

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Golden Spike National Historic Site was set aside in 1957 as a National Historic Site in non-federal ownership to commemorate the completion of the first transcontinental railroad and to acknowledge the tremendous historical consequences it created for our nation (Public Law 89-102). On July 30, 1965, it became part of the National Park System. While the park celebrates the May 10, 1869 joining of the rails built by the Central Pacific (CP) and Union Pacific (UP) railroad (RR) companies, it also emphasizes the paramount historical impact of the first transcontinental railroad upon the far western frontier. It bridged the vast unknown spaces of the Great American Desert and accelerated the processes whereby the American frontier was eventually eliminated. It opened the great western lands to settlement, hastening the creation of western territories and states. It united East and West; instead of taking six weeks by Pony Express to cross the nation, after completion of the railroad, mail took six days to go from coast to coast. Completion of the railroad also changed Native American lifeways and resulted in the almost complete-annihilation of the American Bison. Historians count the completion of the transcontinental railroad among the most significant and far-reaching events in the nation's history.

Portions of this project, located on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM,) are considered an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Because of its unique history, the Transcontinental Railroad Grade was designated as an ACEC. Through the ACEC designation, special management was established to protect the historic and scenic values of the area. The BLM has limited travel to existing roads and trails in the area. The BLM also works on enhancing the visitor's experience and "preventing man-caused deterioration" (BLM 2007). This area is also a backcountry byway known as the "Promontory Branch" byway that winds through remnants of railroad camps, towns, and trestles.

Golden Spike National Historic Site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and its significance was formally documented for the Register in 1986 (Hendricks 1986). The "Joining of the Rails Transcontinental Railroad" was designated a National Civil Engineering Landmark in 1969 (American Society of Civil Engineers, May 10, 1969). The Central Pacific Railroad grade and the unfinished Union Pacific grade from the park's west boundary to Lucin was also documented for the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. In 1994 the utilized, Union Pacific grade to the east of the park was documented for the National Register of Historic Places. Remnants of the unused Central Pacific grade east of the park have not been documented for the National Register.

Because of the railroad's historical significance to the nation's history, it is the intent of the agencies involved to preserve its resources for public edification, enjoyment, and inspiration. This includes: the historic sites, artifacts, and knowledge associated with construction and operation of the railroad. For example, the park is the only place that has been set aside in perpetuity where evidence of construction of the notorious parallel grades can be seen by the American public. Here, too, are the only construction workers' campsites that are to be protected and preserved. These resources, and others unique to the park and associated Bureau of Land