

## STAKING NEW CLAIMS *Reinterpreting Historic Mining Sites*

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**Abstract.** Historical preservation is a discipline that requires a unique interpretation of space and the physical landscape. However, federal and state laws have increasingly dictated historical preservation, which has had the effect of constraining the discourse surrounding historic sites and their interpretation. Regulations require that historic sites be assigned a “period of significance;” a slice of time in which the site is considered to be important and which the public is made to experience it. This practice excludes the larger and continuous histories of sites and the way they have been experienced by all overtime. Borrowing upon Michel Foucault’s idea of heterotopias, this paper will assess the current understanding of historic mining sites at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and suggest new ways to study, interpret, and experience them.

The effect of historic preservation is to “...manipulate ‘real time’ in order to create interpretive contexts in which human behavior may be revealed or explained” (Weeks 1993). Creating these interpretive contexts lies at the heart of historic preservation due to the fact that preservation efforts are not about the sites themselves. Historic preservation is about the cultures and people who experience and give meaning to the sites as a reflection of their ideals and identities. Which sites a society chooses to preserve and how it presents them is significant to how the people understand their past. For the purposes of this research, historic preservation will be examined in the context of interpretive efforts and the creation of space as opposed to concrete technical and physical preservation efforts. In so doing, I will present a more culture-oriented understanding of historic preservation and the ways in which individuals can use sites as an expression of themselves.

Historic preservation in the US has its roots in private academic, antiquarian, and patriotic societies common in America during the 1800’s. Some of the first attempts at preservation involved sites pertaining to George Washington such as Mount Vernon and his Revolutionary War headquarters, the Hasbrouck House. These preservations coincided with the “Cult of Washington” and national efforts to commemorate him such as the construction of the Washington Memorial. Community groups were also concerned with preserving properties on a local historical level, and funds were raised to purchase and maintain these places. While the national and local governments had no legal

commitment to historic preservation during this time, often the private organizations would seek out government support in their efforts (Hosmer 1965).

The Antiquities Act of 1906 was the first piece of national legislation that recognized the need to protect historic and archaeological sites. This was followed by the passage of the 1916 Organic Act, which created the National Park Service. Under the Organic Act, the Park Service is to “Conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (National Park Service 1997, 19). Historic Preservation continued to grow during the Great Depression under New Deal programs such as the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and the Historic Sites Act of 1935. This allowed for the Federal Government to purchase and take direct control of sites of national significance. The Federal Government also began to solidify its working relationship with private preservation groups by charting nationwide associations such as the National Trust in 1946 (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977).

Arguably the most important piece of legislation passed concerning historic preservation is the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). This Act grew out of the idea that historic spaces could be more than just sites associated with famous Americans or nationally significant events. With a new understanding of the way people experience their lived environment and the threat of urban renewal, historic preservation began to consider sites “...for their perceived importance to a community, for their significance to the architectural and aesthetic integrity of a neighborhood, and for their exemplification of changing cultural values and approaches to the living environment” (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977, 29).

The NHPA continues to be the driving force behind historic preservation today. The Act created a federal centralized effort of historic preservation which included the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places, an independent Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Councils, and considerable funding for federal, state, and private preservation groups (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977). While the history of historic preservation in the US is far more complex than that presented here, this brief summary presents the evolution of historic preservation thought as it relates to the National Government. Having the National Government involved in preservation is important as it lends not only legal authority to preservation efforts but also ideological legitimacy. It is a statement that as a society certain places are recognized as significant to an understanding of our past and cultural identity. Furthermore, this understanding was to include not only the sites of the “great white men” in US history, but places important to various cultural groups at national and local levels. As a new awareness grew of what we are as Americans, historical preservation began to reflect this and provide contexts in which to understand ourselves (Murtagh 1988).

### **Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Historic Mining**

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (ORPI) consists of a 132,275-hectare parcel of land located in southwest Arizona adjoining the US/Mexico border. Created on April 13, 1937 by presidential proclamation, ORPI serves to “Perpetuate for future generations a

representative sample of the natural and cultural resources and processes of the Sonoran Desert, and provide for public understanding, use, and enjoyment” (National Park Service 1997, 20). Cultural resources located at ORPI are managed by the National Park Service (NPS) and include Native American, historic mining and historic ranching sites. In addition to the Antiquities Act, Organic Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act, the cultural resources present are also subject to legislation such as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) (Ibid: 21).

The concept of “significance” as written in the NHPA has proven problematic when trying to identify sites worth preserving. It has been commented that “Sooner or later we shall have to face it: to modern man, all buildings are buildings of historic interest” (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977, 95). The National Register, which is the official list of sites “significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture”(National Register of Historic Places 2007), has certain criteria that sites must meet to be considered worthy of preservation. The criteria for eligibility reads as follows:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and\_

- a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or\_\_
- (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or\_\_
- (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or\_\_
- (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (36 CFR 60, 222).

Meeting these criteria relies heavily on having written documentation for a site. Without concrete evidence, either written or archaeological, tying a site or structure to a specific date and event, it is as if the site fails to exist. It can be recognized as a site having possible historic value, but usually nothing more than this. Furthermore, if a site is nominated to the National Register, a “period of significance” is required for the site to be placed in. The period of significance is the time period in which the site is deemed to have historic value suitable for preservation and interpretation (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977). Assigning a period of significance has the effect of singling out a particular slice in time in which the site is to be understood, and risks overlooking the broader history inherent in the site.

Historic mining sites at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument provide a useful example of the limitations of periods of significance in historic preservation and interpretation efforts. Mining in ORPI has a rich and complicated history that has yet to be entirely documented. The most recent attempt took place in the summer of 2007 when mining claims were used to document the early histories of known mines and uncover forgotten ones. Mining claims, which were required by law to be filed when a mine was first located or changed possession, provides the necessary documentation for identifying mines and tying them to specific dates and persons. In doing this, they give a certain

historical legitimacy to a site and provide a framework in which to preserve and interpret it. It will be shown however that in supplying the early documentation for mining sites, they also expose the inadequacy of periods of significance and the labeling of a place as a “mining site.”

Organ Pipe’s main interpretive mining sites are Milton Mine, Victoria Mine, and Lost Cabin Mine. Victoria Mine and Lost Cabin Mine are worth examining as they are located in close proximity to each other yet receive very different treatments and interpretations based on the available documentation. Victoria Mine was nominated for inclusion on the National Register, and is currently interpreted as a mining site associated with M. G. Levy with a period of significance of 1899-1940. Structures still exist from this time period and use, and written records of Levy and his operations there are well known. Lost Cabin Mine, on the other hand, is an interpretive mining site of which little is known, including the original name. What exists there today is a series of shafts carved into the surrounding mountains and a partial stone cabin. The stone cabin is unique among the historic structures at Organ Pipe due to the quality of the stonework in its construction. In comparison with the stone cabins remaining at Victoria Mine, Lost Cabin Mine was most likely constructed by a skilled stonemason.

However, due to the lack of information on Lost Cabin Mine it has largely been overlooked in preservation and interpretive efforts. Although thought to be an important mining structure and possibly one of the oldest surviving in the park, Lost Cabin Mine cannot be entered onto the National Register of Historic Places. It lacks a definitive date and association, and therefore can only be treated as possibly eligible for nomination. The objective of the mining claim research was to fill in this missing information and in effect bring Lost Cabin Mine back into existence. Based on mining claims located in the vicinity of Lost Cabin Mine, it is possible that it was once the “Guadalupe” claim, which was located in 1878 by the Mexican prospector Cipriano Ortega and later relocated by M. G. Levy (Ortega et al. 1878; Levy 1899). However, the sometimes vague description of mine locations prevents a positive identification meeting National Register standards.

Mining claim research however did reveal a large network of miners and prospectors working in the area of Organ Pipe over time. The Victoria Mine was determined to have been first located in 1878 by Cipriano Ortega, Lyman Smith, Orlando Smith, and Samuel Purdy as the “Fresh Start Mine” (Ortega et al. 1878). It was relocated in 1895 by Fred Wall as the “Chloride Mine” (Wall 1895), and then finally located as the “La Americana Mine” in 1899 by M. G. Levy (Levy 1899). Levy later changed the name to the Victoria Mine, and further research revealed that although Levy sold the mine off in the 1930’s, mining continued there until the 1970’s. This new information seriously undermines the interpretation of Victoria Mine as a mining site only significant from 1899-1930 and associated with M. G. Levy.

The appearance of Cipriano Ortega on mining claims is important as he was a Mexican national working claims on US soil. Oral histories put Ortega as the original owner of Victoria mine, which he later sold to Levy under the presumption that the mine would be confiscated by the US government. Under the 1872 Mining Laws Ortega would not have been allowed to own or work a mine in US territory. However, the “Fresh Start” mining claim demonstrates that Ortega found legal means of gaining possession of the mine through American partners. Ortega, using a previously established Mexican mine, used the Smith brothers and Samuel Purdy to secure his right to the Victoria mine in the

US where he was able to work until it was no longer profitable. M. G. Levy also got his start at mining working with Ortega on the multiple mines located on the Mexican side of the border. Considering Victoria Mine from this angle presents an interpretive context of immigration and international border issues, which is lacking in the current understanding of Victoria Mine.

Taking the idea of borders and boundary lines further, the mines located at Organ Pipe cannot be interpreted as mines isolated within the park. Over time, the land has been divided up with park boundaries, private property boundaries, tribal boundaries, and international boundaries. However, these mines were established before we imposed these boundaries upon the landscape, and so there is a commonality among the mines that is often masked by the dividing lines. Successful mining in southern Arizona required that prospectors claim and reclaim a large number of mines over vast areas. Lost Cabin Mine, taken by itself, tells the story of a long forgotten mining venture within Organ Pipe. However, the stonework at Lost Cabin Mine, while unique within Organ Pipe, is identical to stonework located at Gunsight Mine located just outside ORPI's park border. Gunsight Mine is currently located on private land within the Tohono O'odham Reservation. Gunsight Mine was first located in the 1870's and developed into one of the more prosperous and influential mines in the area, drawing considerable investment into other surrounding mines. Based on the stonework at Gunsight and Lost Cabin mines, there is a high probability that they were connected at one point or a least were built by the same skilled stonemason. Due to this separation and disconnect between mines separated by our borders, the interpretation of ORPI's mines lacks the context of multiple claims, abandonments, and the interconnectivity between miners and mines; all of which was systemic to early mining in Arizona.

In addition to rewriting periods of significance and associations, mining claim research calls into question the accuracy of interpreting a site under a specific label. Bates Well and Quitobaquito are two other interpretive sites located within Organ Pipe. Bates Well is interpreted as a ranching site on the National Register with a period of significance of 1900-1949, and Quitobaquito is interpreted as a natural desert spring, a desert farming site, and a continuing Native American site (National Park Service 2007). However, mining claims show that these places also functioned as mines at one point in their history. Bates Well was the location of the 1901 placer claim "Wrangler" (Hovey 1901). Quitobaquito had a number of mines and millsites located there starting in the 1890's, such as the "Atlanta," "Quitobaquoto," "Harrison," and "Levy's Millsite" (Dorsey 1896; Levy 1899). It is possible that the pond created at Quitobaquito, currently associated with desert irrigation farming, was first created for mining purposes.

Likewise, traditional mining sites are open as to how they are interpreted. Sites such as Victoria Mine include prehistoric archaeological sites that are currently overlooked. Old mine shafts and structures provide shelter to illegal immigrants, and the amount of trash found at Victoria Mine demonstrates that it is a popular lay up site for immigrants and smugglers heading north. The mining sites also provide habitats for desert animals and are now conserved as wildlife protection sites. The old mine shafts at Copper Mountain Mine are home to the largest bat maternity roost within Organ Pipe. Finally, these mining sites are no longer active mines and are instead tourist sites for education and recreation. Although it is understood that sites change over time and adapt to new uses, it is not explicitly stated in the history of mining sites at ORPI. Presented is a space termed as a

mining site, when in actuality a mining site is a ranching site, is a Native American site, is a tourist site, etc. The lines have been blurred as to what these places represent, and traditional interpretive contexts are no longer adequate.

### **New Perspectives on Interpretation**

Working in conjunction with the Resource Management Department, the Visitor Center and Interpretation Department at Organ Pipe has developed a Long-Range Interpretive Plan by which to present the many facets of the Monument to the general public. The 2007 plan includes five “primary interpretive themes,” two of which relate directly to the cultural heritage of the Monument. The cultural themes are:

1-This place – long a travel corridor, and more recently a political boundary – invites us to consider the movement of peoples and the management of that movement and its effects.

2-The long history of human habitation and continuing use here demonstrates how ingenuity, resourcefulness, and cooperative efforts can lead to a sustainable relationship between a society and a challenging environment.

(National Park Service 2007, 8).

These new interpretive themes hold important significance for the cultural resources at Organ Pipe. Whereas before the themes included clear-cut categories of site interpretations (i.e. mining sites), here there is no explicit mention of a particular kind. Instead, the interpretive themes focus of movement through space and changing relationships between people and the environment. This new understanding will have significant consequences when bringing in ideas of space, place, and landscape to form alternative interpretations of traditional sites.

Michel Foucault, in the essay “Of Other Spaces,” discusses the concept of a heterotopia. He uses the analogy of a mirror to describe a heterotopia as a place which “...makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault 1986, 352). The interpretive mining sites as found at Organ Pipe serve as heterotopias in this respect; they are grounded in the real physical space of the Sonoran desert, yet the reflection they present to the viewer is a construct of the National Park Service through which it must first pass.

As heterotopias, the mining sites are linked to a slice in time and invite the viewer to a break from their traditional time. The mining sites are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time; they attempt to encompass all the events and history of the landscape in one place, which is itself removed from modern time. Preserving and interpreting the mining sites creates the illusion of a landscape frozen in time, and one that can then be molded to represent specific ideas that we inscribe upon it. Victoria Mine is transformed from a singular place in continual use, to a place stopped in 1899 and used to embody the history of mining in southern Arizona.

As history unfolds, the function of the heterotopic mining sites can be changed by society (Ibid). In this instance the function of the landscape changed from active mining to heritage tourism. Despite this dramatic change, some of the functions of the landscape remain the same. In both instances the mining sites serve an economic function through

the exploitation of resources. The mining site as an active mine served this function by carving out the landscape and removing ore from the earth, an act of destruction. The mining site as a tourist site exploits the historical resources through an act of preservation. Here the heterotopia is able to juxtapose, in a single place, several spaces that prove incompatible. Mining sites are at the same time places of destruction and preservation, frozen in time and continually evolving.

The idea of a singular space encompassing several spaces and functions is touched upon by author John Mitchell. He borrows the Native American concept of “ceremonial time” in which “past, present, and future can all be perceived in a single moment...” (Mitchell 1984, 1). He uses this concept to understand time, which for him is directly tied to the landscape and space. Mitchell noted that:

I found that when the moment was right, by concentrating on some external object, an arrowhead that was found on Scratch Flat, for example, or the running walls or foundations of the area, I was able to perceive something more than just a simple mental picture of what some past event was like. I not only could see the event or the place in my mind’s eye, but would also hear it, smell the woodfires; and sometimes, for just a flash, a microsecond if you care to measure things, I would actually be there, or so it seemed. (Mitchell 1984, 12).

Applying the concept of Ceremonial Time to the mining sites at Organ Pipe helps to resolve some of the issues revolving around these heterotopias. Conflicting interpretations can reside in the landscape simultaneously, and time, no longer static, presents itself as the past, present, and future. Furthermore, approaching the landscape through Ceremonial Time suggests a highly individual experience with time and space not normally associated with historic sites. Current interpretive contexts of historic sites provide the viewer a window for understanding a historical event or cultural ideology, whereas Ceremonial Time allows for a person to create their own interpretive contexts and become part of the site itself.

Before we can move forward to more individual experiences with the landscape and historic sites, the issue of control must be commented on. In playing the role of protector and interpreter of the mining sites, the Park Service creates a space that is both accessible and closed to the public. There is the appearance of open access to the sites for those who wish to enter, but the Park Service controls the entire experience. They have both the physical ownership of the sites as well as the ideological ownership of the site interpretation. The visitor to a site is as the name implies, a visitor. They must seek access through the Park Service and are subject to the Park Service’s interpretation of the sites.

One of the more striking examples of this control involves the grandson of one of the miners who once worked in Organ Pipe’s boundaries. This visitor’s grandfather had located the “Golden Eagle” mine and wrote to Organ Pipe asking that he and his family be allowed to visit the site. According to his letter, he planned to try some recreational mining at the site and erect a concrete monument there in honor of his grandfather. The Park Service responded that he would be allowed to visit the site, but if he disturbed it in any way, including erecting a memorial, he and his family would be subject to arrest and fines. This example is interesting not only because it clearly demonstrates the supremacy of the Park Service over the visitors, but also because the family had a personal connection to the site not normal to most visitors. They were using the landscape to

directly connect with their ancestors. It was not enough to simply read that their grandfather had started a mine or view the site as a visitor. They needed to physically engage the landscape and alter it in order to access their past.

Bourdieu's concepts of *illusio* and *doxa* are helpful here in understanding the relationship between the park and the visitors and why they conform to their accepted roles. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of an athletic game in discussing these concepts, and here it can be easily applied to the landscape and historic sites at Organ Pipe. When experiencing the park and historic sites, individuals exhibit *illusio*, investment in the park and the outcome of the visit, as well as *doxa*, the commitment to the presuppositions of the park. Like Bourdieu's game field, the park is an "...arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy- explicit and specific rules, strictly de-limited and extra-ordinary time and space" (Bourdieu 1990, 66). The Park Service and visitors play out their respective and accepted roles within this socially constructed space. Repeated over time, the practices within the park take on meaning and become "filled with sense and rationality for every individual who has a feel for the game (park)" (Ibid.).

When considering control and access to sites, maps and text play an important role. As discussed by J. B. Harley in "Deconstructing The Map," cartography/maps are a form of rhetorical text and should be treated as subjective representations of space for the purpose of control (Harley 1992). Both maps and text are used extensively by the Park Service in controlling space under their jurisdiction and presenting it to the public. Park maps mark out sites deemed suitable for visitor interpretation while excluding others (The Golden Eagle Mine mentioned before is not an interpretive site). Some maps, such as those showing the location of archaeological sites, are for Park Service use only and denied to the general public. Maps move visitors throughout the Monument in a controlled fashion, presenting them with a landscape managed and inscribed upon by the Park Service.

As discussed before, textual documents such as mining claims provide historical legitimacy to a place. Mining claims declare that an event took place at a specific location in time, which anchors and justifies later historical interpretations of a site. That moment in history retains ownership of the site, and all who approach it later are merely visitors looking back. An example of this is the Park Service program called "Passport To Your National Parks," which gives the impression that this textual legitimacy is being opened up to park visitors. The passport program allows visitors to purchase a passport style booklet and have it date-stamped when visiting a park, thus providing documentation of an individual's presence on the landscape similar to that of the mining claim (Passport to Your National Parks 2007). However, this passport program does not carry the same implications of ownership as the mining claims do. The use of the term "passport" reinforces the owner/visitor relationship. The passport grants access to a site, and the documentation of an individual's presence there reflects this visitor status.

This is not meant to be a condemnation of the Park Service and their use of the landscape. In their defense, they were entrusted with the care and interpretation of sites and they perform this task to the best of their ability. However it is important to recognize that landscapes are never neutral spaces, and that issues of control, power, and knowledge are ever present. The ultimate objective here would be to break down the power relations between the owners and visitors, thus creating a landscape in which individual experience

and interpretation would reign supreme. This is an instance however where theory and reality are not completely compatible. The bureaucracy of historic preservation assures that sites will always be controlled and interpreted by some authority. Therefore, a balance must be found between the authority and the outsider so that new relationships and interpretations can be formulated. The first step in this process, I believe, is the recognition of this power struggle and the subjectivity of interpretations surrounding historic sites.

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