

H. Matthew Nowakowski

Bringing the Past into the Future

Photogrammetric survey of the hominid trackway in Laetoli, Tanzania. Photo by Angelyn Bass, courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Trust (related article appears on page 40).

This issue of *CRM* will explore the effects and impacts of new technologies on cultural resource management. Why an issue devoted to new technologies? Isn't it somewhat contradictory to think about the past in terms of advances in telecommunications and computers? After all, we in cultural resource management are concerned with preserving the past for ourselves and future generations. However, many professionals are discovering that preservation and technology are not mutually exclusive, but mutually enhancing. It is one of life's ironies that technology, which races forward into an infinite and ephemeral future, is proving to be a powerful tool in conserving and recalling the pre-technological past. In many ways, technology acts like a Jules Verne-inspired time machine.

Technology is an effective and empowering tool in making the past meaningful to more and more people. And, technology offers exciting possibilities for cultural resource management:

- Archeological sites are being investigated from space shuttles and satellites.
- Planners and preservationists are using technology to model construction alternatives in historic neighborhoods.
- Visitors are accessing touch-screen databases to learn more about people and history at Civil War battlefields around the nation, at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and right in their own neighborhoods.
- Through virtual reality programming, visitors can experience the marvels of ancient Rome, Amiens Cathedral, and the White House. Far from a diversion, virtual reality is a significant interpretive tool in helping us understand the built environment.
- By combining powerful software programs like GIS and CAD, conservators and museum specialists can formulate and model interventions prior to commencing a course of treatment.

Depicted on the cover is the Unisphere, 1964-65 New York World's Fair. Designated a New York City landmark, it has come to symbolize the "global village" only dreamed of in the 1960s.



- The power of maps has resonated through the ages—today, digital maps are being used to inventory, interpret, and preserve historic districts and archeological sites.
- The power of the Internet is helping our profession expand and reach diverse audiences. On the World Wide Web, people are taking virtual tours, searching state historic archives, and investigating heritage tourism.

These are some of the technology-related developments presented here in this thematic issue of *CRM*. Cultural resource management is constantly searching for unique ways to effectively solve problems in a perpetually changing environment. Rather than exclude ourselves from recent advances in communications, multimedia, and other interpretive technologies, cultural resource professionals must strive to use them in new and innovative ways. If we accept this summons to change, we will be better equipped to face the challenges of preserving the past in the coming millennium and beyond.

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