

Native Americans Come to the Rescue of America's Historic Coastal Forts

The Navajo Nation has had a long tradition of producing brave young men who have fought for the United States. During World War II, they distinguished themselves as the Code Talkers throughout the Pacific theater. Once again young men—this time masons—are leaving the Navajo Reservation to rescue their buddies, who are combating the nearly relentless deterioration of some of the finest examples of brickwork produced by the Corps of Engineers. The masonry of the historic coastal fortifications, now under the stewardship of the national park system, have been in need of some heroic efforts to save them from the ravages of the marine environments. The Native American masons who have responded to this call for help from coast to coast have journeyed over land and sea to serve their country once again.

These seasonal masons were recruited to help out at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas National Park on the East Coast and, concurrently, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's Fort Point. Their availability to help the forts was due to the Regional Director John E. Cook's standard operating procedure for interdependently sharing resources throughout the park system. When the calls came from the parks to help with project funded masonry work on some of the most impressive and oldest of the coastal forts, the Support Office in Santa Fe went to work creating Internal Partnerships to solve the lack of skilled historical masons.

There had been a longstanding connection between the Santa Fe office and the park units inside the Navajo Reservation for shared training for Navajo speaking maintenance workers and for mobilizing roving ruins preservation crews. This collaboration continues today in many new aspects such as the Vanishing Treasures Initiative, where older masons nearing retirement will train new recruits seeking a career in preservation of the ancestral puebloan architecture and other ruins sites that are located throughout the Intermountain region. The call to help save the coast to coast forts was certainly a new one for all involved.

Fresh out of San Francisco, Superintendent Nancy Stone, of Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site, was ready to help in every way possible when the Presidio was damaged by winter storms several years ago. She continued the collaborative efforts

with those in Santa Fe who were busily mobilizing work forces from several parks in the new Intermountain Region for the sake of the many historic structures that had been recently abandoned by the Army. Once the recruiting efforts were accomplished locally in Ganado, Arizona, there was a core group of young workers eager to follow the lead of their Project Leaders, Taylor Tsosie and Delbert Brown. These two more experienced preservation specialists had left the reservation to join the Santa Fe office a decade earlier following a path blazed by three generations of Navajo-speaking park service ruins stabilization masons. Nancy and her staff provided a steady stream of seasonal helpers who were assigned to projects closer to home after their coastal rescue missions were over. Projects at Pipe Springs National Monument and Hubbell Trading Post were supported by this multi-park shared resources concept. In return, Superintendent John Hiscock of Pipe Springs loaned one of his seasonal masons for roving assignments. Over the past five years, several other superintendents have shared workers who filled in behind the downsized former regional preservation crew. These parks include: Aztec Ruins National Monument, Mesa Verde National Park, Fort Smith National Historic Site, Hot Springs National Park, the Long Distance Trails Office, Rocky Mountain National Park, Tumacacori National Historic Park, Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and Fort Frederica National Monument. Finally, there have been partnerships with non-NPS workers who have helped immensely including: the Getty Conservation Fund, the NCCC from Americorps of the National Service Corporation, the National Guard, and the Northern Pueblos of New Mexico.

Recently two more superintendents, whose park units are in the Navajo lands, have recruited four more helpers for the Fort Point project. Anne Marie Fender of Canyon de Chelly National Monument and James Charles of Navajo National Monument have successfully recruited and selected skilled masons for the arduous tasks that lay ahead of them under the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge.

There are great similarities between the work at Forts Point and Jefferson due to the use of the same technology for protecting the embrasures along the curtain walls of these masonry Goliaths. Brig. Gen. Joseph G. Totten, of the Corps of Engineers, pioneered the cast iron shutters that have been named after him. These Totten Shutters would be pushed open when

the cannons were prepared for firing by the artillerymen and would close automatically after the round was fired, thus protecting the soldiers from enemy fire. These same cast iron reinforced embrasures are the cause of the accelerated deterioration at the forts today. When the marine environment saturates the fort with moisture there is a continual oxidation process within the cast iron and after a century and a half the oxide-jacking forces of these rusted members is too much for the old masonry to resist. Overnight entire wall veneers have been known to disengage from the core of these massive walls and slough off into the moats that surround the fort.

A decade of continuous efforts have netted considerable success at Fort Jefferson's front casemates, on either side of the sally port, that greet the visitors who are disembarking from the boats and seaplanes which are the only available transport to this remote island in the Florida Straits. At Golden Gate's Fort Point, which was saved from destruction by the engineer who designed the Bridge that towers over it today, the visitor comes into intimate contact with the same problem embrasures. Fortunately for these visitors, who jog everyday around the fort's seaside location, the walls have been repointed and the hostile marine humidity has been less destructive on the cast iron shutters and reinforcing plates.

The masons from the reservations in the Southwest have worked with many other partners who have been trying to arrest the advanced deterioration. The Historic Preservation Training Center's Tom McGrath was the author of the Historic Structures Report that outlined the intricate steps to save Fort Jefferson a decade ago while he was an historical architect at the Denver Service Center. The former

Southeast Region's preservation specialists implemented the prototype of the stabilization efforts at the Fort. Now he sees to it that a regularly scheduled detail of masons from the Training Center join forces with the roving crews out of Santa Fe's Architectural Conservation Program who are led by Jeff Brown, Project Manager for both coastal efforts.

Jeff Brown, Jake Barrow, and Gary Smith, all hired as supervisory exhibit specialists and now called Project Managers for the Support Office in Santa Fe, have enabled several years and millions of dollars of collaborative efforts. They have brought together over 20 workers from the Western, Midwest, and Southeast regions to merge seamlessly with those preservation crew members who have been loaned time and again from the many parks of the interdependent clusters that comprise the Intermountain region. Sometimes working on short notice, they have been able to field select preservation specialists and their helpers on a service-wide basis throughout their tenure with the Intermountain and formerly the Southwest Region of the National Park Service.

This can-do attitude is rewarded every time a Superintendent says, "Yes" to the call to share their resources with parks in need. Keeping traditions like those that led to the Navajo Code Talkers who had preserved their unique language and thus helped win a war, will serve the Park Service well in meeting the needs of its aging cultural resources that are under attack.

Barry Sulam, AIA, is the NPS Program Manager, Architectural Conservation Cooperative Program at Montana State University, Intermountain Cultural Resources Program.

Larry Benallie, Jr.

The Ganado Project

The Navajo Nation Archaeology Department (NNAD) conducted an archeology field school for Ganado High School students during the summer of 1997. This was made possible through a Historic Preservation Fund grant from the National Park Service, Tribal Historic Preservation Program. It is part of NNAD's effort to influence and change the way archeology and anthropology are conducted on Navajo lands—making them more beneficial and worthwhile to the Navajo people.

When archeologists and anthropologists began exploring the ancient cultures of the southwest in the late 1800s they came for a specific reason—to gather as much information as possible before our cultures

disappeared forever and to stock museum shelves with "primitive" artifacts. Most considered nothing offlimits—ceremonies, songs, sandpaintings, origin stories, clan stories, human remains, pottery, rugs, Kachina dolls, and baskets are just some examples of the thousands that were collected and shipped back to museums in the east.

Because of their obvious disregard for Native concerns and beliefs, the "scientists" were little more than cultural thieves. To make matters worse, they produced numerous books and writings about their work and became renowned using knowledge they took from us. They became experts on Indian cultures without ever understanding what it was to be Indian.

This past behavior has placed the profession of archeology and anthropology in such a bad light that it is difficult to make Navajo and Indian people understand that the profession is attempting to change its methodology and approach to conducting cultural resources work on Indian lands. It hasn't been an easy task trying to live down the past of so many.