

Vista 360 – Folklife Festival, Jackson, Wyoming

Daylong consultancy worked through the possibilities of mounting a folklife festival in Jackson, Wyoming in late June 2010

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Introduction

Vista 360 is a good match for the potential folklife program. The organization's mission 'to help mountain communities preserve their cultural identity and environmental integrity while enjoying full participation in the global society of the 21st century,' and its programming commitment to 'integrate cultural exchange, economic cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and ideas,' give Vista 360 the philosophical foundation for folklife programming. Vista 360 also has extensive cultural programming and presenting experience, and currently mounts a Japanese cultural festival in Jackson Hole. In addition to presenting arts, Vista 360 maintains a network of artists, cultural organizations, local and regional governmental agencies, schools, business, other non-profit organizations and social enterprises. Their long-term partnerships and collaborations are structured to lead to future cultural development among mountain communities and cultures.

Because of Vista 360's capacity to mount a cultural festival, the consultancy focused on folklife content and presentational issues rather than festival administration, design and funding (except as these related to some unique aspects of folklife programming.) The consultancy resulted in a concept and title, programming themes, festival programming areas, fieldwork, ideas for 'beyond the festival,' and regional partners. The following is a summary of the collaborative discussions.

For its future two-day folklife festival, Vista 360 will focus on the Greater Yellowstone Region as defined by the National Geographic Geotourism map www.yellowstonegeotourism.org, with boundaries in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. This tri-state region offers a common ecosystem with common cultural histories and occupational communities. Jackson serves as a major gateway into Teton and Yellowstone National Parks and is the informal 'capital' of the region. Other population centers are Cody, WY, Bozeman, MT, Idaho Falls, ID and Riverton, WY. In addition to two national parks, the region includes one American Indian reservation (Wind River, in Wyoming, shared by the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes), several mountain ranges, wilderness areas, national forests and state lands. Geologically significant (Dubois, WY, rests near the headwaters of three major US rivers, the Colorado, the Missouri and the Columbia) and culturally significant (from ancient Sheepeaters archeology to contemporary outdoor thrill seekers), the Greater Yellowstone region offers a compelling area of cultural and folk studies.

Vista 360 presented its core 'experience goals' for the festival. The festival is expected to be 1) Fun (with elements of surprise); 2) Interactive (leaving audiences with a yearning to learn more) and 3) Personal (bringing an element of self discovery). In addition to the audience experience, there must be a benefit to the participating artists through expanded markets and teaching opportunities through ongoing regional activities including local presentations, workshops, and sales. These goals work well with the goals of a folklife festival and capitalize on the festival format by building regional offshoots of the festival into the initial planning stage. This will avoid a common phrase uttered universally by festival staff – "All this work and such a wonderful experience but it only lasts X days!" Vista 360 is committed to build on the good work and goodwill the festival generates to take the festival format to the next level.

Since Vista 360 already produces a day-long cultural festival in June, the folklife festival will extend the current Fire Festival, a re-cast Japanese Mountain Festival. Therefore, Vista 360 will host First Festival on Friday evening preceding the Saturday and Sunday two-day Folklife Festival.

Which comes first, the title or the theme?

After trying on a number of titles, **Mountain Festival** came to the fore. Vista 360 supports mountain people. Mountains cover 38% of the world. Mountain cultures have developed over centuries and are tied to the environment, two strong elements of folklife as well. Historically, mountain isolation created a natural protection of microcultures but these cultures are rapidly changing. Many mountain cultures want to protect their indigenous identities and are eager to learn from each other how to do so. This generates a compelling blend of local preservation and global communication. The title “Mountain Festival” is descriptive yet flexible. The name also relates well to continuing the Fire Festival and introducing the Greater Yellowstone Region. Because it has programmed other mountain cultures (Kyrgyzstan and Japan) in Jackson, Vista 360’s first Mountain Festival will bring their cultural presentations home to the Yellowstone region. The mountain theme could be problematic but that makes it interesting; there is no single definition of a Mountain Culture – does it apply to everyone living in the mountains currently or those cultures grown there through isolation? This topic could be the basis for a humanities lecture/panel discussion. If the Mountain Festival continues annually, the program could focus on different regions each year and perhaps every 10 years there could be a reunion with all the regions participating. The theme of life in the mountains provides for dynamic programming. It can be interactive, personal, and provide a sense of discovery – the aha!

Mountain people includes hunters and fishers, explorers, different levels of mountaineers, extreme sportsmen, protection/conservation proponents and distracters, scientists, federal land managers, search and rescue crews, cowboys, loggers, miners, tourists, and outfitters. Mountain folkways include how to live/survive in the high mountains, expressions of the value of self-sufficiency (the ‘do-it-yourself’ components of mountain recreation and occupations) and demonstrating how skills are learned through storytelling such as ‘what happens if...the knot not tied correctly,’ initiations and rites of passage, and exploring the characteristics that define ‘greatness’ for the group.

We explored existing models including the **Santa Fe International Folk Art Market**, <http://www.folkartmarket.org/index.php/about/C6/>, which brings juried international artisans to Santa Fe to sell wares. It also support sustainable products, generates new opportunities for new artists, and follows up through professional/business development opportunities. The Mountain Festival will follow a similar process, but the artists will be a combination of invited and juried. The Mountain Festival will also build beyond the two day event to include classes, business incubation, and year round access to sales through a website. We also discussed the **National Folklife Festival** <http://www.nationalfolkfestival.com/2010/> and that the **Montana Folklife** section is particularly strong for presenting folk culture and folk arts as well as providing interpretation through signage and staff. The Trailing of the Sheep <http://www.trailingofthesheep.org/> near Sun Valley, Idaho, is a good example of how a local tradition--the annual moving of bands of sheep from the mountains to lower country in the fall--was reframed from being a nuisance to newcomers into something to celebrate. The heritage of sheep ranching is presented through stories, music, dance, foods and crafts at a weekend festival which culminates in the trailing of hundreds of sheep down the main street on Sunday morning, and which attracts both tourists and locals during a slow time of year. *Candra was able to attend the October 2009 event.* The Smithsonian Folklife Festival <http://www.festival.si.edu/> on the Washington Mall provides incredible built environments to enhance the visitors’ experience and Vista 360 in eager to create ways to surround the guests with the natural and cultural experiences in a festival setting.

The key to a successful folklife festival is in-depth fieldwork and looking through the list of identified groups, fresh fieldwork is needed. Most of the groups are outside what folklorists have been documenting through state arts agencies. Since Vista 360 already has strong contacts through existing programs and interests, the first step for a cultural survey already exists. Since the investigative process is time-consuming, the work should continue over the long-term to build relationships, cooperation and

legitimacy for the project. The fieldwork should to extend beyond a six-week survey, common at the beginning of many local folklife festivals.

The following groups were discussed as priorities for the festival: cowboys and ranching; Native American; Recreation – skiing, mountaineering, river running; hunting and fishing; culture of conservation – conservationists; national parks/forests/founders; and logging. The commonalities of these groups include a strong tie to the land/nature, and that each will have a body of crafts and stories specific to the group.

A fair amount of time was spent generating lists: of groups, cultures, themes, topics, conflicts, festival areas, programming ideas, etc. Below is a sampling of our working lists.

Festival Themes

1. Living in the High Mountains
2. Conservation
3. Borders (Cattle/Sheep; Skiers/Boarders)

Festival Areas - create the fullest experience, build environments to simulate the high mountain camps, huts, areas of work.

1. Stages: Storytelling (personal experiences), music (singer/songwriters, work songs, cowboy/outfitter songs), workshop stage
2. Demonstration area for craft and gearmakers (invite 20 artists)
3. Hands-on area – try it out!
4. Sales area (juried)
5. Story collecting area (Exploratorium – a place to collect stories from the audience like the sheep camp used at the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, staffed by a folklorist. Perhaps the Western Folklife Center could provide theirs camp for this?)
6. Food – must be food, lots of it!

Offsite Program Areas

1. Lecture/seminars/book discussions/scholars (for small audiences)
2. Exhibits and films at the local Arts Center
3. Arena for Powwow, parades, horsemanship, animal skills and marksmanship
4. Dancing? – will be very little – maybe some country western, powwow

Methods of engaging the festival audience

1. Signage
2. Staff on stage
3. Handouts – passport/field guide to festival with reward – gear towards families

Can this happen in 2010?

Artists: Even without enough time for much new fieldwork in 2010, Vista 360 can draw from existing resources through the State Arts Council folk arts coordinators. Montana, Idaho and Wyoming have Master/Apprenticeship grants for a theme of “Passing It On.” Invited artists could come from this pre-selected group.

Staff: Using the Fire Festival model, building on community participation, using volunteers (200) in planning through production, volunteers/staff take responsibility for (and pleasure in) creating the festival, it is possible to have local staff. Folklorist presenters can come from the surrounding area.

The following regional folklife organizations and individuals were identified as key participants as well as having existing resources to identify participants, especially those who will work well in a festival setting:
Montana: Alex Swaney, Nicholas Vrooman, Liz Dear, Darcy Minter, Mike Korn, Yellowstone Business Partnership, Yellowstone National Park, , Montana Heritage (if it still exists).
Idaho: Maria Carmen Gambliel, Bear River Heritage Area, Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock Reservation.
Wyoming: Maryanne Andrus, Annie Hatch, Andrea Graham, University of Wyoming American Studies Program, Wind River Shoshone-Arapaho Reservation.
Nevada: Western Folklife Center
Utah: Elaine Thatcher, Bear River Heritage Area, Utah State University Folklore Program.

Recommendations for collecting leads were made for the following groups:
Cowboy/ranching, Indians, hunting and fishing – use folklorist network
Mountaineering, extreme skiing – Vista 360 connections
Forest Service – Smithsonian fieldwork (Annie has copies)
National Park – historian at Yellowstone has collection of stories (want daily experiences)
Conservation/Protection – Teton Park staff, Murie Center
Scientists – field institute, university (wildlife biologist, geothermal, archeologists)--will be a great area for fieldwork
Hiking/backpacking (not an easy outlet – perhaps businesses serving users)

Beyond the Festival

Vista 360 will use the festival to build future activities – local classes for artists, folklife field school for the community. Festival creates relationships and gives purpose to the fieldwork. The post-festival activities could have a larger direct impact on the participating/festival artists. By bringing activities beyond the festival into the festival design, the extension activities will grow organically from the festival itself. We reviewed models of community development and arts marketing including:

Handmade in America <http://www.handmadeinamerica.org/>

Vista 360 likes this model, it feels organic, from the local community and local resources and helps preserve character of a place by identifying local talent and offerings. Handmade in America founder Becky Anderson could be brought into the festival to have the local business community included and interested in the cultural presentations. Directories, websites, printed guides, and driving tours can promote and support local cultures after the festival. The Mountain Festival could be the kick-off to developing Handmade in Yellowstone. The success of Handmade in America is Becky Anderson and her talents, personality and commitment. Handmade has shown success through the local economic impact and increase in local pride while remaining grassroots/community centered.

Bear River Heritage Area <http://www.bearriverheritage.com/>

Economic development through support of local culture, in the process of trying to get National Heritage Area designation. Combines natural resources with cultural, historic and scenic attributes. Has an endorsement process – four standards: (A) local/regional authenticity, (B) local/regional sustainability, (C) high quality, and (D) a connection or story relating to local/regional culture, history, etc. This is a good model for research and partnering with local business interests – working through tension between authenticity and tourism ‘heads-in-beds.’

Yellowstone Region <http://www.yellowstonegeotourism.org/>

Greater Yellowstone already has a tourism identity and access to tourism money. As a geographic region, geo-tourism is already promoted and popular. Folklife could add to this. Vista 360 would like bring the local culture component to the local businesses. Tim O’Donoghue, director of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, could be the connection between culture and business.

Growing/Building the Fieldwork Initiative

Vista 360 would host a Yellowstone Region Field School to train community members and students in folklife fieldwork. It could be located at the Murie Center/Teton Science School or Journey School. Students would receive UW or USU credit. The American Folklife Center field school program is a potential partner, attracting students from UW and USU and local scholars from the Greater Yellowstone Region. Andrea's new position at the American Studies Program at the University of Wyoming could be an anchor for this effort. *Elaine contacted David Taylor for details.*

Next steps

1. Continue consultancy – bring in Maria Carmen Gambliel at the Idaho Commission on the Arts and Maryanne Andrus at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody. Perhaps there is an ongoing stipend for a conference call meeting. Wyoming Community Foundation could fund a consultancy.
2. Attend Trailing of the Sheep and connect with Diane and John Peavey, the event's founders.
3. Check with the Idaho Commission on the Arts to see what work has been accomplished since Becky Anderson's visit to the state.
4. Work on program design, discuss the presentation/staging of activities in new ways.

Immediate Goals – 2010/11

1. Hold 2010 festival and organize planning session during festival.
2. Bring community to table – increase their buy-in by creating their own model, create a repository for fieldwork collections, generate year-round gatherings, monthly 'meet the artist' event, hold 15 minute lecture/demos with cash bar & mingling – include humanities & science. Sharing knowledge through food, drink and socializing is a powerful community/consensus builder.

Short term goals (1-4 years)

1. Community fieldwork trainings ongoing – schedule on weekends, build to field school in 2011.
2. Bring local crafts into the current western themed experiences of trail rides and hikes.
3. Reach out to 3-4 communities in the region (or 2-3 in each state) to help with a pilot project – ask them what they want to highlight and host a series of events. Diane and John Peavey can help mobilize activities on the local level. Ask communities to present at the festival –share the value of saving local cultural traditions and work with the initiative to collaboratively present locally after the festival. The festival becomes a true community showcase. Have communities stay to interact on the Monday following the festival.
4. Invite Becky Anderson to be plenary at the festival –open to the public but targeted to the showcase communities – 1-3pm on Sunday.
5. Studio tours/open houses schedule on weekends

Long range goals (5 to 10 years)

5. Create economic opportunities for artists to make a living on their work. Yellowstone community has pride in local and unique offerings. The festival and offerings counteract the effect of tourism taking over parts of the community and usurping the local qualities.

Lead: Dan Burgeck – decoy maker in Jackson (also mountaineering, backpacker, scientist)