



Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction

Professor Linda Flint McClelland

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Since its founding in 1916, the National Park Service has been charged with two equally important and often conflicting missions: to preserve our country's natural wonders for future generations and to develop national parks for the appreciation and enjoyment of visitors. Recalling the era of the great lodges at Yellowstone and Yosemite, *Building the National Parks* tells the story of how the new bureau's landscape designers, architects, and engineers met each of these challenges, forging a rich legacy of buildings, roads, and trails that both harmonized with the natural scenery and accommodated visitors to the parks. Their achievements -- detailed for the first time here -- have greatly influenced the design of state and local parks and other recreational areas across the United States.

Planners realized the twin goals of accessibility and preservation by developing a distinctive style of naturalistic design. Rooted in the nineteenth-century rustic gardening tradition popularized in the United States by Frederick Law Olmsted and Andrew Jackson Downing, this style emphasized scenic views, variations in topography, and natural features such as vegetation, streams, and rock outcroppings. During the formative years of the National Park Service -- from 1916 to 1942 and particularly through the public works projects of the New Deal -- dozens of projects were completed in such parks as the Grand Canyon, Crater Lake, Mount Ranier, Acadia, Carlsbad Cavern, Grand Teton, Yellowstone, and Yosemite in the style that became inseparable from the natural identity of each park.

Landscape architects and civil engineers provided safe and convenient access on roads that followed nature's contours and afforded stunning scenic vistas. Carefully planned networks of trails and overlooks aided the service in protecting the parks and also gave visitors access to otherwise hidden wonders. Lodging facilities and sites for camping and picnicking, as well as ranger stations and park museums, were fashioned from local materials with naturalistic or pioneer building techniques.

McClelland's story of these early years, illustrated with 118 rare, archival photographs, is one of remarkable feats of engineering and consistently responsible stewardship. Concluding with a description of national park development since 1942, *Building the National Parks* records the lasting contributions of the National Park Service's designers and engineers.

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