

DWIGHT T. PITCAITHLEY, currently professor of history at New Mexico State University, served as chief historian of the National Park Service from 1995–2005.

Born in Carlsbad, New Mexico, Pitcaithley served in the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam, received his B.A. and M.A. from Eastern New Mexico University, and earned his Ph.D. in history from Texas Tech University in 1976. He entered the Park Service as a seasonal guide at Carlsbad Caverns National Park and soon rose to become a historian at the Southwest Regional office (1976–1979), the regional historian for the North Atlantic Region (1979–1989), chief of the National Capital Region’s Division of Cultural Resources (1989–1995), and, finally, chief historian.

As chief historian, Pitcaithley worked with vision and creativity to push the Park Service to realize its full potential to inspire, inform and educate the American public in what has been called America’s largest outdoor history classroom.

A first-rate scholar and a courageous risk-taker, Pitcaithley both reinvigorated the practice of history within the Park Service and enhanced the standing of public history within the historical profession. Surveyed in 2010 by the Organization of American Historians, Park Service historians praised Pitcaithley’s “energized and proactive” approach for “making us feel respected and listened to.” They credited him with making a “tremendous positive impact on how we present history and resource management issues in the Service.” Pitcaithley was especially interested in bringing the insights of recent scholarship into historical interpretation in the parks. He helped shepherd a service-wide initiative that at last incorporated slavery as a central topic at Civil War battlefields. His ability, a colleague recalled, “to channel ... criticism into discussions based on sound historical scholarship was phenomenal.” He also forged an agreement between the Organization of American Historians and the Park Service that has improved historical interpretation and resource management at many sites, including Gettysburg, where extensive new Civil War exhibits were installed in 2008. At Philadelphia’s Independence National Historical Park, he successfully intervened to ensure that the full story of how slavery underpinned the birth of American liberty would be told at the “President’s House” site near where the Liberty Bell now sits. A major national study of history practice throughout the park system, which he originally envisioned, is currently underway.

A prolific publishing historian, Pitcaithley is author of “Little Paper Amendments: Slavery and the Constitution on the Eve of the Civil War” (forthcoming) and coeditor of “The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation and Nature Conservation” (2006), and has contributed chapters to “Becoming Historians” (2009), “Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory” (2006), “Preserving Western History” (2005), “Public History and the Environment” (2004), “Myth, Memory and the Making of the American Landscape” (2001), and “Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West” (2001).

For outstanding accomplishment in the field of public history, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is pleased to confer on Dwight T. Pitcaithley the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.