



Friends of ACADIA Journal

Spring 2013
Volume 18 No. 1

A Magazine about Acadia National Park and Surrounding Communities

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ACADIA FIELD SCHOOL: DOCUMENTING THE CARRIAGE ROAD LANDSCAPE

Tutku Ak and M. Margaret Bryant



An array of cultural landscape features inventoried along the historic carriage roads of Acadia National Park.

Six college students, six measuring wheels and clipboards, and six backpacks with lunches, bug spray, and water: all came together for six weeks in the summer of 2012 to document the historic landscape of Acadia's carriage road system. Wherever they went with their orange vests and equipment, park visitors wanted to know what the "Acadia Six" were doing. As the students explained their mission, visitors were surely pleased to hear that the information being gathered would be used to maintain and preserve the carriage road system into the future.

The Acadia Six were undergraduate and graduate students from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) in Syracuse, New York. They came to Acadia to participate in a field school providing hands-on experience in park management and cultural landscape preservation, offered through a partnership between the SUNY ESF Department of Landscape Architecture, the National Park Service, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, and Acadia National Park. Lodging at the College of the Atlantic, the

students became part of the Mount Desert Island community and got a wonderful opportunity to discover the natural and cultural beauty of the island.

The main objective of the field school was to inventory landscape characteristics and features on the park-owned carriage road system to provide data necessary for a Cultural Landscape Inventory, which is a comprehensive record prepared for historically significant landscapes within the national park system. The first four weeks were spent documenting landscape features built under the direction of John D.

Rockefeller Jr. between 1913 and 1940. A total of 40 miles of road were surveyed and photographed, and every possible detail, including dimensions and the types of materials used, was inventoried using field survey forms designed for uploading into the National Park System GIS (Geographic Information System). In all, the team documented 670 culverts, 474 guardwalls, 184 vista locations, 146 signs, 114 retaining walls, 42 embankments, 28 bridges, 7 gates, and many other cultural landscape features.

During the last two weeks of the field school, the students revisited the carriage roads to examine the historic character of the landscape with a more comprehensive eye. This second trip was about thinking like landscape architects by “reading” the landscape, noting existing conditions, and describing design characteristics. In journal entries, the students drew sketches and recorded impressions, describing what it feels like to be in the landscape and looking for design characteristics such as spatial sequence, light quality, rhythm, vegetation, and so on.

Throughout the field school, the students participated in lectures and discussions on park management and historic preservation and went for site visits where they combined classroom experience with hands-on learning. This gave context for the field work, demonstrating the multi-discipline effort required to manage Acadia and introducing students to staff involved in the management and operation of the park. The team met staff from Acadia National Park, the Olmsted Center, SUNY ESF, Friends of Acadia, and other park partners. These participants offered their time, enthusiasm, and expertise to the students, introducing the complex issues—such as community partnerships and relationships, maintenance, policy-making, and enhancing the visitor experience—involved in preserving cultural landscapes and operating a national park.

Aside from formal lectures and field trips, the students explored both the park and the Island, and discovered the layers of history (e.g., the Rusticators, George Dorr, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and others that followed) that have shaped the landscape. They went on excursions beyond Acadia

National Park to gain a better sense of the role of local landscape architects and other contextual influences on the park. Excursions included a tour of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden and Garland Farm designed by Beatrix Farrand, and a visit to the Asticou Azalea and Thuya Gardens.

Throughout the six weeks, the students also enjoyed recreational activities including whale watching, visits to Sand Beach, and most importantly, hiking the beautiful trails of Acadia. The team completed the more strenuous hikes on the Beehive and Precipice Trails, as well as easier trails such as those on Dorr Mountain and South Bubble. They attended the annual Wabanaki Native American Festival and Independence Day celebrations, tasted the local food and wine, and enjoyed delicious lobster meals. Even if the six weeks felt short, the students took many unforgettable memories with them.

By the end of the field school, the Acadia Six not only had had the privilege of experiencing the beautiful island, but also had a much richer understanding of resource management in the National Park System. They gained experience in inventorying historic resources; a familiarity with park maintenance, interpretation, operations, and community relations; and knowledge of the history of the National Park System and Acadia National Park in particular. They came away from this experience with a better understanding of the importance of every visitor, job, and partnership within the web of Acadia. A major takeaway was that, in a national park like Acadia, not only are the cultural resources as important as the natural resources but the two are interconnected and mutually dependent upon each other.

Since the end of the field school in July 2012, SUNY ESF has continued the work by synthesizing inventory data and using it



The “Acadia Six” at Jordan Pond, just before an afternoon of field work. Left to right: Charlotte Evanofski, Sara Bonacquist, Benjamin Boisclair, Margaret Johnson, Catherine Ponte, and Tutku Ak.

to develop graphic maps of the carriage road system that will become a primary part of the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI). The final CLI, to be completed in 2013 by the Olmsted Center, will become an important tool for the park in its long-term efforts to preserve and enhance the carriage road system. It will serve the park’s facilities management system, cultural and natural resource managers, and even interpretative programs. For more information on the carriage road Cultural Landscape Inventory, contact the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation at <http://www.nps.gov/oclp/mission.htm>.

TUTKU AK, a Ph.D. candidate in the Environmental Science program, was the student lead in the Acadia summer field school and is completing the GIS maps of the carriage road system during the 2012-13 academic year. M. MARGARET BRYANT, Ph.D. is a faculty member in the Department of Landscape Architecture at SUNY ESF.

The other field school members:

BENJAMIN BOISCLAIR, from Saratoga Springs, NY, is the youngest of the team and is currently in his third year as a Landscape Architecture undergraduate student. SARA BONACQUIST, from Schenectady, NY, is a fourth year Landscape Architecture student and a great athlete. The only Mainer, CHARLOTTE EVANOF-SKI, is from Boothbay Harbor and is in her fifth and last year in the Landscape Architecture program. MARGARET JOHNSON, from Staten Island, NY loves to paint and CATHERINE PONTE, from Woodbridge, NJ, enjoys writing. Both are graduate students completing their Masters of Landscape Architecture.



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Bald eagle in an oak tree, overlooking Somes Sound.

Mission

Friends of Acadia preserves, protects, and promotes stewardship of the outstanding natural beauty, ecological vitality, and distinctive cultural resources of Acadia National Park and surrounding communities for the inspiration and enjoyment of current and future generations.