

Interpreting Native American Connections in National Parks

Moderated by Mary Lou Herlihy, NPS Pacific West Regional Office

CASE STUDY #1

Indigenous Design: Emerging Gifts

Presenter: Johnpaul Jones, FAIA, *Jones & Jones Architects, Landscape Architects, Planners*

Indigenous landscape and architectural design requires a sort of pilgrimage to Native peoples' cultural environment, revealing the rich cultural gifts of their Indigenous ways, beliefs and ancient traditions. The sense of place is paramount in all Indigenous cultures; without it they feel they do not exist! These Indigenous gifts, particularly indigenous verbal stories concerning the natural world, animal world, spirit world and human world are the lessons, and maps for creating Indigenous site and architectural designs.

CASE STUDY #2

The Value of Multiple Perspectives:

Long-Range Interpretive Plan Development at Fort Bowie NHS

Presenter: Julie Sayigh, Certified Interpretive Planner, Associate
EDX: Edquist Davis Exhibits, Seattle

A long-range interpretive plan (LRIP) establishes a mission, significance, interpretive themes, audience, and goals for visitor experiences at a site, as well as offering recommendations for future interpretive programming. At Fort Bowie, EDX was asked to incorporate the perspective of the descendants of the Chiricahua Apache, whose homeland encompassed the park. The story of their culture as well as their experience of conflict and loss, told by representatives of the tribe, was integrated into the LRIP so that interpretive efforts could begin to encompass the complete, multi-perspective history of this fascinating chapter in the history of the American west.

Lessons Learned

- The inclusion of **multiple perspectives** expands cultural awareness, challenges stereotypes, helps visitors to connect to universal themes, accurately represents groups and events, and reinforces a continuity of culture.
- A **process tailored to the specific stakeholder group** can yield better results, build stronger relationships, and lead to a much more honest and insightful interchange.

- Acknowledging **multiple truths** is essential. Rewriting history may not be possible—individuals may remain committed to their perspective on events, even as new information comes to light.
 - A multi-perspective story, told in the voices of those involved, provides a richer experience of history, **promoting inquiry and involvement in visitors**.
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CASE STUDY #3

At Home in this Place:

Blackfeet, Salish-Kootenai, and Pend d’Oreille Perspectives on Glacier National Park

Presenter: Mark Wagner, *Glacier National Park*

This exhibition is an opportunity for members of the Blackfeet, Kootenai, Salish, and Pend d’Oreille tribes to share their perspectives about the land we today call Glacier National Park. All of these tribes have a significant historical connection to this land as well as current and future ideas about the value of a place like Glacier National Park. Individual exhibits reference a variety of subjects related to park resources, including the land itself, animals and plants, storytelling, political issues, and personal perspectives on the meaning of Glacier National Park for them, their families, and their tribes. This is a relatively small exhibition, but it is the only permanent exhibition in Glacier National Park. *At Home in This Place* was designed by Edquist-Davis Exhibits (EDX) and fabricated by Color-Ad. A separate video contract covered animal stories and video presentations and was completed by Great Divide Pictures. The overall exhibition and the video segments both won first place media awards at last year’s National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Workshop.

Lessons Learned

- Develop interpretive messages **specific to the tribes you are working with**, not something generic (like Plains Indians).
- **Be prepared** to negotiate inter-tribal disagreements or differences, working toward telling stories that are acceptable to all.
- Exhibits should **speak from the tribal perspective** rather than your interpretation of tribal ideas.
- Embrace **controversial topics** and let them be told from the tribal perspective.
- Recognize **communication and meeting protocols** with tribes, where higher levels of management are often needed to represent your site or organization.
- Include live interviews or presentations by tribal members – literally the **voice of the tribes**.
- **Embrace ambiguity** with tribal input and recognize diversity of viewpoints. Be prepared for surprises (e.g., Divide Mt delta under visitor center)
- Remember that **tribal perspectives are much more than from the past** – include present and future.

CASE STUDY #4

At the Confluence:

Two rivers and two cultures at Fort Spokane

Presenter: Charles Davis, AIA, Partner, *EDX: Edquist Davis Exhibits, Seattle*

Fort Spokane, part of Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area, is located at the joining of the Columbia and Spokane Rivers. The fort that formerly stood on the site once kept the peace between encroaching Euro-American culture and Native Americans who had made this their home for millennia. Exhibits for the fort use immersive vignettes to tell two stories—one about historical Fort Spokane and its role in Euro-American settlement of the West, the other of its later use as the Fort Spokane Indian Boarding School. The boarding school was part of a nationwide effort to remove children from their homes and forcibly assimilate them into mainstream culture. Created in consultation with the Spokane and Colville Confederated tribes, these exhibits are the first at a National Park site to interpret this troubling chapter of American history.

Lessons Learned

- **MAKE IT EASY for partners** – Many tribal partners are elders. They may have limited mobility, hearing loss, or dietary restrictions. Ask them to help you plan a meeting so that they are comfortable and fully able to participate.
- **MAKE TIME** – Arrive early so that you can individually greet and introduce yourself to each participant. Leave time throughout a meeting for socializing. Understand that a tribal meeting often begins with a prayer. Also understand that introductions take time. Create a flexible agenda.
- **LISTEN** – Never rush or interrupt an elder. It is extremely disrespectful.

NPS exhibits represent an important opportunity for affiliated tribes to tell their story, to be heard, and understood. But the role, meaning, and importance of exhibits transcend the actual completed project. The process itself has important contributions to make:

- The process can facilitate **cross-cultural dialogue** and understanding.
- The process can catalyze **intra-tribal discussion and awareness**.
- The process, and the completed exhibit, can provide opportunities for **cultural healing and pride**.
- Creation of artifacts and artworks for the exhibit **supports local tribal economies** and helps build pride in the community.

CASE STUDY #5

**Revisiting the Past:
Exhibit Replacement at Big Hole National Battlefield**

Presenter: Marc K. Blackburn, Ph.D, *Nez Perce National Historical Park*

Big Hole National Battlefield was given a unique opportunity to replace an out-of-date exhibit with something brand new. Rather than the National Park Service dominating the planning process, the park staff and management gave the Nez Perce the opportunity to define the parameters of the story and the content of the exhibits. The end result is an engaging exhibit that tells the truth and offers visitors new opportunities to learn about an old story.

Lessons Learned

- Get **consensus** on interpretive themes from your tribal partners BEFORE you hire a designer.
- In an attempt to correct a military-centric perspective, be aware that swinging too far in the other direction **may alienate previous supporters**.
- Understand that tribal councils are fluid and that **leadership roles change**.
- If you plan to include Native American languages in your exhibit, be very clear from the start about who will manage this delicate process, both internally and externally. Understand that **the proofing process is very time consuming**.
- The **inclusion of a tribal liaison** on the team, fully devoted to bridging cultural divides between native and non-native groups will result in a much more successful outcome.
- Secure funding for tribal participation and realize that **their time is precious and limited**.

Thank you for your participation in this event. Please feel free to contact the participants for more information about the case studies presented.