

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Scotts Bluff In-Depth Historical Research & Documentation

Discipline: Cultural
Type of Project: Research
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Partners/Cooperators: Colorado State University
Student Involvement: yes, graduate students
Effective Dates: 4/1/2014 - 1/31/2016
Funding Amount: \$97,500 [FY15: \$50,000; FY14: \$47,500]

Investigators and Agency Representatives:

NPS ATR: Kara Paintner, Network Coordinator - NGP I&M, 231 E St Joseph Street, Rapid City, SD, 57701 (605)341-2807, kara_paintner@nps.gov

NPS Technical Expert: Tom Schaff, Chief Ranger, Scotts Bluff National Monument, PO Box 27 Gering NE 69341, 308-436-9717, tom_schaff@nps.gov

Investigators: Ruth Alexander, Public Lands History Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 80523, 970-491-6461, ruth.alexander@colostate.edu

Dr. Adrian Howkins, Public Lands History Center, Colorado State University, Campus Mail 1776, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1776; 970-491-6418/970-491-2941 (fax), adrian.howkins@colostate.edu

Project Abstract: The team will conduct primary research in archives in and around Scotts Bluff, beginning with the Paul & Helen Henderson Oregon Trail Research Collection housed in the Legacy of the Plains Museum. Using these primary sources, the research reports compiled by CSU for Scotts Bluff NM will make use of and highlight materials previously unseen by the general public while directly serving the monument's long-range interpretive plan.

One report will describe and compare the social history and diverse experiences of individuals who traveled west on the trails and of those who encountered the travelers along the way. This manuscript will demonstrate how the perspectives of minorities, women, and children presents a more holistic picture of the social history of American westward migration, discuss how these different groups understood Scotts Bluff and its surrounding environment (e.g. the area from Courthouse and Jail Rocks west to Ft. Laramie, WY), and highlight Nebraska's role in westward expansion. It will also contain excerpts from the diaries, journals, and letters from western travelers as well as a brief summary of the latest historical scholarship about the Oregon Trail.

A second report will document the Native American history associated with the site, including the significance of the bluffs and other landforms to Indian people and their continuing inhabitation and engagement with the land. Topics researchers will explore include historic trade routes and seasonal hunting movements that preceded Euro-American migrations, Native American economic and social interactions with the immigrants and military, the changing social structures within and among tribes, and the positive and negative impacts of contact with trappers, traders, travelers, and settlers.

A third report will document the history of human use and manipulation of the North Platte River Valley and the environmental changes interwoven with those activities. As a transportation corridor and a source of water, animals and people have long relied on the North Platte River Valley. Humans have influenced the ecology of this environment through the use of fire and hunting, have introduced exotic species, altered the flow of the river, and created a transportation corridor that interferes with north/south migration routes for various species.

In addition to these research reports, CSU will assist with a video, visitor guide, and exhibits to provide visitors with a cohesive and consistent message, Public Lands History Center staff and researchers will help Scotts Bluff staff coordinate the project with Montana State University and the exhibit installation team

Outcomes with Completion Dates:

The final research reports are due on November 30, 2015

Keywords: Scotts Bluff National Monument, Colorado State University, History, exhibits