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Local and public heritage at a World Heritage site

Frederick J. Conway*

San Diego State University, USA

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ABSTRACT

The World Heritage Rock Art of the Sierra de San Francisco site in Mexico maintains some of the oldest and largest prehistoric murals in North America. The local ranching community is the custodian of a double heritage, the UNESCO-sanctioned rock art and their own ranching heritage. The rock art heritage is both tangible and public, known to and authenticated by professional archaeologists, while the ranching heritage is largely intangible and private, a lived and remembered experience known within families. As economic conditions deteriorate, the ranchers seek to expand their tourism activities to include their ranching heritage. Understanding their double heritage along tangible/intangible and public/private axes clarifies the challenges they face.

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Introduction

The Double Heritage of the Sierra de San Francisco

The Sierra de San Francisco, in the southern half of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula, is rich in heritage. The mountain range is part of the El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve, designated by UNESCO in 1988 to conserve both the unique biota of the Vizcaíno Desert and the coastal wintering sites for grey whales (Carrabias Lillo, Provencio, de la Marza, Gutiérrez, & Gómez, 2000). In 1993, the Sierra was designated as a World Heritage site for its prehistoric rock art, which many experts regard as the most important in North America, and likely the oldest in the Western Hemisphere. The art, which archaeologists call the Great Mural tradition, consists of dozens of representations of animals and humans, many of them far larger than life size. The region is also known for prehistoric petroglyphs. The World Heritage site is administered by the National Institute of History and Archaeology (*Instituto Nacional de*

* Tel.: +1 (619) 594 5643.

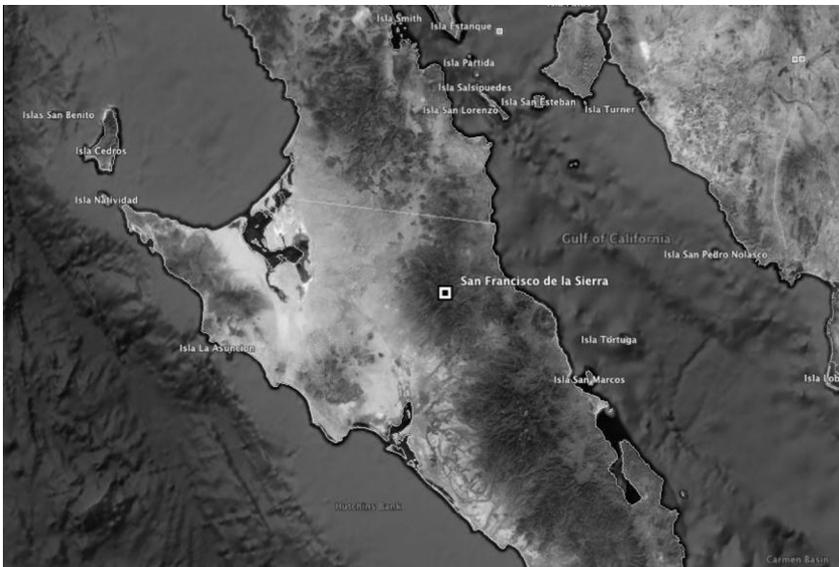
E-mail address: conway1@mail.sdsu.edu

Arqueología e Historia) or INAH, but all of its agents at the site are members of a local ranching community with deep roots in the history of the region.

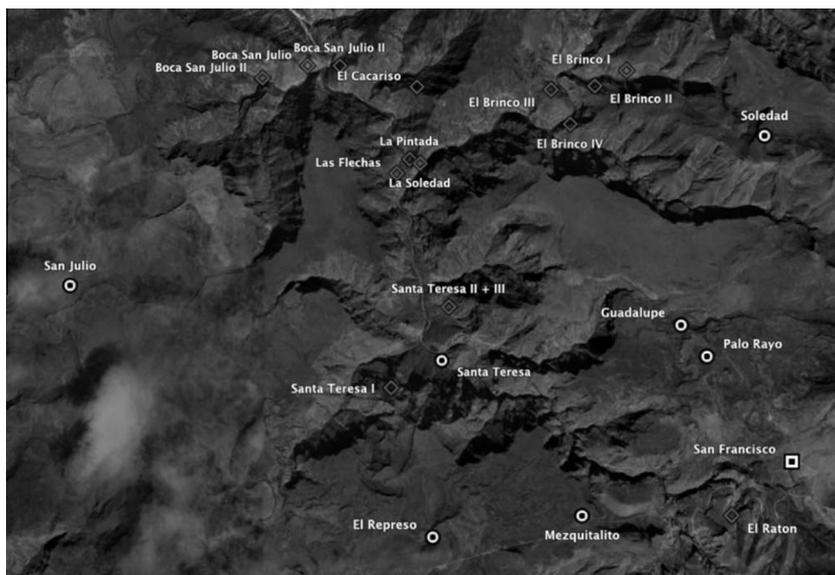
The community has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century and remained largely isolated and self-sufficient until the last quarter of the twentieth century. Over generations, the community (and other isolated ranching groups in the mountain ranges of Baja California Sur) developed a technology from local materials, mainly for irrigation, that enabled them to occupy and transform their harsh desert environment, creating a landscape of small oases. They also developed a style of life and a way of interacting with others that has been admired by diverse observers (Crosby, 1981) and are a strong source of identity for the ranchers. The ranchers of the Sierra de San Francisco are custodians, then, of two heritages. One is their own ranching culture, a heritage that the ranchers know, live, value in varying degrees, and see passing away with changes in technology, the economy, and their relationship with the wider Mexican society. The other is the World Heritage of the Great Murals that the Sierra de San Francisco is best known for. This second heritage is not one that the ranchers particularly identify with. Yet in a formal and even legal sense they are custodians of the second heritage more precisely than they are of the first (see [Maps 1 and 2](#)).

With a trend toward decreased rainfall, the ranchers' economic strategy of producing goats and goat cheese has become increasingly fragile. Living in considerable poverty, the ranching community faces demographic and cultural decline, as younger people desire or are forced to seek opportunities elsewhere and the population progressively ages. As they look toward alternatives for maintaining their life in the Sierra, an obvious route is to augment income from the small but relatively reliable traffic in tourists who come to see the Great Murals. The ranchers see that they can do this both by becoming more effective guides for the World Heritage rock art and by adding ranch and ecotourism excursions to the offerings available to tourists. This paper explores the characteristics of the ranchers' two heritages and their implications for the development of a coherent tourism that combines elements of both. The local valorization of the Great Murals can be strategically used in order to help ensure the survival of the ranching way of life, which in turn assures the preservation of the millennia-old World Heritage site.

This paper explores the distinction between the cultural heritages of the Sierra de San Francisco along two axes: tangible/intangible and public/private. Tangible and intangible are widely used terms, with the latter defined by UNESCO (2013) as "the practices, representations, expressions, as well as



Map 1. San Francisco de la Sierra on Baja California Peninsula (Conway, Espinoza, & Giacinto, 2010).



Map 2. Great Mural Sites, Sierra de San Francisco, BCS, Mexico (Conway, Espinoza, & Giacinto, 2010).

the knowledge and skills...that communities...recognise as part of their cultural heritage.” The anthropologist Erve Chambers (2006) distinguished a professionalized public heritage that values historical accuracy from a private heritage experienced by community members with ties to the local past. The two axes tangible/intangible and public/private are distinct. Tangible and intangible are characteristics of the heritage itself; they describe its form. Public and private are concerned with the values and attitudes about heritage, particularly in its social and institutional context. Thus four possible heritage types are possible long these axes: tangible heritage that is public or private and intangible heritage that is public or private.

It is worth noting that both the public and private heritages of the Sierra de San Francisco lie at the “margins of the state” (Das & Poole, 2004). Baja California Sur, the less powerful of the two states that make up the geographically remote Baja California Peninsula, was the last part of national territory to become a state (in 1974) and has the lowest population of the Mexican states. The ancestors of the ranchers deliberately sought to settle in remote areas where they could lead their own lives. Their self-sufficiency and austerity (Cariño, 2008) served them well for more than a century, but in the twenty-first century it is less feasible to survive at the margins. The public heritage of the Sierra is also marginal. As impressive as the Great Murals may be, they do not exhibit the monumentality and indigenous civilization of Aztec and Mayan sites that have supported the Mexican state’s ideology of national identity for nearly a century. As Bendímez Patterson (2006, p. 198), writing of the INAH centers in Baja California and Baja California Sur, phrases it, “A longstanding problem faced by these centers has been to get adequate consideration for Baja California archaeology at the national level, given the peninsula’s distance from central Mexico and the divergence of its prehistoric traditions from those of Mesoamerica.” Even more is the rancher heritage at the margins of the state. For all their symbolic value in regional identity, the ranchers of Baja California Sur have been largely abandoned by the society around them in terms of services and investment.

Tangible and Intangible, Public and Private Heritage

Tangible heritage has a physical dimension that requires specific technologies of preservation or conservation and raises questions about integrity and authenticity of the site, often from a historical

perspective. Sometimes the tangible property is mandated for preservation, maintaining its present state for future generations. At other times, the site not so much “frozen” as it conserved it in a way that is judged appropriate by cultural custodians (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). Intangible heritage tends to be much more fluid and raises even more questions about the value of conserving a particular form of the heritage over time when the cultural context in which it is produced has changed.

For Chambers (2006, p. 2), public heritage emphasizes historical authenticity as measured by professional heritage elites, while private heritage focuses “on the ways in which the past is dynamically linked to the present, with heritage values identified and interpreted by community members rather than by outsiders,” which he calls its significance. In this sense, public heritage is closely related to history and authenticity, while private heritage is closely related to culture and significance (Chambers, 2006, p. 3). I believe that Chambers associates public heritage with history and private heritage with culture on a metaphorical level, but the association does not always hold as there can be a public heritage focused on the authenticity of culture and a private heritage focused on the significance of history. In his monograph, Chambers discusses the interactions between public and private heritage within a single, if complex, sphere: the history, cultures, and multiple stakeholders of the Chesapeake Bay region of the eastern United States. There, the same material culture and traditions can be seen as both public and private heritage; the private is often a contestation of the public. In the Sierra de San Francisco, the situation is quite different. There are two separate heritages, the public heritage of the Great Murals and the private heritage of the ranching culture.

It is important to note here that Chambers is addressing the heritage and authenticity concerns of heritage professional and local (host) communities rather than of tourists. Chambers' discussion of authenticity in public heritage therefore is not an analysis of tourists' search for authenticity (Cohen, 1988) related to Wang's “existential” authenticity as developed by Kim and Jamal (2007), but is rather something closer to Wang's (1999, pp. 351–353) understanding of “objective” authenticity as related to the measurable qualities of originals (Lau, 2010; Meethan, 2001). This paper also is focused on heritage as understood by professionals and local “heirs” rather than by tourists per se, but the implications of the discussion for tourism will be made explicit. This paper is concerned with members of the custodian community who are considering undertaking new tourism options. They have not yet been able to do so because their level of income does not permit more than the most modest options and they have only begun to organize to take advantage of assistance from outside agencies. The paper seeks to elucidate some of the challenges they face in juxtaposing the managed but “dead” cultural heritage of the Great Murals with the vivid but “unmanaged” ranching heritage they live.

Research methods

This paper emerged from reflections about a study of the socioeconomic situation of ranchers in the Sierra de San Francisco conducted for the International Community Foundation (Conway, Espinoza, & Giacinto, 2010). The study was based on some 30 semi-structured interviews with residents of most of the ranches in the Sierra. The interviews were conducted between December, 2008 and January, 2010. The interviews included questions about ranching life, community organization, and perceived needs. Interviews were also conducted with community leaders, including the *sub-delegado* (the elected government officer for the community) and the head of the local community organization, Forjadores de la Sierra, as well as with representatives of INAH and the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (which manages the Biosphere Reserve), managers of tourism companies, and staff from NGOs that work in the area. The research was conducted by the author and two researchers who spent two months doing participant observation in the community. The author returned to San Francisco de la Sierra in July, 2010 to observe a program working with local guides for the World Heritage site. In addition to fieldwork, research for this paper included review of reports from three socioeconomic assessments of the Sierra and discussions with Mexican researchers working with ranching communities in other areas of the state.

The interviewees were selected with the goals of obtaining a wide variety of perspectives and representing as many of the ranches as possible. For logistical reasons, it was not possible to visit some of the remotest ranches, but residents from most of the ranches were interviewed. The researchers did

not present ourselves as focused on any particular aspect of local life, and thus were not seen as more interested in heritage or tourism than other issues. In this way we were better able to place the respondents' interests and concerns about heritage and tourism in the context of their broader economic and cultural lives and their priorities for the future.

The Great Mural art

The World Heritage Site

The World Heritage site of the Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco consists of some 320 sites found principally in seven caves of this mountain range in the center of the Baja California Peninsula (INAH, 2012). UNESCO (2012) describes the art as being “of exceptional quality at both the national and the international scale, for its high quality, its extent, the variety and originality of human and animal representations, its remarkable colors, and its excellent state of preservation.” These Great Murals date to as early as 2800 BCE, and as early as 5400 BCE in the adjoining Sierra de Guadalupe (INAH, 2008). The paintings appear to constitute a series of cultural traditions lasting two to three millennia (Ritter, 2006, p. 107), but the group(s) that created them has not been named. The meaning and purpose the Great Murals can only be inferred, and as Ritter (2006, p. 107) comments, “[i]nterpretations of the region's rock art are as varied as the art itself. The explanations of meaning have evolved in concert with increasing sophistication of their study.” The most recent work suggests that the murals represent puberty and mortuary rites. Gutiérrez-Martínez and Hyland (2002) see the Great Murals as part of a ceremonial complex found throughout the peninsula.

Rock paintings can be found in other mountain ranges of the Peninsula, but their greatest concentration is in the Sierra de San Francisco. Access to most of the caves is difficult, apart from the Cueva del Ratón, which is located at the side of the road to San Francisco de la Sierra. (Note that the region is called the Sierra de San Francisco and its largest settlement is called San Francisco de la Sierra, or simply San Francisco.) The largest concentration of open caves (including La Cueva Soledad, Las Flechas, and La Pintada) requires a five-hour mule trip from San Francisco down a beautiful but precariously steep trail and two nights of primitive camping. Other caves can be reached with a few more days of travel and camping. Undoubtedly the relative inaccessibility of the Great Murals has helped to preserve them, especially in the past half century since they have become more widely known to the public.

The Great Murals as Tangible and Public Heritage

The Great Murals are, of course, a tangible form of heritage, and there is no current intangible heritage associated with them, other than the belief that they were created by giants. In Chambers' terms, the heritage of the Great Murals is entirely public. Understanding of the dating, creation, and meaning of the art is completely professional, in the hands of archaeologists and largely channeled through INAH. Any research conducted at the cave sites must be conducted under the auspices of INAH, and many of the advances in answering the two most pressing questions about the murals, their age and meaning, are debated among archaeologists.

The Great Murals were first reported by Jesuit missionaries, who learned about them from the local Cochimí. It was with Leon Diguét, a French chemist working at a copper mine in the region in the 1890s, that “the modern era of archaeological research in the central sierras began” (Hyland, 2006, p. 121). Diguét (1895) catalogued and named many of the murals. A half century later systematic archaeological research began under the auspices of INAH with Dahlgren's (1954) study of the San Borjitas rock shelter murals in the Sierra de Guadalupe (the oldest dated site). Popular knowledge of the rock art received a boost in the 1960s, with several expeditions headed by the flamboyant mystery novel writer, Erle Stanley Gardner (who arrived in San Francisco by helicopter), accompanied by UCLA archaeologist Clement Meighan (1966). In the 1970s, Harry Crosby began his systematic survey of the rock art, calling them Great Murals, a term that has been widely adopted. From the 1980s, research under INAH auspices continued (Hyland, 2006), with the most recent analysis by Gutiérrez-Martínez and Hyland (2002). Knowledge about the Great Murals is generated by professionals and circulates among them, with little information filtering down to the custodian community.

The importance of the Great Murals to the ranchers is largely economic. The World Heritage cave paintings bring tourists to the Sierra de San Francisco who would not otherwise come, providing the guides with some income. Interviews with guides, however, revealed that income from tourism was minimal for the average guide, who works with tourists once or perhaps twice a year. In the last years of the 1990s, about 2000 tourists a year were coming to see the Great Murals (Fernández García, 2001). Visits to the Sierra since 2001 have fluctuated around half that number, as Mexican tourism in general has been profoundly affected by the terrorist attacks in New York of that year, by images of violence in Mexico, and by the financial crisis of 2008. Nevertheless, the residents of the Sierra need whatever income can be derived from tourism.

The designation of the Sierra de San Francisco as part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage site has had other economic impacts. Since 1993, the Sierra de San Francisco has attracted the attention of numerous outside groups, notably the Auracaria Project of Cooperación Española, the foreign aid branch of the Spanish government, which made significant infrastructure investment in San Francisco, including the construction of a water system and building a guesthouse for tourists, as well as improving the genetic stock of the goat population. Non-governmental organizations such as the Mexican Pronatura and the U.S. Amigos de las Californias have provided training and health care respectively (Romero-Brito & Varela-Galván, 2011). The International Community Foundation funded a needs assessment of the Sierra de San Francisco in part because of its role as a tourist destination (Conway et al., 2010). A neighboring area to the south, the Sierra de Guadalupe, has both Great Murals and rich rancher heritage, but is part of neither a Biosphere Reserve nor a World Heritage site. It has not received the same interest from either the Mexican government or non-governmental organizations as the Sierra de San Francisco.

There is almost no private dimension to the Great Mural heritage. No local “heirs” claim the Great Mural heritage as part of their legacy or identity, and there probably have not been such heirs for several centuries. Even the 18th century Cochimí saw the murals as created by others, the strange giants of the past, lore that has persisted among some ranchers (Crosby, 1974). (That belief is not surprising, given both the large size of the images and the fact that they are located as many as ten meters above the cave floor.) The current-day ranchers who serve as the custodians of the rock art are thus at two historical removes from it. They identify neither with the creators of the art nor with the Cochimí, who disappeared as a named ethnic group by the mid-nineteenth century.

While the ranchers do not identify the Great Murals as the work of their cultural ancestors or as a legacy in which they have an emotional stake tied to their identity, they do consider themselves the custodians of the Great Murals, both symbolically and in specific institutionalized senses. This is particularly true for the guides discussed below, who come from nearly all the families of the community. But it is really the people of Baja California Sur, the nation of Mexico, and the humanity at large who are, in a rather abstract way, the heirs of the Great Mural tradition, just as UNESCO intended (Di Giovine, 2009).

Management of the World Heritage Site

The Sierra de San Francisco World Heritage site is under the purview of INAH, with management conducted by local ranchers. INAH, a federal agency, is charged with researching, conserving, and informing the public about Mexico’s archaeological and historical heritage. Bendímez Patterson (2006) has noted that only 150 of Mexico’s 29,000 recorded archaeological zones are open to the public. The Sierra de San Francisco in Baja California Sur is one of only two such sites in the Baja California Peninsula. The main institutional concern of INAH is to protect the cave art sites. This it accomplishes through establishing regulations for site visits, including the need for permits by all tourists. The caves are divided into four levels, from Level I for easily accessible caves to Level IV, sites only open for academic research. The INAH Coordinator in San Francisco de la Sierra issues permits, which can also be obtained in INAH offices in San Ignacio and La Paz.

INAH’s active management of the site intensified after its World Heritage designation. In 1995, INAH established a management plan for the site, including a roster system for guides to conduct tourists to the caves, replacing a somewhat chaotic situation in which potential guides had to compete for the services of tourists. The roster system provided both a cadre of guides responsible to INAH and a

means to spread the benefits of rock art tourism (about \$40 per day per tourist including animal rental) more widely throughout the ranching community. All groups, even the occasional tour group with its own guides, must hire an official guide from the INAH roster to escort them to the cave sites. The INAH Coordinator is expected to follow the order of the official roster in selecting a guide for each visiting group. Several analyses (Conway et al., 2010; Romero-Brito & Varela-Galván, 2011) found that the roster system did not work entirely as planned, but has had the desired effect of distributing tourism income and keeping INAH aware of the tourist traffic to the Great Mural sites. INAH designates the camping sites and trails that must be used to access the caves, with authorization for changes (even when erosion has damaged paths) needed from La Paz or even Mexico City. INAH has rigorous rules for camping, including prohibitions on fires, bathing, or alcohol. Tourists must bring all their own food from the outside, as well as food for the guide and helpers who lead the pack animals. There are almost no tourist facilities in the settlement of San Francisco, apart from a few small stores and a hostel-style guesthouse.

I have described the local ranchers as a custodian community, even though INAH is the institutional custodian of the World Heritage site. That is because there is no professional staff, such as archaeologists, in the Sierra. The nearest INAH office is in San Ignacio, 75 kilometers away and the office for the State is almost 700 kilometers away in La Paz. INAH's agents working at the site are all members of the local ranching community. The most important of these is the Coordinator, described above. The guides are responsible for the behavior of tourists according to the strict INAH guidelines. There are also several *custodios* who check on conditions of the murals.

To describe the relationship of these ranchers to the Great Murals it is useful to distinguish between the gatekeeper and custodian roles. The custodian is responsible for the maintenance of the heritage, whether it be tangible or intangible. The gatekeeper, on the other hand, functions as an intermediary who provides information and advice to tourists (McKercher & du Cros 2002, p. 154). The same person may engage in both roles, but the roles are distinct. The INAH Coordinator is clearly a gatekeeper as well as a custodian. It is illegal to visit the Great Mural sites without his permission, and he advises tourists on which caves to visit in a given time frame. The primary role of the guide is custodian: he brings the tourists to the murals, but his main responsibility is to protect the murals from the tourists. Many of the guides know little about the archaeology of the murals; certainly many know less than their better-informed clients. A few guides are highly accomplished and can serve as gatekeepers by providing tourists with advice about visiting the murals, but the function of many guides is restricted to knowing the route and managing animals.

The ranchers and their heritage

The Ranching Community and its History

The Sierra de San Francisco is a community of about 250 people, about half of whom live in San Francisco de la Sierra (with a population of 60) and two nearby ranches. A few small spare stores, the school, the clinic, and the church are located in San Francisco. The remainder of the population lives in some dozen outlying ranches, many of which are only accessible on foot or by animal. Most of the residents have kin or marriage ties with people at each of the ranches. Many adults have lived at more than one ranch, often growing up on one and marrying into another. In this way we can speak of a single community of the Sierra de San Francisco, one that is closely knit by ties that have inter-linked families through generations. The ranchers of the Sierra de San Francisco are part of a wider population of highland ranchers in Baja California Sur, several well-defined (and highly endogamous) groups who inhabit relatively remote mountain watersheds from the Sierra La Laguna in the southern part of the state to the Sierra de San Francisco in the north. These groups are separate from one another, but share parallel histories and ways of engaging with their environment that distinguish them from other rural people in Baja California Sur, including other ranchers.

Harry Crosby (1981, p. 58), one of the first writers to describe the culture of the ranchers, cautions that the word "ranch" in this context does not mean the expansive grasslands of what later became U.S. California:

In Baja California, by contrast, a ranch was created on whatever land happened to lie around any permanent source of water. . . Herds have to feed off the growth on adjacent slopes so precipitous and rocky that it defies the imagination of an outsider to believe that cattle, in particular, could subsist on such unpromising terrain.

Before the arrival of the Spanish at the end of the 17th century, the indigenous people of the Peninsula, including the painters of the Great Murals, subsisted successfully through foraging, moving seasonally among water sources. Jesuit missionaries, who were given control over the Baja California Peninsula, reshaped the landscape by creating irrigated gardens as a suitable setting for their new converts. The indigenous population succumbed rapidly to the diseases brought by the outsiders, however, and by the mid-nineteenth century the missions were but shadows of what they had been previously. In the meantime, a separate civil society had emerged. Some of the population of mission assistants and their descendants came to occupy the well-watered lands around the missions.

Others set off to occupy the more remote mission territories, more arid, less transformed, but essentially depopulated by the collapse of the indigenous population and its concentration around mission centers. These families, by then called *californios*, were the ancestors of the highland ranchers:

Divided into little groups of one to three families, they lived quietly at remote springs of water, often in foothills or mountains. Soon they formed a kitchen garden and stock-raising society, far-flung and loosely organized. Nothing that was to happen later would remove the mark of that formative era in Baja California history. The people who had taken to the hills were to remain there, remarkably unchanged, until our own time." (Crosby, 1981, p. 63).

The Present

It is a mistake to consider the highland ranchers a relic of *la Antigua California*. While much of the way of life of their ancestors has continued, it can no longer be said that they have been "remarkably unchanged," especially in the four decades since Harry Crosby first visited them. In the Sierra de San Francisco, the ranchers' isolation has been reduced in some positive ways and in other ways that make them more vulnerable. Since 1973, the Transpeninsular Highway has linked communities along the whole length of the Baja California Peninsula. Some years later, a connector road to the Sierra was carved out, making it possible to reach San Francisco from the highway in a truck rather than on horseback or mule. Trucks now bring both seafood and candy to the accessible ranches in the Sierra. The town of Vizcaíno to the west of the Sierra has grown as a center of agricultural production and a pole of attraction drawing ranchers away from the Sierra de San Francisco with employment opportunities, schools, and medical services. San Francisco used to have a long-distance secondary school; it now only has an elementary school. Families who wish their children to pursue an education must send them out of the community, and few who complete a secondary or higher education find a reason to return to their family's ranch. Conway, Espinoza & Giacinto note that:

Migration does not simply create a spatial distance from the immediate family; it also precipitates a disconnection from a social network composed of community knowledge and daily ranching practices. This is a very common occurrence in Central Baja California, where many ranches are left deserted and the former owners can no longer be found (2010, p. 2).

More positively, all the ranches are now connected to each other through a radio system that also reaches nearby towns and can report medical emergencies as well as everyday events. Almost all the ranches have solar panels to provide electricity for lighting and water purification. Some of the better off ranchers have added an additional panel for television. There are three private telephones and an internet connection at the school and the guesthouse in San Francisco. Younger people can climb to the top of nearby mountains for fluctuating cell phone connections to relatives in distant parts of the country. New products have replaced much of the old technology. Water is stored in plastic drums and transported by plastic pipes and hoses, no longer in canals shaped from palm trunks.

The rural economy is still based on livestock, but production has shifted from cattle to goats for both cheese and meat. Income from goat production is highly dependent on rainfall, and recent

decades have indicated a general trend toward decreased rain and prolonged drought. Cattle raising, while important historically (and symbolically), has fallen sharply in past decades since goats are better adapted to arid conditions. Without rainfall, or an alternative source of income, the continuation of the ranching community itself is at risk. As rich as their ranching heritage may be, the people of the Sierra de San Francisco were the poorest in the El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve, according to a study by the Spanish Auracaria Project (Fernández García, 2001). This certainly places them among the poorest populations in Baja California Sur. Income from goats and tourism was so low that most families found themselves in debt to stores in San Francisco de la Sierra, San Ignacio and Vizcaíno (Fernández García, 2001, p. 77). The government's temporary employment program, used for maintaining the road, and other subsidies, such as the *Oportunidades* health stipend, supplement meager incomes. For numerous observers, the efforts to diversify the economy are a grim race against time. In a study of the ranchers of the Sierra La Laguna Biosphere Reserve in Baja California Sur, Castorena Davis and Breceda Solis (2008) conclude that demographic trends and the level of poverty are such that the culture of the ranchers there is on the way to extinction. There is little in the data about ranching in the Sierra de San Francisco to suggest that its fate is any less at risk.

The most identifiable alternative to goat production is increased tourism, with ranching and ecotourism as attractions for tourists beyond the Great Murals. Tourists to the Biosphere Reserve are already inclined toward outdoors and ecotourism (Romero-Brito & Varela-Galván, 2011). Even though rock art tourism has declined, the connector road to the Transpeninsular Highway is in the process of being paved. Ordinary passenger cars can make it to San Francisco, but with difficulty. With the completion of the road, access will be easy and available even to tour buses. While residents of the Sierra are understandably uneasy about the potential negative impacts of the paved road, they also anticipate an increase in tourists and potentially tourist income.

Ranching Culture as Largely Intangible and Private Heritage

The ranching culture of the Sierra de San Francisco is both a continuing way of life and remembered experiences, partly the recollection of past practices and technology and partly the oral history of the community. The heritage produced by this culture is both tangible and intangible. Its tangible creations include the ranches themselves, especially the gardens (*huertas*) that have been painstakingly developed over generations and the irrigation systems that serve them. The landscape, both as a physical tangible space and as an intangible arena of knowledge and action is a foundation of the ranching heritage (Crumley, 1994; Tilley, 1994). A narrower definition of heritage would include specific traditions such as musical genres, knowledge of leatherworking, and the horseback procession at the annual patron saint's festival.

The ranchers' relationship to their heritage is varied. They strongly value their way of life, as they know there are alternatives available to them, and yet they remain in the Sierra. Part of their relationship to this heritage is one of nostalgia for ways that have disappeared; adults become quite animated when discussing the practices of their youth, for example how they made irrigation canals from palm trunks and the local music they played. Other components of the heritage, including leatherworking (*talabartería*), are undervalued from my perspective as an observer. Even though one ranch, San Gregorio, is world renowned for its fine saddles and ranchers express pride in locally made leather shoes (*teguas*), which most of them wear, leatherworking has declined. In interviews ranchers said that many people are skilled at leatherworking, but are "too lazy" to practice it. While there is a local market for shoes (and the development of new styles), there is not a local market for other leather goods. Nevertheless, several items, including knife sheaths and canteen covers, are still made occasionally from leather. In my view, there is a potential tourist market for such items, though they are not currently offered to tourists. In the ranchers' experience it is only the occasional tourist who orders a pair of custom-made shoes from one particular cobbler, which is completed by the time the tourists return from their visit to the cave sites below.

If the Great Mural heritage is almost entirely public in the way Chambers has defined the term, the rancher heritage is almost entirely private. It has not been under the gaze of heritage professionals who could measure the historical authenticity of current ranching lifeways. The ranching culture of the Sierra de San Francisco has not been the subject of ethnography since Crosby's descriptions from

the 1970s. There is a thoughtful exhibition of material culture from the Sierra at the Museum of Nature and Culture in Bahía de los Angeles, B.C., but not an attempt to define the “authentic” culture. The ranching heritage has the advantage of not having been subject to professionalization. This gives local people greater leeway to decide what elements to rescue or memorialize and what to let go, what to share with tourists and what to keep to themselves.

The Chesapeake Bay region, where Chambers has worked, is an arena of contestation of public heritage by stakeholders for whom the heritage has different significance. In the Sierra de San Francisco there is not a contestation between public and private heritages. Ranchers do not hold an alternative understanding of the Great Murals that they feel professionals have ignored or suppressed. There is not enough professional treatment of ranching culture to constitute a public heritage. The informal ethnography that Crosby (1981) presents in his history of the ranchers does not constitute a comprehensive account of their culture that could be used to measure authenticity, nor are there other ethnographies that could do so. For the ranchers, the issue of heritage in the Sierra is about how it can be transformed into an offering for tourists. For the public heritage, that means primarily expanding the circle of awareness of information about the Great Murals to include the guides. For the private heritage, it means engaging in a process in which the ranching community defines and articulates its heritage. As these proposed activities, which are discussed further in the next section, suggest, the categories of public and private are dynamic rather than fixed. They can shift as the construction of heritage develops and actors at diverse levels come to value heritage in similar or different ways.

Heritage and tourism

Rancher Interests

The ranchers have expressed an interest in expanding the activities of tourists in the Sierra by offering them both visits on ranches and excursions. It should be said that the ranching heritage, or at least the ranching atmosphere, is already part of the tourist experience the Sierra. The visit to the Great Mural sites is not just an experience in impressive prehistoric art, but also a brief association with the ranching culture of the guides. The “getting there” on muleback along steep slopes, surrounded by skilled riders, arriving at a canyon oasis, is at least as memorable as the rock art itself. Certainly for some tourists, associating with this rugged, seemingly simple rancher way of life is surely an experience of existential authenticity. What the ranchers seek to do is make this a more explicit part of the tourist experience. An important advantage of this kind of tourism is that it “would benefit groups of otherwise excluded local individuals, such as women and children, drawing attention to their significant roles within the household, as well as the community in general” (Conway et al., 2010, p. 24).

Among the ideas ranchers have put forth are botany tours led by women, excursions to local scenic sites, such as elevations from which one can see both the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California, and ranch tours featuring animal herding, cheese production, and ranch food production (such as making tortillas). Another possibility is to revive the production of artisan goods, especially leatherworking and crocheting, for sale to tourists. Women have expressed an interest in preparing food for tourists to eat or to take with them on their camping trips to see the Great Murals. Ranchers have expressed interest in establishing a community museum.

There has been some recent activity by outside organizations towards these goals. The International Community Foundation funded a needs assessment in which ranchers expressed their interest in more effective tourism (Conway et al., 2010, p. 24). That assessment was used by the environmental group Pronatura-noroeste to provide training on a variety of topics, develop a website about the Sierra, improve signage at the guesthouse, and produce an additional assessment focused specifically on low-impact tourism (Romero-Brito & Varela-Galván, 2011). The community-oriented tourism enterprise Kuyimá in San Ignacio, which brings tourists to the Sierra, has conducted training sessions for guides. Other non-governmental organizations are available to help with a reservations system for the guesthouse and marketing.

In terms of the heritage discussion in this paper, more work is needed with regard to both the Great Murals and the ranching culture for the local community to be prepared to expand its tourism

offerings. As we have seen, most of the INAH-authorized guides in the Sierra de San Francisco know little of recent archaeological findings about the Great Murals or the culture of the people who produced them. According to the local guides, INAH provided training sessions some years ago, but the style of instruction was academic, and the largely unschooled guides reported remembering little of its details. Guides reported that they learned much of what they know about the rock art from tourists, a situation whose inequity is glaring. With little information to pass on even to Spanish-speaking tourists, the guides limit their work to taking care of animals and showing tourists the pathway. They are constrained to their custodian role and have little opportunity to become gatekeepers. There is little of “added value” that they can offer to tourists, which undoubtedly has an impact on the kind of tip that they can expect at the end of a tour. Pronatura-noroeste proposed an approach in which the guides would not only be given the information about the murals, but training on how to convey it to tourists.

Participatory Heritage Construction

With regard to the ranching heritage, a process of participatory heritage construction would help members of the local community define their heritage, identify the ways they value it, select features that could be shared with tourists (commoditized) without harming the community, and discuss how they might respond to or incorporate outsiders’ discourses about them. The goals of such a process would include recording descriptions of heritage, preferably by younger members of older members. This would bring together the generations, as some members of the younger generation see the importance of community development and new technologies, while many older ranchers value their independent decision-making. How the community values its heritage could be revealed in discussions about the narratives a local museum could present. The process would also entail conscious decisions about commoditization of the heritage, an inevitable process if it is to become part of a tourist enterprise. The issue is not one of avoiding commoditization altogether, but rather channeling it in ways so that the local community maintains control and suffers the least harm (Sauvage & Gámez, 2013).

To return to leatherworking as an example, part of the intangible heritage of ranching culture is the widespread but relatively unused knowledge of leatherworking, which could certainly be used to create objects for sale to tourists (shoes, belts, knife cases, canteen covers, key chains). Such objects would connect tourists with the history of the Sierra and would convey greater “authenticity” than bracelets and bags made out of soda can tabs, the subject of a proposed workshop in San Francisco. Further removed from the present are certain types of music and songs that are no longer in use but could become part of a repertory of performances to be offered to tourists (a theme analyzed in Bruner, 2005). Is this something that the people of the Sierra would like to do? Would they see it as a way of conserving a valued but disappearing cultural tradition? Would they enjoy or be humiliated by putting on a performance for tourists? These are questions the ranchers of the Sierra need to answer for themselves.

An additional point that a process of participatory heritage construction can address is that of the aestheticization of heritage elements (Sauvage & Gámez, 2013). There is an extraordinary simple beauty to the ranch houses in Baja California Sur, but many are below the standards of even rugged tourists. It would take some investment for the sensory impact of the settlements of the Sierra to suggest “heritage” to tourists rather than “poverty.” Sanitary conditions, not only in terms of toilet facilities but also, for example, cheese-making processes, could be experienced negatively by tourists. A participatory heritage project would ask ranchers to reflect on their own ideas of beauty, the more stringent sanitary standards of tourists, and the degree to which an aestheticizing process would enhance or violate the ranchers’ own sense of authenticity. Could they manage a prettified cheese demonstration (e.g., without the cheese being covered by flies) and remain within the boundaries of their heritage?

In navigating the presentation of their ranching heritage to tourists, additional questions will arise about the kinds of meaning it will have and for whom. Heritage sites inevitably have diverse stakeholders, and cooperation among them is needed so that tourism and preservation can work together (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Landorf, 2009). Chambers contrasts the public meaning of heritage as professional authenticity with its significance to the various heirs of the heritage. I find that it is useful to distinguish stakeholders whose claim on the heritage is both locally based and as self-perceived

“heirs” from stakeholders whose claims are more remote. Therefore, I reserve the term “significance” for the “local heirs” and to use the term “heritage discourse” for those more remote stakeholders, while maintaining a distinction between these discourses and the “authenticity” of public heritage.

Highland ranchers in Baja California Sur are subject to three such discourses. One is that they are the remainder of an otherwise lost world. Of the “missionaries, miners and ranchers” of Old California (Amao, 1997), only the ranchers are left, the “last of the *californios*” Crosby (1981). While neither of these writers sees the ranchers as a relic of the past, others see them as a pristine expression of a western frontier. For example, the introduction to the film “Corazón vaquero/The heart of the cowboy” (McClintock, 2008), made by a saddle maker and an independent filmmaker and much appreciated by the ranchers, suggests that their customs have been untouched by the modern world. The second discourse is that the nobility of spirit of the ranchers is the purest expression of the character of the people of the southern part of the Peninsula (*sudcalifornianos*). They are thus a key symbol of a regional identity constructed as distinguished from national identities (Castorena Davis, 2002). The third discourse is of the ranchers as a model of sustainability. For Micheline Cariño (2008), the ranchers are one of two sustainable cultures in the history of Baja California Sur, the other being that of the disappeared indigenous people. For her, the ranchers are not a relic of the past, but rather an example to follow. Thus as they develop a ranching tourism, the ranchers of the Sierra de San Francisco have multiple layers of meaning to navigate and negotiate beyond their own appreciation and understanding of who they are and what they represent. The process of constructing a heritage would include informing the ranchers of these discourses (to the extent that they are not already aware of them) and exploring the extent to which the discourses, which are in effect the private heritages of other stakeholders, resonate with the community and could possibly be incorporated into tourism narratives.

Conclusion

The actions proposed in the previous section and the analysis on which they are based take into account two dimensions or axes of heritage: the tangible/intangible and the public/private. This paper has intended to distinguish between them and to show how they can help the ranching community to prepare for a broadened and invigorated heritage tourism, given the complexities of the two types of heritage of the Sierra. In doing so, the paper isolates these two elements from many others in the rich theoretical literature on heritage. The challenge of preserving the integrity of the heritage while making it available to tourists applies to both tangible Great Murals and the intangible ranching culture. The 1972 United Nations convention establishing the World Heritage program called for heritage sites to be both protected and open to tourists, engendering potential contradictions (Drost, 1996; Garrod & Fyall, 2000). This is no less true for the cultural heritage of the local community that sees itself as the custodians of the World Heritage site.

The isolation of the Sierra de San Francisco no longer offers the refuge and sustainability for the ranching way of life that it did in the past. It may however, give the ranchers some time and space to develop a heritage tourism on their own terms and to integrate it with the World Heritage tourism for which they are known. In fact, the future security of the World Heritage site itself depends on their success, as they cannot remain in the Sierra to serve as the custodian community for the Great Murals unless they can persist as a vibrant community whose culture they can share with others.

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