

Chapter 1:

Introduction

SCOPE OF WORK

This project is a cultural landscape report for the Platt Historic District of Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA). As stated in *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports*, a cultural landscape report (CLR) is “a flexible document, the scope of which is determined by the needs of park management, type of landscape, budget, and staffing requirements.”¹

The purpose of the *Cultural Landscape Report for the Platt District* is:

- To document the physical evolution of the district’s cultural landscape and provide a base of information to develop a preservation treatment plan.
- To document existing conditions of the cultural landscape, to identify and describe character-defining landscape features, and to analyze landscape significance and integrity.
- To develop appropriate treatment guidelines, strategies, and/or plans for the preservation and enhancement of cultural landscape resources within the Platt District.

Other recent research projects (described below) have inventoried and documented the history of the Platt District and its features. This project has tried to build on, rather than duplicate, those efforts. Therefore, it focused on two main goals. The first was clarifying the physical history of the park—charting the evolution of its physical characteristics and features. Therefore, the project does not emphasize the social or administrative history of the park and assumes readers’ general familiarity with park history. The second goal, given the number of management issues requiring attention, was to emphasize the treatment portion of the project.

METHODOLOGY

The park history emphasizes the years 1933-1940, the years during which most of the extant park features were designed and constructed. Research for the history was primarily conducted at the park archives and the National Archives in Fort Worth, though the Oklahoma State Archives and other archives were also consulted. In general, resources documenting the physical characteristics of the park landscape in the years prior to 1902 are rather limited. Archeological surveys have been few and historic documents are restricted to large-scale land ordinance survey maps, survey reports, and short verbal descriptions. This is in contrast to a much larger body of official correspondence documenting the treaties and negotiations surrounding the formation of the park. As a result, the chapter documenting the physical history of the park prior to 1902 is abbreviated.

Information about the district after 1902 is much more extensive, to the degree that the authors were not able to review all primary resources during the time allotted for research. Secondary sources including Palmer Boeger’s book, *Oklahoma Oasis*, and the recent “Chickasaw National Recreation Area: Ethnohistory of Associated Park Use and Values” (in draft) by Jacilee Wray and Alexa Roberts were preferentially consulted in some cases. Contradictions between secondary sources were found, usually regarding dates. When possible, efforts were made to confirm information from original sources. For the years 1933-1940, research focused on primary documents from the National Park Service (NPS), especially original park drawings and monthly and semi-annual narrative reports produced by NPS landscape architects on their Emergency Conservation Work projects. Unfortunately, the record of these narrative reports is not entirely complete, and information for the years 1936-1940 is quantitatively much less than for the prior CCC years. Extensive endnotes are provided to aid park managers in finding original documentation when required for future treatment project design.

Other resources consulted for the years 1933-1969 included master plans, vegetation maps, aerial photographs, and the park’s numerous historic photographs. The narrative history (Chapters 2 through 5) is illustrated with many of the prints and photographs consulted during the research. Unless otherwise noted in the captions, figures are scanned reproductions of

originals held in the park archives. For other figures, the archival locations of original drawings or photographs is likewise noted in the caption.

The narrative history is also accompanied by a set of period plans, located in a separate section at the back of the report. The period plans include a district-wide plan each for 1933 and 1940 to demonstrate overall development and scale relationships. A set of nine detailed plans for the year 1940 were also constructed; these show components of the district in much greater detail at the end of the CCC period. A tenth plan, documenting Rock Creek Campground after its construction in 1950, was also constructed. A final overall period plan, for 1969, shows changes implemented up to and during the park's Mission 66 campaign. It should be noted that period plans for prior years were not constructed because the lack of spatial data for these times would have resulted in maps so speculative as to be misleading. Instead, copies of important historic plans, such as the 1909 *Map of Platt National Park* are used as records of development and as illustrative exhibits when appropriate.

The period plans were constructed in AutoCAD, using base data from the 1984 aerial topographic survey as a base. Although at least three topographic surveys (1933, 1937, and 1984) were examined, none of these surveys coincided. For consistency and comparison's sake, and because of a higher level of detail, base data was digitized directly from the 1984 topographic survey and extrapolated backwards to 1933. In some cases this may create slight discrepancies between contour lines and topographic features such as swales. This was deemed unavoidable given the time allotted for the project. For clarity at a published scale, ten-foot contours are shown on all plans.

A set of existing conditions plans similar to those produced for the 1940s were also created. These, too, are located at the back of the document. The existing conditions plans primarily document the 2002 conditions of the district and were mostly based on field work conducted in August of 2001 and 2002. Some minor changes that occurred between 2002 and 2004, however, have also been added. The existing conditions plans are accompanied by a narrative text (Chapter 6). This narrative utilizes the system of character-defining features laid out in the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes to explicate

the district's current appearance. Existing conditions photographs further illustrate the district landscape in the early 2000s. These photographs in Chapter 6 were primarily taken by Heidi Hohmann and Kate Grala from Iowa State University. The only exceptions to this are photographs dating to 2004; these were taken by CNRA landscape architect Ken Ruhnke.

Analysis (Chapter 7) focuses on an assessment of integrity, highlighting changes between the existing conditions and the period of significance. This analysis defines the historic character of each individual landscape during the period of significance and then summarizes the change that has occurred in the intervening 60-odd years. The analysis also provides a series of tables describing each feature within the district, including its contributing or non-contributing status and its condition. Although the authors had hoped to coordinate these tables with the park's List of Classified Structures (LCS), the differing timetables of the two projects ultimately prevented such coordination. However, the LCS data, although still being finalized, was instrumental in our research and documentation of the landscape. Chapter 7 then assesses the integrity of each landscape within the district, followed by an assessment of overall district integrity. The chapter concludes with a statement of the district's historic significance and period of significance, based on National Register criteria.

Based on the analysis, an overall treatment philosophy for the district was determined and is outlined in Chapter 8. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 form the treatment plan for implementing this overall vision. Chapter 9 presents district-wide guidelines for preserving the overall character and features common to the entire district. Chapter 10 presents a comprehensive look of the district's vegetation, including recommendations for its future management. Chapter 11 then describes a series of over 100 preservation projects keyed to individual component landscapes. These projects address the deterioration of the landscape and recommendations generally balance issues of historic integrity with current management and use concerns. Project descriptions are general; they are not detailed specifications, but rather chart an overall course of future preservation actions. Projects are indicated on a set of treatment plan drawings located in the drawing set at the back of the report. Cost estimates were also completed for the treatment projects; these estimates provided to the park as a separate document.

Work on the *Platt District CLR* has been conducted in accordance with current NPS cultural resource policies, including *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports*; the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*; *National Register Bulletin 18: How to Evaluate and Nominate Historic Designed Landscapes*; and *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*. The work has also been conducted in accordance with the park's enabling legislation, which requires preservation and protection of the park's mineral springs and streams while providing public access.

STUDY BOUNDARIES

Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA) is located in Murray County in south central Oklahoma and covers approximately 10,000 acres of predominantly forested land surrounding the Lake of the Arbuckles. The Platt District is comprised of 928 acres located in the extreme northeast corner of the CNRA. The Platt District is located near the town of Sulphur, 90 miles south of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and 120 miles north of Dallas, Texas.

The boundaries of the CLR study are the boundaries of the Platt District. These boundaries coincide, with a few minor exceptions, with the historical boundaries of the former Platt National Park, which existed from 1906 until 1976, when it was combined with the Arbuckle Recreation Area to form the CNRA.

Today, the district's north, west and southeast boundaries form a jagged line abutting the City of Sulphur. The district's west and southwest boundaries are contiguous with the rest of the CNRA. The Platt District is approximately three miles wide, east to west and varies in depth, north to south. It is approximately 4,800 feet wide near the center of the district, 6,400 feet wide near the western edge and 2,300 feet along its eastern edge.²

By 1979, an additional small parcel of land, approximately fifteen acres, was added adjacent to the district with the purchase of the Vendome Well area. This area is not included in the study boundary, as it is currently under development as a new park-wide Visitor

Center. In 1983, a small portion of the original park, a strip of land on both sides of Rock Creek, north of Broadway Avenue (State Highway 7) was removed from the district, when the NPS exchanged it with the City of Sulphur for 343.74 acres (the Veterans' Lake area adjacent to the south edge of Rock Creek Campground). This area is also not included as part of the CLR study area.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Originally known as Sulphur Springs Reservation, and later renamed Platt National Park, the park was established in 1902 through an agreement with the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations and the federal government. The Chickasaw Nation sold the land to the government in order to protect the unique freshwater and mineral springs along Travertine and Rock Creeks.

Though a number of landscape elements in the Platt District relate to the early period of the park's establishment (1902-1932), the majority of historic landscape resources relate to the period 1933-1940. During this period, NPS professionals planned and designed extensive park infrastructure which was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Elements included mineral spring pavilions, campgrounds, picnic areas, dams and waterfalls; these were linked by a network of roads and trails. Over one-half million trees and shrubs were planted and an ambitious silviculture program implemented. The CCC work group at Platt National Park was the largest and longest running of any in Oklahoma, employing about 200 workers at any given time between 1933 and 1940.

After 1940, the park first went through a period of war-time economy, followed by minor expansion in 1950. A nature center was added and other changes were made during the NPS's Mission 66 era. In the 1970s, the park merged with the Arbuckle National Recreation Area to become Chickasaw National Recreation area. The former national park lands became designated as the Travertine District, later renamed the Platt District.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

In recent years, the cultural landscape of the Platt District has been carefully maintained and documented. Documentation has included an extensive inventory by both the List of Classified Structures (LCS) and the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI). Two phases of LCS structure inventory have been completed. A “Level 1” CLI was completed in 1997 and documented the entire district on a broad scale. A “Level 2” CLI documenting ten component landscapes within the overall landscape was completed in 2002. National Register documentation, in the form of a National Historic Landmark application, began in 2002 and should be completed soon. Other park studies currently underway include the *CNRA Ethnohistory of Associated Park Use and Values* and a Historic Resource Study.

The district is managed as a part of the larger CNRA and recent management documents have included a CNRA “General Management Plan” (1980), and a Statement for Management (1990), and an “Amendment to General Management Plan” (1994). A new General Management Plan (GMP) is currently underway and is slated for completion by 2004.

PHYSIOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The Platt District is located at the northern edge of a range of steep-sided limestone and conglomerate hills called the Arbuckle Mountains in an area known as the Arbuckle Mountains Uplift. Once higher than the Rocky Mountains, the Arbuckles—which surround the Platt District on the south, east and west—have eroded over the years. Soil deposits from this erosion have defined the geologic conditions of lower elevations, including the Platt District. Elevations in the district range from 920 feet in the Rock Creek stream channel to 1,150 feet above sea level at Bromide Hill.

In the Arbuckle range, the layer of conglomerate and its underlying sedimentary layers were left slightly tilted toward the southwest. As a result, the high ground around Sulphur and the Platt District is the northernmost extension of the conglomerate cap. The surface rock in the area is known as the Vanoss formation, and contains

successive layers of sandstone, shales and conglomerates.³ Conglomerate rock is a characteristic feature throughout the district. It is widely seen in ridges and outcroppings, and is composed of mountain sands, pebbles and rocks cemented together by mineral solution.

The hydrology of the district is intimately tied to its geology. The district’s freshwater springs originate in rock formations beneath the park. Falling rain percolates through the sulphur- and bromide-free porous sands and sandstone conglomerates of the Pontotoc Series to the east of the district. Forced up through fissures, this water emerges as freshwater springs throughout the park. The water of these springs contains calcium carbonate, which over time precipitates out of solution, creating travertine rock. This calcareous tufa rock is a typical feature in the Travertine Creek valley in the eastern part of the district.⁴ In contrast, the park’s mineral springs originate from sandstone beds of the Simpson Group. Water leaches bromide, sulfur, and other minerals out of these soils and holds them in solution, resulting in waters with high mineral contents.

The Platt District is located at the western edge of the eastern deciduous forest and western plains grassland, and, as a transitional zone, contains a rich mixture of woodland and prairie species. More than 600 different plant species have identified in the Platt District in numerous studies spanning more than 60 years. Soils contribute to this diversity, since the limestone-rich soils of the area can support grassland species in dry places and forest species in wetter stream and floodplain environments. Rich, loamy bottomland soil of the Garvin and Elandco types, characterized by moderate water capacity, moderate permeability and a deep root zone, lies along the creeks of Travertine, Limestone and Rock Creeks, promoting growth of a riparian environment of oak-hickory species.⁵

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ Robert Page, Cathy Gilbert, and Susan Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, Techniques*, (Washington: National Park Service, 1998), 5.

² Edward E. Dale, "The grasslands of Platt National Park, Oklahoma," *Southwestern Naturalist*, 1959, no. 4: 45-60.

³ Ballard Barker and William Jameson, *Platt National Park: Environment and Ecology*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 27-35.

⁴ Barker and Jameson, *Platt National Park: Environment and Ecology*, 51.

⁵ Barker and Jameson, *Platt National Park: Environment and Ecology*, 70.

