

The National Register's Role in BLM's Cultural Heritage Program

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has redirected its cultural heritage program to meet 21st century concerns. These changes reflect a number of factors:

- the maturity of BLM's program with regard to Section 106 compliance work;
- increasing use of western public lands for recreation and other purposes and the consequent heightened threat to and interest in cultural resources;
- changing land management policies which emphasize landscape analyses, stronger community involvement, and problem solving across institutional and disciplinary boundaries; and
- the advent of technologies, such as GIS and other database management tools, that promote and facilitate analyzing data-rich environments such as landscapes.

These factors increasingly demand a greater focus on proactive, context-driven, landscape-level work frequently involving multiple partners and the interests of various communities.

BLM has responded to these challenges in three important ways. First, it has implemented a national Programmatic Agreement (PA) with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. The PA enables BLM field offices to streamline routine Section 106 review under the guidance of an internal preservation board, with the intention of providing more resources for proactive work. Second, the BLM has entered data-sharing partnerships with state historic preservation officers throughout the West to conform and coordinate automated site data and link these data to Geographic Information Systems. Third, it has entered numerous partnerships with public and private groups and Indian tribes at the national, state, and local levels to study, interpret, and preserve cultural resources on BLM lands. Significant though these efforts are, however, these changes are not entirely sufficient to move in new directions, as the old handicaps of

inadequate staff and funding follow the program into the new century.

National Register Role

As BLM moves in new directions, the National Register continues to have a vital role in BLM's cultural heritage program. Though many sites deemed eligible to the National Register are not actually nominated due to limited time and funds, the Register provides a robust and flexible tool for approaching the challenges facing BLM today. The development of historic contexts, inherent in the National Register evaluation and nomination process, as well as the integrity assessments for specific properties provide significant organizing frameworks for managing cultural resources. Though the National Register process has been primarily associated with Section 106 compliance, it is equally essential to the more proactive management BLM is moving to adopt. The multiple property nomination for the World War II Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area, in the California Desert District of the BLM, provides an example of the continuing utility of the National Register to address contemporary 21st-century management concerns.

The Desert Training Center/ California-Arizona Maneuver Area

In the early days of World War II, as the United States scrambled to meet the challenges of global conflict, it became apparent that our fighting forces would need to engage the enemy in the deserts of North Africa.* Under orders to find a suitable location to train soldiers for desert combat, Major General George Patton opened the Desert Training Center (DTC) in the Mojave Desert of southern California. The DTC expanded to include maneuver operations in 1943 and became known as the California-Arizona Maneuver Area. From 1942–1944 the facility served as the country's foremost armor training facility and a maneuver area, and as a place to toughen soldiers for the rigors of combat. General Patton commanded the facility for the first months it was in operation; he was followed by other commanders, including General Walton Walker.

The Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area (DTC/C-AMA) encompassed about 18,000 square miles in California, much of which now falls within BLM's California Desert District. The cultural remains from the period of operation are extensive and consist of a wide range of property types, many of which exist as archeological remains with varying degrees of integrity. These include: divisional camps, generally three miles long and one mile wide, with associated features such as model topographic maps made from earth for planning military exercises, stone altars, rock-lined walkways, and tent areas; airfields and airports; landing strips; bivouacs; maneuver areas; military ranges; training areas; campsites; quartermaster depots; railroad sidings; tank tracks; and refuse deposits.

The DTC/C-AMA as a whole has meaningful links to individuals, communities, and the nation, and poses considerable potential for interpretation, education, and research. Its story also encompasses themes, such as the relationship of human action to the natural environment, which are of considerable significance today. If it is to retain its links to the public and realize its potential as a resource, the DTC/C-AMA needs careful management. Yet its landscape scale and the complexity of the individual resources within it pose significant management challenges. The National Register multiple property nomination process provides an organizing framework to approach the daunting task of responsible stewardship of this nationally significant resource.

A multiple property nomination requires a name for the multiple property listing, an associated historic context, associated property types, and individual National Register nominations for each property or district included. Of critical

importance to the DTC/C-AMA project is the fact that individual properties do not need to be nominated all at once, but may be added as they are evaluated. The requirement for a name, a unifying historic context, and the definition of property types provides the framework within which such evaluations may proceed and defines further work needed.

The DTC/C-AMA nomination project is currently a work-in-progress. The historic context is complete, as is the evaluation of a historic district within the area; other properties are under review. The completion of the context permits the BLM to assess individual components for significance and integrity. As these evaluations are completed the BLM can set management priorities among the individual properties, based on their significance, current threats to their integrity, and other factors such as interpretive potential. The historic context study also sets priorities for further work needed to make management decisions. Oral histories of those who trained at the facility are immediately needed, for example, as are archeological surveys to document the more fragile resources and assess their present conditions.

The work needed in the DTC/C-AMA will require considerable resources to accomplish. The advent of modern mapping and data-management tools such as GIS/GPS significantly assist this effort. The ability to identify and protect the significant properties within the DTC/C-AMA and to realize the potential of this unique area for research and interpretation, however, will also depend upon the ability of BLM to find sufficient funding and to broker partnerships with other agencies and community groups to assist in these efforts.

Note

- Bischoff, Matt C. The Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area, 1942-1944: Historical and Archaeological Contexts. Statistical Research, Inc.: Tucson, Arizona, 2000. SRI Technical Series 75, prepared for the Bureau of Land Management, California Desert District, under contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District.

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Catholic altar at Camp Iron Mountain, California, 1998. Photo courtesy Statistical Research, Inc., Tucson, Arizona.

