What are Cultural Landscapes?

Cultural landscapes are places within U.S. national parks that have significance in American history and authenticity to a historic time period. As identified by the National Park Service, the components of cultural landscapes include human-modified ecosystems such as forests, prairies, rivers and shores, as well as constructed works, such as mounds, terraces, structures and gardens. Here's a basic introduction to cultural landscapes. Find out more at nps.gov/culturallandscapes and follow us on social media!

The majority of national park units (417 in 2017) contain cultural landscapes. There are more than 800 throughout the system.

They vary broadly from historically designed, to agricultural, industrial, ceremonial and spiritual places.

They all have authenticity or "historic integrity." This means they are recognizable as the places from the historically significant period.

They range in age from thousands of years to just decades old. And they vary from naturally-occurring places like Devils Tower in Wyoming, to entirely human-made places, like the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in Missouri.

They can be found anywhere, from cities to wilderness.

They vary in size from many thousands of acres to less than an acre.
Cultural landscapes have significance in American history. Their significance varies from a historic event, to a historic person, to a historic style of design or method of construction, to a place with the potential to reveal information through archeology.

They also have historic character that conveys their significance and integrity. Integrity is measured by the presence of landscape characteristics. These are the tangible remains of historic processes or patterns. The NPS recognizes thirteen types of landscape characteristics that can be potentially found in any cultural landscape.

1. **Natural Systems and Features**
   - Processes and materials in nature influencing historical development or use.

2. **Spatial Organization**
   - The historical, three-dimensional arrangements of physical forms.

3. **Cultural Traditions**
   - Historical manifestation of collective cultural identity.

4. **Cluster Arrangement**
   - Historical pattern of aggregation in forms.

5. **Built Water Features**
   - Historical constructed forms for water retention and conveyance.

6. **Land Use**
   - Historical activities that influenced development or modification.

7. **Topography**
   - Historical, human-created shape of the ground plane.

8. **Vegetation**
   - Patterns of human-influenced plants, both native and introduced.

9. **Spatial Organization**
   - Historical, human-created shape of the ground plane.

10. **Buildings and Structures**
    - Historical constructed forms and edifices.

11. **Archeological Sites**
    - Historical or pre-contact ruins, traces or deposited artifacts.

12. **Small-Scale Features**
    - Discrete, historical elements that provide detail and diversity.

13. **Circulation**
    - Historical systems for human movement.

14. **Views and Vistas**
    - Historical range of vision, both broad and discrete.