

ISOLATED CULTURAL LANDSCAPES THROUGH TIME: A VIEW OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA COAST RANGE HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Known factors influencing human use of landscape vary from climate to topography; flora and fauna inherent to specific water availability and soils trigger particular human interactions with their environs. These, in turn, stimulate technologies, economies, and community organization. Published syntheses explain environmental causes affecting cultural response to the landscape but seldom explore intricacies of human response to space -- to isolation. Within the central coast range, the U.S. Army currently manages 165,000 acres for soldier training and technological experimentation. Mountainous terrain and oak covered hills encapsulate elongate, well-watered valleys -- a landscape preserving a cultural record dating from ca. 6,000 years ago, reflecting nearly all periods of California history to the present. The cultural record supports an argument for this isolated landscape benefiting large, self-contained precontact communities; constraining historic-period populations; and, reactivating communal independence during the most recent era.

Introduction

What is a cultural landscape? More importantly, how may perception of a cultural landscape contribute to sensitive resource management? It is understood that climate, topography, soils, and biotic communities inherent to specific water availability influence human use of the landscape. The environment, then, triggers particular human interactions stimulating technological development, economies, and community organization. Within a discrete area, 165,000 fenced acres at Fort Hunter Liggett (FHL), California, the environmental setting and land modifications through time are perceived as a "cultural landscape."

A brief overview of the human land use record within FHL environs merely sets a stage for currently pressing heritage management issues. West of, and about 1000 feet above Salinas Valley, geographic isolation appears

primary to formation of this cultural landscape. FHL is pocketed within valleys of the Santa Lucia Range in southern Monterey County. The installation's western boundary tops a high Pacific-facing ridge in a complex system typical of those resulting from extreme folding and faulting south of San Francisco Bay. Sheltered on the east and west by chaparral and pine-blanketed montane ruggedness, the hilly terrain is incised by two rivers and major seasonal streams supporting dense riparian flora. Level valleys are dominated by annual grasses and oaks and are dotted with seasonal wetlands. Massive sandstone rock outcrops are exposed throughout, especially around valley margins.

Land Use Rhythms Through Time

This resource-rich, isolated setting fostered, and continues to enhance, lifeways clearly identifiable by distinctive land uses. Prehistoric occupants had access to inland as well as coastal resources but appear to have

relied largely upon readily available vegetable and animal resources. After the mid-1770s, the oak savannah environs that supported a large precontact population invited Spanish missionaries, Mexican cattle barons, and early 1800s American settlers to the region. Based on knowledge of per capita needs -- agrarian versus natural food dependency, simple demographics, and socio-political reflections of thriving communities -- it appears that, through time, these distinctive groups experienced varying degrees of success.

A complex prehistory illustrates tremendous cultural success. Of FHL's 500 known archeological sites, the majority are described as prehistoric village, task specific, or ceremonial sites. San Antonio de Padua Mission, presently within an 85-acre inholding, was agrarian-based and, with the exception of brief prosperous interludes, commonly recorded severe crop failures and low or negative livestock increase. Mission efforts to sustain a sizable convert population through grain and animal husbandry were thwarted repeatedly and annual death rates frequently were high. During the Mexican regime, area occupants grazed cattle intensively and enjoyed moderate, although short-lived success. The number of sites from this era points to a peppering of modest enclaves within large land grants. Additionally, post-secularization occupation sites indicate that a few indigenous families, released from mission confines, pursued a return to traditional lifeways within a short distance from the deteriorating mission. Testimony for fluctuations of success during the local American settlement period correspond to economic diversification that included small parcel farming, mineral exploitation, and founding of a typical American-west, stage-stop town. Although settlers and miners increased the overall area population, these numbers fail to compare to those estimated for the precontact period.

Just prior to the turn of the century, heavy cattle grazing was reinstated over the land and continued through the 1930s. Publisher W.R. Hearst Jr. created a vast domain that, on the eve of America's entry into World War II, was melded

with neighboring ranches into the U.S. Army's training facility known today as FHL. The military clearly found the isolated mountainous terrain and level valleys ideal for training soldiers in a realistic setting for combat on the war's European fronts. Wartime use of the land increased local consumer population and the employment market and stimulated regional desire for prosperity realized elsewhere in the United States. Despite heavy military use, the War Department purchase fortuitously resulted in cordoning off a significant block of cultural and natural resources, enabling the area to resist post-war fungal-like development that invaded California's coastal margin. Through stoppages of military use the land was again grazed heavily. Reactivation of the military mission occurred preparatory to involvement in Korea and Vietnam. Thereafter, and to the present, the Army's mission at FHL is two-fold, soldier training and defense technology testing.

Fort Hunter Liggett activities added to the cultural landscape. Distributed among and over the rich and valued ancient heritage sites are features and landscape modifications attesting to nearly six decades of America's efforts to maintain well-trained and technologically responsive armed forces. This most recent cultural record finalizes a rhythm of moderate to heavy land use through time.

Current Land Use and Resource Management

The cultural landscape retains, in addition to archeological and historical records of land use, visible natural and human impacts to sensitive resources. Land use today is reduced greatly, moderate by comparison with that chronicling FHL's prehistory, history, and early military era. Natural impacts, however, including water erosion, storm damage, land slides, and heavy ground squirrel activity, appear to have been a constant, and are significant. Within a landscape of unstable soils on steep slopes, periodically subject to heavy storms as well as drought stresses, it is to be expected that some of the cultural record may be buried or stretched far beyond original use perimeters. Bioturbation

to the degree in evidence at some FHL sites skew surface observations. Analyses following data recovery resolves some problems but excavation is both costly and intrusive. To date, assumptions based on enumeration of previous impacts to site surfaces provide only superficial, and an undoubtedly biased, understanding of the veneer of disturbance over the entire cultural landscape. Surface observations, however sketchy, need to be factored into mandated assessment for potential impacts to historic properties due to today's actions. Current management practices and potential for impact assessment to sites stimulate a "need to know" the entire cultural landscape.

A comprehensive cultural landscape perception simultaneously calls for and facilitates specification of realistic resource management tools. Ideologic tools, for example FHL's recently implemented Historic Preservation Plan, address categories of simulated activities. "Real world," that is, onsite, management, demands real world tools. In this instance, and probably many others, the most basic tools are adequate site records and survey and excavation reports. Simply, these documents should contain data observed, meticulously described. Although a call for accurate site descriptions and maps to increase efficacy of site protection measures may seem to state the obvious, experience suggests otherwise. Despite intensive preaction coordination efforts, sites cannot be protected adequately nor can action impact potential be assessed, regardless how elaborately described preservation programs may be, if onsite managers do not have site boundary definitions or detailed information pertinent to surface and below surface disturbance. In summary, it is clear that practical synthesis of all cultural landscape aspects not only facilitates effective resource management capability but increases coordination confidence.