

Eastern Washington: Conditions and Aberrations

1996 ACSA Design Studio Project Award

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A book entitled *Eastern Washington: Conditions and Aberrations* chronicles the results of a regional research project undertaken by a site design studio in a school of architecture located in the northwest. The intention of this work is to be both an introduction and a reintroduction to a landscape region, which to many Americans is either unknown or unremarkable. In fact, many Americans have been misled by print media into believing that this landscape, which is called *eastern* Washington, does not exist. A study of Washington state travel guides over the last 106 years showed that the landscape features most represented on their covers were forest, mountains, and expansive waterways. Rarely was the grassland steppe of eastern Washington (a landscape condition which, in reality, covers over half the land area of the state) shown. The result of this media bias is that most non-residents believe Washington to be covered with evergreen forest, mountain ranges and lakes, not shrub and grassland.

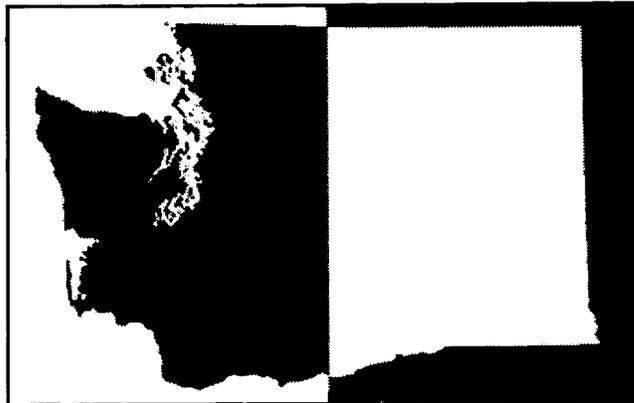
Additionally, many residents of the state who are aware of the landscape features of eastern Washington offer evidence of disinterest at best. Marketing surveys show that the forests, mountains, and waterways of western Washington are preferred landscape features over the "dry, treeless hills" of eastern Washington. Rand McNally in 1989, for example, rated western Washington one of the most preferred landscape regions in America, stating the following reasons.

"... Nature has been especially kind to this little corner

of the world: among its natural assets are the salt waters of Puget Sound and Elliot Bay, Lake Washington, a 24-mile long body of fresh water, two mountain ranges — the Olympics to the west and the Cascades in the east — deep forests almost at your doorstep. . ."

The focus of the project's twenty essays is to begin to both identify why one landscape, in this case western Washington, is preferred over another (eastern Washington) and to find methods of revealing and expressing significance in a region which many consider insignificant. The work endeavors to reveal features of the eastern Washington landscape which will rival forest, or mountain, or sea.

Each author first offers a discussion of existing regional *conditions*, which is followed by an *aberration* to the landscape to amplify these particular characteristics. Additions and subtractions are made in eastern Washington which are meant to provide physical, mental, and emotional transformation. From restoring the wildness of the Columbia River by removing the spillways of Grand Coulee Dam to the construction of a series of shrines along the Snake River for the "wanderer" to reconnect with the sun, moon, wind, and water; from a naked human's embrace of a "naked" landscape to the creation of a "Garden of Eden" in a hidden canyon in the scablands, the odyssey offers views of eastern Washington likely not seen before. The intention of the excursion is to ameliorate and enlighten your view of this region.



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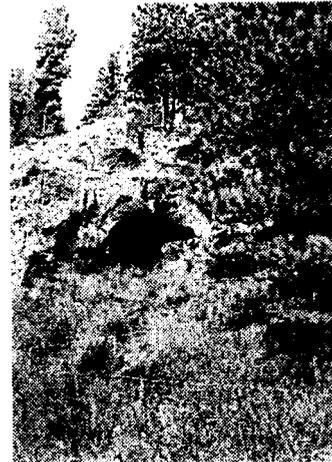
Excerpts from Eastern Washington: Conditions and Aberrations

THE MOST SACRED SITE IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

Steve L. Oldroyd

"Of the many caves in Eastern Washington one is considered by some to be most sacred. Located on the Pend Oreille River, within the Kalispell Indian Reservation, Manresa Grotto serves the spiritual needs of the surrounding community.

For thousands of years this cave has been used by Native Americans, as well as been adopted by the Jesuit missionaries when they arrived. Evidence of its use can still be found. When I visited Manresa Grotto I found ceremonial ash circles as well as offerings of stick bundles left by recent visitors."



View of Manresa grotto main entry



Pictograph found along the Columbia River Gorge photographed by Greg Bettis

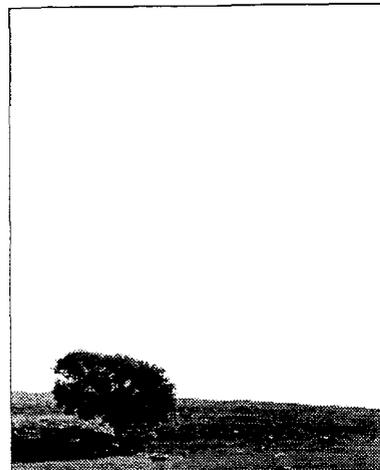


Photo C. Norberg-Schultz

EASTERN WASHINGTON: AN INCOMPLETE EXPERIENCE

Radek O. Stembera

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
 The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
 The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
 The named is the mother of ten thousand things.

-from the Tao Te Ching

"At the human scale, Eastern Washington exhibits some change: the seasons, the weather. The landscape, however, is repetitious. Where there are hills, there are hills to the horizon. Where there is flatness, there is flatness to the horizon. There is little diversity."

"Originally, Eastern Washington supported a thriving variety of vegetation. Today, that can only be experienced at a few nature conservatories. Instead, the area has been enslaved by the highly controlled nature of agriculture. It is not allowed to develop freely and naturally as variety is limited. The land is not allowed to change."

ANTHROPOMORPHIC JOURNEY

Daniel Wayne Wilson Jr.

"Eastern Washington: where the roadways host an erotic journey, revealing through motion the human form hidden within the landscape."

"Tire textures rubbing against the designs in the streetscape at high velocities create a humming, groaning, whining music all the while sending vibrations deep into our bodies. The wheel becomes the medium through which we caress the surface, the skin of Eastern Washington."

"Eastern Washington highways and roadways delineate a journey which reveals a human connection with the land. They embrace the contours of Eastern Washington, choreographing an orgy of forms of enormous scale and intensity."



Steptoe Butte from Kamiak Butte.



Interlocking bodies, Michelangelo