix, and bibliography. In short, the CLR proposes design objectives, treatments, and recommendations for the park professionals and the maintenance staff to refer to and follow for years to come. It is an important and necessary tool to be used by current and future employees who will influence the preservation, development, and man-

agement of the park's landscapes. The CLR basically serves as baseline data which the park staff can return to again and again to make sure that proposed developments are planned in a manner compatible with the park's cultural landscape features.

The availability of a CLR aids immeasurably in the management of the park's cultural landscapes. Recent experiences with flood damage to Virginius Island provide graphic evidence of this fact. This episode began in early January of 1996 when record snow fell throughout much of the northeastern United States. This snow was later followed by several days of heavy rain that led to rapid snow melt that culminated in severe flooding in Harpers Ferry between January 19-21. The Potomac River crested at 29.4', making it one of the four most severe floods in Harpers Ferry history.

Located on the banks of the Shenandoah River just above the point where it joins the Potomac, Virginius Island was completely submerged during the catastrophe. Heavy damage was done to the island in the form of large natural and manmade debris deposits, serious road and trail



*Virginius Island flood damage, 1996. Flood waters removed the paths and trails leaving deposits of silt over the landscape and ruins. Photo by Peter F. Dessauer.*

erosion, further historical ruin destruction, way-side removal, and significant vegetation loss. As nature designed, the brunt force of swift waters from the Shenandoah River exacted a heavy toll on Virginius Island.

Between the early 1800s and the total devastation wrought by the 1936 flood, the 13-acre island was a booming industrial community that exhibited row houses and single family dwellings, numerous mills, workshops, roads, bridges, a canal, and a railroad line that still operates today. This dense and bustling community housed a mixture of government and private armory employees

Virginus Island flood damage, 1996. Damaged brick masonry walls over cotton/flour mill ruins.

skilled in the production of thousands of rifles and muskets for the U.S. military, and employees for other private mill enterprises such as flour, cotton, and sawmills. Much of the island's manufacturing capability was seriously diminished by the havoc of the Civil War. The 1936 flood delivered the final blow to this small industrial island. By 1953, when Harpers Ferry was purchased by the National Park Service, both the island and the town were in serious decline.



Photos by Peter F. Dessauer.

In the process of completing the CLR for Virginus Island, the document emerged as a source of information that identified the locations of long-missing structures, roads, and railroad lines. This documentation enabled park staff to map out and restore many Virginus Island roads. Archeologists also used CLR data to help locate ruin foundations and then implemented the CLR management recommendations by accentuating the ruins with vegetation management techniques. The CLR also served as a body of knowledge that assisted with the construction and reconstruction of bridges, the repointing of ruins, the planting of trees, and the installation of 14 wayside exhibits at points of interest throughout the island.

Virginus Island flood damage, 1996. Flood debris and damaged masonry in the turbine pit of the cotton/flour mill ruins.

Having a CLR that described the pre-flood state of Virginus Island provided a quick and comprehensive information source to use in the post-disaster recovery process. The report was physically taken to damaged locations to reinstall waysides; relocate trail, road, and ruin perimeters; and to reestablish topography grades. The photographs, maps, and narratives, within the CLR gave immediate visual evidence demonstrating how the damaged landscape looked prior to the flood and how it should look after the completion of repairs.

As of yet, the remaining eight distinct landscape com-

ponents of Harpers Ferry NHP do not have CLR's written to assist with their management. When a project is proposed within an area that lacks a CLR, the park's landscape architect has the responsibility to research and design a solution to the problem. Not only does this require the completion of Section 106 documentation and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, but also the park staff must engage in time consuming research to determine the historic character of the landscape to be impacted by the project. In cases where a CLR has already been completed, the research information and several design alternatives will already exist. Needless to say, this results in significant time savings for the park. Over the long term, the initial expense of completing a CLR is more than made up by the time and money saved in designing and planning projects that are compatible with the cultural landscape.

The Cultural Landscape Reports provide readily available research information, design alternatives, and preservation objectives to follow during the development of future projects. CLR's include historical data, concepts, and design treatments that are immediately available for use in managing the landscape. The CLR is not the only information source needed for the effective management of a distinct landscape. It is, however, an official document packed with good information that expedites planning and development activities that promote the overall preservation of a specific cultural landscape.

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