

Cultural Heritage And Exploitation In The Land Of Enchantment

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Abstract

Historic sites are non-renewable resources, and their preservation protocol and interpretive presentation should ensure their long-term conservation. Ironically, public programming and preservation are often in conflict. Archaeological sites that have been excavated and left exposed for public accessibility are virtually impossible to preserve when they are subjected to environmental degradation and visitor use. Alternatives to this exploitive form of interpretation must be implemented. Alternative methods of interpretation can be accomplished in a museum setting through experimental archaeology and other programming limited only by imagination.

Introduction

Cultural (archaeological) resources at parks, monuments, and other sites under both private and public ownership are being compromised for their public programming value. Sites in the Southwestern United States have been excavated, and attempts are made to preserve the architectural remains in situ. Examples of this form of presentation are the mission and pueblo (Indian Village) ruins at Jemez State Monument, the extensive prehistoric settlement at Chaco Canyon, Aztec National Monuments in New Mexico, Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, and numerous other sites in the region.

The difficulties associated with the preservation of sites which have been excavated and left exposed for public visitation are a direct result of their interpretive presentation. The exposed rooms deteriorate rapidly as a result of environmental action such as freeze/thaw cycles, snow and wind, as well as visitor impact. These factors produce wall base deterioration and collapse, rapid loss of architectural features such as floor features, wall plaster, decorative painting, roof remnants. Martha Demas, in an unpublished manuscript related to site preservation for the Getty Conservation Institution states that:

Anyone who has visited an excavated site even after only one season [of exposure] has witnessed the result of these processes. Their cumulative effect after many years can be devastating. The extent of deterioration at any particular site will, of course, depend on the environment, sources of deterioration, and the type of materials being affected. Conservation and management interventions to a site can reduce the rate of deterioration, but none can respond to the totality of deterioration so effectively as backfilling [reburial of the site to protect the remaining architecture and other cultural features]. (Demas, 1993, pp. 4-5)

After several decades of repair, stabilization, and other forms of intervention, it is difficult if not impossible, to distinguish the original fabric from the repaired walls. In addition, these sites take on standardized characteristics which bear little relation to their original configuration, including, in part, relatively level wall tops, tuck-pointed masonry, the introduction of non-original materials (concrete, reinforcing bars), and the lack of most (if not all) of the original plaster and other fragile architectural materials. They have, in effect, become designer ruins. While it cannot be denied that it is a definite pleasurable, even spiritual, experience to visit some of these sites, they cannot be considered valid cultural resources. Visitors are being presented with a fantasy.

In New Mexico, and other parts of the American Southwest, the grand achievements of the pre-European settlers have simply become another roadside attraction. Demas (1993) cites the "Sphinx at Giza, whose survival for over four millennia is attributed to its having been buried in sand for most of that period, and whose present rapid deterioration is attributed to its total exposure for less than one hundred years" (p. 3).

Archaeological excavation must be limited to sites which are endangered by construction or other disturbance. It must be emphasized that our cultural heritage is a non-renewable resource and that excavation, at best, is destruction. Pioneer archaeologists at Chaco Canyon National Monument used ancient roof beams for firewood. In the future, present-day excavations may well be judged with the same abhorrence as the efforts of many early archaeologists.

Non-Destructive Research

William Watley, Director of the Kwastiyukwa Interdisciplinary Research Project and tribal archaeologist for Jemez Pueblo, is conducting landmark archaeological investigation utilizing non-destructive methods at a large site (A.D. 1300-1670) in the high mountains of New Mexico. Watley's unique approach includes the hypothetical re-creation of the village via satellite mapping, sophisticated surveying techniques, investigation of the rich oral traditions of the descendants of the people who lived there,

collection of surface material—which is returned from where it was found after analysis, and other low-impact techniques. While this work will not produce the detailed data associated with excavation of various occupation levels, the interpretive material may be of the same relevance as that which could be gained by digging up the site (Watley, 1991). Of particular interest is Watley's work with the descendents of those who lived at the site. Rina Swentzell, an architect and member of Santa Clara Pueblo, places emphasis on archaeologists working with living peoples:

The question, "Why dig?" arises. When I have posed this question to archaeologists, the response is 'to ultimately learn more about human existence.'" If this is the case, archaeologists could learn from the cultures connected with the sites that they dig. The Southwest is a unique archaeological area in that the descendants of the Anasazi are alive and thriving. The Pueblo culture, obviously, cannot be directly transposed on the old Anasazi culture, because cultures transform through time. But, because of the persistence of traditional stories, languages, and lifestyle in the Pueblo communities, it cannot be denied that modern Pueblo people are closer to the sensibilities of the Anasazi world than are Western-European archaeologists (Swentzell, 1992, p.13).

Many institutions, including the Museum of New Mexico, are literally sitting on a treasure of information. Stuffed away in basements of repositories are vast quantities of archaeological material which was removed from hundreds of sites. A large portion of this material has not been analyzed. This material should be assessed prior to unearthing more material which may simply become warehoused with the backlog of insufficiently researched collections. The analysis and synthesis of these artifacts could have a considerable impact upon the interpretation of the past.

Resource Burial

Consideration should be given to the burial of exposed sites which still retain a significant degree of integrity, and, where possible, burial of unexcavated sites, a process which will help protect them from erosion, civil disorder, vandalism, and other destructive factors.

The Division of Conservation of the Southwest Region of the National Park Service, Santa Fe, has buried (backfilled) parts of sites which were not of salient visitor interest at Pecos and Chaco Canyon National Monuments in New Mexico, and at Pueblo Grande in Arizona. Backfilling as a component of preservation designs is planned for sites at Wupatki and Bandelier National Monuments. According to Terry Morgart of the Division of Conservation, the National Park Service has recognized the

value of site burial as a preservation action and is actively pursuing backfilling as a preservation measure (Morgart, 1991).

Time capsules containing records and photographs of the resource should be placed in the site prior to burial. The capsules will no doubt outlast the institutional records and, perhaps, the institution itself.

An Alternative Preservation Protocol: Fort Selden State Monument

Fort Selden was established in the 1860s to protect settlers in southern New Mexico from Apache raids and bandits. By the latter part of the Nineteenth century, American Indians from the Mexican border to Montana were confined to reservations and no longer presented a threat to the interests of the United States. The Army abandoned Fort Selden in 1891 and soon afterwards the roofs, windows, and doors were removed (Cohrs & Caperton, 1983). Without protection and maintenance, the fort began its return to the mother earth. Today stark adobe wall remnants delineate the extent of the former frontier military post.

Fort Selden was declared a New Mexico State Monument under the Museum of New Mexico in 1974. Since that date several preservation projects have been initiated at the Fort by the Museum of New Mexico. The Museum of New Mexico and Getty Conservation Institute are conducting extensive experiments in adobe preservation at the site. After 20 years of stabilization efforts at the site, the techniques employed, such as wall caps, establishment of drainage slopes, and wall base repairs, have done little to retard the erosion of the exposed adobe walls. While the testing of chemical additives and other methodologies to preserve adobe continue at the site, unless a magic elixir for adobe immortality is discovered, it is estimated that within 50 years the exposed wall remnants will deteriorate to low mounds (Agnew, 1990; Coffman, Selwitz, & Agnew, 1990; Selwitz, Coffman, & Agnew, 1990; Caperton, 1990a; 1990b). Fragile earthen sites, including extensive rock and mud prehistoric pueblo ruins, must be isolated from the natural environment if they are to survive.

In an attempt to prolong the life of Fort Selden until a long-range plan for the site can be developed and implemented, selected walls have been buried, and temporary shelters have been erected over approximately 50 percent (429 linear feet) of the standing walls at the post. The shelters, which consist of polyester woven geotextiles and resemble black plastic sheeting, have presented a substantial visual impact upon the site. A brochure describing the project is provided for visitors, who are asked for their comments on the future of the monument. Respondents are given the following options for consideration:

1. Allow the ruins to follow their natural path of deterioration.
2. Deposit the fort in the bank for distant generations by covering it with earth.

3. Construct permanent shelters over the walls.
4. Selectively implement all of the above.

This survey brings to public attention the fragility of historic Fort Selden, and alternatives for preservation and presentation. Initial responses to the survey indicate that visitors understand the preservation problems, and they offered some interesting solutions. They do, however, wish to be able to see at least a portion of the original military post (Caperton, 1993).

Predictive Modeling as a Tool for Site Managers and Preservationists

To effectively curate and/or interpret a site it would be of great benefit to be able to predict how long the site will be there. The preservation design could then be related to the length of time the site is to be preserved. If it is determined that the resource is to be preserved for 40 years, it will require a different protocol than preserving the same site in perpetuity. Through the use of three-dimensional photographic drawings (stereophotogrammetry) it is possible to quantitatively measure the deterioration of archaeological sites.

A photogrammetric study of Fort Selden State Monument conducted by Kevin McDougall and John Jensen of the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, indicated that by utilizing historic photographs from the occupational and post-occupational periods of the fort, combined with present photographs, it may be possible to plot a deterioration curve of the site (McDougall & Jensen, 1989). Such models will enable site managers or preservation agencies to make informed decisions regarding site conservation needs, funding requirements for preservation/maintenance, justification for limiting visitation, and even resource burial.

Alternative Interpretive Methods

Interpretation can address the below-ground, or hidden, resource through the use of photographic data, museum exhibits, and other forms of programming. There is an element of mystery to the unknown which can be used to an advantage in interpretive presentations.

Interpretation can be accomplished effectively in a museum setting at an archaeological site. Presently the museum facilities at many parks and monuments are viewed as an adjunct to the resource. In addition, some exhibits in the Southwest on pre-Columbian peoples (known as the "corn, beans, and squash" form of interpretation) do no justice to the rich Indian cultural traditions. Edmund Ladd, from the Pueblo of Zuni, producer of the CBS documentary "Surviving Columbus" and Curator of Ethnology at The Museum of New Mexico, stated in relation to the present exhibits at many sites: "What do they think we are, succotash? We have been here for 3000 years" (Ladd, 1992). Exhibit plans for Jemez State Monument focus on the

living Pueblo of Jemez and contemporary tribal life in America today. By using this approach it is hoped that the past will have more meaning and relevance.

In most instances, museums at sites are relatively small and the exposed portion of the site is large. This order should be reversed. If archaeological exploration is unavoidable, a small archaeological site or a portion of a large site can be incorporated into a museum. If the excavated area is in a controlled environment, it might be possible to leave perishable artifacts and architectural elements such as roofing materials, basketry, floors, and wall plaster in situ for interpretation. The extent of subsurface cultural remains could be determined with limited archaeological testing or remote sensing, and the museum could be built over the site prior to excavation. This approach would probably prove more cost effective than creating a large exposed site which requires continual maintenance even if it is to survive in a homogenized and unauthentic state.

Research in the field of experimental archaeology, if based upon solid research, can test theories of life in the past. Experiments in such varied areas as a re-created Viking ship, a functioning Stone Age home in Holland, an Iron Age farm in England, and prehistoric hunter-gatherers in Arizona, are described in Jay Anderson's fascinating publication *Time Machines* (Anderson, 1984). Experimental archaeology, combined with interpretation to replicate past technology, has the potential of producing exciting public programming while not affecting cultural resources. The site can be presented as a laboratory where past technologies and lifeways are researched and re-created. The combination of an archaeological resource, and its working re-creation on the same site, could be very exciting for visitors.

Summary

The preservation and interpretation of prehistoric and historic archaeological sites are often in conflict. It is difficult, if not impossible, to retain the integrity of a site if it is left exposed to climatic and other deleterious conditions. The excavation process itself is destructive in nature, in that it results in the disturbance of the cultural material. Some sites, among which are the most spectacular in North America, have been sacrificed for the benefit of public programming.

Alternatives to the further excavation of cultural resources include analysis of existing collections and the use of non-destructive investigative approaches. Burial is an option for sites which are currently exposed.

Analysis of the site using historic and contemporary photographs can provide valuable information on the resource. This data can be used by site administrators to make informed decisions regarding funding needs for preservation and maintenance, and possibly to estimate the life expectancy of the site if it is left in an exposed condition.

Interpretive programming at archaeological sites which are less exploitive or non-exploitive includes: excavation of a limited portion of the resource which is then placed in controlled environment (museum); use of extensive museum displays for interpretation and not destroying the site through archaeology; and the use of experimental archaeology to re-create architecture, technology, and period lifeways on site.

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