Curated Landscapes: The Evolution of the Postcard Shot

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CURATED LANDSCAPES: THE EVOLUTION
OF THE POSTCARD SHOT

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisianan State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography & Anthropology

by
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For Alizanne, the Cheetham family academic.
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FOREWORD

“You’re going a mighty crooked road,” she had said, “and maybe you’ll keep to it all right. But I reckon you’ll find the Natchez Trace easy to travel and hard to foller. You better ask everybody you see if you’re on it.”

- John Swain, 1905
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ABSTRACT

This research examines traveling landscape-objects in tourist environments and their impact on cultural identity in America. Traveling landscape-objects include any form of tourist paraphernalia or representation of cultural landscapes. For these purposes, I studied different forms of tourist representation of the Natchez Trace Parkway, an entity of the National Park Service. Research areas include the content, location, and changing medium of traveling landscape-objects, while also addressing their meaning, frequency, quality, role in non-representational arenas, and the future of tourist representations.

Methods include detailed cataloguing and analysis of over one thousand images of various shapes and forms — ranging from early illustrations of the Natchez Trace Parkway, to historic photographs, postcards and finally digital images found on flickr.com.

Results suggest that we can identify prominent cultural landscape icons by acknowledging where tourists collected the most representations or traveling landscape-objects. In addition, the form or medium of traveling landscape-objects affects their meaning, frequency, and quality in that tourists value the tactile quality of representations. Lastly, the intrinsic value of representations (even in non-representational arenas) is confirmed, and their future secured.
CHAPTER ONE
FINDING LANDSCAPES

Recognizing and Recording the Landscape

We woke up at 4:45am, and ascended the snowy path, 200 feet to Iceberg Lake (elevation 9500 feet). The plan was to catch the sun rising, see the first rays light up the backdrop of Mount Banner and the Minarets above the water, and get some good photographs to prove we were there! The water of Iceberg Lake was still on that July morning, scattered with floating ice, and reflected the amber tinted backdrop of the peaks, high in the Sierra Nevada mountain range of California. It was the “postcard shot” — the grand icon that we had set out to find and of course, photograph.

Backpacking through the Ansel Adams Wilderness of the Inyo National Forest, and later, in Yosemite National Park, I was not surprised that getting great photographs was a priority for our group of friends. What did surprise me, however, were the lengths that my travel companions, and other visitors, would go to, in order to take photographs of well-known landscapes and find the perfect shot, “...like a postcard.” I had no camera, other than my iPhone, but I too found myself snapping the recognizable vistas and landscapes. Upon our return to cellphone service, I immediately uploaded them to Facebook albums to share with friends, and provide evidence of our intrepid adventures.

Tourists and travelers (like myself) document landscapes as part of a much larger cultural pattern of collecting images and paraphernalia of places they visit. Not only does this desire to record our adventures dictate where people travel to, and visit, but also what they photograph, collect, and remember.¹ Oftentimes travelers seek out memorable landscape icons with which they identify and hold meaning for them in terms of cultural identity. Seeing Mount Banner and the Minarets, as well as Half-Dome in Yosemite, reinforced our connection to the American
landscape, and for some, their identity as Americans. This work is centered on the representation of landscape through various media, and how these representations and their object-hood influence their meaning and ideas of identity in American culture.

**Theoretical Framework**

Many nineteenth century Americans believed in the idea of “Manifest Destiny,” and the total colonization of the North American territory. This concept included the remaking of the west, and strong ideas about American cultural identity, rooted in literature, politics, and the culture of the time. It is the mythos upon which the American public built a cultural identity and chose specific cultural icons in order to reinforce this set of values and ethos.²

The National Park Service in particular, successfully cultivated a set of American landscape icons out of its “crown-jewel” natural features such as Half-Dome, at Yosemite National Park. Historian Alfred Runte’s concept of the crown-jewel landscapes as the American equivalent to Europe’s cathedrals is now the standard trope of the most exalted park features.³ Discussions of National Park Service imagery agree that these well-known, iconic images dominate landscape representations (drawings, paintings, photographs, postcards) of America.⁴ For example, an image of Half Dome (Figure 1.1) is a meaningful representation for most Americans, and one with which they can identify, despite having never visited, or experienced, this landscape first-hand.

Landscape in the sense of iconic imagery, or pictorial representation has not received much attention in landscape studies. Postcards and other landscape representations are traditionally studied for their graphic content alone, yet strangely not for their contextual relevance.⁵ Only recently have scholars challenged this paradigm, and few study the relationship
between images, places, and tourism.\textsuperscript{6} It is this school of thought on which I base this research. Veronica della Dora, for instance, suggests that cultural geographers need to re-think materiality, landscape, and performance. She calls for a “reconceptualization of visual landscape representations as ‘traveling landscape-objects,’” meaning that graphic representations embody material objects.\textsuperscript{7} These images “physically move through space and time and thus operate as vehicles for the circulation of places.”\textsuperscript{8}

Figure 1.1: The Quest to Get the Perfect Picture of Half Dome. By the author.

As photographic and communication technologies have advanced, so too have graphic representations. Representations and images of place (particularly tourist places) became popular with the rise of amateur photography.\textsuperscript{9} We have seen representations of place evolve from hand drawings, to daguerreotypes, photographs, postcards, and now digital images that we can manipulate on screens.\textsuperscript{10} In addition to changes in form and media, graphic objects now travel in
different ways; this applies to the means through which they are sent and received, for example, by hand, through the mail, via text message, email, or any combination of these.

According to della Dora, traveling landscape-objects, include illustrations, postcards, pamphlets, snow globes, paperweights, and any other tourist paraphernalia linked to place. She proposed that these traveling landscape-objects are worth studying for what they are, what they portray, what they mean, in addition to what they can do. This suggests that they should be studied for their materiality, or object-hood, in addition to their iconographic content. Thomas Patin calls this mode of inquiry “visual rhetoric;” a means to understanding how visual materials communicate and function by “addressing an audience in order to accomplish some kind of goal (… persuade, form attitudes, build community, etc.).” In the case of traveling landscape-objects, I am interested in their ability to influence tourists, and their behavior in America’s national parks.

Della Dora further invites the exploration of new research agendas that think about the visual rhetoric, or landscape representation beyond the image; promoters can mass-produce traveling landscape-objects and the abundance of these objects can turn tourist landscapes into cultural icons. In a national park setting, these iconic images (whether produced by the National Park Service or civilian photographers) are even more convincing, because in some cases, they originate in wilderness areas, a conceptual idea of place where people least expect to encounter a fabricated environment.

This is the premise upon which my research is built: traveling landscape-objects are steeped in cultural identity and loaded with persuasion. Through repetitive use, these powerful objects create cultural landscape icons that have lasting and personal significance for the American public.
Research Questions

To address the topic of cultural icons represented as traveling landscape-objects, I chose a small park, what I term a “little gem:” the Natchez Trace Parkway National Park. The Natchez Trace Parkway is a linear park that runs 444 miles through three states: Mississippi, a small corner of Alabama, and part of Tennessee. The park follows a pathway immersed in a richly layered historical narrative, however, despite its cultural significance, the park has no obviously compelling physical landscapes and, as a result, the Natchez Trace Parkway remains a relatively nondescript and lesser-known park entity. The park is, nevertheless, well traveled, and despite having no immediately obvious landscape icons, visual documentation of the area repeatedly re-invents the same places, and thus, the Natchez Trace Parkway does, in a way, possess a set of landscape icons despite their apparent anonymity.

This set of conditions enabled me to address a particular set of questions relating specifically to traveling landscape-objects and landscape imagery in national park landscapes: (1) How have changes in the media of representation altered the content of traveling landscape-objects, and the way they are used? (2) What are the relationships among the image content of traveling landscape-objects and cultural landscape icons for the Natchez Trace Parkway? (3) Does the medium through which images travel influence their meaning, does this matter, and why? (4) What are the trends in the frequency and quality of traveling landscape-objects, and what does this mean for their future? (5) What roles do traveling landscape-objects play in non-representational arenas? And finally, (6) How does the ease of sharing, texting, and posting landscape representations affect the value of traveling landscape-objects?

My interest in representation with regard to landscapes stems from my design and theoretical background in landscape architecture. Oftentimes, landscape architects study places
through history, observation, analysis, and drawing, and in turn, try to instill significance or imbue meaning into their designs through physical or graphic references to contextual elements of the natural or cultural landscape. Cultural-historical geographers try to understand ideologies and meaning in landscape through unveiling historical layers of information (both images and texts), relating to cultures, artifacts, and social elements of the landscape. Following the theories and methods of both geographers and landscape architects, this dissertation embarks on an investigative study of traveling landscape-objects using historical research, collection, observation, contextual analysis, and interpretation. This approach allows me to develop insight into how landscape objects have changed over time, or an evolutionary tale of the postcard image.

Current research in geography has a strong trend toward non-representational theory, however, a new wave of geographers look at representation in different ways and some, like me, are confident that representation matters more than ever in landscape geography. Building on their work, following ideas about the visual rhetoric outlined by Patin and avenues of research proposed by della Dora, I deconstructed how the travel image has evolved in terms of media and content, and how images/objects take on persuasive roles, thus creating cultural landscape icons and their meanings. According to della Dora, the production and promotion of imagery depicting (landscape) icons further elevates these icons in the public eye. The repetitive use of any chosen landscape imagery (iconic or otherwise) elevates that specific landscape in our memory. Patin would agree, pointing out that once embedded in our mind’s eye, any given landscape representation exerts a certain power or persuasion over us. This is particularly true in the case of national park landscapes in America — iconic images remind the American public of their
heritage, and in some cases the idea of Manifest Destiny, persuading them of their cultural identity, sense of belonging and pride.

In addition, I further the research of Patin, della Dora and others through my interpretation of the collected data, and resulting assessment of tourist behavior in terms of tourist representations, or as della Dora terms them: traveling landscape-objects. As mentioned before, representations hold value beyond their immediately apparent visual content. The context, themes, genres, styles, locations, origin, and volume of travel images potentially reveal valuable information about the behavior and preferences of their human counterparts or users. Representations have an afterlife beyond their aesthetic value; according to Daniel Arreola, they possess an “historical legacy… that can tell us about places in retrospect.” My research is focused on doing exactly that — analyzing representations beyond their content and using the data collected to interpret user behavior and tourism trends for the Natchez Trace Parkway.

In practical applications, my findings stretch beyond representation, meaning and sentimentality. My results clearly identify contemporary hotspots of tourist activity, revealing popular areas and sites/sights along the trace. This type of data is useful for decision making in the National Park Service, particularly with regard to what attractions and facilities to upgrade or improve. It also points to locations (and cultural icons) that may warrant promotion, or those that are popular enough already and may need visitor management strategies in order to control crowd numbers.

Statistics on visitor numbers (revealed through photograph volumes at specific locations) may be useful for road and transportation planners and departments. Identifying areas of the highest use can assist in determining areas in need of traffic calming zones, extra parking or in
cases of low usage and numbers, additional signage and clearly marked exit drives promoting greater visitor numbers.

**Methods**

My chosen research methodology utilizes both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Drawing on the strengths of both these methods presents a well-rounded study of the subject matter. Photographs and representations are often seen as bordering on too qualitative, but through a thorough analysis of content, most items in my research cache are intrinsically linked to both time and a very specific place.\(^\text{20}\)

I began this investigation by identifying and collecting as many Natchez Trace Parkway traveling landscape-objects as I could find. These included everything from visitor guides and maps to newspaper articles, historic photographs, and postcards (both old and new). I then identified the categories most prolific in content and established a time frame from which to garner my primary sources. I chose tourist or traveler representations from as far back as I could find, to the year 2013. These include drawings or historical representations (pre-1900), historic photographs (from 1880 – 1962), postcards (from 1925 – 2000), and digital photographs (from 2005 – 2013) of the Natchez Trace.

I organized these into chronological order, then analyzed each individual traveling landscape-object through an in-depth categorization process (fully explained in chapter four). This process resulted in substantial metadata from which I was able to extract my findings, and answer my research questions. My sources are mostly state archives and those of educational institutions, although I did find almost half of my postcards through the online marketplace.
known as eBay. I was fortunate to be able to conduct almost all of my research in the public domain, meaning that I gained free and easy access to most of my data.

**Organization**

Following this introduction, chapter two unveils a succinct history of American landscape representation, cultural landscape icons, and the formation of the National Park Service, constituting the literature review of relevant sources. It explores the landscape movement in American cultural geography, themes of visual representation and rhetoric, and identifies gaps in the literature that I set out to fill. Chapter three tells the history of the Natchez Road, highlighting some of the earliest records of its existence. I give a critical examination of its development into the Natchez Trace Parkway, and its modern day function as a National Park Service unit.

Chapter four takes a detailed look at the methodology used in this study, including the nuts and bolts of my physical data collection, as well methodological procedures in detail. My results, including graduated maps, charts, and tables, appear in chapter five. Each of the diagrams visually represents the data of my findings, and along with descriptive data, shows my findings and data organized into a format that highlight the relevant datasets for discussion. In addition, I highlight outstanding results, for example, the surge in online photographs of the Highway 96 Bridge since 2005.

In chapter six I analyze my findings from chapter five in terms of each of my individual research questions. Each question is explored and discussed in terms of the relevant literature, and through my own analysis. I close with chapter seven, where, I briefly recount my study objectives, findings in terms of my research questions, and relate them to the relevant literature. I explain how my findings add to the field of cultural geography and, potentially, to the practice
and profession of landscape architecture, concluding with suggestions for continuing study and academic engagement.

Endnotes


3 Ibid.


8 Ibid., 335.


Sabine Wilke, “How German is the American West?” in Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 100 – 118.


Daniel D. Arreola, Postcards from the Rio Bravo Border: Picturing the Place, Placing the Picture, 1900s – 1950s, 215.

Each traveling landscape-object, or representation that is attached to an attraction along the Natchez Trace Parkway is identifiable by a mile marker at that location. This means that almost all of my found representations geo-reference to a specific location. This provides quantitative data, the mapped findings of which I represent in chapter five.
Living, Seeing, Believing

Since its inception in 1916, the National Park Service has used landscape imagery to promote national parks in America. The careful selection and use of images enabled the National Park Service to shape public perceptions about specific parks, and create cultural icons of the American landscape.\(^1\) The use of promotional media by the National Park Service began with the repetitive use of images of the “crown-jewel” parks to attract tourists and increase visitor numbers. The availability of landscape imagery in the early twentieth century elevated places beyond the written word or direct experience, and enabled the evolution of the armchair traveler. This paradigm shift fundamentally changed engagement with place in America, allowing images to influence and shape the way Americans think about place.\(^2\) The National Park Service used the power of repetitive and specific iconic landscape images to solidify the concept of the crown-jewel parks in the minds of the nation’s public.\(^3\) These landscape icons, in turn, became the monuments of early twentieth century America, the grand icons of landscape with which the public identified as being American.

Half-Dome, the Grand Canyon, and Old Faithful are all examples of impressive natural landscapes that stood as meaningful symbols for the grandeur of the American nation. The National Park Service now includes all three of these monumental landscapes.\(^4\) For Americans, they equaled Europe’s cathedrals, abbeys, towers, and plazas. Today, the term “national park” continues to elicit imaginings of spectacular scenery, only possible through the repetitive and continued use of images in media and promotional literature created by the National Park Service.\(^5\)
The National Park Service does not randomly select landscapes that represent the parks. Instead, they select images of iconic landscapes, captured as still life, and curated, for the public eye. In a national park setting, these iconic features are even more convincing because they originate in a place where people least expect a fabricated environment. In managing images and representations of national parks, the National Park Service is able to market and portray the different park entities in specific ways. Various parks appeal to different audiences and, the ways that the National Park Service assigns meaning to these images, determines how we perceive them — this is why visual representation is so important; it has the ability to shape our perceptions and create meaning in two-dimensional objects.

The idea of “meaning” in relation to landscapes refers here to the history, ethos, values, and cultural understanding of, for example, a nation, reflected in a given landscape, with this in mind, new questions arise regarding how certain landscapes become symbolic, or meaningful. Donald Meinig claims for instance, that generally speaking, researchers understand landscapes as direct reflections of the society that creates them. Denis Cosgrove proposes that in order to understand landscape, we first need to comprehend the culture, values, and history, associated with a specific landscape.

Recovering meaning in landscape has become an important theme in contemporary geography. The emphasis that a nation or society places on any given landscape contributes to the perceived value of that landscape or place; however, in contemporary America it is increasingly difficult to reflect the widespread views of the nation’s cultural diversity. What we see instead are narrowly chosen or limited representations within the parks, simply due to space, human power and time constraints.
Representing the National Parks

Ideas surrounding the value of nature and the preservation of areas for public use in America have been around since the mid-nineteenth century. A small number of citizens, mostly the wealthy, had pioneered the “landscape democracy” idea. Democratic landscapes are tracts of shared, public land designated as protected open space, and for the greater good. The American Civic Association, an eastern-based society of prominent citizens including Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870 – 1957), promoted “the development of beauty wherever possible.” The idea was based on the belief that beautiful parks would have a favorable effect on communities, and engender a healthy, patriotic society. Roderick Nash argues that society placed value on open space with the “ending” of the frontier in 1890. However, this concept had been evolving for some time, illustrated by the fact that in 1864 United States Congress passed, and Abraham Lincoln signed, the Yosemite Grant. The grant designated Yosemite Valley, and nearby Mariposa Grove of Big Trees a state park for public use, and thus protected it from development. The naturalist, John Muir (1838 – 1914), wrote a series of articles for The Century Magazine (1890 – 1891) in which he recommended the removal of livestock from the high Sierras, and the incorporation of Yosemite into a National Park. In 1890, the United States Congress passed a bill that created a new, federally administered park surrounding the old Yosemite Grant.

Protected open spaces were, however, not limited to great expanses of land in the western part of America. Some were not large or desolate at all; instead they were carefully managed green spaces within the confines of the city. Frederick Law Olmsted (1822 – 1903), a landscape architect, had advocated the idea of “nature in the city” in the form of the urban park. He, along with Calvert Vaux (1824 – 1895), won a public competition in 1858, and designed Central Park.
for New York City, America’s first major landscaped public park. Today, the park continues to function as an open space or green lung in the city, an escape from urban life, and a place for recreational activities. Although not a wild area, the notion of Central Park as protected open space subscribes to the same idea. Urban parks were a response to growing cities and their associated evils; in contrast to this, the western parks (for example, Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Sequoia) were pre-European settlement attempts to save the scenic wonders of the west, as settlement steadily encroached in that direction. Olmsted also played an important role in promoting the protection of Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove, large-scale, undeveloped areas that formed some of the earliest national parks. Olmsted chaired the California state run Yosemite Board of Commissioners and assisted in writing the previously mentioned Yosemite Grant of 1864, one of the first documents written for the preservation of park areas in America. He realized the potential of protected public lands and deemed the two areas worth saving for their unique landscapes. The Yosemite Valley was ideally suited to the requirements of a reservoir, but through the work of Olmsted and others, like Muir, was relieved of this fate.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, Americans did not consider their landscape scenery a cultural asset. Culture, as considered by society at large, resided in Europe, and Americans had to travel across the Atlantic to marvel at cultural icons and monuments in continental cities. Mountains as a source of subliminal inspiration emerged in English and European poetry, and other literature, early in the nineteenth-century, suggested a newfound appreciation for mountains in learned scholars. Soon enough, public perceptions surrounding mountain landscapes changed and interest grew. Mountain tourism was in its early stages of development. The Swiss Alps fast became popular for their majestic views, and established hotels, served by their efficient railroad system, were ideally suited to luxury tours. At the time,
the American high mountains lay “undiscovered” in the largely unchartered west. Soon, however, exploratory expeditions unveiled the Rockies, Sierras, and Cascades. Explorers, writers, and artists mapped and documented these western mountains through written accounts, drawings, paintings, and eventually photographs.26

The lure of gold drew settlers to the Sierra Nevada in 1848 and, led to the “discovery” of Yosemite’s granite cliffs, waterfalls, and groves of giant Sequoia sempervirens trees. These noteworthy features and their architectural form, geologic age, and enormous size measured up to the great cultural antiquities of the world (for example the Sphinx and Pyramids at Giza, and the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris). Finally, America had found a match with Europe; iconic features existed within the American landscape. America could claim meaningful antiquities equaling that of the ancient civilizations.27 Naturally, the Americans wished to promote and display these natural wonders, and set about commissioning photographs and paintings of Yosemite. Carleton E. Watkins photographed the valley in 1861 and, produced thirty plates that later toured the eastern seaboard (see figure 2.1).

Against the backdrop of a civil war, and perhaps as a backlash against the industrial revolution, a new movement of artists emerged. The Hudson River School (1825 – 1875) and associated artists depicted the American landscape, first in the Hudson River Valley region of New York, and later across the American West. A well-known example is Asher Brown Durand’s (1796 – 1866) Kindred Spirits, a landscape painting, that combines geographic features in a fictional representation of the Catskills region of New York. It is not an accurate representation of the landscape but rather, an idealized memory of the area.28
Artists of the movement often portrayed landscapes in an idealized way, for example, using juxtapositions of agriculture and wilderness in peaceful co-existence. Painting from a combination of memory and imagination, the artists shared a common belief that nature as seen in the American landscape, was a manifestation of the sublime, and thus, they created enormous paintings of subliminal content. Their works were often overwhelming in size and scale, featuring vast panoramas of landscapes, embellished with artistic license, for example, the use of romantic, almost glowing light.²⁹

In 1867, acclaimed artist, Albert Bierstadt (1830 – 1902), a German-American, of the same movement, but working in the American West, painted scenes of Yellowstone, Grand
Canyon, and Yosemite. His work, *Domes of Yosemite*, (see figure 2.2) measured nine-and-a-half by fifteen feet. Bierstadt used his artistic license to reduce the width of the valley and emphasize its many vertical rock faces, suggesting the architectural forms of a gothic cathedral. An additional reference to medieval architecture is his use of a soft, romantic light, filtered through clouds, to illuminate the image. Samuel Clemens ([Mark Twain] 1835 – 1910) described the light as “…more the atmosphere of *Kingdom-Come* than of California.” Clemens [Twain] goes on to proclaim the work as unfit for a portrait (or true image), but as “…altogether too gorgeous.”

![Figure 2.2: Domes of Yosemite, Albert Bierstadt. Used with permission from the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, Vermont.](image)

Although not undertaken or commissioned by a formal park organization, these early images are some of the first visual representations of what later became National Parks. These images inform our perceptions of these places and imbue them with meaning. Bierstadt and
others represented the same landscape feature (Half-Dome) from different vantage points, and in different ways, choosing specific styles, sizes, and colors to evoke scenes of grandeur.³³ The results are representations that helped to shape a visual language of wonder, sanctity and exaggeration, still evident in national parks today.³⁴

Many of the scenes Bierstadt painted became protected areas, thanks to the support roused by his touring shows, these include Lake Tahoe, Puget Sound, Wasatch Range (Utah), Lander’s Peak (Wyoming), Mount Whitney (California), Niagara Falls, Yellowstone (including Old Faithful) various sites in the Rocky Mountains and Sierras (including Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove of giant Sequoias). Many of these landscape paintings toured around American cities, and served as some of the first traveling landscape-objects to move place through space and time. The display of professional artworks engendered an appreciation for visual culture across America, for many Americans it was their first encounter with the pictorial arts. Traveling art shows drew large crowds and media attention; this early form of the art museum took on the characteristics and excitement of a traveling show.³⁵ Thanks to the touring works of Bierstadt and the Hudson River School, perceptions of the National Parks and American cultural identity, built through traveling landscape-objects, had officially begun.

Muir compared Yosemite to the gothic cathedrals of Europe;³⁶ the granite cliffs and 300-foot trees dwarfed the continental human-made structures in size and splendor. Yellowstone followed suit as an icon of Western scenery, after the Hayden expedition of 1871, where photographer William H. Jackson (1843 – 1942) and artist Thomas Moran (1837 – 1926), documented the canyons and geysers.³⁷ The visual documentation convinced the United States Congress of the monumentality of Yellowstone, and Congress declared the Montana site the first public (later, national) park in 1872.³⁸
Despite their recognition as national gems, the purpose of setting these “crown jewel”
park areas aside for public use was not recreational or educational. The idea of protecting and
preserving natural monuments in America was purely for their scenic value and meaning as icons
of national pride and identity in the landscape.\textsuperscript{39}

As the list of worthy natural monuments grew, the need for a central organizational body
to manage and coordinate the public parks arose. The U.S. Calvary initially held the
responsibility for protecting the parks, and later the duty fell under the Department of the
Interior. Initially considered of little or no economic value, the parks (particularly the Western
canyons) came under threat at the turn of the nineteenth-century, due to the need for dams to
supply water to growing cities. The prospect of mineral resources in certain park areas also arose
and due to the desire to strip mine for potential mineral resources, jeopardized their preservation
as park and recreation areas.\textsuperscript{40}

Preservationists recognized that unless the public used the parks and saw meaning in
them, they would always be under threat. Fortunately for the parks, President Theodore
Roosevelt (1858 – 1919) had traveled to the West as early as 1883, witnessing overgrazing, and
the demise of certain areas (specifically grasslands) and their associated wildlife. Roosevelt was
a strong advocate of a park system for recreational use, and he worked to preserve and promote
the areas beyond their scenic beauty. During his presidency (1901 – 1909), Roosevelt proclaimed
many new areas as protected and, as park numbers grew once more, so too did the renewed need
for a central organizing body.\textsuperscript{41} Eventually, on August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson
(1856 – 1924) signed the Organic Act of Congress that created the National Park Service.
The Organic Act stated that the National Park Service,

“…shall promote and regulate the use of…national parks, monuments, and reserves…to conserve the scenery and the natural…wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Thus, the National Park Service was charged with a dual mandate, first to promote and regulate the visitation of parks, and second, to ensure the preservation of their scenic beauty and natural resources. This dual mandate was, and still is, “philosophically divided;” Since its inception the National Park Service has grappled with managing fragile ecosystems in the context of “both playground and preserve.” In the early days of National Park Service history, the ecological implications of large visitor numbers was not yet apparent, and thus, in the 1920s, the newly founded National Park Service went about promoting the crown jewel parks with the intent to increase tourist numbers, fulfilling the first part of the Organic Act’s mandate.

Railroads were the most efficient and easiest form of travel to the West and certain railroad companies partnered with scenic parks in efforts to attract passengers. Prior to railroad access, few visitors could access remote areas of cultural significance. For example, until the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF) extended track along an old mining spur, tourism at the Grand Canyon (not yet a national park) remained small scale and localized. Although the Grand Canyon “expressed the grandeur of the continent and the power of the civilization that harnessed its magnificence;” access was limited to stagecoach travel and the site received few visitors. After the track was built in 1901, the Grand Canyon saw a marked
increase in tourist infrastructure and numbers. Rail travel was cheaper, faster and more reliable than overland buggies, thus the railroad changed the economic value of the Grand Canyon and confirmed its growing importance as a symbol of American culture and identity.\textsuperscript{45}

As early as 1902, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway promoted the Grand Canyon through the use of promotional artwork.\textsuperscript{46} Other railroad companies realized the potential of these promotional campaigns, and followed suit. Eventually, the National Park Service launched its own marketing campaign based on a similar model. In the early 1920s, the Great Northern Railroad Company offered rail travel to the remote Glacier National Park in northern Montana via luxury trains.\textsuperscript{47} The National Park Service allied with the Great Northern Railroad Company and paid to launch a marketing campaign promoting Glacier National Park (figure 2.3). This effort and other promotional materials would bring visitors to the park and benefit both parties.\textsuperscript{48} The promotion of Glacier National Park started “See America First,” the first and possibly most successful promotional campaign by the National Park Service to date. The campaign, which started in the early 1920s, and lasted until shortly after World War II, is famous for the stylized posters that began with simple “See America” graphics, and later, promoted specific crown jewel parks.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Tourism and the National Parks}

Promoting tourism in America made economic sense; in the years leading up to 1915, Americans spent an estimated $200 million per year on vacations and tours to Europe. By 1915, this figure had risen to an estimated $500 million each year.\textsuperscript{50} The railroad companies and Department of the Interior realized the economic possibilities if kept at home and devised a plan to encourage Americans to vacation at home. “See America First” promoted America as a
Figure 2.3: Early *See America First Campaign Advertisement*, Published by the Great Northern Railroad, in St. Paul, MN.
destination. Increased amenities at the national parks included hotels, restaurants, tours, and accessibility. The focus of the campaign was purely to increase visitor numbers. The National Park Service and railroads promoted destinations as exotic, yet comfortable and safe.\textsuperscript{51}

The national parks were really parks of the American West; through the 1920s, only Acadia National Park existed east of the Mississippi River. Opportunity in the East lay in the form of historic forts, battlefields and memorials, housed under the War Department at the time. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882 – 1945) signed an order transferring almost fifty historical areas to the National Park Service. These included the War Departments memorials and parks, as well as fifteen national monuments originally managed by the U.S. Forest Service.\textsuperscript{52} The addition of these eastern areas to the National Park Service, gave it a national prominence, and expanded the scope of national parks to include historic, and natural preservation.

During the Great Depression (1929 – 1939), under Roosevelt’s New Deal depression relief projects, the National Park Service received increased attention in the form of construction, conservation and rehabilitation projects. Many of these projects, under the Civilian Conservation Corps, and Works Project Administration, focused on improving access and visitor experience; roads, parking areas, tunnels, trails, benches, overlooks, and visitor centers had a lasting effect on improving services in national parks and are still evident today. The “See America First” marketing campaign continued through these years, gaining momentum and building a brand for the National Park Service.\textsuperscript{53} The National Park Service built the contemporary Natchez Trace Parkway in part through New Deal funding, as is the case with many of its other facilities.\textsuperscript{54}

The proximity of Eastern parks, improved infrastructure (including the vast improvements in the national road network), a growing middle class, and most significantly,
automobile ownership, enabled the American public to access more national parks. This caused a shift from a museum-like appreciation of, to actual, physical experiences of the National Park Service. This boom in infrastructure and visitor numbers lasted up until the start of World War II (1939).  

After the War ended in 1945, the National Parks experienced a huge bump in visitor numbers. The period from 1945 to 1973 saw enormous economic growth in America. The population grew rapidly, employment rates were good, and Americans enjoyed an emphasis on leisure time, including the possibilities created by air-conditioning, air travel, backyard swimming pools, and television. Automobile ownership allowed Americans to travel on their own time and schedule. The emergence of national consumer brands, for example franchised gas stations, displayed their logos as safe, recognizable icons in the landscape, providing familiarity for tourists in unfamiliar surroundings. In addition, the idea and mythos of the national parks aligned with the American desire for adventure, making them ideal and worthy tourist destinations.

As far as the National Park Service was concerned, infrastructure built during the New Deal era was outdated and needed upgrading to cope with higher visitor numbers. Heavy use of the national parks combined with low funding put these areas under extreme pressure. Visitor numbers doubled during the period from 1946 to 1955 (from 10 million to 20 million visitors per year) yet the parks budget had barely increased since 1939. In 1951, the National Park Service appointed Conrad L. Wirth (1899 – 1993), a landscape architect, as director. Despite his best efforts, the park system continued to languish in these post World War II years. It was only after the end of the Korean War (1953), under the (1953 – 1961) presidency of Dwight D.
Eisenhower (1890 – 1969) that Wirth gained traction with Congress, and could implement a plan to re-invent the national parks.\textsuperscript{60}

He called this plan “Mission 66.” The ten-year (1956 – 1966), billion-dollar program planned to expand the carrying capacity of the parks to accommodate the projected 80 million visitors by the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the National Park Service in 1966. Mission 66 targeted road construction, employee housing, visitor centers, utilities, campgrounds, and other overnight accommodations.\textsuperscript{61} The improved infrastructure eased congestion and inevitably, more visitors came. Between 1955 and 1974, visitor numbers tripled,\textsuperscript{62} and the National Park Service came under scrutiny for forgoing its charge to preserve in favor of accommodating visitors. Although Mission 66 greatly improved infrastructure, it did very little for the ecological preservation of national parks.\textsuperscript{63}

The National Park Service, faced with a dual mandate to accommodate preservation and recreation, has implemented a number of controls to manage visitor numbers and park use. The majority of these programs used indirect controls to curb visitor numbers, including attempts to disperse visitors to lesser-used areas of the most popular parks, or other parks entirely, the implementation of ranger-led educational programs to highlight the importance of preservation, the eradication of parking areas, and the promotion of off-season visitation. Ironically, almost all of these strategies brought more visitors at all times of the year, and increased demand for interpretive programs like campfires, ranger-led hikes, and other interactive, educational programs.\textsuperscript{64}

In some instances, visitor numbers threaten the environment to the point where the National Park Service must install paved trails and fences to eradicate all other recreational uses than a simple walking tour. This cuts down on time spent by each visitor, and mitigates
ecological damage. However, this visitor management strategy reverts to a museum-like visitor experience, one that does not fit in with the goals of the National Park Service or the ideology of the American great outdoors. This type of management strategy from the National Park Service is a last resort option, used before direct controls, like limiting the number of daily visitors to an area. The National Park Service has come under extreme criticism for attempts to limit visitor entries, and turn away the American taxpayer at the entrance gate. The dual mandate is a difficult one to manage; despite being in place since 1916, recreation remained the focus of the National Park Service through the 1950s. Incessant marketing campaigns (even if to promote off-season tourism), and improved facilities for automobiles continued to draw visitors; the premise of preservation very much on the backburner.

The need to protect as well as enjoy nature only gained real momentum much later in American popular culture. The 1960s and 1970s brought about new styles of literature, music, political opinion, and decision-making all related to a growing desire to protect the environment. For example, the monograph, Silent Spring, by Rachel Carson (1962) sparked national interest, and debates surrounding the use of chemical pesticides. This sudden increase in the awareness of the natural world as an asset is largely attributed to a major cultural shift. However, cultural shifts do not occur without prompting; promotional imagery released at the time was certainly intended to support the cause. Ansel Adams, for example, (a relatively unknown photographer until the 1960s) became a household name when his work on the Yosemite Valley catapulted him to cult status through exhibitions and print reproductions. His photographs continue to be reproduced en masse, predominantly for calendars, posters, and coffee table books. His original prints routinely fetch six and seven figure amounts at auction.
Gregory Clark builds on investigations into the representation of national parks and the use of certain preferred images. Clark agrees that research into visual imagery of national parks is worthwhile, but he takes it a step further, toward understanding the persuasive powers of landscape imagery, and how these images have the ability to create cultural icons. In order to devote further time to these ideas, I must return to a brief history of the origins of the landscape idea in America.

**Landscape Studies in America**

The term “landscape” originates from the German term *landschaft*, which refers to a bounded area, comprised of both physical and cultural forms. The Dutch version of this word, *landschap*, has more visual and artistic connotations, as well as illusions to perception and meaning whereas the German term (*landschaft*) refers directly to the land itself. Cultural landscapes, as a geographic field of study in America evolved from the Dutch term to describe and analyze natural settings, and later, the relationship between humans and the world around us as “cultural landscapes.”

The study of landscapes in American geography emerged as a sub-field in the early twentieth century. Carl Sauer (1899 – 1975) was not the first to explore themes of landscape in cultural geography, but his work was formative in this country, particularly his 1925 essay, “The Morphology of Landscape.” Sauer owes much of his interest and theoretical background in humans and the environment to the anthropo-geographers of German descent: Friedrich Ratzel (1844 – 1904), Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), and Alfred Kroeber (1876 – 1960). Based on the notion that landscapes are both physical and cultural phenomena, Sauer called for a more
integrated approach to geography. He reasoned that human-cultural processes drive physical landscape change, and thus, the material artifacts left behind become part of the landscape. Richard Hartshorne (1899 – 1992), in his 1939 book, criticized American geography for the human – environment focus. He proposed abandoning studies on human – environment interactions in favor of scientific research based on regions and space. Hartshorne’s ideas did not prevail in all of American academic geography, as evidenced by Sauer’s work and approach that formed the backbone of what is known as the “Berkeley School” in landscape studies, and the broader field of cultural geography. Sauer was a strong believer in fieldwork and observation, and his methods are still employed in contemporary cultural geography. The Berkeley School is a realm of thought no longer taught at the University of California at Berkeley, however, this line of thinking is taught and practiced by many who studied under Sauer, and now work elsewhere. The Berkeley School is known for studies in Latin America and the Caribbean with a focus on human – environment geography, and later cultural ecology and historical and political ecology.

Although John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1909 – 1996) did not study directly under Carl Sauer, he was heavily influenced by Sauer’s work, and devoted much of his academic life to studying cultural landscapes. Jackson taught landscape history courses at the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. In 1951, Jackson published the first issue of his magazine, *Landscape: Human Geography of the Southwest*. Later titled simply, *Landscape*, Jackson’s work regarding cultural or everyday landscapes dominated the magazine. The everyday or commonplace landscape he later termed “the vernacular,” a term still widely used by geographers and landscape architects today. *Landscape* was one of the first publications to focus on cultural landscapes, and along with Jackson’s other writings, enabled
other scholars to realize the importance of the built environment, setting the stage for a cultural
turn in academia.

Geography in the form of a pure science remained strong through the twentieth century
and the prominent journals such as the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*
continued to publish work featuring knowledge derived from statistical analysis and scientific
data collection.\(^7^8\)

In the early 1980s, as a backlash against the positivist focus of the discipline, an
increasing number of geographers published works that investigated landscape in a new way. In
the 1980s, the work of Denis Cosgrove, Peter Jackson,\(^7^9\) Stephen Daniels,\(^8^0\) James Duncan, and
Nancy Duncan,\(^8^1\) among others, led a cultural turn, relating geography to the humanities and
social sciences. In particular, geographers turned to the works of Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger,
Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Henri Lefebvre, and other social theorists to address new
issues in socio-spatial theory in the post-modern era.\(^8^2\)

This “new school” argued that although landscape was important, Sauer’s ideas and the
Berkeley School’s teachings were static, that Sauer was overly concerned with relics, feature
mapping, and material culture. This new school proposed a move toward participant observation
and ethnographic studies. The physical landscape still mattered, but new theories included ideas
regarding people as actors within the landscape, and landscapes as “texts” to be read and
deconstructed to reveal underlying metaphors.\(^8^3\) The idea of landscape as a palimpsest or layered
tapestry that needs unraveling, suggests a “surface and depth” worthy of analysis.\(^8^4\) Landscape
studies were no longer limited to material culture, form, peoples or places. New works tackled
social theory, power relations, art, memory, gender studies and class.\(^8^5\)
The new school and associated “new cultural geography” came under fire from some factions of the academy, and a number of debates ensued. These debates played out in prominent journals such as the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers.* Despite continued elements of resistance from within the academy, the emergence of new, international, academic journals, *Ecumene,* later as *cultural geographies,* and *Progress in Human Geography,* are indicative that a new cultural geography was born. Further growth is evidenced by the publication of a textbook, *The Dictionary of Human Geography.* First published in 1981, and a sixth edition expected in 2017, *The Dictionary* is a commercial textbook designed for graduate students and academics engaged in the field of cultural geography.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the current century, substantially more research blossomed, supporting new ideas surrounding cultural landscape studies. For the purposes of my research, I am particularly interested in the works that furthered study of visual elements of landscape: Joan M. Schwartz began publishing on photography as early as 1978, however it was not until 1996 that her writing featured in a peer-reviewed geographical journal. In 1987, John Jakle’s *The Visual Elements of Landscape,* highlighted the importance of the viewer, and individual perceptions based on the relationship of people to specific landscapes. Paul Groth and Todd Bressi edited a 1997 collection of essays titled *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes.* The collection, featuring notable scholars such as Jackson, Wilbur Zelinsky, David Lowenthal, and Denis Cosgrove, explores aspects of cultural landscape geography, including vision and space as interpretive tools. In 1994, Thomas Vale and Geraldine Vale published *Time and the Tuolumne Landscape,* a study in which they employ repeat photography to explore landscape change over time. Soon after, in 1998, Steven Hoelscher’s journal article titled “The Photographic
Construction of Tourist Space in Victorian America explored how photographs were used to promote idealistic tourist scenes of the Wisconsin Dells. These works were among the first in cultural geography to value the information available to researchers through visual media, namely photographs. Hoelscher’s article was particularly important because in it, he goes beyond the study of photographs and initiates a discussion regarding tourism promotion, place perception, and identity through the use of images.

Before I return to my discussion of new cultural geography and the importance of visual elements, I must first address the ideas of those who prioritize experiences over visual representations.

**Landscape and Non-Representation**

Since 2000, cultural geographers have emphasized performance and non-representational theory, also termed more-than-representation as the key elements of understanding and interpreting landscapes. Non-representational work is certainly valuable in complex studies and the understanding of place. Non-representational theory emerged out of concern for the focus placed on representational dimensions of life. In other words, a growing number of academics voiced their concern over the value society places on images (or representations) and the ensuing lack of recognition for experiential phenomena.

Non-representational theorists prioritize actual experience, ephemera, and the search for different ways to describe events that occur through human practice. Using unconventional interpretation, for example, vivid descriptions in the place of scenic photographs, non-representational theorists aim to achieve “more than” representation. Non-representational theory is not necessarily against traditional representation, but instead claims that conventional
representations have only presentational value and are unable to perform or engage with the world.\textsuperscript{100} This implies that representations do not have the ability to act on, or influence people, a concept that my research counters.

I propose that all types of visual representation (painting, photography, postcards, and social media) emerge from human performance and are thus valid objects of study, even in an arena favoring more-than-representation. Differences in how we view landscapes lie in the multiple ways that people find meaning in landscape. Driving, touring, sightseeing, hiking, walking, and cycling are all ways in which humans enjoy being in the landscape; postcards, snapshots, and digital images on social media sites are how we re-call, re-visit and remember these landscapes. All of these experiential ways of maneuvering through landscapes are avenues through which cultural geographers have explored, and represented through writing, concepts of self and nature or, the body in nature. For example, John Wylie recounts a day’s walk along the south coast of England. He details sensory experiences such as pain, heat and wind, using more than just photographs to illustrate his walking experience.\textsuperscript{101} Thus, he prioritizes the experience that he had while walking, over his snapshots (or visual representations), reminding us of his notion that landscapes are part of the production of our being and not merely a platform upon which our actions occur.\textsuperscript{102}

It should be noted here that despite Wylie’s descriptive text and his theory that the walk was a production of both self and landscape, he continued to include physical representations (photographs) of his encounters. An image of his blistered foot, for example, cannot be better explained than through a visual representation. Thus, while the non-representational theorists have an interesting take on production, and prefer performance over visual representation, there is still a place for images in their research agenda.
The Importance of Representation in Landscape Studies

Although non-representational theory prioritizes experience over representation as a means to understanding landscape, geographers have long understood the importance of images. Renowned geographer Alexander von Humboldt (1769 – 1859) repeatedly called for a holistic approach to science, one that included images and illustrations, to offset the dryness of scientific discovery. In a letter to the Berlin Academy in 1806, von Humboldt noted that,

“Little has been done for the physical description of the earth...because almost all of them [traveling naturalists - ed] are concerned exclusively with the descriptive...and with collecting...”

Instead, Humboldt recognized the value of landscape painting as a key element in understanding non-European lands. Most eighteenth and nineteenth-century explorers and naturalists, for example, William Bartram (1739 – 1823), Alexander Wilson (1766 – 1813), and John M. Darby (1804 – 1877) recorded only individual items and species, but not the surrounding physical landscape. Not only did visual representation of landscapes augment written descriptions and detail drawings of exotic specimens, they also made scientific discovery more democratic, by making it accessible to a wider audience (the non-literate public).

In contemporary geography, Peter Krafft argues that visual representation is essential to the study of landscape. In order for tourist travel to materialize, or even a walk along the South West Coast path, there must be considerable promotional material and media attention. In an attempt to illustrate how important images and representation are to tourist perceptions of place, I usually suggest to people that they think of a prominent city that they have never visited. Many
of us link iconic landscape features with place. For example, if one thinks of Paris, an image of
the Eiffel Tower might be visible in the mind’s eye; for London it might be the Big Ben clock
tower, and for Rio de Janeiro it likely would be the statue of Christ the Redeemer on Sugarloaf
Mountain. The images that appear in one’s mind’s eye are not sporadic but placed there through
perceptions and memory and curated through careful consideration. After visiting London, one
may not recall specifically having seen the iconic clock; however, it remains in the visual library
of the mind when thinking of London. This visual library is built through ephemera and
representations that Veronica della Dora calls “traveling landscape-objects.” These include
photographs, postcards, refrigerator magnets, and snow globes that feature particular visual
elements, thus influencing the way people think about certain places or destinations. The
repetitive use of iconic images, such as Big Ben or, the landscapes of the crown-jewel national
parks, reinforce our perceptions of these iconic places, and drive our desire to travel and
experience them first-hand.

Visual, traveling landscape-objects, as mentioned above, embody form as objects (paper
type, texture, and weight) and possess their own social agenda regarding performance and
practice. Commissioned in advance, promotional ephemera develop through design and
production processes - much the same way drawings evolve as artists sit down and begin
sketching by hand. These objects travel through space and time, via the postal service or
across borders in suitcases and backpacks. They also take on the role of actors within the sphere
of non-representational theory: they occupy space, may have a texture or smell, and might take
on meaning for the user beyond the representational image. For example, a postcard might
remind one of a vacation, or a specific person, and thus be fetishized as a personal keepsake.
Caitlin DeSilvey uses objects to analyze past geographies. DeSilvey un-packs, catalogs, and organizes found objects from an abandoned homestead. She documented her process, and displayed her results, exhibition style. This research agenda incorporates unconventional materials and ephemera, for example, skeins of wool, buttons and kitchen utensils. Her work acknowledges found objects, their materiality, and their value as objects, with lives and performances of their own. DeSilvey and della Dora both argue that representational objects have value beyond their two-dimensional image. This is definitely apt when referring to postcards, which are traveling landscape-objects; they can perform, and do, because they travel through space and time.

Landscape ephemera or traveling landscape-objects stay with us longer than non-representational experiences. What remains with people is the lasting vista in the mind’s eye, the photographs stored in a shoebox for future reflections, or for the lazier brain, the postcard image pinned to the bulletin board.

Daniel Arreola, posits that postcards are often collected as keepsakes, or mementoes, never intended for mailing. This explains why postcard collectors often find the cards blank or never mailed. However, although collectors purchase postcards to remember places, they can stimulate a desire to visit place by elevating specific places in our “geographical imagination.” In terms of the National Park Service, postcard images play an important role in garnering popularity for iconic landscapes through “image density,” a term he uses to describe the volume of visual information relating to a specific place. High image density enhances the power of a place, and for the National Park Service, increases popularity and estimation of place, in turn driving up visitor numbers. Arreola also studies postcards for their visual history. They are useful
for the information they possess relating to landscape change over time and should be valued as such.

Landscape-objects such as postcards, Yolonda Youngs agrees, contain valuable information about historical landscapes. Not only do they aid in recalling memories and places, they allow us glimpses into past scenery, fashions, pastimes, and preferred tourist destinations. Postcards play an important role in how Americans understand the nation’s geography, through the use of repetitive, selected imagery and iconography. Postcards are manufactured through the use of selected points of view that are loaded with social agendas. Always perfect images of specific places have shaped our perceptions of what these places are and how we understand them in our mind’s eye. In some instances, the selected view has been manipulated in some way in order to portray views that appeal to societal norms of the era. For example, in Youngs’ analysis of four Grand Canyon postcards featuring the El Tovar Hotel from 1905 through 1938, the images chosen for the postcards evolve from one predominantly featuring the hotel to one featuring only the scenic canyon and finally to one of an image of the majestic canyon and hotel balanced neatly on the rim. The increasing dominance of the canyon in postcards relates to the allure of the scenery itself, as with the canyon’s increasing fame, more tourists traveled to enjoy the scenery and isolation rather than to take advantage of the comforts of the luxury hotel. The canyon became a memorable icon of the American landscape and a reflection of the American nation. What the postcard or other traveling landscape-object offers is “a mental image in which visual elements of the landscape suggest, and are interwoven with, relations and values that cannot be seen.”

Historical photographs are similar to postcards in their size and presentation, however photographers do not necessarily produce them for marketing purposes. Photographs are more
often taken at face value; historical photographs appear objective or true. Where postcards are embellished with color overlays, defined borders and bold text, photographs maintain an “illusion of factuality.” Critical engagement with photography as a geographical concern emerged with the use of photographs to promote tourism, the rise of mass media and the idea of photographs as social texts. Postcards and posters of iconic features (such as Half Dome, Yosemite National Park) set a precedent, for amateur tourist photography. Preconceived ideas related to well-known compositions dictate the subject matter of everyday tourist snapshots, re-enforcing the agenda of already established cultural landscape icons.

David Tschida pushes this notion further, arguing that “pretext” dictates subject matter, tourist itineraries, continued representation in the media, and the physical landscape. I know this is certainly true for many of my own travel itineraries, as experienced on various trips (including my time in the Sierras). In a national park setting this is even more prevalent. Tourist brochures and postcards produced by the National Park Service influence visitor behavior. Tschida argues that traveling landscape-objects produced by a respected agency, such as the National Park Service, hold considerable sway in informing visitors, persuading them of specific areas to tour, and omitting others; perhaps places vulnerable to negative human impacts, or those that experience overcrowding. Robert Bednar agrees that highlighting specific places to stop and inhabit, designates these spaces as special, elevating them in the tourist mind and experience. “Park maps and guides highlight, preview, and frame marked sites with (in) the park, showing in words and pictures what constitutes an ‘appropriate and authentic’ experience…” Visitors are told what to visit and then reassured that they visited the most special places for an authentic park experience.
The national parks were for the most part designed as an automobile experience. The use of road systems control what visitors can access, and see. Landscape architects designed loop roads, scenic overlooks, drive up campsites, and parking areas for ultimate automobile accessibility, and in turn limiting tourists to specific areas. As a result, tourists experience national park landscapes through their vehicles; a phenomenon Ethan Carr terms, “intermediary landscapes.” The vehicle provides a mediated space between the tourist and nature. This is illustrated by the number of visitors who do not exit their vehicles at any given scenic overlook, a practice I find bewildering yet all too common in my national park experiences. In addition to controlling access, physical landscape design and construction in national parks inform tourist visitation patterns and photography. Scenic overlooks and framed vistas suggest a photograph is necessary. They also conceal alternatives, again influencing tourist practices and resulting representations.

Taking photographs at scenic overlooks is not only determined by the presence of a sign or parking area. The idea of documenting oneself in the landscape is part of a much larger cultural pattern of representing national parks as a tourist space. This informs tourist behavior more than a sign or guide ever could. People want material evidence of their physical presence in these iconic landscapes, Bednar calls this “embodied interaction” and attributes it to a pattern of practices deeply embedded in American tourist identity. This cultural practice directs tourists to replicate well-known vistas, often featuring themselves in the foreground of their own photographs of the National Parks. John Jakle and Keith Sculle suggest that embodied interaction is closely linked to the idea of the postcard. A postcard is sent to another as a kind gesture, but the underlying message is often, “Dear Friend, Say did you know I was away from home and having a good time?” Thus, the manner in which tourists record their journey and
experiences is a result of the values and ethos of the American people who take pride in their interactions with landscape icons and the national cultural identity of America.

These values are also reflected in the frequency that tourists mail postcards, or, in recent times, post replica images to social media, and other web-based platforms. This type of record keeping and proof of self in iconic landscapes is evidence of those values, but in modern times often degenerates into a self-promotional tool. Despite this, the idea of self-promotion due to embodied interaction with cultural icons only reinforces the importance of these landscapes and places. Representation as a tool to record or document these values makes it important, and is one of the reasons that studying images is warranted: they have the power to influence cultural identity, and hence the actions of tourists in any number of places.

Visual images complement our understanding of landscape and place, adding to experience, performance and anecdotal literature. Place understanding and meanings are not constructed anew in each new encounter. Instead, once learned, landscape images become patterns that instruct future actions. This means that images not only remind us of places, but also prescribe our future actions in them, whether these places are known through personal encounter or only via iconic image.\textsuperscript{130} Psychologist Edward De Bono reminds us that conscious memory and understanding is developed from childhood. As we develop and encounter increasing numbers of images, the mind will gravitate toward the familiar ones that are used repetitively. People are trained to see what visual experience suggests that one should.\textsuperscript{131} This is how iconic images are created: people seek uniformity in visual images based on previous visual encounters, and the same or similar images are preferred again and again.\textsuperscript{132}

Landscape-objects are designed to elicit the same effects as the original landscape, through a different medium - to capture the original scene, and preserve it through a variety of
representation media. The strength of landscape representation and persuasion lies in our desire to enjoy, appreciate, and share curated landscapes through images or objects, particularly those landscapes with which we identify, or repeatedly recognize. This is especially true of national park landscape imagery. The National Park Service repeatedly produced and distributed iconic images to such a large extent during their massive growth period (1945-1966) that they became easily identifiable icons of the American landscape, a phenomenon that lives on today through tourist photography and continued National Park Service promotional media.

In the next section, I narrate a condensed history of the Natchez Trace, and explain how it came to be a National Park Service entity.

Endnotes


7 Sabine Wilke, “How German is the American West?” in Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 100 – 118.


14 Ibid, 460 – 472.

15 Ibid, 461.


31 Letter from “Mark Twain: Special Travelling Correspondent of the Alta,” *Daily Alta California*, Volume 19, Number 6350 (August 4, 1867), Page 1, Column 5.

32 Ibid.

34 Sabine Wilke, “How German is the American West?” 100 – 118.


38 Yosemite, although protected by the 1964 Yosemite Grant was not a federal park, and thus Yellowstone is considered the “first” national park. Alfred Runte, *The National Parks: The American Experience*, 29 – 41.


46 The Santa Fe Railway nicknamed the Grand Canyon the “Titan of Chasms;” this title was first used in promotional material in 1902. Alfred Runte, *The National Parks: The American Experience*, 91 – 92.


51 Ibid, 75 – 97.

52 Ibid, 66 – 68.

53 Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940*, 1 – 438;


64 Lary M. Dilsaver, “Controls in the National Parks,” 229 – 244.

65 Ibid, 229 – 244.


84 Stephen Daniels, “Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape,” 196 – 220.


87 Donald W. Meinig, “Geography as Art,” 314 - 328


Steven D. Hoelscher, “The Photographic Construction of Tourist Space in Victorian America,” 


These academics include, but are not limited to Hayden Lorimer, Nigel Thrift, John Wylie, and John D. Dewsbury. I have cited additional scholars, however these four are the most widely known in this school of thought.


123 Ibid, 119 – 139.


125 Ethan Carr, Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service, 92.

126 Ibid, 92.


CHAPTER THREE
THE DEVILS BACKBONE

Early Years of the Trace

The prehistoric pathway from the Lower Mississippi Valley to middle Tennessee was trampled into a deep rutted form by the hoofs of bison, deer, and other game large enough to break through the dense undergrowth. The route followed the high ground, avoiding streams and swamps as most animal trails do. The path ran from the Mississippi bluffs, later the town of Natchez, Mississippi, 450 miles in a northeastern direction to the Cumberland River in middle Tennessee (figure 3.1), where clustered settlements eventually grew into the town of Nashville.¹

Figure 3.1: Location of the Natchez Trace Parkway. By the author.
From its starting point at the Mississippi River bluffs (200 feet above sea level), the Trace crosses the Loess Hills of southwestern Mississippi; the road climbs slowly, over these rolling hills to Jackson (about 300 feet above sea level), and beyond to the Red Clay Hills of central Mississippi (450 feet above sea level). The road then drops down to the Tombigbee Prairie of northeastern Mississippi (300 feet above sea level), and as it enters Alabama, climbs steadily up toward the Cumberland Plateau (700 to 1000 feet above sea level). From this point, it crosses the Tennessee River, ascends to the Highland Rim in the southern part of Tennessee (1000 feet), and finally terminates in the Central Basin of Middle Tennessee.²

The Loess Hills of southwestern Mississippi feature a rich, powdery soil, blown in by dust storms during the last Ice Age. The angular grains create a soil structure such that it resists slumping, and often stands in steep, vertical faces.³ As the original path weathered away with use, the soil on either side held its form, resulting in a deep rut for a trail.⁴ This sunken trace, as well as sections of the old footpaths and wagon trails can be seen at certain stopping points along the contemporary parkway. The original trail existed in multiple shorter sections, until eventual consolidation into one continuous road of 444 miles.⁵

The Natchez Trace played a significant role in enabling the exploration and development of the southeastern United States. The first people to mark the trails were the tribes of Natchez, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Creek nations that inhabited the area. Later, Native Americans, pioneers, and hunters used the trail, and increased use reinforced and widened the trail. The road was extremely important as a connection for the south to, and from, the north and east. It created a direct link between the more developed east coast and the interior, opening up the southwestern frontier to trade, religious missions, military action, and most notably, the initial infiltration of
European settlers into Native American territory. This enabled the distribution of people, goods and services to the region, as well as the settlement and growth of towns along the trading route.

The Southwestern Frontier

The first European explorers to encounter the trail and meet the Native Americans were the French Canadians exploring down the Mississippi River in 1673. The French established a presence on the lower Mississippi, most notably at Natchez and New Orleans. In 1762, Spain took over the territory west of the Mississippi River from her French ally. War with Britain had forced the French out of the Lower Mississippi Valley, and the Treaty of Paris had given the French territory east of the river to the British. The strategic importance of New Orleans and the Mississippi River became apparent as trade exports to colonial markets quickly expanded.

In 1783, in the Second Treaty of Paris, the British ceded their territory east of the Mississippi River to the Americans, however, due to a dispute regarding the southern boundary of said territory, the Spanish remained in control of Natchez. This meant that the Spanish controlled the river, and hence, all traffic downriver toward the port of New Orleans. During times of upheaval, or for political reasons, the Spanish closed the river to American water traffic; this was of great hindrance to the transportation of American trade goods. Eventually, in 1795, the Spanish and United States negotiated the San Lorenzo Treaty, allowing American ships full navigation rights to the Mississippi River, and duty-free transport through the port of New Orleans (still under Spanish Control). The treaty also nullified Spanish alliances to Native Americans in the region, greatly diminishing the ability of those communities to protect and defend their lands.
Although Natchez and Nashville were well-established, the region between them was still largely “undiscovered.” In 1798, Winthrop Sargent (then governor of the Mississippi Territory) appealed to the United States government for improved communication facilities in the region. Shortly thereafter, the United States Postal Service initiated mail delivery between Natchez and Nashville, using the primitive Trace as a postal route. The road was nothing more than a footpath, and soon enough, the postmaster-general of the United States requested that Army troops be employed in clearing out a wagon road.\(^\text{10}\)

Ensuing treaties between the United States and Chickasaw (Treaty of the Chickasaw Bluffs), and Choctaw (Treaty of Fort Adams) in late 1801 had these Nations agree to allow the construction of an official wagon road through their territories.\(^\text{11}\) Then president Thomas Jefferson recognized that a new, safer road would open up potential trade opportunities and development for the Mississippi Territory. It was a time of peace, and multiple troops were already stationed in the region, thus with the treaties in place, work on the military road began.\(^\text{12}\) Designed with horse and foot passengers in mind, troops cut the road to a mere eight-feet wide in places, with a focus on bridging or building causeways across swamps and streams. The work was arduous; teams of thirty soldiers labored on the road, dispatched and relieved once a month for almost two years, until late 1803, when work on the road ceased. By this point the military had completed 264 of the 450 miles, and although the task was clearly too large for the U.S. Army to finish, the better road conditions dramatically increased traffic, effectively serving the original bid for an improved road.\(^\text{13}\)

The Natchez Road was the lifeblood of the Southwest. Many prominent figures traveled the route; Tobias Gibson took Methodism up the road, starting in Natchez in 1799. In 1803, Lorenzo Dow traveled the road in the opposite direction, preaching his way south, to reach
Louisiana by 1807.\textsuperscript{14} The renowned explorer Meriwether Lewis traveled the Trace, from the south, on his way to Washington. His 1809 death at Grinder’s Stand remains a mystery, and is one of the most visited stopping points along the NTP.\textsuperscript{15} In 1810 Alexander Wilson traveled in the same direction, identifying, and painting new species of birds.\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Jackson led his army, including David Crockett, down the same road, to the Creek War in 1813.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to the post-riders and well-known travelers, the majority of the traffic on the Natchez Road was trade related, more specifically, the return route home from the port of New Orleans.

**Trade Route: The Devil’s Backbone**

The powerful current of the Mississippi River was well suited to downstream, non-motorized river transport and enabled the interior states to transport trade goods to the ports. In 1787 an opportunistic ex-soldier from Kentucky rafted on a makeshift platform down the Ohio, and Mississippi rivers, past Natchez to New Orleans.\textsuperscript{18} This journey set a precedent and soon boatmen from Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, and mostly Kentucky were rafting their tobacco, grains, and hides downriver and selling them on their arrival at the port of New Orleans. These boatmen became known as *Kaintucks*, meaning Kentuck (y), however, the term described all men from the north. *Kaintucks* had to be proficient on water and land; after delivering their cargo to New Orleans, they would sell their flatboat rafts for the lumber, and begin the arduous journey home.\textsuperscript{19}

The homeward journey for these boatmen followed the Mississippi River, north to Natchez, at which point it veered east, following the Trace to Nashville, Tennessee. Referred to as the “Devil’s Backbone,” the Trace was a difficult journey, riddled with mystery, and plagued by highwaymen, robbery, murder, and uncertainty. Although dangerous in many respects, the
myth and hype surrounding the Trace was often exaggerated; this intrigue continues to the present time.\textsuperscript{20} Despite the real (and imagined) dangers of the return journey, the \textit{Kaintucks} continued to move their goods south to the growing city of New Orleans. The boatmen oftentimes exhibited reckless behavior; their carefree spirit and frontier mentality were the reason they risked the perilous return journey in order to sustain their livelihoods.\textsuperscript{21}

The commercial availability of the steam engine in 1830 and resulting transport innovations, such as the steamboat, led to the demise of the overland trails such as the Natchez Trace. Steam powered engines could take passengers upriver and the shallow paddle of the steamboat allowed navigation far upstream. It was considerably safer and much faster to make the return journey north via river transport, thus the road became obsolete, and fell into disuse until the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Establishing the Byway}

John Swain introduced the Natchez Trace to the American public in \textit{Everybody’s Magazine} (1903 - 1929) in September 1905. Published by Ridgway-Thayer in New York City, the magazine appealed to a wide audience, featuring literature, entertainment, current events, advice columns, and opinions. In 1905, the magazine cost 10 cents and had a circulation of 750,000 copies.\textsuperscript{23}

Swain describes his adventure along the Natchez Trace as scenic and “delightful,” but more importantly, describes the road as playing a significant role in American history. His encounters, steeped in cultural charm, describe an isolated but friendly population. His words describe a clearly beaten path, which followed the ridgeline, but lost its form, and way through the valleys and streams:\textsuperscript{24}
“You take not that little hog-trail by my fence,” she said, “nor that buggy-track across the creek, nor yet that real, plain path; but if you’re good at paths the’s a trail runs between them and the creek. Take that up the creek, this side, till you come to where some water dreenes down out of the rocks. Take right up the p’int there till you come to the hilltop, and strike back into the woods, and you’ll find it.”

It was by such a way I went. The trail back into the woods till a certain smoothness underfoot told me I was again on my road, forgotten here and never traveled, cumbered at frequent intervals by fallen trees, but so grooved and packed by a century of use that years of neglect could not efface it wholly.\textsuperscript{25}

Although distances were marked in some places with rough-hewn boards, as shown in figure 3.2, he found the road hard to follow as it dipped in and out of the hollows.

Figure 3.2: A Signboard Along the Trace.
Despite his limited journey along the northernmost reaches of the Trace, Swain encountered a number of sites familiar to the modern tourist (and many that are not). His destination, the grave of young explorer, Meriwether Lewis, was hard to find but well worth the journey; the gravestone still stands today, albeit in a very different setting (figure 3.3 and 3.4).

Figure 3.3: Grave of Meriwether Lewis.  
Figure 3.4: Restored Gravesite.

John Swain did not travel all the way to Natchez, Mississippi. However, if he had, he would have found a once booming town in economic downturn. Despite continued agricultural production in the area, the building of railroads across America drew commerce away from river cities, including Natchez. Despite the Civil War (1861-1865), many of the mansions and
plantation homes around Natchez survived undamaged. This provided an opportunity for heritage tourism, and hopefully, economic growth.²⁶

A group of elite, white women, part of the Mississippi State Society Daughters of the American Revolution,²⁷ led a proposal that would re-invent the old road in the form of an historic highway.²⁸ Led by Mrs. Egbert Jones, of Holly Springs, Mississippi, State Regent (1906-1908), the proposal was obscure and piece-meal: construction would take place in sections over a prolonged period of time, and the parkway interspersed with selected historic markers. It was intended only for use by motor vehicle, a luxury for the wealthy. According to John Elliot, Natcheseans wanted a highway to the north, a commercial corridor connecting them to the east coast, promoting economic growth and tourism.²⁹ The scenic parkway idea emerged decades later, as a means to ensure full funding by the federal government; history and heritage were simply along for the ride.

The Mississippi State Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (MDAR), possibly encouraged by Swain’s article, and again led by Mrs. Egbert Jones funded a project to erect a granite stone marker in every county the Trace ran through. The first marker was placed at Natchez, in 1909, followed by Port Gibson in 1910 and Kosciusko in 1912.³⁰ A 1910 article by Mrs. (Eron) Dunbar Rowland, of Natchez, Mississippi, details a brief history of the Trace, claims the first marker for the MDAR, and highlights a number of perceived places of interest.³¹ The next twenty years saw nothing more than the placement of a few more granite markers placed along the original post road.

In 1933, the MDAR, under Mrs. Roane Fleming Byrnes, applied pressure to political leaders. In May 1934, Mississippi Congressmen Thomas Busby, Russell Elzey, and Mississippi Senator Hubert Stephens convinced President Roosevelt to sign an act (H.R. 7312, 73rd
Congress, 2nd session) appropriating $50,000 to survey the Trace.\textsuperscript{32} The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act allocated additional funding in 1935, and in 1937 construction began. By 1938, the continued work of the MDAR had paid off, and the road was named an entity of the National Park Service.\textsuperscript{33} Built under Public Works Administration, construction of the parkway included the New Deal Agencies of Works Project Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The New Deal Agencies were created to provide Depression era jobs. The Works Project Administration in particular was instrumental in the development of many of the National Parks of America,\textsuperscript{34} and played a vital role in sustaining the American population during the economic struggle. Over the next sixty-seven years, the parkway was built, one section at a time.

The bulk of the work occurred under the auspices of the Mission 66 program (1956 – 1966), including the headquarters and visitor’s center in Tupelo. Mission 66 was a ten-year, federally funded program to improve national park visitor amenities in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the National Park Service in 1966. The program addressed the significant rise in automobile tourists and focused largely on visitor centers and improved road access.\textsuperscript{35} Due to the perceived negative impacts of modern development on the so-called “nature” of national parks, the program was highly controversial. Despite the criticism, Mission 66 is one of the biggest government program success stories in American history.\textsuperscript{36} The allocated funds helped to further a number of projects, including the Natchez Trace, which was less than halfway to completion by 1957. By 1966, all but seven miles completed, construction of the road stalled, lagging until the early twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{37}

The overall construction cost was close to $2 billion, spent between 1938 and 2005. Considering that, upon completion, the Interstate Highway system had far out-paced the parkway
as an efficient means of transportation. This was an exorbitant price for an asphalt surface without the commercial potential of an Interstate Highway.\textsuperscript{38} The parkway had gone beyond a road; it was no longer a highway for express transportation. Dawson Phelps, noted Trace historian, declared the parkway, “…not a highway, but a long narrow park,” and so it has become.\textsuperscript{39}

**The Natchez Trace Parkway: Moving Forward**

The Natchez Trace Parkway was eventually finished in May 2005. At 444 miles long, it is second only to the Blue Ridge Parkway in length.\textsuperscript{40} Today, it connects Natchez to Nashville along a smooth, well-paved, scenic route. Contrary to the original desire of the Daughters of the American Revolution for a highway connecting Natchez to the east coast, the Natchez Trace Parkway avoids populated, commercial areas and transcends road intersections with bridge structures.\textsuperscript{41}

The Natchesean elites wanted a better road for economic development.\textsuperscript{42} However, the contemporary parkway features a low-speed limit, and detours around populated areas, contradicting the MDAR’s original proposal for a highway from Natchez to the east coast.\textsuperscript{43} Heritage tourists are entertained along the road through brief glimpses into the historical past of the route, explained through information boards and the visitor’s center in Tupelo, Mississippi.

There are three main critiques of the Natchez Trace Parkway’s disregard of the original path’s route.\textsuperscript{44} First, instead of following the ridges, as the old road had done, the new parkway runs through valleys and branches. Second, heritage information is scattered and numerous sites are a number of miles off the Trace. Accurate historical information is limited, and although the interpretive elements center around the trade route (mostly the Kaintucks), there are random, out-
of-context, Native American sites tacked onto the historical narrative explained along the route. And finally, although the road is an historic byway and thus the focus is heritage tourism, there exists a schism between today’s automobile visitors and the original Natchez Trace experience. Closed inside a vehicle, the visitor can never experience the hardship, physical strain and fear of the early days of the Trace, but today’s visitor demands a certain level of comfort and might experience the byway only for the scenic beauty irrespective of its past.

Today the role of the old post road has largely been forgotten. The Natchez Trace is no longer an integral part of American trade and transportation: it serves little other purpose other than recreational driving, or cycling.

Ironically, the Trace, now a heritage symbol for the American frontier, is a National Park with few, real, heritage sites associated with its origins. The cultural-historic memory and mythos of the Natchez Road has faded, and most visitors get only a cursory glance at the history through limited interpretive elements. Instead it is a picture postcard, of a park without clear or powerful representation. This is the starting point to investigate how people perceive and represent this parkway through images and media. The next chapter expands on my methodologies for investigating representation, and traveling landscape objects.

Endnotes


16 Ibid, 48 – 51.

17 Ibid. 53, 313 – 316.


21 Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (Chatto & Windus, 1883).


25 Swain describes how he received directions to the grave of Meriwether Lewis, on page 335. John Swain, “The Natchez Trace,” 335.


31 Eron Dunbar Rowland, “Marking the Natchez Trace: An Historic Highway of the Lower South,” Mississippi Historical Society, Vol. 11 (1910): 345 – 361. This article is often
erroneously credited to Eron’s husband, Dunbar Rowland, the first director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.


45 Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR
VISUAL DISCOVERY OF THE NATCHEZ ROAD

Using Representation

Thomas Patin’s “visual rhetoric” research investigates what images mean, and how they influence culture and identity through their powers of persuasion. Much like Veronica della Dora, Patin believes that visual objects (in his research these are interpretive vignettes in national park settings) are actors operating in a network of cultural identity; shaping and instructing human perception of place and culture.\(^1\) In order to gain an understanding of how visitors perceive and value the Natchez Trace Parkway, I collected and analyzed a variety of representations of the Trace. These representations are objects in their own right, and reveal, through their content, quality, texture, and form, visitor preferences, and perceptions about the Natchez Trace Parkway; and the changes in these perceptions over time. I collected four different types of representations: analog (drawings and one painting), historic photographs, postcards, and digital images via the online repository flickr.com.

In her study on tourist interpretations of Rome, Maria Pelizzari analyzes and compares three different forms of tourist-centered representations. She uses amateur photographs by an independent traveler, commercial photographs compiled into a photograph album by a tourist, and a photographic novel to form a critical opinion of tourist experiences in Rome.\(^2\) Pelizzari analyzes each of the images in terms of location, composition, textual additions, and visitor experience. From each category of analysis, she deduces information relevant to her investigation. For example, in her assessment of the composition of each photographic image, she considers the spatial elements, architecture, and the presence of people, or lack thereof. These findings lead her to ideas that suggest tourists prefer certain viewpoints of certain built
spaces, a result of guided photography.\textsuperscript{3} In addition, photographs that feature spaces devoid of people suggest discrepancies between actual tourist experiences and images. She also examines text supplemental to the images, using notations to better understand tourist perceptions of place.\textsuperscript{4}

Yolonda Youngs also analyzed tourist representations for information beyond their immediate content. She documented her collected images in a study of the Grand Canyon into one of four main subject groups, and also into one of two primary locations.\textsuperscript{5} Youngs places each postcard into a thematic subject group, “scenery,” “vegetation,” “water,” or “animals;” she also identifies the geographic origin of the image based on her knowledge of the Grand Canyon, gained from extensive fieldwork. Youngs then mapped the locations and compared the subject matter and composition of her postcard collection to determine how the Curt Teich Publishing Company chose to promote the canyon, and in so doing, shaped popular perceptions, visual imagery and tourist perceptions of the Grand Canyon.\textsuperscript{6}

While these methods concern only photographs and postcards, I reason that illustrations and digital images are no different. In 1833, William Henry Fox Talbot, aware of his inability to adequately capture a scene using illustration, searched for a machine that could capture the beauty that he could not.\textsuperscript{7} Photographs, illustrations, postcards, and other ephemera are all constructed out of subjective views; not one of these visual elements is completely objective,\textsuperscript{8} thus I deemed the methods used for photographs and postcards to be appropriate for illustration and digital images as well.

Building on Patin’s position, and using a combination of Pelizzari and Youngs’ methods, my research with four components, addresses the changes in traveling landscape objects over time. First, I examined nineteenth century representations (artworks) of the Natchez Trace and its
surrounding region, including landscape sketches and paintings in order to better understand how people perceived the pathway, before it became a formal entity. Most of these images are from literature, supplemental to written accounts, and describe daily life or events. Most of these sources are unintentional records of the landscape, because the landscape as a subject of art in America only really emerged with the painters of the Hudson River School (mid nineteenth century). Even then, only the grandest of landscapes were considered worthy of painting, for example the valleys of Yosemite and Yellowstone. I found few drawings depicting landscape; those I did encounter, feature landscape as a background element, incidental to the subject matter, and are few and far between. As mentioned in chapter two, the majority of traveling naturalists were primarily concerned with specimens and descriptions. Although Von Humboldt called for visual representations of landscapes as part of travel discovery, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that artists focused on the natural landscape in America.

Finding minimal visual accounts of the Natchez Trace Parkway from before the Civil War, my second focus was on early photographic accounts of the Natchez Trace (1880 – 1975). Historic photographs before the turn of the century follow the same ideas as art; landscape is a background element, and photographs for the most part document daily life. After 1900, I found historic photographs that documented the landscape as a primary focus. John Swain’s 1905 article in Everybody’s Magazine, clearly documents landscape elements for record keeping. This trend continues into the twentieth century.

Third, I examined postcards of the Natchez Trace Parkway (1925 - 2005). These were found through archives, online marketplaces (for example eBay), and through my own collecting. These postcards are the typical four by six inch tourist postcards found in visitor centers and gift shops at any type of visitor attraction. All of them feature an image on one side,
and on the backside, have space for a written address, personal message, and place for a postage stamp. All of them feature either the Natchez Trace itself, or an attraction located along its length.

Finally I assembled digital images from a web-based image platform (2000 – present). The repository of digital images is hosted at flickr.com. Flickr.com is an online photograph album of sorts, to which individual users can upload their personal digital photographs under a chosen user name. Each photograph is stored in this cloud-based online album, and can be viewed by anyone who can access the flickr.com website. In addition, users can create groups (or albums) for certain genres of photographs. Along with other users, individuals can tag their images into these group albums, making it easier to search for images of a particular place or theme. I searched for “Natchez Trace Parkway,” and found two groups dedicated to images of the Trace. I used both of the groups to compile my digital photograph collection.

I examined the collected images from these four periods through the use of numerous categories including: geographic location by name, mile marker along the Natchez Trace Parkway, photographer, date captured, genre, image quality, image composition, content, and whether or not people are present. This created a large amount of data, which I analyzed for broad trends and changes, for example geographic origins of images, content, and media changes over time. My results can be seen in chapter five with a discussion following in chapter six.

**Early Years**

Antebellum representations of the Trace are important in establishing initial identities of the region and road. Due to the relatively small sample size, and extreme variations in format and content, the items I collected can be catalogued, but cannot be directly compared against one
another. Although they are all interpretations of the landscape, some are texts; others are engravings, drawings, and paintings. Thus, their greatest value lies in what they reveal about perceptions of the old frontier; across the board, these representations depict a densely vegetated and sparsely populated rural region. On the old road isolated incidents of robbery and murder cloud a landscape of forests and swamps. Amongst the thick vegetation, there is evidence of clearings that supported small-scale agriculture. The Native American Choctaw tribe inhabited this area and farmed for subsistence purposes.\textsuperscript{13}

**Drawings and Paintings: Procedure in Detail**

For data-driven purposes, I recorded the geographic origin of the content, purpose of the illustration, and landscape contents. To establish a baseline, I was particularly interested in how the artist portrayed the landscape, what the vegetation looked like, and the landscape presence. Landscape presence could be interpreted as how the landscape “feels,” for example, whether it is ominous, safe, threatening, or welcoming. I used keyword searches of digital databases, and also in analog searching of the illustrations catalog housed in the Reading Room at Hill Memorial Library (LSU Special Collections). Keywords searches included “landscape, Natchez Road, Natchez Trace, Trace, Post Road, Kaintucks, Mississippi River, Boatmen, Swamps, and Stands.” Limited findings led me to undertake more arduous archival work, whereby I identified prominent places and families, and delved into the many manuscripts and collections at Hill. Fortunately, as an employee of LSU Libraries Special Collections, I had access to the otherwise off-limits stacks. Despite this, hand rendered depictions of the area are extremely limited.

The earliest representations of the area are simple drawings of Native American hunts with accompanying descriptive texts.\textsuperscript{14} These I found in the LSU Libraries, Special Collections.
One of John James Audubon’s (1785 – 1851) only landscape paintings portrays Natchez circa 1823. This was the representation that most archivists and historians pointed me toward on hearing of my search for Natchez Trace images. The painting depicts a dirt road that meanders through an agrarian landscape up toward a town in the distance. The town, which is Natchez, sits atop the bluff, overlooking the Mississippi River in the distance. Along the road are sparse trees, littered with the epiphytic plant known as Spanish moss. Travelers alone and in groups walk or ride on horseback toward the town. This road is presumably the Natchez Road that eventually became the Natchez Trace Parkway. Like the Natchez Trace Parkway, it originates inland, whereas the other access road, River Road, came from the south, along the river. This is the only painting I found, and rare it is; as mentioned earlier, landscape painting was very uncommon in 1823, particularly in America, and also by the hand of John James Audubon! A reproduction of *Natchez* hangs in the dining room of the National Park Service Historic Site of Melrose in Natchez, Mississippi. It is shown in figure 4.1.

![Natchez painting](image)

Figure 4.1: Audubon’s *Natchez*. Courtesy Historic Natchez Foundation.
The majority of the images are engravings of camp meetings, bars, stands, highwaymen, and robbers. These appeared in print from 1820 to 1858, and the originals are now housed at the Library of Congress. Digital versions of these are available through the nps.gov website, under a section on the history of the Natchez Trace Parkway. In addition I found a number of illustrations supplemental to the writings of Mark Twain, particularly in *Life on the Mississippi*, published in 1883. All of these were analyzed against the criteria listed above, for their emotion, and what they reveal about the landscape. Most of these illustrations, save for *Natchez*, travel through the circulation of novels, magazines, exhibitions, newspapers, and now online via the world-wide-web. A local merchant sold the original *Natchez* painting after the commissioner died unexpectedly. The painting traveled to France, and back to Natchez, Mississippi where in 1881, George Malen Davis purchased, and hung it in the Melrose dining room for nearly one hundred years, until 1976 when the painting sold at auction.

Unfortunately, illustrated representations of the Trace are all limited to western views. I did not discover any records from Native American sources, thus my findings are biased to what I could find.

**Kodak Moments**

Historic photograph research presented traditional, archive-based research. For the most part, the public perceives archives as dusty collections of paper that house needles in the haystack of historical resources. Innovations in research methods have revisited what the term “archive” really means, and in the last twenty years or so, a number of researchers have turned to photographs for historical enlightenment. Since the invention of the 35mm mass marketed camera, tourist photographs have often been overlooked for their historic value, and
passed off as mere snapshots. Despite this school of thought, photographs in fact contain visual data related to historic events, popular culture, and perceptions. The work of Wyckoff and Dilsaver on tourist imagery at Glacier National Park, and Hoelscher on panoramas of the Wisconsin Dells, among others, highlight how photographic media are particularly relevant in understanding how tourists perceive promoted landscapes. Photographs of the Natchez Trace are no different (whether professional or amateur); they are a record of tourist visits, but also a lens through which we can better understand places and perceptions of past visitors.

In order to find the earliest historic photographs, I had to identify prominent people, and families hailing from the region, and sort through finding aids to locate and identify image collections. Many of these searches were fruitless, featuring family photographs, or unknown, undated landscapes. The most meticulous manuscript collections sometimes feature an array of photographs of unknown places, people and dates; evidence of the lack of priority given to photographs as a source of information. This is not necessarily the opinion of any archive or archivist, but simply a matter of what families thought it worthwhile to annotate or even keep. Another method was to identify settlements along the route and do a key word search for the place name. Although somewhat spotty, I did hit a few results for towns that are no longer in existence, for example, Washington, Mississippi. I also connected with historian, Mimi Miller, at the Historic Natchez Foundation, who pointed me toward the Gandy Collection housed at LSU. This is a large collection of photographs, largely from the Norman Photography Studio, in Natchez around the turn of the century. Amidst countless portraits, there exist a few photographs of the Trace, and these were invaluable to my research, not least because of their high quality and excellent condition.
I targeted state archives for early images, as the Natchez Trace Parkway did not exist until the early twentieth century. The first survey of the Natchez Trace was published in 1941, and after that, images were easily located in national archives, such as the National Park Service archives in Atlanta. Most of my findings came from the archival collections of university libraries and state repositories. I was lucky enough to work as a graduate assistant at LSU’s Special Collections located in Hill Memorial Library. This allowed me to page any number of items, and spend time after my shift in the reading room working through them. As an employee, I could access the stacks, which most researchers cannot do. This allowed me to access and assess a collection quickly and easily; in many cases, stumbling on the neighboring collection, that housed exactly what I needed and would not have found otherwise. Working with archival photographs requires a good deal of patience and care. One must wear the white cotton gloves at all times, and it is not easy to sift through and decipher images printed at a three by five inch size. After my experience at Hill Memorial, I understood how photographs tend to be archived, and what to look for in finding aids (any mention of photographs)! This allowed me to connect with photo archivists at other repositories and speak their language; a tool that yielded far more results than my initial investigations. It should be clear that when I say “far more” results, I am referring to relatively small numbers. An initial search at LSU Special Collections yielded one photograph; after working there for a little over a year, I had six. Initial inquiries at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History revealed two photographs, but with better knowledge of what to look for, I managed to find thirteen. On the whole, nineteen images was a much better number than six! The relatively small numbers I found did not allow me to be selective, if the photograph included the road or trail it was put into the coffers. Fortunately, I was able to capture almost all of the historic photographs by using my phone camera with no
flash. I analyzed each image according to the categories mentioned earlier. The exact categorization procedure is outlined in the next section.

**Historic Photographs: Procedure in Detail**

The plan was to collect, analyze, and categorize historic photographs from a number of different collections (more on these later). Following Youngs’ method of categorization for her Grand Canyon Postcards, my criteria for categorization of historic photographs included: source (collection), photographer (where known), content (for example, stone marker), geographic location by name, mile-post on the modern Trace, date captured, genre (artistic/photo-journalistic, landscape, promotional, tourist snapshot), accompanying narrative or caption (where available), class (road, culture, nature, parchitecture), people (are they present), image composition (1 poor, 10 excellent), and finally, image quality (1 poor, 10 excellent).

Some of the categories are fairly straightforward; for example, the mile-post category demands a number between 0 and 444, in order to place the historic photograph in context on the contemporary road. Other categories might not be so evident, thus I shall explain them here to clarify their value. I judged image quality based on a scale of 1 to 10. Factors to consider in image quality include image resolution (clarity), color (where applicable), and exposure. For examples of my image quality assessment standards, refer to Appendix D. Image composition (also judged on a scale of 1 to 10), includes basic layout and composition, for example whether the image is centered, or not. Image composition is compromised by the presence of a foreign object in front of the lens (for example, a finger or large tree branch).

Class required the allocation of each image into one of four categories: road, culture, nature, or parchitecture. Any image featuring the Trace (old or new) was classed as “road.”
Nature included images of flowers, or valleys, and culture included group photographs or other cultural landscape phenomena. Parchitecture includes all and every form of park architecture. This includes signage, visitor’s centers, entrance gateways and monuments. A sample spreadsheet for historic photograph categorization can be found in Appendix A.

I located my collection of historic photographs (ranging from the late nineteenth century through 1962) at LSU Libraries Special Collections, The Historic Natchez Foundation, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Tennessee State Archives, and the National Park Service Archives. Initial searches identified about twenty-five images; however over time as my own knowledge improved I identified key search terms that yielded better results. I asked for “Natchez Road,” “Trace Road,” and specific place names on the old road, “Port Gibson, Mississippi,” “French Camp, Mississippi,” “Water Valley,” “Gordon House,” in addition to “Natchez Trace Parkway.” This technique and multiple visits yielded eighty-four historic images. An example of one such location key word search result is the image I found of the Trace, catalogued in the Gandy Collection at LSU Libraries, Special Collections, under “Natchez Road.”

The items in my sample had varied origins, made up of small private photography studios, individual manuscript and ephemera collections, and from publically funded projects. Six of my photographs from unknown photographers came from the Roane Fleming Byrnes Collection. Although I cannot assume that she took these snapshots, the number is relevant enough to mention. The main drawback to my sample is the large swath of thirty-nine images from the Mississippi Department of Conservation Project 39, all taken in 1955, and of similar content, quality and purpose in recordkeeping (Table 4.1).
Table 4.1 Origins of Historic Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographer</th>
<th>Number of Photographs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norman Studio, Natchez, Mississippi</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knable Lane Studio, Natchez, Mississippi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Photographers (for National Park Service)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown Photographers</td>
<td>51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL HISTORIC PHOTOS</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of these: Department of Conservation Project 39, RFB Personal Manuscript Collection 6

Once compiled into a master spreadsheet, the aim was to notice broad trends in the content of images, quality, and location (specifically any repetitive use of specific places possible cultural icons for the Natchez Trace). Each category was evaluated and organized into graphic format for analysis. I explain this further in the section titled Evaluation of Various Media; the results can be seen in chapter five. In a similar fashion to how I handled historic photographs, I set out to discover postcards of the Natchez Trace.

Wish You Were Here

My interest in postcards began in 1999. As a young student traveling around Europe, I mailed home postcards from each city I visited. Many years later, when downsizing the house, my mother proudly presented me with the stack of postcards I had sent. Initially upset that she did not want to hold onto my wonderful adventures, I soon realized I had a postcard journal of sorts, memories held within each card.
Postcards are not just visual representations. They are useful as historical data for visualizing landscape change over time, and have their own meaning as objects of memory.\textsuperscript{20} They are produced, circulated, and often kept as souvenirs or memories, not only of a place, but of another person or an experience as well. People purchase postcards with various intentions: mail, memento, even as gifts. They play an additional role in what Patin, as mentioned earlier, terms the visual rhetoric; they influence what sites tourists want to visit, and they instruct visitors on the cultural icons of any landscape.\textsuperscript{21} In order to identify, and understand cultural icons of the Natchez Trace, I had to collect and examine postcards. The selection of images for postcard use reveals the landscapes that publishers and the National Park Service deemed worthy of cultural icon status on the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Postcards are almost as elusive as photographs when it comes to the archives. Some postcards are organized into collections, most by town name, then state. I could find no postcard collection specific to the Natchez Trace Parkway, unlike for most major National Parks, such a collection does not exist. I accessed Natchez Trace Parkway postcards by sorting through them individually, and documenting those that featured the Natchez Trace. I found many of these in manuscript and ephemera collections housed in various archival repositories. Although a challenge to locate, postcard resources proved more numerous and accessible than historic photographs. I also collected postcards from my own travels along the Trace including those I purchased at visitor’s centers and in antique collectible stores. I did attempt to find collectors, most of whom pointed me toward the online marketplace eBay.

eBay searches for “Natchez Trace Postcards” returned good results, but tend to feature the same ten or so popular postcards at any given time. While this hints at popularity, it was no way to build a collection. The most valuable additions from eBay included postmarked cards,
with a personal message. I did not find a single mailed postcard of the Natchez Trace Parkway in an archive, thus my eBay searches and purchases, although limited in number, proved extremely worthwhile. Most collectible postcards are blank, ventures Daniel Arreola, a result of tourists buying them as a “memento of a place often accumulated and kept for a collection or album.” 22 In other words, they are not purchased with the intention of mailing them to friends and family.

I documented my collection of postcards by photographing both sides of each card and storing them on a digital drive. This made it easy for me to evaluate and reference them. I analyzed postcards according to the same categories as those listed previously, with the addition of: publisher, postmark, and personal message. The exact categorization procedure is outlined in the next section.

**Postcards: Procedure in Detail**

I began collecting Natchez Trace Parkway postcards in 2011. The search started in visitor’s centers, and antique stores in the Natchez Trace Parkway region. A year or so later, I began trawling the online marketplace, eBay, and eventually, I ended up in formal archives. Materials found range from 1934 through the present day, and my continued collection over a two-year period amassed fifty-five postcards. In addition to eBay, antique stores, and National Park Service Visitor’s Centers, I successfully found images from the following archives: National Park Service archives, Curt Teich Postcard Collection (Waucona, Illinois), and, most successfully in the state archives of Tennessee and Mississippi.

I catalogued each postcard according to the same categories as historic photographs. In addition, I had categories for: publisher, location of publisher, where the postcard was postmarked (mailed), and personal message. Some of the postcards featured handwritten
messages, and addresses, these I documented and considered as vital primary evidence – there are few other ways I can connect with postcard scribes from 1965!

The difficulty in studying postcards for their distribution and popularity lies in that while it may be possible to track store ledgers for postcard sales, it is near impossible to know how many of each postcard image was eventually mailed. Some of the postcards I found of the Trace were mailed from farther afield; Vicksburg, Biloxi, New Orleans, and post office records do not describe the items mailed beyond form and weight.

Limited information regarding the popularity of the images based on the numbers sold and sent makes it difficult to identify popular cultural icons on the Natchez Trace Parkway from postcards alone. For example, there could be only a single postcard featuring the Loess Bluff (see figure 4.2), however, it may have been printed and sold in record numbers, making it a clear iconic image for the parkway. Other than availability on eBay, and recurring results in searches and archival resources, there is no clear way to identify the most popular images through hard data.

Although hard data for the numbers of each postcard image produced cannot be found, I did take note of the extremely popular postcards that popped up repeatedly in my searches. These are mentioned in chapters five and six, and most definitively make a case for the most popular icons of the Natchez Trace Parkway. A sample spreadsheet for my postcard data can be found in Appendix B.

#NTP (Hashtag Natchez Trace Parkway)

Online research in human geography is in its infancy. It is extremely relevant in my study of landscape objects because I ask these questions: how has the medium of representation of
traveling landscape-objects changed? And, does this medium matter? This is important when we consider whether fast uploads, and varying quality of landscape images contribute to a loss of value. Like it or not, online platforms for sharing visual content are upon us, and they influence the future of traveling landscape objects. We do not yet know whether tactile traveling landscape objects may disappear or, become more popular, as ease of sharing digital postcards becomes a reality. Thus, the idea of a digital postcard, sent via the Internet, must be considered. In addition to traditional postcards, I delved into Postagram, an online application for smartphones that allows users to send physical postcards using digital photographs from any location that provides cellular data service. I will explain my findings on Postagram in chapters five and six.
There are relevant concerns over the ethics, accuracy, privacy, and security of web-based research, all of which are affected by the perceived anonymity of using the Internet. In addition to credibility concerns over the use of online resources for content, Andrew Keen criticizes the endless array of social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. According to Keen, the vast user base and amateur quality of uploaded content breeds online mediocrity. Despite the drawbacks of social media and other online forums, online communities provide new connective spaces that allow researchers to interact with others in new ways. For example, without social network sites, I could not have gained access to over 900 photographs of Natchez Trace experiences without contacting over four hundred people.

Instead, I collected visual content (and its associated metadata) in the form of digital photographs, posted to flickr.com, a social media website. Flickr.com is best known for being a visual photo album where users can upload and share photographic content. Unsurprisingly, a brief glance at the website reveals that much of what is posted relates to travel and snapshots of iconic landscapes. Users own a screen name and can post content for others to view, and comment on. Comments are posted back and forth and can be “tagged” according to content. For example “#natcheztraceparkway.” In addition to uploading digital photographs, users can create “groups” and tag their images to them. In this way, anyone can search a “hashtag (#),” for example #natcheztraceparkway, and all associated photographs will show up in the search results, somewhat similar to a keyword search in a library catalogue. Flickr.com has two groups relating to the Natchez Trace Parkway. The first is simply “Natchez Trace Parkway,” and the second is “Along the Natchez Trace Parkway.”

The advantage to research within this type of user group is that I already had a self-selected group of individuals interested in landscape and the Natchez Trace Parkway. The
downside is that these types of online groups are not particularly diverse. They are dominated by middle-aged, male, white, middle-class Americans. Nevertheless, in the case of my research, I was primarily interested in the content of the representation (due to the obvious lack of object- hood), and any type of survey participants along the route would likely be drawn from a similar pool of willing respondents. The main drawback I encountered to using study groups on flickr.com is that they are online, and live. Thus, the sample group size and number of images is constantly growing. I revisited both groups multiple times over the course of my three-month flickr.com data collection in order to update and re-evaluate the content. Ultimately, I set a cut- off date for November 1, 2014 and did not take into account any images that were added after that date.

I selected flickr.com as my online resource because it is an open access website that can be used and viewed by anyone who has Internet access. Although anyone can view the digital photographs, users who wish to upload pictures must create a free account with password protected login features. Users who choose to upload their photographs do so with the understanding that the images enter the public domain and can be viewed by anyone who chooses to do so. In addition to the categories used for historic photographs, I added five more categories; the exact categorization procedure is outlined in the next section.

**Flickr.com: Procedure in Detail**

I joined the two Natchez Trace Parkway flickr.com groups “Natchez Trace Parkway,” and “Along the Natchez Trace Parkway.” I collected and analyzed 902 digital photographs, all posted to one or both of the flickr.com groups. Each image was evaluated on identical, pre- established criteria that I used for the historic photographs and postcards. In addition to the
criteria used above, I added five more social media specific categories to the spreadsheet: group name, number of views, number of comments, comment content, and narrative. For reference the a sample spreadsheet for the flickr.com groups is shown in Appendix C.

The spreadsheet of the two combined flickr.com groups allowed me to create graphs and charts of the overall data, to reveal trends and results shown in chapter five, and discussed in chapter six. In addition to the statistical analysis, I geo-referenced the locations of the images taken according to their mile markers, and used GIS to create weighted maps showing where the geographic “hotspots” of landscape content and tourist activity exist. The most photographed locations clue us in to the most popular stopping points and hence, cultural and landscape icons of the Natchez Trace.

**Evaluation of Various Media**

Each representation (or image) was evaluated in terms of my categories. Each category relates to a research question, for example, the category “image quality” relates to the question of whether representations are declining in quality as their medium changes. The categorization of all of my images (over one thousand in total) created multiple spreadsheets, and a vast amount of metadata. I evaluated this data according to my research questions, looking for broad trends and changes over time. Taking the relevant data from each category, I organized the results into charts, graphs, maps and diagrams that appear in chapter five.

I used various Microsoft programs to create graphs and charts, and Adobe Illustrator to generate GIS maps into diagrams showing geo-locations of photographs, postcards and flickr.com images. My methods are obviously limited by subjectivity, for example, in one category I determined the “quality” of images (scoring them on a scale of one to ten); I assumed
the role of one who is eligible to determine their worth. While this is not the intention of my study, my methods were consistent, because I judged all of the images. As an art historian might examine and interpret a painting, I examined and evaluated each historic photograph, postcard, and digital image according to the categories. My geographic and cultural background, and education uniquely qualify me for this study. This research is a fresh take on images of an old road, and an assessment of how tourist images in America have changed over time and through different available media.

As an alternative method, I might have surveyed participant responses to Natchez Trace Parkway images. However, this too is subjective; and I doubt I would have found any participants willing to look at over 900 images in order to gain consistency from a single perspective. For data on postcard production, I delved into Deep South Specialties (the publisher of most of my found postcards), but could find no business records. Based on my alternative options to data collection, I consider the approach I took to be the best way forward in terms of my research agenda.

Art and Exhibition

Art, and exhibitions, in geography tend to supplement written work, safely harbored in accepted practice. However, lines are blurring between pure academic research and art. Geographers are increasingly comfortable with performance art, or curating exhibitions as an element of the research process. Perhaps this is attributed to more-than-representational theory. It is also possible that art is increasingly a valuable learning experience in the research timeline. Dwyer and Davies suggest that exhibition curators “must really understand the research
material.” Thus, the making of art should be considered a research practice. The practice of “doing” art turns an experience, or idea, into an actual object for study and reflection.28

Art, or the act of drawing is the commitment to a process that demands careful observation, and results in substantial information gathering on a subject. The product, an illustration, is less important as an aesthetic item than for the information it portrays.29 Drawing is not an objective representation, but holds value in that it connects culture and nature – what one chooses to draw, and what one omits, what one creates as the central element of a drawing is an important guide to revealing a cultural identity.30 The same can be said of carefully composed photographs, or postcards for reprint and sale.

Two of the most useful items in my research toolkit are observation and drawing, in either analog or digital formats. The results in chapter five illustrate what I have learned through my data based analysis of tourist images of the Natchez Trace Parkway. Due to the current limitations placed on visual research outcomes, I chose to supplement my text-based work with a visual element. As part of my research I considered changes in landscape representation over time. This approach is similar to that used in a study by Thomas Veblen and Diane Lorenz who employed repeat photography to track landscape change in the Colorado Front Range. They attempted to “reoccupy the original camera position, and take a new photograph of the same scene.”31 This method of photographing the landscape many years apart “provides an effective means in investigating changes…and has been widely used by ecologists and geographers” alike.32 Geraldine Vale and Thomas Vale undertook a similar study of Tuolumne Meadows in the Yosemite high country, as did Jonathan Walker, and Jonathan Leib along the Topia Road in the Sierra Madre Occidental.33 Both studies recreated scenes from historical photographs, and examine landscape change using the sets of comparative images. In addition, Walker and Leib
used field notes from previous researchers, James Parsons and Bob West, who wrote an article on the same route in 1941.34

To evaluate landscape change along the Natchez Trace Parkway using comparative photographs, I used images from the first official survey of the Natchez Trace (1941)35 and compared them to current (2015) National Park Service images promoting the Parkway. As a point of clarification, the images I found are not of the same geographical locations, or sites. Unfortunately due to the extreme changes in the trail landscape, the historic images bore little to no resemblance to the modern parkway in any shape or form. However, as this study revolves around the visual persuasion and power of images, I based my comparisons only on images released by the National Park Service for promotional purposes. Despite my inability to recreate exact photographs in the mold of Veblen and Lorenz, Vale and Vale, and Walker and Leib, I managed to identify and match images based on their origination in the same county, vegetative features, landscape typology (for example open vista, agricultural field, or wooded area), geological features (slope), scale, and composition. In order to highlight the changes in scale and other differences between the two versions of the road, I used my graphic skills to create composite images highlighting the differences between the old and the new.

**Art and Exhibition: Procedure in Detail**

I located the original 1941 survey of the Natchez Road in LSU’s Middleton Library, housed in government documents.36 The images are fairly low resolution, in other words, they will not read well if simply enlarged to any extent (letter sized or larger). Therefore I scanned the images at 600dpi (dots per inch, sometimes ppi – pixels per inch) and used computing power to generate the missing information in the original images, by filling in dots (or pixels) where they
are missing. This allowed me to generate larger versions of the original images. While these are superior to a standard copy enlargement, they are no substitute for original large format photographs, and thus the quality does leave something to be desired.

Current National Park Service representations of the Natchez Trace Parkway are easily available for download from the official nps.gov website. The Natchez Trace Parkway home page has a link to photographs and multimedia, under which eighteen high resolution photographs are “public domain,” and thus freely available for download and use. In addition, there are four albums with public domain images of a slightly lower resolution, yet still high quality. In 2010, the National Park Service in collaboration with photographer Marc Muench created two more albums, copyrighted to National Park Service/Marc Muench. I requested and was granted permission to use these images in this dissertation. Thus, all of the contemporary images used for the composite artworks were sourced directly from the National Park Service.

I used Adobe Creative Suite software (Photoshop and Illustrator) to edit and merge the contrasting image sets. As mentioned earlier, although the images do not originate from the same sites, I matched them based on geographical features. For example, I highlighted changes in road surface and edge condition with two images from counties in Tennessee. Although the older image is from Williamson County and the contemporary one is from an unknown county (in Tennessee), both feature a sweeping downward curve in the road, a distant stream-bed crossing, and wooded hills in the distance. I took the liberty of photo editing where I saw fit to highlight changes in the landscape and provide commentary on the transformation of the Natchez Road. The results are shown in chapter five.
Data Driven Results

I conclude this chapter with a brief summation of my methodology before moving on to the results in chapter five. In order to evaluate the changes in images or, as della Dora calls them, traveling landscape objects over time, I identified four different types of study media. This includes illustrations and paintings, historic photographs, postcards, and digital images from the website flickr.com.

I searched for and found resources in each of these formats in various archives, including traditional or formal repositories, for example, LSU Libraries Special Collections and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. In addition I accessed informal archives through antique stores, gift shops, online marketplaces, and social media networks.

Following this, I catalogued and evaluated each found image in terms of the categories mentioned earlier in this chapter, including, among others: photographer, content, geographic location, mile marker, image quality, content, and so forth. This large database (selected samples shown in the Appendices) allowed me to create graphs, tables and maps, from which I could identify trends, similarities, differences, anomalies, and outliers that respond directly to my research questions. The resulting graphics are put forward in chapter five, with a discussion following in chapter six.

Endnotes


2 Maria Antonella Pelizzari, “Retracing the Outlines of Rome: Intertextuality and Imaginative Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Photographs,” in Picturing Place: Photography and the

3 Ibid, 72.


10 Sabine Wilke, “How German is the American West?” in Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 100 – 139.


13 James Taylor Carson, Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 15 – 19. The grammatically correct form of the word describing “Choctaws,” is in fact “Choctaw” (the tribe is singular).


19 United States National Park Service, *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Transmitting in Response to Senate Resolution No. 222, a Report of a Survey of the Old Indian Trail, Known as the Natchez Trace, Made by the Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, Pursuant to an Act Approved May 21, 1934, with a View to Constructing a National Road on this Route to be Known as the Natchez Trace Parkway* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1941).


24 Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing our Culture and Assaulting our Economy* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2007), 1 – 228.


32 Ibid, 92.


35 United States National Park Service, *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Transmitting in Response to Senate Resolution No. 222, a Report of a Survey of the Old Indian Trail, Known as the Natchez Trace, Made by the Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, Pursuant to an Act Approved May 21, 1934, with a View to Constructing a National Road on this Route to be Known as the Natchez Trace Parkway.*

36 Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE
RESULTS

Mapping and Making Traveling Landscape Objects

The physical landscape of federally owned land in America (including the Natchez Trace Parkway) has changed considerably over the last 150 years. The transformation of the old road into a National Park Service unit elevated its status as a cultural landscape and encouraged the visual documentation and representation thereof.\(^1\) Representations include all visual depictions of the road. The ability of images to move through space and time allows us to classify them as objects, or as della Dora terms them, “traveling landscape-objects.”\(^2\) Despite their changing media, and formats, traveling landscape-objects continue to hold on to many of the preconceived notions of what national parks should be.\(^3\)

The purpose of this study is to examine different types of landscape representations (or traveling landscape-objects), their changing mediums, content, and meaning in terms of preconceived ideas about national parks in America. According to the categories outlined in chapter four, I used a comparative analysis of each of the three image types to represent my findings as charts, maps, and diagrams.

Changing Content of Representations

Changing subject matter is central to the results of this study. I examined drawings and paintings, historic photographs, postcards, and online, digital photographs from flickr.com. Over time the results show, as we might expect, some similarities and also, some differences. Before I delve into the results of the data analyzed in the three main categories of historic photographs, postcards, and flickr.com images, I will briefly touch on the hand rendered depictions of the Natchez
Trace. All but one image (from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) derives from published literature, and thus, augmented written texts. Rudimentary depictions from Le Page du Pratz of Native Americans revealed little more than traditional dress, and hunting techniques, sans any landscape features. Drawings from Mark Twain’s work depict many a brawl, even murder, and an Indian trail, as shown in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Indian Trail.

Historical depictions of western travelers on the Trace are limited to those I found through the National Park Service. Paintings show groups of Kaintucks traveling together for safety. Some illustrations show scenes of highway robbery, for example the “stick up” (figure 5.2). Both scenes depict a pathway through fairly dense woods suggesting an untamed natural environment. Despite this, the focus of early drawings was more on people, culture, or society than on the landscape, a
shift from later representations that were influenced by the great American landscape painters and the ensuing establishment of the national parks idea as discussed in chapter two.\textsuperscript{8}

Figure 5.2: Highway Robbery Along the Natchez Trace Parkway. Image courtesy the National Park Service.\textsuperscript{9}

From 1900 onward, images across all of the three dominant media (historic photographs, postcards, and flickr.com images) predominantly represent the landscape (both cultural and physical). Within the scope of images that I classified as “landscape” (Table 5.1) there was a 50 percent drop off, between 1890 and 2011, of images representing the Natchez Trace road itself. On the other hand, there were significant increases (around four-fold) in representations depicting scenes of nature and culture.
Table 5.1 Content of images per media category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Historic Photographs (percent)</th>
<th>Postcards (percent)</th>
<th>Flickr images (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Road</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Parchitecture”</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historic photographs featured 66 percent images of the road itself (Table 5.2), followed by substantially fewer representing “parchitecture”\(^1\) (17 percent), nature (9 percent), and culture (8 percent). Postcards featured road images in 44 percent of the samples, 29 percent in parchitecture and a marked increase, up to 22 percent, in cultural content, most likely related to National Park Service attempts to promote parkway attractions, for example, the Tupelo Battlefield site shown (figure 5.3). Nature dropped to just 5 percent.

Figure 5.3 Brices Crossroads (Tupelo Battlefield Site). Image courtesy Mississippi Cities and Counties Postcards, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
Flickr images featured an even smaller percentage of the road, with only 32 percent of images showing the road at all. The category with the most photographs was Nature, with 40 percent. Cultural landscapes totaled 23 percent, and only 5 percent featured parchitecture. Although preference of image content has changed, the manner in which people use the images has changed dramatically. The availability of digital images was exponential compared to three-dimensional sources, as illustrated by table 5.1.

Table 5.2: Quantity of images used per media category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Representation</th>
<th>Number of Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drawings, Paintings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Photographs</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcards</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr images</td>
<td>901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Content and Cultural Icons**

This section examines the relationship between the content of images, and cultural landscape icons of the Natchez Trace Parkway. I was trying to find where photographers took the most pictures of specific features. The following figures illustrate my findings. Working with the three dominant media, we have three resulting diagrams: one each for historic photographs, postcards and flickr.com images. In addition to the location of each Natchez Trace Parkway image, each spherical reference point is sized according to the number of results found at that place.
The results show various trends (figure 5.4), with a large majority of the images originating from the extremities of the road, close to urban centers. In the case of historic photographs, we notice that the overwhelming majority of pictures (thirteen) were taken at Meriwether Lewis Gravesite (mile 385.9). This is followed by six images from the Ross Barnett reservoir site at 106 miles (close to Jackson, Mississippi), and then five at Natchez, Mississippi (only trace related images). Additional photographs were from Mount Locust (mile 15.5), Emerald Mound (mile 10.3), Jackson Falls (mile 345) and Sweetrock Branch picnic areas (mile 365), and in Tupelo (mile 266).

Figure 5.4: Location and Volume of Historic Photographs of the Natchez Trace. By the author (sample of raw data available in Appendix A).
Postcards were difficult to analyze, because tracking how many of each postcard was sold is an insurmountable task. Instead, I tabulated the number of postcards found representing each mile marker, as shown in figure 5.5 – the results show a majority of postcards (seven) featuring the Tupelo Battlefield Site (mile 266). Mount Locust (mile 15.5) featured in five, as was Natchez, Mississippi (mile 0). There was only one postcard of the reservoir, as opposed to its popularity as a photograph spot.

Figure 5.5: Location and Volume of Postcards of the Natchez Trace. By the author (sample of raw data available in Appendix B).
Additional hotspots for postcards were the Sunken Trace (mile 41.5), the Tupelo Visitor’s Center (mile 259.7), and the split rail fence (mile 410), with four postcards each. Also of interest is the Cypress Swamp postcard (mile 122), although only one version was published, it appeared in every collection I encountered, in online marketplaces, archives, and elsewhere (figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: Cypress Swamp. Image from the author’s personal postcard collection.

Flickr.com images of the Natchez Trace Parkway are plentiful, and in the public domain. This allowed me to create a much larger database than for my other media types. Drawing from data collected from over 900 images, figure 5.7 (next page) is possibly one of the most useful graphics found in my results. The most photographed landscape of the Natchez Trace (with sixty-nine images) was the double arch bridge at Birdsong Hollow (mile 429). Completed in 1994, the Birdsong Hollow Bridge is a new icon of the trace. Its late construction explains why there is no earlier record of it in postcards or historic photographs. Sixty-two flickr.com images originated at the
Cypress Swamp (mile 122); see the postcard in figure 5.6. Meriwether Lewis’ Gravesite (mile 385.9) made thirty-nine appearances, followed closely by Mount Locust (mile 15.5) with thirty-one. Natchez (mile 0), Port Gibson (mile 39), Fall Hollow, Gordon House, Water Valley Overlook and Leiper’s fork each had eighteen to twenty images. In the cases of Port Gibson and Leipers Fork, the number of users posting these images was five or less, meaning that few users had posted multiple photographs of one spot, skewing the overall statistics.

Figure 5.7 Location and Volume of Flickr images of the Natchez Trace. By the author (sample of raw data available in Appendix C).
Means of Travel and Meaning

A limited number of postcards feature postmarks and include personal texts or messages. Most messages were fairly banal, featuring commentary on the weather, future destinations, travel snippets, and other personal news. Some are written, but never mailed. A message inscribed on the backside of one postcard (and shown in Figure 5.8 and 5.9) stood out from the rest. Mailed from Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1965 and addressed to a couple in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the card, featuring an image of a stream and signboard at Metal Ford, reads, “We were here yesterday. I took a picture similar to this….”

Figure 5.8: Metal Ford. Image from the author’s personal postcard collection.
Figure 5.9: Backside inscription. Image from the author’s personal postcard collection.

The original postcard image of Metal Ford is unremarkable in quality, composition, and lighting. Despite this, the author perceived it as important enough to photograph, and then mention on the postcard of the same scene. Unfortunately I do not know whether the postcard was purchased before or after the photograph was taken, however, there is no denying that this author perceived the place as more important after seeing it in a postcard representation. Thus, the medium of the postcard increased the meaning of the image, making it more powerful as a traveling landscape object.

How then do contemporary, digital images travel, other than by multimedia message? To investigate the effectiveness of digital message sending, I tested a new smartphone application that uses digital images to send an actual postcard in the mail. “Postagram” mailed a postcard to my
home address. It was incredibly easy to use, by clicking on, and adding photographs from albums, or text by typing, as shown below in figure 5.10.

![Create Postagram](image)

Figure 5.10: Screenshot. Image by the author.

**Role in Non-Representational Arenas**

Figure 5.11 shows the number of flickr.com users uploading images of each site. The images were not necessarily uploaded on location at these sites, but the map shown geo-references the location where the image was taken. Thirty-two users uploaded images from the Highway 96 Bridge at Birdsong Hollow, followed by twenty individual users at the Cypress Swamp, thirteen at Mount
Locust and Meriwether Lewis’ grave site.

Eleven images were uploaded of Colberts Ferry, ten each of Ross Barnett Reservoir, Fall Hollow, and Gordon House.

Figure 5.11: Users Uploading Images of Each Site. By the author (sample of raw data in Appendix C).
According to National Park Service statistics, the Natchez Trace Parkway is the eighth most visited park in the United States.\textsuperscript{11} Vehicle count statistics from the National Park Service are only available at a limited number of mile markers, and not at each specific stopping point along the road (figure 5.12). Interestingly, the highest numbers of people in vehicles experience the Parkway at Ridgeland (four million in 2014), and at Tupelo (3 million in 2014). Much smaller numbers occur at Nashville, Cherokee, Kosciusko, and Port Gibson.\textsuperscript{12} This is important because the National Park Service statistics on visitor numbers do not correspond with the findings in figures 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, and 5.11 (this is further illustrated in figure 5.13, and discussed in chapter six).

Figure 5.12: National Park Service Visitor Statistics. By the author.
Natchez Trace Parkway statistics from 2012 showed a total of 14.5 million visitors. Nine million of these were commuters, and 5.5 million were recreational visitors. Figure 5.12, although somewhat skewed by commuter numbers (potentially being counted twice or more each day, for example, a parent passes the same counter four times in one day, as they ferry a child to and from school), reveals a pattern very different than that shown in figure 5.11.

Figure 5.13 (left) shows the data from figure 5.12 represented in the same graphic format as used before.
Frequency and Quality of Representations: Virtual Postcards

The following graphs compare my findings with regard to the image quality and frequency of photographs against postcards, and digital flickr.com images. To recap, my fourth research question asks whether the ease of sharing, texting and posting has influenced the quality of traveling images. Figures 5.14, 5.15, and 5.16 show the quality of historic photograph, postcard, and flickr.com images, based on clarity, composition, and content. Using my own judgment, the ratings are unavoidably subjective. However, as the same subjectivity was applied to all sets of images, and the results show interesting trends, I deemed this category of investigation as worthwhile to include.

Figure 5.14: Quality of Natchez Trace Photographs as Determined by the Author (sample of raw data and image quality assessment available in Appendices A and D).
Photographs of the Natchez Trace Parkway were generally of average quality, or above, this is possibly due to their location in the archives and/or decisions to archive only the best photographs (figure 5.14). Not surprisingly, many of the photographs I found were from professional studios (such as the Norman Studio in Natchez), or from professional photographers deployed as part of New Deal projects such as the Works Project Administration or Civilian Conservation Corps. Five photographs were below average, twenty-five were average, and fifty-two were above, or far above average.

Figure 5.15: Quality of Postcard Images as Determined by the Author (sample of raw data and image quality assessment available in Appendices B and D).
One would expect to find similar results from postcard shots (figure 5.15). It would seem sensible to produce postcards from only the best photographs or artwork. None were below average, but interestingly none were excellent either. The same photographers took a number of the postcard images; Hubert Lowman took fifteen photographs for Deep South Specialties, and Gilbert Ford took five. Not all the postcards credited the photographer, twenty of those I found are from unknown sources, and five more were simply attributed to the National Park Service, but no specific photographer.

Figure 5.16: Quality of Flickr.com as Determined by the Author (sample of raw data and image quality assessment available in Appendices C and D).
The majority of flickr.com images (figure 5.16) scored a four or five on a scale of one to seven (where one is worst and seven is best). One-hundred-and-fifty-five images fell into categories one, two, and three. These are below average, and in my opinion, considered unfit for sharing, meaning that if they were my own I would have discarded or at least omitted them from my online album.

**Changing Landscapes**

As the final part of my research methodology, I examined images of the Trace before formal, continuous construction, and juxtaposed these original images against contemporary images of the Natchez Trace Parkway, creating composite storyboards. The pre-construction images I used derived from the initial Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. For consistency, I again used National Park Service images (public domain) from the nps.gov website as the contemporary element in my investigation, matching locations or mile markers of the before and after images wherever possible (figure 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20, 5.21). Although I sourced all of the images from the National Park Service, it should be noted that the comparative images are not of the same sites. Instead, I matched old and new based on geographical features: county, physical landscape (such as a stream crossing), vegetation, scale, gradient of the road, and curvature of the road.

Obvious results visible in these composite images include differences in road surface, formality, width, and signage. More subtle differences allude to changes in atmosphere; the Trace morphed from an adventuresome backwoods trail to nothing short of a highway.
Figure 5.17: Old and New Road Surface and Edges. By the author.  

Figure 5.18: Old and New Creek Crossing. By the author.
Figure 5.19: Old and New Road Edges. By the author.\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 5.20: Old and New Abandoned Trace. By the author.\textsuperscript{19}
The resulting graphic comparisons reveal the considerable changes undergone by the Natchez Road landscape since 1942. I included these here to reiterate the idea that visual media is a powerful tool. The beautifully composed, professional images from 2014 sell the Natchez Trace Parkway as a serene and leisurely landscape featuring sweeping roads and manicured edges. The images from the 1942 survey tell a different story; weary travelers on foot or horseback, washed out stream crossings, rough roads, and eroding verges all communicate a landscape that is much more difficult for people to travel. Comparing these images of the old and new allowed me to interpret the landscape through my own visual lens in order to better understand the pathway as it was pre-construction.

I discuss these results further in chapter six. An exhibition of these five images, along with interpretive information on the changing landscape of the Natchez Trace Parkway (figure 5.22),
featured in the Design Building atrium, College of Art and Design, Louisiana State University in March and April 2015.

Although certain categories (nature, parchitecture, or culture) have increased or decreased with changes in media, depictions of the road are the most obvious to track, because the Trace, after all, is the centerpiece of this entire national park.

Figure 5.22: 1942/2014: Landscape Change Along the Natchez Road. By the author.

Endnotes


6 Although these images of the Trace are from the National Park Service, they depict a time period before designation as a national park.


9 National Park Service, “People.”

10 “Parchitecture” is a term I use to describe the architecture of national parks. It includes National Park Service signage, entrance gateways, information boards with text hewn out of wooden planks, benches, stone masonry, overlooks and anything built in the typical National Park Service rustic style.


13 Ibid.

14 United States National Park Service, *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Transmitting in Response to Senate Resolution No. 222, a Report of a Survey of the Old Indian Trail, Known as the Natchez Trace, Made by the Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, Pursuant to an Act Approved May 21, 1934, with a View to Constructing a National Road on this Route to be Known as the Natchez Trace Parkway* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1941).

16 See endnotes 12 and 13.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.
CHAPTER SIX
REPRESENTING ICONS

Embracing Changes in Representation

Over time the content of Natchez Trace images has changed. Based on the categories established in chapter four and the results shown in chapter five, the way that the National Park Service depicts the road is the most significant change in Natchez Trace Parkway representations. Early, hand-rendered, representations of the Trace depict daily events and conditions along the road. Some drawings feature taverns, roadside inns, and many feature bar fights, fireside brawls, and murders, all of which were certainly popular themes in period literature set in the Trace region.¹

Some, although far fewer, drawings depict travelers on a pathway (the Trace, shown in figures 5.1 and 5.2), embarking on a hunt, or making the return journey from Natchez to the north. As was typical of the time, scholars used visual representations to record events and augment written descriptions.

Landscape drawing or painting in America was fairly limited and unusual at the time, and occurred mostly in western landscapes considered subliminal, or excessively grand,² for example the works of Bierstadt, as discussed in chapter two. Other visual landscape records include those of Henry Howe, who sketched illustrations of selected Ohio towns in the 1840s, and again in the 1880s. These records of built spaces are valuable historic artifacts, despite Howe’s use of artistic license to exclude certain non-symmetrical or out-of-place elements of the built environment.³ In addition, cartographers had been preparing county atlases since 1848; these volumes featured “landownership, local topography, and selected artists’ views of individual land holdings.”⁴ One such example is that of Alfred T. Andreas, who published state and county atlases of the
Midwest from 1869 – 1882. Andreas included landscape features such as rivers, woodlands, swamps, bluffs, hills and other local topography, however, his focus was on the cultural landscape as altered or “improved” by humans. He included property ownership on maps and illustrated the landscape of farmsteads and smallholdings for an additional fee.⁵ The efforts of Howe, Andreas, and others who sketched the American landscape during the nineteenth century provide valuable records of visual America. The work of these artists set a precedent that landscape illustration made a valuable contribution to society; landowners paid Andreas to record their farms or smallholdings and publish them in his atlases.⁶ These, and other published illustrations served as a precursor to landscape painting in the American west. As previously mentioned, some of the landscapes painted by Bierstadt and his contemporaries were recognized for their scenic beauty, and potential as recreational areas and set aside for preservation.

Historic photographs (taken between 1900 and 1966) generally feature the road itself. Perhaps this relates to the idea of “automobile tourism,” and the idea of driving as a leisure activity, a driving force for the establishment of the Natchez Trace as a Parkway.⁷ My sample of historic photographs also included a large number of images from the 1955 Department of Conservation project that documented the road, potentially skewing the results. However, all things considered, even without the road documentation project, the majority, albeit by a slim margin, still feature the roadway (paved or unpaved) as their central subject matter.

Postcards published by a number of different sources and sold at visitor’s centers and country stores, by comparison, featured fewer images of the road itself; it was the centerpiece in just forty-four percent of postcards. The postcard era (1940 – 1990), relates to the era of the tourist, and the emergence of leisure tourism for the American masses.⁸ Thus it is no surprise that the results show a substantial increase in the number of postcard images featuring culture and
parchitecture. Changes in the content or subject matter of postcard images can tell us about changing opinions of a place. This is particularly true for tourism marketing and promotion as the tourist is the primary audience of a postcard image.  

As mentioned in chapter five, the National Park Service used postcards to showcase attractions, and cultural icons, along the Natchez Trace Parkway. I discuss the significance of specific cultural icons in the next section of this chapter, however at this point it is necessary to mention specific phenomena relating only to postcards. Amongst the postcards found was a set of pastoral scenes featuring “living history,” demonstrations at Mount Locust, Mississippi and Kosciusko, Mississippi. These include making sorghum, hewing a horse trough, outdoor cooking, and straining sorghum, all at Mount Locust, Mississippi. Although these postcards do not feature cultural icons, they align with the National Park Service branding of the Natchez Trace as an “historic parkway.”

Other postcards featuring parchitecture often include a park ranger, or tourist, standing at an informational signboard. Stepping back for a moment, and contemplating the Grand Canyon postcards examined by Youngs, not a single representation shows us a signboard explaining the natural phenomenon; Grand Canyon postcards show us the grand hotel or simply the canyon!  

This might imply that the Natchez Trace lacks worthwhile scenery, which is not at all true, but it reveals something of what the National Park Service considers most valuable about the parkway: the historical wealth. Organized stopping points along the road are considered more attractive than the scenic drive itself. This aligns with the notion that the Blue Ridge Parkway was built for its scenic beauty and the Natchez Trace was built as an historic parkway.

Flickr.com images are in my opinion the most interesting group because they are unfiltered; anyone can upload any image and tag it as part of a group, in this case, “Natchez
Trace Parkway,” and “Along the Natchez Trace Parkway.” Thus, a greater variety of images exists within these groups, as visitors post any and (some) all of their images on the website for all to see. Some users are discerning, posting two or three high quality images, while some appear to batch upload as many as twenty images of varying quality. At this point however, I am only concerned with the content of the flickr.com images.

Images of “the road” were still prominent, but keep in mind that this includes any and all images of the road, including bridges. The 32 percent featuring the road includes the double arch concrete bridge at Birdsong Hollow, arguably one of the foremost attractions of the contemporary Natchez Trace, and featured in sixty-nine flickr.com images. The largest increase in content was in the “nature” category, which increased eightfold from relative historic photograph and postcard percentages. Considering the original time periods, this makes perfect sense. As I mentioned much earlier, the environmental movement in America became far more prominent in the second half of the twentieth century, as music, art and literature such as Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*, and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* began to influence public perception on a national scale, and alter societal values toward natural resources. It is no surprise, therefore, to see users posting images of spider webs, beautiful flowers, and fall colors in these online groups. A large component of this group is the thirty-nine images of the Cypress Swamp, another newer attraction along the road.

Cultural images include landscapes such as tobacco drying barns, hayfields, churches, cemeteries, and heritage sites. There was no marked increase in the percentage of cultural content from postcards to flickr.com images, however I did notice an increase in the variety and types of cultural landscapes, stretching beyond the formalized heritage sites featured in
postcards, and into more abstract representations of culture, for example the grave of an
unknown soldier, or a derelict building or cemetery.

Parchitecture images on flickr.com dropped down to its lowest value of the three (being
historic photographs, postcards, and flickr.com images). Frankly this does not surprise me, I
cannot imagine why visitors take pictures of the brown, standard issue information boards, or of
the Visitor’s Center. Nevertheless, it is apparent that people continue to do so. When questioned
on this practice, one user “Tiegs” replied of his or her desire to mark the occasion and obtain
proof of being at the historic site (in this case, the Meriwether Lewis gravesite). This
corroborates Bednar’s theory on embodied interaction, explored in chapter two. The American
tourist wants proof of his or her physical occupation of iconic landscapes.14

Forty-five images included some form of National Park Service construction, or signage.
Notable in that number were images featuring gateway signage at entrance and exit points, or
well-visited site-specific signs relating to historical features, for example the information sign at
Meriwether Lewis’ grave.

The medium of representation has changed, as has the content. There is more focus on
nature, less on the road itself. Changes in mediums have allowed a greater diversity of images to
be captured. We cannot be sure what users would photograph if they were limited to one image
of the Natchez Trace Parkway, I for one, would photograph the road, but the freedom of digital
media has created a paradigm shift in the way people capture images and how they are
distributed. The sheer number of flickr.com images as compared to historic photographs and
postcards is indicative of this shift; the ready access of the cellphone camera and seemingly
limitless storage capacity means tourists take a great deal more photographs than they used to.
Tourists are also more spontaneous and carefree with their picture taking, as poor quality or unwanted images are easy for users to erase.  

Perhaps the National Park Service was overly zealous with the multitude of postcards featuring “parchitecture.” Despite this, “parchitecture” postcards are bought and mailed, kept as keepsakes, or given as mementoes, thus considered of some value to those who purchase them. It is possible that the lack of recognizable landscape icons for the Natchez Trace Parkway prompted the National Park Service to use “parchitecture” as a means to identify place. As I reflect on what previous generations sought to document and keep, I wonder what the next generation of visitors will choose to capture and how? If three-dimensional representations become commonplace, visitors might print tiny three-dimensional vignettes of parkway landscapes. Alternatively, GoogleEarth (the earth imaging software) or real-time web cameras might allow users to visit any place in real-time. This has the potential to leave us with no need to capture places for our own records, as a record is continuously available through the world-wide-web. However, people still have the desire to hold on to physical mementoes. I argue, and I think della Dora would agree that tactile objects still hold appeal for travelers. People like to take paraphernalia home as travel keepsakes to store and revisit at a later time. Thus if the two-dimensional or even digital image has served its purpose and is no longer considered valuable, other, less common traveling landscape-objects will surely take its place.

**Significance of Icons**

The official logo of the Natchez Trace Parkway is a round icon featuring a *Kaintuck* mounted on horseback. The official webpage from the National Park Service features a banner image of a curving road with some fall color. Based on my investigation of photographs,
postcards and digital images found on flickr.com, and the diagrams shown in chapter five, I shall now discuss how the cultural icons put forth by the National Park Service differ from the icons chosen by visitors to the Parkway. As explained in chapter five, there are three diagrams illustrating the location and volume of images of the Natchez Trace Parkway, one diagram for each of the three predominant media types: historic photographs, postcards, and flickr.com images. These are shown in chapter five, figures 5.4, 5.5 and 5.7.

A comparison of the three images reveal a number of trends, the most obvious being that the majority of representations feature the end points of the road (near Natchez, Mississippi or Nashville, Tennessee), or are close to major urban areas (for example, Jackson, Mississippi). The reasons for this could be related to a number of things: day-trippers not venturing beyond an hour or two out of the city, or travelers being excited, and “snap-happy” at the start of their trip, and losing interest as the long road winds on and on. The second broad trend is the difference between historic photographs and flickr.com images versus postcards. Photographs (whether historic or contemporary) feature a large number of images taken at the Meriwether Lewis gravesite (thirteen historic photographs and thirty-nine flickr.com images), yet only one postcard. This seems odd considering that seven different postcards were produced of the Tupelo Battlefield Site alone. The National Park Service did not publish all of the postcards, however, the large majority feature the round Natchez Trace Parkway logo of the mounted Kaintuck and a brown shield indicating some type of National Park Service approval. It is unclear why publishers overlooked the Grinder’s House and grave of Meriwether Lewis as postcard opportunities – perhaps the grave was considered too somber a landscape for the frivolity of a late twentieth century postcard.¹⁹
On the whole, image hotspots tend to hover around stopping points highlighted along the Natchez Trace Parkway – mostly convenient and well signposted pull off areas designated as noteworthy on visitor maps and guides produced by the National Park Service. The construction and design of “noteworthy” areas, inform, and to an extent control the visitor experience. Visitors are instructed where to pull over, where to stop, what to look at, and so forth. Although stopping at other points is not prohibited, it is difficult in some places. In a similar vein, certain stopping points feature much larger, more prominent signage than others. For example, the Meriwether Lewis site, featuring the Grinder House and his grave marker, has multiple approach signs, a large site sign, a significant entrance driveway, a tourist information center, restrooms and ranger station. In contrast, the Napier Mine site has only a single approach sign, indicating a stopping point at half-a-mile ahead, the turn off itself is unremarkable. Most tourists, unless specifically looking for this site on a map or guide, skip most of the smaller stopping points, and the results shown in the diagrams in chapter five reflect this phenomenon. Out of over 900 flickr.com images posted to the Natchez Trace groups, thirty-nine were of the Meriwether Lewis site, yet only one was of the Napier Mine site!

The phenomenon revealed in this result builds on the literature discussed earlier, particularly that of Dilsaver, Carr, Tschida, and Patin. These scholars explore how the National Park Service, through selective interpretive and physical design directives, directs visitor experience in the national parks. The creation of a convenient, well-marked parking area, paired with a structured walking path to an overlook or attraction, ensures greater visitor numbers. The National Park Service through a lack of infrastructure, for example, minimal signage, an unpaved road, and no restroom facilities, can protect delicate or threatened areas. Alternatively, the National Park Service uses indirect controls to limit crowd numbers and environmental impacts.
For example, at Muir Woods National Monument in California, parking is limited, no camping or picnicking is allowed, and visitors are restricted to a paved path lined with fences.

These types of controls alter the visitor experience into something less spontaneous and more museum-like. This might seem somewhat obvious, even trivial, but it matters because the majority of visitors are unaware of their guided experiences, or that their visual experience is controlled through a visual rhetoric that they do not even know exists. Considering this, if the National Park Service can control visitor numbers in certain places, it would seem possible that the representative landscapes chosen by the National Park Service as icons of the park, would also be the most photographed (as recognized icons).

The data reveals that this is not so. The most photographed icon of the Natchez Trace (based on the flickr.com images) is the Highway 96 Bridge at Birdsong Hollow. Completed in 1994, the concrete, double arched bridge is the first segmentally constructed concrete arch bridge in America. The bridge has won multiple design awards, and the attention of the public; flickr.com users uploaded sixty-nine images of the bridge to the two groups that I studied, making it the most popular feature along the Natchez Trace. In 2015, this could be considered the most iconic of the landscape features in the park; it is a symbol of the park — one that people recognize as specific to the Natchez Trace Parkway, and identify with.

The second most photographed attraction, with sixty-two images was the Cypress Swamp at mile marker 122. The swamp is proximate to Jackson, Mississippi, but does not feature in any of the official Natchez Trace Parkway website galleries, or even in brochures. It did, however, feature as a favorite postcard in my search for representational objects. Although only one image of the swamp ever showed up in postcard form, it was the postcard I came across the most. It featured in almost every archival collection, appeared multiple times in every eBay search, and
showed up in found collections at antique stores, and flea markets. The Lewis gravesite (thirty-nine) and Mount Locust (thirty-two) were the next two most featured of the flickr.com images, predictable due to their design and intended function as visitor hotspots. Aside from these four places, no location featured in more than twenty images.

From my findings, it is clear that the Highway 96 Bridge and the Cypress Swamp are the most prominent icons of the Natchez Trace Parkway. However, the National Park Service has not capitalized on their prominence in social media, nor employed the repetitive use of them in promotional material. Neither of these places display a strong reference to the historical narrative set out by the National Park Service, and thus, may be passed over as irrelevant. Historical narrative and National Park Service acknowledgement (or lack thereof) aside, it is clear that these two sites are the contemporary icons of the Natchez Trace, and as such, hold value and meaning for those visitors who chose to record their encounters at these places.

This is unfortunate, as the physically challenging landscapes presented at each, allow us to imagine the experience of traveling the historic road through difficult terrain. Visitors might gain a heightened appreciation for the difficulties of travel in the early days. Travelers took circuitous routes to avoid the pitfalls of swampy lowlands, instead staying on the high ground through central Mississippi. Old roads tend to stick to ridges, and avoid river crossings in order to maximize access and minimize the expense of bridging waterways. Further north, arduous ridges and valleys slowed progress, particularly where valleys featured deep gorges or wide rivers, such as the Duck, Tennessee, and Harpeth rivers, along with many smaller creeks, and seasonal waterways.

The original Trace experience was vastly different than that of the modern tourist. A study of historic roadways and paths by Karl Raitz and Nancy O’Malley confirms that old roads “favored dry uplands and avoided steep slopes and boggy bottomland.” It also
determined that new construction tends to follow original routes, as influenced by the cultural and economic factors that established the early road in the first place.26

Although routes might follow the same high ground, an easy fifty-five miles-per-hour in the closed capsule of a vehicle presents none of the challenges (real or perceived) of the original users. Non-representational theorists would agree, and perhaps relish the opportunity to experience the place as a person on foot, through lived experience, instead of in a closed vehicle or from a guidebook. On a personal note, the Trace was very different as experienced from my bicycle, riding through the February sleet in slightly above freezing temperatures, than it was from the confines of a vehicle, sipping hot coffee carried out from the ranger station. While I can vouch for the more comfortable option, I have much clearer, vivid memories of my exposed, and fragile state on the slick road as I crossed the Tennessee-Tombigbee waterway by bicycle. I do not remember nearly as much from the inside of the car, perhaps because the longer periods of time compress in my memory, or simply because the experience inside a closed vehicle was not as memorable as the icy wind biting my fingers and toes.

**Tactile Quality**

The collected historic photographs I studied were mostly commercial in nature. They circulated in magazine or journal articles, appeared in newspapers, historic books, or were part of a government-funded program. All of these outlets are considered (by a general audience) as truthful, accurate media sources. They are a reliable record of the Natchez Trace Parkway, and their value to society is high because they are perceived as 100 percent accurate. Incidentally, a digital photograph taken by a semi-skilled photographer, and uploaded to flickr.com in 2011, does not hold that same value, only because of the media outlet through which it is distributed. One could argue that there is no real difference between John Swain’s 1905 snapshots27 and a set
of snapshots uploaded to flickr.com, except than their format. Perhaps a modern day Swain might have uploaded his images to flickr.com and written about their origins alongside in the comments section. Theoretically, this is possible, however, because Swain’s images were published, they are worth more, in academic value and as historical records.

A lack of auditing on flickr.com means that images can be digitally re-mastered, or altered. However, even if they are not altered, the media through which they travel does not hold the same authority as published work, simply because flickr.com is unrestricted, and unmonitored in terms of factual representation standards.

One aspect of flickr.com images that particularly interests me is the view counter. It is possible to see how many other flickr.com users viewed any one image, suggesting favorites, popularity or preferred images. Flickr.com users are able to share albums or photographs with friends and family. This might bias the view counter toward those users who share their albums with a large number of people, but there is no literature to support this theory. The number of views per image does not appear to correspond to the quality of the image, but more to the number of groups that image is tagged in, allowing that image to appear in more search results and on more screens. For example, a beautiful image (well composed, clear, and focused) of the Natchez Trace Parkway at the Ross Barnett Reservoir by flickr.com user “giessengerk,” has just seventeen views. In contrast, a non-specific, albeit enthralling night sky image of Scorpio and the Milky Way, taken by flickr.com user “Tim_Weber,” has 1019 views. The night sky, although a beautiful image, is tagged in eight groups, and the aerial shot tagged in only one. The night sky, having substantially more views, is far more likely to appear in search results for “Natchez Trace Parkway” than the more relevant photograph of the reservoir. This is another reason flickr.com might be deemed less reliable as an information source.
Postcard authenticity lies somewhere in the middle ground, perceived as closer to published images in newspapers and journals, however postcards are also edited for content. Postcards are more than just single sided visual representations. They are printed on two sides, an image on front; the back features lines for an address and space for a stamp. On occasion, they incorporate a brief blurb on the content, location, or history of the front side image. The postcards I collected were for the most part produced, or published by the National Park Service itself. Many of these incorporate a shield, such as the one in figure 5.3, containing the Natchez Trace parkway logo. The presence of the National Park Service element on these postcards changes their dynamic. The postcards contain the National Park Service stamp of approval, and are thus considered informational, reliable, and truthful forms of media. However, their content is carefully chosen, cropped, and altered to produce a marketable image for each card. When issued by the National Park Service, postcards join in as part of the promotional media which influences and guides visitors, and their actions, while visiting a national park.

Postcards are difficult to track, from point of purchase to recipient, if indeed the postcard is mailed. A small number of the postcards I collected featured addresses and postmarks, however, the majority of them were blank, implying their purchase as tourist keepsakes, stored, and eventually traded. As mentioned earlier, Arreola explains that many tourists buy postcards as keepsakes with no intention of mailing them and this is the reason that so many collectible postcards are blank. Most mailed postcards get stored away, thrown out after a stint on the fridge, or lost in home moving. They do not, as a general rule of thumb, hold as much value for the addressee as they do for the person who purchased and on occasion mailed them. However, postcard recipients are still influenced by images they receive in the mail; in addition to their role as mementoes, postcards can also be driver for tourist behavior, encouraging people to physically
visit a place or landscape icon. There is no fathomable way to uncover how many postcards of the Natchez Trace Parkway got mailed, kept or collected, nor a means to track where they were mailed from, or to whom they were sent. We know that people like buying, sending and receiving postcards and thus, they have value as traveling landscape-objects.

The ease of sharing and storing digital images means that there is less motivation to create, and take care of actual objects. While images can travel from place to place in a digital sense, their value as traveling landscape-objects is diminished, compared to that of a physical object. Today, far fewer people buy and mail postcards than in years past. While this implies that physical image/objects have decreased in value, it may also have the opposite effect. Postcards are now a rarity, and thus, when received, it is possible that they hold more value for the recipient than in years gone by.

Evidence of this value, is the emergence of smartphone applications that allow users to send physical postcards from a smartphone or tablet. This reiterates that there is perceived value in receiving an actual object in the mail (as opposed to a text message with a photograph attached). One such application is “Postagram,” a free smartphone app that allows one to take or choose an image from either an existing album or another “app” (such as Facebook or Instagram), add a personal message and “mail” it for $0.99. In the United States, physical postcards arrive within two to five days. International mail (rates vary) takes anywhere up to two months (as in my experience mailing a Postagram card to South Africa). In some cases, this is cheaper than a sleek postcard, and in most cases a whole lot more convenient. I have bought, written, addressed, and stamped postcards so many times, only to find myself incapable of locating a mailbox for the remainder of my trip. The postcards return home in my daypack, mailed (if at all) from Baton Rouge. Postagram allows users to send postcards immediately, from
the top of a mountain, or a backyard, without needing a stamp and a mailbox. Although not handwritten, the image content is more personal, and unique, in that any image can be sent, and one is not limited to the five or ten images produced by the traditional postcard publisher.

I tested the efficacy of “Postagram,” by sending a “postcard” from the Natchez Trace Parkway to my home address (figure 6.1). The application was incredibly easy to use and the postcard arrived within six days. The photograph part of the card can be popped out (as shown) and kept (a copy of the personal message is repeated on the back side). Incidentally I chose one of the modern icons of the Trace for my image, the Highway 96 Bridge at Birdsong Hollow, Tennessee.

![Postcard Image]

Figure 6.1: “Postagram.” By the author.
The success of such applications lies in their ability to work on both digital and analog platforms. This approach employs the best of both technologies: capturing the image, typing a message, and even purchasing happens on a mobile device from the convenience of just about anywhere with cellphone coverage. Production of the object, including graphic layout, printing of the image, and placing in the mail happens in San Francisco (according to the postmark on my self-send test). The resulting traveling landscape-object arrives in the intended mailbox as a personalized item, an object with tactile quality that can be held between fingers and placed on the refrigerator. The result is the best of both worlds; total convenience for the postcard sender who manufactures the object in digital form, and a tactile object for the recipient. This matters because it suggests that there is still a place for the traveling landscape-object in a digital world and that people still like receiving physical mail. Users might store all of their images on a cloud-based server, but there is still a desire to communicate in a tactile way, as evidenced by the emergence and growth of apps like Postagram.

The Image Versus Experience

Although figure 5.7 may look similar to figure 5.11 showing us how many flickr.com images were uploaded of certain tourist stops along the Natchez Trace Parkway, figure 5.11 instead shows us how many users uploaded images from each of the prominent stops along the trace. This is important because it displays a more accurate reflection of how many users experienced each place as a photographer. The earlier diagram highlighted the most photographed locations, but in this instance, we are interested in how many people experienced each stopping point. As there is no National Park Service data to support how many people stopped at each of these specific mile markers, I have used the data I collected via flickr.com and
analyzed how many people took pictures at the various stopping points. While this does not represent every traveler who stopped there, it does suggest a trend in the places that travelers experienced.

The highest number of individual users (thirty-two in total) uploaded images of the Highway 96 Bridge at Birdsong Hollow. This is consistent with the total number of images uploaded, and confirms this as one of the most recognized and popular places on the contemporary parkway. Second in popularity, again confirming the data discussed earlier, was the Cypress Swamp with twenty users. Third and forth, once again confirming earlier data was Meriwether Lewis’ gravesite and Mount Locust, with thirteen users at each. Although the data correlates to the number of images uploaded via flickr.com, the numbers are much smaller. As a general observation, images uploaded for each location amounted to triple the number of flickr.com users. As an example, for Meriwether Lewis’ Gravesite, thirteen users uploaded thirty-nine images. For the Highway 96 Bridge, thirty-two users uploaded sixty-nine images, and for the Cypress Swamp twenty users uploaded sixty-two images.

The only outliers were Colbert’s Ferry, where eleven users uploaded eleven images, and Ross Barnett Reservoir, where ten users uploaded thirteen images. Both stopping points are easily recognizable and visible from the parkway itself (unlike others where a small sign points to an off-Trace stopping point), both have good proximity to water, feature a picnic area, and view of a large body of water.

In order to ratify the user numbers and locations revealed by flickr.com, I analyzed data from National Park Service vehicle count statistics for the Natchez Trace Parkway. The resulting chart (figure 5.12) portrays a different scenario than figure 5.11 (I created figure 5.13 to achieve the same graphic layout of figure 5.11, but using the data from the chart in figure 5.12). The most
obvious discrepancy is that of the commuter numbers at Ridgeland (near Jackson, Mississippi), and Tupelo, Mississippi. As previously mentioned, commuter vehicles are sometimes counted twice or more during any one day. Interestingly enough, the lowest number of vehicles counted was at Nashville, Tennessee, contradicting my previous comment related to day-trippers accounting for the majority of flickr.com images originating close to population centers. The denser road network closer to Nashville might account for lower numbers of visitors entering the Trace via the official northern gateway, omitting them from counts as they enter and exit the Trace via one of the other major roads.

Unfortunately, the National Park Service does not have any studies analyzing different types of visitor use along the Natchez Trace Parkway. The length of the park, multiple entry and exit points, its use as a commuter route, and unstaffed visitor attractions make it difficult to monitor visitor numbers and activity types. While vehicle counts tabulate vehicle numbers, they do not reveal any clues relating to the number, or behavior of, the visitor(s) inside counted vehicles. It is difficult to say whether the visitors had the windows rolled down, listening to sounds, and experiencing the fresh air, or if they were using the Trace as a commuter route and did not see past their morning coffee. Similarly, it is incredibly difficult to measure the value of, and role of postcards, photographs and mementoes simply by looking at the number of users uploading images. However, through this information, we gain (at least) a contemporary understanding of the favored visitor places to experience. While we do not know which of these places is most treasured in memory, it would follow that the most popular stopping points would be the places most remembered, talked about, and shared, be it via digital or analog means.34

Although online groups, albums, and social media repositories store uploaded images, there is growing concern over a lack of privacy in online environments.35 Sharing Natchez Trace
landscape imagery may not be a privacy concern, however, family photographs or photographs featuring children or individuals are not as suitable for the public realm. My data revealed that out of the 484 flickr.com landscape images of the Natchez Trace, only four images featured people. This indicates a missing element in the cultural landscape, that of people, or in this case, tourists. An almost complete lack of people diminishes the value of this online Natchez Trace Parkway record. Natchez Trace Parkway photographs and postcards feature humans in certain cases as part of the cultural landscape, for example, three postcards featured re-enactments of pastoral activities, or living history demonstrations (figure 6.2), three more featured people standing next to, or pointing at signage, and two showed a man on horseback.

Figure 6.2: Living History Demonstration at the Tupelo Visitor Center. By the author.

Human beings are an intrinsic part of all national park landscapes, and along with automobiles, are a cultural feature of the Natchez Trace Parkway. The lack of humans across almost all flickr.com representations of the Natchez Trace Parkway landscape is yet another example of how users perceive an ideal national park image. The lack of beings in National Park representation distorts reality. Most images are devoid of people, yet many park visitors in
fact report overcrowding, overflowing parking areas, noisy park accommodations, and stressful park experiences.\textsuperscript{37}

Non-representational theorists might argue that the flickr.com images I examined are so unrealistic, that they hold almost no value. Instead, they would be interested in figure 5.11, and the visitor experience. Some might argue that the most valuable of all the pieces collected is John Swain’s journal article published in \textit{Everybody’s Magazine}. Swain talks of the rough road, the navigation issues, the smell of the air, and the local people he encounters.\textsuperscript{38} His account of a lived experience reveals a more accurate evaluation of the landscape than most images ever could. Swain’s piece is not unlike that of John Wylie’s “A single day’s walking,” as mentioned in chapter two. Wylie uses this article to investigate the relationship between landscape and self, but also highlights encounters with others, feelings of anxiety, and pain. Wylie also describes moments of what he terms, “visual epiphany,” and while the focus of the article is on non-representational theory, it should be noted that Wylie did include images from the day’s walk in this article.\textsuperscript{39} While I agree with non-representational theorists on the value of lived experience, and the conveyance thereof, I argue that there is still a place for the image, particularly in the case of the traveling landscape-object.

Enamored by the history and mythos of the trail, early supporters of the Natchez Trace envisioned a recognized and well-marked route. They imagined the parkway through the eyes of John Swain, and embraced the idea of the road as a genuine frontier trail that needed to be preserved and celebrated. One of the road’s most verdant supporters, Mrs. Roane Fleming Byrnes, of Natchez, wallpapered her entire drawing room with images of the old, unpaved Natchez Trace. In figure 6.3, Mrs. Byrnes stands in a section of the old trace that she and the Natchez Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated their time to commemorating. It is
unclear whether early Trace supporters ever imagined the road as it is today, or how they might react to the contemporary Parkway.

Engineering the parkway to create a National Park was no small feat. Unfortunately, in doing so, the National Park Service, through expansive construction measures and tourist infrastructures, managed to lose part of the original mythos that made this trail so interesting. All that remains of the original experience are short, and stochastic sections of the sunken trace, the historic photographs and few written accounts. I shall engage further with this topic later in this chapter.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 6.3: Mrs. Byrnes Stands on an Old Section of the Natchez Trace Parkway. Memphis Commercial Appeal.
Trends in Frequency and Quality

As mentioned in chapter five, I evaluated the quality of images based on image clarity, composition and content. The graphs display a clear trend in the decline of image quality over the changing image types, from historic photographs, to postcards, to digital images. This is not the case if we compare the best image from each category against each other. Technological advances and high tech equipment allow photographers to capture outstanding images through digital means, however, across the board, the number of below-average digital images uploaded to the flickr.com repository is something to be considered; although a reasonable number of flickr.com images are of outstanding quality, as a percentage, there are a large number of images that are just average, or even below average.

Archivists select and keep historic photographs for their quality and condition; most of the photographs that I found came from a studio collection, the Works Project Administration, or Civilian Conservation Corps project teams (in other words, professional photographers took them). As illustrated in figure 5.14, of the eighty-two photographs that I catalogued, only five are below average in quality. “Below average” could mean that the photograph is clear but the subject matter is cut off. Similarly, the subject matter could be slightly blurry, or part of the image could be obscured by a shadow or dark room error. Only 6 percent of the archived photographs were below average, thus, it appears that studios and photographers discarded most of their below average photographs. The nature of film photography makes it highly likely that a substantial number of below average negatives never went to print.

Postcards are sometimes free, promotional items, but are more commonly sold in visitor centers and gift shops, as is the case in most National Parks. Overall, I considered the postcard collections good, solid quality reproductions of the Natchez Trace Parkway. No postcards were
below average (Figure 5.15) all were quality photographs that held their own in terms of clarity, composition, and content. As I mentioned earlier, the most notable result is that of no “excellent” photographs either. When a publisher has a choice of photographs from which to print postcards, it is strange that an “average” image would be chosen over one that is far above average or even excellent. The decision to publish the chosen images for postcards could relate to a lack of image or photographer options to choose from, the need or desire to publish a specific site, production deadlines or budget constraints, all of which are likely to impact a publishing house. Hubert Lowman photographed fifteen of the images published by Deep South Specialties, presumably under commission to do so. This might also explain the variety of locations and sometimes obscure subject matter (such as park signboards); it is possible photographers were required to capture a set number of images with no repetition.

The flickr.com groups contained some spectacular images ranging from night skies, to aerial images of Natchez Trace Parkway landscapes, to abstract details of cemetery fences. Oftentimes when judging an image, I asked myself, would I buy that if it were a postcard? Sadly, for a considerable number of flickr.com images, the answer to that question would be a resounding no!

Figure 5.16 explains that in the categories of “worst, far below average and below average” I found 155 flickr.com images. These were out of focus, lacking subject matter (for example pieces of grey sky including a piece of a vehicle) or were extremely over-, or under-exposed. Some users might batch upload images from their travels, however, users still need to tag the images one-by-one into one of these Natchez Trace Parkway groups. This implies that users assess these images and intend to keep them.
As a researcher in the field of representation, I find it deeply disturbing that users either want to keep and share every single photograph, or they are simply too lazy to edit out the inferior ones. The ease of capturing images on a camera or increasingly, on a smartphone, has made images disposable, and failed attempts at capturing a certain image should in my opinion, be discarded! It is hard to believe that my current Apple smartphone has a ten-megapixel camera, far superior to my first ever Canon digital camera, purchased not ten years before. Recording images is so easy that it is no longer left to the professionals. Sharing images through text or uploading to social media is easy too, so easy in fact, that it is seldom worth printing images for safekeeping because they are all stored on cloud-based web servers.

The overarching theme in the frequency and quality of images is that, over time, images of the Natchez Trace Parkway are more plentiful, and easier to find, but of a poorer quality in general. This trend implies that future Natchez Trace Parkway images will be plentiful, yet average or below average. I expect that at some point in the future, a backlash is inevitable. To a certain degree, the non-representational argument could be construed as such. Poor photography is no substitute for first-hand experience. However, in my opinion, everyday people cannot travel and explore indefinitely, and thus, the need for quality images and representation is still relevant because although diminished, there is some experience in viewing beautiful or unusual travel images. In the interim, I expect the plethora of poor quality images will continue to expand, and the online environment will continue to serve as a repository for the mediocre.

**Changing Landscapes**

The gradual construction of the formalized Trace transformed the road beyond recognition to all who knew it: from a barely discernable footpath, to the slightly wider wagon
trail built in the early nineteenth century, to the smooth two-lane road with mown right of ways built between 1938 and 2005. Based on the results of the visual comparison studies from my exhibition 1942/2014: Landscape Change along the Natchez Road, shown in chapter five (figure 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20, 5.21, 5.22) it is evident that the contemporary, engineered parkway bears little resemblance to the former trail. Obvious results include differences in road surface and width, right-of-ways, and signage. For example, in figure 5.17, it is clear that the old road was flanked by vegetation (as one might expect of a trail cutting through the densely vegetated landscape of Mississippi) compared to the 2014 roadway featuring wide right-of-ways, and well-maintained grassy verges.

Creek crossings in 1942 were treacherous and often washed out (figure 5.18), this made waterway crossings difficult. The modern parkway crosses all waterways via bridges; the 2014 image (figure 5.18) is of a short hiking trail at Rock Spring, Alabama, one of the National Park Service sign-posted stopping points. Today, Rock Spring is represented as a quiet creek, easily passable via giant stepping-stones. However in 1942, after a heavy rain event, the creek would be washed out, difficult to cross, and look like the image of Cole’s Creek Ford, Mississippi, shown to the left.

Engineering and construction standards prescribed a new route for the Trace. It was nearly impossible to determine the original route made up of footpaths and animal trails and despite efforts to mark the original route, the 1935 survey acknowledged that only 10 percent of the proposed parkway was in fact historic ground. Engineers and landscape architects created a smoother, more accommodating road by bridging waterways, decreasing slope gradients through cut-and-fill techniques, and clear-cutting stands of trees where the best road gradient and subsurface existed. Figure 5.19 demonstrates the abovementioned changes: a gentler curve, an
underground water drainage system at roadway low point, and wide right-of-ways, clear cut through stands of fir and pine trees. These engineering solutions created an optimal driving experience, and the loss of historic accuracy justified by “defining the Parkway as memorializing the trace.” The Trace morphed from a backwoods trail to nothing short of a highway, featuring substantial grass verges and right of way clearances built to strict engineering code and standards.

More subtle differences from pathway to parkway allude to changes in atmosphere, particularly in the way that the National Park Service represents the Trace. Images from 2014 are often infused with a mystical rhetoric when compared to the images from 1942 (figure 5.20). In 2014, National Park Service photographers used morning mist, dappled sunlight, certain seasonal aspects (such as fall color), extreme view angles, and carefully constructed perspective to achieve various atmospheric conditions. Even the naming conventions used change the way we perceive the images. In the historic image, the section of trail is simply referred to as “Abandoned Trace, Madison County, Miss.” The 2014 image refers to a very similar scene as “Old Trace, Chickasaw County, Mississippi,” the word “old” piques one’s interest far more than “abandoned,” which alludes to something of lesser value.

The modern Trace has few sections of incised road segments, a common trait of the old pathway (figure 5.21). Instead, strict engineering code replaced these worn out sections with cut and fill, ensuring a roadway safe from erosion, and featuring wide grass verges for added safety. Figure 5.21 also features National Park Service signage, a change that helps visitors navigate the Trace road. In chapter three, John Swain struggled to find the original pathway in his travails to find the grave of Meriwether Lewis, a vast change from today, when cars simply turn off at a well marked exit.
Changes in the physical landscape of the Natchez Trace from pathway to parkway are some of the most criticized elements of the contemporary Trace. Unlike the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway that has no historical precedent, the National Park Service dubbed the Natchez Trace Parkway as an historical parkway. The National Park Service uses interpretive elements to narrate the visitor experience. As previously mentioned, this tourist experience is vastly altered from the original pathway in terms of the physical landscape, and despite the National Park Service attempts to illustrate these changes, they are difficult for visitors to recognize. However, as a researcher, physical changes are easy to understand through the use of visual communication tools.

In my exhibition, featuring a visual comparative analysis, I attempt to highlight the power of representation as a communication tool. I draw attention to some of the changes in the landscape over time in a manner that is easy to understand, immediately accessible to viewers, and without the need for reading comprehension. In a sense, this democratizes the information, allowing any passer by to access that information without needing to spend a considerable amount of time with text based works. It should be noted here that my interpretations and presentation are obviously not without bias, and thus, viewers would be influenced by my own observations; however, this is true of almost any qualitative research and thus I deem it worthwhile.

**Representation Matters**

The creation of some national park landscapes, although intended to preserve these landscapes as historic entities, can have quite the opposite effect, as demonstrated in the case of the Natchez Trace Parkway. The original frontier trail used by bison, Native Americans, and
Kaintucks alike, no longer exists, except in very short, random sections. According to a study by Phelps, less than 10 percent of the contemporary Natchez Trace Parkway follows the path of the old trail.\(^{47}\) The creation of the paved roadway, although an engineering feat in itself, removed the visitor from any understanding of the authentic experience.\(^{48}\) Although this may seem preposterous, it is unremarkable in terms of most of America’s national parks.\(^{49}\)

How then does this relate to traveling landscape-objects? Representations of the Trace before construction were uncommon and although interesting, and beautiful in many cases, they were not widely distributed or cherished. The creation of a national park based around the history of the old trail, elevates contemporary traveling landscape-objects to a new status; iconic images promote cultural icons, and visitors collect traveling landscape-objects in the form of photographs, postcards, and other paraphernalia to memorialize and in some cases share their experience.\(^{50}\)

What has been lost in terms of landscape character is gained in terms of popularity, status and funding, all resulting in part from the designation of the road as a National Park Service entity. It is difficult to say what form (if any) the Natchez Road would take today if it had not been developed into a national park and memorialized as a scenic byway. Perhaps it might not exist at all, and historic photographs would remain as the only record of such a road. Postcards, flickr.com images, and Postagrams of the road might not exist at all, and the Trace might have faded into legend, or simply become a piecemeal route, designated with tourist signboards and staking claims to a forgotten past. In this scenario, there might be few, if any traveling landscape-objects associated with the Trace.

My findings demonstrate that changing media has impacted the content of traveling landscape-objects (table 5.2) through the developing relationship between image content and
cultural landscape icons as determined and promoted by the National Park Service. Changing media has impacted the way tourists use images; most noticeably through the ease of sharing images via digital platforms. The significance of National Park Service designated stopping areas and the resulting iconic landscapes that these promote, is corroborated by my findings on icons of the Natchez Trace Parkway. The repetitive images found of specific landscape features demonstrate the number of tourists who take photographs of the same places, at the same designated stopping points along the Natchez Trace. Oftentimes these places are stopping points as prescribed by the National Park Service, and designed to accommodate large numbers of visitors. The exception to this result are the two iconic outliers: the Birdsong Hollow Bridge and the Cypress Swamp, both widely photographed in digital media, but not otherwise.

I examined the tactile quality of images and how the medium through which images travel impacts their meaning. I discovered that, as della Dora proposed, physical traveling landscape-objects hold more value as keepsakes than digital media representations, and that perhaps the future of traveling landscape-objects exists in digital-analog hybrids like Postagram cards. Trends in the frequency and quality of landscape images revealed a disappointing drop in overall image quality and composition, and a large increase in the quantity of Natchez Trace Parkway images. Not only has this decreased the value of traveling landscape-objects in the digital age, but creates a plethora of mediocre images clogging up the veins of online storage solutions.

In non-representational arenas, the physical experience of the Trace may trump traveling landscape-objects for quality and exhilaration. Despite the quality of lived experience over representation, visitors still place a high value on travel images. The phenomenon of “embodied interaction,” or the desire to record one’s physical presence in and of a given landscape
persists, particularly in the case of America’s national parks, like the Natchez Trace Parkway. It is this phenomenon that drives tourists to take photographs, collect and mail postcards and post about their travels and experiences on social media websites.

“High image density” or the repetitive use of images of one place or iconic landscape enhances the power of that place or landscape, and shapes the way that tourists and the American public at large perceive that place or landscape. This reiterates the importance of representation in tourism and the power of traveling landscape-objects.

Endnotes


2 Sabine Wilke, “How German is the American West?” in Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 100 – 118.


5 Ibid: 46 – 63.

6 Ibid: 46 – 63.


8 The Curt Teich Postcard Collection in Waucona, Illinois is one of the largest repositories of postcards in the United States. Although the collection does not hold any Natchez Trace Parkway postcards, it features postcards in two major categories: towns and cities, and travel images. Postcards of towns and cities prevail until the 1940s after which a marked increase is evident in images of cultural landscapes relating to travel and tourism. See also John A. Jakle and Keith A.


27 Ibid.


31 Ibid.


33 I contacted Postagram for statistics of how many postcards they print and send on a daily basis, and/or how many registered users they have on their database. Unfortunately due to their privacy policy, they could not furnish me with this or any other information.


43 United States National Park Service, Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. *Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Transmitting in Response to Senate Resolution No. 222, a Report of a Survey of the Old Indian Trail, Known as the Natchez Trace, Made by the Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, Pursuant to an Act Approved May 21, 1934, with a View to Constructing a National Road on this Route to be Known as the Natchez Trace Parkway* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1941), 122.


48 Jack D. Elliot Jr., “Paving the Trace,” 199.

49 Peter Peters, “Roadside Wilderness,” 55 – 76.


CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

Framework

This study builds on the research of Veronica della Dora and Thomas Patin, both of whom invite further study on the “visual rhetoric,” or the examination of tourist landscape representations beyond the image. This involved studying and evaluating images or representations beyond their visual content. I refer to the representations as “traveling landscape-objects.” This term includes all types of tourist paraphernalia, including postcards, photographs, snow-globes, pamphlets, maps, and other travel ephemera. The premise upon which my research is built is that traveling landscape-objects influence tourist behavior in a lasting and significant way. The National Park Service repeatedly uses carefully chosen images to create cultural landscape icons for the American public.

This research contributes to a growing body of work on representation and traveling landscape-objects within the fields of geography and landscape architecture. After much debate in the academic realm, landscapes (in particular the vernacular) are now accepted as meaningful cultural places, full of socio-economic information, and worthwhile of study. This study is different because I evaluate one of the least known entities of the National Park Service and thus, contribute not only to the realm of representation, but also to the research and understanding of tourism and tourist behavior within the National Park Service.

My case study for the evaluation of traveling landscape-objects is the Natchez Trace Parkway, a 444-mile historic byway that connects Natchez, Mississippi to Nashville, Tennessee. The Natchez Trace Parkway is an entity of the National Park Service, and thus, the National Park Service promotes and manages it in the same way as most of America’s natural and cultural-
historic resources: through finding a balance between preservation and conservation. Historically, the National Park Service used monumental landscape icons to promote the crown-jewel national parks to the American public. This strategy incorporated core American values and cultural identities in a marketing strategy based upon national pride. Although the National Park Service does an excellent job of identifying and marketing cultural landscape icons in the crown-jewel parks, many of the smaller, or lesser-known parks lack in immediately identifiable landscape features. This results in the weaker promotion of, and lack of attention on what I term, the “little-gem” parks. Convinced that these parks do in fact possess worthwhile landscape icons, I became interested in what these icons might be, and how both the National Park Service, and everyday tourists document and promote these places. This study determines what these landscape icons likely are through the identification and evaluation of tourist paraphernalia associated with a lesser-known park, in this case, the Natchez Trace Parkway.

I undertook the collection and evaluation of various types of representations, or traveling landscape-objects, associated with the parkway in order to answer the following research questions: 1) How have changes in the medium of representation impacted traveling landscape-objects and they way that they are used? 2) What is the relationship among the image content of traveling landscape-objects and cultural landscape icons? 3) Does the medium through which traveling landscape-objects travel affect their meaning, and does this matter? 4) What are the trends in frequency and quality of traveling landscape-objects, and what does this mean for their future? 5) What role do traveling landscape-objects play in non-representational arenas? And finally, 6) Has the ease of sharing and texting representations affected their value, and how?
Research Findings

This section reflects on each research question and briefly revisits and outlines my findings and discussion from chapters five and six.

Changes in the medium of representation have impacted traveling landscape-objects and the way they are used. The medium has evolved from hand drawn images, to photography, to postcards, and beyond to digital postcards and images shared through social media outlets, such as flickr.com. This evolution resulted in a large increase in traveling landscape-objects. The number of traveling landscape-objects I found in each category illustrates this phenomenon.

Access to, and the number of traveling landscape-objects increases with changes in the medium. Found traveling landscape-objects increased from a total of only six hand rendered illustrations or paintings, to ninety historic photographs, sixty-two postcards, and finally 901 flickr.com images. This increase in numbers confirms what Gareth John proposed: digital cameras enable users to document their travels more freely without the fear of wasting film. Seemingly limitless storage capacity means that people take a lot more photographs than they used to.\(^5\) These digital representations are easy to share via multimedia text messaging or social network web portals. This results in tourists using traveling landscape-objects more often, by sending them wirelessly to friends and loved ones for immediate enjoyment and impact.

However, as Cronin and Arreola explore, tourists continue to desire physical mementoes,\(^6\) this is evidenced by the emergence of hybrid technologies, for example the tech start-up Postagram that allows users to send physical postcards via their smart phones. These findings present a number of opportunities for scholars and entrepreneurs, as well as the National Park Service. Hybrid concepts that employ both analog and digital components promise success. The National Park Service might distribute park information in portable document format.
download (pdf) for tablets, or send text messages alerting travelers to nearby attractions inside national parks. In addition to communications, the National Park Service (or any tourist destination) could promote the parks via high quality digital media, and elect to introduce new landscape icons or reinforce those with which the public is already familiar.

There is a definite relationship between the image content of traveling landscape-objects and cultural landscape icons. As shown in the map diagrams in chapter five, I undertook to find where tourists took the most pictures along the Natchez Trace Parkway, and in turn identify contemporary landscape icons of the park. Results of the historic photographs and flickr.com studies show popular locations at either end of the parkway, and near bigger towns. This is clear in the discovery of the two most popular places of the contemporary Trace: the Cypress Swamp and Birdsong Hollow Double Arch Bridge. This means more tourists visit the extremities than the more isolated middle section. The postcard study displays a more even distribution of locations along the road, however, the National Park Service distributes the postcards and thus, the most plentiful locations relate to National Park Service preferences and not necessarily those of the public.

As discussed in chapter six, image hotspots for all categories occur in those areas well signposted and promoted by the National Park Service. Thomas Patin describes this as a controlled visitor experience, as do Lary Dilsaver, Ethan Carr, and David Tschida; design strategies and implementation manage the way tourists engage with the national park landscape. The National Park Service has the ability to create landscape icons in any park through employing design and visitor management strategies. Their ability to control and promote landscape icons in turn means they can control the content of traveling landscape-objects that some tourists value as travel mementoes.
The medium through which traveling landscape-objects travel does affect their meaning. Tactile quality does have an impact on the meaning of traveling landscape-objects. Published images hold more value for a scholarly audience, as compared to digital images that humans upload to social media web platforms. In the same vein, postcards hold more value for tourists in terms of meaning and memory than digital picture albums. Postcards also elevate the status of specific landscape icons and places, as seen in the example at Metal Ford. This relatively non-descript (although historically relevant) site gains popularity and visitor numbers simply because it features on a printed postcard. David Arreola’s research confirms that postcards can be drivers of tourist behavior, because they mean more to people than temporary on-screen representations.

Digital representations hold less value because they are so easy to share. The ease of sharing multimedia messages from almost anywhere deflates their value. Tourists can send digital images of places to almost anywhere in the world via e-mail or multimedia message. These easily shared representations do not hold the same value as a physical traveling landscape-object because they do not evoke the same emotional response as items that embarked on a physical journey across the same distance. Digital representations tend to hold more value for the sender than recipient, as suggested by Robert Bednar’s ideas of “embodied interaction,” in which tourists attempt to capture their physical presence in well-known landscape vistas. Tourists do this for their own satisfaction. Although they may share these images, their own need to prove their presence in a landscape is the highest priority.

Although the conventional postcard industry has declined, people continue to value postcards, as evidenced by the emergence of the postcard smartphone application “Postagram.” This suggests that tourists still demand the need for physical objects like postcards, and that there is still a place for traveling landscape-objects in the digital world.
As digital images abound, there is a noticeable trend of the increase in frequency, and decrease in quality of traveling landscape-objects. Traveling landscape-objects have declined in quality as their medium changed. Advances in technology allow tourists to take more photographs; this means that contemporary images of the Natchez Trace Parkway are more plentiful than in previous decades. However, the increase in volume is met with a decline in quality. For example, none of the postcards, and only a few photographs fell into the “below average” category, however 155 digital images on flickr.com fell into the “below average, far below average, or worst” categories.

This scenario implies that future digital tourist images will increase in number, but decline in quality. As mentioned in chapter six, a backlash against poor quality representations is inevitable. I agree with Daniel Arreola and Veronica della Dora that human appreciation for fine imagery, items, and quality physical traveling landscape-objects is likely to gain momentum.\(^\text{10}\)

Traveling landscape-objects can contribute toward scholarly research in non-representational theory. In chapter five I used mapped diagrams to show how many users uploaded images from each place. This looks beyond cultural landscape icons, and into the data of how many users experienced each place. This part of my study is important because the National Park Service does not have, or use these numbers in any way, instead they employ car counters at various points along the road. Although helpful, the car counts do not reveal anything about the way that tourists experience the Trace. While National Park Service statistics show the highest number of visitor vehicles at the Ridgeland, Mississippi and Tupelo, Mississippi gateways, my research shows the highest number of visitor experiences (where tourists got out of their vehicle and took photographs) at the Highway 96 Bridge at Birdsong Hollow (Nashville, Tennessee), and the Cypress Swamp (Jackson, Mississippi). This means that there is an
opportunity for the National Park Service to re-examine their visitor studies; as John Jakle and Keith Sculle remind us, the most popular stopping points are those most favored in tourist memories. This is where traveling landscape-objects are useful for non-representational theorists.

The Importance of Representation

The study of landscape representation has not received much attention in landscape studies. Traditionally, postcards and other such ephemera are studied for their graphic content but not for their relevance, meaning, or the relationship between places and imagery. Veronica della Dora called for further study on the role of traveling landscape-objects; this research contributes toward a broader understanding of how scholars can use representation for purposes beyond the aesthetic. Thomas Patin refers to this research as “visual rhetoric,” and suggests that visual materials can communicate and persuade an audience for the purpose of achieving a goal. This research unearths ideas about how landscape images can be used for such a purpose, specifically in tourism and the promotion of America’s national parks.

As Peter Kraftl argued, representation is an integral part of landscape study. This is particularly true of tourist landscapes because visual representations have the ability to influence the way people think about places. Our perception of any place influences our desire to experience that place, thus landscape representations have the power to control visitor numbers in tourist destinations. Arreola reinforces this idea with the concept of “image density,” or the volume of visual information relating to a place. The higher the density, the more power the imagery possesses.
Lastly, the study of representation is important in evaluating landscape change over time. As my comparative images highlight, landscapes evolve and change. What scholars can glean from comparative photographs of the Natchez Trace Parkway taken seventy-two years apart is that the character of the Trace has changed. The character of the path morphed from backwoods trail to scenic highway. The new parkway floats over stream crossings, moderates steep climbs and sharp curves, and directional signage is easy to follow. In comparison, travelers struggled to navigate the old path. These changes alter the Trace experience and bring up questions of authenticity, as contemporary visitors do not experience the real hardship of the Trace journeys.

**Limitations**

The chief shortcoming to this study was the limited data available on the number of postcards bought by tourists. Despite collecting over eighty postcards, there was, and is no way of knowing which postcard sold the most copies, or which was the most popular among tourists. This means that even though there may be six or seven postcards of the Brice’s Crossroads Battlefield in my collection, it is entirely possible that more tourists bought the single postcard featuring the Cypress Swamp than any Brice’s Crossroads postcard at all. This means that my findings, although they determine Brice’s Crossroads as the most popular landscape icon during the postcard era, may be flawed, and there remains the possibility that the Cypress Swamp was favored over the historic site.

Secondly, my study relied on flickr.com images of the Natchez Trace Parkway, and while I collected and interpreted over nine hundred of these, I relied on the data specific to a certain type of tourist group. In other words, the personality and type of tourist who documents travel and posts their journeys on flickr.com might be limited to a group of people with similar interests.
and not representative of the entire tourist population. However, after some consideration, I realized that this is true of most participant studies; if I had interviewed willing tourists at Natchez Trace Visitor centers it is likely that a similar set of personalities would agree to be surveyed, and lend a level of homogeneity to the study sample.

Lastly, although the Natchez Trace Parkway is the eighth most visited of all the national parks, it remains relatively obscure and awkward in size and form. It is a long, skinny park, approximately 444 miles in length and for most of that length, less than half a mile wide. Due to the historic focus of the park, it has few well-known icons, which made collecting images difficult, particularly at first. In retrospect, my lack of perceived iconic landscapes for this park allowed me to be more objective in my research and approach the study without preconceived ideas regarding outcomes.

**Moving Beyond Pictures: Further Research**

This project has made a small indentation into the realm of possibility for studies in representation, traveling landscape-objects, and the promotion of the National Park Service. Future research I would like to engage with includes similar studies of routes outside the National Park Service, for example on popular, but disjointed historic roads like U.S. Route 66, and on even lesser known travel ways, for example the El Camino Real de los Tejas, an historic travel route linking Natchez, Mississippi to the Mexican border town of Guerrero.

It would also be useful for scholars to engage with a wider variety of media, for example a study on the collection of place specific paraphernalia like prayer flags from the Himalayas, their rise in popularity and the ensuing commercial availability of these objects as home décor would make a worthwhile topic of study.
A repeat of the methods used in this study for other National Park Service entities could reveal landscape icons previously thought of as unpopular or overlooked by the National Park Service. This is particularly relevant in the case of human-built landscape icons—bridges, tunnels, and structures that are recognized as the emblem of a place. A study involving an analysis of park signage as relates to the volume of images at particular sites might also prove useful to the National Park Service. Following these ideas, I propose that scholars interested in the National Park Service, as well as the National Park Service itself, look beyond the statistical data collected from within parks and engage with the broader realm of representation found in the media in order to gather better data relating to landscape icons and perceptions.

**Conclusion**

Few scholars have addressed issues of representation beyond the content of images.17 This dissertation research answers a call for further investigation into the value of representations (in this case traveling landscape-objects) beyond their immediate visual content. The study of representation is important because images have the power to persuade an audience. Traveling landscape-objects play an important role in the curation of cultural identity in America.

In line with the research of Veronica della Dora, the study of representation is worthwhile not only for the iconographic content of traveling landscape-objects, but because of what they can accomplish. My evaluation of the collected traveling landscape-objects in terms of their context, medium, meaning, use and how this has affected their value, is a new approach to data collection for cultural landscapes—those of the National Park Service in particular.

In the case of the National Park Service, Thomas Patin’s idea of the “visual rhetoric” stresses the importance of visual materials in the promotion and management of parks.18 There is
an opportunity here for park custodians and managers to realize the power of traveling landscape-objects and employ their use to consciously curate meaningful landscapes, and in turn cultural landscape icons.

**Endnotes**


3 I explain this debate in chapter two, but evidence of landscape as a valued field of study is found in the continued publishing of *Landscape Journal*, and featured articles relating to cultural landscapes that appear in the *Annals, Professional Geographer, Progress in Human Geography* and *Geographical Review*.


8 Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing our Culture and Assaulting our Economy* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2007), 35 – 64.


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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH CATEGORIZATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Qual</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Norman Studio</td>
<td>Trace Marker</td>
<td>Downtown Natchez</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>c.1910</td>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Parchitecture</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>DAR Stone marker, at Natchez Riverfront</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natchez Democrat</td>
<td>Knable Lane</td>
<td>RFB in her parlor</td>
<td>Ravennaside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>c.1940</td>
<td>Photo/journ</td>
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<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Yes, RFB</td>
<td>Roane Fleming Byrnes in her living room, wallpapered with NTP images</td>
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<td>Photo/journ</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Yes, group</td>
<td>DAR committee and others signing NTP agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Natchez, MS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>c.1900</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Man and woman in buggy</td>
<td>Horse pulling buggy on the Natchez Road, on outskirts of the town of Natchez</td>
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<td>Jefferson College</td>
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<td>pre1900</td>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Parchitecture</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>College Presidents house, picket fence, with drive in front</td>
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<td>LSU Special Collections</td>
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<td>Wooden Door</td>
<td>Jefferson College</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
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<td>Wooden door in brick wall at Jefferson College</td>
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<td>Memphis Comm. Appeal</td>
<td>Knable Lane</td>
<td>RFB on Sunken Trace</td>
<td>Sunken Trace</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>c.1930</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Yes, RFB</td>
<td>RFB standing in sunken trace, wearing yellow dress. Posed for press.</td>
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APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF POSTCARD CATEGORIZATION

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<td>SSC</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>320.3</td>
<td>pre 1980</td>
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<td>Road</td>
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<td>Probably 70s or 80s</td>
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<td>Signboar d</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Dean Wilson</td>
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<td>320.3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Parchitect</td>
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<td>Later postcard/ simple design on back</td>
<td></td>
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<td>TN.gov</td>
<td>Fall foliage</td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>375.8</td>
<td>after 2000</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Typical of flickr type images</td>
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<td>Ole Miss Archi ve</td>
<td>Picnic Area_402</td>
<td>DSS</td>
<td>Gilbert Ford</td>
<td>Jack's Branch</td>
<td>377.8</td>
<td>landscape</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nature/Tourist</td>
<td>Yes, woman and child</td>
<td>Picturesque, simple, good tones</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ole Miss Archi ve</td>
<td>Napier Mine</td>
<td>DSS</td>
<td>Gilbert Ford</td>
<td>Napier Mine</td>
<td>381.1</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>abandoned mine</td>
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List of Abbreviations:
DSS = Deep South Specialties: Jackson, MS
SSC = Scenic South Card Company: Bessemer, AL
JE = Jenkins Enterprises: North Little Rock, AR
DP = Dexter Press: West Nyack, NY
EN = Eastern National: Fort Washington, PA
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<td>Fall Trees</td>
<td>nr Jeff Busby picnic site</td>
<td>194</td>
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<td>art</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Mark Steve Guillory</td>
<td>Old Trace</td>
<td>Old Trace</td>
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<td>Line Creek</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Penny Sanford Fikes</td>
<td>Old Trace Sign</td>
<td>Old Trace</td>
<td>221.4</td>
<td>1/25/07</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>tourist snapshot</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<td>Bynum Mounds</td>
<td>232.5</td>
<td>8/25/11</td>
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<td>Larry</td>
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<td>Davis Lake Road</td>
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<td>Forest</td>
<td>South of Tupelo</td>
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<td>4/28/08</td>
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<td>Nature</td>
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<td>Blooming Tree</td>
<td>Chickasaw Site, Tupelo, MS</td>
<td>261.8</td>
<td>3/14/13</td>
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<td>Nature</td>
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<td>Jamie</td>
<td>NTP Visitor Center</td>
<td>Tupelo, MS</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>8/5/08</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>tourist snapshot</td>
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<td>Parchitecture</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<td>Mural at Visitors Center</td>
<td>Tupelo, MS</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>1/28/07</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>tourist snapshot</td>
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<td>People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ronnie Harris</td>
<td>Headlight Trails</td>
<td>Nt Tupelo, MS</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>10/20/09</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>art</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Short</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX D: IMAGE QUALITY ASSESSMENT

I scored each image on a scale of one to ten, ten being “excellent” and one being “worst.” Below are examples of images by my ranking standards. I assessed each image based on clarity, exposure, composition, focus, and content:

Birdsong Hollow Bridge by flickr.com user Phillip_Riggins. Categorized as “excellent,” or a 9, based on good color, composition, exposure, and relevant content.

Fall Color by flickr.com user KingKong911. Categorized as “average,” or a 5, based on average color (washed out), slightly off center composition, and although interesting, the image lacks a focal point.
Tree at Sunset by flickr.com user Michael_Brown. Categorized as “far below average,” or a 2, based on poor composition, lack of focal point, or scale reference, poor color, poor focus, lack of context, and over exposure.
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Date: 02/04/15
Name: Louise Cheetham
Institution name: LSU
Phone: Fax: Email: lcheet1@lsu.edu

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**LACB**

6.10.2015

Signature (the user)  
Date

**Bonnie Dashur Andersen**

Signature (for the Athenaeum)  
Date
VITA

Louise Cheetham Bordelon, born in Durban, South Africa, earned her Bachelor of Architectural Studies degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2002. She spent a year working in American National Parks, before returning to South Africa in early 2004 where she began work at a design and marketing firm. In 2005, she took a position at a landscape architecture firm in Pretoria, South Africa. Soon after, she returned to academia part-time, graduating with an Honours Degree in Landscape Architecture in 2007. Shortly after, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue an advanced degree in the United States. In May 2010, she received a Masters of Landscape Architecture from Louisiana State University.

Louise entered the Department of Geography and Anthropology doctoral program at LSU in the fall of 2010, studying under the guidance of Professor Craig Colten. During this time, she worked as a teaching assistant, landscape architectural intern, graduate assistant at LSU Libraries Special Collections, and adjunct faculty member in the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at LSU. Upon graduating, Louise plans to find a permanent position teaching in the landscape architecture field, either in her hometown of Cape Town, South Africa or in the United States.