

# Golden Gate

National Recreation Area

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



641/D-489.A



## The Park That Makes Its Own Weather

An Administrative History of Golden Gate National Recreation Area

By Hal K. Rothman

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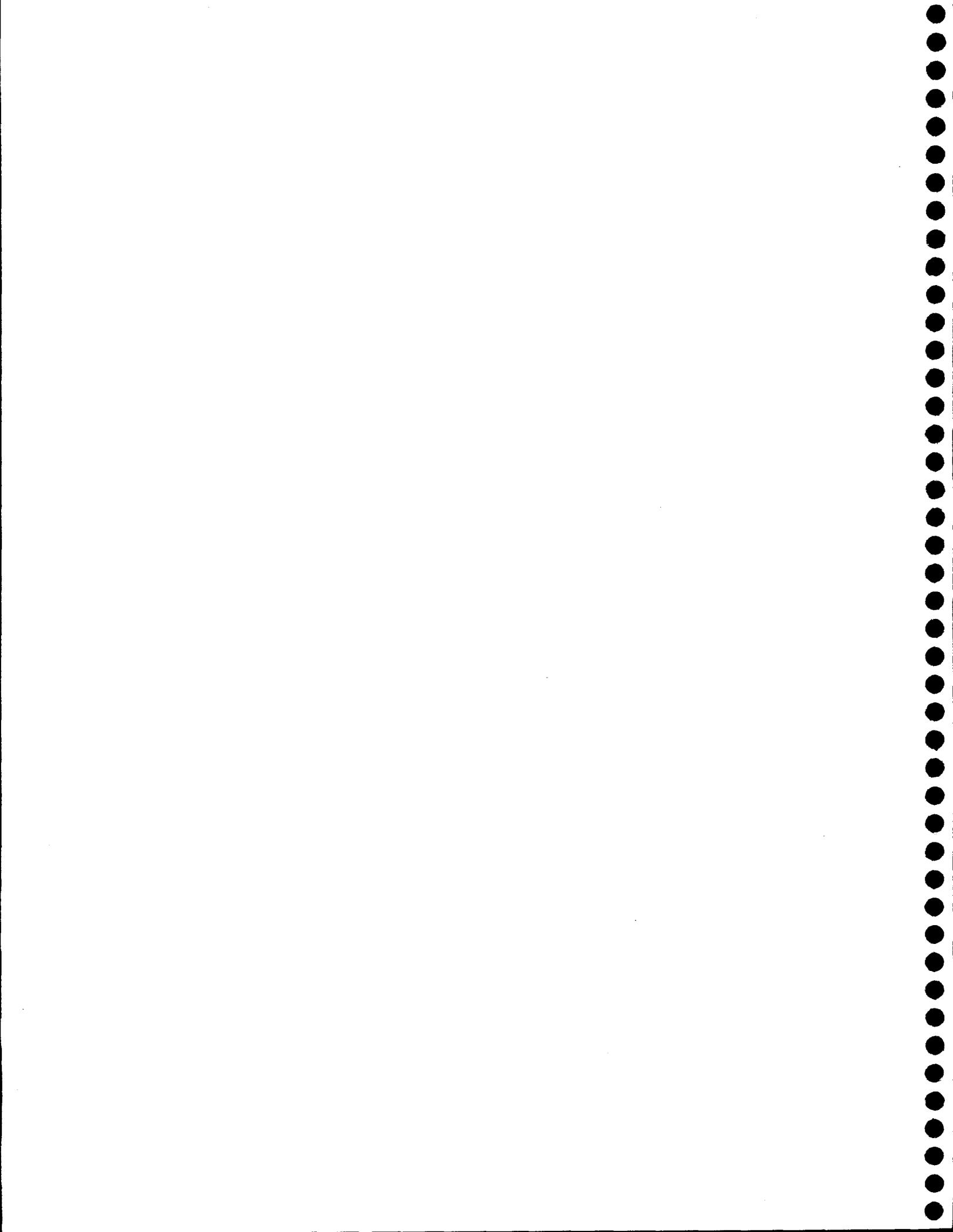
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## Abbreviations

### Abbreviations and Formats used throughout footnotes

AD	Alcatraz Documents
CCF	Central Correspondence Files
CRMP	Cultural Resources Management Plan
<i>DCR</i>	<i>Daly City Record</i>
FPAR	Fort Point Administrative Records
GMP	General Management Plan
GMPA	General Management Plan
HDC	Historic Documents Collection (number)
KFC	Katharine Frankforter/Headlands, Inc. Collection
MIJ	<i>Marin Independent-Journal</i>
NRMP	Natural Resources Management Plan
NRMR	Natural Resources Management Records
OCPA	Office of Communications and Public Affairs Records
<i>PAT</i>	<i>Palo Alto Times</i>
<i>PAC</i>	<i>Petaluma Argus-Courier</i>
PARC	Park Archives and Records Center, GGNRA
PCC	Press Clippings Collection
PFGGNRA I	People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area Archives, 1972-1984
PFGGNRA II	People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area Archives, 1985-1994
<i>PRL</i>	<i>Point Reyes Light</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Pacific Sun</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pacifica Tribune</i>
<i>SCS</i>	<i>Santa Cruz Sentinel</i>
<i>SFBG</i>	<i>San Francisco Bay Guardian</i>
<i>SFC</i>	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>
<i>SFC&amp;E</i>	<i>San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner</i>
<i>SFE</i>	<i>San Francisco Examiner</i>
<i>SFI</i>	<i>San Francisco Independent</i>
<i>SFP</i>	<i>San Francisco Progress</i>
<i>SJMN</i>	<i>San Jose Mercury News</i>
SOA I	Superintendent's Office Archives, 1957-1977
SOA II	Superintendent's Office Archives, 1977-1984



## Chapter 1:

### A National Park for the Golden Gate

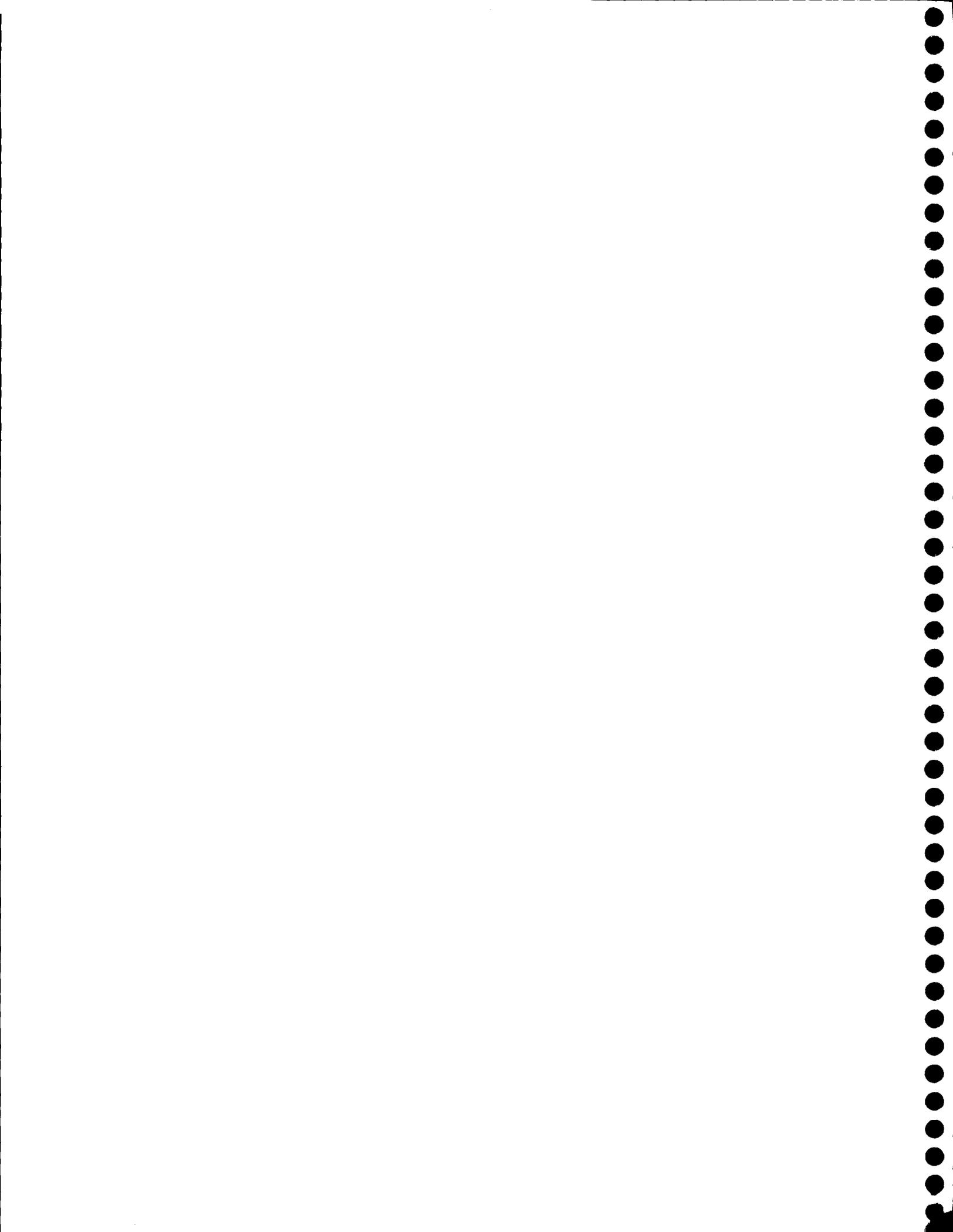
If there is one genuine contribution that the United States has made to the application of the principles of democracy, the most likely candidate is the national park. Prior to the Age of Enlightenment—the eighteenth-century intellectual and ultimately social revolution that insisted individuals possessed natural rights and added the concept of a relationship between the governors and the governed to human affairs—the idea of a park owned and used by the people was entirely unknown. In most cultures, especially monarchies and other forms of hereditary government, parks were the provinces of the nobility and wealthy, kept and maintained for their use alone. Common people were forbidden to use designated lands, sometimes on the penalty of death. Many stood outside the boundaries of such areas and looked in with envy, conscious of the wealth of natural resources and aesthetic pleasures within and equally aware of the huge price to be paid for violating the liege's prerogative. Such parks, like the forests set aside for royal hunts, served as manifestations of power, markers of different standing in a society riven by social distinctions. They were also the flash points of class-based tension. The story of Robert of Locksley, a member of the twelfth-century English gentry who as Robin Hood took to the woods after defending a man who stole a deer from restricted land to feed his starving family, clearly illustrated the tension inherent in the traditional organization of private parklands.<sup>1</sup>

United States history followed a different vector, for the acquisitive nation of the nineteenth century encompassed more land than its people could then inhabit. The great beauty and uniqueness of much of this land inspired a culture that saw itself as a light to nations, one that believed it was in the process of perfecting human endeavor in a way earlier societies had not. Such lands answered the dilemma of the nineteenth century. They demonstrated a distinctiveness in nature that Americans saw in their society; they served as a counterpoint to European claims that the New World was inferior in every way. Yet nineteenth-century America was a commercial society devoted to economic wealth by the measures of industry. Parkland could not impinge on economic effort, on the process of observing, demarcating, and then harvesting the bounty of the land. The parks' contribution to the purpose of nation-building must be more valuable as symbol than reality; awe-inspiring scenery had to outweigh ranch and agricultural potential at the time momentum for a park gathered. The first parks, including Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, General Grant—now part of Kings Canyon, Crater Lake, and their peers, all shared a combination of beauty and inaccessibility for commercial economic purposes that made them valuable manifestations of American cultural needs instead of sources from which to wring wealth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Gilbert, *Robin Hood* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1912), 11-23.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* 3d ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 33-61; R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American*



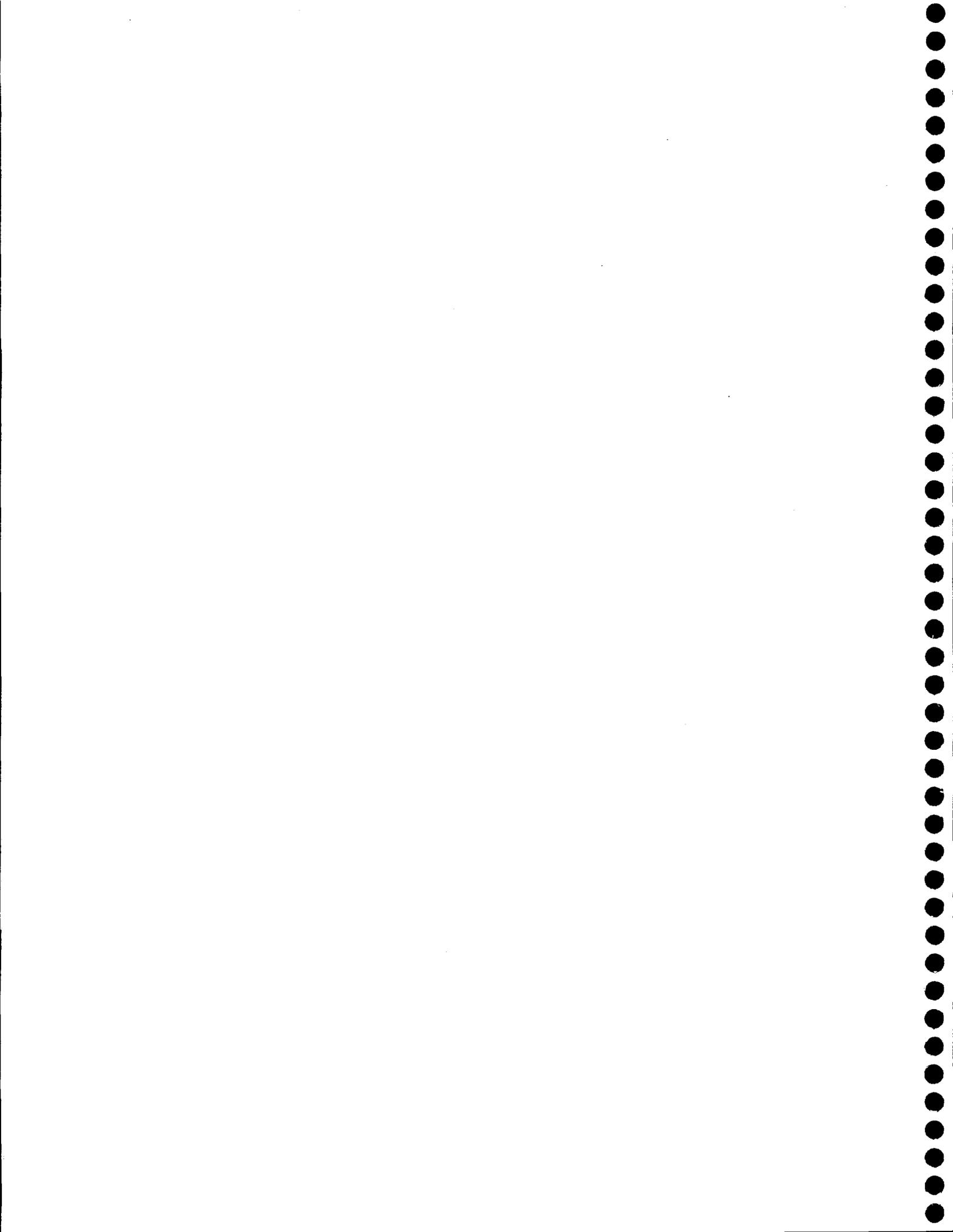


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San Francisco, California  
Revised 2002



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Golden Gate National Recreational Area is young enough to benefit from the insights of its founders, of the people who made the park happen and who influenced it as it developed. Their presence and their contribution to this study have provided a measure of depth that belies documents alone. The people who have offered their memories and observations for this revised version include Amy Meyer, Edgar Wayburn, Doug Nadeau, Rich Bartke, and Bill Whalen. And thanks are also due to John Reynolds, former regional director of the Pacific West Region, who suggested the title for this study.

## Executive Summary

Golden Gate National Recreation Area offers one of the most complicated management challenges in the entire national park system. A compilation of urban green space and rural and wild lands throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, it reflects the growing tensions in the National Park Service about the purpose of a national park designation. Labeled a "national recreation area," the lands included in the park offer scenic vistas, nationally significant cultural resources, and belts of vegetation scattered across the urban landscape. Balancing the competing needs of these lands and their many constituencies is the dominant feature of park management.

Since its inception in 1972, management at Golden Gate National Recreation Area has evolved through three stages. Golden Gate National Recreation area was an evolutionary idea, an extension of what national parks meant at the time of its creation. During the park's first decade, the Park Service's management strategy was simply reactive. Managers sought to find their place in the region and they responded to the needs of constituencies. With the implementation first of the General Management Plan in 1980 and the ancillary plans in cultural resources management and natural resources management shortly after, the park was able to develop clear, distinct plans and ambitions. In most circumstances, such goals would have been easy to implement. At this park, the plans showed both the limits of their process and the way in which the planning deflected unwanted park uses. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Park Service sought to implement its plans; it often revised them in response to the specific needs of constituencies and the Bay Area's political situation.

In this sense, the Park Service revised its modes of operation at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Typically the federal agency dictated terms to surrounding communities; in urban areas, the park was only one of a large number of sources of revenue and jobs for the region. The result was a more interactive, more flexible form of management, guided by the post-National Environmental Policy Act processes of public access. It also created a context in which the Park Service responded to outside demands, preparing the agency for multidimensional management within a major metropolitan area.

The Presidio addition complicated this clear articulation of management phases at the park. As a result of congressional action, the Presidio evolved into a federal/nonprofit partnership, and the Park Service became skilled in negotiating not only with the public but with its twinned management entity, now called the Presidio Trust. As Golden Gate National Recreation Area learned to negotiate with groups around the Bay Area, it learned to work with the Presidio and its powerful array of board members. The result was a hybrid, a national park area that was run by national park standards, but equally administered by a congressionally created entity.

The factors combine to make Golden Gate National Recreation Area the archetype for national park areas in the twenty-first century. In its urban location, its close relationship with many communities, its ability to involve the public and at the same time adhere to agency and other federal standards, and finally in its participation in joint management of the Presidio, Golden Gate National Recreation Area has the look of the national parks of the new century. Its issues are different from those of the traditional national parks, which are remote from population centers. Instead, Golden Gate National Recreation Area is part and parcel of a major urban area and all its turmoil, offering the Park Service access to previously unreachable

constituencies. In this Golden Gate National Recreation Area leads; whether the Park Service will follow, and to what end, remains an open question.

Writing history is a complicated and contentious process, made even more so when the participants in the events in question are still active. Historians can not rely on memory alone, for as any attorney will tell, it is the most fallible and malleable form of historical data. "The palest of ink," the medieval scribes averred, "is better than the sharpest of memory," and with good reason. In the historians' creed, documents from the historical moment supersede any after-the-fact account, and responsible historians must try to reconcile the differences that necessarily emerge. Nor is it possible, in a project bound by time and space, to consult every available document. Especially when a project is governed by the dictates of a contract and the contract articulates clear and specific goals, the historian is bound by the terms of their agreement. Nor can history be an encyclopedic account of every event that occurred in a time and place. Instead it is an effort to represent the past through the use of selective examples that illustrate dominant trends. The history of Golden Gate National Recreation Area is filled with stories that are important in and of themselves, but tell little about the park's overall evolution. Sadly, many of these have had to be omitted in this volume.

In the end, the historian is asked to make decisions about historical events and their meaning. Especially in the study of the recent past, this is a task that is sure to cause controversy, to enrage proponents of one or another point of view. Yet historians must hold a steady course. Achieving a balance between personal reminiscences and documents from the time, judiciously choosing examples that explain larger themes, setting them in the context of professional scholarship that addresses the field, the time, and place, is the historian's goal in any study. It is my hope that I have achieved such a balance here.