Reading the Manzanar Landscape

After the war, the government removed most of the structures, and buried gardens and base-ments. As time passed, Manzanar was further buried, both in sand and in memory. Today, when visitors see Manzanar, they may think there's nothing out there. Yet for those who learn to read the landscape, the place comes to life. A pipe sticking out of the ground becomes a water faucet where children splashed their faces in the summer heat. A foundation reveals the shoe prints of a child who crossed the wet cement. Ten iron rings embedded in a concrete slab evoke the humiliation of ten women forced to sit exposed next to strangers, enduring private moments on public toilets.

Whether driving the 3-mile self-guiding tour or exploring Manzanar on foot, visitors can see a number of Japanese gardens and ponds. People built gardens to beautify the dusty ground outside their barracks. Others built larger gardens near mess halls where people waited in line for meals three times a day. The most elaborate garden was Merritt Park, which Tak Muto, Kuichiro Nishi, and their crew built as Manzanar’s community park. In 2008, the Nishi family helped park staff remove decades of soil to reveal the park.

The National Park Service continues to uncover and preserve historic features, including elements of the early 1900s farming town of Manzanar. This land is home to the Owens Valley Paiutes, whose own stories have been passed down through millennia and are an important part of the history of Manzanar.

TO READ MANZANAR’S LANDSCAPE, LOOK FOR:

- Rocks arranged to personalize barracks “yards” or create gardens
- Sidewalks that lead to doorways
- Water pipes that stood at corners of barracks
- Concrete foundations of latrines, laundry rooms, and ironing rooms
- Concrete blocks that supported barracks

Many pieces from Manzanar’s past lie scattered on the ground. It is against federal law to disturb or collect these items.

TOYMI MIYATAKE / COURTESY ALAN MIYATAKE

Let It Not Happen Again

I have come to a conclusion after many, many years that we must learn from our history and we must learn that history can teach us how to care for one another. Rose Hanawa Tanaka

The story of Manzanar has not ended—Japanese Americans and others keep it alive. At age 95, Fumiko Hayashida testified before Congress to support the Nobotsu Ake Hiro (“Let it not happen again”) memorial on Bainbridge Island, Washington. She was photographed at that site in 1942, holding her daughter—and an image that became an icon of the World War II Japanese American experience. At age 100, Fumiko returned to Manzanar with her daughter Natalie for the first time since World War II ended. Today, thousands of people who visit Manzanar and other sites of conscience feel connected to these places and their stories (right). At Manzanar, some see their own struggles reflected in the injustices that over 10,000 Japanese Americans faced here.

MORE INFORMATION

The Manzanar Visitor Center features exhibits about the camp and area history, plus a film and bookstore. Block 14 includes exhibits about the challenges of daily life. The grounds are open daily, sunrise to sunset. Check the park website for visitor center hours, programs, events, and special exhibits.

Safety and Regulations

It is against federal law to disturb or collect artifacts. Drive only on the designated tour road; see additional tour regulations in red on the map.

- Drive slowly. • Pets are allowed outside if leashed. • Firearms are prohibited in federal buildings. • Pets are allowed outside if leashed. • Drive slowly. • Pets are allowed outside if leashed. • Do not park on vegetation, even if it appears dead. This fragile desert environment takes years to recover.

National Park Service conducts a service at the cemetery. Cemetery Monument

Catholic stonemason Ryo Kado built this obelisk in 1943 with help from residents of Block 9 and the Young Buddhist Association. On the front, a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi, the “consoling monk.” People attended religious services here during the war. Today the monument is a focal point of the annual pilgrimage, serving as a symbol of sacrifice and hope. City of Barracks

Manzanar was arranged into 36 blocks. In most blocks, up to 300 people crowded into 14 barracks. Initially, each barracks had four rooms with eight people per room. Everyone ate in a mess hall, washed clothes in a public laundry room, and shared latrines and showers with little privacy. The storage room and recreation hall offered spaces for classes, shops, and churches. Over time, people personalized their barracks and most blocks evolved into distinct communities.

Contact Information

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760-878-2194
www.nps.gov/mana
Follow us on Facebook.

The National Park Service cares for other Japanese American World War II sites: Tule Lake (CA), Manzanar (CA), Honouliuli (HI), and a memorial on Bainbridge Island (WA).

Manzanar National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about your national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

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