As with other elements of the broader discipline, ethnographic information has been used to aid the interpretation of various aspects of archaeological landscapes since the very beginnings of the subfield. The way in which such information has been used and incorporated within the interpretive process has also followed broader temporal trends, starting with the use of simple ethnographic parallels, often picked seemingly at random from the available literature, to the formulation of more explicit formal and, most recently, relational analogies (see Wylie [1985] for a discussion of these terms). However, the use of ethnographic information has not featured as widely in landscape archaeology as it has in many other aspects of the archaeological process, such as the analysis and interpretation of stylistic behavior, intrasite spatial patterning, spatial and architectural symbolism, butchery practices, and artifact technologies. There have also been remarkably few ethnoarchaeological studies explicitly concerned with notions of “landscape” as opposed to attempts to document the material traces of different activities and mobility patterns at a landscape scale through either direct ethnoarchaeological observation (see below) or synthesis of ethnographic studies (e.g., Allen 1996). This is also well illustrated by a recent and relatively comprehensive review of the ethnoarchaeological literature of the last four to five decades (David and Kramer 2001), which only considers “landscape” in terms of the analysis of settlement patterning and distributions. Here, I aim to summarize these various trends with examples and go on to make some suggestions for possible future research.

Beginnings

O. G. S. Crawford, widely regarded as a pioneer of landscape approaches in British archaeology, was one of the first to make explicit use of ethnographic information in the interpretation of archaeological landscapes. Although this was due undoubtedly to his abilities as a field archaeologist and his “eye” for detail, it can also be attributed in part to his own career history, which included a visit to the Sudan in 1950. This is especially evident in his book, *Archaeology in the Field* (1953), which was published shortly after he had left the Sudan and contains several ethnographic parallels from Africa (see especially pp. 226–31). In common with the strongly empirical focus of British landscape archaeology at the time, Crawford’s primary concern was with demonstrating how recourse to ethnography could aid in the correct identification of specific landscape features, rather than with how landscapes might have been perceived or understood by people in the past, or with the cultural meanings associated with specific elements of a
particular landscape. Archaeologists during this era also often used brief ethnographic vignettes to illustrate how archaeological landscapes may have operated when they were in use, often likening the modern conditions in parts of the non-Western world with those that possibly prevailed during medieval, Roman, or later prehistoric times in Western Europe. This is illustrated by Crawford’s use of an aerial view of Luo homesteads and farms around Kisumu, Kenya in c. 1950 to envision the form and appearance of rural landscapes in parts of medieval Europe (1953: plate 15, following p. 184).

With the rise of more critical approaches to the use of analogical reasoning in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Freeman 1968; Gould 1978; Wobst 1978), one might have expected the issue of how to improve the use of ethnographic information about landscapes to have become a central component of ethnoarchaeological research. That this did not happen can perhaps be attributed to the more general lack of consideration given to understanding archaeological landscapes during the heyday of the New Archaeology and also to the continuing dominance of the conception of “landscape” as being broadly equivalent to “the environment” (see David and Thomas, this volume). This said, some ethnoarchaeological studies have been conducted at a landscape scale, especially those concerned with understanding settlement systems and dynamics among hunter-gatherers (e.g., Binford 1982; Yellen 1977), pastoralists (e.g., Cribb 1991; Hole 1978), and agriculturalists (e.g., Loubser 1991; Stone 1991). These provide some valuable insights into the manner in which societies utilize different areas of land and distribute their activities across space.

This is especially well illustrated by Binford’s (1982) descriptions of the way in which different Nunamiut hunter-gatherer task groups and residential clusters moved around their landscape in the recent past, at times reusing previously occupied places for alternative purposes, at others using certain spaces for the first time in living memory albeit perhaps just for a few weeks or even days, as part of annual and seasonal settlement mobility and the changing social composition of work groups. The archaeological consequences arising from the operating of such systems, as Binford amply illustrates, is a series of palimpsests of discarded materials, specially deposited items, abandoned site furniture, and, at least by implication since this aspect is not discussed by Binford, modified ecosystems. Binford’s ultimate purpose, however, was to illustrate how these composite archaeological traces created by hunter-gatherer communities with delayed-return subsistence strategies (termed collectors by Binford) differ in a fundamental way from the archaeological traces created by immediate-return hunter-gatherers (termed foragers by Binford, and including groups such as the !Kung San communities of northern Botswana with whom Yellen [1977] worked) might leave across the landscape.

This model (for a tabulated summary of the key differences, see David and Kramer 2001: 235) has been particularly influential in hunter-gatherer/Paleolithic archaeology (e.g., Bamforth 1991; Dale, Marshall, and Pilgrim 2004; Kornfeld 1996; Marean 1997; Savelle 1987) and has resulted in some positive improvements in archaeological understanding of the diversity of land-use practices and settlement systems among both past and ethnographic hunter-gatherers. However important it may be for archaeologists to recognize that immediate-return foragers and delayed-return collectors might utilize the land in different ways, the rich corpus of anthropological literature on both low- and high-latitude hunter-gatherers indicates that they also imbue their world with complex symbolic meanings, spiritual values, and mythological associations (e.g., Bodenhorn 1993; Layton 1995; Morphy 1995; Silberbauer 1981). Of course, this is equally true of other types of society, and in the last few decades archaeologists have increasingly turned to a different range of ethnographic data concerning landscape in their attempts to access these more intangible elements for a diverse range of groups including herders, farmers, maritime communities, and urban dwellers as well as hunter-gatherers (e.g., Boivin 2004; Breen and Lane 2003; Dunning et al. 1999; Thomas 1993; Tilley 1994; Ucko and Layton 1999; Young 2000). Below, I sketch out some of the more common approaches to the use of ethnographic data in terms of the construction of relational analogies, the influence of natural places, socializing the land, and notions of dwelling and “being-in-the-land.”

**Relational Analogies**

Unlike the use of simple ethnographic parallels, in the construction of relational analogies much greater emphasis is placed on establishing the relevance of the observed similarities between the archaeological phenomena under analysis and the ethnographic case material used to infer other, non-observable similarities. Thus, it is not just the existence of observable similarities between the subject (that is, archaeological) and source (that is, ethnographic) sides of the comparison that matter, but the fact that these similarities directly relate to the inferences being drawn (see Wylie 1985). There are many ways of demonstrating rele-
Chapter 22: The Use of Ethnography in Landscape Archaeology

Ian McNiven’s recent paper on the archaeological dimensions of indigenous Australian marine specialists (including Torres Strait Islanders), whom he terms “Saltwater Peoples” (2003), is a good recent example of the “direct historical approach” within a landscape archaeology context. Dated to between A.D. 700 and 1050, effigy mounds are earthen and gravel constructions with plan forms in the shape of stylized birds and terrestrial animals (especially bears and panthers) that occasionally, but infrequently, contain burials and/or artifacts. They occur in groups, sometimes with the terrestrial and celestial types carefully segregated, and in some areas also set in distinct alignments with local topographic features. Other clusters exhibit no such obvious structure, with mounds of both terrestrial and celestial form intermingled and seemingly placed at random within the broader landscape. Drawing on Winnebago ethnography, and especially information about Winnebago clans, territory, and rituals, Gartner argues that the effigy mounds were probably a kind of territorial marker associated with different clans and used to “convey notions of social and geographic boundary within and across generations” (1999: 680). The typical “empty” nature of effigy mounds, he suggests, implies that the act of their construction was more important than their contents. This is also supported by the use of special kinds of “exotic” earths in the construction of some mounds, and also the extensive geoarchaeological evidence for the ritual use of fire and the admixture of various natural substances such as crushed bone, clam shell, and different minerals to the ashes, in a manner consistent with the ethnographic information for the region. Taken together with their spatial positioning within the landscape, typically overlooking streams or lakes, or situated close to cross-country trails, the effigy mounds seem to have served as material manifestations of Late Woodland mythological and cosmological principles that simultaneously served to classify areas, communicate social boundaries and enforce control (Gartner 1999: 681).

Another strategy, which is by no means incompatible with the direct historical approach, is to enumerate the degree of similarity between the subject and source sides of the equation in such a way that other possible interpretations can be shown to be invalid.

Gartner’s (1999) study of Late Woodland Period “effigy mounds” found in various parts of Wisconsin is a good recent example of the “direct historical approach” within a landscape archaeology context. Dated to between A.D. 700 and 1050, effigy mounds are earthen and gravel constructions with plan forms in the shape of stylized birds and terrestrial animals (especially bears and panthers) that occasionally, but infrequently, contain burials and/or artifacts. They occur in groups, sometimes with the terrestrial and celestial types carefully segregated, and in some areas also set in distinct alignments with local topographic features. Other clusters exhibit no such obvious structure, with mounds of both terrestrial and celestial form intermingled and seemingly placed at random within the broader landscape. Drawing on Winnebago ethnography, and especially information about Winnebago clans, territory, and rituals, Gartner argues that the effigy mounds were probably a kind of territorial marker associated with different clans and used to “convey notions of social and geographic boundary within and across generations” (1999: 680). The typical “empty” nature of effigy mounds, he suggests, implies that the act of their construction was more important than their contents. This is also supported by the use of special kinds of “exotic” earths in the construction of some mounds, and also the extensive geoarchaeological evidence for the ritual use of fire and the admixture of various natural substances such as crushed bone, clam shell, and different minerals to the ashes, in a manner consistent with the ethnographic information for the region. Taken together with their spatial positioning within the landscape, typically overlooking streams or lakes, or situated close to cross-country trails, the effigy mounds seem to have served as material manifestations of Late Woodland mythological and cosmological principles that simultaneously served to classify areas, communicate social boundaries and enforce control (Gartner 1999: 681).

As McNiven explains (2003: 238–89), there are four reasons for this: (1) the V- and U-shaped arrangements that most closely resemble tidal fish-traps are small in area and have their openings facing the sea, not away from it as required by fish traps; (2) many other forms, including circles and stone piles, also occur that would have provided no technical advantage for fishing; (3) the sites tend to be located close to the upper limits of high water, and so would have been inundated only rarely, and hence their location would be inappropriate for use as fish traps; (4) the arrangements often lack interlinking walls, which would have been necessary for trapping fish on a falling tide.

Having discounted more functional explanations, McNiven turns to the extensive ethnographic information on Australia’s indigenous Saltwater Peoples concerning their spiritual engagements with the sea. He notes, in particular, that although some rituals were performed on water, many were performed on tidal flats in precisely the same way. That although some rituals were performed on water, many were also practiced on tidal flats in precisely the same way.
kind of location as the archaeological features he describes. Moreover, the form and structure of the marine stone arrangements are also comparable to terrestrial stone arrangements found across Australia and known to have ritual and sacred connotations. Taken together with the broader ethnography concerning the rights and responsibilities towards the sea and marine resources, and the rules governing customary marine tenure, as encapsulated in Dreaming cosmologies, the stone arrangements found in the intertidal zone along the Queensland coast are all consistent with their role as places of ritual significance and spiritual engagement with the sea and especially the ontological significance of the fluidity of the tides and water (McNiven 2003: 344).

Research by Klara Kelley and Harris Francis on Navajo landscapes (1994) can also be mentioned here. Although primarily motivated by concerns with cultural rights protection and historic preservation concerns, their study provides detailed accounts of how members of thirteen Navajo local communities in New Mexico and Arizona consider landscape to be culturally significant, why this is the case and what constitutes landscape for these Navajo. Kelley and Francis also noted some significant differences between Navajo conceptions of landscape and those typically employed by cultural resources managers. Specifically, instead of thinking about their land as being made up of a number of isolated, albeit culturally significant, places that deserved protection, for Navajo a “place is usually important because it is part of a larger landscape constituted by a story, customary activities, or both” (Kelley and Francis 1993: 157). Each place draws its “particular distinct significance qualities” (p. 157) from its interrelations with other places that are themselves created partly by the repeat performance of customary (typically ceremonial) activities but also partly through the act of telling.

Landscape for these Navajo is thus not only the whole land and its functioning elements but also comprises multiple and overlapping entities that are in constant need of reconstitution through daily practice and telling stories about that practice, with each repeat performance having the capacity to equally reconfigure or reconfirm the relationships of significance. Significantly, perhaps, the notion that landscapes are revealed only through a combination of dwelling and storytelling is not unique to the Navajo but has also been documented among other Native American peoples of North America, including the Algonkian (Bruchac 2005) and Iroquois.

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**Ethnography of Natural Landscapes**

As the previous examples illustrate, ethnographic literature on landscapes commonly indicates that people throughout the world not only often have an intimate knowledge of their physical surroundings but also frequently associate certain “natural places” such as prominent rock formations, various watery contexts, caves, mountain peaks, and trees (among others) with the supernatural or mythological world. In the last few decades, landscape archaeologists have turned increasingly toward these aspects of the literature (e.g., Boivin 2004; Cummings and Whittle 2003; Richards 1996; Tilley 1996).

Bradley, for instance, in a recent book on the archaeology of natural places (2000), draws initially on an extended review of Saami sacred geography. Of the more than 500 known examples of sacred natural places across Finland and other parts of northern Scandinavia, most stand out as distinctive features in the wider terrain, and the majority also contain small idols made from either unworked pieces of stone or carved sections of living trees. These natural places were also the focus of various sacrifices associated with the exploitation of local resources including its fish stocks and wild and domesticated animals. The sacrifices were also dedicated to natural forces such as the wind, thunder, the sun and water, and a wide range of votive objects were often deposited nearby. These sacrifices were commonly made to secure divine protection from the elements, to secure food supplies, and as offerings to the dead (Bradley 2000: 5–13). At one level, therefore, Saami could be said to have adopted a fairly practical approach to the supernatural, aimed at securing livelihoods and protection from the natural and human spirit world. However, as Bradley notes, for the people who used and designated such sacred elements of the topography, these sites “would have been only the outward embodiment of a wider system of belief that had profound consequences for the ways in which the landscape was perceived” (2000: 11).

Drawing inspiration from this ethnography, and also examples from other parts of the world, Bradley proceeds to offer a range of worked examples of the possible importance of natural places and spaces at different times and in different landscapes in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe. These include the changing patterning of votive deposits over the course of the Bronze Age in Denmark, the location and meaning of rock engravings in Scandinavia, and the specific positioning of Neolithic
some cases, Bradley uses the insights drawn from ethnography simply as a demonstration of general principles, but elsewhere, he suggests that some prehistoric practices, such as those that structured votive deposits in watery bogs in Denmark during the Neolithic, may be directly ancestral to the later, ethnographically recorded systems found among the Saami (Bradley 2000: 60–63).

**Socializing Landscapes**

One class of archaeological evidence that is most obviously associated with natural places, and hence open to dual symbolic loading in terms of its stylistic and/or formal content and its place within the landscape, as Bradley’s work also illustrates, is rock art. Indeed, as Whitley has observed, “the defining characteristic of ‘rock art’ is its placement on geological substrates” (1998: 11) and not the manner in which it was created or the motifs employed. Tacon makes a similar point where he argues that “in the process of marking and mythologizing landscapes humans socialized them” (1994: 117). As he goes on to observe, one effect of marking landscapes through rock art is to make them part of social activity, which in turn brings with it implications of access, control, ownership, and the significance of such marks to different individuals and groups. Whitley’s landscape study of the rock art of far western North America (California, the Great Basin and the Columbia Plateau), in which ethnographic, ethnohistorical, environmental, and archaeological data are integrated provides a useful illustration of some of these points.

The rock art of this area is dominated by two regional traditions (although others have been identified), known as the Californian Tradition which occurs mostly in the wetter, western portions of California, and the Great Basin Tradition that is typically found in the dryer desert regions of eastern California and the Great Basin in Nevada. The former tradition is dominated by geometric paintings, mostly monochrome and in small panels in caves and rock shelters. Human and animal figures are comparatively rare. Great Basin Tradition rock art, however, is dominated by rock engravings, which often occur in large panels with hundreds or even thousands of individual motifs. Although geometric forms occur, there is a greater proportion of figurative art, the most common being bighorn sheep, snakes, lizards, and felines. The art is typically marked on open cliff faces and boulders. Despite such differences, the combined ethnohistoric and ethnographic evidence strongly supports the view elsewhere, rock art was associated with shamanistic activity (although some was also produced in connection with female puberty rites) and relates especially to altered states of consciousness (see e.g., Whitley 1992; also Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 1989). As such, rock art sites were widely regarded as symbolic portals into the supernatural world. This is substantiated by the regular placing of motifs close to cracks and openings on the rock face, and also in the naming of the landscape features on which rock art occurs.

Another feature of this art is its emphasis on gender symbolism. Again, this is reflected in the generic terms used to refer to rock art sites, which typically have strong feminine referents, and in the range of motifs and their symbolic referents. However, it is also evident from the placing of rock art sites in the landscape. Most obviously, caves and rockshelters in the local ethnography are regarded as symbolic wombs, and mountain peaks as penises. Other landscape features, such as the U-shaped sandstone outcrop on the Carrizo Plain in south-central California, on which a very rich rock art site known as Painted Rock occurs, are explicitly likened to a natural vulva. At the apex of this site is a panel depicting human figures as a sexual metaphor, since in Chumash ethnography “getting into the canoe” is a metaphor for intercourse (Whitley 1998: 20).

A particular feature of this rock art is that it is dominated by female sexual symbolism and referents. This is also evident from the predominant selection of lower topographic localities for the placement of rock art than on the highest elevations, since in the local ethnography height was associated with males and masculinity and low spots with females and femininity (Whitley 1998: 22–23). Yet, as Whitley remarks, the art was almost certainly exclusively produced by male shamans. To explain this apparent paradox, Whitley suggests that because female sexuality was regarded as dangerous and threatening, at one level rock art sites can be regarded as centers of power controlled by shamans for both beneficial and malign purposes that the majority of the population would have avoided. However, the ethnographic literature also indicated that in the local mindscape, the supernatural world was regarded as the direct opposite to the human world. Thus, through the principle of symbolic inversion the rock art sites, as portals to the supernatural world, and despite the overt female symbolism, could have been read also as potent centers of masculinity and heightened male
Being-in-the-Land

An additional feature of more recent approaches that has emerged across the disciplines, which has obvious resonance with several of the examples given above, has been the recognition that landscapes are not simply viewed from afar or acted on but are also *lived in*. As David Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhambo observe in their historical anthropology of Siaya, western Kenya, for its Luo inhabitants, landscape “means existence” (1989: 9). Here, the concept refers simultaneously to the physical terrain, its occupants, and the habits and customs that allow its exploitation in a particular way (cf. Crawford’s perspective on what constituted the Luo landscape, cited above). As such, the term evokes both possibilities and constraints. In a more general essay, Ingold makes much the same point: “Landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein” (1993: 156). Being “dwelt in” necessarily means that landscapes are not the static, inscribed forms conventionally documented by cartographers, archaeologists, and historical geographers but are instead temporal phenomena with multiple and often overlapping rhythms that come into being through the process of human occupancy—in other words, by a “being in” the land. This perspective has been developed further with reference to archaeological landscapes by Tilley (1996), who suggests that there are four defining characteristics to the concept. First, landscape is holistic, in the sense that it comprises a series of locales, each with its own associated meanings, and a series of relationships that link these locales into a composite whole. Second, landscape comes to be known and is experienced through the human body and its variable spatiotemporal placement within that landscape. Third, learning about a landscape is a form of socialization, the practical mastery of which provides an important component of a person’s sense of ontological security. Finally, control over the mechanisms of learning the “lie of the land” can be an important source of power and a basis for social domination (Tilley 1996: 161–62).

In marked contrast to the manner in which ethnography has often been used in other landscape studies, as illustrated above, many of the recent phenomenological approaches draw less on the ethnography of others, except perhaps as a way to illustrate general principles, and more on the ethnographic experiences of the researcher through her/his own physical engagement with an archaeological landscape (e.g., Thomas engagement has obvious advantages over a purely map- and text-based analysis of landscape, since it provides the archaeologist with direct bodily and visual encounters with the land, it is not without its problems. Most notably, the landscapes of today are often vegetated differently than they were when they were occupied in the past (Cummings and Whittle 2003), and hence many points that may be intervisible today may have been obscured from view in the past (or *vice versa*). Equally, as Barrett has noted (2004), the landscapes of today are structured by entirely different rights of access, familial, and political obligations, and even bodily habitus. Modern landscapes also have their own historicity, which overlies and subsumes that of the older landscapes that archaeologists seek to investigate—by which is meant that round barrows and dykes in Wiltshire today, for instance, exist alongside other features such as modern farm buildings, enclosure-era hedgerows, Roman roads, and medieval droveways that were not there during the Bronze and Iron Ages. As palimpsests, modern landscapes are also sites of memory open to contestation, debate, and resistance (Bender 1993; Given 2004: 138–61; Küchler 1993), of which the archaeological process is also a part.

Conclusions

A wide variety of ethnographic sources and types of information has been used to aid the interpretation of archaeological landscapes and landscape features from the very beginnings of the subfield. As in the broader discipline, these applications have ranged from the use of rather piecemeal ethnographic parallels to more carefully argued formal and relational analogies. The insights gained from more general anthropological principles concerning non-Western perceptions of landscape and the concept of “dwelling in the landscape” have also been informative. In recent years, there has been a trend toward more phenomenological approaches, wherein the experience of the fieldworker’s engagement with a landscape is treated as the primary source of ethnographic imagination. The aspects of ethnographic landscapes that archaeologists have found particularly inspirational in recent years include the significance of natural places, the links between landscape and memory, and the politics of place. Although not discussed here, ethnographic data regularly feature in more historical ecology oriented studies of landscape change and continuity. Although there have been some landscape-scale ethnarchaeological studies,
settlement and site distributions and their material signatures, with little or no discussion of the symbolism and meanings of these landscapes and their archaeological traces to the ethnographic actors concerned. There is certainly considerable scope for more integrated ethnoarchaeological studies that consider these latter elements in conjunction with the more material aspects.

References


