

"Ranching Through Time"

NPS and Montana State University create a new exhibit at Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

By Chris Ford, Curator, Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site



An exhibit titled "Ranching Through Time" was recently installed at Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Deer Lodge, Montana. The display - which helps visitors understand the evolution of ranching in the American West and the Ranch's role within that history - is the final product of a two-year RM-CESU agreement between Professor Bill Rea, School of Architecture, Montana State University, and Curator Chris Ford, Grant-Kohrs Ranch.

Professor Rea used the project as a learning opportunity to guide MSU students through a real-life maze of, first, understanding their client's objectives, and then designing a product that met those needs. NPS park staff wanted an exhibit

that would depict how national and state ranching, the Grant-Kohrs Ranch, and the historic bunkhouse building that would house the exhibit, evolved through time. Among the project limitations was the need for the exhibit not to impact the integrity of the historic scene or damage the original fabric of the structure. And, finally, the entire project, including design and construction, had to be completed for \$5,000.

In the first year, an entire MSU architecture class took on the project. Students broke into four groups and produced concept models for park review. Professor Rea warned NPS staff that, as a product of teaching a class, there would be some pretty "far out" designs. He was right, but each class group developed some element that was used in the final concept.

Professor Rea also knew from experience that someone other than architectural students should provide the exhibit text and graphics. To this end, two graduate history students were brought on to research and choose significant events to appear on the exhibit timeline, as



Montana State University students Sean Shearer, Adam De Jarlais, Jacky Chan, and Kadri Rebane review their 90% draft with Grant-Kohrs Ranch Chief of Interpretation David Wyrick.



Grant-Kohrs Curator Chris Ford and Chief of Interpretation David Wyrick comment on draft exhibit.

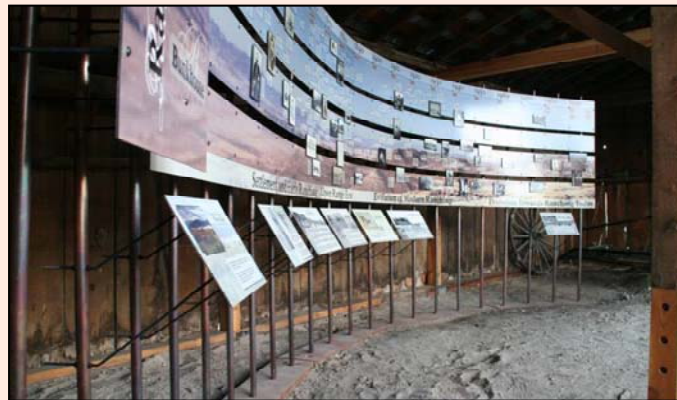
well as work with park staff to provide a narrative of major ranching themes. During the second-year phase of the project, Professor Rea worked with two architectural students to complete the exhibit. Two graphic art students also lent their talents to the project. These four students, under the guidance of their professor, worked with park staff through three reviews to design and create the final exhibit.

Once the exhibit components were produced, Professor Rea and the students arrived on site to install the exhibit. Upon completion, the students each received 3 credits in their respective departments. Although installed for only a short time, the exhibit already appears to meet all expectations: visitors appreciate seeing in a glance the expanse of ranching history, and park rangers are using the timeline to support their tours.

This partnership project was a success on all levels. Grant-Kohrs Ranch has a quality exhibit at one-fourth the usual cost. Professor Rea used the project to teach his students real-life applications of classroom concepts. Students acquired professional experience and the opportunity to list the National Park Service as a client on their resumes. And the RM-CESU, which facilitated and provided partial funding for the project, can add this venture to their long list of success stories.



Professor Bill Rea and students install the exhibit.



The "Ranching Through Time" exhibit ready for visitor enjoyment.