

HISTORY

ON THE AIRWAVES

National Park Service, University of Montana Partner for Public Television



Above, right: National Park Service divers document the wreck of the ferry *Ellis Island*.

Anasazi ruins deep below the waters of Glen Canyon National Park, on the Arizona-Utah border. The remains of old frontier ranches at the bottom of the lake at Texas' Amistad National Recreation Area. Often spectacular, seldom seen, what lies beneath the waters of the national parks may soon air in America's living rooms, thanks to a grant from the National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

Few viewers are probably aware that some of the most groundbreaking preservation work is being done underwater by the National Park Service. As divers from the agency's Submerged Resources Center descend on an assortment of shipwrecks and sites, filmmakers will document their work in a series of programs, to air initially on Montana Public Television, with potential nationwide distribution.

The link between the National Park Service and Montana Public Television owes a little to coincidence. MPT, an entity of Montana State University, happens to be near Yellowstone National Park. The university, with one of the country's most highly regarded media arts programs, has worked with the National Park Service on films about the Yellowstone ecosystem and the historic roads that wind through several parks in the Rockies. The idea for the underwater series was born while MPT was filming archaeologists diving on the wreck of an 18th century British ship in Biscayne National Park in Florida.

The Submerged Resources Center's impressive record of research has produced a vast and largely untapped video archive. This footage will augment new film shot during the actual projects. So far, four episodes have been funded with the help of \$80,000 in NCPTT grants.

Two films are ready for broadcast on MPT. The first follows divers as they investigate wrecks in remote Dry Tortugas National Park off the Florida Keys—and features a guest actor and a amateur diver Gene Hackman. The second accompanies archaeologists as they assess the wreck of the *Ellis Island*, which carried 12 million immigrants—more than any other vessel—to their new home in America. In use from 1904 to 1954, the *Ellis Island* sank at its slip in 1968 and has been on the bottom since.

Production costs for the new series are expected to be much lower than the average \$100,000-per-half-hour PBS show, given the partnering of National Park Service equipment and expertise with that of Montana Public Television. In-kind donations and existing footage are also expected to make the enterprise more economically viable.

The producers hope to connect with a national audience. Episodes will be available through American Public Television, a menu service that offers programming to local affiliates free of charge.

Future episodes will feature national parks in Arizona and Hawaii, focusing on a B-29 bomber that disappeared into Lake Mead in 1947 and work being done on the USS *Arizona*.

For more information on NCPTT grants, go to www.ncptt.nps.gov and click on "About Us."