

# Alcatraz Island National Historic Landmark

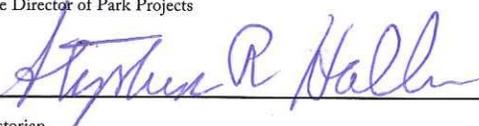
## Cultural Landscape Report

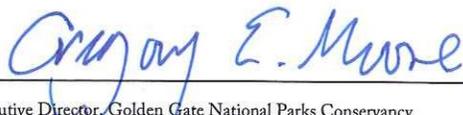
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA  
ALCATRAZ ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK  
AND  
THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY  
GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVANCY

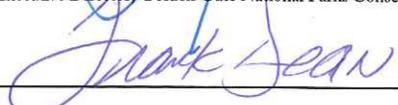
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DECEMBER 2010

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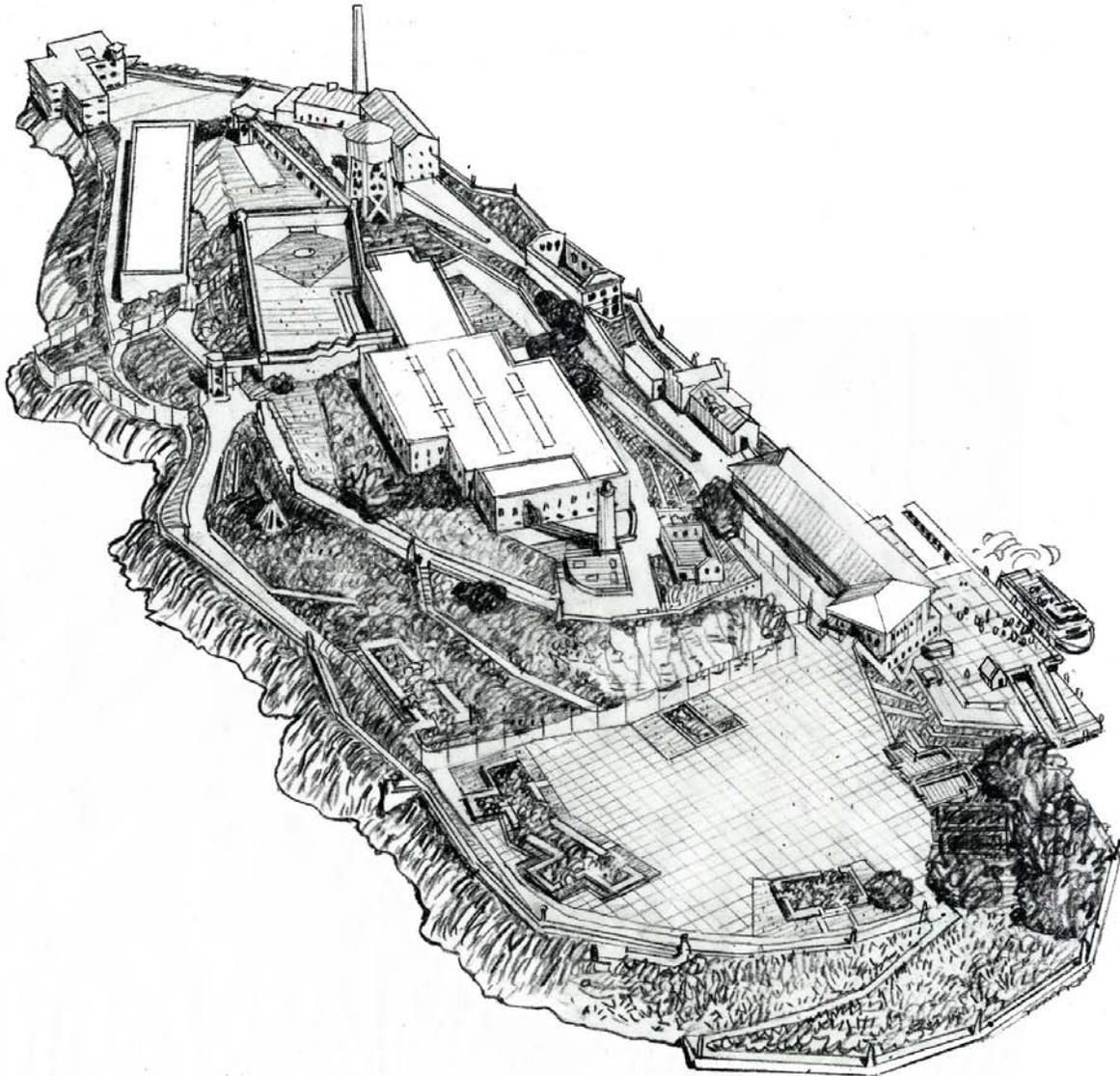
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# Cultural Landscape Report

Alcatraz Island National Historic Landmark  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area



December 2010

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Alcatraz Island National Historic Landmark



MUNDUS BISHOP



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# **Chapter 1. Introduction**



# Chapter 1. Introduction

## Scope of the Report

This document presents the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for Alcatraz Island. The report includes detailed documentation of Alcatraz Island's historical development; an evaluation of existing conditions according to condition (good, fair and poor); an analysis and evaluation of the Island's cultural landscape characteristics; and treatment recommendations for the cultural landscape.

This CLR builds upon the numerous studies, investigations and documentation that have occurred since the establishment of Alcatraz Island as a component of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) in 1972. These include the 1985 National Historic Landmark Nomination (NHL),<sup>1</sup> *The Rock: A History of Alcatraz Island, 1847-1972*,<sup>2</sup> *The Historical Gardens of Alcatraz Island*,<sup>3</sup> and Draft Cultural Landscape Report for Alcatraz Island,<sup>4</sup> among others.

This CLR also builds upon the 2005 Level II Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI)<sup>5</sup> that used secondary sources to establish historic significance. The CLI determined that sufficient extant features existed to convey the property's historic appearance and function, and provided preliminary identification and analysis of many of the Island's contributing features.

This CLR provides more detailed information than the CLI as well as a greater depth of research, based on readily available primary and secondary source material. In addition, work related to the Island's archeological resources is included with this CLR. The archeological resources were only partially addressed in the CLI. The additional work is provided by GGNRA and includes archeological investigations and recommendations completed by its network of experts and park staff.

## Report Methodology / Research Design

This CLR was conducted at a thorough level of investigation and documentation for historical research, existing condition assessment and landscape analysis. The thorough level research methodology, as defined by the National Park Service (NPS), focuses on the use of select documentation of known and presumed relevance, including primary and secondary sources that are easily available.<sup>6</sup> A review of all readily available documentation from Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), Golden Gate National Park Conservancy (GGNPC) and The Garden Conservancy (TGC) was undertaken including review of planning documents such as GGNRA's 1980 General Management Plan (GMP), administrative reports, technical reports and historical documentation. In addition, limited archival research was undertaken at the GGNRA archives on select topics.

The thorough level existing conditions investigation for Alcatraz Island was conducted according to best practices. It utilized existing site information provided by GGNRA, including the

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<sup>1</sup> Haller 1985

<sup>2</sup> Thompson 1979

<sup>3</sup> Lutsko 1992

<sup>4</sup> Delgado et al 1992

<sup>5</sup> Bradley 2005

<sup>6</sup> Page et al 1998: 5

2001 topographic survey and the most current available GIS data, to document the Island's cultural landscape features; and a series of on-site investigations. The thorough level of research and investigation did not include archeological techniques to locate buried ruins or artifacts; however the CLR provides information on the current archeological site data provided by GGNRA in list and map form. The CLR also includes the use of other materials provided by the GGNRA such as the CLI, geographic information system (GIS) database, National Historic Landmark (NHL) nomination, Archeological Sites Management Information System (ASMIS) data, and relevant planning documents and natural resource studies.

## Report Organization

The CLR is organized into seven chapters that present the findings of the research, inventory, evaluation and analysis, and treatment recommendations for the cultural landscape of Alcatraz Island. This chapter, Chapter 1, includes a summary of the significance of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) in which Alcatraz Island is located. Identification of Alcatraz Island's landscape characteristics is also presented in this chapter. The landscape characteristics provide a system for organizing and understanding the Island and are used in all sections of the CLR.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter 2 documents the historical and developmental history of the cultural landscape of Alcatraz Island as it relates to its physical evolution. The Island's social and administrative history is not addressed. The history is based on a review of documentary information from a variety of primary and secondary sources such as topographic surveys, historic maps and photographs, correspondence, planning reports, technical reports, and first person narrative accounts. Sources are documented and presented in the bibliography in the appendices. The narrative history is illustrated through historic photographs and maps, and by graphic plans summarizing Alcatraz Island's periods of landscape change, up to and including present day management. Eight periods of landscape change document the physical changes that modified the cultural landscape of Alcatraz Island throughout its history. Of these, seven are within the Island's period of significance (1847 to 1973) and represent the Island's historic periods.

Chapter 3 documents the existing conditions of Alcatraz Island's cultural landscape and is presented as narrative text, supported by photographs and maps. The 2001 topographic survey and the more recent GIS data are used as base data. Information derived from field investigations was added to this base to graphically convey the Island's landscape characteristics that together comprise its cultural landscape. A narrative of existing conditions is presented in matrix format, describing Alcatraz Island's cultural landscape features and their condition according to a scale of good, fair or poor, as defined by NPS cultural landscape guidelines.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter 4 provides an evaluation of the significance and integrity of the cultural landscape of Alcatraz Island. This chapter identifies the Island's landscape characteristics and associated features, and assesses their historical significance within the context of the landscape as a whole. A description of the NHL is provided. Threats to the overall integrity of the cultural landscape, such as the loss of contributing features, and to its NHL status are identified. A statement of significance of the cultural landscape is provided as well. In addition, an evaluation of the Island's natural systems as they relate to the cultural landscape is provided. The focus of the evaluation is the

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<sup>7</sup> Page et al 1998: 6

<sup>8</sup> Ibid: 8

relationship between natural and cultural resources, including evaluating how natural resources such as wildlife habitat may coexist with the cultural landscape.

Chapter 4 includes a review of the period of significance for Alcatraz Island, and recommends extending the end date to 1973 from the current date of 1971. This revision acknowledges all physical modifications that relate to the significance of the Island, beginning with its initial occupation and continuing until the Island is established as one component of the GGNRA in 1973.

Chapter 5 presents the current management context of Alcatraz Island as it relates to its cultural resource management, visitor experience and park operations. Competing values or impacts to the cultural landscape are identified, as are management issues and concerns. Current management practices, existing regulations and current planning efforts are included in the evaluation (i.e. the CLI, The Garden Conservancy and GGNPC treatment plans, the Bird Management Strategy, VMP, ADCP, 1980s GMP). The current GMP process is also described. The final component of this chapter is a list of potential issues and recommendations to be considered within the treatment recommendations.

Chapter 6 presents treatment recommendations for Alcatraz Island's cultural landscape. The CLR is recognized by the NPS and its partners as the principal treatment document, and the primary tool for the long-term management of Alcatraz Island's cultural landscape. Treatment recommendations address the monitoring, protection and stewardship of the Island's significant contributing features and cultural landscape.

Chapter 7 provides guidance for the phased implementation of the Alcatraz Island treatment recommendations. This is presented as a series of project statements generally describing those actions necessary to accomplish the recommended treatments. The implementation strategy includes protecting the integrity of the NHL; immediate needs; first priority projects; and prioritization. The implementation strategy is intended to assist GGNRA, GGNPC and their partners with a sequence of work and set of clearly defined projects.

## Study Area

Alcatraz Island, at 225 acres, is one of the three large islands in San Francisco Bay, California; a three-mile wide bight that lies along California's Pacific Coast and meets San Pablo Bay to the north. The Island lies at the northern end of San Francisco Bay, where the Bay narrows to little more than one mile wide at Golden Gate. Current management practices, existing regulations and current planning efforts are included in the evaluation (i.e. the CLI, GGNPC/TGC treatment plans, the Bird Management Strategy, VMP, ADCP, 1980 GMP). The current GMP process is evaluated in relationship to its affect on Alcatraz Island's cultural landscape. Figure 1-1 depicts the context of Alcatraz Island.

As part of the GGNRA, the Island was entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986 for its association with military history, social history (penal), and maritime commerce. Its historic boundary and exclusionary zone includes an area 300 yards off-shore.<sup>9</sup> The study area, shown in Figure 1-2, includes the buoys and submerged resources including potential shipwrecks, dump sites, and Little Alcatraz-approximately one hundred yards from Alcatraz Island.

The boundary of Alcatraz Island, defined by the Alcatraz National Historic Landmark, is a rectangle with its long axis lying in a northwest southeast direction encompassing all of the Island

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson 1979: 378

and its immediately surrounding waters.<sup>10</sup> At approximately 1,700 feet long and 580 feet wide, Alcatraz Island occupies a commanding position nearly four miles directly east of the entrance to the Bay. Fog and high winds frequently pour in from the Pacific Ocean through the Golden Gate to buffet the Island.

Precipitous cliffs ring Alcatraz Island, rising as high as fifty feet from the water. Two rounded peaks that once stood 138 feet and 135 feet were reduced to 134 feet and 131 feet respectively during the early development of the Island, and the shallow saddle between the peaks was largely filled with the removed rock to form a long flat area. The bare rock of the Island is today covered by a thin layer of imported soil and vegetation and dotted with structures associated with the Island's military and prison history.<sup>11</sup>

The Island was the site of the first lighthouse on the Pacific Coast (1854), served as a Civil War bastion, and became the nation's first official army prison.<sup>12</sup> As the Island's fortifications became obsolete, the U.S. Army continued to develop the Island as a military prison. The U.S. Army turned Alcatraz Island over to the Bureau of Prisons in 1934, and the facilities were converted into a high-security federal penitentiary.<sup>13</sup> "Uncle Sam's Devil's Island" was transferred to civilian authority in 1934 and became infamous as a place of incarceration for the nation's most hardened criminals. After the penitentiary closed in 1963 the Island was abandoned for nine years, except for a nineteen-month occupation by American Indian activists. In 1972, Alcatraz Island was turned over to the NPS as part of the GGNRA. The Island was the first unit of the GGNRA<sup>14</sup> and has since become one of the Bay Area's most popular attractions, with over one million visitors a year.<sup>15</sup>

The Island is dominated by buildings associated with the military and federal prisons, including the imposing Main Prison perched on the Summit.<sup>16</sup> Figure 1-3 depicts the present day arrangement of these buildings, and identifies important features of the Island's cultural resources.

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<sup>10</sup> NHL Haller 1985:

<sup>11</sup> Bradley 2005

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Project Scope, GGNRA

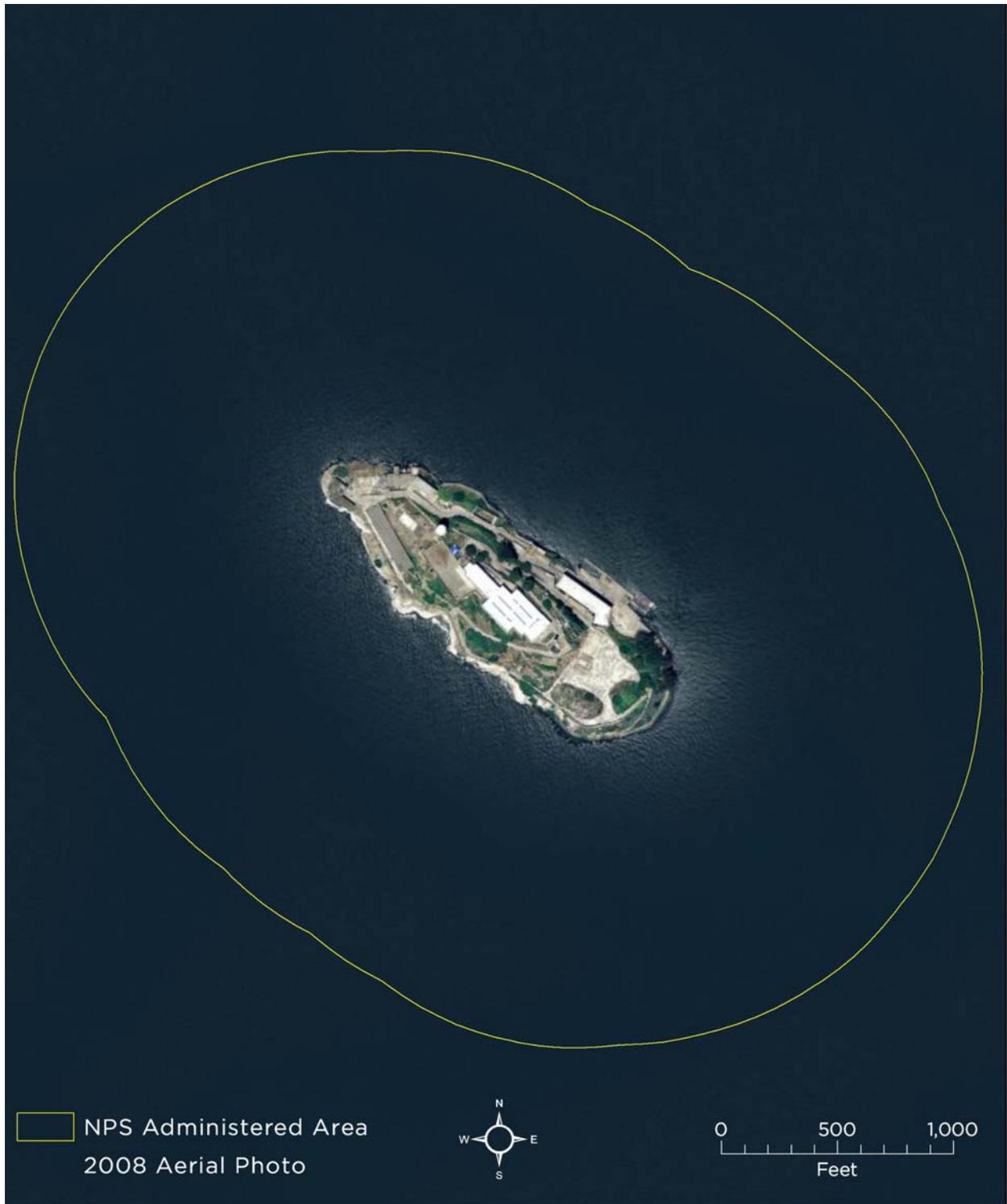
<sup>14</sup> Bradley 2005

<sup>15</sup> Project Scope, GGNRA

<sup>16</sup> Bradley 2005



Figure 1 - 1. Context Map



**Figure 1 - 2.** Study Area

## Significance of Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) provides a continuum of park resources at the doorstep of the San Francisco Bay Area offering an abundance of recreational and educational opportunities. More than twenty million people visit the park each year. GGNRA offers one of the largest collections of historic buildings of any national park. Dozens of plants and animal species that are accorded state or federal protected status are within the boundaries of the park, and the park is part of the United Nations-designated Golden Gate International Biosphere Reserve.

The coastal headlands of the Golden Gate are internationally recognized for their outstanding scenic quality. They serve as the panoramic backdrop to the metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area and contribute to the quality of life for area residents and visitors.

The convergence of the San Andreas Fault, San Francisco Bay at the Golden Gate, and the California coastline creates a dynamic environment of exceptional scientific value. The remnant undeveloped coastal corridor of marine, estuarine, and terrestrial ecosystems supports exceptional native biodiversity and provides a refuge for one of the largest concentrations of rare, threatened and endangered species in the national park system.

GGNRA includes park lands within the traditional homelands of Coast Miwok and Ohlone people. They contain indigenous archeological sites with native heritage, historic, and scientific values.

GGNRA includes one of the largest and most complete collections of military installations and fortifications in the country, dating from Spanish settlement in 1776 through the 20th century. These installations served as command post for the Army in the Western United States and the Pacific. This long period of military presence has yielded one of the most extensive collections of historic architecture in the national park system.

Alcatraz Island, the site of pre-Civil War fortifications, was the nation's first military prison, later became the most notorious maximum security penitentiary in the United States, and subsequently was the site of the occupation that helped ignite the movement for American Indian self determination.<sup>17</sup>

## Landscape Characteristics

Landscape characteristics are identified for Alcatraz Island that relate to its specific character and to the unique nature of its development.<sup>18</sup> Alcatraz Island's landscape characteristics provide a system for organizing and understanding its site history and existing condition. They also assist in documenting the changes in the landscape over time.<sup>19</sup>

Landscape characteristics are defined as the tangible and intangible characteristics of a landscape that individually and collectively give a landscape character and aid in understanding its cultural value.<sup>20</sup> Landscape characteristics are categories under which individual features can be grouped.<sup>21</sup> The appearance of a cultural landscape, both historically and currently, is a unique web of landscape characteristics that are the tangible evidence of the historic and current uses of the land.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> GOGA GMP/EIS Newsletter 4, Spring 2008

<sup>18</sup> Page et al 1998b section 3, Landscape Characteristics: 6-11

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 4

Alcatraz Island's landscape characteristics are presented in two ways.

- Landscape characteristics such as topography, circulation and land use are nested together as they are the characteristics that give structure to the Island's spatial arrangement;
- And, in a hierarchical arrangement that presents those landscape characteristics that individually (and collectively) give the Island its character and assist in understanding its value.<sup>23</sup>

The following landscape characteristics are determined to exist for Alcatraz Island:<sup>24</sup> These landscape characteristics are used in all sections of the CLR.<sup>25</sup>

**Spatial Organization** is the three dimensional organization of physical forms and visual associations of Alcatraz Island. Clusters of buildings, topographic forms and circulation routes all define space on the Island. Spatial organization is evaluated with topography, circulation, and views and vistas due to their inter-relationship in creating a distinct character.

**Topography** is the three-dimensional configuration of a landscape surface characterized by features and orientation, and is evaluated as part of spatial organization. Topography includes the level plateau of the parade ground, the excavated roadbed of the main road, and the three terraces of the Summit.

**Land Use** describes the principal activities in a landscape that form, shape and organize it as a result of human interaction, such as the prison facilities on the Summit and the cluster of industrial uses in the Industries.

**Historic Buildings** are those that are either currently or were historically habitable, including the Main Prison, Guardhouse Complex, Model Industries, and New Industries buildings. Structures that have burned but still have walls, such as the Warden's House and the Post Exchange, are also evaluated as buildings.

**Historic Structures** are the smaller non-habitable buildings and those structures that provide functional purposes other than sheltering human activity, such as guard towers, the tool shed, and the Stockade / Recreation Yard, as well as taller retaining walls along the main road, fortification walls, and foundations of ruined buildings.

**Historic Small-Scale Features** are the human scaled elements that provide detail and diversity for functional needs and aesthetic concerns. These include smaller retaining walls, utility-related features such as those for drainage, light poles and fixtures, fire hydrants, fences and gates, railings, staircases and sidewalks, and garden beds.

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<sup>23</sup> Page et al 1998b section 3, Landscape Characteristics: 11

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 6

**Vegetation** includes all plant material, whether indigenous or introduced to the Alcatraz Island. The Island had little vegetation prior to 1852, and all extant trees, plantings and garden areas represent cultural adaptations of the landscape.

**Archeological Features** are the ruins, traces or deposited artifacts in a landscape, evidenced by the presence of either surface or subsurface features. The identification of archeological features is provided by Leo Barker, park archeologist.<sup>26</sup>

**Natural Systems** are the natural aspects that have influenced the development and physical form of the Island, including directional winds that buffet the Island, lack of fresh water, and the steep topography of the rocky island.

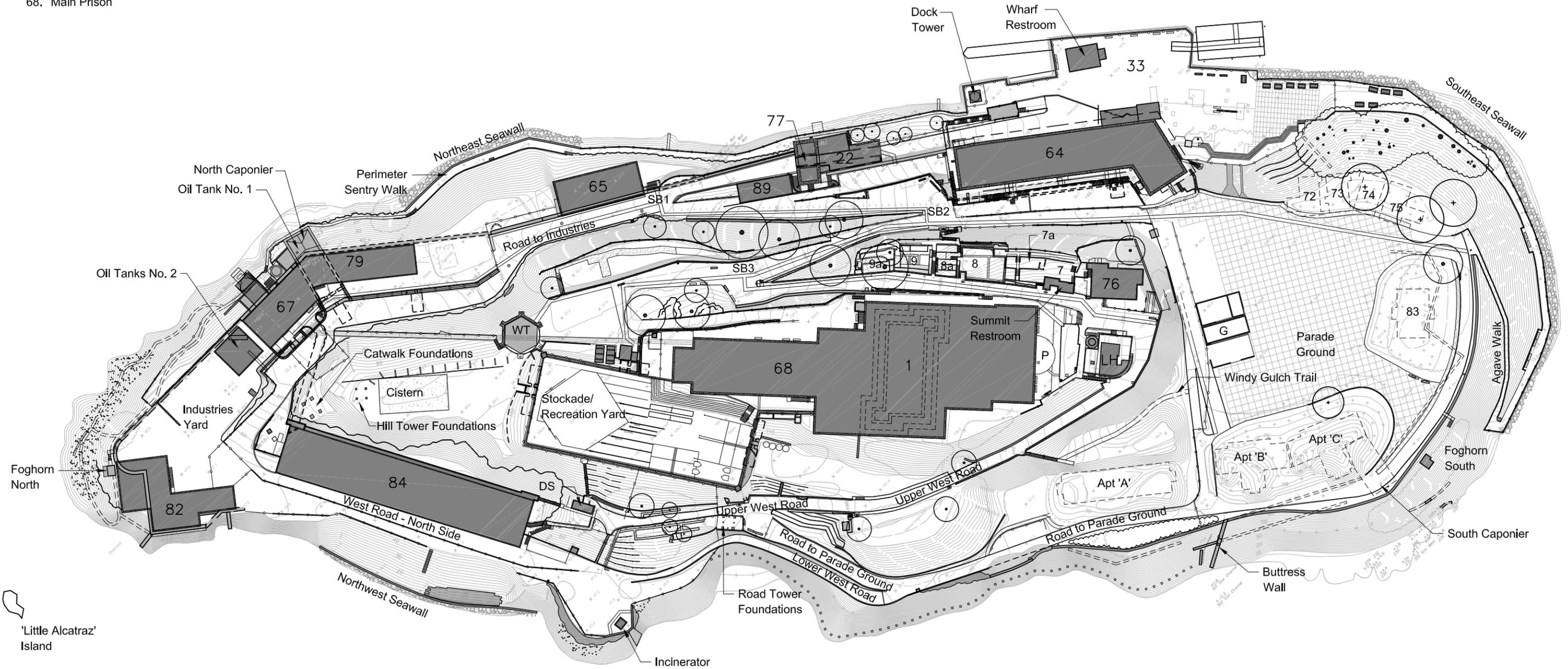
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<sup>26</sup> Barker 2009



**Legend**

- |                                 |                                |  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Citadel (foundation / moat)  | 72. Officers' Quarters 72      | DS Metal Detector Shed                         |
| 7. Officers' Quarters 7         | 73. Officers' Quarters 73      | G Gymnasium Foundations                        |
| 7a. Officers' Quarters 7 Garden | 74. Officers' Quarters 74      | LH Lighthouse                                  |
| 8. Officers' Quarters 8         | 75. Officers' Quarters 75      | P Main Prison Plaza                            |
| 8a. Officers' Quarters 8 Garden | 76. Warden's House             | SB1 Swithback One, Two, and Three on Main Road |
| 9. Officers' Quarters 9         | 77. Guardhouse Complex         | WT Water Tower                                 |
| 9a. Officers' Quarters 9 Garden | 79. Stores/ QM Warehouse       |  |
| 22. Guardhouse Complex          | 82. Model Industries           |  |
| 33. Wharf                       | 83. Officers' Quarters-Duplex  |  |
| 64. Building 64                 | 84. New Industries             |  |
| 65. Post Exchange               | 89. Prison Site/ Electric Shop |  |
| 67. Powerhouse                  |                                |  |
| 68. Main Prison                 |                                |  |



<p><b>FIGURE 1-3</b></p> <p>UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR</p> <p>NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA</p>	<p>TITLE OF PROJECT <b>CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT</b></p> <p>EXISTING CONDITIONS</p> <p>TITLE OF DRAWING <b>ALCATRAZ ISLAND</b></p> <p>NAME OF PARK <b>ALCATRAZ ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK</b></p>
	<p>REGION COUNTY STATE PACIFIC SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA</p>

