

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU)
RM-CESU Cooperative Agreement Number:

Final Report

Title of Project: Interpretive Exhibit Design and Fabrication

Name of Park/NPS Unit: Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

Name of University Partner: Montana State University

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT NUMBER: *H1200040001*

TASK AGREEMENT NUMBER: *J1586040104*

PROJECT NUMBER: *MSU-09 and MSU-24*

NPS KEY OFFICIAL:

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STUDENT LEADS:

Jacky Chan, Graphic Design
Adam De Jarlais, Architectural Design
Kari Oelkers, Historical Research and Writting
Kadri Rebane, Graphic Design
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COST OF PROJECT:

\$5425

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this project was to create an exhibit that would provide on-site visitors with an orientation to the evolving story of ranch on a national level and how this particular site fit within that framework. There is no visitor center on the ranch where visitors can receive an adequate introduction to the history of ranching at this site and on the national level. There was also a vacant “buggy shed” located where most visitors first arrive at the ranch located in a structure that also reflects how this site evolved. A time line which depicted the national, state, ranch and family, and bunkhouse ranching history through time was imaged. Montana State University architectural students would design and fabricate an exhibit that would interpret these various “bands” of information.

ASSIGNED TASKS:

Task One: GRKO would provide MSU staff with background information about the National Park Service messaging image, the history of GRKO, statements of significance and primary interpretive themes, and existing information about proposed text and images.

Task Two: MSU would conduct an on-site visit to GRKO. GRKO staff (curator, museum technician, building preservation, park rangers) will attend appropriate portions of the visit. They will look at the exhibit spaces, as well as the site in general. Shared information will lead to Task Three.

Task Three: MSU project staff would produce a 50% and 95% draft of the exhibit design for comment by GRKO staff. The exhibit panels and text will be produced and installed after acceptance of the 95% draft.

RESULTS

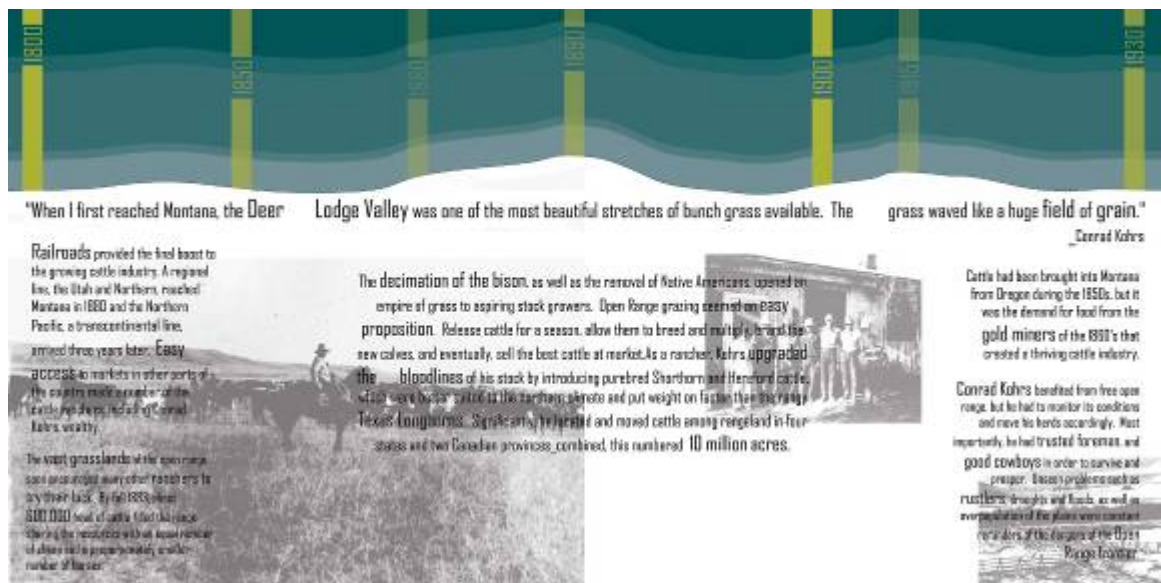
An exhibit titled “Ranching Through Time” was installed May 9, 2006. Professor Rea, the Principal Investigator, guided students through a real-life maze of first understanding their client’s objectives and then designing a product that met those needs. The parameters of the display were quite extensive – give the necessary information in a way that would not impact the integrity of the historic scene or damage original fabric and do it for \$5,000.

In the first year, an entire class took on the project. The initial assignment was to break into four groups and produce a concept models for park review. Professor Rea warned ranch staff that, as a product of teaching a class, there would be some pretty “far out” designs. Chris Ford, Curator and Key Official for the project, visited the class to see their models. Some were pretty outrageous but all had some design element that eventually worked into the final exhibit.

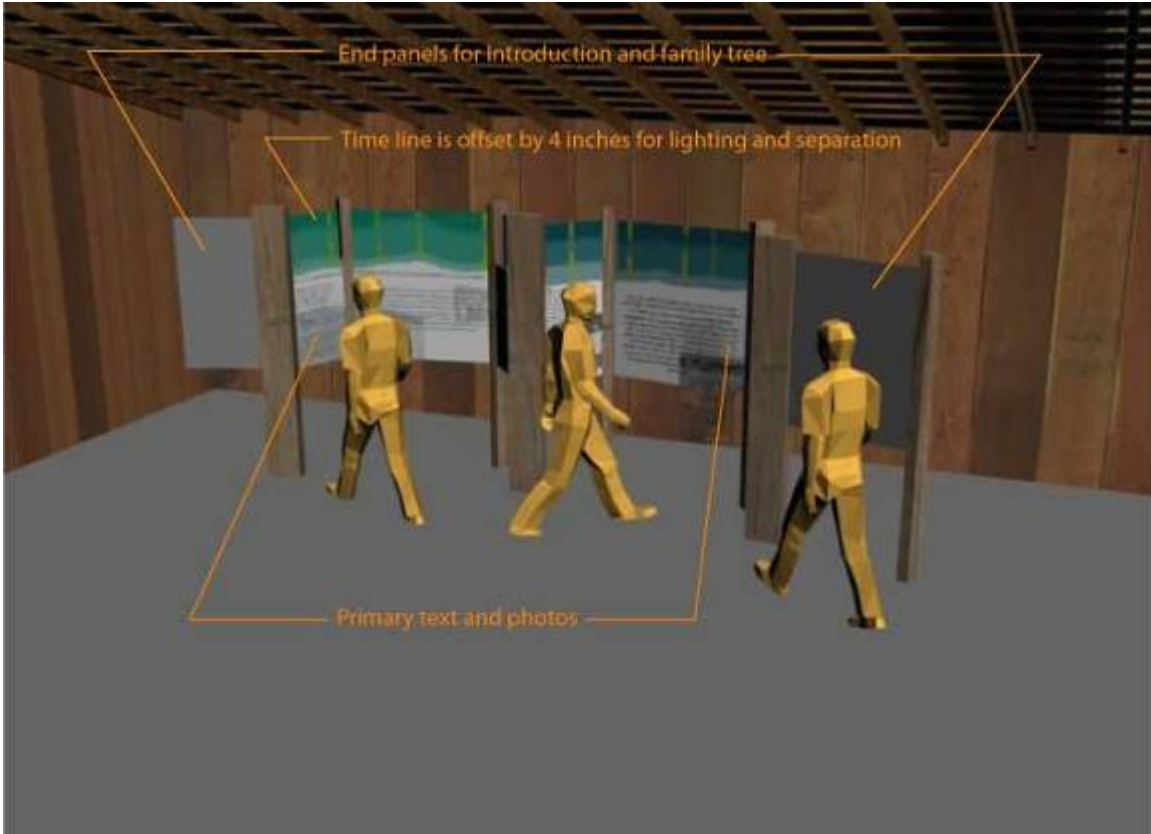
Professor Rea knew from experience that it should be the responsibility of Grant-Kohrs Ranch to provide all text and graphics for the exhibit. To this end, two graduate history students were also brought on after the initial Scope of Work to research and choose significant events to appear on the timeline. They also provided a narrative of major ranching themes that were difficult to express in a simple timeline. Eventually, the text and graphics were finalized by park staff, but not in time for the initial class of architectural students to complete the project.

Montana State University and RM-CESU were flexible and the project was extended another year. This round, Professor Rea selected two architectural students involved during phase one to bring the project to conclusion. Realizing the limitations of their discipline, Rea also chose two graphic art students to lend their talents to the project. These four students, under the guidance of their professor, worked with park staff through three reviews to design the final exhibit. Park staff worked hard to fine-tune text and graphics, placing them into a huge spreadsheet that could be printed out on a plotter for easier review. Graphic students in turn pulled that into their design software and various versions were reviewed, once during a second visit to the classroom by park staff to really nail the final layout.

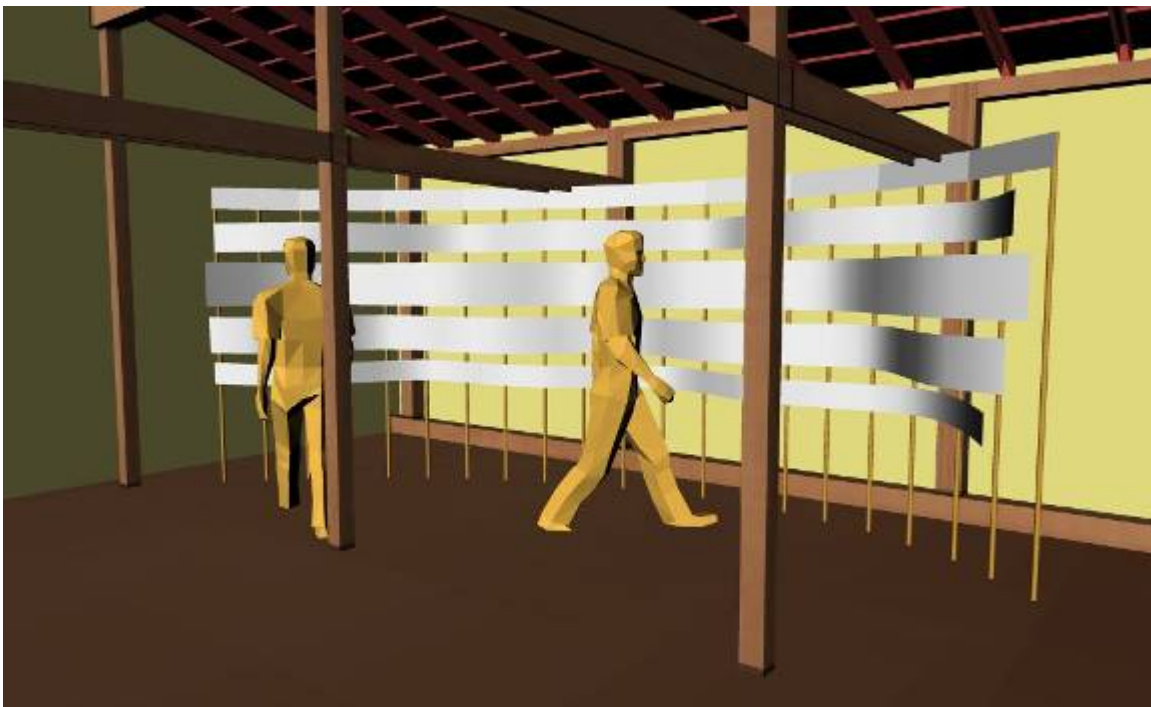
In the end, products were purchased and the exhibit was fabricated. Professor Rea and the students worked late into the night. This project was a success on every level. Grant-Kohrs Ranch has a quality exhibit at one-fourth the usual cost of an interpretive display. Four students acquired real-life experience in their chosen field and can now list a National Park Service project on their resume. Professor Rea crafted the project into an education experience and professional development opportunity for six students. Finally, RM-CESU, who partially funded the project, can add this venture to their long list of success stories.



Early design concept that reminded park staff of an ocean scene.



A more conservation concept park staff felt fit the historic scene.



Design approaching its final configuration minus the “undulating” bands.



Installation begins: leveling base with minimal soil disturbance and mounting timeline bands.



Students installing exhibit: two 12 hour plus days.



Trimming all-thread connections to address safety concerns.



Installation Complete.



Four bands of information through time with Open Range image as a backdrop.



Details of final exhibit.