



1. Map of Crater Lake Ski Bowl, cartograph by James B. Floyd. Appeared in the *Klamath Falls Evening Herald*, January 29, 1940 (courtesy Klamath County Museum).

## Some Ghosts at Crater Lake

Stephen R. Mark

As a check with most dictionaries should reveal, the word *ghost* has multiple meanings. The one I like most refers to “a shadow or mere semblance,” especially when related to “a mark or visible sign left by something dead, lost, or no longer present.<sup>1</sup> This definition (which resembles the one for archaeology, as long as there is physical evidence) is a useful way to approach landscapes where humans have left impressions of their presence in the past, often alongside more subtle and nuanced signs on land and water. This “duality” can be seen almost anywhere, even in national parks and wilderness areas, where sublime nature only seems to obscure human activity rather than remove it entirely.

All manner of developments can exist side by side with little or no intervention, but the pace of change can also be unsettling, in particular where important pieces of the past were and are threatened with obliteration. To counteract what some Americans painted as a crisis more than fifty years ago, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on October 15, 1966. At its heart is the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), which is the nation’s official list of properties considered worthy of preservation. Individual listings on the National Register consist of buildings, sites, structures, districts, and objects. Format of the nomination is crucial to being successful in getting the property listed, but so is content. For example, where the nomination has to meet at least one of four National Register criteria. These are events, activities, or patterns important in American history (A); association with important persons (B); distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction, or form (C); and potential to yield important information relating to prehistory or history (D). Finally, the property’s significance can be at the local, statewide, or national level.

### Crater Lake National Park and the National Register

It will likely come as no surprise to readers that Crater Lake Lodge served as the first historic property listed by the NPS in the park.<sup>1</sup> It came in 1981 when the

NPS had piqued Congressional interest in possibly funding rehabilitation aimed at fixing the hotel's many structural problems. These had become evident in the decades after it had opened for business on June 28, 1915.<sup>2</sup> The actual nomination, brief as it is, had very little to do with the construction project that started a decade later and went through two phases and four summer seasons before the hotel reopened on May 20, 1995.

### *Munson Valley Historic District*

A more direct connection between nomination of an entire historic district at Park Headquarters and the adaptive rehabilitation of three buildings there, was made when listing twenty-two "contributing resources" (all of them buildings under criteria A and C) occurred on December 1, 1988. Adaptive rehabilitation is the changing of form and function for what amounts to new uses, and the nomination amounted to mitigation that became part of what the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office stipulated as part of agreeing to let the project move ahead. It allowed the reconfiguration of interior spaces in the Administration Building (1936), the Rangers Dormitory (1932), and the Mess hall (1929, 1934) under guidelines provided by both the NPS and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.<sup>3</sup> The nomination went forward under the unifying theme of "NPS rustic architecture," which some people thought of as a "style," while others more correctly understood it as adaptation of much older estate design.<sup>4</sup>

### *Rim Village Historic District*

A pioneering cultural landscape report printed by the NPS in 1990 set the stage for the agency to move away from planning for a second hotel and additional site development at Rim Village by early 1995. A new visitor services plan for the park emphasized retaining historic buildings and preserving designed landscape features at Rim Village, making for a nomination that essentially mirrored the cultural landscape report. The authors of both documents recognized how various features defined a "designed cultural landscape." This included the lodge and five other buildings, along with a "plaza" next to the Cafeteria on its west end, a former campground now serving as a picnic area, and the promenade that supplied a unifying feature to the site.<sup>5</sup>

### *Rim Drive Historic District*

Unlike previous nominations tied to agency planning efforts or construction projects, this effort embraced an entire linear cultural landscape and arose from

federal funding aimed at inventory of potential historic properties. Nomination of the Rim Drive centered on how highway engineers and landscape architects in the 1930s created a scenic road 30 miles in length, one almost perfectly melded with its stupendous setting. The Rim Drive Historic District includes all of its namesake road, but also four hiking trails that start from the road circuit as yet another expression of rustic architecture.<sup>6</sup>

### *Army Corps of Engineers Road System Historic District*

For roughly three decades, the listing of historic properties at Crater Lake seemed stuck on a period of significance that went from 1926 to 1941. There were, of course, some efforts that fell outside that bracketed date range, starting with the Fort Klamath – Rogue River Wagon Road, which remained in use for almost a half century as the only developed corridor to reach Crater Lake, starting in 1865. Not really engineered in any sense, traces of it remain. The route existed mostly as a beaten path for freight sent to Fort Klamath, but also for visitors in wagons and stages bound for Crater Lake and included small nodes for rest stops or informal camps positioned near streams and springs en route. A determination of the road's eligibility for the NRHP was secured in 2003.<sup>7</sup>

Considerably more evidence exists, both in archival documents and on the ground, for what superceded the wagon road—the Army Corps of Engineers Road System (ACERS) for Crater Lake National Park. Its period of significance is from 1910 to 1920, at a time when highway engineering was still in its infancy, but that profession blossomed as the number of automobiles exploded in the United States around the time of World War I. Congress authorized and funded a system of engineered roads for the park at that time, with construction utilizing hand tools, horsepower, and steam shovels over the summers of 1913 through 1918. The ACERS consists of one circuit route (the Rim Road) and three approaches. This historic district is the first one at the park to include archaeological sites—mostly the remnants of seasonal construction camps. None of them would be individually eligible for the NRHP, but they contribute to the district as a group, ranging anywhere from a steam shovel arm to remains of a system that once pumped water from Crater Lake to a construction camp at the rim.<sup>8</sup>

### **Some shadows of the past**

In late 2019, formal historic preservation at Crater Lake National Park consisted of four listed historic districts that contain a total of 67 contributing resources (25

buildings, 17 road segments, 12 archaeological sites, 7 landscaped overlooks, 5 trails, and 1 walkway).<sup>9</sup> What a tally such as this does not capture, however, are those pieces of the past that officially “lack integrity” or cannot be easily shoehorned into a nomination, yet often have at least some relevance to the present. For whatever reason they do not fit the NRHP, even if some may occur alongside listed historic districts. These “ghosts” can take a variety of forms, as the following examples from Crater Lake may demonstrate.



Figure 2. Mess hall at the Engineers Camp, Munson Valley, 1917  
(National Park Service photo by Alex Sparrow)

### *Ghost #1: The first mess hall in Munson Valley*

National Register nominations use the methods of history to make a case for preserving an existing property or resource by describing its integrity (essentially the physical characteristics employed to tell a story referencing the past) and significance by writing to at least one of four main criteria. This is difficult to do if a building no longer exists, especially if another structure has occupied the same site since 1932.<sup>10</sup> The first mess hall came into being during the summer of 1914 for an “Engineers Camp,” built by the Army Corps for their aforementioned road project—since they considered Munson Valley to be a central point in the vehicular circulation system under construction. Its days were numbered once the NPS gradually took over Munson Valley for its new park headquarters. An impressive two-story mess hall, whose exterior consisted of stone masonry wood frame, took shape in 1929 not all that far away from its predecessor and

represented a considerable improvement in providing meals for single employees as well as dormitory space.

Apart from what might be gleaned from archival evidence and the few photographs taken of the first mess hall during its short existence, it received only passing mention when the writer asked former NPS employees about the building more than two decades ago.<sup>11</sup> One report from the project engineer, while the Corps was building roads, provided some terse details of the first mess hall's construction, which described the "mess house" as a "temporary" log building that cost just under \$500 to erect. With dimensions of 24 by 30 feet, it contained a kitchen and dining facility on the ground floor, with sleeping space for workmen on the two floors above it.<sup>12</sup> "Rustic" in the sense that it utilized native materials (mostly wood), the first mess hall possessed a steeply pitched roof as its lone architectural distinction, which was likely a response to major damage or collapse of several park structures during the winter of 1908-09. It can be seen as strictly utilitarian and bereft of amenities such as landscaping to help it blend with the surrounding subalpine forest. Many NPS employees around 1930 welcomed its demise, with the stench of scat left by dusky woodrats being especially acute while building burned, according to more than one interviewee some six decades later.

The building's short existence in Munson Valley could have disappeared entirely from the consciousness of all current park employees had it not been for installing some computer cables at the site in 2016. The subsurface area along this part of Munson Creek is rocky, making for difficult work by a small crew using augers and shovels to make a shallow trench. At one point, however, they came across a single bone from a bovine and fragments of shoe leather. Neither of these could be conclusively tied to the time when the mess house existed, but hint at occupation that is transitory instead of the permanency imparted by the current Park Headquarters complex as developed by the NPS during the 1930s. Instead, these finds summon an era when the idea of paying for garbage to be hauled from the park to distant landfills lay far in the future, and they might even suggest one of the most famous opening lines in literature: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."<sup>13</sup>

### *Ghost #2: A ski lift in Rim Village*

Despite the bright summer scenes that pervade the majority of postcard views of the park, winter is the one season that has truly dominated Crater Lake. Visiting



Figure 3. Skiers in the "bowl" at Rim Village, with Crater Lake Lodge in distance (courtesy Klamath County Museum)

on skis is a tradition harkening back to the nineteenth century and shows no sign of declining in popularity. Nordic, or "cross country" skiing has drawn many enthusiasts to the rim and elsewhere in the park, especially once rotary snow plows allowed automobiles to regularly reach Rim Village all year long for a view of the lake. If there is such a thing as a heroic past, many local residents have perceived the ski races held annually for several years between Fort Klamath to Crater Lake Lodge and back as truly epic. The longest version of 42 miles was held from 1927 to 1931, then shortened to 32 miles in 1932, 1933, and 1935.<sup>14</sup>

Alpine, or "downhill," skiing furnished the next experiment—one fueled by a prewar Crater Lake Ski Club with separate chapters in Klamath Falls, Chiloquin, and Fort Klamath. By early 1940, they had financed a lift (a gasoline-powered "rope tow") to the top of what was called "Knob Hill" in Rim Village. This was where beginners could take a "slow speed ski run," as opposed to the steeper "expert's ski run" toward an "open ski bowl" south of Crater Lake Lodge. Those preferring Nordic skiing could either use the "novice ski trail" through the bowl or the more difficult "Canyon Ski Trail" down to Park Headquarters.<sup>15</sup> After the hiatus caused by World War II, both types of skiing resumed at Rim Village by January of 1947. Interest from the Rogue Snowmen in Jackson County allowed a second "lift" to be used by skiers each winter weekend, with this one near Park Headquarters, on a slope of Garfield Peak, just above the road connecting Munson Valley with Rim Village.<sup>16</sup>

The two rope tows persisted on snowy weekends into the 1960s, yet more than 50 years after ski operations ceased, the only evidence of the both types of skiing co-existing at Rim Village consists of faded newspaper clippings and a few black and white photographs. Those skiers who follow the more recent Nordic circuit called the “Hemlock Trail” can still obtain some sense of the two ghost runs leading down from Knob (now called “Ranger”) Hill. The Hemlock first appeared around 1980 and allows skiers to experience a wider variety of terrain than simply shooting downhill from the lodge or for that matter, following the first mile or so of West Rim Drive.

*Ghost #3: A half-finished viewpoint above Rim Drive*

A very low snowpack coincided with the onset of two very popular work relief programs (the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Public Works Administration) and made the summer of 1934 arguably the longest, as well as the most productive, in park history. Infrastructure projects that year included new buildings, utilities, roads, trails, and campground improvements, with all of them aimed at putting men to work during the dark days of the Great Depression. This was the fourth summer of construction work on what had become known as Rim Drive, which emerged from a series of contracts that allowed the road circuit to take shape in sections going clockwise from Rim Village to Park Headquarters. Road grading in 1934 got as far as a point above Grotto Cove to eventually be followed by the stages of surfacing and paving, but no final decisions had yet been made about road location beyond Kerr Notch. Controversy erupted among NPS employees by this time regarding whether a “high line” from Dutton Cliff past Sun Notch to reach Vidae Falls was a wiser choice than a “low line” adopted by the old Rim Road in 1914, which followed what is now the “Grayback Road” going west to Vidae Falls from Lost Creek.<sup>17</sup>

Vidae Falls has long been a point of interest for motorists, so most NPS employees of 1934 assumed that the new Rim Drive would cross the falls by means of a bridge rather than a cheaper earthen fill. Since the old road crossed Vidae Creek at the base of the falls, building a trail to a new viewpoint across from the top of the falls was considered desirable over another plan only briefly entertained by the NPS to connect Garfield Peak with Vidae Falls by trail. The most advantageous trail alignment to the chosen viewpoint involved traversing the east flank of Vidae Falls, so a group of CCC enrollees began construction of a pedestrian route in late August 1934. A majority of the enrollees on this job were



black, as it happened for probably the only time in park history. By the end of that season in October, CCC laborers had completed enough rough grading for most of the trail to be evident over a distance of two miles. No additional work, however, occurred in 1935 or any other construction season thereafter, mainly because the approved line for Rim Drive turned out to be higher than originally anticipated and seemed to remove the need for a trail, especially one whose alignment failed to mesh with how the road sat on a fill—one that removed about a third of the falls from view.

Those who approved the building of a massive fill instead of a bridge evidently assumed that motorists stopping there would not try to climb any further toward Vidae Falls than the road level. Social trails have since created a condition where loose rock can fall into a long culvert. In attempting to alleviate this problem, an archaeological survey became necessary before a mini-excavator could remove some of the talus. The survey crew came upon the unfinished trail and recorded it, but had also gathered archival documents that revealed how the trail's construction involved some unexpected diversity among its builders in the CCC.

*Ghost #4: A partially obliterated auto trail to Diamond Lake*

When the Army Corps of Engineers finally completed the rough grading of Rim Road so that the first adventurous motorists could drive the circuit around the rim of Crater Lake in October 1918, it opened an opportunity to connect the park with Diamond Lake. The newly created NPS wanted to wrest administrative control of Diamond Lake from the U.S. Forest Service, but appropriations for Crater Lake National Park at that time barely paid for maintaining the unsurfaced road system left to the NPS by the Corps of Engineers. Consequently, the only automobile access that the NPS could provide northward from the Rim Road consisted of widening a horse trail that more or less followed an earlier aboriginal travel route that ran toward Diamond Lake.<sup>18</sup>

Opened in 1921, the auto trail generally did not exceed one car width. It sometimes dodged lodgepole pines where they occurred along relatively straight stretches of the route, but the few cars that traveled the trail almost always generated clouds of dust that could be seen miles away. Portions of the auto trail lying closest to the new North Entrance Road, which branched from Rim Drive at the “Diamond Lake Junction” were “obliterated” or at least reduced in width beginning in 1932 to maintain an illusion of pristine nature. Most of the auto

trail's alignment, however, lived on as a part of the pedestrian route from Mount Hood to Crater Lake for almost four decades, and then as a section of the Pacific Crest Trail until the late 1970s.<sup>19</sup> "Rediscovery" of the Diamond Lake Auto Trail came in 2019, when an archaeological crew happened upon it



Figure 4. Three Klamath men at Discovery Point, Crater Lake National Park, 1908 (photo by H.C. Tibbitts, courtesy of Old Oregon Photos)

when "clearing" survey units for future prescribed fires. A subsequent reconnaissance of the entire auto trail found that part of it was surprisingly intact, even to the point where some obliterated sections still held traces of past use.

## Conclusion

Readers might think it odd, apart from one glancing reference to an Indian trail that once connected Crater Lake to Diamond Lake, no mention of indigenous people has yet been made. A vastly different cultural view of Crater Lake and its surroundings held by members of park-associated Indian tribes stands in marked contrast to what is often called the "tourist gaze" of Europeans and their descendants. Fully differentiating these will not be attempted here, but anthropologists have, however, generated considerable documentation of what has been called "traditional use" by tribal members.<sup>20</sup> What is probably the most ubiquitous sign of their presence is in the form of ceremonial rock stack features, which is likely a very ancient practice that continues to the present time.

Documenting such features as part of a formal historic preservation program administered by the NPS poses a number of challenges. They begin with tribal protocols and lead directly to the sensitive nature of religious practice by

individuals. These rock stacks do not exist in isolation, but are part of a ritualized landscape. Among the Klamath, the stacks are part of a quest for aid sought in lonely places on tops of mountains, in montane pools or river eddies. As Leslie Spier remarked in his classic ethnography on the Klamath 90 years ago, “[everywhere in Klamath territory] Spirits are legion and many cases localized, so that one looking over the countryside finds it rich in religious connotation.” Spier described a land of the dead believed by traditional Klamaths of the time to lie in the west, the sunset:

“Everyone goes there. It was created by the culture hero, Gmukamps, who made humans that figure in the tales (called psaudi’was) and ordained that they go to this land when they died...Everything in the land of the dead is inverted from this living world. The ghosts sleep by day and live at night. In the day there is nothing to be seen but their houses and skeletons...”<sup>20</sup>

There are, of course, some dangers in attempting to draw parallels between traditional beliefs of indigenous people and what a settler society has embraced in law, even if a statute has mythological foundations.<sup>21</sup> Myth, in this sense, is not a falsehood or necessarily populated by heroes and gods. Instead, it helps people make sense of their lives and is essentially a guide, telling them what must be done to live more fully. As a widely shared story, myths are true because they are effective, not because they provide factual information. As historian Karen Armstrong has written, if a myth forces us “to change our minds and hearts, gives us hope, and compels us to live more fully, it is a valid myth. Mythology will only transform us if we follow its directives.”<sup>22</sup> For example, what lies behind the urge to preserve three historic districts at Crater Lake (Munson Valley, Rim Village, and Rim Drive) is an artistic desire to make earth over in the image of heaven through rustic architecture, thereby transcending the ordinary.

Fundamentally, myth is but one of five ways to create and define the world through story. In essence, myth establishes world—while apologue defends world, action investigates world, satire attacks world, and parable subverts that world. At the opposite end of this “spectrum,” parable is a story calculated to show the limitations of myth, to shatter that world so that its relativity becomes apparent. As the philosopher John Dominic Crossan has written:

“It does not, as parable, replace one myth with another. Like satire, parable keeps us humble by reminding us of limit...It is, in fact, the dark night of story, but

precisely therein and thereby can it prepare us for the experience of transcendence.”<sup>23</sup>

In a way, each of the “ghosts” presented is a parable because they are intended to undermine any perception of the past being entirely shoehorned into a formula, or somehow controlled by the present. Crossan quoted T.S. Eliot to make the point that parable is:

“The backward look behind the assurance  
Of recorded history, the backward half-look  
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.”<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

1. These are drawn from the *Reader's Digest/Oxford Complete Wordfinder* (Pleasantville, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 616, see #2; *Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993), 954, see #6.
2. Law, Henry G. “Crater Lake Lodge,” Listed May 5, 1981. NRIS #81000096.
3. Juillerat, Lee. *Lodge of the Imagination: The Crater Lake Lodge Story* (Crater Lake: Crater Lake Natural History Association, 1995), page 6.
4. Lentz, Flo and Stephanie Toothman, “Historic Resources of Crater Lake National Park.” Listed December 1, 1988 and divided into the Munson Valley Historic District (NRIS #88002622) and four other properties listed individually in the National Register database.
5. Its pedigree is traceable to “discovery” of how landscape could be manipulated as part of the Italian renaissance villa; on this point see John Dixon Hunt, “The Influence of Anxiety” in Ethan Carr, et al (eds.), *Public Nature: Scenery, History and Park Design* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pages 13-26.5
6. Mark, Stephen R. “Rim Village Historic District.” Listed on September 18, 1997. NRIS #97001155. This is really a “model village,” derived from private estates where parks fused with gardens in the eighteenth century. As a “village,” it is totally contrived.
7. Mark, Stephen R. “Rim Drive Historic District.” Listed January 30, 2008. NRIS #08000041.
8. This was completed with concurrence from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. A nomination still awaits funding from the NPS. Some detail about the road can be found in Stephen R. Mark, “At the Forefront: Three Contributions to Transportation Infrastructure in the Land of the Lakes,” *Journal of the Shaw Historical Library* 28 (2016), pages 65-69.
9. Mark, Stephen R. et al., “Army Corps of Engineers Road System Historic District.” Listed August 12, 2019. NRIS #19004255.

10. The Rangers Dormitory, which has existed under the name of “Steel Center” since 1987, is also a contributing resource in the Munson Valley Historic District.
11. All four employees interviewed are deceased, so it would be fair to say that the building is no longer in living memory.
12. Goodwin, George. Crater Lake National Park, Improvement of Roads and Bridges, Report of Operations for the month of November 1914.
13. Hartley, L.P. 1953. *The Go-Between* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), page 1.
14. Lund, John W. 1997. “History of the Crater Lake Wilderness Ski Race,” *Nature Notes from Crater Lake* 28, pages 25-28.
15. “Choice of Slopes Available at Top of Ski Club Lift,” *Klamath Falls Herald*, January 29, 1940. I am grateful to Steven Stenkamp for his reference to this source and Niles Reynolds, curator of the Klamath County Museum, for its reproduction.
16. “Ski Hoist Will Move,” *Medford Mail Tribune*, January 21, 1947.
17. Mark, Stephen R. and Jerry Watson, *Rim Drive Cultural Landscape Report*. Seattle: Government Printing Office, 2009, pages 41-44.
18. Mark, Stephen R. 2013. *Trails at Crater Lake National Park*, Seattle: Government Printing Office, page 16.
19. A summary of this contrast, at least as it existed between 1850 and roughly 1950, is by Robert H. Winthrop, “Crater Lake in Indian Tradition: Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Survival,” *Nature Notes from Crater Lake* 28 (1997), pages 6-12.
20. Leslie Spier, Leslie. 1930. *Klamath Ethnography*, volume 30 of the *Univ. Calif. Publ. Amer. Archaeology Ethnology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pages 95-99.
21. See Section I of the National Historic Preservation Act.
22. Armstrong, Karen. 2005. *A Short History of Myth*. New York: Canongate, page 10.
23. Crossan, John Dominic. 1988. *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*. Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press, pages 42-43.
24. Eliot, T.S. 1943. *Four Quartets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, page 39.