



Unspoken Messages – Basque Arborglyphs: Methods for Recording and Documenting Arborglyphs on Department of Defense Land

Project No.
07-359



Background:

Basque carvings, associated groves, and camps are cultural resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and as such are potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Basque sheepherders inscribed thousands of messages and representations on aspen trees in at least 10 states from California to Montana. Basque tree carvings and the data they contain represent a roughly 150-year period of Basque contribution to the American West from the last decades of the nineteenth century through the 1970s.

Objective:

The focus for this project is on presenting a consistent method for recording tree carvings created by Basque shepherds. This study presents a thematic landscape approach that will facilitate a programmatic approach to determining NRHP eligibility for historic aspen tree carvings (arborglyphs) found on Department of Defense (DoD) properties. The proposed system was developed with the hope that it will be used on a range of federal properties, including U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management holdings, and by individual state historic preservation offices.

Summary of Approach:

Study methods included archival research, literature review, development of a historic context, a review of existing DOD facility in terms of the potential for Basque resources, data analysis, a review of existing recording methods, and the development of a recording method using video cameras. The data collected from a three-year study at the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Bridgeport Training Facility (Grouse Meadows) was used as a test case to determine the efficiency of the recommended recording methods and in developing a historic context for other DOD facilities.

Benefit:

This study is an evaluation tool for the management of cultural resources in compliance with federal laws and regulations. Furthermore, it helps comply with Section 110 of the NRHP, which requires federal agencies to identify and catalogue their cultural resources and assess them for NRHP eligibility. By undertaking the steps defined here, the DoD will be taking a proactive approach to managing their cultural resources, which can minimize and even avoid delays for federally sponsored projects that require consultations with State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) and other parties in compliance with Section 106, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other related federal laws and regulations. As a result, the information provided in this report will help the DoD make informed decisions regarding cultural resources, specifically historic arborglyphs.



Accomplishments:

Development of a historic context, refinement of a computer/data retrieval system for recording and managing new and existing data, and preparation of an instructional video showing how to record and document individual arborglyphs. The research and conclusions presented in this document provide sufficient information to determine and identify the historic and cultural significance of arborglyphs that might be found on individual installations.

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