

Spilsbury's historical narrative meets its intent of providing the reader with a "pleasurable glimpse" into the complex planning history of Washington, DC, underpinning the development of Rock Creek Park. The book provides source notes and an ample bibliography to pursue further study of those historical themes. Like many books related to the interpretation of historic places or environmental preserves, the intended audience is the general public. For park visitors or local residents who hike and bike in the park and know it well, this book is a handsome keepsake outlining the environmental history of Rock Creek Park and provides a passionate argument for the preservation of its natural beauty. For cultural resource professionals looking to find historical information on the built environment of Rock Creek Park—its historic bridges, buildings, roads, bridal paths, hiking trails, picnic areas, and golf course—the book's brevity will be a drawback as important themes are not explored.

For example, road improvements receive only scant mention. The core of the historic road network of Rock Creek Park, the first major program of park improvements, was in place before the 1918 report. They were a prominent component of Olmsted's park master plan. The study called for an arterial system of parkways that would follow the routes of the main tributaries of Rock Creek and Piney Branch and three major cross-valley thoroughfares (never built as planned). Regraded older existing roads and new roads were constructed under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers. This road network determined the modern character of Rock Creek Park, and the preservation of Rock Creek Park hinges on retaining their alignment, width, scenic character, and control of traffic volume.

Rock Creek Park does achieve the stated goal of the author to share the 1918 Rock Creek Park Report with the public and to renew interest in the historic significance of Olmsted's long-range planning for the park. The report was an indispensable resource for a generation of park managers from 1921 to

about 1950. Its definition of distinctive natural areas and its description of the ways recreational facilities should be carefully woven into the landscape guided park officials whenever major decisions were made. Gail Spilsbury underlines that the Olmsted plan remains invaluable today as a document of the park's environmental condition and demonstrates that this master plan provides historical evidence that much of the park's landscape retains its 19th- and early 20th-century character.

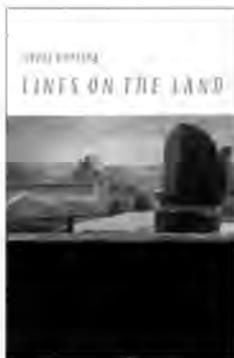
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White House Historical Association

t. James Bryce, *The Nation's Capital* (Washington, DC: Committee of One Hundred on the Future Development of Washington, DC, 1913).

Lines on the Land: Writers, Art, and the National Parks

By Scott Herring. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004; 216 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography; cloth \$49.50; paper \$16.50.



Everyone comes to America's national parks with preconceptions, expectations, and down-right prejudices. When Scott Herring arrived to work for the concessioner in Yellowstone one summer, it was in the guise of an English major steeped in Wordsworth and with Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* in his duffel bag, bringing with him, by his own admission, all the mental baggage that implies. He ended up pumping gas and—inexplicably, since he had no aptitude for it—working as a mechanic at a gas station at Old Faithful. His listening point, the locus for his "national park experience," was a trailer bunkhouse in the nearby service area.

Well and duly hidden from tourists by a beautiful screen of trees, this anti-majestic landscape of sewage lagoons and diesel fumes is vividly described in the opening pages of this often-engaging book. To judge from its beginning, one might expect *Lines on the Land* to be another of those angry books that depends for its effect on criticizing the national parks, the more so since at the outset Herring declares (truly enough) that the literary stance vis-à-vis the parks has gone from celebration in the early days to disillusionment to, now, raw fury at what hordes of tourists and others have done to these places. This anger, rooted in a deep sense of aesthetic betrayal, is the central theme of the book.

Fortunately, Herring, who now teaches English at the University of California–Davis, is much too thoughtful to leave things at such a facile level. He does thoroughly chronicle the various permutations of disgust that mass tourism in the parks has elicited from writers over the past 40 to 50 years, a theme preeminently mastered by Abbey, whose work is treated at length. But more interesting are Herring's explorations of the ambiguous reactions of writers such as Jack Turner (*The Abstract Wild*), Gary Snyder (*Turtle Island*), and Vladimir Nabokov (yes, the infamous *Lolita* touches upon, if only very tangentially, the parks). Although there are elements of "lit-crit" analysis at various junctures, Herring has the refreshing ability to step back from academic-speak and reconnect the important points at issue with real-life experience. This comes, I suspect, from his having actually grubbed around in Yellowstone for several seasons.

The primary thing I took away from the book (having myself once edited an anthology of writers' encounters with the national parks) is a renewed sense of how deeply the parks have embedded themselves in the American literary imagination. We are not surprised to find a Steinbeck engaging these places, but would we expect the poets and spouses Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes to have had a life-changing experience in Yellowstone? Well, they

did, and Herring lets us understand their rather morbid introspections through a lucid analysis that is grounded in a sense of sympathy for fellow human beings struggling to come to terms with a mythic, forbidding landscape dominated by other-than-human habitants.

There are two difficulties with *Lines on the Land*. First, like so many books that claim to be about "the parks," the writings and art Herring surveys are mostly about only a handful of the most famous western parks, preponderantly Yellowstone. Iconic, they are; representative of the diversity of the National Park System, they are not. In a place like Big Bend or Isle Royale or the top-side of Mammoth Cave, among dozens of others, the "ideal park experience" combining solitude and great beauty—the antidote, in short, for the angry reaction that is the subject of the book—is there to be had for anyone willing to venture a hundred yards beyond the most heavily used areas of the front country. To his great credit, Herring realizes the basic truth of this, ending the book by declaring that, "the pleasure I take from parks has grown immensely stronger since I came to understand that they are not 'dying.'" He is right to warn us away from a kind of hyperbole that has become habitual in environmental writing. Old Faithful may be ground zero for the type of park experience most connoisseurs do not want to have, but the coast-to-coast diversity of the National Park System is precisely what provides the possibility for people to have an ideal park experience somewhere.

The second and more important shortcoming is the book's tendency toward diffuseness. Herring jumps from Muir to Abbey to Robert Pirsig (he of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*) to Kipling to Vonnegut to Plath/Hughes to Rick Bass and after awhile it seems like we are skimming the surface of the stream by skipping from rock to slippery rock. The feeling of diffuseness is exacerbated by the uneven discussion of artists, which seems little more than a throw-in, far too small in proportion to the space given novelists and essayists. Early

on we get a section on Thomas Moran's Yellowstone paintings, but then, later, only a scattering of short analyses of Ansel Adams and some contemporary satirical photographers. Although focusing exclusively on writers would have deprived us of such things as Herring's analysis of the very witty parody photograph by Ted Orland that graces the cover, overall I think the book would have benefited from a more concentrated editorial approach.

Still, *Lines on the Land* is well worth taking time to read. If you do, you will be in the company of a competent and discerning guide to the changing cultural meanings that have been projected upon, and found in, America's national parks.

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George Wright Society

*An Architectural Guidebook to the National Parks:
California, Oregon, Washington*

*An Architectural Guidebook to the National Parks:
Arizona, New Mexico, Texas*

By Harvey H. Kaiser. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith,
2002 and 2003; paper \$21.95 and \$16.95.

Harvey H. Kaiser, scholar of the rustic architecture of the national parks and author of *Landmarks in the Landscape* and *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*, offers two regional guidebooks to national park architecture. These volumes, which he refers to as the "The Far West Book" and "The Southwest Book," serve as true guidebooks providing practical information on visiting and enjoying the architectural resources of 40 national parks (and 1 national forest site) in 6 states. Each section includes a map and driving directions, as well as the government website for each unit.

Kaiser begins by describing the natural setting of the park, and then he relates the cultural history from the earliest Native American groups associated with the land, through the period of territorial and colonial settlement, to the eventual development and conversion to national park status. Quotes from noted park creators and developers, historians, architects, and archeologists highlight the significance and beauty of the featured structures. Of particular interest are the numerous sidebars outlining influential people, events, and natural and cultural history associated with the parks and their architecture. Included in Kaiser's architectural descriptions of the historic structures is the history of preservation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of these buildings by the National Park Service.

"The Far West Book" features the familiar big lodges of sites like Yosemite, Mount Rainier, and Olympic National Parks. These wilderness mansions, set ingeniously within natural landscapes, reflect integrity of design in form, structure, and materials. Kaiser also includes lesser-known remote destinations such as Manzanar National Historic Site and Lewis and Clark National Historical Park (formerly called Fort Clatsop National Memorial), as well as the urban parks of Cabrillo National Monument, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. The architecture at Manzanar and Lewis and Clark, far from being monumental, is spare or even reconstructed. [Editor's note: On October 3, 2005, a fire destroyed the replica of Fort Clatsop at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. For more information go to: <http://www.nps.gov/lewi>.] Kaiser acknowledges the significance of buildings of lesser design or authenticity that nevertheless contribute to powerful cultural landscapes. Kaiser also describes sites, buildings, and structures of importance in engineering and technology, such as the lighthouses at Cabrillo and Point Reyes National Seashore, the vessels of San Francisco Maritime, a suspension bridge at Mount Rainier, and artillery casements at Fort Point National Historic Site.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship

Volume 3 Number 1 Winter 2006



CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship
Winter 2006
ISSN 1068-4999

CRM = cultural resource management

CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship is published twice each year by the National Park Service to address the history and development of and trends and emerging issues in cultural resource management in the United States and abroad. Its purpose is to broaden the intellectual foundation of the management of cultural resources.

The online version of *CRM Journal* is available at www.cr.nps.gov/CRMJournal. Back issues of *CRM* magazine (1978–2002) are available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/crm>.

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CRM Journal is produced under a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.

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