



National Parks And The Future Of Museums In Ghana

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How can the museum sector in Ghana better harness the enormous cultural and natural heritage assets of the country's protected areas for accelerated institutional development and sustainable heritage tourism?

This essay explores the potential benefits for the museum sector in associating with Ghana's protected areas, especially the national parks and resource reserves. The goal of the paper is to identify specific opportunities that the country's national parks might avail themselves of in order to revamp the museum sector and heritage tourism (Beaudoin 1997: 21-23). The paper argues that national parks and resource reserves are crucial to facilitating a more sustainable and financially viable museum sector in Ghana. The essay is inspired by

the museum sector of the National Park Service of the United States of America, where these institutions play educational and interpretive roles within the national parks (see the National Parks Service Museum Handbook, Part I, 2006).

Ghana's Protected Areas And Park Museums

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature 2010 report on Ghana (IUCN/PACO 2010: 7), there are 21 Wildlife Protected Areas (PAs) in the country, constituting 1,347,600 ha, or 5.6% of the nation's territory. The PAs include seven national parks, six resource reserves, two wildlife sanctuaries, one strict nature reserve, and five coastal wetlands. Many of these PAs have significant tangible and intangible cultural heritage components that are well-protected, but remain unexplored for educational and tourism purposes. For instance, the Mole and Bui National Parks

and Shai Hills Resource Reserve contain several historical caves, cultural and archaeological sites that are yet to be systematically identified, documented, interpreted and exhibited by museums at these parks. The parks are also surrounded by communities, such as the Shai, Banda and Gonja communities, and by towns with rich histories and cultural heritage traditions that could better be incorporated into the interpretative narratives of national parks and reserves.

Deepened Collaborations

For the country's museum sector to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable heritage and eco-tourism development, it is important for three organisational bodies to work more closely together: the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB); the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission, a key government institution responsible for the protection and conservation of

the natural and cultural heritage resources of the country; and the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana.

Ghana's PAs are managed by the Forestry Commission (FC), while the tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources of Ghana are managed by the GMMB. The Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies is crucial because it is currently the only local university department responsible for training people for work in the museum sector as archaeologists, museum and heritage experts. These archaeologists and heritage experts help both the GMMB and FC to identify, document, protect, explore and manage the rich cultural and natural heritage resources of Ghana.

Of equal importance in preserving the past and building for a better future are the Ghanaian people; especially communities considered to be living heritage, or who live in or around heritage assets such as national parks and historical monuments. They form the basis of "our heritage won for us".

In working together, the museums and national parks in Ghana can enhance each other's work while developing the natural and cultural heritage conservation and promotion of eco-tourism. Already, there are promising outcomes in the interrelationship between the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, the national parks and the museums of Ghana, including the founding in March 2020 of the Museum of Natural and Cultural Heritage at Shai Hills (Shai Hills Resource Reserve). Discussions are underway about further Museums of Natural and Cultural Heritage, including one at Kumasi Zoo.

Especially encouraging is the work being done on the proposed Museum of Natural and Cultural Heritage at Mole (Mole National Park) to curate surface archaeological reconnaissance that was conducted by the Department of Archaeology in the park in the 1970s, producing significant cultural materials such as pottery, terracotta rasps or 'cigars', Neolithic stone tools and fauna remains. The Mole National Park currently hosts a small museum that is expected to be expanded to curate and exhibit the natural history and cultural heritage materials of the park and the local communities in the area.

Working more closely with the museums, these sites could be better preserved and activated. An action plan for the historical, cultural and archaeological resources and sites within the reserve might incorporate:

1. Documenting key site locations with GPS
2. Recording on-site oral histories of local people from an older generation
3. Properly training guides on local history and site protocols
4. Monitoring activities at the

site to ensure proper policies to protect it are in place

5. Revising policies as necessary
6. Providing adequate interpretation and educational materials, including informational notices near each historical site
7. Professional archaeological inspections of key cultural and historical sites
8. Taking advice from curators at the National Museum for any newly-discovered archaeological and cultural heritage materials.

The Potential For Park Museums

Museums can help support the mission of the national parks and assist in harnessing, conserving and promoting the enormous cultural, historical and natural heritage sites and resources of the parks. They can serve educational purposes for visitors and foster research opportunities for scholars. The site-specific nature of park museums can help build more sustainable futures for all Ghanaians in various ways:



Shai Hills National Park



Park museums can have a profound effect on the environment and landscape

Park museums (and community museums associated with parks and reserves) provide invaluable conduits for learning about the indigenous knowledge systems, resilient traditions, cultures, and creative arts of the people, whose engagement with their landscape and environment spans millennia to form the larger story of the parks and communities that host them. These museums can thus help promote Ghana's biocultural heritage and ecological history.

Site-specific museums encourage deeper environmental understanding. As seasons shift—particularly in this era of dramatic climate change—these national park museums could function as the ideal places to monitor landscape transformations, and how people adapt to them. Museums can play a vital role in helping to preserve, by way of education, species and fauna likely otherwise to become extinct in the national parks. Meanwhile, such museums can fulfill key requirements of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) by developing a limited area of a reserve for public education and appreciation.

Park museums also serve as memory centres for understanding the recent and deep history of our people, and as places for crafting possible futures in foods and herbal medicines, for instance, for the local communities associated not only with the Protected Areas but with Ghana, Africa and the African diaspora.

Park museums provide research opportunities and historical understanding

Working together, parks and

museums can advance knowledge in the humanities and sciences while providing important baseline data for park managers, scientists and other researchers. Crucially, museums can better preserve scientific and historical documentation of the parks' histories, resources and local communities. For example, the Freedom Park Heritage Site and Museum in Pretoria archives and preserves South Africa's indigenous knowledge, providing information about unique heritage and cultures.

Park museums can entertain diverse audiences

Museums in national parks can also provide entertainment for people. The Nairobi National Museum in Kenya and Nairobi Snake Park, for example, aim to interpret local heritage through enjoyable leisure activity. By creating museum spaces within national parks, the public can be better served and audiences expanded.

Success Elsewhere

Helpful examples of other park museums such as the Masorini Iron Age site and museum, Wolhuter hut museum, and Campbell 1929 Hut Museum can be found in Kruger National Park, South African National Parks (SANParks). Meanwhile, the collection of the Yellowstone museum in the United States of America, for example, contains more than 720,000 objects, in addition to archival and library collections. The museum collection comprises natural history, archaeology and items such as obsidian points and faunal remains. In both countries, these museums foster community engagement and empowerment; enhancing cultural heritage management capacity and facilitating the development of skilled curators; and establishing research partnerships

with universities, museums and conservationists.

Meanwhile, the 'Take Kruger to Kasie Project' spearheaded by the Kruger National Park's People and Conservation Department, which aims to "take the park to the people", is an innovative campaign using two buses fitted with screens to spread awareness of the local environment and conservation (Kruger National Park Management Plan 2018-2028: 158). Targeting communities adjacent to the park, it provides direct access to information about what the park has to offer and is also a means of boosting tourism. SANParks places emphasis on responsible tourism as a means of creating benefits for its local communities and buoying the parks' financial sustainability. There is a focus on communicating clear interpretations throughout the sites; a process designed to reveal meaning and relationships through explanations about objects, artefacts, landscapes and sites. Opportunities for educational engagement range from guided drives, trails and walks to informational boards posted in camps, picnic grounds and on fates, as well as specific information centres at some camps including museums, education centres and libraries. These interpretive centres focus on natural and cultural heritage and are used by tourists, as well as visiting schools and communities who are welcomed through direct programmes, self-guided observation, formal presentations and films.

Conclusion

In working together, museums and national parks can develop an accelerated institutional capacity as well as more sustainable financial



The Museum of Natural & Cultural Heritage at Shai Hills

futures and deeper knowledge bases. For the museum sector to contribute meaningfully to Ghana's cultural heritage and heritage tourism development, the GMMB needs to strengthen its partnerships with the FC, especially through the national parks and resource reserves of Ghana, and to work increasingly with researchers at the University of Ghana. Other key stakeholders with direct relationships to the national parks ought also to be engaged at a more rigorous level. For instance, the local communities surrounding the national parks, and heritage research institutions and departments such as the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana. The GMMB has the potential to lead the country in harnessing the rich heritage resources of Ghana for the betterment of the lives of Ghanaians and Africans on the continent and in the diaspora.

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