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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MUSEUM AND OTHER INTERPRETIVE DEVELOPMENT
AT COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT, BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON
NATIONAL MONUMENT AND GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL MONUMENT

BY

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The three above-mentioned areas are under the coordination of the Superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park. They were visited in company with the Superintendent and Park Naturalist during the latter part of September 1941. The following recommendations regarding museum and other interpretive development are based on observations and discussions during this trip.

COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT: The interpretive story at this Monument is primarily geological. The situation of the monument, high above Grand Valley through which flows the Colorado River, the deeply eroded red sandstone canyons and monoliths, the tilting strata, the Great Hiatus and the fault escarpment and features which approach the spectacular and which arouse the interest and admiration of visitors. There are paleontological remains which will be discussed later; there are bison on the Monument, and there ~~is~~ is other wildlife including elk and deer, but structural geology stands ~~out~~ out above all else as the principal story.

The Master Plan places the museum building on the site of the present CCC camp. From this point, situated on the rim of one of the canyons, the visitor has a fair view, but it is blocked by a rock wall which juts out into the canyon directly opposite the site. Another objection to the proposed location is that it is within a stone's throw of the residential area. The selection of a site farther down the road, and on higher ground is recommended. There are several such locations available, which would not only increase the view of the canyon by 60 per cent but would also offer an outlook to the side of the Monument where the Colorado River winds down through the broad flat Valley. In addition, Grand Mesa said to be the largest flat-topped mountain in the world would be visible. A new site would further remove the museum from the residential area and place it in closer proximity to the campground.

It would seem entirely logical for the museum and the administration building to be combined as a single unit. A separate office for the custodian should be unnecessary since the area will probably never have a full-time naturalist and such work will be carried on by a temporary ranger-naturalist.

There is a feeling among certain local residents, that, because dinosaur remains have been found, the principal story should be paleontological. This is, perhaps, natural since dinosaurs appear much more impressive and interesting to the local population than fault scarps and erosional features. The principal proponent of featuring dinosaurs is a Mr. Al. Look, himself an amateur scientist. Mr. Look is so enthusiastic over the matter that he is anxious to have life-size concret casts of dinosaurs made and placed about the monument.

The Riggs Hill Addition consists of approximately 190 acres, a detached section slightly removed from the monument proper. Here the Field Museum has done some excavating for dinosaurs but, due to certain misunderstandings with local groups, the digging stopped and the three skeletons unearthed were not removed. The Riggs Hill Area has been acquired by the National Park Service, the skeletons have been covered with rocks as a protective measure, and the area about them has been fenced.

The Riggs Hill Addition is interesting and has good interpretive possibilities. Protection of this detached section will always be a problem, but it is suggested that, as a part of the museum program, a structure be erected over the three skeletons which are exposed and interpretive devices installed. It will be necessary to run electricity from the road, a distance of less than a quarter of a mile, in order to properly illuminate these exhibits in place.

No additional exhibits of dinosaurs are recommended for this monument since the logical place to tell this story is Dinosaur National Monument, less than a hundred miles to the northwest, and since paleontology is given a prominent place in the Scotts Bluff Museum, Nebraska.

There are numerous collections in and about Grand Junction which can probably be acquired for a National Park Service Museum. While there are some good historical objects, most of the collections consist of paleontological specimens, and, if obtained, should probably be placed in study collections. It is highly important that the museum accessions policy be strictly adhered to in the accepting donations in this area. Among the largest of these collections is now on display at the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce.

Some time ago, the local Lions Club had constructed and donated to the Teachers' College at Grand Junction, a number of wooden museum cases. Rapid expansion of the school has made the placement of these cases somewhat of a problem and the institution is anxious to donate them to the National Park Service if and when a museum is constructed. I had occasion to examine these cases and do not recommend their acceptance. They are of poor construction, awkward design and far from being dustproof.

BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON NATIONAL MONUMENT: Here again the story is primarily geological. However, this is in the heart of the Ute Indian country and is the best-situated Service area to tell the story of the Utes. The amount of space devoted to the Indians will depend largely upon the acquisition of the McKee collection of Ute items. This collection was to have been willed to Mesa Verde National Park by the owner. The son was one of the executors of the estate and, since he was not on especially good terms with the National Park Service, the collection was never received. The matter is being quietly investigated at the present time. Meanwhile a portion of the collection containing some excellent leather work, is on display in a motion picture theatre at Montrose, Colorado. If this exhibit is obtained, it will alter interpretive plans at this point insofar as an additional room should be constructed on the museum to tell the Indian story.

While the North Rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison is probably the more spectacular, it enjoys but 30 per cent of the travel to the monument. It is suggested, therefore, that exhibits on this rim be limited to two or three exhibits placed on good vantage points along the road.

No museum site on the South Rim was discussed since I was not able to reach the rim due to an impassable approach road. It is suggested, however, that an attractive unobtrusive building be constructed on the South Rim and that it follow the plan of Yavapi Station at Grand Canyon and Sinnott Memorial at Crater Lake in that it include a roofed observation platform with a parapet. On the parapet should be mounted pointers and field glasses while weather-proof illuminated boxes should be set into the parapet to contain explanatory material. A fine story of dike intrusions and of erosion can be explained from the rim. Behind the observation platform would open the exhibit room or rooms, depending upon the extent of the story to be told here. If the Ute story is not taken up at this monument, probably one good-sized room would be sufficient.

GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL MONUMENT: Since the story of sand dunes has been exhaustively told at White Sands National Monument, it is not recommended that any extensive museum development be undertaken at this point. It is felt that the story can be handled adequately by the large trailside exhibit, possibly "V" shaped in order to give maximum exhibit space, placed at some strategic point in the area.

It is felt that museum planning here should be held in obedience pending further scientific investigation of the area. Folsom material has been found just outside the boundaries of the area. If further work reveals Folsom material actually on the monument it would seem highly desirable to play up this angle since it will be the only National Park Service area upon which such material appears.

The location of Folsom material, then, should dictate future museum development at Great Sand Dunes National Monument. If it is found, museum space should definitely be provided. This space might well be one or two rooms in combination with the administration building which will be located near the operator's development and the campground. Such an exhibit would then, of course, include material on Folsom Man, on the dunes themselves, and on such other features of interest as may be taken in by the proposed enlargement of the area which will add a portion of the Sangre de Cristes.

If Folsom material is not located, an exhibit, as indicated above, should be sufficient to tell the story of the dunes.

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